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The Carter Center

# Explosive Weapons Use in Syria, Report 3

Northwest Syria: Aleppo, Idleb, and Latakia Governorates

Syria Conflict Mapping

August 2020

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## Introduction

Since 2011, there has been widespread use of explosive weapons by all sides of a variety of factors, a portion of these either fails to detonate, becoming or is abandoned, becoming abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO). These (ERW), in addition to landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs),<sup>1</sup> long after the violence has stopped. Not only can these explosive munitions people for decades, the presence of these weapons can hold back a







3% of activity was split between various types of ground-launched weapons, cluster munitions, landmines, and IEDs (Figure 2).

Explosive weapons impacted 1,414 identifiable communities<sup>5</sup> throughout northwest Syria. Notably, a quarter of all explosive munitions use in northwest Syria were recorded in just three locations:<sup>6</sup> Aleppo city, the formerly government of Syria (GoS) controlled (an area just 4 km by 4 km), and the former opposition-held town of Khan Sheikhoun (similar in size at 3.5 km by 3.5 km.) Another 18 communities in northwest Syria were impacted by 21% of munitions use in the northwest.<sup>7</sup> The remaining 54% of activity was split between 1,301 communities or neighborhoods throughout Aleppo, Idleb, and Latakia governorates. Of note, though Aleppo Governorate as a whole recorded the majority of explosive munitions uses in northwest Syria, four of the top five communities with the highest munitions use in the northwest are in Idleb Governorate (Figure 3 and 4).

The following sections review each governorate in detail.

*Figure 3. The 21 communities that were impacted by 46% of all munitions use in northwest Syria.*

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<sup>5</sup>  
*longitude.*  
<sup>6</sup>

*s to a town, city, neighborhood, or point of interest with an associated latitude and*





Explosiv





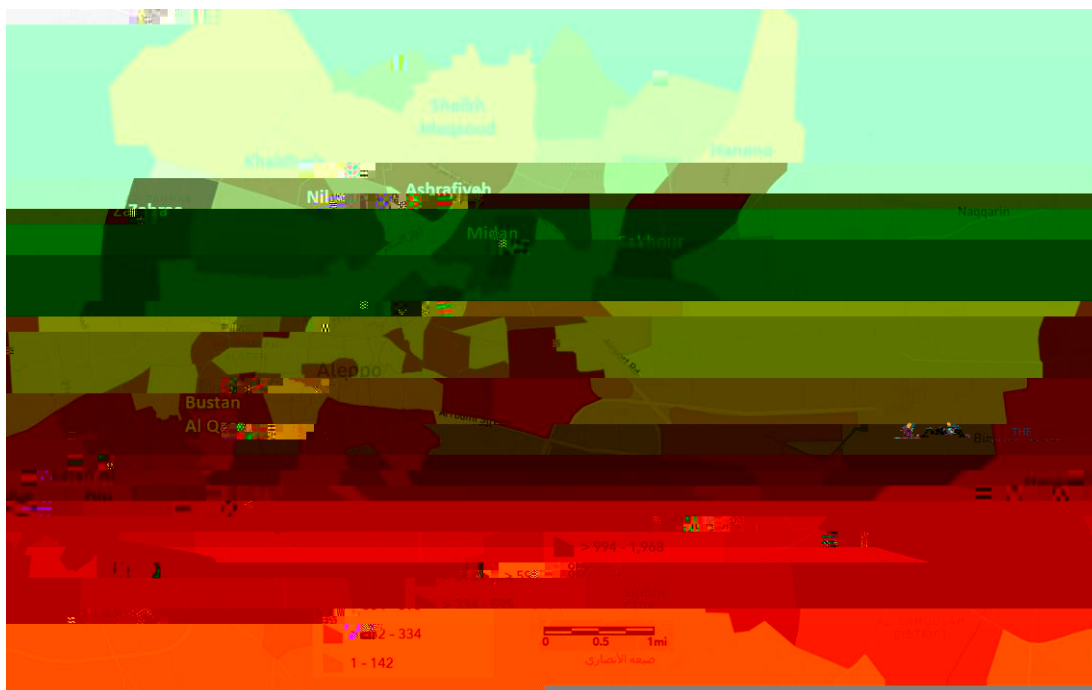


Figure 9. Distribution of explosive munitions use in Aleppo city. The 11 neighborhoods that were impacted more heavily by 37% of total activity in the city are highlighted in darker red and labeled.

## Idleb Governorate

From 12,474 conflict events, at least 45,019 individual uses of explosive munitions were recorded in 443 identifiable communities across Idleb Governorate,<sup>9</sup> representing 40% of the total activity in northwest Syria.

