

Threat Tactics Report: North Korea versus the United States



US Army TRADOC G-2
ACE Threats Integration
Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas

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Executive Summary

- A North Korean regular infantry division is the most likely type of division a US unit would face on the Korean peninsula. While the Korean People's Army (KPA) fields armor and mechanized units, the number of regular infantry units far exceeds the other types (pg 3).
- KPA offensive operations include the heavy use of artillery with chemical munitions; a primary focus of attacks on combat support (CS), combat service support (CSS), and command and control (C2) units; and deep operations conducted by KPA special-purpose forces (SPF) (pgs 3–4, 11–16, 21–23).
- KPA defensive operations focus on the elimination of enemy armor through the heavy use of artillery; battalion, regiment, and division antitank kill zones; and the use of counterattack forces at all levels above battalion-sized units (pgs 16–19, 23–26).
- While US forces will face KPA conventional infantry to their front, KPA SPF will initiate offensive operations in the US/South Korean rear areas to create a “second front” (pgs 15–16).
- KPA regular forces and SPF will remain in place to conduct stay-behind annihilation ambushes on CS, CSS, and C2 units passing through the passed unit's area of operations (pg 25).
- The KPA divisions are already prepared to fight US and Republic of Korea (ROK) forces today. The vehicles and equipment may be different in the future, but their tactics and techniques will be similar to those used today (pgs 10–26).
- Since 2003, the KPA has created seven divisions that are specialized to operate in urban and mountain terrain using irregular warfare techniques. It is expected that the KPA will use several techniques deemed successful in Afghanistan and Iraq against US/ROK forces (pg 20).

This (U) report was produced in accordance with (U) *Intelligence Community Directive Number 203: Analytical Standards* (Effective: Jan 2015). This TTR was coordinated with:

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon S. Cleaves'.

Jon S. Cleaves
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Purpose and Audience

TRADOC G-2 ACE Threats Integration (ACE-TI) is the source of the threat tactics series of products. The Threat Tactics Report: North Korea versus the United States (US) and the other similar products serve to describe the foreign nation's most common combat division with an order of battle, its offensive and defensive doctrine as articulated in its manuals or recent military actions, and an analysis of how this actor would fight if facing the US in the future.

This document is intended primarily for US Army training organizations, but will be applicable across the wider community of US Army Combatant Commands, Army Service Component Commands, and allied partners.

Introduction to North Korea

The United Nations (UN) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) have been at war since 1950. Even though an armistice (cease fire) was signed in 1953, over 60 years later there is still no permanent peace treaty between the two sides.¹ As part of the UN contingent, the US maintains a permanent presence in South Korea. North Korea, with a population of only 24 million people, maintains five percent of its population—1.2 million personnel—on active duty, with another 7.7 million personnel in its reserve forces.² In any war, the DPRK government will have no qualms about mobilizing its entire population against its enemies.

The DPRK espouses three primary goals, with additional second-tier objectives that support its principal aims. From Kim Il Sung, the country's founder, through Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un, North Korea's overarching intention is the unification of the entire Korean peninsula under the control of the DPRK government. While this ambition is probably not obtainable in the near future—as long as US forces remain on the peninsula—a unified Korea under the Kim family's control remains the DPRK's ultimate objective. North Korea's second primary goal is to remain an independent state free of outside interference, especially from the Western powers. North Korea's possession of a nuclear arsenal and its pursuit of missile technology is an attempt to ensure that external powers do not interfere with the DPRK's internal affairs, for fear of a nuclear reprisal. North Korea's third primary goal is for Kim Jong Un and his family to maintain its position of authority in the regime through the ideological indoctrination of the country's population. The Kim family and its supporters will likely pursue any strategy necessary to remain firmly in power.³

North Korea's strategy is focused on the control of the DPRK government by the Kim family in pursuit of the long-term goal of reunifying the entire Korean peninsula under the self-proclaimed communist government. The large military is used not only as a threat to North Korea's neighbors, but also to exercise control over its own citizens. The DPRK leverages limited military provocations to obtain diplomatic concessions at the negotiating table with South Korea, Japan, the US, and other countries. North Korea uses threats of possible war to obtain not only diplomatic concessions, but to obtain economic aid for its people. The North Korean government knows that the Western powers and South Korea do not want another active war on the peninsula, so the DPRK's threats often lead to limited success at the negotiating table. The North Korean nuclear arsenal and fear by other countries that the DPRK will initiate a nuclear

