Input of the Philippines to the Report of the Secretary-General in compliance with UN General Assembly resolution 73/67 entitled “Countering the threat posed by improvised explosive devices”

Philippine responses to the threat of IED

The rise of insurgency in the Philippines in the 1980s has been accompanied by a drastic and continuing surge in weapon stockpiling (small arms and light weapons, launchers, and improvised explosive devices or IEDs). IEDs have been used by criminals, insurgents, and terrorists to strike fear in government and civilians, and to spread extremist and radical ideologies. The problem has many parallels in other places in the international community.

Based on the report “Explosive Violence Monitor 2018 of the Action on Armed Violence (AOAV),” the Philippines is among the countries that have been most affected by explosive weapon attacks, whether air-launched, ground-launched, or IEDs. These attacks have resulted in 306 casualties, of which 192 were caused by IEDs. AOAV-recorded civilian casualties from IED incidents were perpetrated by the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), the Abu Sayyaf Group and the New People’s Army (NPA). However, 85 civilian casualties, comprising 70% of civilian casualties from IEDs, were from IED attacks where the perpetrating group was not identified.

To address this problem, the Philippines has taken various initiatives and actions, including the following:

1. The government strengthened the mechanism to counter the threat posed by IEDs through Executive Order No. 70 signed by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on 04 December 2018 and the National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NAP PCVE) adopted in July 2019 by the Philippine Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC).

Through EO No. 70, the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) was created as part of the institutionalization of the whole-of-nation approach as a government policy in attaining inclusive and sustainable peace in the Philippines. The NTF-ELCAC serves as the main venue for an inter-agency coordination to address the issues on insurgency. The Task Force was tasked to adopt a National Peace Framework to address the root causes of insurgencies and tensions as well as armed conflicts and threats in identified areas. Through the ELCAC, local government units (LGUs) develop and implement bridging programs to reach community leaders and residents in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs) in order to address their needs and educate them. Orientations about ELCAC and the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) are also conducted for local town officials.

On the other hand, the NAP PCVE is the most comprehensive, harmonized, and synchronized national strategy of the government to date to prevent and counter violent extremism and radicalization. It promotes soft and more
community-centered approaches that focus on countering the political, economic, cultural, psychosocial, and religious drivers of radicalization.

2. In addition to the NTF-ELCAC, the Philippine Government also established the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) on Counter IED, composed of relevant units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP). This IATF was created to intensify intelligence and police operations for the prevention of IED deployment, and to engage stakeholders, particularly those industries, such as agriculture and mining, that are concerned in preventing the manufacturing and use of IEDs.

As part of their prevention strategies, the IATF on Counter IED monitors inventories of mining firms in their procurement and use of blasting implements, and of fertilizer factories in their procurement of ammonium nitrate, a main ingredient in fertilizer production which can also be used in manufacturing explosives. The IATF also monitors the number and location of mining firms’ personnel who assist licensed blasters because they are the ones who may have gained knowledge and skills in the preparation and use of explosives while working with licensed blasters.

3. The Philippines enacted Republic Act No. 10697, also known as the Strategic Trade Management Act (STMA). This law provides for the monitoring and regulation in the trade of strategic goods and services to address the proliferation of IEDs and other weapons of mass destruction, and sets the penalties for violations of the STMA.

The following were the actions taken since the STMA’s enactment:

a. Establishment of the Strategic Trade Management Office (STMO);
b. Publication of the National Strategic Goods List (NSGL) that contains the list of goods and services that need to be controlled, alongside the issuance of the STMA’s Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR);
c. Conduct of the STMO of industry outreach activities on the implementation of the STMA, and publication and distribution of compliance guidelines to industry stakeholders;
d. Formation of the Security Council – Strategic Trade Management Committee (NSC-STMCom), the central authority focused on the country’s international commitment towards the promotion of a secured and safe environment for trade in strategic goods consistent with the objectives of the STMA; and

e. Identification by the NSC-STMCom of the roles of each government agency in implementing the STMA, and establishment of Sub-Committees on Technical Reachback, Risk Assessment Policy Review, and Enforcement.

4. On 22 April 2016, the National Police Commission approved the creation of the PNP Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Canine Group (EOD/K9). The group is mandated to safely dispose of all bombs and neutralize hazards from chemical, nuclear, and IEDs that pose a threat to public safety, installations
and utilities as well as to police operations and personnel, and to also conduct post-blast and crime scene investigations.

The Philippine Bomb Data Center (PBDC), established in 2005, was strengthened. It is mandated to provide technical intelligence reports to the EOD/K9 Group and other PNP units and law enforcement agencies, to establish and maintain a target list of suspected local and foreign terrorist, and gather and maintain data of all bomb related incidents.

