

# Casualties from Victim-Activated Improvised Explosive Devices in 2014

30 November 2015



A deminer demonstrates how a locally typical victim-activated IED, constructed from common items, operates as an antipersonnel landmine. Colombia, April 2014 © ICBL-CMC

The Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor recorded increased casualties from victim-activated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Early data from 2015 also indicates that victim-activated IEDs continued to cause a higher number of casualties in some states.

IEDs may incorporate military explosive items or industrial explosives, but frequently they are composed of homemade explosives. According to the definitions used for the Monitor's global casualty data recording, there are two main categories of IEDs: victim-activated IEDs and command-detonated IEDs. An IED that is command-detonated is devised so that the user decides when to activate the explosion.<sup>2</sup>

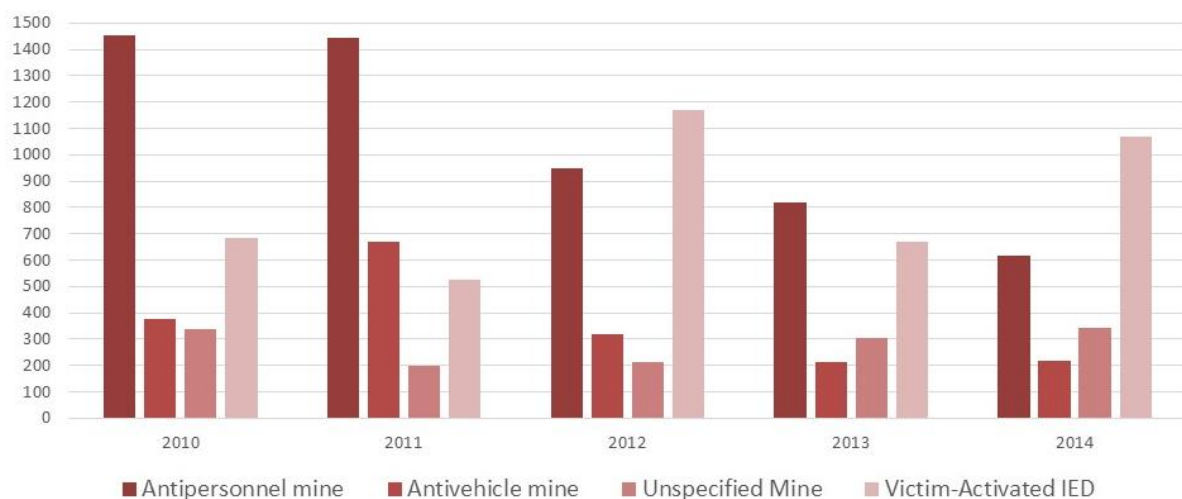
Victim-activated IEDs are devices that are detonated by the presence, proximity, or contact of a person or a vehicle. Casualties due to victim-activated IEDs are included in the global annual total of casualties recorded by the Monitor.<sup>3</sup> If they can be detonated by the presence, proximity or contact of a person then victim-activated IEDs fit the definition of antipersonnel landmines and are therefore prohibited under the Mine Ban Treaty.<sup>4</sup>

In most cases it is not possible to distinguish between antivehicle and antipersonnel victim-activated IEDs because reporting does not provide a clear means of determining the sensitivity

of fuzes after an explosion. The information that is available indicates that the fuzing of many victim-activated IEDs causing casualties allows them to be activated by a person (as well as a vehicle). The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported that most of the victim-activated IEDs in Afghanistan had the “trigger sensitivity of an anti-personnel mine.”<sup>5</sup>

The annual global total of recorded casualties from mines, IEDs, unexploded submunitions, and all forms of explosive remnants of war (ERW) has declined since 1999.<sup>6</sup> However, the number and proportion of victim-activated IED casualties has increased. In 2014, victim-activated IEDs caused 31% of the total number of mine/ERW casualties where the explosive device type was known (1,069), a significant increase as compared to 18% of the total recorded casualties in 2010.<sup>7</sup>

Mine casualties: 2010–2014



## Overview of victim-activated IED casualties in 2014

In total, the Monitor recorded 3,678 mine/ERW casualties in 2014. In many countries, numerous casualties go unrecorded and thus the true casualty figure is likely significantly higher. Explosive items that caused casualties in 2014 included: landmines (including four sub-categories: antipersonnel mines, antivehicle mines, unspecified mines, and victim-activated IEDs—see chart above); unexploded submunitions; ERW; and unknown explosive items.<sup>8</sup>

For 3,408 mine/ERW casualties recorded in 2014, the item type that caused the casualty was known.<sup>9</sup> Of these, 1,069 were caused by victim-activated IEDs. Civilians accounted for the majority (81%) of victim-activated IED casualties (865), including at least 202 children.