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attack often serve as the trump cards that force the DPRK's enemies to acquiesce to the Kim regime's demands.⁴

While North Korea's leaders may seem outlandish at times to the outside world, they are culturally accepted by the North Korean people. The Kim family is treated reverently and seen as almost godlike in a secular regime that brutally suppresses religious worship. Kim Il Sung cultivated a tradition of hero worship grounded in his own personality during his long tenure in power. His son, Kim Jong Il, reinforced the myth of the Kim family's iconic status during his time as the DPRK's supreme leader. The North Korean people regard their current ruler, Kim Jong Un, with almost the same awe—or are too afraid not to appear so. Those that do not support the regime or the Kim family fear exile to a labor camp—or even crueler actions—by their government. Kim family cult status is a major component of the glue that holds the DPRK together.⁵

In the past couple of years, Kim Jong Un has continued to urge his scientists to test missiles and miniaturize the country's nuclear weapons in defiance of both its enemies and allies, clearly violating international law and protocols.⁶ Both US forces and their allies must be prepared for a time when the current DPRK ruler or his successor fears the end of the North Korean regime and launches a ground war to take over South Korea, with the possible use of weapons of mass destruction. In the event of such an offensive, understanding the most likely division a US force will face on the Korean peninsula will help in defeating the Korean People's Army (KPA).

Section 1: Most Common North Korean Combat Division

The most likely division a US unit will face on the Korean peninsula will be a KPA infantry division, despite North Korea fielding one armored division, four mechanized divisions, and 15 armored brigades.⁷ The active-duty KPA contains 27 infantry divisions and 14 infantry brigades, while the KPA reserve contains 40 infantry divisions and 18 infantry brigades.⁸ While a KPA infantry division or brigade does possess some vehicles, the infantry soldiers travel primarily on foot.⁹ This does not mean that the division cannot move quickly in the mountainous terrain found on the Korean peninsula. The individual KPA soldier is taught to endure hardship, survive on scant rations, operate with few supplies or on what he can take from the enemy, and travel many miles a day on foot.¹⁰

North Korea believes that offensive operations are the decisive form of warfare and the KPA's main operational strategy is to avoid its enemy's armor and infantry units and attack CS and CSS units in the US rear areas.¹¹ The KPA believes that, without logistical support, US frontline units will collapse due to lack of supplies. This belief that Americans will quit fighting when surrounded or without a large logistical advantage dates back to the Korean War (1950–1953) and the Chinese/KPA assessment of American combat units.¹² The KPA will attempt to create an opening in the front lines with regular infantry divisions in order to pass an armored or mechanized exploitation force through to attack the US/ROK rear areas. This rear-area attack by mobile forces may be easier said than done, as the KPA is facing a severe shortage of fuel for its vehicles due to sanctions imposed on North Korea by the international community.¹³ Reports indicate that military fuel is now flooding the black market, suggesting the desperation of KPA soldiers to exchange fuel for food to avoid starvation.¹⁴ The DPRK government recently ordered its farmers to grow more cannabis instead of soybeans in order to use its oil as a military fuel alternative.¹⁵ Another source for vehicle fuel may be conversion of coal to petroleum, like Nazi Germany did when blockaded during

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World War II.¹⁶ While the DPRK maintains a wartime fuel reserve, the KPA will likely be dependent on the capture of US/ROK supplies in order to keep its vehicles operational for any extended period of time. It is estimated that the KPA does not possess enough fuel to conduct an offensive south of Seoul, South Korea, unless it captures enemy fuel depots.¹⁷ The severe fuel shortage also hinders training for mobile KPA units, reducing many of them to practicing light infantry skills. Without fuel, many of the KPA tank and mechanized divisions will, in essence, become standard infantry units, unless they succeed in capturing fuel during offensive operations into South Korea.

The standard infantry divisions will be supplemented by North Korea's most lethal forces: SPF, missile batteries, and long-range artillery units equipped with chemical weapons.¹⁸ While the US forces will be facing a conventional enemy at their front, American soldiers will need to be aware of the asymmetric threat all around them.

