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Contents

Focus

Libya



Notes

History

Features

Located across the Mediterranean Sea from Italy, Libya has always attracted colonizers. It was an important part of the Roman Empire and was also invaded by the Islamic Arabs and Ottoman Turks. In 1911, Libya was attacked by Italy and, after years of struggle, was colonized in 1939. During World War II, it became an arena where Italy and Germany fought the Allies, leaving the country scattered with landmines. More landmines were planted by Libya during border conflicts with Egypt and Chad during the 1970s and 1980s.

Staff

Call

Journal

Home

Casualties

While Libya is not known to have ever produced or exported landmines, minefields exist throughout the country in deserts, ports and urban areas. The majority of the landmines are left from European participants of World War II, such as Germany, Italy, France and the United Kingdom. Libyan officials estimate that both Allied and Axis forces left 1.5–3 million landmines and UXO in Libya. Libya also imported landmines from the Soviet Union, used them during border conflicts with Egypt and Chad, and placed them, for protection, in economically important areas of the country.

Casualties

Figures from numerous sources show a vast variance in the number of landmine casualties. The United Nations, for instance, states that between 1940 and 1975, 5,670 people were killed and 4,935 were injured. The Libyan police claim that between 1940 and 1995, 6,749 people were killed and 5,096 were injured, while the Libyan government, at the U.N. National Assembly in 1999, stated that there have been approximately 4,000 deaths. Italy, because of their involvement with Libya, has provided several types of assistance, including the construction of a mine injury hospital, cooperation between the Italian Red Cross and the Libyan Red Cross and the treatment of injured Libyans in Italy.

Demining

Insufficient historical records and maps of mined areas during World War II make it difficult to know the exact location and numbers of landmines/UXO, creating a dangerous situation for demining. Demining is conducted by the Police Force Explosive Division; however, locals are also trained to demine. In addition, private companies linked with products, such as oil, actively participate in mine clearance. Recently, some advancements have been made in demining; in 1998, Italy signed an agreement that provides Libya with Italian historical records, technical assistance, training for Libyan deminers and support for mine casualties. Currently, however, it is not known if records exist that show the number of mines or the area of land cleared.

Reality Check

Neither independent non-governmental organizations nor human rights groups are found in Libya, and the government prohibits the formation of political parties and political criticism of any kind, even extending control over the press.

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