Below are activities and program thrusts that form part of the Philippine Counter IED strategy undertaken by the PBDC:

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<td>a.</td>
<td>Trainings on Post-Blast Investigation and IED Components, Detection, Recognition and Identification for Maritime and Border Security</td>
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<td>These are capability-enhancement trainings conducted jointly with the UK Government to capacitate the field operators of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines in IED incident investigation and border security arising from explosive chemical pilferages/smuggling.</td>
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<td>b.</td>
<td>Lectures/Seminars on IED Awareness and Bomb Threat Management</td>
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<td>This effort provides awareness on IEDs and knowledge of handling bomb threats, motives behind bomb threats, police procedures in responding to bomb threats, and how to prepare a bomb incident plan. This is intended for PNP personnel, the community and stakeholders to identify their role and purpose for handling security matters.</td>
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<td>c.</td>
<td>Protocol for Explosive Related-incident Investigation</td>
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<td>This protocol serves as a comprehensive guide not only to the first responders such as the explosive ordnance disposal/bomb technicians, investigators and forensic experts, but also to every personnel involved in responding to and investigating explosives incidents especially those who operate in the field.</td>
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<td>d.</td>
<td>PNP Memorandum Circular (MC) No. 2018-031 on Counter-IED (C-IED) Strategy</td>
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<td>The PNP has been following the established C-IED Strategy developed by NATO C-IED Centre of Excellence through the initiative of the PBDC. This MC was crafted to adopt a PNP C-IED Strategy, and to provide C-IED policies to be followed, including the tasks, duties and responsibilities of the concerned offices/units of the PNP.</td>
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5. The Philippines participates in sub-regional workshops to expand the understanding and inter-operability of its agencies towards countering the threat of IEDs. One such workshop is the Sub-Regional Train-the-Trainer Workshop on Programme Global Shield held on 13-22 April 2018 in Pasay.
City, Philippines, co-hosted by the Bureau of Customs (BOC) and the World Customs Organization (WCO). This activity was participated in by South East Asia and the Pacific countries. Apart from the BOC, the Philippines was also represented by the AFP and PNP. The objective of the workshop was to provide the officers the knowledge and skills in detecting and handling precursor chemicals, which is now commonly used by terrorist groups in IED manufacturing.

The PNP likewise takes part in the South East Asia Bomb Data Center Working Group Annual Forum and activities of the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation (JCLEC). These platforms are used by governments to share best practices, expertise and experiences on countering emerging threats posed by IEDs, as well as to collaborate and cooperate on capacity building programs.

6. The Philippines participated in the INTERPOL Project Watchmaker Southeast Asia Working Group together with Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. The operation aims to detect the movement of those personalities (bombers and cohorts) listed in the project watchmaker database including the shipment of explosives and explosives precursors with the use of available INTERPOL search systems, such as the Fixed Interpol Network Database/Mobile Interpol Network Database, Facial Recognition System, Fingerprint Identification System and Chemical Detection Kits.

7. Through national instrumentalities such as the NTF-ELCAC and the IATF on Counter IED, law enforcement agencies, particularly the AFP and the PNP, which are at the forefront in the fight against the proliferation of IEDs, are able to conduct programs, in partnership with LGUs and non-government organizations (NGOs), to address the problem of IEDs from the level of the grassroot communities.

The AFP, through the Philippine Army, conducts programs in local communities to strengthen their military and civilian campaigns against insurgency. To cite an example, the 602nd Brigade in Kidapawan City conducts programs such as promoting an IED-free community, in coordination with the LGU, in an effort to neutralize local insurgent groups like the BIFF. As part of this program, they encourage each LGU to adopt a K-9 unit, and encourage local business and establishment owners to install closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras. They also spearhead efforts to settle clan wars within the community to prevent further armed conflict.

The PNP conducts its own efforts and awareness campaigns, both within the organization and within the community under their jurisdiction. To cite an example, in a recent incident of IED-planting by the NPA in a local village in Agusan del Sur in Mindanao, Southern Philippines, the Commander of the Philippine Army's 401st Infantry Brigade called for the cooperation and vigilance of the public to cooperate with their existing checkpoints and procedures established for the protection of the people from both the threat of the insurgent group's attacks and the health threat of COVID-19.
The use of IEDs is a clear violation of international humanitarian law, and, consequently, of Republic Act 9851 or “An Act Defining and Penalizing Crimes Against Humanitarian Law, Genocide, and Other Crimes Against Humanity, especially on the use of weapons prohibited in warfare such as landmines.” However, domestic insurgent groups in the Philippines are taking advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic situation to continue keeping and planting IEDs in local villages as part of their communist insurgency attacks against the Philippine Government.

The Philippines is able to implement measures on countering the threat posed by IEDs by enacting the appropriate local statutes, ensuring that the proper mechanisms are in place, and institutionalizing a whole-of-nation approach. More importantly, by enabling mechanisms that allow law enforcement agencies to conduct local programs in partnership with local communities, the Philippines is able to address and combat this issue from the grassroots level.

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REFERENCES:


