

Lindmines and Japan

Pre-Reading Activities

1. What do you think are some challenges for communities impacted by war after the war ends?
2. Look at these vocabulary words. Write their meaning, and then write a small sentence explaining how you think they might be connected to Japan today.

Word	Meaning in my language	How could it be connected to Japan?
Landmine		
De-mine / de-mining		
NGO (nongovernmental organization)		
Explode/explosive		
Landmine victim		
Landmine clearance/removal		

3. What is your image of countries that have problems with landmines? Why do you think they have those problems?

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Landmines and Japan's Role in a Global Challenge Towards Peace

When war ends, many people first celebrate. They then begin to rebuild destroyed towns and communities, and begin a long process of questioning how the war happened and reconciliation. One part of the rebuilding after a war ends is the cleanup of the land. In many areas of the world where war has ended, small, deadly weapons called landmines are buried in fields, forests, and areas where people farm and build communities. These explosive devices are often placed during wars to disrupt attacks or stop enemy movements.¹ Long after the fighting stops, the landmines remain. They do not become less deadly with time, and they are often buried in unmarked areas, not easily detectable to ordinary people.

According to the United Nations, in 2022, more than 50 countries are still affected by landmines today.² In Southeast Asia, especially in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, millions of landmines and unexploded bombs remain buried in the soil. These countries experienced intense wars in the twentieth century, and the weapons left behind continue to harm people and cause conflict decades later.³ Indeed, an outbreak of hostilities in October 2025 along the border between Cambodia and Thailand began when a Thai army officer was injured by a landmine placed on a disputed area of the border.⁴

Every year, thousands of people are killed by landmines, and there are greater numbers of people who are wounded or disabled.⁵ 86% of landmine victims are civilians who are not fighting in a war, and of these, 23% are children (ibid). When a person steps on a landmine, it explodes instantly, often causing the loss of limbs or death. Survivors face lifelong physical and psychological challenges. Beyond the individual suffering, entire communities are affected: according to a Japanese nongovernmental organization, Japan Mine Action Service (JMAS), known in Japanese as 日本地雷処理を支援する会, when an area is known to have landmines, farmland cannot be used, villages are abandoned, and economic development is slowed. The fear of hidden explosives shapes daily life, limiting education, agriculture, and trade.

¹ UNMAS, "Together for mine action: a multilateral success story," UN Mine Action, no date. Available online: <https://www.unmas.org/sites/default/files/History-of-mine-action/>

² United Nations, "Why Mine Action Matters," United Nations Peace and Security. No date. Available online: <https://www.un.org/en/peaceandsecurity/why-mine-action-matters>

³ Landmine Cluster and Munition Monitor, "Focus on Southeast Asia: Assessing and Addressing the Impact of Landmines and Cluster Munitions," International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 2024. Available online: https://the-monitor.org/api/assets/Resource-Hub/2024/Fact-Sheet-Focus-on-Southeast-Asia_Final_web.pdf

⁴ Panu Wongcha-um and Devjyot Ghoshal, "Land mines that sparked Thai-Cambodia clash were likely newly laid, experts say," The Japan Times, 16 October 2025. Available online: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2025/10/16/asia-pacific/politics/landmines-thailand-cambodia-clash/>

⁵ Peter Moszynski, "Landmine casualties are falling, but the wounded need more help," British Medical Journal 329(7477):1256. Available online: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC534468/#:~:text=Many%20casualties%20go%20unreported%2C%20and,%2C%20and%2023%25%20were%20children.>

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Landmines are not just remnants of war; they are also a serious human rights issue. The right to life and safety is a basic human right. When landmines prevent people from living safely in their own land, that right is violated. Children who cannot walk safely to school, farmers who cannot farm their fields, and families who cannot return to their homes are all victims of this ongoing injustice.

The injustices caused by land mine use are so serious that the Ottawa Treaty, officially called the Mine Ban Treaty, was adopted in 1997 to prohibit the use, production, stockpiling, and transfer of anti-personnel landmines.⁶ It also requires countries to destroy existing landmines and assist victims. Today, more than 160 countries have joined the treaty, including Japan. However, some nations with large militaries, such as the United States, Russia, and China, have not yet signed it and continue to use landmines to protect borders and harm their enemies.

Amongst the countries that signed the Ottawa Treaty, Japan's connection with landmines is complex. During World War II, the Japanese military used landmines in various parts of Asia and the Pacific, with extensive use in Okinawa and the coastal areas.⁷ After the war, Japan experienced occupation, reconstruction, and a national transformation that led to the adoption of its pacifist constitution in 1947. Article 9 of the Constitution renounces war and prohibits Japan from maintaining traditional military forces for warfare.

