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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 1942 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 in addition to 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 contamination of each affected area is different depending on the extent occupied by those mines.

In 1976, the UN Mine Action Centre (UNMAC) estimated that 320,000 to 420,000 mines and 100,000 explosive remnants of war were in Algeria.

In 2003, the UNMAC estimated that 1.27 million to 1.53 million ERW affected the implementation of development and repair of infrastructure.
Land Reclamation published an estimate of 1,139 square miles in Libya cannot be used for grazing. In 1976, 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 (135,641,475.728). Raising livestock is important for this industry. In 1976, the Libyan authorities estimated 1,452,077 hectares (5,607 square miles) of affected land could not be used for grazing. In addition, 75,000 camels, 48,750 sheep and 1,250 cows were lost because of mines/ERW incidents. Due to rising population rates and the slow process of demining, these statistics have not seen much improvement over the past 30 years. Many ports in Libya were affected by sea mines/ERW and cleaning them was very expensive. These included Benghazi, Derna, Tobruk and Tripoli ports. Mines/ERW have affected the infrastructure of the transportation network in Libya, causing delays in trade reorientation. The oil sector 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 2004. However, the country still does not have a future plan for national mine action.

Morocco

Morocco is not affected by ERW, but it was affected by mines for eight years from World War II to late 1990. During its conflict with Algeria in late 1990, the Moroccan Army used mines that Morocco had employed in the six bermes, or defensive walls, it built in Western Sahara during the sovereignty conflict.

Humanitarian impact. The humanitarian impact of mines in Tunisia is very minor while the humanitarian impact of ERW from World War II is more significant, although it remains relatively small by international standards. Most of the minesfields and ERW-affected areas are located in remote desert areas with few to no local population. From 1995 to 2005, there were nine ERW victims. These were killed because of World War II ERW. One in 1995, one in 1999 and one in 1996. In 2001, one child was injured by ERW while he was working as a shepherd. In 2002, four children were injured in two different incidents by ERW in the same manner.

Economic impact. Economic impact is limited due to the location of ERW 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 ERW by the engineering team in charge.

Outlook. Tunisia has a national committee responsible for implementing the