



Cluster Bombs and Thermobaric Weapons

For Prelims: Cluster Bombs, Thermobaric Weapons.

For Mains: International Treaties and Agreements, Russia's Invasion of Ukraine.

Why in News?

Human rights groups [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) accused Russia of using cluster bombs and vacuum bombs in the [ongoing war \(on Ukraine\)](#).

- Amnesty International said **international humanitarian law prohibits the use of inherently indiscriminate weapons** such as cluster munitions. Launching indiscriminate attacks **that kill or injure civilians constitutes a war crime**.
- International humanitarian law is **a set of rules that seek to limit the effects of armed conflict**. It protects people who are not or are no longer participating in hostilities and restricts the means and methods of warfare.

What are cluster munitions?

- A **cluster munition means a “conventional munition that is designed to disperse or release explosive submunitions** each weighing less than 20 kilograms, and includes those explosive submunitions”.
- Essentially, cluster munitions are **non-precision weapons that are designed to injure or kill human beings indiscriminately over a large area**, and to destroy vehicles and infrastructure such as runways, railway or power transmission lines.
- They can be dropped **from an aircraft or launched in a projectile** that spins in flight, scattering many bomblets as it travels.
- Many of these bomblets end up not exploding, but continue to lie on the ground, often partially or fully hidden and difficult to locate and remove, posing a threat to the civilian population for long after the fighting has ceased.
- The **Convention on Cluster Munitions** specifically identifies “cluster munition remnants”, which include “failed cluster munitions, abandoned cluster munitions, unexploded submunitions and unexploded bomblets”

What is a thermobaric weapon?

- Thermobaric weapons — also known **as aerosol bombs, fuel air explosives, or vacuum bombs** — use oxygen from the air for a large, high-temperature blast.
- A thermobaric weapon causes **significantly greater devastation than a conventional bomb** of comparable size.
- The weapons, which go off in two separate stages, can be fired as rockets from tank-mounted launchers or dropped from aircraft.
- As they hit their target, a first explosion splits open the bomb's fuel container, releasing a cloud of fuel and metal particles that spreads over a large area.

- A second explosion then occurs, igniting the aerosol cloud into a giant ball of fire and sending out intense blast waves that can destroy even reinforced buildings or equipment and vaporize human beings.

What is the Convention on Cluster Munitions?

- The Convention on Cluster Munitions is a **United Nations-adopted legal instrument that prohibits all use**, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions.
- It establishes **a framework for cooperation and assistance to ensure adequate assistance to survivors and their communities**, clearance of contaminated areas, risk reduction education and destruction of stockpiles.
- It was adopted in Dublin, Ireland in 2008, and was opened for signature in Oslo, Norway. It **entered into force in 2010 after the requirement of 30 ratifications** was complete.
- Currently, the convention has 110 State Parties and 13 Signatory States.
- Countries that ratify the convention are obliged to never use cluster munitions, and also to never develop, produce, otherwise acquire, retain, stockpile or transfer to anyone cluster munitions.
- **India has not signed the convention and is not a party to it.** Other countries that are not parties are the **US, Russia, China, Pakistan and Israel, among others.**
 - **Vacuum bombs are not prohibited by any international law or agreement**, but their use against civilian populations in built-up areas, schools or hospitals, could attract action under the **Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907.**
 - Hague Convention is any of **a series of international treaties that were issued from international conferences** held at The Hague in the Netherlands in 1899 and 1907. They **establish the laws and customs of war in the strict sense**, by defining the rules that belligerents must follow during hostilities.

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