Because of this postwar commitment to peace, Japan has not used landmines in combat since the end of World War II. In 1998, Japan joined the Ottawa Treaty and committed to destroying all of its landmine stockpiles. By 2003, it had completed the destruction of over one million landmines and destroyed all the landmines in Japan. In doing so, Japan became the 38th country in the world to completely abandon landmine use and possession.⁸ Yet Japan's role in the global landmine issue does not end with its own disarmament. Instead, Japan has become one of the world's leading contributors to landmine clearance and victim support in post-conflict countries, with both the government and NGO groups involved in various efforts.

According to JMAS, clearing landmines is a slow and dangerous process. It requires trained professionals, specialized equipment, and a great deal of time to search an area for even a single mine. Other organizations might even use trained animals such as rats or dogs to help detect that can detect the scent of explosives.⁹ But whatever tools are used, no one person can

⁶ United Nations Treaty Collection, "Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction," 18 September 1997. Available online:

https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVI-5&chapter=26&clang=_en

⁷ Nozomu Takeuchi, "76 years after Battle of Okinawa, tons of unexploded US shells lie hidden beneath ground," *The Mainichi*, 24 June, 2021. Available online:

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20210623/p2a/00m/0na/025000c#:~:text=Incidents%20continued%20after%20Okinawa's%20reversion,especially%20high%20at%20construction%20sites>.

⁸ Nao Shimoyachi, "Japan says goodbye to last land mine," *The Japan Times*. 8 February 2003. Available online: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2003/02/08/national/japan-says-goodbye-to-last-land-mine/>

⁹ Apopo Mine Action, "Accelerating Land Release through the use of Animal Detection System (ADS)," 8 September 2025. Available online: [https://docs-](https://docs-library.unoda.org/Convention_on_Certain_Conventional_Weapons_Protocol_V_Meeting_of_Experts_(2025)/2025_Meeting_of_Experts_on_CCW_PV_-_Panel_II_(APOPO).pdf)

[library.unoda.org/Convention_on_Certain_Conventional_Weapons_Protocol_V_Meeting_of_Experts_\(2025\)/2025_Meeting_of_Experts_on_CCW_PV_-_Panel_II_\(APOPO\).pdf](https://docs-library.unoda.org/Convention_on_Certain_Conventional_Weapons_Protocol_V_Meeting_of_Experts_(2025)/2025_Meeting_of_Experts_on_CCW_PV_-_Panel_II_(APOPO).pdf)

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safely clear an area alone. Workers must carefully search each area, often under extreme heat or difficult terrain. A single mistake can be fatal.

Despite these risks, thousands of individuals and organizations around the world dedicate themselves to this mission. Among them is the Japanese non-governmental organization called Japan Mine Action Service (JMAS). JMAS has been active since 2002 in countries such as Cambodia, Laos, Angola, Palau, Afghanistan, and other areas. Their work includes not only removing landmines and unexploded bombs, but also rebuilding and educating local communities about safety, and providing support for victims.

In Cambodia, for example, JMAS has worked with local authorities to clear contaminated land and train Cambodian de-miners. The cleared areas have been returned to communities for farming and housing. In Laos, where millions of unexploded bombs remain from the Vietnam War, Japanese support has helped improve safety education and medical care for victims. These projects reflect a partnership based on mutual respect and shared commitments to human rights. When land is cleared of mines, families can return home, children can attend school safely, and local economies can recover. Demining may seem like a small, technical task, but it has wide-reaching effects on community well-being and national development.

The issue of landmines raises deep ethical questions. Who is responsible for removing them? Should the countries that produced or used landmines pay for their removal, or should the global community share the burden? In many cases, the nations most affected by landmines are also the poorest. They often lack the financial or technical resources to clear the mines on their own. International cooperation, including aid from wealthier countries like Japan, becomes essential. However, this cooperation must be based on respect and partnership, as is modeled by JMAS, and not simply a relationship of donor and recipient.

The fight against landmines is not just about removing metal from the ground. It is about restoring dignity, safety, and land to communities that lost everything in war. Each landmine cleared represents one less threat and one more step for communities rebuilt. Japan's involvement in this global effort shows that peace is not simply the absence of war, but that it is an active, ongoing process that requires cooperation and joint action. Through organizations like JMAS, Japan continues to contribute to a safer and more just world.

But the work is far from finished. Today, there are still an estimated 110 million landmines buried in at least 65 countries, Japan and its Okinawa islands among them.¹⁰ As long as landmines remain buried in the earth, the past conflicts continue to claim new victims. Building peace means not only having organizations like JMAS continue to clear land mines, but also using partnerships to overcome barriers that keep societies divided.

¹⁰ United Nations, "The deadly legacy of landmines," UN News: Global Perspective Human Stories, 2 April 2023. Available online: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/04/1135252>

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Post Reading Activities

1. The article raises the question of who should be responsible for landmine clearance. In your opinion, who should be responsible and why?

2. What can Japan learn from its work in landmine clearance when thinking about peace in Asia and at home?

Extension Activity

Read the transcript of the interview with JMAS representatives. After reading, write a brief report, including new facts you learned about the groups' work. Then, write one question you still have about this topic and the group. Visit the group's website to try to answer your question!