In contrast to Aleppo Governorate, the most common explosive munitions used in Idleb Governorate were air-dropped from airplanes. This accounted for 52% of all documented activity. Ground-launched explosive munitions made up 45% of all explosive munitions in the governorate. Figure 10 provides a breakdown by category of the munitions used in Idleb Governorate.

<sup>9</sup> Including 15 neighborhoods in Idleb city.



Figure 10. Breakdown of explosive munitions categories in Idlib Governorate.

Within the ground-launched munitions category, shelling of unknown type made up the majority of the explosive munitions use. Rockets, artillery shells, and mortars of various types also made up a sizable amount of activity. The remaining 3% was divided between five different types of ground-launched weapons and various IED / landmine / UXO detonations as well as 355 cases of cluster munitions. Figure 11 provides more detail on the types of munitions used in Idlib Governorate.

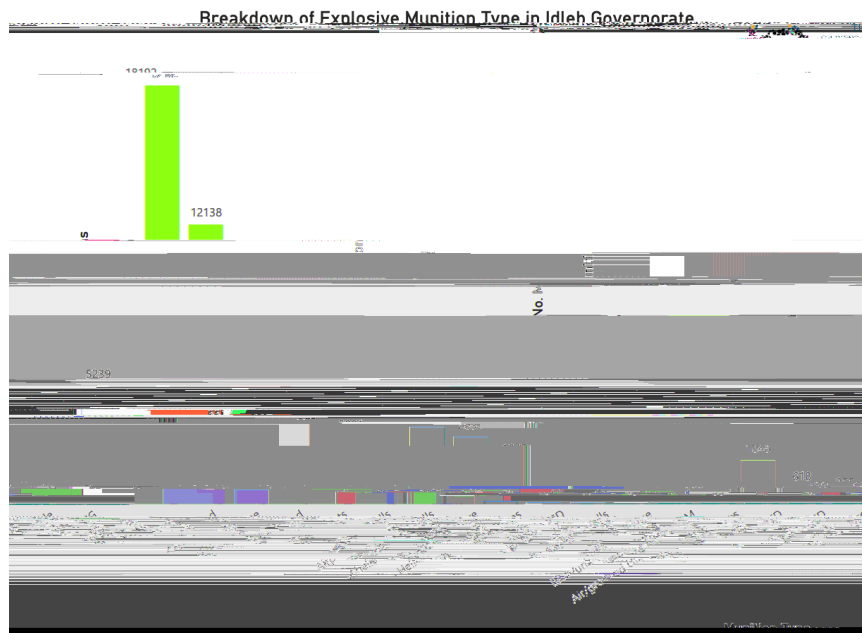


Figure 11. Breakdown of the 18 different explosive munitions types used in Idlib Governorate.

Over 40% of explosive munitions activity in Idleb Governorate was in just 10 communities (Figure 12).

Unsurprisingly, there was a focus of explosive munitions , two longstanding

government-held pockets wi671.86 Tm0 g0 G -0.05049 -0.05049 -0.05049 -0.05049 -0.05049 -0.05049 97/F21.04 Tf1 0 0



Figure 13. Explosive munitions uses across Idlib Governorate, with the 10 communities that were impacted by nearly 40% of explosive munitions use in the governorate highlighted in purple.

## Latakia Governorate

Though Latakia Governorate remained under the control of the Syrian government for most of the conflict, still it experienced notable levels of violence. During 2,634 conflict events, at least 10,004 individual uses of explosive munitions were recorded in 141 identifiable communities in the governorate. As in Aleppo Governorate, the most common explosive munition used in Latakia Governorate was ground-launched munitions, accounting for 73% of all activity (Figure 14). Most of these were documented as shells of unknown type, but mortar shells made up nearly 20% of the explosive munitions count in the governorate. This makes Latakia Governorate different than other regions in the northwest. The use of mortar shells is indicative of close-quarters, given the short ranges of standard 60mm – 120mm mortars (between 3km -

7km). The mountainous terrain of Latakia likely contributed to the increased use of mortars as an infantry support weapon in this governorate.

Other prevalent munitions types in the governorate were airplane-launched munitions, rockets, artillery, and helicopter-dropped barrel bombs. The remaining 2% of activity was split between three types of ground-launched munitions as well as cluster munitions and IED / landmine / UXO detonations. See Figure 15 for more details.

