THE POST-WAR LANDMINE ISSUE IN KARABAKH

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Following the end of the Karabakh War, the Azerbaijani government, with its decree dated November 16, 2022, took steps to facilitate the return of the Karabakh people who were forced to leave their lands due to occupation carried out by Armenians 30 years ago. According to this decree, the first phase of resettlement is planned for completion between 2022 and 2026.[1] As part of this effort, the process of clearing the liberated areas of mines and other hazardous military remnants has begun, along with the revitalization of the local economy, the development of infrastructure, and the restoration of livable conditions in the region.

However, landmines remain a significant problem in the areas slated for resettlement. The incomplete demining not only endangers public safety but also delays the restoration process of the region and restricts the availability of land for returning residents.

During the 30-year occupation, around 12% of Karabakh was contaminated by Armenians with approximately 1.5 million landmines and an unknown amount of unexploded ordnance. Additionally, between 2020 and 2023, new mines were planted, resulting in the contamination of 500 kilometers of additional territory. Today, 147,988 hectares of mined regions are classified as high-risk, and 675,570 hectares are considered medium- and low-risk. Since 2020, 361 people, the majority civilians, have been affected by landmines; 68 have died, and 293 were injured to varying degrees. In total, since the beginning of the Karabakh war, approximately 3,400 people have been harmed by mine explosions.[2]

Today, the Azerbaijani state is managing the demining process in addition to the ongoing restoration of Karabakh. The demining efforts are being conducted by the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) using artificial intelligence and drones. Since 2020, ANAMA has cleared 118,000 hectares of land from mines; however, this only accounts for 10.5% of the total contaminated areas.[3] While Azerbaijan is working to address the issue with its own resources, the full demining of the affected areas seems unfeasible at present due to the high costs involved.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the cost of clearing a single landmine ranges from $300 to $1,000, while producing one costs just $3 to $75. [4] Following the ceasefire in November 2020, the European Union and the United States provided approximately $12.5 million in aid to ANAMA for demining efforts. However, this

falls far short of the estimated $25 billion required to clear all contaminated areas.

One potential way to expedite the demining process is by obtaining the minefield maps known to be in the possession of the Armenian Government. After the ceasefire, on June 12, the Armenian side, through mediation by Georgia, the United States, and the European Union, handed over a map of 97,000 anti-tank and anti-personnel mines to Azerbaijan. In exchange, Azerbaijan returned 15 Armenian prisoners held for various crimes during the war. However, only 25% of the provided map was accurate. In February 2024, Armenia submitted 8 additional maps to Azerbaijan, but like the previous ones, they too were incomplete and inaccurate.[6]

Mines have often been found near roads, cemeteries, bridges, and homes. Some mines laid during the First Karabakh War continue to detonate to this day. Armenias refusal to hand over mine maps after losing the war can be seen as an effort to prove that it still maintains some interest in the area.

Azerbaijan continues to raise the issue of landmines on international platforms through diplomatic means. In this context, from May 24 to 26, 2024, an international conference was held in Baku and Aghdam in collaboration with ANAMA and the United Nations in Azerbaijan.[7] The conference, attended by 190 representatives from over 50 countries, provided comprehensive information on the mined areas and the demining process.

In conclusion, the landmine issue in Karabakh poses a significant threat not only to human life but also to environmental and ecological balance. Mines cause direct human casualties and have long-term negative impacts on the ecosystem, including air, water, and soil pollution. Azerbaijan continues to raise this issue on international platforms, seeking global support for the resolution process. Enhanced international cooperation will be crucial for both the demining efforts and preventing environmental disasters in the region, ensuring the successful reconstruction and sustainable development of Karabakh.

[1] Azərbaycan Respublikasının işgalden azad edilmiş ərazilərinə Böyük Qayıdışa dair İ Dövlət Programının təsdiq edilməsi haqqında Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin Sərəncamı, October 14, 2024, https://president.az/az/articles/view/57883

[2] Участникам международной конференции на тему «Снижение воздействия мин на окружающую среду Мобилизация ресурсов для безопасного и зеленого будущего, October 11, 2024, https://azertag.az/ru/xeber/uchastnikam_mezhdunarodnoi_konferencii_na_temu_snizhenie_vozdeistviya_min_na_okruzhayushchuyu_sredu___mobilizaciya_resursov_dlya_bezopasnogo_i_zelenogo_budushchego-3029562

[3] Нарастающий опыт Азербайджана в области разминирования может внести вклад в деятельность в этом направлении, проводимую во всем мире, October 11, 2024, https://azertag.az/ru/xeber/narastayushchii_opyt_azerbaidzhana_v_oblasti_razminirovaniya_mozhet_vnesti_vklad_v_deyatelnost_v_etom_napravlenii_provodimuyu_vo_vsem_mire-2954221

[4] Нарастающий опыт Азербайджана в области разминирования может внести вклад в деятельность в этом направлении, проводимую во всем мире, October 11, 2024, https://azertag.az/ru/xeber/narastayushchii_opyt_azerbaidzhana_v_oblasti_razminirovaniya_mozhet_vnesti_vklad_v_deyatelnost_v_etom_napravlenii_provodimuyu_vo_vsem_mire-2954221

[5] Нарастающий опыт Азербайджана в области разминирования может внести вклад в деятельность в этом направлении, проводимую во всем мире, October 11, 2024, https://azertag.az/ru/xeber/narastayushchii_opyt_azerbaidzhana_v_oblasti_razminirovaniya_mozhet_vnesti_vklad_v_deyatelnost_v_etom_napravlenii_provodimuyu_vo_vsem_mire-2954221

[6] Ереван передал Баку карту минных полей в Карабахе в обмен на 15 Заключенных, October 10, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-57709190

[7] Mina təhlükəsi ilə mübarizə - Dayanıqlı İnkişaf Məqsədlərinə gedən yol mövzusunda 2-ci beynəlxalq konfransın bəyannaməsi, October 18, 2024, https://azerbaijan.un.org/az/235501-%E2%80%9Cmina-t%C9%99hl%C3%BCk%C9%99si-il%C9%99-m%C3%BCbariz%C9%99-dayan%C4%B1ql%C4%B1-i%CC%87nki%C5%9Faf-m%C9%99qs%C9%99dl%C9%99rin%C9%99-ged%C9%99n-yol%E2%80%9D-m%C3%B6vzusunda-2-ci

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