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Explosive Remnants of War in North Africa

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Protection of Armaments and Consequences

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This article looks at explosive remnants of war in North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia) from different perspectives, including the scope and history of the ERW, its impact and its relationship to security.

Several countries in North Africa are affected by mines and ERW as a result of the North African Campaign of World War II, also known as the Desert War, which was fought between 1940 and 1943. Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia are dealing with the contamination that has resulted from internal and regional conflicts over the past 60 years as a result of the Desert War contamination.

Algeria

Algeria is affected by ERW as a result of World War II, the Algerian War of Independence and ongoing conflicts with terrorist groups. There is no distinction between landmine and ERW estimates and the contaminated area of affected is different depending on whether or not it is undamaged land. The contaminated area in the east and west, known as the Mersel and Challe lines, are most affected by mines, as are the strategic areas in the north that the Algerian Army secured with mines in its ongoing fight with terrorist groups. The other affected areas of the country are mostly ERW-affected due to battles fought during WWII. Algeria estimates there were between 0.5 and 1 million mines and ERW during and after the independence war, which is the same given to people affected in natural disasters. Forty adult males are responsible for a family, which means that the mines are giving rise to people affected in natural disasters. Forty adult males are responsible for a family, which means that the mines are giving rise to people affected in natural disasters. Forty adult males are responsible for a family, which means that the mines are giving rise to people affected in natural disasters.

Erw have not blocked access to community resources such as health centres, schools or religious sites. An Algerian Ministry of Defense official stated that ERW affected the implementation of development projects in the affected areas, such as road and railway projects. The Ministry did not give any details, stating that they do not have such information.

Outlook

Algeria became a State Party to the Ottawa Convention 1 April 2002. Algeria created a national committee in 2003 that is responsible for implementing the Convention and to deal with the mines/ERW issue. Clearing began in November 2004, but it is progressing very slowly. The committee is in the process of finalising agreements to do the assessments and planning with the United Nations Development Programme and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

Egypt

Egypt is affected by ERW in two main areas. The first area is in the west and in the region of Aswan and the second area is in the north and the red sea. As regards the first area, there are 17,000 people affected. In the north, however, the number is about 11,000 people. ERW affected 2,640 hectares (10 square miles) in the western border area. Terrorist groups have planted approximately 33,000 homemade bombs, which means that their main income once injured. The social system in Egypt does not give any assistance for mine/ERW victims; they might make some income by payment of up to 1,000 LE after a long process of filing our paperwork to prove their injury. This amount is the same given to people affected in natural disasters. Forty adult males are responsible for a family, which means that the mines are giving rise to people affected in natural disasters.

Economic impact

Fifty-seven victims of mines and ERW were not kept. However, by extrapolating the data, the find the ERW victims can be estimated between 1,662 and 2,078.

Information about mines since 1998—a total of mines/ERW in Egypt—shows that the 500,000 people living in the Sahara oasis and the 600,000 people living in the Sinai are more affected by ERW than mines. Being a mine or ERW victim in one of the affected regions in Egypt is a complicated health issue because of the limited health services in these areas.

All of the victims are found in groups of people—those who work on the development and repair of infrastructure, Bedouins, or farmers, which means that they lose their main income once injured. The social system in Egypt does not give any assistance for mine/ERW victims; they might make some income by payment of up to 1,000 LE after a long process of filing our paperwork to prove their injury. This amount is the same given to people affected in natural disasters.

In the next 20 years and there is a national committee in charge of the development of the northern coast. This will be a regional issue of importance, irrigation, agriculture, oil/gas exploration and tourism projects. While the Egyptian Army is the only authority that deals with the demining, the 20-year development plan for the northern area also aims at determining locations affected by mines/ERW.

Libya

Libya is affected by ERW in different areas in the northern part of the country because of the World War II campaign in North Africa, in the northeastern area at the Egyptian-Libyan borders because of the Egyptian-Libyan conflict in 1977, and in the southern area, including the Libyan-Sudanese border. There are many mines that were planted by the Libyan Army in the northeastern area and the border with Egypt. All available statistics, publications and photos show that ERW account for the majority of those numbers in the north and some areas in the south.

Humanitarian impact

There is no current estimated number of mine/ERW victims in Libya. It is estimated there were 12,258 victims during the period of 1952 to 1975, which includes 3,874 deaths and 8,384 injuries. Some publications show that there were 25,000 deaths and 100,000 injuries. There are an estimated 11.62 million to 12.45 million ERW victims in Libya; some officals make estimates up to 10 million. This makes Libya the third highest in the world in number of mine/ERW victims, behind Afghanistan and Angola. The area was given a special emphasis on returnees and refugees.

It is very difficult to know how many of these were ERW victims since specific records were not kept. However, by extrapolating the data, the find the ERW victims can be estimated between 1,662 and 2,078.

