

# Cluster bombs are evil, but banning them is pointless

23 COMMENTS

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By Kevin Myers  
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There are some subjects on which it is impossible to have a realistic, sensible discussion, without the word "war-criminal" occurring. Landmines are one.

Cluster bombs -- the subject of a major conference at [Croke Park](#) next week -- are another. But what is there to discuss about these weapons systems? They're evil, through and through, aren't they? How can anyone even begin to doubt the validity of banning them?

Please, please, please: tell me, what weapons system has ever been successfully banned once it has been invented? Go on. Name one. They tried it with the crossbow. Didn't work.

You cannot uninvent that which has been made; moreover, international law is solely the law of the already compliant: it does nothing whatever to compel the rogue or super-powerful state.

Why did [Ireland](#) survive the Second World War? Was it because we boldly stood up to the menaces of the [Third Reich](#), and deployed our resources and our manpower in the defence of our sovereignty?

Or was it because British bomber crews were laying waste to German cities, immolating tens of thousands of innocent civilians in their homes? (And if they hadn't been doing so, then 4,000 anti-aircraft guns would not have been pointing upwards into German skies, but straight at allied tanks in Normandy).

Why did we not then become part of the greater Soviet empire? Because of the FCA? Or because the USAF [Strategic Air Command](#) in [Nebraska](#), with its dirty nuclear bombs which would have incinerated hundred of thousands, perhaps millions of [USSR](#) citizens, and turned their land into an ashcan?

That is the nature of war. It is a disgusting and evil business; but they who are not prepared to engage in that business, or are incapable of doing so, yet do not sub-contract out the responsibility for their defence to the more technically skilled and more warrior-like, will soon vanish from the face of the earth. Visit the land of the Hurons and the Choctaws, and you'll find the invader at his ease, and the natives gone.

The arguments against cluster bombs are laudable and obvious. They are evil devices which shower many small explosive devices over a wide area; and when they do not detonate on impact, they remain potentially lethal, to be discovered by children, farmers, or whomever, with often catastrophic effects.

Next week's conference will hear from [Branislav Kapetanovic](#), a Serb soldier on munitions-clearing duties who lost all four limbs, and much of his hearing and sight, from a cluster bomb long after it had been dropped. His case is too tragic for words.

But of course words are not what tyrants and dictators use. They use every weapon, every barbarity they can.

And you cannot fight steel with linen; you cannot oppose poison gas with piety. You have to get nasty: and if generals think that filthy weapons like cluster bombs will save the lives of their 18-year-old infantrymen, then that is what they'll use.

Almost all 'laws' over war apply only to the weak and the defeated. Unrestricted submarine warfare by the Germans became a war crime at [Nuremberg](#), where the tribunal ruled that if a U-boat could not rescue the crew of a vessel it was attacking, then it must let the vessel sail on.

But of course, such risible stipulations were not applied to the unrestricted submarine warfare by the [US](#) navy against [Japan](#). Moreover, the principle that it is criminal in law to plan war, which was used to condemn the Nazis, would have seen the British prime minister [Anthony Eden](#) hanging from a noose for his complicity in [Suez](#) in 1956.

Today, the Americans are not going to allow their war-fighting tactics to be controlled and judged by those prating, infantilised countries which enjoy the protection of the US armed imperium.

Moreover, states which are engaged in generation-long struggles for national survival - like [South Korea](#) and [Israel](#) -- are unlikely to heed lectures from a gathering in [Dublin](#) 3 about how they should or should not protect themselves. The use of landmines might be banned in international law: but South Korea knows that its (probably illegal) minefields are a pretty useful protection against a surprise attack by North Korean armour. Nobody wants to see children blown up by unused munitions. No-one wants to see any more [Branislav Kapeta](#)-novics.

But outright bans on effective battlefield weapons will simply not work, because of course they'll be ignored by combatants, who would rather a slap on the moral wrist by international lawyers than lose an army or a war.

Much more effective (but less morally glamorous) would be conventions on inbuilt time-expiry of munitions, and on post-conflict battlefield clearance.

But even this last presumes a secure zone in which ATOs can work in safety, which is seldom the case after modern wars -- vide [Iraq](#), [Afghanistan](#), [Lebanon](#).

But I can already see the headlines for next week's conference, all of them deploring the evils of modern weaponry -- especially if deployed by the US and the Israelis. Of course weaponry is evil: that's its job. Just as food nourishes, weapons kill.

And it is usually those who are entirely free from the threat of war who feel so qualified to

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GENE KERRIGAN  
POLITICS AND SOCIETY



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Last week, I had a bedtime fantasy about Brian Cowen. Not a cool thing to admit, perhaps, but relevant to the future of this great little nation. The fantasy came to me, whole and unbidden, as I was reading the Lisbon Treaty.

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