

KEY DATA

**ANTI-PERSONNEL (AP)
MINE CONTAMINATION:**

UNKNOWN

AP MINE
CLEARANCE IN 2023

UNKNOWN

AP MINES
DESTROYED IN 2023

UNKNOWN

LAND RELEASE OUTPUT



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Egypt should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- In the meantime, 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 publicly and 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. There are mines in the Western Desert, which date back to the Second World War, as well as in the Sinai Peninsula and Eastern Desert – 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.¹ This was reiterated in June 2017 at a United Nations (UN) Security Council briefing by Egypt's permanent representative to the UN.² 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 2017.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ Reports of possible AP mine and IED explosions in North Sinai continued in 2023 and 2024.⁶ 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.⁷

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.⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

In 2014, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) reported that, in terms of the number of items of explosive ordnance, Egypt was one of the most heavily contaminated countries in the world. According to NATO, AP mines and ERW can be found at depths of more than 1.5 metres, and are in areas contaminated with fragments of metal.¹¹

Data on contamination and clearance are unreliable. The Egyptian government claimed in 2009, for instance, that 17 million mines remain in the Western Desert and another 5.5 million are in Sinai and the Eastern Desert.¹² In an April 2009 assessment, though, the UN Mine Action Team cautioned that data needed careful analysis to avoid reporting areas that had already been cleared and thereby misrepresenting the problem.¹³ More than a decade later, the Egyptian authorities were still citing similarly high contamination figures. In a statement to the UN General Assembly in 2021, Egypt claimed, incorrectly, that it was contaminated with 22 million AP mines. The figure had not changed despite recent European Union (EU)-funded clearance and land release by the Egyptian authorities of around one fifth of the suspected area of contamination.¹⁴

Other reports of AP contamination and release since 2010 include the Executive Secretariat for the Demining and Development of the North West Coast (Executive Secretariat) reporting to donors in August 2010 that the army had destroyed 2.9 million "mines" while clearing 38km² in five areas, leaving "more than 16 million mines" covering an estimated area of 248km².¹⁵ In 2013, the army handed over to the Ministries of Housing and of Planning and International Cooperation an area of some 105km² in the Western Desert, which it had reportedly cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). Details of clearance 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.¹⁶

1 P. Schwartzstein, "ISIS Is Digging Up Nazi Landmines From World War 2 As Explosives", *Newsweek*, 10 August 2016.

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, accessed 23 July 2024.

5 ACLED, "Filters: 01/01/2022-31/12/2022, Remote explosive/landmine/IED, Egypt," accessed 20 August 2023, at: www.acleddata.com; and Fenix Insight database, at: <https://fenix-insight.online/>

6 ACLED, "Filters: 01/01/2023-31/12/2023, Remote explosive/landmine/IED, Egypt," accessed 22 July 2024, at: www.acleddata.com; and "Landmine explosion kills two children in Egypt's North Sinai", *The New Arab*, 2 June 2024, at: <https://bit.ly/3yaoBwa>.

7 See: Landmine Monitor, Egypt: Mine Ban Policy, accessed 23 July 2024."

8 A. Nayder, "Helping Landmine Victims in Marsa Matrouh – and Preventing More", *Because*, 3 November 2016.

9 UK Parliament website, "Egypt and Libya: Land Mines", written question – 122961, 16 January 2018, at: <http://bit.ly/2Z4gJsB>.

10 "MG: We cleared 130,000 acres of mines in El Alamein and there was no single incident", *Times of Egypt*, 26 February 2018.

11 NATO/OTAN, "Egyptian desert: new technologies for landmine detection", 3 April 2014 (last updated 17 September 2014), at: <https://bit.ly/4fgUsMf>.

12 State Information Services, "Landmines in Egypt", 20 July 2009; M. Abdel Salam, "First phase of demining in Egypt complete", *Bikyamasr* (blog), 18 April 2010.

13 UN Mine Action Team, "Egypt Mine Action Inter-agency Assessment", 14–18 April 2009, p. 11.

14 Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, "Egypt", note 1, accessed 23 July 2024, at: <https://bit.ly/4fcKaw0>.

