



МЕЃУНАРОДНА НАУЧНА КОНФЕРЕНЦИЈА
БЕЗБЕДНОСНИ КОНЦЕПТИ И ПОЛИТИКИ - НОВА
ГЕНЕРАЦИЈА НА РИЗИЦИ И ЗАКАНИ



INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE
SECURITY CONCEPTS AND POLICIES - NEW
GENERATION OF RISKS AND THREATS

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04 - 05 Јуни 2017, Охрид

Том I

Скопје 2017

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

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04 -05 June 2017, Ohrid

Volume I

Skopje 2017

Издавачи:

Универзитет „Св. Климент Охридски“
Битола
Факултет за безбедност – Скопје

За издавачите:

проф. д-р Сашо Коруновски, ректор на
Универзитетот „Св. Климент
Охридски“ – Битола
проф. д-р Оливер Бачановиќ, декан на
Факултетот за безбедност – Скопје

Уредник на изданието:

Доц. д-р Марјан Ѓуровски

Лектор на англиски јазик:

Рози Гроздановска Велеска

Компјутерска обработка:

Оливера Трајанова Ѓорѓијовски
Кемал Рушид

Печати:

АД „Ван Гог“ - Скопје

Адреса на издавачите:

Факултет за безбедност 1000 Скопје
П. Фах 103
тел: 022546211

Универзитет „Св. Климент Охридски“
1ви Мај б.б. 7000 Битола,
тел: 047223788

Publishers:

University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
Bitola
Faculty of Security- Skopje

For the Publishers:

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the University “St. Kliment
Ohridski”- Bitola
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Editor in Chief:

Marjan Gjurovski, PhD

Lecturer in English:

Rozi Grozdanovska Veleska

Computer Processing:

Olivera Trajanova Gjorgijovski
Kemal Rushid

Print:

“Van Gog” - LTD Skopje

Address of the Publishers:

Faculty of Security 1000 Skopje
P.O. Box 103
tel: ++389(0)22546211

University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
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TERRORIST ACTS WITH IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES, THE THREAT TO THE MODERN-WORLD, THE EXAMPLE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN

The use of improvised explosive devices in the execution of terrorist acts in Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

The latest developments on the international scene have made the safety factor an unavoidable issue in international relations and political debate. Today, the world we are living in is facing complex threats coming from the largest modern international security danger - terrorism. Terrorists intensify their activities using violence as a means of political action and create an atmosphere of uncertainty and instability. The trend of using unconventional methods of warfare, tactics and procedures continued during the first and second decade of the XXI century, causing unconventional resources to become the dominant mode of extremist activity worldwide. The use of unconventional weapons brings great success and losses and is also accompanied by great media attention, which is one of the main goals of the extremists that will be presented in this paper. The relatively easy access to weapons and bio-chemical substances is an effective and relatively easy tool to use against civilians and against security structures. Extremists will continue to change and promote their tactics, techniques and procedures of action in view of inflicting maximum damage with minimum risk. Afghanistan is facing a complex threat from terrorism throughout their territory, which historically refers to the period starting from 1979. These extremist terrorist activities include the use of conventional weapons and conventional mode of action and use of improvised explosive devices as a way to inflict serious losses on the forces in Afghanistan. Statistics show an enormous number of civilian casualties as a result of the use of unconventional weapons and improvised explosive devices in the territory of Afghanistan, among which the most frequently used include the so-called "vest" terrorist bombers and improvised explosive devices - "car bombs".

Keywords: terrorism, Afghanistan, a suicide bomber, car bomb, an explosive device

THE EXECUTION OF TERRORIST ATTACKS WITH IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES IN AFGHANISTAN

INTRODUCTION

In the course of 2012 and the first half of 2013, according to the available information, an exceptionally high number of movements in lines had been noticed by the international security forces, the Afghan national security forces and the international factor throughout Afghanistan. The potential danger from improvised explosive devices is still present, given the fact that their use still remains to be the most practiced tactic of the extremists and the antigovernment elements. It has been shown that this is one of the effective ways of intimidation, where the psychological effects of the incidents with improvised explosive devices are directed towards the local population, despite the efforts of the international military presence and the Afghan national security forces to fight these occurrences. The estimation that follows is a compilation and analysis of the tactics, techniques and procedures which are used by the extremists and antigovernment elements in Afghanistan and their influence on the general safety situation.

