

Course

ILLICIT MARKETS AND ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE AMERICAS



Class

Improvised Explosive Devices: An Analysis of the OAS Response in the Americas

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Introduction

This class that looks at Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), their impact and the humanitarian response that is aimed at helping affected communities deal with them.

Today's discussion will be focused on a specific type of explosive devices – those that are constructed in an improvised manner and used as a key weapon of choice by non-state armed actors. Improvised anti-personnel mines are a central feature of the OAS mine action program in Colombia and increasingly in programs around the world.



Concepts

Humanitarian principles: humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence;

Organizations

ICAE: The International Coalition Against Illicit Economies is a network of former senior US government officials providing advice on national security, diplomacy, military, intelligence, and law enforcement/judicial action, policy decision-making, and operations around threats current globals.

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As the face of conflict evolves and the rise of notable global networks of armed non-state actors increases, we have seen a significant rise in the use and the impact of IEDs.

In this environment, the popularity of IEDs rocketed because **their improvised nature provides flexibility and allows for subterfuge**, somewhat leveling the playing field in conflict. Their home-made explosive devices are tailored to their situation and can be constantly adapted and disguised depending on the tools on their disposal.

According to a June 2022 report by the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, IEDs were at the origin of 30% of civilian casualties as a result of explosive devices, most of them improvised.



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Humanitarian actors aim to alleviate the suffering, prevent accidents, and pave the way for reconstruction, in particular, the establishment of basic services after a conflict, things like water and electricity, and over the long term promote socio-economic development. This work is guided by the **humanitarian principles**.

The **security sector** acts in a different way than humanitarian actors. Security objectives are related to protection, as well as the humanitarian sector, but they do not operate under humanitarian principles and cannot be seen as impartial or independent in the context of a conflict.



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IEDs have **five basic components: a container, a power source, a switch, an initiator, and the main charge**. Their construction is often simple; however, the architecture can also be extremely complex depending on the skill and the objectives of the maker.

IEDs can be time activated, command detonated, or victim operated. **The humanitarian focus is on victim-operated devices**, due to their indiscriminate nature, as well as to the fact that both timed and command devices are used directly by armed groups, and it signifies that the conflict is ongoing. The purview of the security sector is in the context of a criminal act or terrorism linked to the someone at the other end of the wire or overseeing a timed device.



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Some of the common elements that are used as precursor elements chemicals include the following: **fertilizer** grade ammonium nitrate; chlorates for **weed killers**; gas generating ingredients for **foam plastic**; organic **peroxides** that function as polymerization catalysts; **pharmaceutical compounds** - **Nitroglycerine and PETN solutions**, for example; salts of nitrated organic acids from **pest control sector**. These commonly-used products are very difficult to control, since they have other essential uses in the economy.

IEDs are not always reliable and can be a hazard to its makers, as well as to security officials or humanitarian workers. It is therefore important for recognition training.



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For the humanitarian response, **warning communities of the dangers of IEDs is of the highest priority.** The challenge is that Explosive Ordnance Risk Education normally relies on explaining the dangers of touching or moving explosives and due to the fact that IEDs are constantly changing, pictures and descriptions must be used very carefully. Instead, scenario-based education must be used, where the population are educated to conduct their own risk assessments based on their local context.

Clearing the danger is the ultimate prevention, however. Where states are parties to the Anti-Personel Mine Ban Convention, they are also required under Article 5 of that Convention to clear all improvised explosive devices that fall into the category of an Anti-Personel mine.

The key to the humanitarian clearance effort is that the objective is not to attack the perpetrators, or provide movement for state actors, but to **save lives**, and allow communities to return to **their productive lives and livelihoods**.

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The efforts of the security sector are part of an overall effort aimed at protecting civilians from the effects of IEDs as well, but each sector has its own frameworks and structures.

The humanitarian sector must be kept separate from security-oriented activities if it is able to operate according to humanitarian principles, despite the need to share information in some cases. Thus, navigating the boundaries of such collaboration can be complex.



Summary

- The reason behind the use of IEDs as an effective weapon in asymmetric conflicts in particular;
- The humanitarian response strategy based on the humanitarian principals and victim-focused;
- The components of IEDs and they impact on civilians;
- The complexity of the collaboration between the humanitarian and security sectors.



References

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