

IED – THE “TOOL OF DEATH”

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Abstract: *All media, from states that have sent military structures to Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, etc., have commented and continue to comment extensively on the effects of military outbreaks of improvised explosive devices, abbreviated IED. Many civilians are rightly wondering what an IED is and what destructive performance it records as a result of its coming into operation by different means. Years ago it was found that there were also some soldiers who did not have much knowledge about IEDs and consequently lost their lives, especially in Iraq, but also in Afghanistan, because they did not have the necessary and sufficient training, based on which to be able to apply procedures if they discovered these „tools of death”, located on the ground or at targets, or when trying to help their comrades seriously injured by the explosions of these devices. In those conditions, the military decision-makers imposed the implementation in the combat manuals of EOD protection. With all the measures taken, by the military decision-makers, the IEDs continued to make new victims in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, etc., among the local defense forces, the multinational Coalition military, the civilian population, the animals used as suicide bombers, etc. Starting from this finding and knowing what was written about these „tools of death” through combat manuals and specialized articles, developed by the military based on the lessons learned from the „dust” of Iraq and Afghanistan, I intend, through this paper, to try to put together some information that will provide further insights into IEDs and the danger it poses to local defense forces, to the Alliance’s military and civilian population, who are on Afghan ground.*

Keywords: IED, shattering power, deflagration, explosive mixtures

1. Introduction

What we are trying to present with this paper is not infallible, but we believe that it brings an additional need for information that is known to help all those who are fighting for a common noble goal in Afghanistan to take action to prevent the emergence of disasters generated by these „tools of death”, used unreservedly by the insurgency of the Afghan Taliban, according to models used by Iraqi insurgents, who used IEDs in 2003 against the military and targets belonging to the Multinational Coalition, or who executed suicide attacks. Certainly, the „criminal”

actions of Sunni nationalists, who supported the former Ba’athist regime, are still alive in our memory. In fact, Sunni nationalists were „elements of death” in Mehdi Army of Muqtada Al-Sadr, who worked closely with volunteers considered Islamic extremists, unaffiliated, with Arab and Islamic groups of volunteers, as well as with those who acted under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and who formed the Qaeda Organization for Holy War in Iraq. Other elements were added to these, made of criminals with political inclinations or remunerated with exorbitant amounts to kill cold-heartedly, using different methods

and processes of which the IEDs occupied an important place. Their preferred areas of action were in particular supply roads in southeastern Iraq. More specifically, these „agents of death” chose their attack objectives between the border with the state of Kuwait, important military bases, the refineries in Basra, Shuaibu, the Port of Umm Quasar or Tallil. They were acting in these areas as they were there carrying out missions of patrolling or accompanying convoys, military forces of the Multinational Coalition. The countless attacks committed by these „death forces” led to the killing of many of the Multinational Coalition and local defense forces, as well as of civilians, among the native population, raised a question mark regarding the insufficient attention paid by The Multinational Coalition to these IEDs, although there was enough information about their destructive effects ever since 1970, when the IRA used them in their terrorist actions. Even the British Army called them IEDs. They were named like this as they were made rudimentarily from agricultural chemical fertilizers represented by ammonium nitrate, sawdust, diesel and SEMTEX 10 explosive, to amplify their explosive power and shattering power (the ability to disintegrate the destroyed environment). We believe you remember the horrific explosion that occurred on May 24, 2004, at 5.50 am, when a truck loaded with 20 tons of ammonium nitrate (400 bags from the Doljchim Chemical Plant [1]), overturned in Mihăilești commune, Buzău County and the fertilizer in combination with the diesel fuel leaked from the truck’s tanks caused a blast, which killed 18 people, including seven firefighters, two journalists at Antena 1 TV station [2], three locals, etc., and injured 13 people. The explosion produced a crater with a depth of 6.5m and a diameter of 21m[3]. It was the greatest tragedy ever produced in the area [4]. The Iraqi, Afghan, Syrian, etc. insurgency teaches children to build these „tools of death” from an early

age and to use them against those whom their parents indoctrinate as occupants of their homeland. Taking as an example the tragedy from Mihăilești we can realize how easy it is to make an IED, if you have some amounts of ammonium nitrate, pine wood bran, diesel fuel etc. Moreover, Iraqis, Taliban, Syrians, etc. children learn since their childhoods recipes for making explosive mixtures of ammonite, ammonal, etc., in which the basic raw material is ammonium nitrate. With these elements in mind, we should go further into the thread of logic and see what the IEDs are according to the NATO concept [5].

