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Country Profile: Libya

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Country Profile: Libya

Libya, located on the north coast of Africa between Egypt and Algeria, was contaminated with landmines and unexploded ordnance during World War II and the wars with Egypt (1977) and Chad (1980–1987). Additionally, Gadhafi's regime (1969–2011) amassed extensive stockpiles of anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines, which pro-Gadhafi forces and some rebel freedom fighters later used during the Libyan Revolution (February–October 2011). NATO forces, using air-to-surface weapons during the Libyan Revolution, created further UXO contamination.¹

Under Gadhafi's rule, Libya refused to sign any pro-ban resolution on landmines. On 28 April 2011, the National Transitional Council (the opposition government) pledged to prohibit the use of AP mines, promised to destroy all stockpiles in the country and stated that any future government of Libya is expected to join the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction* (Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or APMBC). However, because the NTC was never in a position to sign the APMBC, its promises and pledges remain unfulfilled.¹

Landmine/UXO Overview

The extent of Libya's landmine threat is unknown and requires more extensive survey throughout the country. Reportedly, areas surrounding the northern coastal cities of Brega, Misrata, Ras Lanuf and Sirte and the northern landlocked city of Bani Waled, were particularly affected by shifting frontlines where Gadhafi's forces laid landmines as they retreated, leading to haphazard and scattered minefields.² One instance was recorded of rebel freedom fighters using AV mines near Adjabiya in northeastern Libya. In addition, as a result of the Libyan Revolution, Gadhafi loyalists scattered cluster munitions throughout residential areas in Misrata and Ajabiya.¹ In 2012, NATO gave detailed coordinates to the United Nations for each of its air strikes, as well, resulting in 313 possible contamination sites.¹

Abandoned and unstable ordnance and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons are also widespread problems. The civilian uprising led to improvised weaponry, unsafe storage, misfires and abandoned ordnance in areas where the fighting moved quickly and was in constant flux. Abandoned ammunition storage sites allowed weapons and ordnance to become easily accessible, and as a result the subsequent illicit SA/LW proliferation poses a danger to



Figure 1. Libya
Figure courtesy of CIA World Factbook.

civilian populations.²

Casualties

While the exact number of landmine and explosive remnants of war casualties in Libya is unknown, estimates range from 1,852 to 12,258, depending upon which organization is providing the data.³ The Libyan Demining Association and the Libya Civil Defense Department estimate that by the end of 2006, 1,852 people were killed or injured by mines. Earlier estimates from the Libyan police (1940–1995) indicate that mines caused 11,845 casualties (6,749 killed/5,096 injured). The Libyan Jihad Center for Historical Studies claims 12,258 casualties (3,874 killed/8,384 injured) occurred from 1952–1975.³ More recently in 2011, 187 ERW casualties were reported (47 killed/131 injured/6 unknown).¹

Clearance

In May 2011, rebel freedom fighters created the Libyan Mine Action and Removal of Remnants of War Committee (LMAC). In April 2011, the U.N. Mine Action Service became involved in Libyan demining efforts. UNMAS partnered with nongovernmental organizations including the Danish Demining Group, DanChurchAid, Handicap International, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Norwegian People's Aid, MAG (Mines Advisory Group), Swiss Foundation for Mine

Action and UNICEF to form a Joint Mine Action Committee Team.¹ The Minister of Defense appointed a management board for LMAC in December 2011; it is tasked with responsibility over all mine action activities in Libya. LMAC's mine action standards are based on the International Mine Action Standards.⁴

Today, LMAC seeks to coordinate with JMACT to create a system to work together until control of all humanitarian mine action organizations in the country lies with LMAC. Present efforts focus on organizing NGOs to coordinate their efforts to work simultaneously without any duplication of effort.⁵

Since February 2012, the Libyan Army Corps of Engineers has destroyed 20,000 landmines. Eastern Libya contained the vast majority of these mines. In addition to the Corps of Engineers, 27 international clearance teams and 29 mine risk education teams operate in Libya.⁶ Libyan teams and individuals conduct most clearance in the country, but international operators cleared 20 sq km (12 sq mi) of battle area in 2011.¹

Mine Risk Education

In July 2011, UNICEF and HI began providing mine risk education in internally displaced persons camps. They distributed more than 30,000 information leaflets in these camps. Mosques, local radio and civil-society groups also disseminate information on landmine dangers to the general public.⁴ UNICEF, with implementing partners in the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, LMAC, and national and international NGOs, began and continues to lead a MRE program in Libya, extending from January 2012 through December 2012. This program covers a broad spectrum of goals, aiming to

- Integrate MRE into the school system
- Develop a national MRE strategy
- Design and distribute MRE materials in a variety of media
- Create MRE activities and special events that will raise awareness of landmine/UXO/ERW risks⁷

Current Realities

On 8–9 August 2012, Libya instituted the new, nationally elected the General National Congress and an interim president. The Congress, a 200-seat assembly, replaced the now-dissolved National Transitional Council and will oversee the election of a prime minister and the creation of a full parliamentary system.^{8,9} The general public remains to elect a 60-member panel for the creation of a new constitution.⁸ The Libyan Congress elected Mustafa Abu Shagur as the new prime minister on 12 September 2012. However, Shagur was removed 25 days later on 7 October 2012 after he was unable to form a cabinet approved by the Congress.¹⁰ One week later, Congress elected Ali Zeidan as the new interim prime minister. The Congress approved his proposed cabinet, and he was sworn into office 14 November 2012.¹¹

Amidst Libya's changing political situation, authorities continuously struggle with armed groups that refuse to lay their weapons down, believing that to retain their weapons is to retain a degree of control over the drastically shifting future of Libya's social, political and economic state.⁷ The future role of the new government in landmine and UXO removal is uncertain. Until then, LMAC, along with JMACT and NGOs, will continue striving toward a safer Libya. 🌐

~ Paige Ober, CISR staff

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TOP OF PAGE

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