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Bloomfield Details Landmine Policy Changes
U.S. seeks to alleviate landmine crisis

The United States will accelerate its efforts to end the global humanitarian problem of landmines by eliminating all of its non-self destructing landmines and by increasing funding for mine action programs worldwide, a State Department official says.

Lincoln Bloomfield, assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs and the special representative of the president and secretary of state for mine action, told reporters February 27 that the new policy "serves two important goals: a strong push to end the humanitarian risks posed by landmines; and ensuring that our military has the defensive capabilities it needs to protect our own and friendly forces on the battlefield."

The new policy, Bloomfield said, has several components:

-- After 2010 the United States will use neither long-lasting or "persistent" anti-personnel nor persistent anti-vehicle landmines;

-- Within one year the United States will no longer have any undetectable landmines in its inventory;

-- The United States will push to develop alternatives within the decade to its current persistent anti-personnel and anti-vehicle landmines, incorporating enhanced self-destructing, self-deactivating technologies and control mechanisms;

-- The administration is asking Congress to increase the budget for global humanitarian mine actions programs in the 2005 budget to \$70 million; and

-- The administration will lead an international effort to conclude a worldwide ban on the sale or export of all persistent mines with minor exceptions for training purposes.

The new policy, Bloomfield said, is focused on persistent landmines -- those that remain active for years or decades until something or someone sets them off -- almost always with tragic results.

While the new policy emphasizes doing away with persistent landmines, it conversely emphasizes the use of non-persistent landmines. "These munitions have reliable features that limit the life of the munition to a matter of hours or a few days, by which time it self-destructs," Bloomfield said. "And in the unlikely event the self-destruct features fail, the battery will run out within 90 days, rendering it inert, and these batteries always expire," he continued.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability Operations Joseph Collins, who briefed with Bloomfield, provided the rationale for retaining and deploying landmines.

Landmines, Collins said, "act as force multipliers, allowing us to fight and win with ... fewer forces ... against numerically superior opponents; and they also protect our forces, saving the lives of our men and women in uniform. At present, no other weapon system exists that provides all of these capabilities."

Bloomfield also addressed the issue of the 1997 Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel landmines. Continuing the policy of the previous administration, he said the United States "will not become a party to the Ottawa Treaty."

There are two types of landmines: anti-personnel and anti-vehicle. But both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines can be divided further into persistent and non-persistent categories. The Ottawa Convention, in banning all anti-personnel landmines, fails completely to address the great problem of anti-vehicle landmines, while unnecessarily prohibiting the use of non-persistent anti-personnel landmines. Bloomfield said the United States will continue to work internationally through the "Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons to ... end the ... indiscriminate use of all landmines."

(begin transcript)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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ON-THE-RECORD BRIEFING

Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs
Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr.
On New Developments in the U.S. Approach to Landmines

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Washington, D.C.

MR. BOUCHER: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome. A briefing today on U.S. landmine policy. The briefers for you will be our Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs, Mr. Lincoln Bloomfield. He is speaking to you today as the Special Representative for the President and the Secretary of State for Mine Action.

We have with us as well Dr. Joseph Collins, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability Operations, and Brigadier General Kevin Ryan, Director of Strategy, Plans and Policies of the U.S. Army Staff.

So, without further ado, let me introduce Assistant Secretary Bloomfield.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Thank you, Richard. Good morning.

This morning I wish to announce the President's policy decisions and initiatives relating to landmines. There are several elements, but the thrust of the policy is that the United States will now accelerate, by its example, diplomacy and resources, the effort to end the humanitarian crisis caused by live landmines left behind in former conflict areas all over the world.

More specifically, under the new policy, the United States is committed to eliminate persistent landmines of all types from its arsenal by a date certain and is requesting a substantial increase in funding for our humanitarian mine action programs worldwide.

The President's policy serves two important goals: a strong push to end the humanitarian risks posed by landmines; and ensuring that our military has the defensive capabilities it needs to protect our own and friendly forces on the battlefield.

The new policy demonstrates that our humanitarian and military goals are fully compatible; one does not have to be achieved only at the expense of the other. We can and will prevent

unnecessary harm to innocent civilians and, at the same time, protect the lives of American service men and women.