2. IEDs in NATO conception

NATO military specialists define IEDs as handmade improvised explosive devices, representing an unconventional weapon that can take any form in a variety of ways, targeting both military and civilian personnel [6]. From this definition one can draw the conclusion that IEDs represent destructive, asymmetrical elements used by insurgents in conflict zones, which have nothing in common with the interests of the civilized world. With these „tools of death” the insurgents in the conflict areas try to surprise the local forces and those of the Multinational Coalition and maintain a state of pressure and uncertainty about them, considering that they are giving up actions aimed at resolving asymmetrical conflicts and efforts to stabilize conflict-affected areas. At the same time, the insurgents believe that this way they can avoid the military confrontation, in which they would be the ones who lose. In other words, the insurgents are aiming to weaken the morale of the local forces and those of the Multinational Coalition, thus trying to discourage them and cause them to stop taking military action against them. The attacks are usually suicide attacks and internal attacks, which, apart from the national defense and security forces and the forces of the Multinational Coalition, also target the civilian population, deliberately

violating Art. 3, common to all four Geneva Conventions on the standards of international law regarding humanitarian problems [7]. The experience of the theaters of operations has shown that by using the IEDs by the insurgency, the morale and cohesion of the forces of the Multinational Coalitions have not been affected, but on the contrary they have strengthened, with disastrous influences on these users of „tools of death” [8].

3. What else should be known about IEDs by the least knowledgeable in the field?

The insurgency places the IEDs in places where it considers that those targeted least expect it. For example, if a stone slab is on a road, it must be carefully examined by those who are qualified or informed as beneath it, an IED can be placed in a pit, which can lift the respective slab. If there are fresh traces of excavation on the edge of a road sector, care must be taken because an IED may be placed there. The pavements of the roads or of the sidewalks can hide buried and masked IEDs under them, which act on pressing or commanding. Any beverage packaging abandoned on the side of a communication path may be an IED whose explosion may be remotely controlled or triggered by the movement of the respective packaging. If there is a pipe on the side of a communication path from which drinking water flows, it must be carefully investigated because a sensor-based IED may be located inside it, which opens the electrical circuit of the improvised explosive medium, activated by the heat of the human body. Any backpack, bag, luggage, etc., abandoned on the side of a communication road or at the intersection of several communication routes or at the entrance or on the path of a bridge, etc., should be carefully examined by specialists, as these can hide IEDs with increased destruction performance. Civilians who observe such baggage must notify the specialists, and the military of other

specialties, other than the ones dealing with EOD, must notify the EOD specialists, while taking measures to guard and secure the area until their arrival for research and neutralization of the respective luggage. Trucks, vans, trailers, cars, etc., parked in areas near crowded or signposted areas as if they are having a flat tire, may be actual carriers of IEDs and should therefore be carefully investigated by the EOD technicians. Dead animals on the outskirts of communication routes, near the intersections or crowded car parks, in the area of the stations, buses stops, etc., can become through their bodies IEDs carriers, located there by those who have nothing in common with the civilized world. Carriers of IEDs may also be living animals that seemingly graze near the targets aimed by insurgents, as well as bearers of these „tools of death” may be suicidal people, for whom the ideals they believe in are stronger than the desire to live and that carry them in bags, backpacks, etc., and take them to markets or other crowded places where they detonate the loads, losing their lives and at the same time, producing many casualties among the military and civilians, but also major damage to the targets. Ornamental shrubs, attractive flowers, abundant vegetation along the roadsides, in crowded parking lots, can be places where IEDs can be placed and masked. A well in a crowded parking lot, without any other sources of water, may be the place where insurgents can place IEDs operated by traction or by remote control. A restaurant room, a theater, conference rooms, etc., can become places where the insurgency places IEDs. They can be placed near the entrance and exit doors in/from the respective rooms, in places in the floor and walls, cleverly masked, in windows, in the drawers of tables, in libraries, etc. It should be specified that the IEDs located in the places mentioned above can be operated both remotely using remote controls or mobile phones, and from the spot using sensors, by traction or pressing, etc. [9].