North Korean Infantry Division Order of Battle

The following North Korean infantry division order of battle (OB) was created using unclassified documents, beginning with the COL James M. Minnich's KPA division structure.¹⁹ Adjustments to the infantry division were made based on comparison with other documents.²⁰ The draft document was then sent out to various subject matter experts and agencies for review and comments.ⁱ

Some infantry divisions may receive addition units. This would include units assigned to operations in mountains, which would receive 160-mm mortars for additional indirect support. The best units would receive the latest equipment in the KPA inventory, to include such weapons such as AT-4 or AT-5 antitank gun missiles (ATGM) or SA-13, SA-14, or SA-16 surface-to-air (SAM) missiles. The photographs later in this section are the most prevalent weapons based on estimated inventories.²¹

ⁱ If errors are found in the unclassified OB, please send them to the author, [H. David Pendleton](#), along with the unclassified source, for inclusion in future updates of this product.

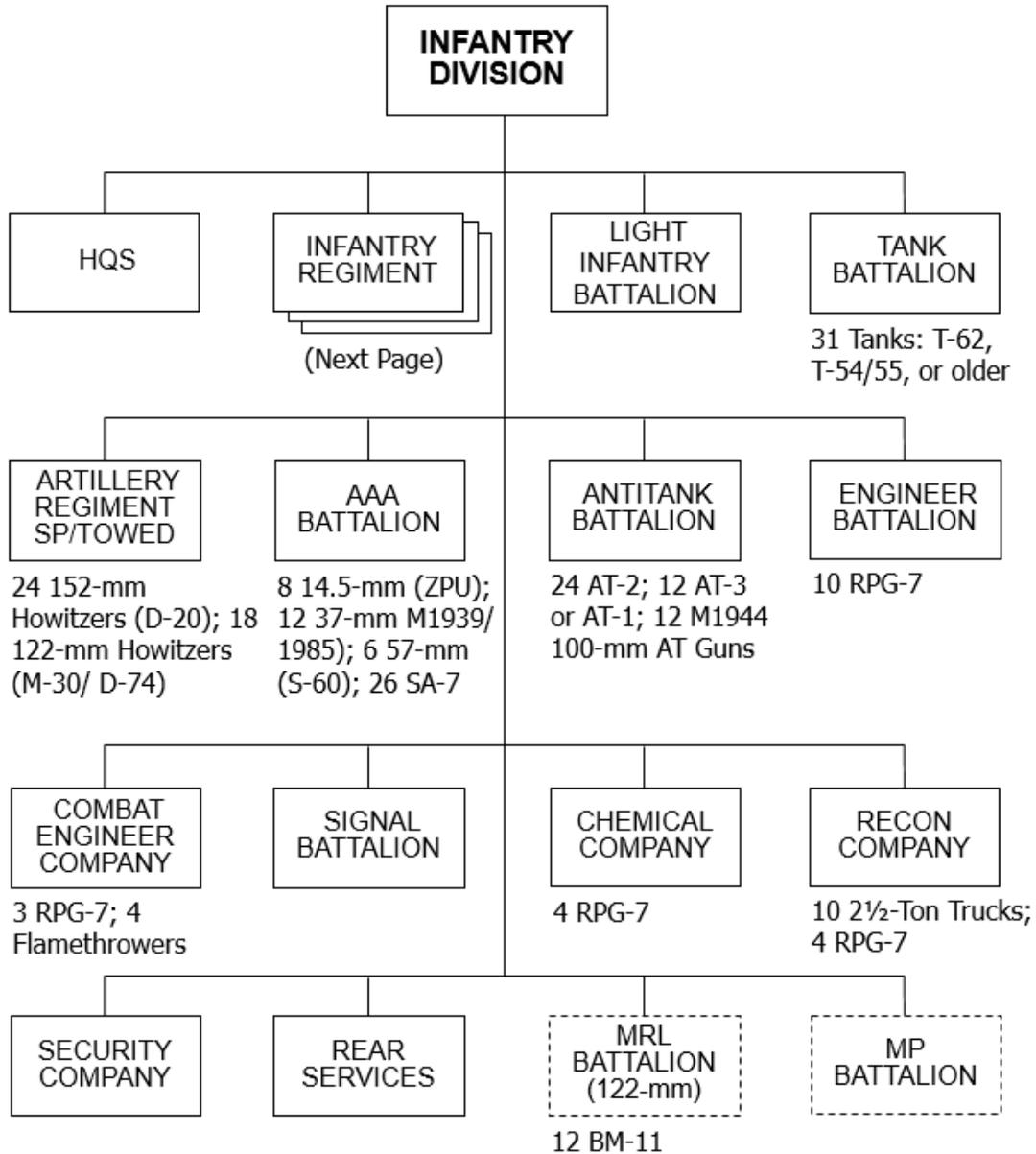


Figure 1. KPA infantry division order of battle

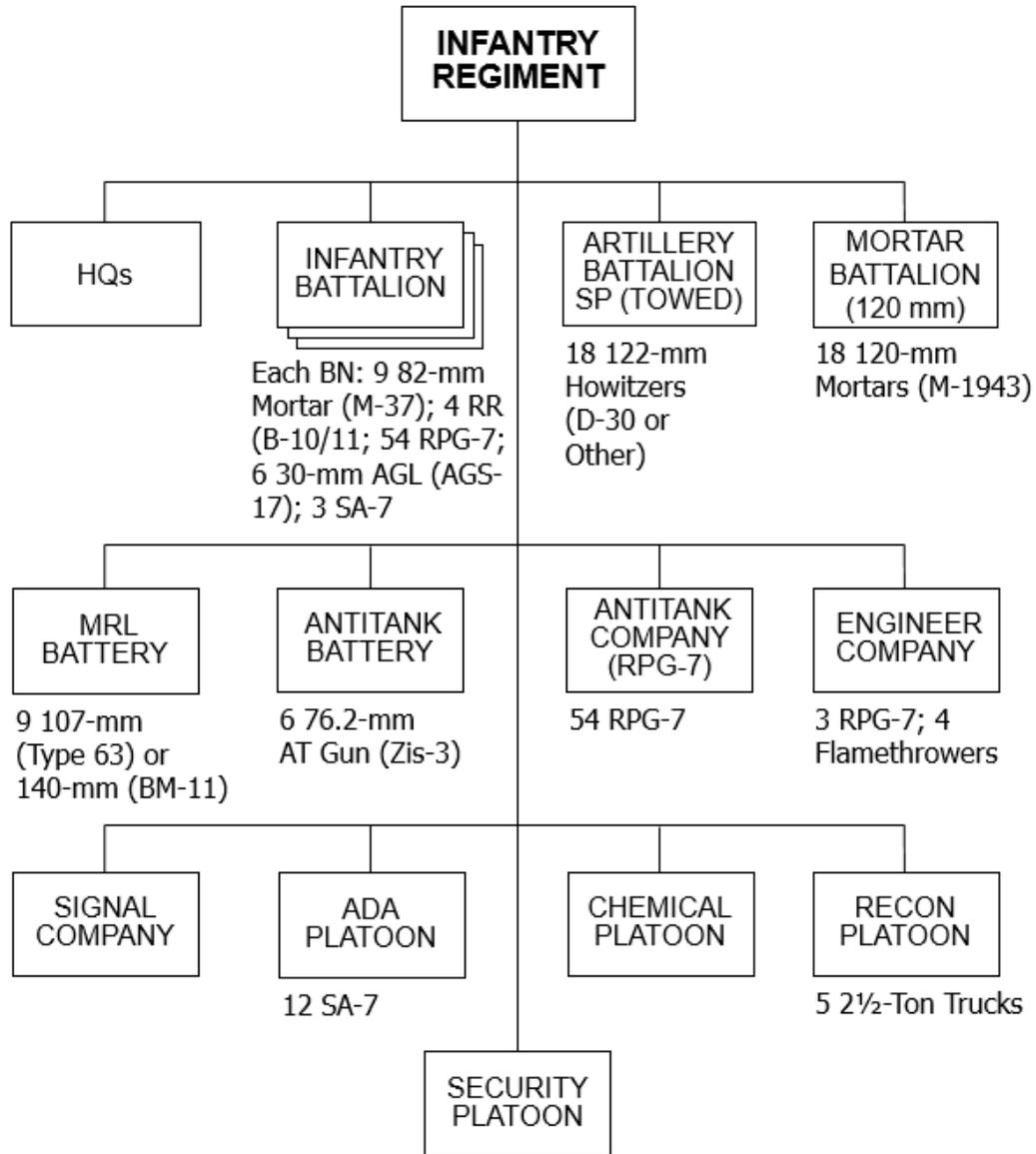


Figure 2. KPA infantry regiment order of battle



North Korean Infantry Division Major Weapon Systems

The KPA uses a variety of primarily Tier 2, 3, and 4 equipment in its units, as it rarely disposes of any weapons. The best units receive new(er) weapons and their systems are then cascaded through the lower-quality units. Some of the KPA's weapons and vehicles date back to World War II. Units will attempt to field the same type of weapon systems to reduce logistical issues. The following are some of the major weapons found in a KPA infantry division or infantry regiment.