1. Defining the improvised explosive device¹

According to the explanation given by the dictionary of the US Department of Defense, “an improvised explosive device is a device which is set or produced in an improvised manner, which contains destructive, deadly, dangerous pyrotechnical or inflammable chemicals and is created with the purpose to destroy, incapacitate, attack or draw attention. It may contain military materials, however this improvised device is mainly created by components of no military nature.”



Picture 1 - An example of an improvised explosive device manufactured in domestic environment and found in a house in “Helmand Province” in Afghanistan in May, 2009, UNAMA, UN, Safety device, intern report

¹ www.securitymanagement.com/library/000339.html.

1.2 General characteristics of the improvised explosive devices used in Afghanistan²

The improvised explosive devices can be divided into several categories. Namely, these devices include:

- Bombs planted along the way,
- Booby traps,
- Vest-bombs worn by suicide bombers,
- Bombs in vehicles,
- Static bombs, or bombs carried by suicide bombers, and
- Different improvised explosive devices with a shaped charge.

Essentially, any explosive weaponry that does not come from industrial production can be considered an improvised explosive device. In Afghanistan, the improvised explosive devices are produced with diesel fuel and sometimes mortar rounds or metal plates are used. Some of the devices use a cell phone as a remote control. However, some improvised explosive devices can explode by giving a signal through a button, or with the touch of wires and batteries. Thanks to the Internet, in recent years there has been an advancement in the techniques for creating improvised explosive devices. Most of the improvised explosive devices are special in some way, because the creator improvises with the material available to him at the given moment. The improvised explosive devices are created to defeat a certain target or type of targets, so they are harder to be discovered or prevented, because as time goes by they have an increasingly complex structure.

1.3 Components of the improvised explosive devices according to the registered incidents in Afghanistan

Generally, the improvised explosive devices have four main components:

- Energy source,
- Initiator,
- Explosive, and
- Switch.



Picture 2 - An example of a set improvised explosive device with remote control

² www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/past-issues/volume-18-2012/august/ieds-the-home-made-bombs-that-changed-modern-war/

The energy source fuels the system of the improvised explosive device with electric energy. Most improvised explosive devices have an electric plant, which as such, seeks a source of electric energy.



Picture 3- An example of an energy source

The initiator causes an explosion of the main charge and they can be improvised explosives or explosives of high quality. The main charge must be activated, because it will not explode by itself.

The explosive material or the explosive is a reactive substance which contains a large quantity of potential energy, which creates an explosion when released all at once. Along with the explosion, it creates light, heat, sound and pressure.

The switch is found in the device as a switch for activation or a detonator. The switch can have a simple or complex structure. Many improvised explosive devices contain an activation switch, as well as a detonator-switch. The activation switch is a backup part of the improvised explosive device and acts through deactivation (electric disabling) of the detonator switch. When the activation switch is armed, the detonation switch functions, however the wheel is still closed. When the detonation switch is activated, then the wheel is opened, the battery charge is connected to the initiator (a hat that explodes) and the detonation takes place.



Picture 4 - An example of switches

1.4 Ways of delivering the improvised explosive devices in Afghanistan

1.4.1. Wire-controlled improvised explosive devices

The wire-controlled improvised explosive devices are activated with the help of a moving wire. The command wire-controlled improvised explosive devices are set in motion by a moving operator. A special modified type of this improvised explosive device is the one that is directed by the victim itself and is activated by the target itself, while moving through so called plates under pressure.



Picture 5 - An example of a wire-controlled improvised explosive device

1.4.2. Car-bomb

Car-bombs are automobiles or trucks full of explosives. A special kind of a car-bomb is a vehicle which has an explosive device installed underneath (Sub-vehicle borne). These vehicles are controlled by suicide bombers on the territory of Afghanistan. The construction of these devices needs a lot more time and knowledge of logistics than the construction of other types of improvised explosive devices. However, the use of vehicles enables the delivery or setting of higher quantities of explosives on the planned targets in a faster manner. The use of multi-purpose car-bombs against a single target can improve the attack itself. The vehicle bombs use higher quantities of explosives and the explosive charge varies between 45-450kg. The explosive charge may contain parts like grenades, mine-throwers, projectile motors, rockets, warheads, C4 explosives and artillery grenades. The attack technique of car-bombs is increasingly present and includes the use of multipurpose vehicles. In such cases, the leading or the first vehicle is used as a bait or a destroyer of barriers. This was one of the most commonly used methods as part of a “complex attack” in Afghanistan in 2012 and 2014.



