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Landmines/Explosive Remnants of War and the War on Terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

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Protection of Armaments and Consequences

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by planting new mines, which the PKK designated as ‘‘field research domes’’ within the Kurdish ‘‘free zone’’, that was created by the Southwest’s Campaign to Ban Landmines to examine incidents in 2007, suggests a different picture. The PKK, who are deeply committed to the struggle of the Kurdish people, and have, since 1964, sought independence through armed struggle, are likely to continue to use mines as a weapon of war. The PKK has been responsible for mining entire regions for years, and has been known to use mines as a means of intimidation and control.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is home to 15 affected countries and territories that are contaminated with landmines and ERW. These countries have declared the numbers of mines and ERW in their lands, though others have not as they do not know how many remain. All affected countries, however, have projections based on estimated affected land and previous demining operations. Regional projections vary greatly, totaling 52–66 million mines and ERW. The estimations of each country are as follows:

- Algeria: 2,783,553
- Egypt: 21,600,000 (only 20–25 percent are mines)
- Iran: 12–16 million
- Iraq: 8–12 million before the 2003 Coalition invasion, which destroyed many mines
- Jordan: 260,000, emplaced by Israeli security forces
- Kuwait: 203,000
- Lebanon: small number after clearance of 5–7 million
- Libya: 1.5–3 million
- Syria: 150,000 to 2 million
- Tunisia: 3,240 mines and an unknown number of ERW
- Yemen: 190,000 to 2 million
- Western Sahara: Small number after clearance
- Lebanon: small number after clearance
- Iraq: 8–12 million before the 2003 Coalition invasion, which destroyed many mines
- Egypt: 21,600,000 (only 20–25 percent are mines)
- Norway: 56,000
- Switzerland: 56,000
- England: 56,000
- France: 56,000
- Italy: 56,000
- Spain: 56,000
- Germany: 56,000
- Poland: 56,000
- Portugal: 56,000
- Sweden: 56,000
- Finland: 56,000
- Denmark: 56,000
- Belgium: 56,000
- The Netherlands: 56,000
- Austria: 56,000
- Czech Republic: 56,000
- Slovakia: 56,000
- Hungary: 56,000
- Romania: 56,000
- Bulgaria: 56,000
- Greece: 56,000
- Cyprus: 56,000
- Turkey: 56,000
- Israel: 56,000
- Jordan: 260,000
- Kuwait: 203,000
- Lebanon: small number after clearance
- Iraq: 8–12 million before the 2003 Coalition invasion, which destroyed many mines
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warred the Al-Husayn group and its followers about using landmines in their ongoing conflict against government forces in the governorate of Arda in northern Yemen. In all MENA countries, possession of explosives in any form or type without permission from the authorities is illegal or the police is prohibited. Violation of such laws could cost the guilty person his life or require that he spend the rest of his life in jail. However, this appears not to be a deterrent to the violators.

The Case of Egypt

Egypt is affected by 26.8 million mines and ERW in the western area of the country because of Wadi and the Israeli-Egyptian wars in Sinai and the Red Sea area. Because 75 to 80 percent of this number is ERW, explosives comprising those mines and ERW are estimated at 5.400 metric tons (18.400 U.S. tons). Many affected areas in Algeria are not marked or fenced as old fences have been stolen or have disappeared either because of climate conditions or because of official carelessness. Terrorist groups in Algeria have used landmines and improvised explosives devices against security forces since the early 1990s. In August 2006, 31 military persons were injured because terrorist groups planted landmines and improvised explosives devices against security forces. In July 2005, an explosion targeted a military base in Al-Akhdaria area, Bouira, in eastern Algeria, when security forces were following them. In October 2006, three soldiers were killed and another 15 injured in a similar operation in Beni Abbes governorate. In April 2007, two explosions, one outside of the Shokora police station and another at the police station in Center Algiers and the other targeting a police station in East Algiers, resulted in the death and injury of more than 160 persons. In July 2007, an explosion targeted a military base in Al-Alkabira area, Bouchaiona governorate, resulting in the death and injury of more than 50 military personnel. Although authorized to use weapons of war against terrorist groups, in May 2006, 34 landmines exploded in the country. The explosives used in those acts came from mines and ERW, the fact that the terrorist group in Algeria is part of Al-Qaeda, which uses the same methods in Iraq, and that the source of explosives used is unknown, indicates a high possibility that recovered mine and ERW explosives were used.

Additionally, police arrested a small group of criminals with 100 mines AP1000 mines they had removed from old minefields to use in fishing. In July 2007, the police force of Thomson in West Algeria arrested a criminal group of eight for transferring and stockpiling anti-personnel mines. The criminal group would remove anti-personnel mines from the mined area of Ain-El-Safia, El-Naâma governorate, and transfer them to the Salign Belaskha area, near the border with Morocco, to remove TNT and then sell it. The authority arrested part of the group while they were transferring 100 AP40s, and then found another 289 AP40s cached in Ain-El-Safia.

Conclusion

Analyzing the similarities between terrorist attacks in Egypt and Algeria will provide further connection between terrorist groups in both countries, reflected in their groups’ usage of recovered landmines and ERW in suicide-bomber cars as well as a common membership in Al-Qaeda. The huge amounts of explosives available from mines and ERW throughout MENA, and confirmed and suspected use in previous terrorist acts, should alarm all security forces. Officials are encouraged to study such relations carefully and be ready to deal with them, particularly in the absence of any mine action programs in these countries.

For additional references for this article, please visit http://tinyurl.com/bjxag.

News Brief

Robotic Ankle Recovery Takes Step in Right Direction

Garth Stewart, 24, lost part of his leg while serving with the U.S. Army in Iraq. In the summer of 2007, he took a big step toward improved recovery with the world’s first robotic ankle. The device, which is unique in design and function, uses tendon-like springs and an electric motor to propel the user forward. This forward motion helps reduce fatigue while improving balance and providing a better, more fluid gait.

Conventional prostheses have a passive response toward walking, requiring more energy expenditure for amputees with prostheses than those with a robotic ankle. The new ankle was created through the Center for Restorative and Regenerative Medicine, a collaborative effort that includes the Providence (Rhode Island) Veterans’ Affairs Medical Center, Brown University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.