Figure 3. T-62 tank



Figure 5. Type 59 tank



Figure 4. T-54/55 tank



Figure 6. M-1937 (D-20)
152-mm howitzer/gun



Figure 7. M-1943 (D-1)
152-mm howitzer



Figure 8. M-30
122-mm howitzer



Figure 9. D-74 (D-30)
122-mm howitzer



Figure 10. M-1944 (BS-3)
100-mm antitank gun



Figure 11. BM-11
122-mm multiple rocket
launcher (MRL)

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**Figure 12. M-1942 (ZiS-3)
76-mm antitank gun**



**Figure 13. Type 63
107-mm MRL**



**Figure 14. ZPU-2
14.5-mm anti-aircraft gun**



**Figure 15. M-1939
37-mm anti-aircraft gun**



**Figure 16. S-60
57-mm anti-aircraft gun**



**Figure 17. M-37
(82-BM-37)
82-mm mortar**



**Figure 18. M-1943
160-mm mortar**



**Figure 19. AT-3 (Sagger)
antitank gun missile (ATGM)**



Figure 20. AT-2 (Swatter) ATGM

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Figure 21. AT-1 (Snapper) ATGM



Figure 22. SA-7 (Grail) surface-to-air missile



Figure 23. B-10 recoilless rifle



Figure 24. B-10 recoilless rifle



Figure 25. AGS-17 (Plamya) automatic grenade launcher



Figure 26. RPG-7 (rifle propelled grenade) launcher

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Section 2: North Korean Division Offensive and Defensive Doctrine

The following paragraphs explore division-level actions in detail. North Korean terms will be used throughout this section. While similar to US terms, they may not convey precisely the same meaning. In addition, these terms may not correspond to those opposition force (OPFOR) terms found in [TC 7-100.2, *Opposing Force Tactics*](#). The following table gives a translation of the most used frequent North Korean military terms.

Table 1. KPA terms

North Korea/KPA Term	US Opposition Force Term (TC 7-100.2)	TC 7-100.2 Para
Anti-armor engagement area	Antitank kill zone	2-48
Anti-armor fire plan	Fire support plan	9-57
Anti-armor obstacles	Antitank minefield	12-133
Anti-armor rectangular fires	Close support fire	9-98
Antitank defense position	Complex battle position	4-19
Antitank mobile reserve	Antitank reserve	4-33
Area fires	Interdiction fire	9-99
Attack against an attacking enemy	Spoiling attack	3-90
Attack against a defending enemy	Integrated attack	3-64
Attack against a retreating enemy	Integrated attack (continuation of)	3-64
Besetment maneuver	Attack to dislocate	3-9
Buffer zone	Battle zone	2-42
Combat security area	Disruption zone	2-38
Counterattack force	Counterattack forces	4-29
Division artillery group (DAG)	No actual equivalent, but the fire support coordination center (FSCC) coordinates fire similarly to how the DAG is organized to fire as a group	9-38
Encirclement maneuver	Attack to gain control of key terrain, personnel, or equipment	3-7
First defense zone	Battle zone	2-42
Forward observers/SPF (in general and combat security areas)	Combat security outposts (CSOP)	4-112
General security area	Disruption zone	2-38

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North Korea/KPA Term	US Opposition Force Term (TC 7-100.2)	TC 7-100.2 Para
Holding maneuver	Attack to disrupt	3-10
Infiltration maneuver	Reconnaissance attack	3-193
First tactical echelon (1TE)	Assault force	3-15
Penetration maneuver	Attack to gain freedom of movement	3-5
Regimental artillery group (RAG)	FSCC	9-41
Rolling fires	Close support fire	9-98
Second defense zone	Battle zone	2-42
Second tactical echelon (2TE)	Exploitation force	3-73
Sniper brigade cells	SPF sniper teams	15-69
Stay-behind ambush	Annihilation ambush	3-151
Third defense zone	Battle zone	2-42
Thrust maneuver	Attack to gain freedom of movement	3-5
Turning maneuver	Attack to dislocate	3-9

