

Watch where you step

By Brian Lockhart

The world has always been pretty innovative when it comes to thinking up new ways to kill your neighbour.

First, it was a rock or club, then likely some kind of edged weapon. Pretty much every society on earth figured out the bow and arrow, which actually is a pretty complicated weapon when you think about it.

The thing about war is that when you are attacking your neighbours, innocent people suffer right along with soldiers in the battlefield. In fact, in many wars, if not most these days, civilian deaths are higher than combat deaths.

It's not easy to drop bombs on a factory without killing the people who live next door.

In military terms this is called 'collateral damage.' That's a nice way of saying they dropped a bomb on a hospital or school or senior's home.

No general will take part in a press conference describing a military action and say they knowingly ordered airstrikes on civilian targets ? 20 dead children killed while at recess at school are referred to as collateral damage.

There are some weapons that have been deemed too cruel, even for warfare.

Expanding, soft nose bullets, also known as 'dumdum' bullets were declared illegal in warfare because they were considered 'cruel.' I guess instead of shooting your enemy with a dumdum bullet, ridding him with several rounds from an AK-47, won't kill him quite the same way.

Landmines are another great invention designed to kill and maim.

They are easy to use, and very effective at blowing up anyone who has the misfortune of stepping on one, or in some cases, just getting close to it.

At one time, landmines were designed to kill. There were several versions.

One version, called the Bouncing Betty, was a hugely powerful mine that would pop up from the ground when triggered, leaving only a red mist floating in the air from anyone who happened to be nearby. Other mines were very powerful and designed to disable tanks.

New versions of landmines are no longer designed to kill people. They are designed only to maim ? usually by blowing someone's foot off ? and there is a good reason for this.

When a soldier is maimed, he is out of action. However, you need at least two other soldiers to get him off the battlefield, and others are needed to transport him. You then need medical personnel to treat him.

The idea is by maiming one guy rather than killing him, your enemy now has to use valuable resources, eliminating more of them.

Cluster bombs are another way of causing mayhem. A cluster bomb releases a number of smaller bombs before detonation. This is an effective way of destroying aircraft on a runway or killing troops hiding in trenches.

The real problem with these devices is no one ever goes back and retrieves the leftovers once a war is over. They are left there in the

dirt. They are a hazard to any innocent person who has the misfortune of stepping on one.

A landmine will kill a child, a young mother, a teenager, or a dog, A lot of people have been maimed or killed by these devices years after a war had ended.

The hand-held device attack in Lebanon was an act of terror no matter how you look at it.

As an act of terror, it was genius. Hand-held devices all exploded simultaneously, killing 37, and wounding several thousand people.

How this happened is still not known. How did they get all these devices into the country and into the hands of the people they wanted to kill? Were the devices implanted with a timer that set off the explosions or was it some kind of radio transmitter or similar that sent out a signal to detonate?

No one has claimed responsibility for this attack.

This is a new level of warfare. How would the attacker know if a man was holding his young child when the device exploded? How would they know if the device exploded when someone was visiting a sick family member in a hospital?

This is just indiscriminate killing of innocent people.

The attackers will say it's collateral damage, but tell that to a woman who has brought her maimed or dying child into a hospital after a hand-held device exploded in their face.

No one can justify using weapons and technology to kill innocent people.

But that's the Middle East for you ? where life is cheap and war is a way of life.