Picture 6 - A vehicle-bomb with 107mm rockets discovered in the Kunduz Province, Afghanistan, according to UNAMA, UN Security Administration, intern report – document.

1.4.2.1. Indicators

The following characteristics can be indicators of a possible risk posed by a car-bomb:

- Lowered vehicle: A visibly lowered vehicle on the suspension is a sign of a large quantity of explosives.

- Covered windows: Darkened or covered windows to hide the content of the vehicle.

- Unusual items inside the vehicle: fuel cylinders, wires, leaflets, large bags or cardboards and batteries in addition to the usual batteries (accumulators) for the vehicle.

- Abandoned vehicles: The presence of vehicles in the area where their presence is not usual.

- Holes in the vehicles: Holes made in the vehicle itself to conceal the explosives, which are roughly covered.

- Changes on the doors from the inside: Proof that the part from the inside is removed to hider the explosive.

- Presence of gunpowder: The presence of gunpowder that remains after the explosive materials have been loaded in the vehicle.

- Recently painted vehicle: recently painted vehicle to cover the vehicle's changes.

- Additional fuel tanks: The presence of additional fuel tanks.

- Unusual smell: Unusual smells, for example the smell of timed fuse, gasoline or waste.

- Additional antennas: The presence of additional antennas on the vehicle for radio controlled devices.

Indicators for drivers of car-bombs:

- Irregular driving speed: Irregular driving speed, driving too slow or too fast when passing in front of the Afghan Government and the controlled security stations.

- Ignoring orders: Ignoring the orders to stop, an attempt to go around a controlled security station or an attempt to maneuver, especially to get close to the locations of the international military forces.

- Improper clothing: wearing improper dress or improper clothing for driving such a vehicle. Also, signs of anxiety, sweating, trembling or unusual expression.

-Number of people in the vehicle: The presence of a driver only in the vehicle is common for the operations of car-bombs. However, there can be any number of people in the vehicle, except if the person that drives the car-bomb is not a suspect.

-Difficulties that the driver faces: The inability for the driver to properly move the vehicle or use the equipment he/she has.

1.4.2.2. Tactics, techniques and procedures of the car-bombs used in Afghanistan

The primary purpose of car-bombs is to attack fixed targets. They are used in several attacks of the controlled stations of the international military forces, as well as their infrastructure. However, car-bombs are also used for convoys. The tactics, techniques and procedures of the car-bombs used by the rebels in Afghanistan are as follows:

-Multipurpose vehicles: Three vehicles are used to escort the car-bomb. The first vehicle is a hunter – its purpose is to identify the targets. The second vehicle carries a person with a camera, whose task is to film the event. The third vehicle is the car-bomb.

-Car-bait: The first or the leading vehicle serves as the bait, it draws the attention of the security forces from the car-bomb, which approaches fast.

-Destroyed vehicles: The car-bombs are made from the remains of destroyed vehicles, or damaged vehicles on the road; when the convoy passes near a car-bomb, it is activated from a distance. Some of the vehicles that have not been used long and can be found near the road can be turned into an immobile fixed car-bomb.

1.4.3. Remotely controlled improvised explosive device

The detonation is mainly controlled from a distance with different wireless devices. They are taken out of remote controls for toys (with the reach of around 100 meters) to transmitters (with the reach of around 5 kilometers). They may also use car alarms and keyless entry systems (reach of around 200 meters), wireless phones (reach of around 100 meters) and cell phones.



Picture 7- Examples of improvised explosive devices with remote controlled transmitters

1.4.4. Magnetically set improvised explosive devices

There are many kinds of magnetically attached improvised explosive devices used in the region of Afghanistan. One of the most common is the so called “sticky bomb” – an improvised explosive device set in the vehicle’s engine. In practice, the bomb is usually connected with a masking tape or magnets. The antigovernment elements and extremists use a wide range of devices to hide the magnetically improvised explosive devices.



Picture 8 - Examples of magnetically attached improvised explosive devices and their setting



Picture 9 - Locations with detonation of magnetically attached improvised explosive devices, in which ISAF transport vehicles are burned, Samangan Province, Afghanistan, July 2012, according to UNAMA, UN, Security Administration, intern report – document.

