

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

The six-week armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region that broke out in September 2020 ended with Azerbaijan regaining control over seven districts of its internationally recognised territory, in addition to part of Nagorno-Karabakh. The area along the former Line of Contact (LOC) between Armenia and Azerbaijan is heavily mined, leading to a huge area of anti-personnel mine contamination falling under Azerbaijan's jurisdiction and control. A huge clearance effort is underway involving the Army, the Ministry of Interior (MoI), and the Mine Action Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan (ANAMA, formerly the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Azerbaijan should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Azerbaijan should clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, consonant with its obligations under international human rights law.
- Azerbaijan should mobilise funds to enable survey and clearance of all mined areas as quickly as possible.
- ANAMA should work to establish a robust nationwide baseline of mined area using evidence-based non-technical and technical survey.
- Azerbaijan should reinforce the necessary national structures to oversee efficient and safe mine action in the mined areas recently returned to its control. This process should be underpinned by the adoption or revision of national mine action legislation that reflects the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).
- ANAMA should ensure that mined areas are released in accordance with international best practice, by ensuring that clearance is only conducted in areas where there is clear evidence of contamination.
- ANAMA should ensure that National Mine Action Standards (NMAS) are updated in line with IMAS.
- ANAMA should draft a new mine action strategy, to replace the one expired in 2018, reflecting the significant increase in explosive ordnance (EO) contamination now under Azerbaijan's control.
- ANAMA should complete the transition to Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) Core as soon as possible.
- Azerbaijan should systematically collect and report publicly on data on contaminated areas as well as progress in survey and clearance.
- ANAMA should elaborate a gender and diversity policy for mine action and an associated implementation plan.

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

The precise extent of contamination from anti-personnel mines in Azerbaijan is currently unknown but is certainly massive, especially along the 300km-long LOC that previously existed between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces. The defensive belts of berms, anti-tank ditches, and barbed wire, along the LOC, which are estimated to vary between 3km and 7km in depth, contain massive quantities of both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines, and is now recognised as one of the largest mined areas in the world.¹ The LOC has been heavily mined over the three decades since 1990 by all parties to the conflict.² Further minefields and other EO contamination, including abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO), are found in areas previously occupied by Armenia outside the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

In 2018, ANAMA had estimated that mine contamination in areas occupied by Armenia covered between 350km² and 830km², and contained between 50,000 and 100,000 mines.³

The figure, however, is now believed to be a significant underestimate. According to a mine map of Aghdam provided by Armenia in June 2021, Aghdam district alone contains 97,000 anti-personnel and anti-vehicles mines.⁴ That is only one of the total seven districts reclaimed by Azerbaijan in 2020.

In July 2020, fighting broke out on the international borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and in September 2020, Azerbaijan launched a fully-fledged military operation. Fierce fighting for six weeks was brought to an end on 8 November 2020 by a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement. Under the terms of the "trilateral statement", Azerbaijan took full control of the five major cities of Fuzuli, Gubadi, Jabrail, Shusha, and Zangilan. Armenian troops also left the districts of Agdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin, handing them back to Azerbaijani control by 1 December 2020.⁵ Azerbaijan also gained control of a substantial part of Nagorno-Karabakh

where a new LOC is patrolled by Russian peacekeeping forces with the Nagorno-Karabakh local authorities retaining the north of the region.⁶

Azerbaijan claimed that Armenia emplaced new mines in the Kalbajar district before withdrawing following the November 2020 agreement.⁷ Armenia denied the claims stating that the retreating Armenian forces had scarcely enough time to evacuate the bodies of the 1,500 Armenian soldiers who had been killed during the fighting.⁸ Since November 2020, more than 140 persons have been killed or injured by mines in the territories reclaimed by Azerbaijan.⁹

At the end of 2020, Azerbaijan reported only 21 mined areas in the regions previously under its control covering an estimated total of 19.2km². Of this total, 6.7km² was anti-personnel mine contamination and 12.5km² anti-vehicle mine contamination (see Table 1). Eleven confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) covered a total of 5.9km² while two suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) totalled 0.8km².

