

(d) SN-SD vs dumb mines

Debate on this issue has not been so much between states as between military and diplomatic experts. Military experts accept that they will be required eventually to replace dumb mines with SN-SD mines. However, they seek exceptions that are as wide as possible to maintain their freedom to manoeuvre, or, at least, to delay the day when replacement becomes necessary. Arms controllers and lawyers advocate that all dumb mines be replaced with SN-SD mines as soon as possible. This debate went back and forth in the technical working groups of the first three Experts Group meetings. At the fourth meeting, it was almost completely settled. Some final political decisions on this will have to be made at the Review Conference.

At the fourth Experts Group meeting, it was largely decided to require that all mines used should be ones that are self-neutralizing and/or self-destructing. The only time "dumb mines" could be used would be in situations of fixed defences (ie: on the borders, as China wanted) or when the mined field is mapped and fenced with internationally accepted warning signs.

The issues to be settled here are: what percentage of a country's stock of mines may be "dumb mines" (we want around 15%); how long may a SN/SD mines be active (proposals range from 30 days to several years; Canada favours 15 years); and exactly in what situations can "dumb mines" be used.

This third point will probably be the most difficult to resolve. China definitely wants to be allowed to use long life "dumb mines" on its borders, so the issue of fixed perimeter defence is a non-starter. In other situations (eg defence of buildings and other military sights, use in a moving battle situation) how can they be used? The Australians have proposed that the use of "dumb mines" be banned completely in all situations other than fixed perimeter defences. Other countries do not want to be as stringent as Australia. Canada agrees with the Australian proposal in principle, but feels it goes too far, too fast.

Although this issue is technical it has an important political consideration because the NGOs are watching it carefully. NGOs have taken the view that mines, if they cannot be banned altogether, should have the shortest possible life-span. This issue is also closely tied in with the issue of a total ban on land mines.