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victim reports, but without dates, places or specific periods. Many publications and photos show that the majority of victims in Libya are ERE victims. Officials are sure there are new mine/ERW victims each month but do not have figures as there is no mechanism to collect such data on a national basis. The Libyan Jihad Center for Historical Studies counted 100,000 families affected directly or indirectly by mines and ERW. Libya was known for its fairly good health system in the past, but this has changed since the United States and the United Nations imposed international sanctions in 1986 and the United Nations followed suit in 1992. Consequently, mine/ERW victims suffer from the shortage of rehabilitation and psychological care.

Economic impacts. Mines/ERW affect the agricultural sector in Libya. It is estimated that approximately 253,059 hectares (1,139 square miles) in Libya cannot be used for agriculture because of mines/ERW. In 1972, the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation published an estimate of the total income loss from not using affected lands at 18,897,760 Libyan Dinars (US$14,475,728). Raising livestock is also affected by mines/ERW; they increase the costs of any petroleum project due to the need for demining before drilling can begin. The Great Man-Made River that brings water from underground in the south to the populated areas took much longer and cost significantly more than was originally expected to complete because of mines/ERW clearance.

Outlook. After decades of sanctions and with Libya’s new strategy for trade and interaction with the world, many projects are planned to take place in different parts of the country, including for tourism. This will bring more people to the affected areas, which will have both humanitarian and economic impact. Libya established a National Program for Demining and Land Reclamation in 2005. However, the country still does not have a future plan for national mine action.

Morocco
Morocco is not affected by EWR and mines except for the territories it controls in Western Sahara. Between 1975 and 1991, Western Sahara territories witnessed a sovereignty conflict among Morocco, Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguia el Hamra y Rio de Oro (The Polisario Front)—a Saharawi nationalist organization—and Mauritania, before its withdrawal from the conflict in 1979. This conflict came after the withdrawal of the Spanish colonial forces from the territories. All parties to the conflict used a variety of weapons and munitions throughout their fighting.

Tunisia
Tunisia is affected by an unknown number of EWR and mines because of World War II conflicts in North Africa and anti-tank and anti-personnel mines is emplaced to secure its borders with Algeria and Libya. During its conflict with Libya from 1970 to 1980, Tunisia planted 1,530 anti-tank mines (including the Egyptian Mk7 and Mk8, the American M6A2 and the Yugoslavian M5A1/3/M4A1) in nine minefields along its border with Algeria and Libya. EWR-affected areas in Tunisia include Marraret, Mamarra and El Hanmia regions in the south, Ksarine and Fatiid regions in the centre, Le Cap-Bon and the northeastern region of the country. Minefields planned by Tunisia include several booby traps that are attached to some of the anti-tank mines to prevent removal. However, the exact number of booby traps is unknown.

Humanitarian impacts. The humanitarian impact of mines in Tunisia is very minor but the humanitarian impact of EWR from World War II is more significant, although it remains relatively small by international standards.

Most of the minefields and EWR-affected areas are located in remote desert areas with few or no local population. From 1995 to 2005, there were nine mine victims in Tunisia. These were killed because of World War II EWR; one in 1995, one in 1999 and one in 1996. In 2001, one child was injured by EWR while he was working as a shepherd. In 2002, four children were injured in two different incidents by EWR in the same manner.

Economic impact. Economic impact is limited by the location of EWR in remote areas, except in some areas that are used for grazing. Any large-scale construction or engineering projects in Tunisia require prior clearance of all EWR by the engineering battalion of the armed forces.

Outlook. Tunisia has a national com- mittee responsible for implementing the Mine Ban Convention and currently the Tunisian Army is the only authority that conducts demining. Tunisia began demining in late 2004 and is nearing clearance completion. The plan has been made ready for EWR clearance. The Tunisian government intends to construct new roads throughout the country, including a road between Tunis and Tripoli. It also plans to build a gas pipeline that will cross the Tunisian/Libyan border. To begin these projects, clearance of the mines/ERW on the border area is needed.

ERW in North Africa and Security Concerns
Beyond the basic economic and humanitar- ian impacts these North African coun- tries face due to the presence of mines/ERW, these weapons create a security risk for civilians as well. Incidents involving the use of EWR and mines in criminal and terrorist activities have occurred in many of the affected areas in North Africa. Removal of ERW is important for the security of the region.

ERW can be used for criminal activi- ties such as smuggling, illegal immigration, illegal fishing and disrupting political and security stability in affected communities. ERW can also be used in terrorist activities because it offers a significant amount of acti- ve explosives that can be used easily with a little bit of experience.

In October 2004, an unknown terror- ists blew up the Hilton Taba Hotel and two small tourist camps located in Taba and south Sinai in Egypt. The official declara- tion of the Egyptian Ministry of Interior stated that the terrorist used explosives that they took from mines and ERW in Sinai. According to Protection of Armaments and Consequences, an NGO that focuses on banning arms that affect civilians, applying international law and international humanitarian law, and helping victims of arms in the Middle East and North Africa. He is also a Landmine Monitor researcher and an IHL management committee member. Sorour is a 2005 graduate of the UNSC Senior Management Course presented by the Mine Action Information Center at James Madison University. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies from Cairo University, and is registered with the Egyptian Bar and is a member of the Arab Lawyers Union.