

Land Mines:

Land mine, in simple terms, can be defined as an explosive mine laid on or just under the surface of the ground. Also, according to Wikipedia, land mine is defined as *“usually a victim-triggered explosive device which is intended to damage its target via blast and/or fragments”*

The term “landmine” is said to originate from mining practice. They work when they are triggered after being filled with explosives and then detonated. Throughout history, there have been controversies over the use of land mines mainly because they can be seen as indiscriminate weapons. History also shows planted and forgotten landmines even by those responsible for it, which in turn can cause severe damages to lives and properties as it can remain functional for many years because of its long life span. The use of landmines in wars are completely decision based on decisions made by people in authority, usually the military and this has been criticized because it is easier said than done and life changing decisions can be made in a comfort of an office rather than the war front. Another reason for the criticism is because people living in rural areas are hardly considered when making these decisions as they are more prone to the deadly damages of the landmines.

Landmines started appearing in large quantities around the American-Germany war, in about 1918. Also, the Americans were the first nation to develop landmine, not just a landmine, but an operational landmine. Around the time of the Second World War, the Germans developed two types of mines, namely; the anti-tank mine and one anti-personnel mine. Because they fought defensively around 1942 period, they relied heavily on these mines and its value, which cannot be over exaggerated during this period, began to grow extensively.

In modern times, the use of landmines, its sale and production has spin out of control. Since 1939, more than 400 million mines have be planted and this has in a way, changed the face of the earth. Within the last 20 years alone, more than 65 million mines have been laid and planted. During the Korean War, which lasted from 1951 - 1953, almost ten countries for their defence, relied and put faith on the anti-personnel mines. For people who laid these mines, it was a constant threat to them, let alone the oppositions.

Also, around the period of the American-Vietnam war, from 1958-1968, an entire village or territory could be surrounded be landmines, some of which were dropped from the air while the

others were laid by hands. Due to the fact that some of these mines were dropped from the air using aircraft, there are no actual records or figures as to how many mines were laid, and it is worth noting that even after many decades of ended wars, these mines still pose threats to people living in and around these areas.

Looking at the country Angola, the western African country is considered to be the most mine-infested country. Mines were being laid since around the 1970s and even to this present day, the process still continues and major towns are being surrounded by anti-personnel mines which, as mentioned earlier, could endanger humans, animals and properties. Similarly, looking at another case study, Iraq, its population is facing unexploded military weapons and ammunition. Around the '60s and '70s, during the internal conflict that arose between the Iraqi forces and the Kurdish mountain fighters, as a way of preventing military action by the Kurdish fighters, the Iraqis used landmines. Also, during the Iran-Iraq war which lasted for 8 years from 1980-1988, widespread of land mining occurred. Further planting of mines have been witnessed throughout the world. During the 1991 Gulf War, 117,634 landmines, 27,967 anti-personnel mines and over 80,000 anti-vehicle mines were planted by the United States in Iraq and Kuwait. Due to these large figures of mines planted, the total number of mines in Iraq for example, is still unknown and many of them are unmarked, thus, only few clues are known to signify the area(s) as a mined one.

It is worth mentioning that in Cambodia, the number of amputees per capita of the population is higher than any other country in the world. This is because of the high numbers of casualties which occur monthly. The number has significantly dropped to 100 victims per month compared to around 300 victims per month in the early 1970s, thus, the reason for so many amputees.

One of the most heavily mined countries which have suffered greatly from the war since 1979 is Afghanistan. There are so many contaminations in the countries from landmine planting. These areas include agricultural farms, irrigation canals, residential areas and even footpaths, both in rural and urban areas.

A survey conducted in 2008 shows that Egypt is the highest mining country in the world with approximately 23 million landmines buried in its territory. These mines, due to their old age, are difficult to locate and they are responsible for injuries and death there.

Over the time, there have been very horrifying pictures and stories worldwide and they show or tell stories destruction these mines cause, mainly involving civilians in large numbers. Although tremendous effort has been made to clear landmines that have been laid for years and decades, it has been a very difficult task to do, as well as risky and very dangerous. The factors which affect these difficult tasks of demining include little or no kept records of plated mines, unknown exact locations of mines dropped from aircrafts and conflicts in preparation.



