A Rose by Any Other Name: The Interrelationship of Landmines and Other Explosive Remnants of War

The author explores the vast diversification in landmine etymology, condemning efforts that sought to provide more information but only complicated an already difficult process. Duggar continues with a historical perspective on the progression of language and processes used to address problems posed by landmines and other explosive remnants of war.

When I first became involved with unexploded ordnance and landmines in 1993, the terminology was more straightforward and perhaps a bit more descriptive than the tortured phrases we use today. We named our company “UXB” after seeing the long-running situation Masterpiece Theatre entitled “Danger UXB.” “UXB” is a British acronym for “unexploded bomb” and the show that depicted the trials and successes of the elite British UXB team was a phenomenal success.

Most everything back in the early 1990s could be described as a mine, a rocket or a bomb. The more clever members of our group would try to enhance the description. We might embed into how a civil mine, such as a “little” mine or a “big” bomb. Whatever the “name du jour,” all of these things were potentially deadly and sometimes bore more of an impact upon the geopolitical landscape than their presence otherwise indicated.

In less political minds may believe they are the facilitators of change, in most cases they are not. How refreshing it would be for politicians in some of the conflicted countries to decide to settle their disputes with a duel, as opposed to sending their forces in harm’s way and exposing their populations to the threats of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. Since that sort of “gentlemens’ behavior” is a long gone, politicians almost universally come to rely upon their governments to facilitate their strategic aims in harm’s way and landmines.

In examining how these threats have become commingled and co-embedded, we need further investigation in each of the affected areas. There is no single answer. The threats are varied, but time is often the enabling issue.

Ordnance evolution may be divided into three segments. The earliest segment includes that period during which stone-dum was employed; guns during the period 1313 to 1520 were mostly wrought-iron with a few early examples of more expensive cast-bronze guns that have been documented. The second segment was that extending from 1520 to 1854, during which cast-iron round shot was routinely employed. In this segment, both bronze and cast-iron ordnance was actually used, but technology advanced linearly from the first period. The increase in power of the ordnance systems during this period was due primarily to the use of corn and ordnance development. The second period witnessed some small technological increase due to better technical design of the guns toward the end of this period. The third or current segment started in 1854 with the innovation of elongated projectiles and rifled gun barrels. Rapid progress has been made since then. Ordnance items are manufactured by most countries today, and they are deployed by virtually every country.

Ordnance is generally more powerful than landmines and the damage to men and material can be significantly more devastating. The moral effect of gunshot would be considered more or less constant today, as people all over the world are aware of atrocities, bombs and the noise and destruction they can cause. However, the ordnance threat produces a moral effect quite different from landmines, mainly because of the detonation and visible destruction, but also because of the ever-present fear that one’s final moment will arrive without giving any advance notice.

“A rose by any other name would smell as sweet,” and while the “sweetness” of landmines and ERW may be somewhat evident to facilitators who employ the technology, they are manufactured by a group of Second-World countries and are deployed by many Third-World countries that are predisposed to make use of what they can afford.

Of course, few of these facilitators recognize the widespread threat posed by landmines and other explosive remnants of war. Since this audience is knowledgeable on the concept of a “dangerous duo”—landmines and other explosive remnants of war—for discussion simplicity, they are considered together.

Without question, the world’s military organizations are the primary catalysts for change, but they are followed in rapid succession by a host of others including, but not limited to, religious groups, activists and nongovernmental organizations, militaries, family groups and terrorists. There are immense variations in personnel, technology and application methodology resident within these groups, but we know each will use whatever technology and methodology available in an attempt to achieve its goals—taking what they have and making the very best use of it. It is at this point that the threats of the landmines and other ERW become enmeshed.

The pressures of a pressure-operated landmine come from the German military historian H. Frieherr von Flemming, who described a “pressure mine” in his 1726 book. He wrote, “It consisted of a ceramic container with glass and metal fragments embedded in the clay containing 0.90 kilos (2 lb) of gunpowder, buried at a shallow depth in the glass of a fortress and actuated by someone stepping on it, raining down sharp metal.”

The same basic low-cost, low-technology method is being used quite effectively today. In quantity, anti-personnel landmines can be procured for less than US$3 each.

They can be rapidly deployed by minimally trained personnel and provide a significant anti-intrusion capability even for the most advanced military opponents. Generally, the techniques of landmines and the high cost/high technology usually found in other ERW, and how these current or legacy threats impact the world’s population and effect change.

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Abatement, which utilizes country assessments. As an enhancement to the standard assessment process, the WBA program seeks to develop concurrent plans, in coordination with the various country hosts, to assist using a fast-track approach so that serious threats can be addressed much more expeditiously than with other methods. Under this methodology, as country assessments reveal threats, the information is shared with the host country and discussions include possible solutions to the threats. As the assessments continue, the solution sets are fine-tuned, and it quickly becomes obvious which option is best to mitigate the specific threat. Once the solution is mutually agreed upon by the Department of State and the host country, the same teams that are conducting the assessments can be expanded to handle the implementation.

The benefits of this improved approach are numerous but include faster response to identified threats, a cost-effective mitigation of threats, a fast-tracked timeline (the same teams expand to handle the solution; there is a minimal learning curve for personnel) for response, and ongoing host-country buy-in to the solution. The Department of State has done an admirable job in constructing a highly efficient, responsive, accurate and timely program for weapons removal and abatement.

In conclusion, there is an irrefutable relationship between landmines and other remnants of war. Their origins are complexly independent; their technology and cost components are quite different; their general manufacturing and deployment sources are different; but both excel as weapons since the effectiveness of any weapon depends upon two factors:

1. Its ability to damage or destroy men and material
2. The moral effect of its use, or threat thereof, upon the enemy

Both of these threats have many names, and I am certain someone somewhere is thinking up a new name for landmines and other explosive remnants of war. Regardless of the new tortured phrases we will be forced to endure, let us not forget that "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," but these threats are the thorns of the rose.  

See Endnotes, page 110