1.4.5. Improvised explosive devices – vest³

The suicide bombers in the region of Afghanistan in most registered cases use a jacket full of explosives and they activate the device themselves or through another operator from a distance. The suicide bomber poses a notably great danger to the safety of the international security forces personnel and civilians. The purpose of these terrorists is not only to commit suicide, but also to kill or injure as many soldiers or other civilians as possible. The suicide bombers mainly use highly explosive and fragmented effects and a command system for detonation, or in other words, some kind of a switch or button that is activated manually. The explosives with the fragments can be carried in a vest, belt or

³ Kix, P.: “The Truth About Suicide Bombers,” *Boston Globe*, December 5, 2010.

specially manufactured clothes where the explosive is hidden. The suicide bomber usually wears clothing or a belt that contains explosives. Unlike the former robust devices, today the devices are particularly small and the explosive can be easily hidden.



Picture 10 - Suicide bombers General description of the acting of improvised explosive devices during the execution of terrorist acts in Afghanistan

The improvised explosive devices remain one of the biggest threats facing the civilians, the international military presence and the Afghan security forces in Afghanistan. One example indicates that in the period January – June 2012, the improvised explosive devices caused 29% of the total number of deaths of civilians.

According to the International Organization for Victim Assistance, since the beginning of 2012 there have been 108 victims of the International Security Assistance Force – ISAF caused by improvised explosive devices, out of the total 240 deaths, as a result of these incidents, or 45% of the total number of deaths.

According to the information of UNAMA, the Department for human rights, improvised explosive devices were the single greatest killer of Afghan children, men and women in 2011, taking 967 lives of civilians or nearly one out of every three victims (32%) murdered in the conflict. The improvised explosive devices were the cause of 41% of civilian victims related to the antigovernment elements. In 2012, the improvised explosive devices continued to be the greatest threat to civilians. Antigovernment elements continued using improvised explosive devices in a way that is threatening and illegal. For example – in the period from January 1 to June 30, 2012, the improvised explosive devices were the specific reason behind 33% of all civilian victims, killing 327 and injuring 689 civilians. Considering the tactics used by improvised explosive devices, like the suicide and complex attacks, the improvised explosive devices caused a total of 53% of the victims and injured civilians during the first six months of 2012. According to the United Nations report, it is concluded that most of the improvised explosive devices that caused civilian victims were not directed towards a certain military target, but were regularly set on the sides of the roads, resulting in terrifying deaths and injuries of civilians while breaking the international humanitarian law.

In 2012, a large percentage of improvised explosive devices was discovered and deactivated by members of the international military forces before they were used, however the antigovernment elements and extremists are trying to improve these devices and find better and more effective ways of their use. During the period of January – June 2012, according to the UN mission in Afghanistan, there were 1195 detonations noted and 1490 improvised explosive devices were found.

The increased activity of attacks with improvised explosive devices in 2012 – 2013 implies that the operations of the international military forces and the antigovernment forces progressively destroyed the rebels' capacity of executing direct attacks. This indicates that the rebels, instead of being defeated, turned to other tactics and their continuous ability to execute serious attacks and maintain control over the local population can be noted.

2. General features of the operations with improvised explosive devices in Afghanistan⁴

Historically speaking, the first improvised explosive devices were used by the Mujahideen in the fight against the Russians. Starting six months before the invasion of the USSR in Afghanistan, on December 27 1979, the Afghan militants possessed high quantities of military equipment. There were different kinds of anti-tank mines between them. The rebels removed the explosive from several anti-tank mines and combined them with a can of cooking oil, with the purpose of creating a stronger explosion. After the detonation of the improvised explosive devices, the users would use weapons to "open fire", like automatic rifles and rocket grenades, with the purpose of continuing the attack. Since 2001, the Taliban and other antigovernment elements used improvised explosive devices in the fight against the international military forces and the Afghan forces, but not against civilian targets. The increased use of improvised explosive devices indicates the determination of the rebels to avoid victims in conventional armed conflicts. The improvised explosive devices became a weapon which gives an advantage and whose effects are the main cause of victims. Currently, in Afghanistan the improvised explosive devices can be made of any kind of material and designed in such a way that they can kill or seriously wound the wanted target, kill or incapacitate their victims. Considering the small number of asphalt roads in Afghanistan, it is relatively easy to set up any kind of device without any track.