The full extent of contamination across Azerbaijan will only be better known after completion of a countrywide re-survey that includes the areas it has newly regained. As at May 2021, the nationwide survey had not yet begun though it was expected to be initiated before the end of the year.¹⁰

Table 2 summarises estimated contamination by region outside the LOC and surrounding areas.¹¹

Following extensive international mediation, Armenia provided a first mine map of Aghdam district to Azerbaijan in June 2021.¹² Azerbaijan continues to request "the immediate release of information by Armenia on the location of the

remaining minefields".¹³ Armenia maintains that most of the mines were emplaced by Azerbaijan since the early years of the conflict to deter the Nagorno-Karabakh forces.¹⁴

Azerbaijan began large-scale clearance of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) in December 2020 in the territory it had regained. The Azeri Prosecutor General and Ministry of Interior (Mol) issued a joint warning to citizens to avoid "travelling to the recently de-occupied territories without proper permission and until the areas are cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance".¹⁵ Reportedly, many military personnel, deminers, as well as civilian returnees have been killed or wounded by different forms of explosive ordnance.¹⁶ There are also the bodies of Armenian soldiers in minefields, which are being torn apart by jackals.¹⁷

Mine contamination in Azerbaijan is the consequence of the 1988–94 armed conflict with Armenia, which saw landmines laid by both sides. During the most recent conflict in 2020, media reported that the retreating Armenian forces planted mines in civilian infrastructure, lamp posts, canals, road junctions, rural and urban paths, courtyard entrances, cemeteries, and riverbanks.¹⁸ The most heavily contaminated areas are along the borders and confrontation lines between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including the area in and around Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan is also suspected to be contaminated with cluster munition remnants and other ERW: both unexploded ordnance (UXO) and AXO, the extent of which is not known (see Mine Action Review's *Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants* report on Azerbaijan for further information).

Table 1: Mined area by contamination type (at end 2020) excluding the LOC¹⁹

Contamination	CHAs	Area (km ²)	SHAs	Estimated area (km ²)	Total SHAs/CHAs	Total area (km ²)
Anti-personnel mines	11	5.9	2	0.8	13	6.7
Anti-vehicle mines	7	12.0	1	0.5	8	12.5
Totals	18	17.9	3	1.3	21	19.2

CHAs = Confirmed hazardous areas SHAs = Suspected hazardous areas

Table 2: Anti-personnel mined area by region (at end 2020) excluding the LOC²⁰

Districts	CHAs	Area (m ²)	SHAs	Area (m ²)	Total SHA/CHA	Total area (m ²)
Aghdam	2	2,000,000	0	0	2	2,000,000
Aghjabadi	1	500,000	0	0	1	500,000
Fuzuli	3	1,200,000	0	0	3	1,200,000
Gazakh	0	0	1	300,000	1	300,000
Goygol	0	0	1	500,000	1	500,000
Gubadli	2	1,000,000	0	0	2	1,000,000
Jabrail	2	800,000	0	0	2	800,000
Zangilan	1	400,000	0	0	1	400,000
Totals	11	5,900,000	2	800,000	13	6,700,000

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

ANAMA, was established by Presidential Decree 854 in 1999 as the National Agency for Mine Action to plan, coordinate, manage, and monitor mine action in the country. Prior to the 2020 conflict, ANAMA had been conducting demining operations, along with two national operators it contracts: Dayag-Relief Azerbaijan (RA) and the International Eurasia Press Fund (IEPF). In March 2020, the mine action programme was restructured and RA's field personnel were incorporated within ANAMA while RA as an organisation continued to provide logistical support to ANAMA.²¹ Following the 2020 conflict, clearance operations were rapidly scaled up with the involvement of the Army and MoI to address the significant mine and ERW contamination now under Azerbaijan's control.

In mid-January 2021, by Presidential decree, ANAMA was restructured and given a status of a public legal entity as the Mine Action Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan.²²

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provides capacity development to ANAMA. In 2020, the capacity development project was extended to 2023.²³ The five main project activities were: maximising the socio-economic impact of clearance; supporting the institutional capacity of ANAMA for mine/UXO clearance according to international and national mine action standards; promoting ANAMA as an international mine action centre; procurement and upgrading of equipment; and introducing a gender-sensitive approach to mine action to Azerbaijan.²⁴ According to ANAMA, as at June 2020, project outputs included improvements to ANAMA's regional structure, enhanced international training services, better training equipment, and support for the training centre.²⁵

