

Afghanistan War IED Coalition Deaths 2001-2014

IEDs caused 50.4% of Coalition combat deaths

From 2001 to the end of 2014, NATO/ISAF coalition forces suffered 1,401 deaths from IEDs, or 50.4 percent of their total losses in combat. In the period from 2008 to 2011, IEDs fatalities amounted to between 58 percent and 61 percent of the coalition losses. Data is unavailable regarding the number of wounded from IEDs, or the casualties among the Afghan forces.

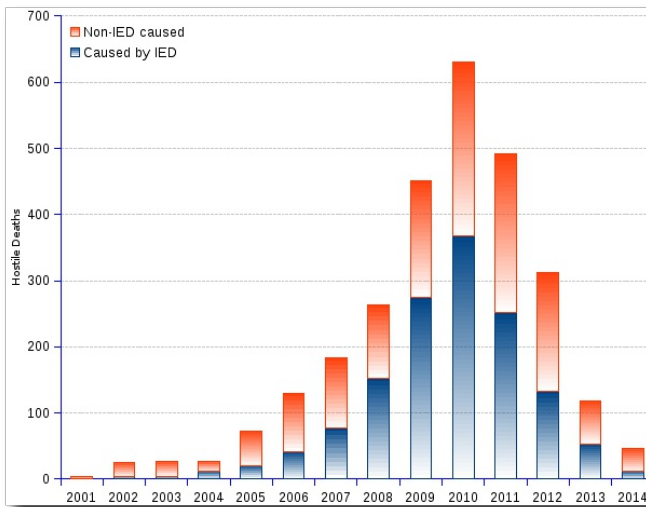


Fig. 1: Afghan War: NATO/ISAF deaths, IED- and non-IED caused, 2001-2014.

Insurgents learned from US military

Improvised Explosive Devices or IEDs occupy a prominent place in the gallery of lethal artifacts brought to Middle East and Central Asia by the US military. Iraq insurgents probably learned how to manufacture the deadly devices from the electronically accessible US Army Technical Manual TM 31-210. They hurriedly improved on the basic American recipes, building a succession of harder to detect, more potent and easier to use contraptions. Iraqi know-how was successfully transferred to Afghanistan and continuously enhanced, both technically and tactically, thus turning IEDs into a most effective weapon in the hands of the Taliban fighters.

Prior to 2011, US commanders in Afghanistan worried most about insurgent use of IEDs, including roadside bombs. In January 2010, President Karzai issued a decree banning importation of fertilizer chemicals (ammonium nitrate) commonly used for the roadside bombs. The ban was reportedly circumvented for certain civilian uses, and the material kept flowing into Afghanistan from production plants in Pakistan. Some insurgents have used bombs hidden in turbans — the latter are generally not searched.

Such a bomb killed former President Rabbani on 20 September 2011 and President Karzai's cousin Hashmat Karzai on 29 July 2014. A suicide bomber who wounded the intelligence chief Asadullah Khalid in December 2012 had explosives implanted in his body.

US Efforts to Defeat IEDs

Emerging as an unanticipated wartime hazard, IEDs demanded ad-hoc responses. These consisted mainly of setting up emergency programs to develop IED-resistant armor for land vehicles, and safer and more sensitive IED detection systems. The US Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Fund (JIEDDF), set up in FY2006 with a USD 2.0 billion appropriation to cover the research and procurement costs to counter IEDs, received a

total of 9.3 USD billion from 2009 to 2015. US Congress has also provided appropriations in a lump sum to meet the IED challenge — the largest annual appropriation was the USD 16.8 billion to a newly established Mine Resistant Ambush Program (MRAP) account —. Equivalent data for the other coalition members could not be found.

This level of spending on countering IEDs explains only partially the decrease of IED deaths. The latter's variation is mostly explained (up to 65 percent) by the variation of the number of ISAF forces engaged — US "boots on the ground" went from 10,000 in 2001, to 20,000 in February 2005, 45,000 in May 2009, 68,000 in November 2009, 98,000 in September 2010, 100,000 in May 2012, 66,000 in March 2013, and 33,000 in March 2014.

Shaky Prospects

Overall, after 13 years of war, and despite the official reassurances dispensed by NATO/ISAF leaders, Afghan security remains an empty promise now and in the foreseeable future. On December 2013, a US National Intelligence Estimate reported that, even with continued international force support, Afghan integrity is likely to erode significantly by 2017. An "Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces," released February 2014 by the US Center for Naval Analyses, says, "We conclude that the security environment in Afghanistan will become more challenging after the drawdown of most international forces in 2014, and that the Taliban insurgency will become a greater threat to Afghanistan's stability in the 2015-2018 timeframe than it is now."

David and Goliath

What can a best-in-class army do to succeed


against a bunch of rugged fighters like the Afghan insurgents? Numerical superiority does not seem to be decisive. By late 2014, the total foreign forces in Afghanistan were about 42,000: 29,000 US and 13,000 partner forces, not including thousands of mercenaries assigned to security, maintenance and other support functions. Afghan insurgents went up to 25,000 Taliban fighters, including about 3,000 Haqqani and 1,000 HIG, plus about between 50-100 Al Qaeda members. Roughly a ratio of two to one. Notwithstanding, the insurgents get the upper hand.

Money does not make the grade either. The per-US troop cost in Afghanistan rose from USD 580,000 in 2005, to USD 820,000 in 2008, to USD 910,000 in 2011, to USD 3.9 million in 2015 (as per FY2015 budget request). This growth in Afghanistan is steeper than in Iraq in terms of both dollars and rate of increase, without delivering any favorable results worth mentioning.

Industrial and military might of the engaged nation does not turn the scale either. Forget the allies, the US alone are the world's largest economy, rely on 4,217,412 people reaching military age annually, command a defense budget of USD 612.5 billion, own 34,107 tanks and armored vehicles, 1,934 self-propelled guns, 1,791 towed-artillery, 1,330 multiple-launch rocket systems, a total aircraft of 13,683 including 914 attack helicopters, and a naval strength of 473 war vessels, including 10 aircraft carriers. Well, Afghan fighters jeer at them.

Lessons Learned

Friendly, defense-conscious countries, currently wasting two to four percent of their GDP with their military forces, should rather try and learn from the David-against-Goliath Afghan re-enactment. Expensive aircrafts,

land systems, and sophisticated technological weaponry can surely fill the pockets of armament suppliers, but they definitely drain the nation's resources without securing any significant advantage on the battleground. 

Afghanistan War NATO/ISAF Coalition Military Deaths caused by IEDs ¹ Status as of end of 2014				
Period	Caused by IED	Non-IED	Total	Percent
2001	0	4	4	0.0%
2002	4	21	25	16.0%
2003	3	23	26	11.5%
2004	12	15	27	44.4%
2005	20	53	73	27.4%
2006	41	89	130	31.5%
2007	78	106	184	42.4%
2008	152	111	263	57.8%
2009	275	176	451	61.0%
2010	368	262	630	58.4%
2011	252	240	492	51.2%
2012	132	180	312	42.3%
2013	52	66	118	44.1%
2014	12	35	47	25.5%
Total	1401	1381	2782	50.4%

¹ Improvised Explosive Devices or IEDs are munitions manufactured from seemingly innocuous locally available materials.

References :

Afghanistan: Coalition Fatalities [<http://icasualties.org/oef/>].

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Sources :

http://stats.areppim.com/stats/stats_afghanwar_ied.htm