Commission: Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC)

Topic: Strengthening International Cooperation in Mine Action: Clearance, Victim Assistance, and Accountability for Explosive Remnants of War

-Nourhan Sayed

About DISEC:

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) addresses matters concerning international peace and security, with its main focus on disarmament, arms regulation, and the prevention of general threats to international stability.

Member states can discuss existing and emerging security challenges, go over humanitarian consequences of war, and propose solutions and approaches to reaching international security. This includes addressing nuclear disarmament, conventional weapons, military technologies all which may pose risks to the civilian population.

Unlike the UNSC, (United Nations Security Council), DISEC does not possess the authority to impose legal sanctions or oblige Member states to undertake any military or enforcement actions. Its base function is to debate and adopt recommendations through resolutions, this can include, encouraging cooperation, promoting treaties, and calling for action.

Introduction:

Landmines and explosive remnants of war are one of the most continuous consequences of armed conflict. Unlike conventional weaponry, which presents threats immediately, explosive remnants and landmines can continue endangering innocent civilians long after conflict has concluded. These remnants remain buried underground in agricultural, residential, and educational facilities and areas of land. This can make the return of life after war difficult and unsafe towards civilians.

Landmines and explosive remnants do not distinguish between military combatants and innocent civilians. Once placed down, a child may come across unexploded hazards while simply playing out, and many more examples. Victims and survivors of this hazard require rehab, psychological support, prosthetics, and long term medical support. Whose responsibility is this?

Key Terms:

Anti-Personnel Mine: An explosive device designed to target and detonate by the presence of a person, proximity, or contact with potential to cause injury and death.

Anti-Vehicle Mine: An explosive device designed to target and detonate by the contact, proximity, or presence of a vehicle.

Explosive Ordnance: All munitions, devices, or materials designed to detonate, explode, or produce an explosive effect.

Unexploded Ordnance: Explosives or ammunition that have been primed and fused and deployed but failed to detonate as intended.

Explosive Remnants of War (ERW): Explosive devices left behind after the end of active conflict. Under the legal framework, these include unexploded ordnance and abandoned explosive ordnance.

Abandoned Explosive Ordnance: Explosive ordnance that has not been used during conflict, rather has been left behind by a party to the conflict and is no longer under its control.

Mine Action: An approach to reduce the social, environmental, and economic consequences of mines and explosive remnants of war.
It has 5 pillars:

1. Clearance
2. Explosive Ordnance risk education
3. Victim Assistance
4. Advocacy
5. Stockpile destruction

Mine Clearance: The process of locating, and removing mines and other explosive hazards to make contaminated areas safer to use for civilians.

Victim Assistance: Medical, psychological, social, and economic support provided to individuals affected by mines and explosives.

Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE): Educational programmes with the intent of informing communities about the dangers of explosive hazards and educating on safe approach and behavior to reduce the risk of injury or death.

Stockpile Destruction: The safe destruction of mines and explosive ordnance (stored & not already placed in the ground). This is treaty-mandated and is in accordance with international obligations.

Minefield Records: Documents with information aiding identifying location, boundaries, and other details of mined areas. This can be used for clearance operations.

Booby Traps: A concealed or camouflaged, or disguised device designed to cause death or harm when triggered by an unsuspected person interacting with it.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Specialised gear, clothing, etc. to minimise exposure to hazards that can cause injuries. In this context, blast-resistant vests, aprons, and full face visors.

Mine Detection Dogs (MDDS): Specially trained dogs trained to use sense of smell to locate landmines, unexploded buried ordnance and explosive remnants of war.

HERO Rats: African giant pouched rats trained by a non-profit organisation APOPO, to detect landmines and unexploded ordnance.

Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW): An international framework adopted in 1980. It seeks to restrict the use of specific conventional weapons that are considered to cause excessive and indiscriminate effects. This covers a range of weapons, including mines and booby traps.

Anti-Personnel Mine ban Convention (The Ottawa Treaty): An international treaty adopted in 1997, and taking into play in 1999. It prohibits its States Parties from using, developing, producing, acquiring, stockpiling, or transferring anti-personnel mines and establishes rulings to clearance, stockpile destruction, and more.