The President's approach departs from landmine policy formulations of the past. It addresses squarely the condition that has caused the humanitarian crisis of civilian casualties and continued hazards in cities, towns and farmlands around the world. That condition is called persistence, referring to a live landmine that sits, ready to explode, for months, years, and often decades, after the conflict that led to its use has ended.

We estimate that there are 60 million persistent landmines posing risks to innocent civilians in more than 60 countries today.

The President's policy applies to all persistent landmines, be they anti-personnel landmines or the larger anti-vehicle landmines.

Let me spell out the four key elements of the President's new policy:

-- The first element is the President's firm, specific and unconditional commitment that after 2010 the United States will not use persistent landmines of any type, neither anti-personnel nor anti-vehicle landmines.

The United States becomes the first major military power to make this comprehensive commitment regarding all persistent landmines. Any use of persistent anti-vehicle landmines outside Korea between now and the end of 2010 will require Presidential authorization. The use of persistent anti-personnel landmines during this period would only be authorized in fulfillment of our treaty obligations to the Republic of Korea.

In either case, use of these mines would be in strict accordance with our obligations under international agreements on the use of these weapons. Within two years, the United States will begin the destruction of those persistent landmines that are not needed for the defense of Korea.

The second element of the new policy is a firm commitment that within one year the United States will no longer have any non-detectable landmine of any type in its arsenal. The U.S. becomes the first major military power to make a commitment covering all landmines to the internationally recognized level of eight grams iron ore equivalent of metal content, assuring reliable detection by humanitarian deminers using the standard equipment in use today.

Third, the President has directed a concerted effort to develop alternatives to its current persistent landmines, both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle, incorporating enhanced self-destructing, self-deactivating technologies and control mechanisms, such as "man-in-the-loop" and on-off commands that would allow our forces to recover the munitions. These enhancements are to be brought forward within the decade.

The fourth major element of this policy is the President's decision to request from Congress a 50 percent increase in the budget for worldwide humanitarian mine action programs administered by the State Department, starting in fiscal year 2005, measured against the fiscal year 2003 budget level, to a total level of \$70 million.

Additionally, the administration will soon solicit international support for a worldwide ban on the sale or export of all persistent mines, with exceptions only for training deminers or countermine personnel, improving countermine capabilities, and the like.

The U.S. already has a statutory prohibition on transfers of anti-personnel landmines, and we will continue to obey the law.

Those are the key elements of the new policy. Before taking your questions, let me say a few words about the significance of this policy, and perhaps anticipate some of the questions you may have.

The administration came to this position in drawing from 16 years of U.S. experience assisting mine-affected communities all over the world. The United States is already the world's largest contributor to humanitarian mine action, having provided close to \$800 million to 46 countries over the past decade for landmine clearance, mine risk education and survivor assistance.

What we have seen, very simply, is that the landmines harming innocent men, women and children, and their livestock, are persistent landmines. Nor are these lingering hazards caused solely by the anti-personnel category of persistent landmines. We find that persistent anti-vehicle landmines are left behind following conflicts, posing deadly risks to innocent people and requiring remediation by ourselves and the many other parties engaged in humanitarian mine action.

And so the President's policy focuses on the kinds of landmines that have caused the humanitarian crisis, namely persistent landmines, and it extends to all persistent landmines because the roads and fields we are helping to clear, in the Balkans, Africa, Asia and elsewhere, are infested with lethal anti-vehicle landmines in addition to the live anti-personnel landmines.

Let me hasten to add that the President's decision to end U.S. military use of persistent landmines after 2010 is not to draw a connection between our military and the harm being done to civilians in mine-affected countries. The deadly landmines being painstakingly uncovered by the deminers of many nationalities, hard at work in at least 40 mine-affected countries today, are not mines left behind by U.S. forces, the only potential exception being U.S. mines left behind during the Vietnam conflict more than three decades ago.

Rather, the worldwide humanitarian crisis is very much the product of persistent landmines used by other militaries or non-state actors who did not observe international conventions relating to the use of these munitions. The U.S. military already follows the strictures of the Amended Mines Protocol and the Convention on Conventional Weapons, which specifies obligations to mark, monitor and clear persistent minefields after hostilities end.

