

June 2004

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Recommended Citation

Eblagh, Kefayatullah (2004) "Afghan Technical Consultants: A Brief Overview," *Journal of Mine Action* : Vol. 8 : Iss. 1 , Article 32.
Available at: <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol8/iss1/32>

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Afghan Technical Consultants: A Brief Overview

by Kefayatullah Eblagh, *Director, ATC*

Introduction

Afghan Technical Consultants (ATC) was established in 1989 as the first humanitarian mine clearance organization sponsored by the United Nations. Through February 2004, ATC had cleared 82.4 sq km of high-priority mined areas and 192.7 sq km of former battlefields. During its 14 years of operations, ATC has located and destroyed a total of 3,437 anti-vehicle mines, 143,392 anti-personnel mines and 1,611,676 pieces of UXO. ATC currently employs nearly 2,000 personnel working in every region of Afghanistan.

Methodologies and Capacities

Within ATC there are 25 manual minefield and battle area clearance (BAC) teams of 40 men each (operations and support staff). The operation teams include 10 mechanical clearance units of 14 men each. These units use equipment such as excavators, backhoe loaders and rotary cutters. Also, 12 EOD teams of 14 men each are involved in manual demining. Other projects that ATC manages are volunteer mine risk education units, a sandbag producing project—the sandbags are used for the creation of protective works (around "in situ" disposals) in support of EOD and BAC teams—three manual teams assigned to demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants, marking teams (DDR), and another mine risk education team assigned to the DDR project. The activities of the above teams are coordinated and controlled by five field offices and 11 site offices located in various United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan (UNMACA)-designated geographical areas of operations within Afghanistan.

Current ATC Projects

ATC is currently conducting the following projects in support of reconstruction in Afghanistan:

- Minefield clearance and BAC of the Kabul International Airport.
- Clearance of the Kabul-Jalalabad Highway and nearby secondary roads, which at some time in the future could serve as an alternate route to the highway
- "Side Projects" for the clearance of the Sardeh Dam in Ghazni province.
- Clearance of provincial roads, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).
- "Adopt-a-Team" project funded by the United Nations Association of the UNSA

- Mine Action for Peace (DDR): In December 2003, ATC was the first organization to implement a pilot DDR project in the northern Kunduz province. The project has succeeded in facilitating the absorption of 110 ex-combatants into a program performing mine clearance, mine risk education and permanent marking.
- The same type of DDR program was started in Parwan province (north of Kabul City) on February 25, 2004; 49 people have been enrolled in training courses so far.

Conclusion

ATC prioritizes its efforts to benefit the people of Afghanistan, focusing its clearance on areas that have the highest landmine risk first. These areas include those that have the most landmine incidents, be they agricultural land, roads, canals or villages. ATC's second priority is the areas that the United Nations or non-governmental organizations request be demined because funding is not currently present even though the operation is planned. The final priority for ATC is the areas requested by local government that need reparation but no immediate or dire removal. ATC knows that the need for landmine removal is great, and the operations and priorities that are put in order are those that will help the people of Afghanistan the most.

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