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Peacemakers Along the DMZ: Non-Self Destruct Landmines in the Republic of Korea

The need for landmines in Korea will remain the same without a change in the terrain or the proximity of either the threat or the enemy, unless we successfully find a viable, fully fielded alternative.

by LTC Albert Marin, Assistant Chief of Staff of the Plans and Operations Division, U.S. Forces, Korea, and Capt Michael Litzelman, Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Officer with Special Operations Command, Korea

Introduction

AP landmines have caused thousands of deaths and injuries to innocent civilians and peacekeeping forces long after the military conflict came to an end. They have prevented economies from growing and contributed to political and societal breakdown throughout the world. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Canada, who spearheaded the 1997 Treaty on Ban Landmines, have framed the problem as a humanitarian issue: the world's only superpower, the United States, has called for exceptions to the treaty based on legitimate concerns of national security. The United States refused to sign the treaty due to legitimate military and national security requirements.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported that the United States has ratified a measure to protect civilians from weapons of war, known as the Protocols of the Geneva Convention of 1977, which "reaffirmed and refined principles of humanitarian law mandating that armed conflicts be conducted so as to inflict a minimum of suffering. The use of weapons causing unnecessary suffering or superfluous injury and whose damaging effects are disproportionate to their military purpose was prohibited, and parties in a conflict were mandated to distinguish between civilians and combatants. According to the Convention, landmines could be directed only at military objectives, with all feasible precautions taken to protect civilians. Remotely delivered munitions would not be used unless their locations were accurately recorded or fitted with an effective neutralizing mechanism. Records verifying the location of minefields were mandated..." (ICRC 1996).

The United States ratified the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) Amended Mines Protocol in May 1999. It required that mine fields containing non-self destructing AP mines be marked and monitored and that all AP mines be marked and deactivatable by standard detection equipment. John T. Jessell claims that these restrictions are consistent with the standard operating procedures of the U.S. Armed Forces, and that it strikes an appropriate balance between humanitarian concerns and military requirements (Tressell 2000). While landmines continue to main and kill large numbers of civilians around the world, they can, through detection, prevent war, in particular by protecting American and South Korean forces and civilians from being attacked by North Korea, thereby avoiding thousands of potential casualties.

An argument for keeping the mine option is that the mines are manageable and can be regulated so that they maintain a military legitimacy and until they become incriminated against civilians (Rosenfeld 1995). Although most of the minefields that compose the Korean Barrier System (KBS) have been installed by Republic of Korea (ROK) forces, some have existed as far back as the Korean War. Infrequently, spring floods may move some of the landmines from the DMZ to outlying areas. Occasionally casualties occur from mines inserted during the war that were not marked or are not included in the DMZ. Soldiers are also rarely injured or killed while patrolling in the DMZ from these unmarked mines. The ROK Army upgrades, maintains and repairs the obstacles and barriers, marking the minefields. This continued maintenance has enormously benefited the South Korean populace. If North Korea does attack, the South could use the Seoul corridor, as it did during the Korean War. This natural condition is expected to benefit South Korea.

What nations and groups seem to use them because they are a cheap and ready accepted weapon because forces know that they are an easy way to protect and control national borders and territories. Stephen Biddle believes that landmines serve an important purpose for the military. They enable defensive positions to be held successfully by smaller forces, permitting commanders to use their available resources more efficiently. Mines are used to force attackers to reduce frontage or to direct those relations into prepared engagement areas where defensive weapons can be cited for maximum effect. They increase an attacker's losses, both by inflicting direct damage on a defending line of troops and vehicles and by inducing attackers to slow down in the presence of enemy fire. The demolition of the enemy, force a military force to move with extreme caution and reduce military efficiency (Biddle 1994). Overall, mines provide an adequate protection to military personnel in the field.

The constant and long-term threat that North Korea poses to the ROK demands the enduring protection afforded by NDS ATL and APL. We remain at arm's length, not peace the military situation between North Korea and the ROK has not changed. In fact, the North Korea military continues to grow in size, and improve by acquiring modern equipment, and it continues to increase the majority of its force in proximity to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). All of these actions potentially reduce warning time of a North Korean attack, further necessitating constant readiness. We continue to need NDS ATL and APL until acceptable alternatives are fielded and in place.

United Nations Command/Combined Forces Command (UNC/CFC) plans depend heavily on the extensive employment of tactical obstacles to disrupt, turn, fix and block enemy mounted maneuvers in ways that enhance direct and indirect fire systems. The combat multiplication that the Korea Barrier System (KBS) affords our defending forces is fundamental in halting an attack north of Seoul with the force currently available. Mixed mine fields consisting of both NDS ATL and APL are the backbone of the KBS. The effectiveness of these mixed mine fields is not derived from the ATL alone. It is erroneous to consider ATL as a pure system; they are doctrinally and pragmatically inseparable from their APL counterpart. Any discussion of a war plan requirement for APL also carries an implicit requirement for APL ATLs are rarely employed without accompanying APL.

NDS ATLs enable the Commander to maintain an appropriate level of high readiness by having a portion of the mines installed today with minimal risk to non-

Gay Corinthians. The overwhelming majority of mine fields are in the General Out-Post Line (GOP) and the Forward Edge Line (FEA).

The KBS is a critical component in support of the combined forces command (CFCC) for the Defense of the Korean Peninsula. The Republic of Korea (ROK) is very skilled in the employment and construction of the KBS. ROKs for every mine are pre-buried marked and fitted with a molder of the Battle Area (BA) areas which are not accessible to noncombatants. Maintaining installed mine fields along the GOL forces are employed to complete the defensive preparations of the remaining FEAs in minimal time if hostilities occur. Again, the planning is based on the premise that we will get 1-3 days of unsupported warning of a North Korea attack. Without the existing mine fields being installed, there is absolutely no way that they could be installed in 24-72 hours. Further, the mine fields along the GOL serve as a viable and real demonstration of UNCCFs readiness and resolve to defend the ROK against aggression.

Non-Self Destruct Landmines (NSDLs), Self-Destruct Landmines (SDLs)

NDS ATLs are employed to achieve three primary functions. First, NDS ATLs are used to fix, disrupt or block an enemy's advance and to maintain an appropriate level of high readiness by having a portion of the mines installed today with minimal risk to noncombatants. The overwhelming majority of mine fields are in the General Out-Post Line (GOP) and the Forward Edge.
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