In March 2021, the UNDP crisis response and UN's Central Emergency Response Fund provided US\$1 million to ANAMA to train, equip, and deploy emergency response teams to clear mines and UXO. UNDP planned to scale up its support to ANAMA and provide funds and international expertise

to conduct a mine action needs assessment, assist in the prioritisation of clearance of mined areas, develop heat maps for mine detection, and procure mine action equipment and mine detection dogs (MDDs).²⁶

In its Article 7 report to the APMBC (covering 2020), Turkey reported it had donated US\$200,000 to Azerbaijan for mine and UXO clearance of approximately 22km² in Azerbaijan. A cooperation agreement for demining planned to be signed with Azerbaijan in 2020 was postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 restrictions in place in both countries.²⁷ According to media reports, Turkey exported seven remote-controlled demining machines to Azerbaijan between February and May 2021.²⁸ In addition, 140 personnel from Turkey's Special Mine Detection and Clearance Teams were deployed to assist in clearance operations in Azerbaijan.²⁹ Media sources also reported support from Russia in mine clearance. As at April 2021, 100 Russian military personnel were said to be using IMP-52 mine detectors and Uran-6 robotic systems in the region.³⁰

As at May 2021, a draft national mine action law was being considered by the cabinet of ministers (CoM).³¹ The process of elaborating the law has been ongoing for seven years. Once adopted, the legislation will regulate mine action in Azerbaijan, governing issues such as licensing, accreditation, quality assurance (QA), and tender procedures.³²

In 2019, the Azerbaijani government funded 90% of ANAMA's operating costs and 90% of all survey and clearance in Azerbaijan.³³ The proportion of international contribution to ANAMA's budget is believed to have significantly increased since 2020. But despite the resources allocated by the government, ANAMA remains significantly underfunded and understaffed when compared to the huge needs resulting from the additional contamination in the territories regained in 2020. ANAMA is seeking international funds to be able to clear the mined and ERW-contaminated areas in a timely manner and in compliance with the NMAS and IMAS.

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

ANAMA does not have a gender and diversity policy in place. While women made up 30% of managerial and supervisory positions at ANAMA in 2020, as at May 2021, no women were working in operational roles. ANAMA was planning to deploy a ten-strong all-woman demining team by the middle of 2021, but as at July 2021, the process was still ongoing.³⁴ The rapid upscaling of ANAMA's mine action operations currently taking place provides an opportunity for ANAMA to improve the proportion of women in operational roles and to mainstream gender and diversity throughout its programme.

One of the goals of the UNDP-ANAMA capacity strengthening project is to introduce a gender-sensitive approach to mine action to Azerbaijan.³⁵ This is defined as delivering train-the-trainer sessions to mine action staff on a gender-sensitive approach to working with affected populations and the development of an accompanying training manual. In 2020, ANAMA deployed a network of volunteers to deliver Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE). The teams distributed EORE material to communities residing alongside the LOC.³⁶ Women participate in risk education sessions and are said to be consulted during survey.³⁷

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

As at May 2021, ANAMA was in the process of transitioning to IMSMA Core and had already established an Online ArcGIS Portal. Draft forms to record daily progress, non-technical survey, and hazardous areas, and for external quality control (QC) were created and translated into Azeri. ANAMA intended to launch the new system for testing by August 2021.³⁸

ANAMA reports that it regularly checks the quality of data in its database. This checking is carried out first at regional level and then at headquarters. With the significant increase in the scale of operations and area of responsibilities in 2020, the progress reporting period was reduced from 15 days to one week and, as at May 2021, it was planned to generate daily progress reports.³⁹

PLANNING AND TASKING

The existing mine action strategy was for 2013–18. Its main aims were said to be to continue mine and ERW clearance in support of government development projects and to provide safe conditions for the local population in affected regions.⁴⁰ The strategy expired at the end of 2018 and has not yet been replaced. As at May 2021, ANAMA reported that a new strategy was being developed with the assistance of a UNDP Chief Technical Advisor deployed to Azerbaijan.⁴¹

ANAMA is integrated into the State Social and Economic Development programme and mine action is reported

to be an integral part of the new State socio-economic development plan developed for 2019–22.⁴² In the absence of a new multiyear strategic plan, tasks were being prioritised according to the State development plan and instructions from the government.⁴³ Since the 2020 conflict, however, and according to a secondary data review, ANAMA was prioritising clearance in former settlements in the newly-gained territories in preparation for population resettlement and despite surrounding areas being potentially highly contaminated and thus off-limits.⁴⁴