Suicide attacks are particularly dangerous. These attacks are produced by individuals with radical political views, who have strong discontent and who consent to carry quantities of explosives and means of ignition in crowded places, fixed on their bodies and detonated by losing their own lives but also destroying the lives of some innocent people and producing immeasurable material damage. Often, these suicide bombers drive vehicles loaded with explosives, which they detonate in crowded places, losing their lives, but killing and injuring a significant number of people. There are also situations in which explosive-loaded vehicles can be blown up not only by their drivers, but also by other people inside the cars, aiming at designated or random targets [10]. We still remember the explosive truck attacks carried out especially by the Taliban insurgents, an example in this regard being the one produced in September 2019, when two Romanian operators from the special forces [11] (Vasile Claudiu Popa and Adrian Postelnic lost their lives). If we think that of the 30 Romanian soldiers on duty in theaters of military operations, 27 lost their lives only in Afghanistan, we can conclude that the most ferocious insurgency is that of the Taliban [12].

4. The action procedure in the situation of the insurgents' intention to use the IEDs and the response to it

The soldiers who participated, but also those who are carrying out missions in the theaters of operations understood that IEDs are „tools of death”, and that they should be taken very seriously. The victims of these „tools of death” in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, etc., also contributed to this conclusion, both among the local defense forces, as well as the military of the Multinational Coalitions and the native population. In order to detect them before they do harm or to prevent the harm from escalating after the explosion, the military have developed procedures, which they strictly observe and

which they continuously improve based on the lessons learned. Essentially, the action procedure in the situation of discovering the intention of the insurgents to use the IEDs and the response to it includes the following stages [13]:

- warning by the commanders of patrols, FOBs, drivers of vehicles, their passengers, etc., who observe or identify IEDs using the phrases:
 - „Pull right”;
 - „Pull left”;
 - „Slow down”;
 - „Go faster!”;
 - „Stop”.
- rapid evacuation, as ordered, of the danger area by moving forward, backward, sideways or stopping, moving to a position and at a tactical safety distance;
- establishing a security perimeter;
- scanning the area;
- further identification of the trap IEDs, additionally located and the signs of possible insurgent activity aimed at: insurgent maneuvers; execution of ambushes; use of grenade launchers; engaging the insurgents involved with fire;
- preparation for the response;
- request, if necessary, the support of the nearest unit of rapid reaction, reinforcement, etc.;
- urgently sending the information to the upper echelon and the neighbors of a message aiming at: Who?; What?; Where?; When?; Threat priority!;
- not getting close to the suspect IED;
- not touching detonation wires;
- identification and tracking of the route of the control wires;
- not focusing on finding the IED, but on ensuring the protection of the force.

5. Procedure of action in the situation of the threat/attack of suicide with the suicide truck bomber

We had mentioned earlier that the

insurgents will stop at nothing in organizing and carrying out suicide attacks with suicide truck bombers. These attacks, once triggered, cause significant losses among the multinational Coalition's military, local defense forces, civilian population, etc. That is why the military of the Multinational Coalitions using the lessons learned collected in the theatres of military operations have developed standard action procedures in case of the threat/attack suicide truck bombers. Basically, such a procedure concerns the following stages [14]:

- training the personnel to react as quickly as possible to the necessary escalation of the force;
- the supervision and control of the tactical space within an area of at least 100m;
- avoiding agglomeration or gathering of own forces and technical means in a confined space of maneuver;
- mounting on the force's vehicle of some signs in Arabic language that says: "Keep the distance"; "Do not cross";
- the use of signals given by acoustic means or by waving by the occupants of the vehicle;

- use of offensive tactics to drive the vehicle;
- use of the armament provided with the application of the rules of engagement;
- collecting and processing information about the security status.

6. Conclusions

The civilized world pays a heavy tribute to normalize the situation in Afghanistan. The Taliban do not stop at nothing when it comes to using more or less advanced means of combat but which cause losses to the Alliance forces. Among them, IEDs are the „tools of death” preferred by the Taliban. In order to avoid Taliban use of IEDs, the Alliance's military must have coherent procedures which help identify their intention to use them and annihilate these intentions. In the situation of the use of IEDs, the known procedures must be applied quickly, in order not to cause other losses in personnel, military technology etc. Any compromise from the procedures generates human, technical and material losses. The experience must generate lessons learned from which to constantly update the procedures to combat Taliban attacks with IEDs.

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