Division Offensive Operations

The KPA conducts three types of offensive operations based upon what activity its enemy is conducting at the time: an attack against a defending enemy, an attack against an attacking enemy, and an attack against a retreating enemy. An attack against a defending enemy requires deliberate planning and can be accomplished with or without a numerical advantage in forces over the entire defensive foe. To make an attack, the KPA requires only a 2:1 advantage at the actual point of the attack. KPA doctrine envisions the main attack advancing through a very narrow attack zone, which requires the rest of the division to disperse more widely across the remainder of the divisional front. The KPA commander's intent is to provide the appearance to the enemy unit that there is significant military force to its front in order to keep it from assisting other units.

The division's four artillery battalions are located in the division artillery group (DAG). The DAG may receive additional indirect fire assets from the corps, depending on whether the division is conducting the main or supporting attack. The DAG initiates the dispersed attack with artillery indirect fire and rockets directed at not only front line units, but also against the enemy brigade command post and brigade reserve as well. The DAG's task is to provide sufficient indirect fire support to achieve neutralization of the enemy brigade's reserve; disrupt the brigade and battalion command posts; and harass as a minimum, or neutralize if possible, the opposing front-line units.²²

The KPA conducts seven different varieties of offensive maneuvers at the divisional and lower-unit levels. A unit may conduct more than one type of maneuver within the same mission. A brief explanation of each



type provides a general overview of KPA offensive doctrine. The numbers shown in the division offensive operations graphics in Section 3 match the numbers listed in the following paragraphs.

1. Penetration Maneuver²³

Unlike US doctrine, in which a penetration is a maneuver to destroy enemy forces, a KPA penetration is conducted by a KPA first tactical echelon (1TE) unit to create a corridor for the 2TE units to pass through, in order to enable a deep attack against command, CS, and CSS units in the enemy's rear areas.

2. Thrust Maneuver²⁴

KPA thrust maneuvers are concentrated across a narrow front to pierce a strong point and pass a main-effort 2TE that will exploit the attack in one of four missions: attack the flank or rear of the unit just pierced, attack the flank or rear of an adjacent unit, assist in the passage of a turning or besetment maneuver force, or open a blocked maneuver corridor.