To a large degree the high ratio of victim-activated IED casualties compared to previous years can be attributed to the recent increases in recorded IED casualties in Afghanistan. There were 809 victim-activated IED casualties in Afghanistan in 2014, which accounts for 76% of recorded global IED casualties during that year.

Other countries with victim-activated IED casualties in the Monitor's global casualty total for 2014 included: Algeria, India, Iraq, Mali, Pakistan, Russia, Thailand, and Tunisia.

Victim-activated IED casualties were also believed to have occurred in Colombia, Myanmar, Syria, and Turkey, but were not differentiated from casualties caused by other mines/ERW in the data available.<sup>10</sup>

In 2014, all reported use of victim-activated IEDs was by non-state armed groups (NSAGs). Due to the success of the Mine Ban Treaty, very few NSAGs now have access to factory-made antipersonnel mines. Some NSAGs have access to mine stocks, and some lift and re-empower existing mines, but most armed groups still using antipersonnel landmines today manufacture their own improvised devices. IEDs produced by NSAGs in Myanmar, Colombia, Syria are sometimes almost equivalent to factory-made mines. In Iraq, Libya, Syria, and other areas experiencing conflict, unsecured stockpiles of weapons and unexploded ordnance has led to an increase in materials available for IED production.<sup>11</sup>

In many countries where armed violence is prevalent, media reporting and other sources do not clearly identify the type of explosive item causing casualties. The term "landmine" is often used both for victim-activated and command-detonated IEDs. Casualties caused or reasonably suspected to have been caused by IEDs that were not victim-activated are not included in the annual Monitor total.

### **States with victim-activated IED casualties in 2014**

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Victim-activated IEDs caused almost two-thirds of all casualties in **Afghanistan** in 2014, the vast majority (96%) of whom were civilians. However, there was a lack of clear reporting on military casualties of victim-activated IEDs in the country during the exit the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) presence in the country through to the end of 2014. Data from Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), based on analysis of English language media reporting, included 33 casualties of victim-activated IEDs among Afghan security personnel (armed forces and police) and one ISAF military casualty in 2014.<sup>12</sup> Due to the lack of detailed media reporting, particularly on national armed forces casualties, the actual number of all casualties is likely much higher.

IEDs in general are a major problem in Afghanistan, with remote-controlled, victim-activated, vehicle-borne, and magnetic IEDs. Victim-activated IEDs accounted for 26% of all IED casualties in Afghanistan in 2014. The 809 casualties reported in Afghanistan is a large increase compared to 557 IED casualties reported in 2013, and is close to the highest reported number of IED casualties, 913 in 2012.

For the first half of 2015, UNAMA reported that the number of civilian deaths and injuries from victim-activated IEDs rose, whereas there was a decrease in overall civilian IED casualties compared to the same time period in 2014. Victim-activated IEDs caused almost half (46%) of all civilian casualties from IEDs recorded during the year.<sup>13</sup> UNAMA reported that most of

these victim-activated IEDs have antipersonnel fuzing and approximately 20–25 kg of explosive content, about twice the explosive charge of a standard antivehicle mine, giving people exposed to their detonation little chance of survival and often resulting in large numbers of deaths and injuries. For example, in Faryab province, a child playing with his friends stepped on a victim-activated IED on 21 December 2014, and the resulting blast killed five children.<sup>14</sup>

**Mali** also saw an increase in the use of victim-activated IEDs. In 2014, the Monitor recorded 16 casualties from victim-activated IEDs and another 92 from unspecified mines, many of which likely were IEDs, compared to zero casualties from IEDs and 31 from unspecified mines in 2013. The UN reported that a high-proportion of peacekeeper casualties in Mali were caused by IEDs, including victim-activated IEDs, as conflict involving NSAGs, the government, and peacekeepers continued.<sup>15</sup> All reported victim-activated IED incidents involved vehicles, and it was not known if the devices fit the Mine Ban Treaty's definition of antipersonnel mine.

Victim-activated IED casualties were confirmed in three states not party to the Mine Ban Treaty in 2014. The Monitor reported 81 victim-activated IED casualties in **Pakistan**. Due to imprecise language in media reports, it is possible that a number of casualties in Pakistan reported as being from antivehicle mines may have been caused by victim-activated IEDs. In addition, there were another 277 IED casualties recorded, not all of which were reported distinctively as having been caused by command-detonated IEDs, and some may have actually been due to victim-activated devices.<sup>16</sup> All 19 casualties reported in the **Russia** were caused by victim-activated IEDs, sometimes also referred to as “mines” in the same reporting. A single casualty was reported in **India**, where many IED attacks were reported but the means of activation was often unclear or likely command-detonation. Casualty monitoring in **Nepal** includes casualties of improvised hand grenades that failed to explode and thus became explosive remnants that were accidentally activated. Those persons killed and injured are recorded as IED casualties in the national database.

Due to a lack of disaggregated data and the use of unclear terminology, casualties of victim-activated IEDs in **Colombia**, **Myanmar**, and **Turkey** were not differentiated from casualties caused by other mines/ERW, such as factory-made landmines. In 2014, 245 landmine casualties were reported in **Colombia**. These casualties were registered by national authorities as having been caused by antipersonnel mines, although it is widely accepted that many of these were improvised mines made by NSAGs and other victim-activated IEDs. The Colombian army's Counter IED and Mines National Center estimated that 75% of the incidents affecting their troops were from IEDs.<sup>17</sup> Victim-activated IEDs also indiscriminately kill and injure many civilians. Civilians made up 35% of the total casualties in 2014, with security forces making up the remaining 65%. Among other uses, IEDs are laid to protect coca fields targeted by Colombia's illicit crop eradication program, resulting in casualties among the civilians employed by the program. In 2014, there were four civilian casualties among manual coca eradicators.<sup>18</sup>

It is likely that victim-activated IEDs accounted for many of the casualties attributed to antipersonnel mines (100) and unknown devices (147) in **Myanmar** in 2014. It is also possible that some of the 14 casualties of unspecified mines in **Turkey** in 2014 included victim-activated

IED casualties. Additional clarity in reporting could assist in better assessing the national and global impact of victim-activated IEDs that act as antipersonnel mines.

### **Victim activated IED casualties in 2015**

In 2015, victim-activated IEDs, including homemade landmines and booby-traps, were found throughout Kobani, **Syria**. At least 40 deaths and many more injuries caused by these victim-activated IEDs were reported in the first quarter of 2015 in the villages surrounding Kobani.<sup>19</sup> Eastern areas of the town were heavily booby-trapped with victim-activated IEDs.<sup>20</sup>

2015 also saw a number of casualties from victim-activated IEDs in **Iraq**. Heavy casualties have been reported among security forces attempting to clear IEDs.<sup>21</sup> Media reports indicate that IEDs were the leading cause of death among the 750 Kurdish Peshmerga forces killed in Iraq between June 2014 and January 2015; however, it was not reported how many were the result of victim-activated IEDs.<sup>22</sup>

### **Victim assistance and IED casualties**

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IED blasts, including victim-activated IEDs, can result in serious permanent or long-lasting impairments including amputations, internal injuries, burns, brain injury, and psychological trauma. Even though victim-activated IEDs have a higher fatality rate than factory-made antipersonnel mines, as reported in Afghanistan,<sup>23</sup> they still wound far more people than they kill, and most who survive the explosion will need medical help and other assistance for many years to come.

States Parties should include victims of IEDs into existing programs to ensure access to necessary services. Iraq and Afghanistan have both reported on how survivors of IEDs are included in their existing victim assistance programs.<sup>24</sup> The agreed principle of victim assistance in the Mine Ban Treaty (also codified in the Convention on Cluster Munitions) has been that victim assistance be delivered based on rights and needs, without discrimination with regards to cause, including the weapon involved, nor by types of impairment.

In Afghanistan, the long-established landmine action system includes standards for victim assistance.<sup>25</sup> They are designed to “bring about lasting improvements in the daily lives of people accidentally injured by a landmine, explosive remnant of war (ERW) or improvised explosive device (IED) and other persons with disabilities.”

There can be differences between the types and prevalence of certain injuries and long-term impairments caused by IEDs compared to other types of landmines and explosive weapons that should be kept in mind. These differences may result in the need for specific emergency medical care and use of particular rehabilitation methods.<sup>26</sup>

Victim assistance efforts that include IED survivors can also benefit from the implementation of the obligations of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

## Conclusion

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Internationally, increased attention is being paid to the problem of all IEDs, including victim-activated types. In 2014 and 2015, IEDs continued to be a topic of discussion at the Convention on Conventional Weapons meetings as well at the UN General Assembly. In 2015, the first United Nations resolution on IEDs, proposed by Afghanistan, was passed by the General Assembly's First Committee. In the resolution, states express "grave concern over the devastation caused by the increasing use of improvised explosive devices... which has affected a large number of the world's countries and has resulted in thousands of casualties, both civilian and military."<sup>27</sup> States and international organizations are starting to recognize the need for increased support for victim assistance due to increasing IED casualties, but this has not yet resulted in tangible improvements.<sup>28</sup> Strengthening of existing victim assistance programs would significantly improve assistance to direct and indirect casualties of IEDs.