So the question may be, "Why impose restraints on the U.S. use of persistent landmines if these American munitions are not the ones contributing to the humanitarian crisis?" The answer is that the administration recognized that persistent landmines used indiscriminately by so many others have created a serious crisis with at least 300,000 innocent victims, by most estimates, and a terrible burden on the international community to help mine-affected countries clear these mines and help their societies recover from conflict, particularly their landmine survivors.

Under the President's policy, the United States will take even further measures to ensure these weapons do not threaten civilians by becoming the first major military power to adopt a policy ending use of all persistent landmines, and maintaining the international standard of detectability for landmines of any kind.

We are not seeking to impose our policy on other countries, but this policy correctly places the focus on the problems that can be caused by persistent landmines. We want to strengthen provisions in existing international arms control mechanisms relating to the use of persistent landmines of any kind, and compliance with the goal of ending the indiscriminate laying of persistent landmines anywhere in the world.

Now, as you may have inferred from the emphasis on persistence as the source of the humanitarian problem with landmines, there are other kinds of landmines on which the administration's policy is not imposing restrictions. These munitions have reliable features that limit the life of the munition to a matter of hours or a few days, by which time it self-destructs. And

in the unlikely event the self-destruct features fail, the battery will run out within 90 days, rendering it inert, and these batteries always expire.

The evidence is clear that self-destruct[ing] and self-deactivat[ing] landmine munitions do not contribute to the grave risks of civilian injury that we find with persistent landmines that can and do, literally, wait for decades before claiming an innocent victim.

To illustrate this point, if all landmines ever used had been destroyed within hours or days of being deployed, and in any case rendered inert after 90 days, there would be no humanitarian landmine issue in the world today. We would not see an estimated 10,000 civilian casualties every year. Refugees would not resist returning to their villages and farms for fear of mine explosions, and we would not need to mount a global humanitarian mine action effort.

At this point, let me invite my Defense Department colleague, Dr. Joseph Collins to address the military requirements aspect of the President's policy.

Dr. Collins.

DR. COLLINS: Thank you, Linc.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the joint staff of our military services were active partners in the development of the policy that Secretary Bloomfield has outlined for you today. Let me say just a few words about the military aspects of landmines.

U.S. military forces presently carry a very large burden of security missions around the world. Recent history has shown that we cannot predict with confidence where, or against whom, our forces may be engaged in hostilities.

It is the considered judgment of our senior military commanders that they need the defensive capabilities that landmines can provide. These capabilities enable a commander to shape the battlefield to his or her advantage. They deny the enemy freedom to maneuver his forces. They enhance the effectiveness of other weapons systems, such as small arms, artillery or combat aircraft.

They act as force multipliers, allowing us to fight and win with fire -- with fewer forces, rather, against numerically superior opponents; and they also protect our forces, saving the lives of our men and women in uniform. At present, no other weapon system exists that provides all of these capabilities.

As Assistant Secretary Bloomfield mentioned, the President's policy calls for the development of more sophisticated, counter-mobility and tactical barrier capabilities in the future. But the United States Armed Forces will retain the ability to use self-destruct, self-deactivate landmines.

Secretary Bloomfield.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Thank you.

In sum, the President's policy strikes an appropriate balance that accommodates two important national interests: It takes significant and comprehensive steps, by our example and by the increased commitment of funds backed by a strategic plan, toward surmounting the global problem caused by persistent landmines, while at the same time meeting the needs of our military for defensive capabilities that may save American and friendly forces' lives in combat.

Many Americans, and others, upon hearing of the new U.S. policy, will ask how the United States policy relates to the Ottawa Treaty banning anti-personnel landmines of all kinds. And while we

have no desire to revisit or revive policy disagreements of the previous decade, we will not become a party to the Ottawa Treaty.

The Ottawa Convention offers no protection for innocent civilians in post-conflict areas from the harm caused by persistent anti-vehicle landmines, and it would take away a needed means of protection from our men and women in uniform who may be operating in harm's way.

We are hopeful that Americans will support the President's judgment that focusing on persistent mines, both anti-vehicle and anti-personnel landmines, addresses the root of the humanitarian crisis, which is indiscriminately used persistent landmines of all types.