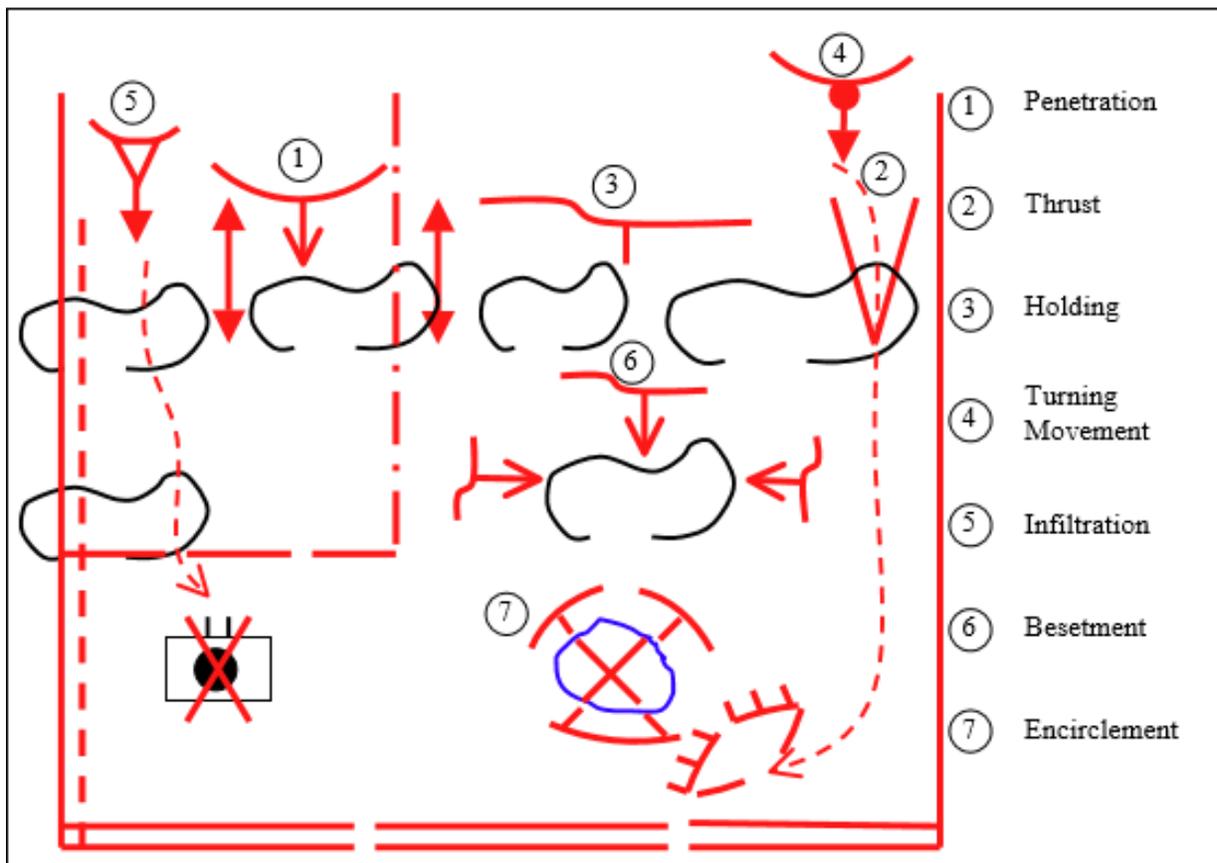


Figure 27. KPA offensive forms of maneuver



3. Holding Maneuver²⁵

KPA holding maneuvers are feints or demonstrations across a broad front that fix a larger enemy force with a smaller KPA force as the KPA main effort penetrates or thrusts along a narrow front. Ultimately, the holding unit will attempt to cause the commitment of the enemy reserve away from the KPA main effort.

4. Turning Maneuver²⁶

KPA turning maneuvers occur when a unit advances through enemy lines and changes directions to conduct an encirclement or besetment against a rear unit—often the enemy's reserve.

5. Infiltration Maneuver²⁷

KPA infiltration maneuvers are stealth movements through enemy lines to establish rear-area attack positions. In most division-level offensive operations, four of the six light infantry companies assigned to the division's light infantry battalion will infiltrate into the enemy's rear in order to attack his enemy's command and control centers and artillery units or to secure chokepoints in order to facilitate the movement of 2TE units.

6. Besetment Maneuver²⁸

KPA besetment maneuvers destroy enemy strong points or units. Employing a 3:1 force ratio advantage, the KPA conducts four types of besetment: the front and one flank, the front and two flanks, the front and rear, or from all four sides. Any side not assaulted by maneuver or direct fire will be covered by artillery.

7. Encirclement Maneuver²⁹

KPA encirclement maneuvers are conducted in its enemy's rear area against the retreating enemy where it can be surrounded and destroyed. The KPA believes that if a penetration or thrust is successful at the front, the enemy will withdraw and be in his most vulnerable position during the retrograde operation. A KPA division may use its entire force to conduct a successful encirclement. The KPA conducts four types of encirclements: partitioned destruction against a large force, compressed destruction against a small force, firepower destruction against forces in a narrow area, or raid destruction against enemy forces in built-up areas.

Other Assets Supporting a KPA Infantry Division

Depending on their echelon or mission, some divisions will receive additional assets. These assets may include:

Military Police Battalions: Normally assigned only to the divisions in the first echelon of the attacking force. Missions will include traffic control, prisoner collection, deserter control, identifying US/ROK special forces operating in the KPA rear areas, and general rear-area security missions.