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<sup>1</sup> Casualty figures include individuals killed or injured in incidents involving devices detonated by the presence, proximity, or contact of a person or a vehicle.

<sup>2</sup> Casualties from command-detonated IEDs were not included in Monitor reporting of mine/ERW casualties. Mine and ERW casualties recorded by the Monitor are only those people who have been killed or injured by an explosive device that is activated by the victim and unintentionally, not including casualties by strikes, or any other kind of direct attack during intentional use.

<sup>3</sup> Not included in the totals are: estimates of casualties where exact numbers were not given, incidents caused or reasonably suspected to have been caused by remote-detonated or command-detonated IEDs (those that were not victim-activated), and people killed or injured while manufacturing or emplacing devices. For more details on casualty figures or sources of casualty data by state or area, please see country profiles on the Monitor website.

<sup>4</sup> The use, production, transfer, and stockpiling of victim-activated antipersonnel IEDs are prohibited under the Mine Ban Treaty. According to the Mine Ban Treaty definition, an antipersonnel mine is a munition "designed to be exploded by the presence, proximity or contact of a person..." In contrast, antivehicle mines, also referred to as "anti-tank mines," have a larger explosive charge than antipersonnel mines and are designed to be detonated by the presence, proximity, or contact of a vehicle as opposed to that of a person. These mines are not prohibited under the Mine Ban Treaty unless the fuzing allows them to be activated by a person.

<sup>5</sup> UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, "[Annual Report 2014: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict](#)," Kabul, February 2015, p. 48. Victim-activated IEDs used in Afghanistan are often called pressure plate IEDs.

<sup>6</sup> See the *Landmine Monitor Report 2015*.

<sup>7</sup> Due to an unclear use of terminology in media reports and the Monitor's strict definition for including casualties due to victim-activated IEDs, it is believed that the number of victim-activated IED casualties reported in the Monitor is lower than the actual figure.

<sup>8</sup> Figures include individuals killed or injured in incidents involving devices detonated by the presence, proximity, or contact, of a person or a vehicle, such as all antipersonnel mines, antivehicle mines, abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO), unexploded ordnance (UXO), and victim-activated IEDs. AXO and UXO, including cluster munition remnants, are collectively referred to as ERW. Cluster munition casualties are also disaggregated and reported as distinct from ERW where possible. Not included in the totals are: estimates of casualties where exact numbers were not given, incidents caused or reasonably suspected to have been caused by remote-detonated mines or IEDs (those that were not victim-activated), and people killed or injured while manufacturing or emplacing devices. For more details on casualty figures or sources of casualty data by state or area, please see country profiles on the Monitor website, [www.the-monitor.org/cp](http://www.the-monitor.org/cp).

<sup>9</sup> For 270 casualties, the explosive item type was not known because of uncertainty regarding the type of explosive items recorded.

<sup>10</sup> Other reporting indicated frequent use of IEDs and that victim-activated IED casualties are recorded under differing explosive item types.

<sup>11</sup> AOA, “CCW 2015 side event: Efforts to address IED harm on humanitarian workers and civilians,” 11 November 2015, <https://prezi.com/miohar3wenoc/ccw-2015-side-event-efforts-to-address-ied-harm-on-humanitarian-workers-and-civilians/>; Small Arms Survey, “Small Arms Survey 2015: Weapons and the world,” 1 June 2015, [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2015/eng/Small-Arms-Survey-2015-Highlights-EN.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2015/eng/Small-Arms-Survey-2015-Highlights-EN.pdf); and Armament Research Services, “Jabhat al-Nusra re-purposing SPBE and AO-2.5RT Submunitions in Syria,” 18 October 2015, <http://armamentresearch.com/jabhat-al-nusra-re-purposing-spbe-and-ao-2-5rt-submunitions-in-syria/>.

<sup>12</sup> Email from June Hunter, Armed Violence Researcher, AOA, 21 July 2015.