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

Azerbaijan has its own NMAS, which were adopted in 2001 and subsequently revised in 2003, 2004, and 2010 in accordance with IMAS and best practice.⁴⁵ No major modifications to the standards were made in 2020.⁴⁶ ANAMA periodically conducts meetings with stakeholders to discuss and make relevant changes to NMAS and standing operating procedures (SOPs).⁴⁷

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

ANAMA had a total capacity of 300 deminers, 6 machines, and 40 MDDs in 2020 and was planning to significantly increase the numbers of its non-technical and technical survey personnel in 2021 in order to implement its countrywide survey and resurvey operation.⁴⁸ According to media reports, ANAMA was undergoing a huge restructuring with plans to increase its capacity from 500 to between 12,000 and 15,000 employees in 2021. ANAMA was planning to deploy its deminers mainly in the regions around Nagorno-Karabakh.⁴⁹

According to UNDP, ANAMA had initially planned to train, equip, and deploy an additional 100 deminers per month in order to respond to the surge in needs since the end of the 2020 conflict. This monthly upscaling rate, however, could not be sustained and ANAMA instead has been encouraging the expansion of other operator capacities, including a significant commercial base, and envisages strengthening its role as a national mine action centre.⁵⁰

In 2019, the Azerbaijan mine action programme had more than 300 deminers/explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) personnel, 32 MDDs, and an 18-man team operating six machines.⁵¹ MDDs and mechanical assets were used to support release through technical survey and manual clearance.⁵²

DEMINER SAFETY

On 2 November 2020, an ANAMA deminer was struck by the blast of an anti-personnel mine while on duty. Reportedly, the mine was buried by the Armenian armed forces in Jabrail region. As a result of the explosion, the deminer's left leg was amputated at the ankle.⁵³ A second ANAMA staff member was injured while on duty in the city of Horadiz, Fuzuli district, in an artillery shell explosion. The employee, who received three shrapnel wounds, was hospitalised.⁵⁴

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2020

ANAMA released a total of 100,977m² of mined area through survey and clearance in 2020.⁵⁵ The breakdown of land release through survey as opposed to clearance was not reported. ANAMA reported the same area of cluster munition-contaminated land released in 2020,⁵⁶ indicating that the 0.1km² figure includes clearance of all EO, and not only mined area. A total of 5,669 anti-personnel mines, 4,563 anti-vehicle mines, and 3,281 items of UXO were destroyed during spot tasks in 2020.⁵⁷

In its statement to the APMBC intersessional meetings in July 2021, Azerbaijan declared that ANAMA has cleared about 30km² since the start of the demining operation in its reclaimed territories, destroying in the process 8,256 anti-personnel mines, 3,792 anti-tank mines, and 9,211 items of UXO.⁵⁸ The 30km² of contaminated area cleared is thought to include clearance of all EO contamination, and not only mined area.

A total of 2.01km² of mined area was released in 2019, of which 1.01km² was cleared and 0.99km² was reduced through technical survey.

SURVEY IN 2020

ANAMA released a total of 100,977m² of mined area through survey and clearance in 2020. The breakdown of land release through survey as opposed to clearance was not made available.⁵⁹

In 2019, nearly 1km² of anti-personnel mined area was reduced through technical survey across three regions. There was no cancellation through non-technical survey in 2019.⁶⁰

CLEARANCE IN 2020

ANAMA did not formally clear anti-personnel mined area in 2020, though it conducted more than 1,600 spot tasks between September 2020 and May 2021.⁶¹ A total of 100,977m² of land was released through survey and clearance combined in 2020.⁶² ANAMA reported it had destroyed 5,669 anti-personnel mines, 4,563 anti-vehicle mines, and 3,281 items of UXO during spot tasks in 2020.⁶³

According to the regular operational reports published on ANAMA's website, a total of 2,891 anti-personnel mines were found and destroyed in spot tasks between 7 November and 16 December 2020,⁶⁴ of which, 2,581 anti-personnel mines were found between 12 and 14 November 2020 alone.⁶⁵

In its statement to the APMBC intersessional meetings in June 2021, Azerbaijan declared that ANAMA has cleared about 30km² since the start of the demining operation in its recently claimed territories, destroying in the process 8,256 anti-personnel mines, 3,792 anti-tank mines and 9,211 items of UXO.⁶⁶ This is thought to include all EO contamination, and not only mined areas.