With that in mind, we will work with other nations within the treaty provisions of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons to seek the end -- to end the discriminate use -- indiscriminate use of all landmines.

As a final note, it should be clear that the President's decision to increase substantially our humanitarian mine action funding is a positive call to action in cooperation with all our partners in humanitarian mine action. This \$70 million Mine Action Program will be conducted on the basis of a comprehensive strategic plan with clear measures of performance. The intent is to provide relief to mine-affected areas of greatest humanitarian need and to accelerate their progress toward being declared mine-safe.

We recognize that among the nations dedicated to mine action, there may be differing perspectives on landmine policy, based on respective national equities involved. But it is a high priority for this administration to have effective coordination and partnership among donor nations, the U.N. and the international NGO [non-governmental organization] community.

We should never let policy debates stand in the way of the strongest, most comprehensive and energetic possible global effort to help mine-affected countries and their people overcome the burdens of persistent landmines still waiting to claim new victims under their feet.

There are many Americans, and a large international community of people and organizations, who have dedicated tremendous effort to address this humanitarian crisis in recent years, and we respect and appreciate them all.

In conclusion, as we carry out these policy and program initiatives directed by the President, we look forward to working with the Congress, our private partners in humanitarian mine action, and the international community to accelerate progress in ending this terrible problem around the world once and for all.

Happy to take your questions. Sir.

QUESTION: How big a problem do the mines remain -- that remain in Vietnam pose? How often are there incidents?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: I don't have information on that. We are currently surveying, supporting survey activities in Vietnam, and we look forward to proceeding with an energetic program in Southeast Asia.

QUESTION: You don't have any kind of numbers on it at all?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: No --

QUESTION: Perhaps your colleague from Defense Department?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: But we wanted to be absolutely clear about the history of U.S. military use of landmines. And that's why I mentioned Vietnam.

Ma'am.

QUESTION: I know you don't want to revisit the issue -- the arguments about the Ottawa Treaty, but a lot of critics of the U.S. policy say that the only reason you won't sign the treaty is because the U.S. wants to use the landmines that it wants to choose and that it's kind of a cherry-picking [i.e., choosing among alternatives] situation, a double standard.

Is the only reason that the U.S. won't sign the Ottawa Treaty because it wants the flexibility to be able to use this for the military? And if you can issue the whole -- if you can address the double-standard issue.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Obviously the administration is not looking to impose any double standard. What the President has done is analyze the humanitarian crisis on its own terms. And what we found is that not only are anti-personnel mines a problem when they -- when their hazards linger indefinitely, but anti-vehicle mines are a major contributor as well.

So the President has placed the focus on anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines, if they are persistent. So persistence is really the common denominator.

The judgment that some of the munitions in the U.S. military arsenal were still needed because they provided defensive capabilities in certain situations, as Dr. Collins described, is one that is a purely military judgment. And I think that the President, as Commander-in-Chief, listened closely to his senior military commanders who, after all, are bearing any number of security missions around the world, and that was weighed very closely.

What we concluded is that, by allowing our military to use munitions that have self-destruct[ing] and self-deactivat[ing] features that have shown themselves to be very reliable in testing, and that have not shown themselves to be a hazard to civilians in these post-conflict societies, that we could achieve a great step forward in the push to end the humanitarian crisis, and we could also assure that our military commanders had this needed defensive capability for certain tactical situations, and that one goal did not have to be done at the expense of the other. And we believe that.

QUESTION: If I could just follow up. Is the Korean Peninsula the kind of primary military situation right now where the U.S. is using those type of landmines, or, in recent years with Afghanistan and Iraq, have landmines also been a tool on the battlefield? I guess this is for the military.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Well, I'm not sure I understand the exact thrust of your question, but clearly the defense of Korea is a major security priority for the United States of America, and this policy in no way affects, diminishes our commitment to the defense of Korea or our capacity to defend Korea. And we've made that very clear in briefings here in Washington and in Seoul within the last -- this week.

