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Nov 04, 2016 by **Markos Kounalakis**

Ridding the World of Land Mines: U.S. Gets on Board ^[1]

Princess Diana's legacy still inspires debate. The royal cover girl who historically sold greater numbers of magazine issues than any other celebrity was no more or less flawed than most

human beings – just a lot more privileged and popular.

One positive legacy continues, however. The United States recently paid tribute to Lady Di's unwavering and highly visible fight to eradicate anti-personnel land mines.

In a keynote address she delivered to the Mines Advisory Group a couple of months prior to her death, she said, "The mine is a stealthy killer. Long after the conflict is ended, its innocent victims die or are wounded singly, in countries of which we hear little."

At about the same time that America unleashed the awesome destructive power of its latest F-22 Raptor fighter jets against the Islamic State's infrastructure in Syria, this country also took one more significant step toward making past and future battlefields safer to tread in war's aftermath.

Anti-personnel mines do exactly what it sounds like. They kill or maim individuals indiscriminately. The mines are sown like seeds on battlefields and front lines. Their sole purpose is to take out combatants and demoralize civilians.

In a policy reversal, the Obama administration announced at the end of September that it would follow key parts of the Ottawa Convention, a treaty originally drafted two weeks after Diana's death that now has 162 member countries agreeing to rid the world of anti-personnel land mines. China, Russia, and the United States are not yet treaty signatories. The United States, however, has not used or exported land mines since just before Bill Clinton became president and stopped producing them during his administration.

The same cannot be said for Russia. In its recent Ukraine adventure, it reportedly put down mines both around the Crimean peninsula and some of the country's rebellious regions. According to The Associated Press, Russian-supported rebels surrounded the Malaysia Airlines MH-17 crash site with land mines.

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Once conflicts are over, the land mines continue to terrorize local populations around the world – on the African continent, in Afghanistan and even to this day in parts of Europe. Most of these mines do not have expiration dates and continue to cause death and destruction for anyone who wire-trips or steps on a "Bouncing Betty" or pressure-plate mine.

During a reporting trip to Kabul, Afghanistan, as the Soviet war and occupation were winding down, I and other observers were struck by the prevalence of limbless children and limping adults who had all fallen victim to land mines. In 1991, the number of people wearing prosthetics or on crutches I saw made it seem as though only war-wounded males were allowed to reside in Kabul.

The children were the hardest cases to witness. During that war, Soviet helicopters dropped “butterfly” mines – brightly colored plastic mines that resembled toys that fluttered down from the sky – throughout the country. The “butterflies” were intended to be picked-up by unwitting kids, blowing off their hands or arms.

Both of Princess Diana’s own children would eventually make it down to Afghanistan as soldiers to witness the Soviet legacy of land-mine death and destruction. And while Diana was the most visible and celebrated campaigner against land mines, the global movement has had many American activists continually working on the issue. Jody Williams of Vermont founded the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. She and her organization were co-awarded the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., has worked on this issue for more than 29 years and has an annual \$10 million war victims fund used primarily to help those suffering from land-mine injuries. During the course of Leahy’s activism, the U.S. government has spent more than \$2 billion – more than any other nation – to help victims and reduce the threat and impact of land mines, even without joining the Ottawa Convention treaty.

Clearly, Vermont is on the cutting edge of anti-land-mine organizing along with its border neighbor Canada. And while *People* magazine’s most interesting woman is no longer around to pitch the importance of mine removal, her message has been picked up by the world’s most interesting man. Actor Jonathan Goldsmith of Dos Equis beer fame is raising money to remove land mines in Cambodia. An estimated 8 million to 10 million land mines still litter that long-suffering country. Cambodia’s widespread and perverse personal suffering created the conditions for a Miss Landmine beauty pageant to develop. The winner received both cash and prosthetics.

Little fanfare accompanied the recent U.S. announcement to further lead the global effort to eradicate land mines. This is partly because America will keep mines in Korea. The mines are there to keep Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un’s North Korean troops from jumping the security fence and sprinting toward the South’s capitalist capital, Seoul, 35 miles away. Even the most interesting man would likely agree they will remain there as long as North Korea stays hungry, my friends.

Note from the CPD Blog Manager: This post originally appeared in [The Sacramento Bee](#).
