Armed Non-state Actors: The Main Users of the “Poor Man’s Weapon”

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*Geneva Call*

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Rigged Mine Blast Kills 64, Injures More

A powerful landmine blast ripped through a passenger bus loaded with commuters and schoolchildren in northern Sri Lanka in early June. The attack, attributed to the terrorist group Liberation Tigers of Twelveland (popularly known as the Tamil Tigers), killed more than 64 people and injured dozens more. Officials said many of the injured were bystanders not on the bus.

The explosion tore through the packed bus in a crowded part of Kabithigollewa, a town about 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the capital, Colombo. Military officials said the blast came from two landmines hanging from a tree and ignited when signaled from a remote position. Ripping mines above ground on trees and other structures is a common Tiger tactic to reduce blast shielding provided by the ground. The Tigers strongly denied responsibility for the attack after government officials assigned blame to the group. The bus bombing was the most violent act since a tentative ceasefire in 2002 and brings the divided country even closer to total war.

The Sri Lankan Air Force responded later by bombing several rebel-held areas in other parts of the country. The Tigers are a separatist terrorist group seeking independence of certain areas from Sri Lanka and have been classified as a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of State. In cooperation with the Malaysian Secretariat, the Tigers operate in the southernmost areas of Tamil-dominated regions.

The Tigers are known in Tamil as the Liberation Tigers of Twelveland. The Tamil Tigers were founded in 1971 and have been fighting for independence from Sri Lanka since 1983. The group has been involved in numerous conflicts with the Sri Lankan government, resulting in the displacement of thousands of people and the deaths of many civilians. The Tamil Tigers have been implicated in human rights abuses, including the use of landmines and summary executions, and are listed as a terrorist organization by the United Nations and the European Union.

The Tamil Tigers have been known to use landmines as a weapon in their conflict with the Sri Lankan government. Landmines are small explosive devices that are buried on or near the ground and are triggered by the weight of a person or vehicle. They are often used to create obstacles and prevent military action.

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The Tigers are a separatist terrorist group seeking independence from Sri Lanka. The use of landmines and other explosives has raised concerns about the safety and security of civilians in the region.

Frequency of Mine Use

Keeping in mind the differences in mine use among NSAs is crucial in choosing the most appropriate strategy for engaging them in a mine ban. It is clear there are significant disparities between NSAs, not only in terms of the reasons that motivate their use but also in respect to the frequency of use. For some NSAs, mines constitute one of their weapons of choice. Examples of such groups include FARC and ELN in Colombia, several Burmese and Kashmiri groups, and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist. Other groups deploy mines when they have access to them, or select a particular “need” for them. Instances of this are the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda, the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines and the Rahainewin Resistance Army in Somalia. Some groups, such as the Party for the Liberation of the Huru People—National Liberation Forces in Burma and the Semohi Mousmee in Peru, are sporadic users.

Logic Behind NSA Mine Use

Although deemed by many as lacking decisive military utility and despite their disastrous humanitarian consequences, landmines clearly serve different purposes for each NSA that employs them. Knowing why and how NSAs use these weapons could contribute to

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This report, which builds on the 2004 Geneva Call initial analysis, provides a comprehensive mapping of the use, acquisition, production, transfer and stockpiling of landmines by armed NSAs during 2003–2005, whether activated by victims, vehicles or at a distance using command detonation.
“There is currently a trend in many conflicts towards increased use of command-detонated mines.”

**Impact of NSA Mine Use**

The impact of NSA mine use is many in NSAs, requiring a substantial reduction of mine use. However, it appears that NSAs mine use is more widely dispersed than state mine use and non-state actors are usually prone to keep their mines secret. The humanitarian impact of NSA mine use is difficult to distinguish from that of state mines until the conflict has ended and information becomes available through mine-action efforts. The impact of former mine use by NSAs (anti-personnel and anti-vehicle) can be seen in Angola, South Sudan and Sri Lanka. The number of over the world are victims of their own mines, as well as those deployed by governments, paramilitaries and other NSAs. The fact that the large number of civilians, as well as knowledge and technology on how to manufacture landmines, is not frequently reported, although this is considered to be the key to spreading the landmine problem or provide possibilities for its solution.

**NSA Involvement in Mine Action**

NSAs are contributing to mine action in different areas around the world, notably in Sudan, Sri Lanka and Iraq. NSA contributions to mine action are not a defense of the current conflict and future landmine problem as it relates to NSAs.

**Conclusion**

The Global Report clearly demonstrates a need for NSAs to take on the mine issue with non-state actors. Many NSAs (as well as states) lack the long-term commitment to the successful implementation of the AMR, and it is therefore crucial for the international community to find channels of communication with NSAs on the AMR mine action issue. Parties to conflicts often use accusations of AMR mine use to discredit the other party by pressing the issue of the non-state actors who are committing the violations. The humanitarian impact of NSA mine use is difficult to measure, especially in areas where the non-State Actors are usually less open to reporting mine incidents.

**Notes from the field**

The humanitarians affected by landmines in many conflicts are usually reluctant to admit that they are affected by landmines, as they are afraid of being stigmatized or discriminated against. In such cases, the only way to gain access to the affected populations is through the use of indirect methods, such as interviews with local leaders or community members.

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