Pakistan

Country Profile
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By the time Spain abandoned its Western Sahara claims in 1975, both Morocco and Mauritania had emerged, taking up arms over custody of the territory. Morocco seeking southern annexation, Mauritania seeking northern annexation, and Saharan natives seeking to establish their own nation, the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Negotiating control over their Saharan homeland with a guerrilla army, these natives united under the Front Polisario to free the Liberación de Saguia el Hamra y Río de Oro (the Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro region). In order to prevail during the deadlocked standoff with the Polisario, Morocco pursued a military strategy involving the construction of six berms, or three-foot tall (one-meter) earthen walls, supplemented by landmines. The berms divide the middle of the territory, extending 1,690 miles (2,700 kilometers) from the southwestern to northeastern boundaries. Meanwhile, the United Nations imposed an end to hostilities in 1991, and Morocco and the Polisario dropped their weapons, but they have yet to arrive at a peaceable reconciliation.

Mine Action

Over a period of three years after the official establishment of MINURSO in 2003, Morocco and the Polisario agreed to demine 600 kilometers of land, mines, and UXO in the conflict area. As part of these efforts, the countries have cleared over 80 percent of their minefields to date. Since 2004, the Polisario have cleared 50 percent of their territory, while Morocco has cleared 65 percent. MINURSO has also been involved in the mine-clearance efforts, as it has provided technical support and financial assistance to many of the mine-action groups operating in the area.

Organizations have had difficulty keeping precise mine incident data, which has limited the effectiveness of the mine-clearance operations. As a result, there is little agreement on the number of landmines and UXO remaining in Western Sahara. The United Nations Mission in Western Sahara (MINURSO) is responsible for the mine-clearance efforts in the area, and it has estimated that there are approximately 50,000 landmines remaining. However, the Polisario has stated that there are over 100,000 landmines still in place. This discrepancy in data has hindered progress in mine clearance efforts.

By 1979, at which point Morocco was able to seize control of Western Sahara’s southern region, in order to prevent the deadlocked standoff with the Polisario, Morocco purchased US$6.5 million worth of VS-50 anti-personnel and VS-1.6 anti-tank mines. Though Morocco purchased their weapons, they have yet to arrive at a peaceable reconciliation.

Mine Action

At the time Morocco and the Polisario agreed to demine their use of landmines in 1991, the United Nations established MINURSO, also known as Mission des Nations Unies pour l’Organisation de l’Indépendance de l’Afrique Occidental. In order to maintain peace and improve the environment on both sides of the berms, many of MINURSO’s mission objectives involve mine action: marking mines and UXO, publishing maps for safe passage throughout the territory, destroying and finding landmines and promoting mine-risk education for locals and refugees.

Though inconsistencies in recordkeeping make it difficult to determine the impact thus far in Western Sahara, one estimate finds that from 1999 to 2005 MINURSO marked 1,294 dangerous objects, marked 144,000 objects, disposed of 113,000 landmines, and destroyed 4,000 pieces of anti-tank mines. In addition, the Polisario have removed over 20,000 landmines from their territory. MINURSO has also been involved in the mine-clearance efforts, as it has provided technical support and financial assistance to many of the mine-action groups operating in the area.

Dispute Settlement

Since 2000, the UN has attempted to find a peace agreement in Western Sahara. In August 2000, the UN announced that the two sides were close to an agreement, but further negotiations were needed.

In 2003, the United Nations provided a two-day retreat with researchers for the two sides to negotiate a resolution, but parties were ultimately unable to arrive at an agreement. The prospect of peace is uncertain, and the future of Western Sahara remains unclear. The Polisario have stated that they will not negotiate with Morocco until the Polisario leadership agree to discontinue their use of landmines. As a result, Morocco and the Polisario have continued to use landmines and UXO as a weapon of war. The future of Western Sahara remains uncertain, and the prospect of peace is uncertain.

The present mine and UXO situation ensures continued casualties in Pakistan, particularly in the areas closest to the LOC, such as the Abbottabad and Hajira Tehsils in Poonch district.

In addition, internal struggles and continued lack of governmental support have allowed for the perpetuation of the mines and ERW. The lack of governmental support has allowed for the perpetuation of the mines and ERW in Pakistan, and the situation will continue to claim the lives of those in the affected areas.

Looking Ahead

The recent conflicts surrounding or involving Pakistan have left a large threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war for both Pakistan and its neighbors. The continuing instability in the region and Pakistan’s lack of effective mine action may allow for the situation there to compound itself. The use of mines in multiple conflicts and a lack of mine-action efforts between conflicts have resulted in multiple generations of mines and ERW.

The recent conflicts surrounding or involving Pakistan have left a large threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war for both Pakistan and its neighbors. The continuing instability in the region and Pakistan’s lack of effective mine action may allow for the situation there to compound itself. The use of mines in multiple conflicts and a lack of mine-action efforts between conflicts have resulted in multiple generations of mines and ERW. In the future, mine action efforts will rely on the various NGOs operating in the country, helping from the government seems unlikely. The possibility of renewed use of mines seems probable. Unless Pakistan commits itself to effective mine action and the establishment of national mine-action institutions, the situation will continue to claim the lives of those in the affected areas.