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ANAMA Expands Demining Operations Towards

by Emil Hasanov [Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action]

Azerbaijan, located south of the Caucasus on the western shore of the Caspian Sea, is a country rich with oil resources. As of 2005, Azerbaijan has a population of 8.1 million people living in 65 regions of the country and the autonomous exclave of Nakhchivan to the west. One-fifth of Azerbaijan territory is currently occupied by Armenia.

Background of the Conflict

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1988 was waged over Nagorno Karabakh, an autonomous region of the Republic of Azerbaijan. As a result, 20 percent of the Azerbaijani territory was occupied and 15 percent of the Azerbaijani population became refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs). A changing front line resulted in mass destruction of housing, infrastructure and productive resources in occupied regions and surrounding territories. It wasn't until 1994 that a ceasefire agreement was signed.

Scope of the Landmine Problem

Because of the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, Azerbaijan suffers from a landmine and UXO problem. Although hostilities ended in 1994, no peace agreement was reached, and negotiations continue with the assistance of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group chaired by the United States, France and Russia.

Mine clearance is currently a priority to make liberated territories safe for the return of IDPs and to create a favorable environment for the implementation of rehabilitation and reconstruction projects.

In 1996, when these projects began in war-torn areas, the danger of mines proved to be very high. Returning IDPs frequently came in contact with mines and were injured or killed. In the event that they made it home, often their equipment had been destroyed, their livestock killed and their property seriously damaged. Ammunitions left at former battle areas and permanent or temporary stays of military units were also present.

Landmine contamination seriously impeded the reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts of the government and international agencies. Access to war-torn parts of Fizuli, Aghjabedi, Aghdam and Terter districts was limited.

Similarly, Aghstafa, Khanlar, Tovuz, Gazakh and Goranboy districts were seriously affected by mines, UXO and other remnants of military activity.

In November 2000, the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) commissioned a general survey in 11 mine-affected districts. The findings of this survey, carried out by the International Eurasia Press Fund (IEPF), indicate there are 64 affected villages covering a total area of about 50 million square metres (19.30 square miles) of productive land. Most former inhabitants of these areas are living as IDPs in other parts of Azerbaijan and therefore could not be interviewed. However, 74,809 individuals were able to provide information. As a result, 84 minefields and 85 battlefields were identified. The overall number of mine victims identified during this survey exceeds 1,200; of these, 12 were killed and 36 injured during the last two years.

Additionally, it was confirmed that Fizuli and Aghdam districts were heavily affected. Two districts, Terter and Goranboy, were also added to the list. Seven square kilometres (2.70 square miles) of heavily contaminated battlefield areas were found in the Aghstafa district.

Azerbaijan and the Ottawa Convention

Neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan has signed the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel landmines. However, the Republic of Azerbaijan supports the idea of having a comprehensive international legal document on the prohibition of use, storage and transportation of anti-personnel mines. The establishment of ANAMA is an important step by the government of Azerbaijan toward the objectives of the Ottawa Convention.

Azerbaijan believes that complete prohibition and destruction of anti-personnel mines is the principal humanitarian goal; however, since it is occupied by Armenian forces and under the threat of renewed hostilities, Azerbaijan is not able to join the Convention now. Officials hope that in the near future, when the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is resolved and the Azerbaijan territories liberated, the country can become a full member of the Ottawa Convention and contribute to resolving the mine problem globally.

ANAMA

The government of Azerbaijan and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have launched several mine action programmes. Their goal is to address mine and UXO problems that the government has faced since 1996. In July of 1998, ANAMA was established by a presidential decree to implement these programmes.

The Azerbaijan Mine Action Programme is

divided into several phases, establishing a sustainable national mine action capacity to respond to the existing mine and UXO problem and to be able to rapidly expand when the occupied territories become accessible. The first phase covers the overall aspects of manual demining, mine detection dogs (MDDs), and support and integration of mechanical demining.

In 2005, ANAMA plans to expand its manual demining capacity, enhance MDD support and introduce additional mechanical demining assets. ANAMA activities are a major part of the government's efforts to support the state programme for rehabilitation and reconstruction for the safe return of refugees and IDPs.

The UNDP, the European Commission (EC), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the governments of the United States, and the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, Switzerland, Norway and Canada, together with the government of Azerbaijan, provide valuable support and contributions for a better Azerbaijan. Their goals are to ensure a safe living environment, economic growth, employment opportunities and poverty reduction.

