

1949

In the United States, the Armed Forces Security Agency, the predecessor to the National Security Agency, is established.

1956

In Operation Redwing, the first United States airborne hydrogen bomb is dropped over Bikini Atoll in the Pacific Ocean.

1964

Discovery of the cosmic microwave background radiation by Robert Woodrow Wilson and Arno Penzias.



1967

The Popular Movement of the Revolution political party is established in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



TOP  
4  
TWEETS

01



Today is the final phase of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. I urge all those voting in this phase to vote in record numbers. Your one vote will shape India's development trajectory in the years to come. I also hope first time voters vote enthusiastically.

@narendramodi

02



Today is the 7th and last phase of polling. Our mothers and sisters have played a key role in these elections, not just as candidates, but also as committed voters whose voices must be heard. I salute them all. #AbHogaNYAY

@RahulGandhi

03



Majestic and magnificent. Serene and spiritual. There is something very special about the Himalayas. It is always a humbling experience to return to the mountains.

@narendramodi

04



San Francisco police raided a journalist's home, seized his computers, phones and notebooks, and handcuffed him for six hours — all because he refused to divulge the identity of his source. Baffling to me that this isn't a bigger story.

@kenklippenstein

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)

# Protecting civilians in combat zones: tackling explosive weapons in populated areas



Sri Lankan security personnel keep watch outside the church premises following a blast at the St. Anthony's Shrine in Kochchikade, Colombo (file photo)

*Many weapons originally intended for battlefield use pose serious humanitarian concerns when used in populated areas*



IZUMI NAKAMITSU

Human suffering caused by war is not a new phenomenon. And while our highest priority remains the prevention of war, evolving patterns of armed violence are posing new and more difficult challenges that require action.

The number of people killed in armed conflict has risen tenfold since 2005. Conflict is migrating into villages, towns and cities, but governments and non-state actors are continuing to use weapons designed for open battlefields.

Many weapons originally intended for battlefield use, those that disperse multiple munitions over a wide area, fire without a direct line of sight to the target, or produce large blasts and fragmentation, pose serious humanitarian concerns when used in populated areas.

In 2018 alone, these "wide-area" weapons killed civilian women, men and children by the tens of thousands, both directly and by destroying critical infrastructure needed to move supplies like food and medicine.

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In places like Afghanistan and Yemen, combatants continue to use weapons like improvised explosive devices and air-launched munitions, both of which harm people far beyond the user's line of sight.

This devastating reality demands new measures to protect civilians.

The need to protect people from war's effects—called the "humanitarian imperative"—has driven decades of international efforts to regulate warfare.

In the 70 years since the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, which established the cornerstones of international humanitarian law, global-level prohibitions have entered into force for anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions as well as chemical and biological weapons.



Yemeni firefighters douse flames following an explosion near a security post in the southern port city of Aden (file photo)



Afghan security forces gather at the site of a suicide bomb attack outside a British security firm's compound in Kabul (file photo)

Despite this progress, civilians continue to bear the brunt of conflict globally.

A number of responsible governments and armed forces have taken many steps to protect civilians from warfare, such as adjusting military doctrines, policies and rules of engagement, and some have enhanced training practices in these areas.

NATO and the African Union, for instance, have each enacted tactical directives and other policies aimed at placing limits on the use of certain heavy weapons.

The United Nations has compiled information on these practices that can serve as a basis for common standards to safeguard civilians. There needs to be a shared understanding that combatants should not use certain heavy weapons in densely populated areas as they are highly likely to cause indiscriminate harm. Affirming this understanding in a political declaration would be an important first step.

Other measures should be pursued in parallel.

Improving how we collect data on civilian casualties can further inform policy and practice. Authoritative information on the impact of these weapons will help governments meet their humanitarian commitments and weigh risks associated with arms exports.

In his agenda for disarmament issued

in 2018, Securing Our Common Future, the Secretary-General calls for new efforts to protect civilians from the urbanization of armed conflict, in particular from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. He stands ready to facilitate the development of a political declaration as well as appropriate limitations, common standards and operational policies, building on proven and existing practice.

Governments can also support these efforts by sharing more details on their practices, including through military-to-military dialogue.

Momentum for effective multilateral action is growing. In October 2018, 50 countries at the UN General Assembly jointly voiced their grave concern about the humanitarian harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

This was a clear call to accelerate our efforts in the spirit of "disarmament that saves lives," as the Secretary-General described these initiatives in his agenda for disarmament.

We need to seize this moment and act together to protect civilians from unacceptable harm caused by the urbanization of warfare. The humanitarian imperative must drive us forward with urgency.

(Izumi Nakamitsu is UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs)