

## KEY DATA

### ANTI-PERSONNEL (AP) MINE CONTAMINATION: UNKNOWN

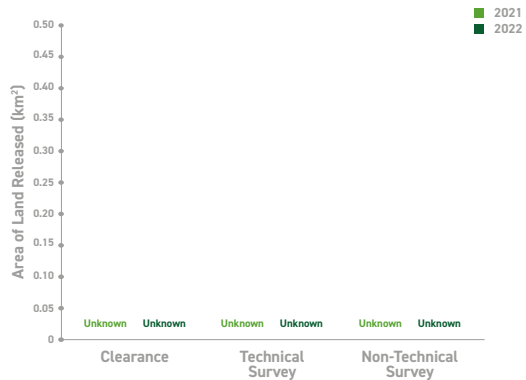
AP MINE CLEARANCE IN 2022

**UNKNOWN**

AP MINES DESTROYED IN 2022

**UNKNOWN**

## LAND RELEASE OUTPUT



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Egypt should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Egypt should clear anti-personnel (AP) mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, consonant with its obligations under international human rights law.
- Egypt should not use AP mines under any circumstances.
- Egypt should report accurately on land release, disaggregating clearance from release through survey.

## DEMINING CAPACITY

### MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

- National committee for the Supervision of Mine Clearance and the Development of the North West Coast
- Executive Secretariat for the Demining and Development of the North West Coast (ESDD)

### NATIONAL OPERATORS

- Corps of Military Engineers

### INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- None

### OTHER ACTORS

- None

## UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

The precise extent of AP mine contamination in Egypt remains unknown and past estimates have been wholly unreliable. Egypt is contaminated with mines in the Western Desert, which date from the Second World War, and in the Sinai Peninsula and Eastern Desert, which are a legacy of wars with Israel between 1956 and 1973.

In August 2016, reports indicated that Islamic State had been harvesting explosives from Second World War mines still uncleared in Egypt. Ambassador Fathy el-Shazly, former head of Egypt's Mine Clearance Secretariat, noted at least ten reports from the military about terrorists using old mines.<sup>1</sup> This was reiterated in June 2017 at a United Nations (UN) Security Council briefing by Egypt's permanent representative to the UN Mine Action Team.<sup>2</sup> In January 2018, it was reported that Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), a group aligned with Islamic State since 2014, had been using old mines and caches of explosives left in Sinai to produce improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Egypt faced five major terrorist attacks using such devices in 2017.<sup>3</sup> This underscores the urgency for Egypt to intensify mine clearance efforts.

Landmine Monitor has reported new use of improvised AP mines by Islamic State militants in the Sinai between 2020 and 2022. These include pressure plate IEDs found by the Egyptian Army in houses and arms caches in early 2022. Tarabin tribesmen have reportedly been killed by mines laid by a group associated with Islamic State.<sup>4</sup> The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) database and the Fenix Insight database both contain details of numerous incidents involving IEDs in 2022. These include mines laid by Islamic State targeting the Egyptian military and what are likely to be incidents involving the Union of Sinai Tribes and/or the Union of Sinai Mujahideen.<sup>5</sup> The Egyptian military may also be using AP mines. In May 2015, the military told an Egyptian newspaper that it had begun placing landmines around military outposts in Sinai, which resulted in the reported deaths of two militants.<sup>6</sup>

Most of the Western Desert contamination occurred around the location of Second World War battles that took place between the Qattara depression and Alamein on the Mediterranean coast. Other affected areas are around the city of Marsa Matrouh and at Sallum near the Libyan border. In November 2016, during a ceremony to mark the opening of a new prosthetic limb centre, the United Kingdom's Ambassador to Egypt announced that all the maps of minefields laid by British and Allied forces during World War II had been handed over.<sup>7</sup> According to the head of the military engineering department, though, the British minefield maps were "sketch maps" and most of the mines were buried randomly.<sup>8</sup> Major General Mahrous Kilani, Head of the General Secretariat for Mine Clearance, reported that while the mine maps are an indication of possible mine locations many have been found in areas unmarked on the maps.<sup>9</sup>