Operational Capacity

ANAMA headquarters have been established and strong regional facilities are located in Fizuli and Khanlar districts. These facilities provide technical and management capacity to implement operations in the northwest and southwest parts of Azerbaijan. From 2000 to 2004, ANAMA staff attended training sessions conducted by U.N. Technical Advisors and U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) instructors. The training sessions were aimed at developing mine action management and the technical skills of ANAMA personnel.

ANAMA was one of the first mine action centres provided with an opportunity to participate in the Mine Action Senior Managers' Course conducted by Cranfield University of Great Britain. Since 2000, three ANAMA staff have attended these Senior Managers' Courses. At the end of 2004, five ANAMA headquarters, the regional office and non-governmental organization (NGO) staff participated in the Cranfield University Mine Action Middle Managers' Courses conducted by Amman University in Jordan. Two key staff members from the ANAMA Operations Department participated in the UNDP Mine Action Exchange (MAX) programme in Croatia, Afghanistan and Lebanon. The aim of the programme is to allow participants to broaden their knowledge on different perspectives of mine action. ANAMA hosted the Operations Officer from the Afghanistan Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA) as part of the programme. The director of the newly established Tajikistan mine action centre participated

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in a one-month MAX programme with ANAMA. In addition, two ANAMA staff visited Lebanon and Croatia under the UNDP-funded MAX programme to learn more about mechanical demining.

Training and Quality Assurance Team

On October 1, 2001, the National Training and Quality Assurance Team (T&QA) was established thanks to the joint efforts of the UNDP and Mines Advisory Group (MAG), minimizing the need for international experts. The team strives to achieve its objective of ensuring professional clearance of contaminated land through training. The team monitors field operations to ensure that ANAMA standards are maintained and followed with no exception. The instructors continue to train field personnel at all levels in Azeri, English and Russian on 15 different types of training courses on humanitarian demining activity.

Manual Demining and Technical Survey

Two national NGOs contracted by ANAMA, each with a 38-man manual demining team, operate mostly in the southwest and northwest regions of the country, particularly in Fizuli, Khanlar, Agjabedi and Terter districts. Those regions are priorities for the Azerbaijan state programme for reconstruction and rehabilitation of war-affected areas. Supported by MDDs, one of the teams conducts minefield clearance tasks to reclaim the mined areas for agricultural use. The other team has been deployed to clear the anti-personnel minefield located in the area of a former Soviet military base.

In 2004, two five-man Technical Survey teams supported by MDDs were deployed to Fizuli, Khanlar, Agjabedi and Terter regions for area reduction and to establish the actual size of the minefield. In October 2004, one more technical survey team was established and made operational.

Mechanical Demining and MDDs

In 2004, the EC, Italy and the UNDP funded the procurement of a mechanical demining machine for Azerbaijan. In May, ANAMA signed a contract with Slovakian-based Way Industry (WI) for the procurement of a BOZENA-4 remote-controlled mechanical demining mini-flail system. Three key ANAMA staff were sent to Slovakia for machine maintenance training at the production factory. Upon completion of the training, two specialists from WI were deployed to Azerbaijan to carry out a two-month practical training for ANAMA operators.

Upon request from the Ministry of Defense of

Azerbaijan, two of their representatives have also participated in the training. ANAMA has requested USEUCOM to conduct mechanical demining integration training for ANAMA staff. Two-part training was conducted in early August 2004, at the Fizuli Regional Office for senior field staff and at ANAMA headquarters for management staff. The first part of the training was held in the form of a seminar and aimed at discussing mechanical demining operational procedures and identifying the best techniques and methods in local conditions. During the second part of the training, the participants had an opportunity to become familiar with the cost-effectiveness module for mechanical demining.

To help realize its MDD capacity, ANAMA has been working closely with the RONCO Consulting corporation (who replaced MineTech after fall 2000), a contractor of the U.S. Department of State since September 2001. Thanks to RONCO's support, ANAMA now has one trained MDD Officer, 16 MDD handlers, three supervisors and 15 operational MDDs.

Emergency Response Team

In June 2004, ANAMA established a new 12-man emergency response team (ERT). The main goal of the team is to 'quickly react to emergency requests from the local people and organizations based in mine-affected regions of Azerbaijan.

