Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War

History of the Problem

Landmine use can be traced back to the American Civil War in the late 1800s. During World War II, there were extensive minefields in the Soviet Union, Northern Africa, and along the Western Front. The main reason for the use of landmines in World War II was to disrupt or prevent attacks from tanks and/or infantry. Another early use of landmines was during the late 20th century during the guerrilla wars that proliferated Asia and Africa, such as those in Vietnam, Cambodia, Angola, and Afghanistan.

In 1983, the use of landmines was regulated under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). The convention’s main goal is to protect military personnel and noncombatants from accidentally being injured or killed. As of 2017 the amount of states-parties who have signed the convention is 120. After the treaty was signed, countries began pushing for a full ban on the use of landmines. Since the enactment of the CCW, forty million landmines that were kept in stockpiles have been destroyed. There are daily instances where civilians are killed or severely injured as a result of accidentally encountering hidden landmines. In war-torn communities many civilians are exposed to hazardous remnants of war.

A major contributing factor for this is that local communities are unable to properly handle mines. There is a severe lack of proper technology in the affected areas that puts the citizens at a substantial disadvantage when combating landmine use. Globally, there were over 3,300 deaths

2 Ibid
4 Ibid
reported as a result of landmine explosions in 2013. Although the number of deaths is still very high, it is down 24% from the previous year. Unfortunately, the use and production of landmines still continues. Some of the countries that still produce landmines include China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Russia. In addition to those nations who still produce landmines there are still nations who stockpile landmines such as the United States, Russia, Pakistan, India, and China. Nations that still produce landmines enable the use of landmines to continue to cause widespread destruction. Although, these nations still produce landmines there is a UN convention designed to prohibit the use and production of landmines. The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction mentions that the state parties are, “determined to put an end to the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines.”

Environmental Impacts
Landmines cause widespread environmental destruction. The detonation of such explosives impact how land can be used as well as how resources can be gathered.

Agricultural Land Destruction
The destruction of agricultural land due to explosions caused by landmines is leading to a dramatic decrease in the amount of food that can be produced for the citizens of the impacted areas. Explosions of landmines have destroyed great areas of the agricultural sector in affected countries. In addition to the physical destruction of land there is the presence of toxic pollution. The pollution from the mines present a long-term human health and environmental hazard. The explosions destroy the land through soil degradation and pollute the groundwater due to heavy metals leaking into the water. The widespread damage to agricultural lands brings along a greater struggle for citizens: famine. In Syria, for example, an area controlled by ISIS has been littered with landmines resulting in citizens fleeing in order to escape famine and subsequent disease. According to Ahamad Rhamadan, “In case ISIS leaves the city, who could remove the thousands of mines? Death lies in wait for the inhabitants of Deir ez-Zor,”.

Another case of a famine caused by landmines is in the Horn of Africa. There has been evidence of a drought-led famine caused by landmines bringing death and destruction to the civilians and the agricultural areas. In a survey done about Ethiopia and Eritrea it was found that there were

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11 Ibid
6,295 victims of mine accidents in those two countries. Thus, the large number of casualties makes farming and grazing difficult, resulting in drought and famine.\textsuperscript{13}

**Limited Access to Fresh Water**

Explosions of landmines and explosive remnants of war present a problem to access to fresh drinking water. The explosions and the remnants of the explosions leach into bodies of fresh water resulting in widespread contamination of the water. Landmines also inhibit access to freshwater by destroying roads that lead to bodies of freshwater. The UN Secretary-General is calling for stricter regulation of mines as they restrict access to basic aid and access to fresh drinking water.\textsuperscript{14} The Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention strives to provide assistance to those affected by landmine explosions as well as ensuring stricter regulations for landmines. Regulations such as prohibiting the stockpiling of landmines in civilian areas. The convention also mentions that approximately forty million mines have been destroyed but there are still areas where mines are still lurking. Landmines and other unexploded ordinances violate almost every article in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.\textsuperscript{15} One of the key rights violated is the right to clean drinking water. This is not just a violation against children’s rights it is also a violation against the basic human right to clean drinkable water for everyone. Once the mines explode, if they are in close range to a water source, contaminants and toxic metals from the mines enters the water making the water unsafe to drink. As a result of widespread contamination of fresh water sources in conflict areas caused by landmines forced the UN to act and ensure everyone has access to fresh water. In July of 2010 the UN declared safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right.\textsuperscript{16}

**Impact to Maintenance and Construction of Infrastructure**

Landmines pose a great threat to the regular maintenance and construction of infrastructure. The explosions destroy existing infrastructure as well as prevent the construction of new infrastructure. Mines placed along roads and tracks inhibit the repatriation of refugees and impede the delivery of necessary aid to affected areas.\textsuperscript{17} Exploded or unexploded mines pose a difficult challenge for citizens and governments of areas where mines are widely dispersed; it is an expensive operation to remove and deactivate the mines as well as rebuilding existing infrastructure after an explosion. The UN has established a voluntary trust fund through which countries can share the burden of mine clearance. To date, countries have pledged $22 million towards the UN goal of $75 million.\textsuperscript{18}

