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 Tamil Eelam (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 Kathipulawa, 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 rigged to detonate when signaled from a remote position. Rigging 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.
When engaging NSAs, priorities must be set as to where and when to allocate scarce resources: If humanitarian actors target a group that is a frequent user and manager of landmines, the beneficiaries for the population are greater: yet a sporadic user or non-user may be more open to re-negotiating the use of landmines. It may not be a crucial part of their military strategy. The Global Report, by exploring specific characteristics of the NSAs and their mine use, intends to provide a background tool for humanitarian actors to strategize regarding which non-state actors to target and what the appropriate approaches might be. For NSAs, understanding the impact and conduct of humanitarian mine action is crucial. It is therefore important to understand the negative and positive implications of NSAs mine use.

Concluding Remarks

The Global Report clearly demonstrates a need foríveis in mine use with non-state actors. Many NSAs (as well as states) lack the long-term commitment to the consequences of mine use, and it is therefore crucial for the international community to find channels of communication with NSAs on the AP mine issue. Parties to conflict often use accusations of AP mine use to discredit the other party be-cause of the complicated situation following the Ottawa process and, in addition, because of the natural perception of landmines as an illegitimate weapon.10 NSAs, as well as states, are thus reluctant to admit they are using AP mines. This is also relevant to non-state actors: Many NGOs have advocated an inclusive approach—addressing the humanitarian mine issue—since NSAs are at times unwilling to participate in mine action due to the difficulties and risks involved. The report offers a basis for discussing the issue of landmines with NSAs and potential victims of landmine use. Ultimately, the issue of landmine use with NSAs must be addressed on a case-by-case basis for different regions.

Appendix

The Involvement of Armed Non-state Actors in Mine Action

The Involvement of Armed Non-state Actors in Mine Action and Challenges

At present, there is a need to investigate the extent to which the work of NGOs in landmine action with NSAs is successful. This is not to say that such action is not important: humanitarian actors must continue to work with NSAs to change their attitudes and behavior. However, it is crucial to understand the complexities of the situation and to develop strategies that are effective in the long term. The Global Report aims to provide a framework for this work, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for action.

The Global Report also explores the potential implications of NSAs’ involvement in mine action, including the need for further research and collaboration with other stakeholders. It recommends that humanitarian actors work closely with NSAs to understand their perspectives and motivations, and to develop strategies that can be effective in the long term.

The Global Report is available for download on the website of the Global Reporting Project. The website also provides additional resources and information on the issue of landmine action with NSAs. The report is intended to be a starting point for further research and action in this important area.