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Landmines in Latin America



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History

Fidel Castro led a rebel army to victory in Cuba in 1959 and has held power since. Cuba's communist revolution was supported by the Soviets and exported throughout Latin America and Africa during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. The country suffered a severe economic recession following the withdrawal of Soviet subsidies in 1990. However, Havana blames its struggles on the U.S. embargo in place since 1962.

Landmine / UXO Overview

The United States and Cuba have both laid landmines around the U.S. Guantanamo Naval Base occupying Cuba's southeast corner. Approximately 70,000 AP and AT mines were planted at the beginning of 1961. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, Cuba has produced at least five different kinds of landmines, including three AP mines. Since 1996 Cuba has maintained that it does not and has never exported AP mines. However, Cuban mines have been found in Nicaragua and Angola. The size and composition of the Cuban AP mine stockpile is not known.

Casualties

Twenty-three people have been killed in Guantanamo's mine fields since 1961, including 18 U.S. servicemen and five Cuban asylum seekers. There were no known casualties in 1999 or 2000.



Demining

Cuba stated in the June 29, 1999 Caribbean Update that it will not remove its mines around Guantanamo "until the Americans leave the base." Cuba describes these mines as having "an exclusively defensive nature."

Reality Check

Political opponents continue to suffer under the communist government in Cuba. The government has jailed an increasing number of peaceful demonstrators over the last two years. In October 2000, trade union activists were arrested.