2.1 Attacks with use of improvised explosive devices

In the last couple of years, the engagement of extremists and antigovernment elements whose acting is spread across the territory of Afghanistan, has led to an improvement in the tactics of the attack in several cases on a very high technological, operative and executive level. The complexity of some attacks indicates an increased level of training in camps and improved availability of sophisticated conventional weaponry, reforming the way of executing the attack, as well as a highly developed logistic support - the infiltration with using vehicles, which are completely identical to those of the international security forces, uniforms of the operatives – perpetrators of the attacks which are identical with those worn by the international forces and the members of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Afghanistan. The identity documents and passports used to infiltrate the attackers are very high quality copies. On the basis of the analysis of the extremist attacks in the last 10 years used in Afghanistan, the most efficient has been identified as the tactic called "complex attack". According to the definition of the UN mission in Afghanistan, "a complex attack" is an intentional and coordinated attack which uses a suicidal improvised explosive device (ex. car-bomb, suicide bomber

⁴ Lankford, A.: "Could Suicide Terrorists Actually Be Suicidal?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34 (2011), 337-366; Ronald W. Maris.

etc.), with more than one attacker and more than one kind of weapon and explosive device (ex. a suicide bomber armed with a rocket launcher). All three elements must be present in the attacks, so that it can be considered “complex”.

2.2 Potential indicators of the improvised explosive devices

The attacks with improvised explosive devices can occur at any time. These means are mainly set during the night when the visibility is limited. Even when the improvised explosive device does not kill or wound the victim, the danger complicates the movement of different convoys of the security forces, the international organization, the UN and civilians. Up to date analyses indicate that the networks controlled by the extremists, including the Taliban, are multilevel. They include financiers, logistic experts, experts for improvised explosive devices and trainers. At the bottom of the ladder are those that set the bombs, usually farmers and shepherds paid 10\$ or less to dig holes or be engaged as observers.

Indicators for potential improvised explosive devices are as follows:

- Wires. Electrical wires, batteries, traps, cables etc.
- Markers. Markers are used to activate the improvised explosive device at the right time. Usually, capacities are needed to be used as markers. When the vehicle passes the marker, the operator of the improvised explosive device can activate the device at the right time.
- Shapes of objects that are unusual for that environment.
- Unexploded explosive device
- Vehicles: abandoned vehicles, war equipment, weapons, uniforms, documents
- Terrain abnormality: Footprints that suddenly stop, fresh holes, new dust, lots of stones are indicators that someone buried something there recently, which can be an improvised explosive device.
- Unusual vehicle behavior: The vehicles behave unusually, follow the convoys or are far ahead of them, a car parked on the side of the road with activated turn signals are also indicators that something is not right.
- Road barriers: The man-made road barriers can be set so they can obstruct the vehicles or direct the convoy before the attack with an improvised explosive device.
- Changes in the way of life: Sudden absence of playing children, normal traffic course and other daily activities can be an indicator that something is going to happen.

2.3 Possible locations for setting improvised explosive devices

Possible locations for setting improvised explosive devices are the following:

- Roads as a main or secondary communication, unpaved roadsides, the devices can also be buried under the road surface, in the vehicle tires of the Afghan security forces and the international military forces, or in the channels for underground cables under the road.
- Road holes. The improvised explosive devices can be set in the holes of the road, inside, around or under any kind of package or cargo.

Locations that are identified as especially suitable for setting improvised explosive devices in Afghanistan are:

- Soft sand
- Sharp parts
- Riverbeds, channels for underground cables
- On hillsides or through them



Picture 11 – Examples for set improvised explosive devices on the road

2.3 Roads of delivery of the improvised explosive devices to Afghanistan

The delivery of the improvised explosive devices to Afghanistan can be from Pakistan, Iran or the former USSR countries. According to the information from JIEDDO (Pentagon's Joint IED Defeat Organization – organization for fighting the improvised explosive devices), Pakistan is the source of 80% of the bombs in Afghanistan, which are domestic and based on fertilizers that cause 90% of the victims from the members of the international military forces. The porous border with Pakistan is a big problem in the fight against terrorism. Almost all devices found in the southern provinces Helmand and Kandahar contain explosives made of ammonium nitrate. The most common form of domestic explosive is ANFO, which is a combination of ammonium nitrate fertilizer and diesel fuel, which makes it highly explosive. Although it is not legal in Afghanistan, it is still produced in Pakistan in large quantities and smuggled across the border. There are collaborative efforts of the security forces to discover and prevent the smuggling of fertilizer with calcium ammonium nitrate (CAN) from Pakistan to Afghanistan. Almost 80% of the improvised explosive devices in Afghanistan contain domestic explosive, mainly CAN which is smuggled from Pakistan. On many security forums in Afghanistan, Iran is accused of supplying weapons for the Afghan rebels, including the explosively formed penetrator (EFP). This type of improvised explosive device, according to the available information, was successfully used by the Shiite militants against armored vehicles (as it is previously stated, there are no confirmed reports of using the EFP on the territory of Afghanistan). What has been found, according to the ISAF sources, is commercially manufactured Iranian merchandise like batteries and bulb wires. It is known that some of the components necessary to create an improvised explosive device come through the transparent borders of the former Soviet Union. There are some presumptions that some commercial explosives used by the rebels are manufactured in the countries of the former Soviet Union, where the weapon industry is well developed.

