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## Libyan Mine Action Center

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## Libyan Mine Action Center

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Despite the landmines and explosive remnants of war left over from World War II (1940–1943), the 1977 conflict with Egypt and the Libyan-Chadian war (1980–1987), Libya's former dictator Moammar Gadhafi made little effort to establish a demining program in Libya.<sup>1</sup> While the De-mining Society of the Gadhafi International Charity and Development Foundation worked with the United Nations Development Programme to provide information management and mine-risk education within Libya in 2008,<sup>2</sup> efforts were made to create a civilian mine-action program in response to mines along borders with Egypt and Chad.<sup>1</sup> However, the Government of Libya is not a signatory to the 1997 *Convention on the*



*Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction* (also known as the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or APMBC) or the *Convention on Cluster Munitions*.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Gadhafi even criticized the APMBC in October 2007.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of Libya's struggle, the newly founded Libyan Mine Action Center, also known as the Libya Centre for Mine Action and Remnants of War, now serves as the lead organization for addressing weapons security according to Libya's Ministry of Defense.<sup>4</sup>

Operating out of Tripoli, LMAC relies on approximately 20 employees and, although no final decision has been made, hopes to expand regional branches into affected areas.<sup>5</sup> Together with the German Government, the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) has agreed to support LMAC in capacity development and will fund start-up costs, employee salaries and equipment purchases for one year.<sup>5</sup> Collaborating with Libya's Ministry of Defense, LMAC is working with two Sterling International technical advisors, deployed and funded by PM/WRA to assist in capacity development. LMAC also receives support from a U.S. and U.K. technical advisor who are working with LMAC to create a strategic plan and additional capacity development.<sup>5</sup>

## MANPADS

When the Gadhafi regime collapsed, Libya could claim the largest stockpile of man-portable air-defense systems of any non-MANPADS producing nation, having acquired approximately 20,000 within the past four decades.<sup>4</sup> On 2 February 2012, Assistant Secretary Andrew Shapiro of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs addressed the challenges in Libya and stated that the United States is currently involved in "the most extensive effort to combat the proliferation of MANPADS in U.S. history."<sup>4</sup> The United States has allocated US\$40 million for the securement and recovery of Libya's weapons stockpiles.<sup>4</sup> In fact, when the fighting in Libya intensified, the U.S. provided nongovernmental organizations with \$3 million in April 2011.<sup>4</sup> These organizations conducted clearance of unexploded ordnance and other explosive remnants of war, collaborating with the Transitional National Council, also known as the National Transitory Council.<sup>4</sup>


### On the Ground

Although the situation in Libya is fluid as the interim government deals with the political crisis, PM/WRA provided grants to the MAG (Mines Advisory Group) and the *Fondation Suisse de Déminage* (Swiss Foundation for Mine Action) for various clearance operations in the country.<sup>6</sup> FSD has trained and deployed battle-area clearance teams.<sup>5</sup> Primarily working in Tobruq, FSD's BAC teams are funded by PM/WRA and received \$1,400,000 in grant money. As of 25 April 2012, FSD teams have cleared 658,819 square meters (163 acres) of land with the removal of 19,541 items of UXO.<sup>5,7,8</sup>

From as early as April 2011, MAG operated in Libya with a \$1,222,080 grant from PM/WRA and \$290,000 in aid provided by the British Government.<sup>8</sup> Employing explosive ordnance disposal teams to conduct spot tasks, MAG began its work in Benghazi and proceeded to move along the coast to new contaminated areas as fighting ceased and opportunity permitted.<sup>5</sup> As of May 2011, MAG had already conducted 30 spot tasks and cleared 168 explosive remnants of war.<sup>7</sup> Spokesman for the United Nations Mine Action Service Tekimiti Gilbert stated that MAG was also tasked with a removing and destroying aviation ordnance for a downed fighter jet that crash-landed 40 kilometers (31 miles) east of Benghazi.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, ammunition storage areas targeted by NATO forces are of great concern for MAG and are a focus of clearance.<sup>5</sup>

To assist in containing the UXO problem, UNMAS is also working in Libya with the International Committee of the Red Cross.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, UNMAS has facilitated donations from the Government of Denmark and the Australian Agency for International Development.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Handicap International is working with the Libyan Scouts Organizations and LMAC to provide mine-risk education to the civilians on the risks linked to ERW, UXO and small arms and light weapons.<sup>9</sup> DanChurchAid and the Danish Demining Group are also working in Libya to clear ERW.<sup>5</sup>

In an effort to aid in disposal of landmines and ERW, Germany's Federal Foreign Office has given EUR€750,000 (US\$1,004,100)<sup>10</sup> to LMAC.<sup>11</sup> This donation will support LMAC in the recovery and destruction of weapons stockpiles as well as help fund start-up costs.<sup>5,11</sup> As the plundering of Libya's amassed weapons stockpiles has attracted international attention, reports cite that stockpiles show clear signs of looting. Alexander Griffiths, Head of Operations for FSD, claims "the ammo dumps we've seen are either partially destroyed or picked clean."<sup>8</sup>

In his speech on the proliferation of MANPADs in Libya, Shapiro noted that the State Department's programs have provided "diplomatic and development work [that save] ... lives and help foster stability in every region of the world."<sup>4</sup> The assistance provided by the U.S. State Department and the collaboration of NGOs on the ground in Libya, working together with LMAC, are providing the war-torn country with much needed relief, with the intent of securing weapons that ensure the safety of not only Libya but of the region and the rest of the world. Despite the current situation in Libya, the U.S. and German Governments are providing LMAC with the necessary means to begin to handle issues of weapons security and clearance operations within Libya. 

~ Blake Williamson, CISR staff

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## Endnotes

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