Clearing landmines can be painstaking, slow, and very dangerous. Photos: Left: US soldiers clear landmines in Iraq. Right: Colombian soldier uses a mine detector to look for mines on side of road. Photo was taken in 2003. (Shah, A., 2009).

A universal agreement has been reached to solve the problems of global landmines. A recent discovery shows that about 65 –90 million of uncleared anti-personnel landmines are spread all over 56 countries. These countries include El Salvador, Mozambique and Cambodia. In these countries, peace has been negotiated, but it has not stopped civilians’ deaths and injuries due to exploding landmines. About 500 per week is the estimated number of injuries and death in these countries. Most victims of these exploding landmines include poor farmers, women and children who tend to collect food and materials like firewood from areas previously battlegrounds. Like

having effects on lives and properties, landmines have effects on the human body, such as driving dirt and bacteria, plastic fragments into tissues and causing secondary infections. Due to its high porosity, they are capable of destroying blood vessels well up in the leg and this can cause amputation further up.

Although it is known that working /middle class men are the largest group of landmines' casualties, children make up a significant figure of landmines' victims. In 2007, a disturbing figure of 46% of children are either injured or killed during normal activities like playing and running and this accounted for almost half of the casualties.

In the 1990s, a non-governmental organization which was against the use of landmines was formed, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL). The primary reason behind the formation of this organization was to prohibit the use of landmines. A treaty called the "Ottawa Treaty" was developed by the help of this organization. The motto of this developed treaty was called "convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction". The treaty was developed and became fully functional in 1997.

Within two years of ICBL's existence, over 300 organizations gave their support around the world. In 1991, the Medico International and Vietnam Veterans of American foundation came together and decided to ban landlines globally by bring together different non-governmental organizations. These NGOs campaigned in nations like Cambodia, Britain, Germany, United States amongst others. They were different purposes of these campaigns. Some of them were public awareness exercises, and programmers' and signature campaign.

Eight pro-ban nations – Austria, Canada, Denmark, Mexico, Switzerland, Norway, Belgium, and Ireland – met at a conference in January 1996 to discuss the ways to control use of landmines. This was successful and within months, this campaign was transformed into a partnership. Months later in October 1996, the Ottawa conference was held and it was attended by fifty nations, the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and so many NGOs with the sole purpose of trying to ban the use of landmines and its production.

In the 1990s, over 100 million mines were discovered present in about 60 countries across the world. These high numbers of mines caused about 2000 injuries or deaths monthly. Apart from death and injuries, it also affected infrastructures and land. The ICBL campaign on landmines was, as reported, a successful campaign that in 1997, a treaty that exclusively banned the production, transfer and use of anti-personnel landmines was reached. Some of the key findings on this treaty are:

- **Decrease in usage of landmines:** The government use of anti-personnel landmines decreased significantly during a 10 year period of 1999-2009. Also, for the non-state armed groups (NSAG), the usage has also significantly decreased and within the past decades, 13 countries have committed to stop using anti-personnel mines
- **Universality** – During that 10 year period of 1999-2009 as mentioned earlier, about three quarters of the world with about 156 states are part of the treaty with a total of 39 countries still yet to join. These include countries like China, United States, India, Pakistan and Russia.
- **Limited production and trade of landmines** – within the same 10 year period, a total of 39 former producers of anti-personnel landmines were stopped from producing, and only about 13 producers still produce them, which is significantly less than it used to be.
- **Unification in landmines destruction** – During the treaty in Ottawa for the destruction of these landmines within the 10 year period, only three countries – Greece, Turkey and Belarus - of the lot could not make the destruction deadline set by the treaty. An impressive number of 86 countries have successfully and completely destroyed their landmines stock and 4 countries are in the process of destroying theirs. In total, about 44 million anti-personnel mines have been destroyed.
- **Successful clearances of mines-** Within the 10 year period, 11 countries have successfully and completely cleared their known mines from their land and territory. Although according to a recent study, more than 70 million countries are still in a way or the other affected with mines in its area/territory, and the study also reveals that over 2.2 million anti-personnel mines have been destroyed. According to this treaty, there is a requirement for countries to completely clear their known mines, which has been adhered to. The production, trade, use and transfer have been forgone in these countries.

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