So Korea is certainly a situation where a million-man army to the north poses a grave risk to the Republic of Korea, but I would defer to the Pentagon to explain the military utility of landmines. It's not necessarily a weapon of choice. This policy in no way tries to accelerate or encourage the use of landmines. It is purely drawing a distinction between mines which have no life, in any case, after 90 days, and those which last for decades and which are clearly the cause of the humanitarian crisis.

Sir.

QUESTION: Speaking of Korea, what's the military use of a mine that expires in 90 days in a situation like Korea? It's for defense use. You don't have any means of telling when the enemy comes. What's the use of a minefield that's inert when it's needed?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Well, there are persistent landmines in use in the Republic of Korea as well. And as I said, the President has directed the accelerated exploration of alternative and better technologies, and we'll be engaged in that discussion with our Korean allies as we go forward with the President's new policy. But there are both persistent and non-persistent landmines used in Korea. The minefields south of the Demilitarized Zone are in the control of, actually, the Republic of Korean Armed Forces.

QUESTION: Can I follow up? You said if I understood you correctly, you said that you'll give up all the persistent landmines after 2010.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: 2010.

QUESTION: What's the use of these self-destruction mines in Korea after --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Well, I will defer to my Defense Department colleagues to explain the military utility.

General Ryan.

GENERAL RYAN: Sir, I mean, you ask a good question about minefields in Korea. The self-destruct[ing], self-deactivating minefield mine technology that we have right now is just for a localized combat or an operation of a limited duration, and that is the reason why we are devoting money and research to finding an adequate replacement for the persistent mine, the persistent anti-personnel, [and] the persistent anti-tank mine. We don't have that yet.

So you're absolutely right. We can't replace the persistent mines in Korea with self-destruct technology that we have today because, as you pointed out, it would be -- you'd be constantly replacing it.

Does that answer your question, sir?

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Sir.

QUESTION: In President Clinton's May 1998 pledge to sign the Ottawa Convention by 2006, if the Pentagon was able to develop and field alternatives to anti-personnel landmines, is this a policy announcement kind of an admission that that search for alternatives failed? And how much funding did the Pentagon dedicate to that effort to find alternatives so that they could sign Ottawa by 2006?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Clearly, I cannot speak for the previous administration. And it's clear that when the Ottawa Convention was drafted, the United States government and the previous administration was not able to come to terms with the drafters of the Ottawa Convention. The pledge, the pledge that you've cited, was conditioned on certain facts being done. And, again, I refer you to the Clinton administration on those points.

I can tell you that when this administration took office there was not an actively funded program ongoing for alternatives, and President Bush has directed that there be an energetic push to explore the technologies that would allow commanders far greater control over these types of munitions.

Ma'am.

QUESTION: If I could just follow up on the Korea questions. Does this mean that the Pentagon is confident that there will be this new technology by 2010? And if there's not, will all the persistent landmines be pulled up in Korea?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: I can ask for a military answer to that, but I believe it's fair to say that the President has made it a decision, as President and Commander-in-Chief, that allows for a period of time during which any possibility of a capabilities gap will be addressed. So he has charted a course that will have to be energetically pursued, and we intend to do that.

Did you want to add something?

DR. COLLINS: Yeah, I would. We are well along in the development of program to develop, in effect, a "smart" minefield, computerized with self-destruct[ing], self-deactivat[ing] capabilities. The program is funded, it's working, and we're going to have to do a lot of work between now and 2010 to make sure that that all comes on line. But this is not a case where -- there's no shell game here. There is a real program and a search for alternatives on that.

You made one point about mines in the ground in Korea being taken up. The United States has no mines in the ground in Korea.

QUESTION: There are no mines?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: The Koreans --

DR. COLLINS: The Koreans have mines there.

QUESTION: They're our allies, right?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Absolutely.

QUESTION: I see.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: They own them, though.

QUESTION: They own the mines. All right.

Can I try you on something? It seems to me you have two categories. This administration thinks there are two categories of landmines: those that are horrible and kill civilians, and those that are very useful in stopping aggression.

Why do you distinguish landmines from other horrible weapons? You wouldn't use mustard gas. That would deter attack, too. You wouldn't use biological weapons. That might cause a potential enemy to back up -- what is so -- and 150 countries disagree with you.

So, you know, so why this division, this decision to keep certain kinds of landmines when you wouldn't use certain types or keep certain types, or put in use certain types of other awful weapons that most of the world thinks are too horrible to use?