Azerbaijan submitted voluntary APMBC Article 7 transparency reports in 2008 and 2009 but has not submitted a report in the last ten years. Over the last five years, 6.19km² of mined area has been reportedly cleared in Azerbaijan. Accuracy of reporting of contamination, survey, and clearance data, though, continues to be an issue in Azerbaijan. So too are the effectiveness and efficiency of land release methodology, with many areas being cleared that prove to have little or no mine contamination. In June 2020, one month before the start of the military operation, ANAMA stated that mine clearance could only be completed once it has access to territories currently occupied by Armenia.⁶⁷

In the span of four months (September to December 2020), the size of anti-personnel mine contamination falling under Azerbaijan's control and jurisdiction has magnified exponentially. Regular operational reports published on ANAMA's website attest to the scale of the needs with tens of UXO-related emergency call-outs received and responded to on daily basis.⁶⁸ Two decades of mine and ERW clearance potentially beckon given the scale of the task.

In a statement to the APMBC intersessional meetings in June 2021, Azerbaijan called on all States Parties to support its mine action efforts. According to its statement: "despite the huge resources allocated by Azerbaijan, the [demining operation] still requires more resources given the size of the contaminated areas. Azerbaijan urgently seeks broad international donor support, also in terms of funds and provision of technical equipment required to continue its demining efforts".⁶⁹

Table 3: Five-year summary of AP mine clearance

Year	Area cleared (km ²)
2020	0.10
2019	1.01
2018	0.35
2017	*4.00
2016	0.83
Total	6.29

* A further 3.7km² was cleared but was found not to contain mines.

PLANNING FOR RESIDUAL RISK AFTER COMPLETION

Azerbaijan has a national capacity which could be deployed to deal with residual risk post-completion. In July 2020, ANAMA reported that the elaboration of a plan for the management of residual risk is contingent upon the liberation of contaminated areas that are currently occupied by Armenia.⁷⁰ As at May 2021, updated plans for the management of residual risk had yet to be reported.

- 1 Online interview with Steiner Essen, Senior Mine Action Consultant, UNDP, and Guy Rhodes, Chief Technical Advisor, UNDP, 29 April 2021; and email from Guy Rhodes, UNDP, 23 June 2021.
- 2 Statement of Armenia, APMBC Intersessional meetings (online), 22-24 June 2021.
- 3 ANAMA, "Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action 2018", p. 5.
- 4 Statement of Azerbaijan, APMBC Intersessional Meetings (online), 22-24 June 2021; and "Armenia and Azerbaijan exchange detainees for mine maps", *Euroasianet*, 23 June 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3gXYWdx>.
- 5 ACAPS, Azerbaijan: Pre-Existing Situation and Impact of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, 21 December 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3hIUwt2>; BBC, "Armenia-Azerbaijan: Why Did Nagorno-Karabakh Spark a Conflict", 12 November 2020, at: <https://bbc.in/3ywhU2V>; and VOX, "The Armenia and Azerbaijan War, Explained", 3 December 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3yrmqjj>.
- 6 International Crisis Group (ICG), "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Visual Explainer", last updated 7 May 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3uiOou2>.
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- 8 Statement of Armenia, APMBC Intersessional Meetings (online), 22-24 June 2021.
- 9 Statement of Azerbaijan, APMBC Intersessional Meetings (online), 22-24 June 2021.
- 10 Email from Nijat Karimov, Head of Planning, Development, and International Relations Department, ANAMA, 21 May 2021.
- 11 Email from Nijat Karimov, ANAMA, 21 May 2021.
- 12 Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) Press release, MoFA website, accessed on 12 June 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3j86BIM>.
- 13 Statement of Azerbaijan, APMBC intersessional meetings (online), 22-24 July 2021.
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- 17 J. Kucera, "Post-war report: Armenia accuses Azerbaijan of dragging feet on POWs", *EurasiaNet*, 5 March 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3sk5eta>.
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- 19 Email from Nijat Karimov, ANAMA, 21 May 2021.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Email from Nijat Karimov, ANAMA, 28 July 2020.
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- 37 Emails from Sabina Sarkarova, ANAMA, 2 April 2019 and 8 June 2020.
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- 57 Ibid.
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