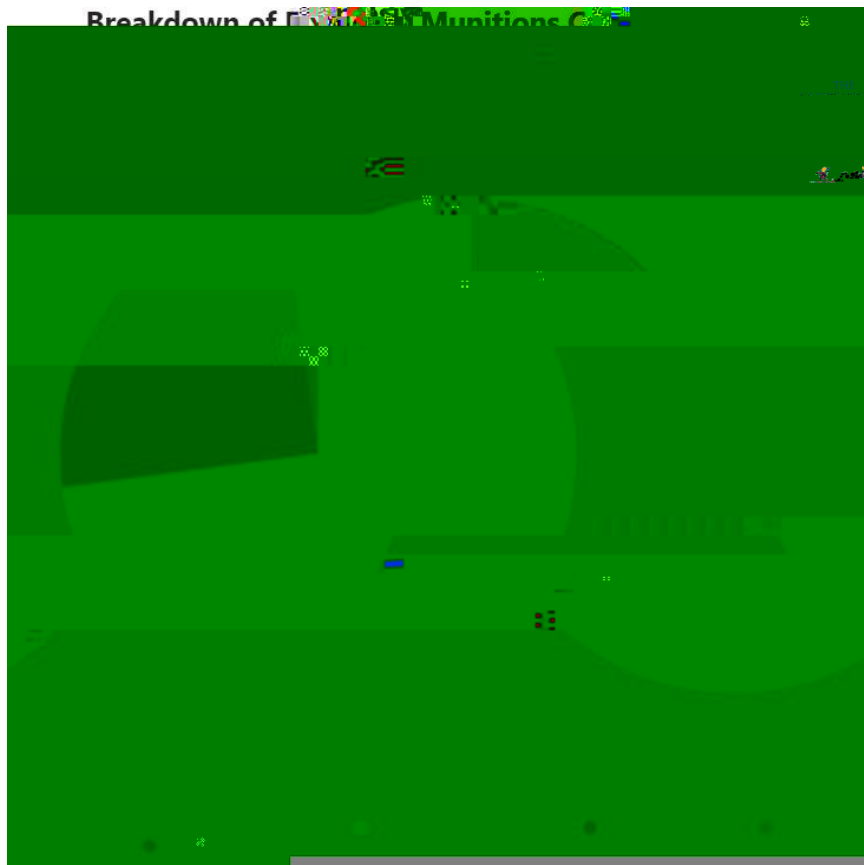


Figure 14. Breakdown of explosive munitions categories in Latakia



*Figure 15. Breakdown of the 18 different explosive munitions types in Latakia Governorate.*

In large parts of Idleb and Aleppo governorates, explosive munitions use was widespread, but explosive munitions use

and Ain Issa.<sup>10</sup> The remaining 45% of conflict events were split among 134 communities, including the governorate of Idlib.

*Figure 17. Explosive munitions use across Latakia Governorate, with the seven communities that were impacted by over half of explosive munition use in the governorate highlighted.*

## **Conclusions**

The findings in this analysis could

When the findings of this report are combined with findings from

While there are notable differences between firing conditions on U.S. ranges and battle conditions in Syria, as well as differences between the quality of U.S.-made munitions and the Russian-made munitions that are predominantly used in Syria, the study is nonetheless helpful. If we apply a failure rate of 10% - 30% to the total documented explosive munitions uses from all three reports, then at a minimum, between 24,430 - 73,290 explosive munitions have failed to detonate in northwest Syria, southern Syria, and in and around Damascus.

Explosive munitions clearance in Syria will most likely be long in duration. In [Mozambique](#), it took 23 years to clear over 86,000 explosive hazards in

conflict. In the meantime, the contamination from explosive munitions in Syria will continue to have an economic, social, environmental, and psychological impact on communities. Some of these issues can be addressed by humanitarian action, but they should also be addressed by development, security, and peacebuilding initiatives, as recommended in Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining and

their policy goals, but also to help Syrians civilians who must live with the effect of these weapons every day.

## Appendix - Terminology

As terminology used in the explosive weapons clearance and demining field is highly specialized and often used interchangeably outside the sector. The following section highlights commonly used terms in this study and the demining field. Definitions for these terms were compiled from [International Mine Action Standards \(IMAS 04.10\) Second Edition \(May 2013\)](#) as well as from [Conflict Event Data and Beyond](#) from World Bank Training Workshop March 2018.

**Ammunition, munition, or munitions** are complete devices charged with explosives, propellants, pyrotechnics, initiating composition, or nuclear, biological, or chemical material for use in military weapons, ammunition, and equipment.



**Explosive Remnants of War (ERW)**

*For queries or comments about this report, please contact [kate.keator@cartercenter.org](mailto:kate.keator@cartercenter.org)*

open-source information related to the Syrian conflict in as much detail as possible, with the goal of assisting mediators and conflict responders with up-to-date, detailed analysis of developments on the ground. Using these publicly available resources, as well as information gleaned from regular consultations with stakeholders, the Center has documented and mapped 155,000 conflict events