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

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Geneva Call

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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 Kabithigollewa, a town about 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the capital, Colombo. Military officials said the blast came from two landmines planted on the roadside.

The attack 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 some areas from Sri Lanka and have been classified as a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of State.

The official delegation of the Republic of Tajikistan took part in the First Review Conference in Nairobi and made a presentation about the process of implementing the Ottawa Convention. TMAC and other governmental representatives continue to take an active role in international conferences and meetings on the banning of antipersonnel mines. TMAC conducts ongoing training, meetings, liaison and other activities as part of the process of implementation of the Tajikistan Mine Action Programme.

The Civil War of the 1990s created a mine/UXO problem for Tajikistan that is still threatening the daily lives of its citizens a decade later. The Tajikistan Mine Action Centre is remediating the devastating effects this problem has had on the country. TMAC, with international support, has started and will continue to make huge strides in mine/UXO clearance, mine-risk education and victim assistance.

Conclusion

Reporting

In accordance with Article 7 of the Ottawa Convention, the Republic of Tajikistan submits its annual reports to the U.N. Secretary-General on the country’s mine-contamination status and on the completion process to comply with the Convention.

The report records global occurrences of anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mine planting by NSAs during 2003–2005, whether activated by victims, vehicles or at a distance using command detonation.

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

by Anki Sjöberg [Geneva Call]

On-state actors often have more limited military resources than the states against which they fight and, therefore, use landmines, “the poor man’s weapon,” more frequently. As a consequence, the number of NSAs using landmines significantly exceeds the number of states deploying this weapon.

Around 60 NSAs have emplaced landmines in 24 countries across five geographic regions: sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East/North Africa. In addition to these NSAs, armed groups, which are difficult to identify as belonging to a certain category of ideology or organizational form, have also made frequent use of landmines in a few other countries. Two-thirds of these groups have deployed some type of victim-activated devices. These devices were both factory-made and handmade, indicating NSA involvement in both the transfer and the production of mines.


Although deemed by many as lacking decisive military utility and despite their devastating 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 non-state actors through a presentation of individual group profiles and a global analysis.

The report records global occurrences of anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mine planting by NSAs during 2003–2005, whether activated by victims, vehicles or at a distance using command detonation.

Frequency of Mine Use

Keeping in mind the differences in mine use among NSAs is crucial in choosing the most appropriate strategies for equipping them in a mine ban. It is clear there are significant disparities between NSAs, not only in terms of the reasons that motivate their mine use and the types of mines they choose to employ, but also in respect to the frequency of use. For some NSAs, landmines 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–Marxist. Other groups deploy mines when they have access to, or a particularly “useful” for, mines. Instances of this are the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda, the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines and the Rahmanin Resistance Army in Somalia. Some groups, such as the Party for the Liberation of the Hunu People–National Liberation Forces in Burundi and the Sendero Luminoso in Peru, are sporadic users.

Logic Behind NSA Mine Use

Although deemed by many as lacking decisive military utility and despite their devastating humanitarian consequences, landmines clearly serve different purposes for each NSA that employs them. Knowing why and how NSAs use these weapons could contribute to...
“There is currently a trend in many conflicts towards increased use of command-detoxed mines.”

Impact of NSA Mine Use

The impact of NSA mine use is in many respects similar to other forms of weapon use. However, it appears that NSA mines are more widely dispersed than state mines and non-state actors are usually less prone to mark or map their mines. The humanitarian impact of NSA mine use is difficult to determine from the point of impact on the civilian population. Nevertheless, it is clear that NSA mines are a more widespread part of the conflict, in areas where little or no mine action is taking place and where civilians may fear reporting mine incidents. In addition, the humanitarian impact of NSA mine use is difficult to distinguish from that of conflict itself. The need to end the conflict has ended and information becomes available through mine-action efforts. The impact of former mine users by NSAs (anti-personnel and anti-vehicle) can be seen in Angola, South Sudan and Sri Lanka. The global report on the use of landmines/various states and individuals to protect their own people (including civilians) from the use of landmines is difficult to measure, since it takes place in a conflict situation, and is the use of mines in areas with no observable impact on the civilian population. Nevertheless, it is clear that NSA mines are a more widespread part of the conflict, in areas where little or no mine action is taking place and where civilians may fear reporting mine incidents. In addition, the humanitarian impact of NSA mine use is difficult to distinguish from that of conflict itself. The need to end the conflict has ended and information becomes available through mine-action efforts. The impact of former mine users by NSAs (anti-personnel and anti-vehicle) can be seen in Angola, South Sudan and Sri Lanka. The global report on the use of landmines/various states and individuals to protect their own people (including civilians) from the use of landmines is difficult to measure, since it takes place in a conflict situation, and is the use of mines in areas with no observable impact on the civilian population. Nevertheless, it is clear that NSA mines are a more widespread part of the conflict, in areas where little or no mine action is taking place and where civilians may fear reporting mine incidents.