Since fighting in the Middle East has intensified the damage caused by dangerous anti-personnel explosives has left citizens of many cities from Mosul to Aleppo with severe damage vital infrastructure.\textsuperscript{19} The extreme loss of infrastructure in many cities has forced many civilians to count

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{15} “Landmines.” UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/index_landmines.html.
\item \textsuperscript{17} “Landmines.” UNICEF.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid
on outside aid for help rebuilding and maintaining existing infrastructure. In Fallujah, Iraq, families turned to Elrha’s Humanitarian Innovation Fund. This fund is in place to help families return home and begin rebuilding the infrastructure.

**Threat to Human Health**

The impact of landmines and other anti-personnel mines becomes more detrimental every year. Humans who accidentally come into contact with hidden mines experience loss of limbs or even death.

**Populations reluctant to return home**

Once landmines are detonated, the citizens who lived in the affected area are very hesitant to return home due to fear of more explosions. The fear of more mines exploding weighs heavy on those who survived or escaped the explosions. The threat of undetected mines still lurking sparks fear and hesitation into those who call the area home. Even after fighting in an area had stopped the fear of an unforeseen threat to the population is still very high; due to the fact that mine clearance is dangerously low in many areas.20 Citizens in areas where there is a high concentration of landmines are doubtful that cities and towns will return to how they were prior to the use of landmines and explosive remnants of war.21 The reluctance to return home doesn’t stop with the presence of mines but with the horrors and trauma received by injuries.

**Mental health impacts**

Survivors of explosions of landmines are faced with extreme trauma which impact mental health. Survivors who return home have to live with the horrors of what occurred every day. Whether it be surviving an explosion or losing a loved one, those are the horrors survivors are tasked with each day. The psychosocial trauma caused by landmines requires long-term rehabilitation for many survivors due to the fact that a large number lived in poverty prior to experiencing the trauma.22 Even though many of the injuries and traumatic experiences occur in rural areas the centers to help treat and rehabilitate citizens are mainly found in more urban areas posing a challenge to those who do not have easy access to transportation.23 The mental health impact on children can be far worse due to the fact that many children mistake the mines for toys resulting in catastrophic injuries or death. The psychosocial effects of mine related incidents can range from mild stress reactions and depression to substance abuse or posttraumatic stress disorder.24

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23 Ibid
Limiting the Use of Landmines

Over recent years, the need for limitations regarding landmines has grown exponentially. There are various groups pushing for stricter limitations and bans regarding land mines and other unexploded ordinances.

**International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) Campaign to Ban Landmines**

Various INGOs are campaigning to completely ban the use of landmines in combat. One such INGO that is part of the campaign is the International Committee of the Red Cross. The campaign to ban landmines has grown to include about three hundred and fifty INGOs in about twenty countries. Other organizations have joined together to actively promote “Joint Call to Ban Anti-personnel Landmines”. Such other INGOs include Human Rights Watch (USA), the Mines Advisory Group (UK), and Handicap International (France). This call focuses on two very crucial components to ban landmines. One being an international ban on the use and stockpiling of mines along with the sale and transfer of mines. The other side focuses on holding countries who are responsible for production to finance victim assistance through UN programs. NGOs have also made strides by documenting the problems associated with mines. The NGO International Campaign to Ban Landmines has been a voice for pushing governmental policy change as well as shining light on the humanitarian crisis resulting from landmines. Another NGO helping to resolve the many problems resulting from landmines is Mines Advisory Group (MAG). MAG is a group that searches for and finds landmines and other cluster munitions and destroys them in a controlled environment.

**UN Mine Action Strategy**

Derived in 2018 the UN Mine Strategy focuses on holding those who use mines accountable as well as introducing a theory of change for the UN engagement in mine actions. The strategy was drafted and coordinated by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) for the years 2019 until 2023. This strategy focuses on two main points, accountability framework and introduces a Theory of Change. The framework for accountability allows the UN to better hold those who violate UN regulations on mines accountable for their actions. It will also include a reinforced monitoring and evaluation mechanism to apply clear indicators to ensure accountability. The Theory of Change is a detailed, multi-step process of highlighting the UN outputs and outcomes when dealing with the elimination of mines and other explosive remnants of war.

**UN Regulation**

26 Ibid
27 “Landmines and Measures to Eliminate Them.” *International Committee of the Red Cross.*
31 Ibid
There are various UN conventions regulating the use of landmines. These conventions are good starting points but there is still more that needs to be done in order to ensure landmines are not used as a weapon of war in the future.