And secondly, if you have an answer to this, why won't the U.S. sign the treaty?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Without trying to dispute all the premises in your question --

QUESTION: Go ahead.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: -- in fact, the President is singling out persistent mines of all kinds as the root of the humanitarian crisis, so there is an exercise in saying these mines, whether they be anti-personnel mines or anti-vehicle mines, are not what we want the United States, as a major military power, to have in its arsenal.

He has established a timeframe by which time -- unconditionally, worldwide -- the U.S. will no longer use those mines of any kind. And so he has identified a munition which we no longer want to be associated with, and we hope that that will find favor and will influence the thinking of other major military powers, who, as yet, have not exercised restraint on the use of persistent landmines. So this is the beginning of a dialogue that has actually not been held.

With respect to the munitions that the United States Armed Forces uses -- as a State Department person I'll try to be careful about this, [since] it's not entirely my business -- but I think it's fair to say that the Defense Department is quite serious about the utility, the safety, the appropriate use of all the munitions in its arsenal. And there is -- a case has already been articulated as to the conditions under which United States Armed Services personnel in harm's way may need the capabilities that are presently only provided by landmines to save their lives, the lives of allied soldiers in the field, and potentially, the populations that they're trying to defend.

The fact of the matter is that the safety devices on these landmines, the self-destruct[ing] and self-deactivat[ing] features, have been tested 60,000 times with no failure. So it's a perfect safety testing record.

The fact of the matter is, I will put it this way: As the Special Representative on this issue, who has been doing this now for three years and has had an interest beforehand, I have yet to encounter a single case where a self-destruct, self-deactivate landmine in the hands of the United States Armed Forces has ever been tied to a civilian -- innocent civilian casualty in the world.

I may be wrong, but no such case has ever come to my attention. So when you base that -- if you apply a collateral damage standard to this weapon system as compared to any others, these munitions in the hands of U.S. Armed Forces come out quite well, indeed.

Sir.

QUESTION: And what about the treaty? Can I elaborate?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Yeah --

QUESTION: Because there's a feeling this administration -- more than a feeling -- there's evidence this administration has aversion -- has an aversion from the outset to international treaties. It doesn't want to sign the Test Ban Treaty, it's letting the START Treaty disappear, it killed the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty, you won't sign this treaty. But in the Test Ban case, for instance, you at least continue a pledge made by the previous administration to follow the same, you know, follow the provisions of the treaty voluntarily.

Can't you accommod-- why not sign the treaty? Or, if you can't sign it, isn't there a way to accommodate to the treaty?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Let me take that one on in two fronts.

This is an administration -- as a member of this administration, I can tell you that this administration takes the literal terms of treaties dead[ly] seriously. Whatever the United States signs up to, we adhere to fully and unconditionally. That's the ethos that underlies each of the cases that you brought forward. And I won't go into the cases, but we didn't -- I don't think you characterized our actions as I would.

With respect to the Ottawa Treaty, I've already said it only applied to one part of the problem and ignored entirely anti-vehicle mines, the persistent anti-vehicle mines that, for example, we have found in a recent report have -- are found in up to 70 percent of the major roads in Angola. And so the buses full of people and the cars and trucks could trigger these mines. It is a clearly important dimension of the humanitarian problem, which the President is now addressing.

But the definition of anti-personnel mine, under the terms of the Ottawa Treaty, includes munitions, which, as I just said, have shown no evidence of posing a harm to civilians internationally in the hands of U.S. Armed Forces, and indeed, have shown some continued utility for our armed forces personnel around the world.

Without trying to make any kind of case for American exceptionalism, it's clear that the United States cooperates well with countries all over the world on many fronts. This is -- this should be evident on so many fronts.

In this case, we will continue to seek the full cooperation of countries around the world regardless of their political views or their policy views on the formulas pertaining to landmines. Unity of effort is essential to solve this problem, and that is the spirit behind the President's policy. And so we will be going forward in a constructive manner. We appreciate and respect all of the efforts to raise consciousness on this issue, even if we don't always agree on the formula.

Sir.