Historical Background:

The use of landmines began expanding significantly during the twentieth century, especially through the First and second world wars. They were initially used to defend positions, and obstruct enemy movements, however their use came along with many negative consequences. The use of mines became increasingly common throughout conflict in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

As further wars developed, the humanitarian consequences of mines became more and more prominent. Large quantities of explosive ordnance remained in territories after conflict ended. This created long-term dangers for the civilian population. Agricultural land, infrastructure, were damaged and had become inaccessible. Displaced civilians and communities also encountered hazards when attempting to return home.

The civilian impact of these weapons prompted international concern. This led to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which aimed to establish restrictions on weapons to prevent unnecessary suffering. Its protocols addressed specific weapons, including mines and booby traps.

However, this convention was seen by humanitarian organisations as lacking and not addressing the issues with anti-personnel mines. International campaigns called for a total prohibition and that movement gained momentum and was supported by governments, organisations and communities. This drove the beginning of the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention in 1997.

The convention entered into force in 1999 and became a major development in international humanitarian disarmament. It established a total prohibition on anti-personnel mines for States Parties and covered requirements on stockpile destruction, victim assistance, and clearance of mines.

Despite progress, the problem remains uneliminated. Existing contamination is still present in many countries. Not to mention, many major countries have not become state parties of the Ottawa Treaty, like Russia, United States, India and Pakistan. Furthermore, many countries withdrew from the treaty and suspended their adherence and many more completely violated the treaty (Seek source page to see the list of these countries). Lastly, the convention cannot bind states that are not parties to it, this distinction is important when considering the effectiveness and universality of this prohibitional convention.

Current International Situation

According to the Landmine Monitor 2025, 6,279 people were killed or injured by landmines and explosive remnants of war in 2024. What's striking is that civilians represented about 90% of the recorded casualties, while children were also a major proportion of this statistic. These figures concern landmines and explosive remnants of war, and not just mines alone.

Several regions like Afghanistan, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam are still affected by landmine reach and many more in the Middle East. See full list of countries here. In affected territories, explosive hazards restrict access to agricultural land, residential areas, transportation routes, and essential infrastructure. The scale of contamination places considerable pressures on national governments and organisations for clearance and assistance.

Recent developments have raised questions about the future of the Ottawa Treaty. Many European states bordering Belarus and Russia have announced the desire to withdraw from the convention, citing changing security conditions and concerns regarding their ability to respond to military threats.

Current environmental conditions further complicate mine-action efforts. Flooding, soil erosion, vegetation growth, and other changes can displace explosive hazards, making previously identified contaminated areas more difficult to clear due to location records now becoming inaccurate.

The international response must address not only existing contamination but also the ability of states and organisations to prevent new contamination, and maintain cooperation despite political disagreements on mines.

International Legal Framework and Existing Efforts

1. Ottawa Treaty:

Each State Party undertakes never under any circumstances:

- a) To use anti-personnel mines;
- b) To develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer to anyone, directly or indirectly, antipersonnel mines; c) To assist, encourage or induce, in any way, anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under this Convention.

See all articles of this here.

2. The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW):

It states restrictions on the use of specific conventional weapons that may be deemed to be excessively injurious or have indiscriminate effects.
It is a pillar of international humanitarian law, concluded in Geneva in 1980.
See more here.

3. UNMAS and the five pillars of mine action

The United Nations Mine Action Service, works around five pillars designed to eliminate the threat of landmines, and explosive remnants of war.

Clearance
Explosive Ordnance risk education
Victim Assistance
Advocacy
Stockpile destruction

See more here.

Challenges and Policy Considerations

Addressing the humanitarian consequences of landmines and explosive remnants of war requires a lot more than the mere removal of these devices. Effective international cooperation requires consideration towards financial, legal, environmental, socioeconomic and medical challenges faced by these affected states and communities.

A. Victim Assistance

Survivors of landmine incidents may need emergency medical treatment, psychological support, prosthetics, physical rehab and socioeconomic assistance. Access to these differ significantly from region to region, as some states have very limited healthcare infrastructure.

B. Social Reintegration

The dangers of landmines extend beyond just physical harm. Survivors and their families may experience psychological trauma, loss of employment, and barriers to education. Also, children affected by these hazards can especially face difficulty in leading normal lives and accessing education. Not to mention, the disability inclusion and psychological rehab.