2.4 Most distinctive attacks in Kabul with the use of improvised explosive

Devices as part of the tactics, techniques and procedures of the extremists.

The following table shows the suicide attacks in Kabul executed in the period between December 2012 and June 2013, with the use of improvised explosive devices.

DATE	DAY	TIME	TARGET	EXTREMIST TACTIC
December 2012		19:00	The head of the national security directorate	1 suicide bomber (explosives in the body – rectal part)
16 January 2013	Wednesday	12:12	National security directorate	Combined attack: 1 car-bomb + 6 suiciders
21 January 2013	Monday	05:50	Main headquarters of the traffic police	5 suiciders
27 February 2013	Wednesday	07:30	Afghan army – employee transport bus	1 suicider
9 March 2013	Saturday	09:00	Ministry of Defense	1 suicider
16 May 2013	Thursday	08:00	ISAF Convoy	1 car bomb
24 May 2013	Friday	16:05	International migration organization of the UN	combined attack: 1 car-bomb + 4 suiciders
10 June 2013	Monday	04:40	ISAD camp on the north-eastern end of the international Kabul airport	7 suiciders
11 June 2013	Tuesday	16:14	High Court in Kabul	1 car-bomb
25 June 2013	Tuesday	06:30	President palace in Kabul	8 suiciders
2 July 2013	Tuesday	04:33	Logistic camp „Pinnacle“ in Kabul	Combined attack: 1 car-bomb + 3 suiciders
25 November 2014	Tuesday	06:30	Kabul	Magnet bomb
11 December 2014	Thursday	07:15	Kabul	Suicide bomber



Picture 12 – The attack on June 11, 2013, which caused 17 victims and 40 wounded, but also damage on 48 vehicles



Picture 13 – The attack on November 25, 2014 in Kabul



Picture 13 – The attack on December 11, 2014 in Kabul

Conclusion and recommendations

One of the leading threats presented in this paper is the use of improvised explosive devices through reputed modalities of production on the territory of Afghanistan. As stated, the potential danger of improvised explosive devices is still present, because their use still remains the most practiced tactic of the extremists and antigovernment elements. It has been shown that it is one of the effective ways of intimidation, where the psychological effect of the incidents with improvised explosive devices on the local population is unmatched, despite the efforts of the international military presence and the Afghan national security force to fight these events. On the basis of the reported statistical data, it is concluded that the improvised explosive devices continue to be the largest threat that the civilians, the international military forces and the Afghan security forces face in Afghanistan. The trend of large numbers of civilian victims and victims from the members of the security forces in Afghanistan confirm the data presented by this study, covering the period 2012-2014. Further analysis of the statistical data points out that the improvised explosive devices were the greatest killer of Afghan children, men and women in 2011, taking the lives of 967 civilians or nearly one of three civilian victims (32%) killed in the conflict. The improvised explosive devices were the reason behind 41% of civilian victims related to the attacks of the antigovernment elements. As stated, even in 2012 the improvised explosive devices remained to be the biggest threat for civilians and that trend continued in the first half of 2013, which contributes to the most important incidents stated in the paper.

The activities which are the basis of any kind of initiative in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan include:

- Building the required capacity through training and education, as well as equipping the security forces in direction of discovering the improvised explosive devices and preventing terrorist activities.

- Establishing an elite antiterrorist unit, which will be adequately equipped and financed by the government with the purpose of dislocating the terrorists in the country, through special operations for catching and eliminating the extremists who are inclined to violence.

- Improving the legal capacities and adopting a strong and sustainable strategy for the security forces, led by investigating and informative acting in direction of identifying the threats which are multidimensional and international in their nature, such as terrorism, through the exchange of information and coordination between the countries in the region.

- Identifying the threats, vulnerability and risk evaluation and a wide-range concept of security management, which must be integrated in the process of building the capacities of the security forces with the purpose of addressing the phenomenon of terrorism from the perspective of risk management.

- Implementation of sanctions against the persons, business and financial entities in the region, identified as facilitators in the transfer of cash for the terrorists through their internal financial systems with the purpose of money laundering.

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