QUESTION: This is somewhat of a follow-on to your last comment, and I understand you speak only for this administration, this country, and for the policy you've enunciated today.

But am I correct that what you've announced today doesn't do anything to alleviate the possibility of harm from landmines already out there in, what you said, the 40 countries around the world where it's a continuing problem?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: On the contrary. By increasing our humanitarian mine action programs, from what was already the largest figure of any donor in the world to a figure of \$70 million worldwide in fiscal years 2005, if the Congress finds favor with the President's proposal, we are clearly signaling the intent to join forces with all of the humanitarian mine action community, American and international, and the U.N., according to a strategic plan to get the casualty rate down to zero.

Mine action works. There were 26,000 casualties a year when the crisis peaked in the 1990s. Today we think the figure is closer to 10,000 per year. It proves that these programs are effective. Of course, 10,000 mine action casualties, landmine casualties from persistent mines, is 10,000 too many, and that's the motivating force behind this comprehensive plan to attack the problem.

Sir.

QUESTION: But what seems to be the argument of the opposition is that the -- you're relying on the technological superiority of the U.S. arsenal and that, by doing that, you're sort of saying to the poorer countries of the world that, you know, we can handle landmines because we have sophisticated ones and you can't -- that's the argument being made by former Pentagon spokesman Ken Bacon and others -- and that what you need to do, you know, is to just set a flat line and, not at all, not sort of hide behind the technological superiority of the United States.

What's your answer to that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Well, let me refer back to something my colleague Dr. Collins said, which is that we have had -- we have had military engagements in recent years in

this war on terrorism that no one anticipated even four or five years ago. There's an unpredictability in the international security environment.

I can't speak for the other countries that you cited, but it is a fact that the United States has several hundred thousand forces deployed outside our nation in over 100 countries on an annual basis. We have treaty commitments that will exceed 50 when our new NATO partners join.

That is a mark, first of all, of American credibility as a security ally, and I think the President, as Commander-in-Chief, has responsibly drawn a distinction between those landmines which are contributing to the problem -- and he has indicated that America will lead the way among major military powers to be the first to end use of all persistent landmines of any kind, unconditionally, by a date certain -- and at the same time has taken munitions which have not -- which have been shown not to contribute to that humanitarian crisis and which are appropriate to a major military power with security responsibilities that are probably surpassed by no other nation today, like it or not.

And he has found a formula which we believe advances both the humanitarian and national security equities of the United States.

MR. BOUCHER: We're going to finish up. Let's do two more.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) the other major (inaudible) countries, including Russia and China? To your knowledge, do they use similar kinds of modern mines? And are you willing to sell that kind of equipment to others as well?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: On the first issue, I'm not going to -- I can't characterize the landmine policies of the countries you cited. Obviously, we're interested in the policies and the activities of major military countries in the world. And it is our hope that our example and our commitment to end all indiscriminate use of persistent landmines of any kind will lead to productive dialogues with all willing countries to see if we can raise consciousness about this problem and influence behavior in a positive way so that this entire humanitarian crisis can be brought to the speediest possible end.

Now, as far as transfer goes, the policy that I have articulated on behalf of the President today is that we will obey the law with respect to anti-personnel landmine transfers and we will seek an international ban on all persistent landmine transfers of all kinds, subject to the conditions that I enumerated.

MR. BOUCHER: Last one.

QUESTION: Yes. Obviously, persistence is the key criteria here in your new policy. There are other weapons systems that the United States uses, such as cluster bombs that fail to explode, and then they persist and they cause civilian casualties after a conflict ends.

What is this administration going to do about weapons systems such as that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: I'm not in a position to address policies other than the landmine policy that I have addressed today. I will merely say, since you've raised this issue, that the anti-personnel and anti-vehicle landmines that we propose to retain in the United States arsenal, and to improve and perfect with the President's directive to seek better technological solutions, stack up extremely favorably among the weapons of war, if you compare to bombs, artillery shells and all other sorts of kinetic fires.

War is a very damaging thing. And by the standards of collateral damage that you're alluding to, I hope it's clear that the United States is retaining weapons which have an exceedingly good record in that regard.

MR. BOUCHER: OK. Thank you very much.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLOOMFIELD: Thank you.

(end transcript)