C. Responsibility Clearance and Contamination

Determining responsibility for affected territories can be difficult when multiple parties participate in a conflict. This is because the armed group responsible for placing these devices may no longer control the affected territory, or may have ceased to exist, or be impossible to identify.
This creates difficulty towards determining who should bear responsibility for locating, documenting, and clearing these hazards, particularly when the affected state lacks the necessary resources.

D. Financing Mine Action Stockpile Destruction **[IMPORTANT, please read :)]**

Stockpile destruction requires major financial resources, specialised equipment, and trained personnel. Many affected states have economic difficulties and cannot afford to independently stockpile destruction. (Note that stockpile destruction is only for STORED mines and not placed in the ground, already placed would be mine-action. See Key Definitions)

As for mine action, they similarly require specialised equipment and trained personnel but to a further degree. This process is a much more complex process. Experts must collect data on the whereabouts of mines, use equipment to map about boundaries and densities of the minefields. After that, they use metal detectors, ground-penetrating radars, and prodder tools to excavate soil centimetre by centimetre. They may also use MMDS (Mine Detection Dogs) or specially trained rats (HERO rats) that sniff out the vapour of explosive compounds rather than the metal itself. They may also use heavily armoured vehicles equipped with rollers and tillers to chew through vegetation, tripwire hazards, and detonate ground-placed mines. This also requires background trauma medics prepared for any accidents to treat blast injuries instantly. This includes ambulances, and even helicopters prepared to route to the nearest hospital. All staff must wear PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) like blast-resistant vests, aprons, and full face visors.

The capacity for mine-action differs between member states. Some counties possess specialised equipment, personnel, and clearance programs, others remain dependent on international assistance. This raises the question of burden-sharing and the role of international organisations. Effective communication is also crucial to prevent duplicated efforts, inefficient funding and gaps in assistance.

The financial responsibility for survivor assistance also remains a problem, especially when the party responsible for landmine contamination cannot be identified or no longer exists. In short, who pays?

E. Identification and Monitoring

The identification and location of contaminated territories is essential for effective and safe clearance. However, the issue is, minefield records can be incomplete, inaccessible, outdated or withheld due to national security considerations. Also, contaminated areas may remain completely unidentified for years.

F. Agricultural Contamination

Explosive contamination can prevent farmers from accessing their agricultural land, grazing areas, and even water resources. This can reduce agricultural production, which in turn disrupts local livelihoods, and increase dependency on other nations or organisations for food importance. This overall contributes to food insecurity.

G. Infrastructure

Landmines and explosive remnants can obstruct roads, hospitals, schools, electricity, and residential areas. This may prevent humanitarian organisations from safely reaching affected populations. Clearance therefore must account for essential infrastructure, and the needs of displaced populations.

H. Accountability and International Legal Responsibility

Establishing accountability for contamination may be difficult when evidence is unavailable, parties do not cooperate, or cannot be identified. Who should take accountability?

I. Disarmament Commitments

While many states support comprehensive prohibitions due to the long-term humanitarian consequences of these weapons, others argue that they may retain military significance in defensive circumstances. Recent withdrawals from the Anti-personnel Mine Ban convention have renewed debate over this relationship between defence requirements, and the protection of civilians.

J. Environmental Recovery and Land Rehabilitation.

Explosive contamination can restrict access to agricultural areas, forests, and the natural environment. Changes including flooding, soil erosion can also complicate identification and clearance of explosive hazards.

K. Implementation and Monitoring

The effectiveness of international mine action initiatives depends on their evaluation after implementation. Clearance programs may face delays, insufficient funding, and difficulties measuring progress. There must be reporting standards, monitoring mechanisms, measurable objectives, assessments and long-term sustainability.

Sources and Data

Where landmines still live
https://www.statista.com/chart/26209/landmines-contamination-map/

Ottawa Treaty and its Obligations
https://www.apminebanconvention.org/en/convention-text

Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons
https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/conventional-arms/convention-certain-conventional-weapons
&
The humanitarian Law, International Committee of the Red Cross
https://www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/conventional-weapons

The UNMAS and the five pillars of mine action
https://unmas.org/en

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)
https://disarmament.unoda.org/en