15 "Egypt Mine Action Project Northwest Coast: Phase I Accomplishments", Presentation by Amb. Fathy El Shazly, Director, Executive Secretariat, Cairo, August 2010.

16 N. al Behairy, "20% of the Sahara in West Egypt cleared of landmines", *Daily News*, 20 March 2013.

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Egypt has not acceded to the APMBC. It reiterated its reservations regarding the Convention at the UN General Assembly in November 2023 arguing, among other factors, that it lacks balance between humanitarian concerns and possible legitimate military uses. It also criticised the APMBC for not assigning responsibility for clearance to those who laid mines.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

In 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 (which was reported to have succeeded the ESDD¹⁹). The centre set out to release 600km² of mined area in the North West Coast.²⁰

A joint project between the UN 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 2017.²¹ 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.²² The project supported the expansion of the organizational structure of the ESDD, which was mandated with coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the development plan and humanitarian mine action activities in the North West Coast.²³ As at July 2020, it was reported that a total area of 2,182km² of land had been released from the reported 5,100km² of mined area

since the beginning of the project in 2009.²⁴ A more recent report indicated that 1,950km² was demined during the first two phases of the project in the North-West Coast. The EU provided €4.7 million for the second phase that ran in 2014–18, reportedly releasing 1,674km² of the 1,950km² total, far exceeding the target of 902km².²⁵ The EU-Egypt Innovation Fund is also reported to have funded research into the digital mapping of minefields.²⁶

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.²⁷ NATO has provided training to the Egyptian armed forces on IEDs, alongside its wider efforts to support Egypt in mine and UXO detection.²⁸

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".²⁹ 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 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.³⁰ In March 2022, the Executive Secretariat participated in an Arab Regional Cooperation Programme (ARCP) IMSMA Core Workshop organised by the GICHD in Beirut.³¹

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- 17 UN, "First Committee Approves New Resolution on Lethal Autonomous Weapons, as Speaker Warns 'An Algorithm Must Not Be in Full Control of Decisions Involving Killing'", Press release, UN doc. GA/DIS/3731, 1 November 2023, at: <https://bit.ly/4dbYUu5>; see also "Landmines in Egypt", State Information Service, 18 January 2022, at: <https://tinyurl.com/ynv9x5cf>.
 - 18 UN Development Programme (UNDP) Project Document, at: <http://bit.ly/3ghRon1>, p. 6.
 - 19 Egypt continues to suffer from WWII landmines", *Mada*, 4 April 2017, at: <https://tinyurl.com/538ft7pd>.
 - 20 "Establishment of National Center for Mines Action and Sustainable Development completed: Nasr", *Daily News Egypt*, 23 January 2017, at: <http://bit.ly/3dqbcmu>.
 - 21 UNDP, "Support to the North West Coast Development and Mine Action Plan", undated.
 - 22 "Egypt to invest \$17.5M in Anti-Mines Action Project", *APA News*, 11 August 2017, at: <http://bit.ly/2z1ChYn>.
 - 23 The Executive Secretariat for the Demining and Development of the North West Coast website, accessed 5 July 2020, at: <http://bit.ly/3ivjTwl> (link no longer working).
 - 24 Ibid.
 - 25 UNDP, "MoIC, EU and UNDP Egypt Joint Statement: International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action", 4 April 2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/47p5he5c>.
 - 26 MineProbe, "EU-Egypt Innovation Fund - Grant Scheme 1 - EuropeAid/132-715/M/ACT/EG", undated, accessed on 23 July 2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/mvw78jak>.
 - 27 Executive Secretariat for the Demining and Development of the North West Coast website, accessed 5 July 2020.
 - 28 NATO/OTAN, "NATO trains Egyptian experts in improvised explosive devices investigation", last updated 4 December 2017, at: <https://bit.ly/3SfQIRh>.
 - 29 Executive Secretariat for the Demining and Development of the North West Coast website, accessed 5 July 2020.
 - 30 "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.
 - 31 Email from Boris Ohanyan, GICHD, 22 March 2022.

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. 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.³² Between August and September 2023, 125 Indian military personnel participated in a bilateral exercise in Egypt (Exercise Bright Star), which included demining.³³ No further details were available.

32 "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>.

33 India Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) Amended Protocol II Article 13 Report (covering 2023), Form E.