<sup>13</sup> UNAMA, “Afghanistan Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2015,” Kabul, August 2015, pp. 7–8, [http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/human\\_rights/2015/PoC\\_Report\\_2015/UNAMA\\_Protection\\_of\\_Civilians\\_in\\_Armed\\_Conflict\\_Midyear\\_Report\\_2015\\_FINAL\\_5\\_August-new.pdf](http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/human_rights/2015/PoC_Report_2015/UNAMA_Protection_of_Civilians_in_Armed_Conflict_Midyear_Report_2015_FINAL_5_August-new.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> UNAMA, “Annual Report 2014, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict,” pp. 48–49.

<sup>15</sup> “Landmine Threats Down, IED Threats Rising,” *Global Issues*, 2 April 2015, [www.globalissues.org/news/2015/04/02/20821](http://www.globalissues.org/news/2015/04/02/20821); and ACLED, “Remote-violence, bombings and conflict part 3: Over trends in the use of improvised explosive devices,” 6 November 2014, [www.crisis.acleddata.com/remote-violence-bombings-and-conflict-part-3-overall-trends-in-the-use-of-improvised-explosive-devices/](http://www.crisis.acleddata.com/remote-violence-bombings-and-conflict-part-3-overall-trends-in-the-use-of-improvised-explosive-devices/).

<sup>16</sup> These were not included in the Monitor global casualty total for 2014.

<sup>17</sup> United States (US) Department of Defense, “U.S. Military Helps Colombia Fight IED Threat,” 10 July 2014, [www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/602850/us-military-helps-colombia-fight-ied-threat](http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/602850/us-military-helps-colombia-fight-ied-threat).

<sup>18</sup> DAICMA’s database—updated to 30 April 2015, sent by Camilo Serna, Colombian Campaign to Ban Landmines (CCCM), 11 June 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Handicap International, “Kobani: A city of rubble and unexploded devices,” May 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Richard MacCormac, Head of Mine Action, DanChurchAid, June 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Mike Giglio, “The hidden enemy in Iraq,” *Buzzfeed News*, 19 March 2015, [www.buzzfeed.com/mikegiglio/the-hidden-enemy-in-iraq-.t1mk50IDZm](http://www.buzzfeed.com/mikegiglio/the-hidden-enemy-in-iraq-.t1mk50IDZm).

<sup>22</sup> “In Iraq, IS kills with hidden bombs even after leaving,” *Dawn (AFP)*, 22 January 2015, [www.dawn.com/news/1158682](http://www.dawn.com/news/1158682).

<sup>23</sup> UNAMA, “Annual Report 2014, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict,” pp. 48–49.

<sup>24</sup> CCW Amended Protocol II, “Iraq Ministry of Health Program to Support Mine Victims,” Session of the Group of Experts, IEDs and Victim Assistance, 23–24 April 2012, [www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/%28httpAssets%29/1DDB4820E28C064DC12579F1005531BB/\\$file/Iraq\\_IEDs+2012.pdf](http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/%28httpAssets%29/1DDB4820E28C064DC12579F1005531BB/$file/Iraq_IEDs+2012.pdf); and CCW Amended Protocol II, “IED Victim Assistance in Afghanistan,” Session of the Group of Experts, IEDs and Victim assistance, Geneva, 8–9 April 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA), “AMAS 09.02, Second Edition, November 2012 Victim Assistance (VA),” [www.mineactionstandards.org/fileadmin/MAS/documents/nmas-national-standards/afghanistan/AMAS\\_09.02\\_Victim\\_Assistance.pdf](http://www.mineactionstandards.org/fileadmin/MAS/documents/nmas-national-standards/afghanistan/AMAS_09.02_Victim_Assistance.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; and “IED casualties and victim assistance in Afghanistan,” Landmine and Cluster munition blog, 12 February 2014, <https://landmineandclustermunitionblog.wordpress.com/2014/02/12/ied-casualties-and-victim-assistance-in-afghanistan>.

<sup>27</sup> Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the UN in New York, “Afghanistan’s resolution on IEDs adopted by the UN General Assembly,” 9 November 2015, [www.afghanistan-un.org/2015/11/afghanistans-resolution-on-ieds-adopted-by-the-un-general-assembly/](http://www.afghanistan-un.org/2015/11/afghanistans-resolution-on-ieds-adopted-by-the-un-general-assembly/).

# LANDMINE & CLUSTER MUNITION MONITOR

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<sup>28</sup> European Union, “European Union statement to the Meeting of Experts of the High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II To the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW),” 9 April 2015, [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un\\_geneva/documents/eu\\_statments/conference\\_disarmament/20150409\\_ccw\\_mxp\\_apii\\_eu\\_statement\\_ieds\\_alignment\\_final.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un_geneva/documents/eu_statments/conference_disarmament/20150409_ccw_mxp_apii_eu_statement_ieds_alignment_final.pdf).