**Convention on Cluster Munitions: 2008**

This convention focuses on prohibiting any production and transfer of cluster munitions such as mines. Concerns raised in this convention include the destruction of stockpiles, rehabilitation of affected areas and victims, as well as allowing for transparency in reports regarding mines. As a humanitarian driven legal instrument, this convention establishes a framework for cooperation to ensure proper assistance to survivors as well as clearance of contaminated areas.

As stated in the Convention, cluster munitions are unacceptable because of the widespread effects and the inability to distinguish between a combatant and an ordinary civilian. There are many key states who have yet to join the Convention on Cluster Munitions such as China, Iran, DPRK, Russia, Yemen, The United States, Israel, and Cambodia.

**Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty- 1997**

The purpose for the international community enacting this treaty was to formulate practical efforts towards banning mines and building the necessary relationships to achieve a global ban on mines. This treaty ensures that the production and stockpiling of mines will cease. The treaty also states that any stockpiles of mines must be destroyed with the exception of a small amount for training purposes. The treaty has shaped international norms by discouraging a country from using mines whether they have signed the treaty or not. Signatories of the treaty commit to not producing, transporting, using, or stockpiling mines defined by the treaty as mines that are “specifically designed to explode within a close proximity or by contact of a person”. There is a section of the treaty that focus on able member states to assist those who are in need of assistance in treating the wounded or destroying remaining mines. Those who sign the treaty are expected to be as helpful as possible in making sure everyone has access to proper technology and machinery to completely destroy remaining mines. As for transparency, the treaty mandates that each signatory provides a comprehensive report containing the status of mine removal, locations of any mines they possess, as well as other key information to the UN. Key nations who have not signed the treaty include China, Iran, Israel, Russia, Syria, and The United States.

**Case Study: Landmine Proliferation in Yemen**

Landmine use in Yemen has been present since the 1960s when the first Civil War broke out in the country. Since then landmines have been used on various occasions by various groups. More mines were scattered in the decades to follow on the border with Saudi Arabia. One group in particular that

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33 Ibid
36 Ibid
has been using mines at an astonishingly high rate are the Houthis. The current war, Houthi mines were placed along the coast and the border with neighboring Saudi Arabia as well as other key towns and routes. In a 2017 report from Human Rights Watch, the initial supplies of Houthi landmines were solely from domestic stockpiles. The humanitarian impact of the Houthi use of landmines is one that stretches far beyond physical injuries. In a quote from Acting Emergencies Manager from Human Rights Watch Priyanka Motaoarthy “Houthi-laid landmines have not only killed and maimed numerous civilians, but they have prevented vulnerable Yemenis from harvesting crops or drawing clean water…” Total removal of mines placed by Houthi forces will be a challenge that will take time and numerous talks to negotiate removal. The main focus of de-mining negotiations would be centered around the Yemen and Saudi Arabian border. Talks regarding southern territories will prove to be more difficult as there is a conflict of landownership and politics surrounding the area.

Case Study: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Beginning in 1992 an ethnically rooted war broke out in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The conflict involved Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), Serbian, and Croatian forces. In 1946, the People’s Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina became a constituent republic to the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia. This move to join the Yugoslav Republic caused widespread social, political, and economic changes for the citizens of Yugoslavia. It wasn’t until the 1980s when the economy in the Yugoslav Republic took a sharp downturn, that Bosnia and Herzegovina began to agitate for independence. After these economic struggles, subsided Bosnia and Herzegovina voted for and obtained their independence from the Yugoslav Republic. Shortly after obtaining independence the Bosnian city of Sarajevo was under attack by Bosnian Serb forces. The attacks were a part of an ethnic cleansing by the Serbs to expel the Bosniaks. The war was not just artillery and air strikes but there was a use of a more elusive weapon, the landmine. Landmines became very common during

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38 Ibid


42 Ibid
this war because they could be hidden for long periods of time and still remain able to detonate. From
the beginning of the war in 1992 until 2008 over five thousand people were killed in Bosnia as a
result of landmines and other unexploded ordinances. Bosnia currently has about 80,000 mines still
left in an area 1,000 square kilometers, or 2.2 percent of the country is still littered with hazardous
mines. Despite progress being made for the removal of mines, a landmine free Bosnia continues to
be delayed. Part of the problem is limited funding for the removal of the mines. A report from the
Balkan Insight in 2017 reported that only half of the total 660 million Bosnian marks (roughly $512
million US dollars) was used to fund de-mining operations across the country. Today, Bosnia is still
in the process of de-mining the remaining areas. The current status of mines has put Bosnian
authorities in a position where migrants have been transferred to areas with concentrations of hidden
landmines.

Questions to Consider:

- How has the use of mines impacted how wars are fought?
- What else needs to be done to ensure mines will not prove to be an issue moving forward?
- What other factors play into the prohibition of mines in war?
- What are some diplomatic ways of resolving the issue of using mines in war?

44 Ibid
45 “UN: Bosnia Moves Migrants to Area Infested with Land Mines.” Associated Press. https://www.apnews.com/b8afebed9d694f8b83c7d7d13b78d73.