UXO Teams

Until September 2002, ANAMA had a limited UXO capacity. In October 2002, ANAMA began to operate with two fully equipped five-man UXO operations teams. These teams were trained by USEUCOM on UXO clearance operations, including various aspects of clearance and destruction techniques, to ensure maximum safety on site. Operators were selected from a number of experienced deminers. The standard operating procedures for UXO clearance and disposal were developed and approved.

During 2004, ANAMA's 15-man UXO clearance team operated in two districts of Azerbaijan-Aghstafa in the northwest and Fizuli in the southwest. Four and a half square miles were

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Subsurface UXO clearance procedures at the marked task site.



Deminer investigating detector readings.



Bozena-4 in an area-reduction operation.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RONCO

A RONCO EOD team conducts demolitions near Basra, Iraq.

homegrown version of a survey that was accurate enough to direct someone to a minefield, but fell short of international standards. While simplistic, this improvised survey capability actually worked quite well, and individual maps could be rather impressive. Once the technology for a survey that included a global positioning system element and would comport to Information Management System for Mine Action standards became available, though, its implementation became a priority. Although implementing such a system has been impacted by a shortage of Afghan engineers, national survey capabilities are making good progress.

Iraq. After the initial QRDF tasking in Iraq, RONCO's efforts focused on developing a national capacity in the country. This task has proven particularly challenging since humanitarian landmine/UXO clearance was never a priority of the Saddam Hussein regime; a demining infrastructure had to be built up from scratch and government personnel had to be convinced of the effort's importance. The proliferation of mine action organizations entering Iraq after the war presented RONCO with another challenge: helping the interim government organize the various national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), commercial companies, and military units into one coordinated effort. To this end and on behalf of the U.S. Department of State, RONCO helped develop the National Mine Action Authority within the Iraqi Ministry of Planning. This organization has since developed national mine action standards, accredited all mine action organizations in Iraq, created a national mine action strategy, and drafted a national budget and work plans.

Conclusion

RONCO's experience over the last decade highlights changes and developments in the field of humanitarian demining. Once manual deminers were the principal capability; however, fully integrated MDD, mechanical and manual demining capabilities are now imperative. While standards were once variable and incomplete, the IMAS are now the operating environment. While humanitarian demining and mine clearing were once considered separate missions and doctrines, RONCO's experience in Afghanistan now shows that they are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. While humanitarian responses once took time to organize and deploy, the QRDF has demonstrated the impact and usefulness of a highly trained rapid-reaction force. And, while humanitarian demining was once strictly a peacetime endeavor, Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated that such operations will sometimes have to take place in dangerous and even hostile environments. Throughout its experiences, RONCO has demonstrated that governments, international organizations, private companies and NGOs can cooperate, learn from each other, and coordinate their efforts to better ensure a future free from the scourge of landmines. ♦

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public education with respect to the dangers of undiscovered mines. Ideally, all citizens will be able to react and initiate a successful response through established governmental structures. Coordination remains vital even with the much-reduced mine action requirement at end-state and needs to be accounted for within the normal government coordination mechanism and structure.

A key element in the successful implementation of an ESS and the long- and medium-term plans for implementing it will be the successful training of personnel at all levels. This training will include not only the technical field level, but program and project management skills along with careful computational-backed administration and records keeping, budgeting and financial administration, and other essential elements of modern management and administration.

Program achievements will require continued successful interface with all of its donors, which requires a strong public-relations capability. While the local language is essential for most operations and for communicating with the various government agencies and authorities, all aspects of the program must be capable of being communicated to the international community. ♦

See "References and Endnotes" on page 104

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cleared and 1,400 items of UXO were destroyed that year. In July 2004, in compliance with the requests from the government of Azerbaijan and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipe Line Company, ANAMA began surface and sub-surface UXO clearance operations on the main oil pipeline route in Agstafa district. A part of the BTC pipeline crosses a UXO-contaminated area in Saloglu village that is located in close vicinity to former Soviet army ammunition warehouses. Clearance operations were carried out on a 32-kilometre-long (19.88 miles) route that was 60 metres (0.04 mile) wide. The project was completed at the end of August 2004 and 121 items of UXO were found on the depth of up to 3 metres (3.28 yards) and destroyed. ♦

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