Data on contamination and clearance are unreliable. The Egyptian government has claimed, for instance, that 17 million mines remain in the Western Desert and another 5.5 million are in Sinai and the Eastern Desert.<sup>10</sup> In an April 2009 assessment, though, the United Nations (UN) Mine Action Team cautioned that data needed careful analysis to avoid reporting areas that had already been cleared and thereby misrepresenting the problem.<sup>11</sup>

In August 2010, the Executive Secretariat for the Demining and Development of the North West Coast (Executive Secretariat) reported to donors that the army had destroyed 2.9 million mines while clearing 38km<sup>2</sup> in five areas, leaving "more than 16 million mines" covering an estimated area of 248km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>12</sup> In 2013, the army handed over to the Ministries of Housing and of Planning and International Cooperation an area of some 105km<sup>2</sup> in the Western Desert, which it had reportedly cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). Details of clearance operations were not reported. Minister of Housing Tarek Wafiq was quoted as saying that, with the completion of the project, one-fifth of the Western Desert had been cleared.<sup>13</sup>

- 1 P. Schwartzstein, "ISIS Is Digging Up Nazi Landmines From World War 2 As Explosives", *Newsweek*, 10 August 2016, at: <https://bit.ly/46JVT1o>.
- 2 UN Security Council meeting, UN doc. SC/12866, 13 June 2017, at: <http://bit.ly/2YSmjPL>.
- 3 "How Egyptian security dealt with IEDs threat?", *Egypt Today*, 1 January 2018, at: <http://bit.ly/2HbRwCe>.
- 4 See: Landmine Monitor, Egypt: Mine Ban Policy, last updated 28 September 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3YSLixV>.
- 5 ACLED, "Filters: 01/01/2022-31/12/2022, Remote explosive/landmine/IED, Egypt," accessed 20 August 2023, at: [www.acleddata.com](http://www.acleddata.com); and Fenix Insight database, at: <https://fenix-insight.online/>
- 6 Egypt Mine Ban Policy, *Landmine Monitor*, 15 October 2020, at: <http://bit.ly/3trc5kb>.
- 7 A. Nayder, "Helping Landmine Victims in Marsa Matrouh-And Preventing More", *Because*, 3 November 2016, at: <http://bit.ly/2Hbsl2V>.
- 8 UK Parliament website, "North Africa: Land Mines", written question-122961, 16 January 2018, at: <http://bit.ly/2Z4gJsB>.
- 9 "MG: We cleared 130,000 acres of mines in El Alamein and there was no single incident", *Times of Egypt*, 26 February 2018, Unofficial translation at: <http://bit.ly/33EQrMO>.
- 10 State Information Services, "Landmines in Egypt", 20 July 2009; and M. Abdel Salam, "First phase of demining in Egypt complete", *Bikya Masr* (blog), 18 April 2010, at: <http://bit.ly/3S8PQPi>.
- 11 UN Mine Action Team, "Egypt Mine Action Inter-agency Assessment", 14-18 April 2009, p. 11.
- 12 "Egypt Mine Action Project Northwest Coast: Phase I Accomplishments", Presentation by Amb. Fathy El Shazly, Director, Executive Secretariat, Cairo, August 2010.
- 13 N. al Behairy, "20% of the Sahara in West Egypt cleared of landmines", *Daily News*, 20 March 2013.

## PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Egypt's mine action programme has been developing extremely slowly since 2007 and includes only the basic structures and institutions to regulate, coordinate and implement mine action activities. As at 2015, the programme consisted of a three-tier structure that comprised the National committee for the Supervision of Mine Clearance and the Development of the North West Coast; the Executive Secretariat for the Demining and Development of the North West Coast (ESDD); and the Corps of Military Engineers, which has overall responsibility for demining operations in Egypt.<sup>14</sup>

In January 2017, Egypt's Minister of International Cooperation alongside a representative of the Ministry of Defence announced the establishment of the National Centre for Landmine Action and Sustainable Development. The centre set out to release 600km<sup>2</sup> of mined area in the North West Coast.<sup>15</sup>

A joint project between United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Egypt entitled, "Support the North West Coast Development Plan and Mine Action Programme: Mine Action" was conducted in two phases from 2007 to 2014 and from 2015 to 2017.<sup>16</sup> In August 2017, it was reported that negotiations had begun on a third phase of the project to allocate \$5 million to clear the rest of the northern coast and the Sinai peninsula.<sup>17</sup> The project supported the expansion of the organizational structure of the ESDD, which is mandated with coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the development plan and humanitarian mine action activities in the North West Coast.<sup>18</sup> As at July 2020, it was reported that a total area of 2,182km<sup>2</sup> of land has been demined (released)

from 5,100km<sup>2</sup> of mined area since the beginning of the project in 2009.<sup>19</sup>

Trained deminers from the Corps of Military Engineers conduct manual and mechanical demining. The ESDD is said to have procured 461 mine detectors, 355 demining suits and protective helmets, 1 Casspir armoured vehicle with the "Mine Lab" detecting device, and 5 Amtrak vehicles.<sup>20</sup>

According to the ESDD website, "the Executive Secretariat's Quality Management Unit proactively guarantees quality in all key processes, makes sure that quality requirements are fulfilled in accordance with international mine action standards (IMAS), measures process performance, develops procedures, and provides the right equipment".<sup>21</sup> Funding was also used for capacity building, establishing a quality management unit, and supporting the creation of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) database.

In November 2019, Egypt's Minister of Investment and International Cooperation signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) on mine clearance and development of Egypt's North West coast. The MoU provides a cooperation framework to enhance capacity building for the Egyptian mine action programme but according to the GICHD there has been no activity since the signing of the MoU.<sup>22</sup> In March 2022, the Executive Secretariat participated in an Arab Regional Cooperation Programme (ARCP) IMSMA Core Workshop organised by the GICHD in Beirut.<sup>23</sup>

## ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ACTION

It is not known how, if at all, the environment is taken into consideration during planning and tasking of survey and clearance of mines in Egypt in order to minimise potential harm from clearance.

## LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

Egypt has not reported in detail on its release of mined areas in recent years and no target date has been set for the completion of mine clearance. New use of mines by the military is seemingly inconsistent with its obligations under international law.

In August 2022, a spokesman for the Egyptian Armed Forces said that the army had destroyed "more than 25 million mines, explosive objects and ammunition over the past years" including in areas around El Alamein, and the Hamman canal, although no detailed information was provided on the timeframe, number of mines or amount of area cleared.<sup>24</sup>

14 UNDP Project Document, at: <http://bit.ly/3ghRon1>, p. 6.

15 "Establishment of National Center for Mines Action and Sustainable Development completed: Nasr", *Daily News Egypt*, 23 January 2017, at: <http://bit.ly/3dqbcmu>.

16 UNDP, "Support to the North West Coast Development and Mine Action Plan", undated.

17 "Egypt to invest \$17.5M in Anti-Mines Action Project", *APA News*, 11 August 2017, at: <http://bit.ly/2z1ChYn>.

18 The Executive Secretariat for the Demining and Development of the North West Coast website, accessed 5 July 2020.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 "Egypt, Switzerland sign agreement on demining North West Coast", State Information Service, 14 November 2019, available at: <http://bit.ly/2CcF0mj>; and email from Boris Ohanyan, Junior Programme Officer, GICHD, 22 March 2022.

23 Email from Boris Ohanyan, GICHD, 22 March 2022.

24 "Egyptian army has cleared 25 million WWII landmines, explosives from Western Desert: Spox", *Ahram Online*, 31 August 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/47R1gfQ>; and "Egypt removes 25 million mines planted during World War II", *Daily News Egypt*, 1 September 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3Pd4MKp>.