RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

■ Syria should ensure that its armed forces do not use mines.
■ Other states engaged in the armed conflicts in Syria should ensure that their armed forces and any armed groups they support do not use mines.
■ Syria should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
■ Syria should initiate survey and clearance of mines as soon as possible and take other measures to protect civilians from explosive remnants of war (ERW).

CONTAMINATION

Mine contamination in Syria is a legacy of Arab-Israeli wars since 1948 and a consequence of the ongoing armed conflicts. No credible estimate of the extent of contamination across Syria exists, although one Handicap International demining expert suggested it would require an “unprecedented clearance operation” and would “probably take more than 30 years to eliminate the risk entirely”.

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There has been continued use of mines by pro- and anti-government forces across the country. Turkish authorities have reportedly claimed that between 613,000 and 715,000 mines had been planted along the Turkish-Syrian border, making clear they were not emplaced by Turkish forces.\(^2\) At the end of January 2016, US Secretary of State John Kerry criticised the Syrian government for laying mines around Madaya and other besieged towns in Syria.\(^3\) Soviet/Russian-made PMN-4 anti-personnel mines have been cleared from Madaya. Syrian government use of these mines was first reported in 2012.\(^4\)

In Kobani and the surrounding villages, which were captured from Islamic State forces in 2015, humanitarian demining operators found a significant quantity of improvised anti-personnel mines.\(^5\) To the east, IS are said to have surrounded government-controlled areas in the city of Deir ez-Zor with thousands of landmines. According to one witness from Deir ez-Zor’s besieged al-Jura neighbourhood who was cited in the media in March 2016, “After a year of living under siege, some inhabitants tried to flee driven by famine and disease. They were either killed by ISIS sharpshooters or exploding mines. Some torn corpses are still lying in the minefields.”\(^6\) Mine casualties are reported to have occurred in areas of Hassakeh province in the far north-east contested by Islamic State and Kurdish forces.\(^7\)

Remotely delivered T-84 antivehicle mines were reportedly used in the Golan Heights in the south-west of Syria [already heavily contaminated with anti-personnel mines].\(^8\)

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**PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT**

There is no national mine action programme in Syria, no national mine action authority, and no mine action centre.

On the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 2165 (2014), UNMAS was asked to provide assistance for mine action in Syria. UNMAS deployed a team to southern Turkey in August 2015. In addition to coordinating mine action operations, UNMAS has supported direct implementation of survey and clearance activities.\(^9\) Although a “comprehensive clearance programme is not currently possible, UNMAS believes it is possible to train local capacity to survey and clear cluster munitions and other ERW.”\(^10\) UNMAS was planning to initiate training and mentoring for national organisations in 2016 to address specific explosive hazards.\(^11\)

**LAND RELEASE**

Syria does not have a comprehensive civilian programme for survey or clearance of mines. UNMAS reported in early 2016 that conflict in many governorates has prevented access by mine action organisations. The extent and impact of contamination has resulted in Syrians without formal training conducting “ad hoc clearance without the technical ability to do so. The capacity of some local teams conducting clearance has been reduced by half as a result of casualties occurring during operations.”\(^12\)

Russian deminers arrived in Syria in March 2016. In April, the Russian military reported completing demining of the ancient part of the city of Palmyra, recaptured by Syrian and Russian forces in late March from IS militants.\(^13\)

**ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE**

Syria is not a state party to the APMBC. Nonetheless, it has obligations under international human rights law to clear mines as soon as possible, in particular by virtue of its duty to protect the right to life of every person under its jurisdiction.\(^14\)

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\(^10\) Ibid.

\(^11\) Ibid.


\(^13\) Syria is a state party to the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 6(1) of which stipulates that: “Every human being has the inherent right to life.”