Artillery: Due to the expected air superiority of its enemy, the KPA emphasizes the heavy use of artillery to support its infantry. North Korea fields over 14,100 artillery pieces, including multiple rocket launchers (MRLs).³⁰ Starting about five years ago, the KPA began replacing its 107-mm MRLs deployed on the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) with larger 240-mm caliber weapons.³¹ It is likely that the older weapons were transferred to reserve units or placed in storage for future combat operations, as North Korea has a habit

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of never ridding itself completely of obsolete weapon systems. It is expected that the KPA will mix chemical rounds with conventional rounds during offensive operations. North Korea may possess a stockpile of 2,500 to 5,000 tons of chemical weapons, and it is estimated that 20% of the rounds fired by forward-positioned artillery units could be chemical munitions.³²

First-echelon and most active duty infantry divisions have three organic artillery battalions: two battalions of 12 152-mm howitzers and one battalion of 18 122-mm howitzers, for 42 guns in general support. Most front-line divisions will also be assigned one battalion of 122-mm M-1992 MRLs. Each infantry brigade is supported by an organic 122-mm artillery battalion, bringing the total number of organic artillery pieces in a division to 96. When the infantry division forms a DAG, it is typically augmented with up to two additional artillery battalions from corps. Units located adjacent to the sea or rivers may be assigned 107-mm MRLs.³³

Second-echelon divisions will be assigned 4–6 artillery battalions depending on their specific missions. This artillery would most likely consist of 152-mm self-propelled (SP) artillery, 130-mm SP or towed artillery, 122-mm SP or towed artillery, or 122-mm MRLs. While batteries will field the same type of equipment, the battalion may field both SP and towed artillery.³⁴

Reserve divisions will normally be assigned four artillery battalions, either organic or in a direct support role, depending on the unit's mission. This artillery would most likely consist of 152-mm towed artillery, 130-mm towed artillery, 122-mm towed artillery, and/or 100-mm towed artillery.³⁵

Special-Purpose Forces (SPF): The KPA fields the largest SPF in the world. These SPF assets include eight strategic Reconnaissance General Bureau (RGB) battalions; a reconnaissance group comprised of 17 reconnaissance battalions; a light infantry group with twelve light infantry brigades and three sniper brigades; an air maneuver group with three airborne brigades, one airborne battalion, and two sniper brigades; and an amphibious group with three sniper brigades and two SPF maritime brigades.³⁶ Many of the tactical- and operational-level SPF units are assigned to a single command—the 11th Storm Corps. Three additional light infantry brigades are assigned directly to the KPA corps stationed along the DMZ.

Four of the eight reconnaissance battalions specialize in DMZ infiltration, with one battalion assigned to each of the four forward-deployed KPA army corps.³⁷ The forward-deployed corps and the mechanized corps receive additional reconnaissance assets from the reconnaissance group.³⁸ The soldiers assigned to the light infantry brigades typically have served four to seven years in the military and are considered very politically reliable, as they will operate 35–70 km behind enemy lines.³⁹ The sniper brigades are the KPA's most elite SPF units, and their sizes range from 3,300–4,600 personnel, depending on the number of subordinate battalions assigned.⁴⁰ Sniper brigades operate in 5–10 men cells tailored for conducting raids on command posts, communication nodes, logistics sites, potential chokepoints, or other high-payoff targets.⁴¹ The airborne brigades will infiltrate from the sky, often in small aircraft such as the AN-2 Colt; with 200 of these aircraft, the Korean People's Army Air Force (KPAAF) could transport 3,500 SPF personnel in one lift.⁴² The KPAAF also operates Mi-2 and MD-500 helicopters that could infiltrate SPF soldiers into South Korea by air.⁴³ The amphibious SPF brigades receive specialized training to infiltrate South Korea from the sea, and the KPA Navy operates over 370 amphibious assault craft ranging in size from small rubber craft, to hovercraft, to a 350-ton utility landing craft.⁴⁴ There is a maritime SPF unit

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located on each coast with enough amphibious craft to deliver 7,000 soldiers during a single lift—sufficient to deploy every single member of the maritime SPF units.⁴⁵

Table 2. KPA SPF units

SPF Unit Type	Level	Command	Number of Units	Soldiers (Estimated)
Reconnaissance Battalions	Operational or Strategic	RGB	8	4,000
Reconnaissance Brigades	Tactical or Operational	Forward-deployed corps	3 (17 Battalions)	4,500
Light Infantry Brigades	Tactical or Operational	11th Storm Corps or RGB	12	49,600
Light Infantry Brigades	Tactical or Operational	11th Storm Corps (Attached to the forward-deployed corps)	3	15,600
Sniper Brigades	Operational or Strategic	11th Storm Corps	3	16,800
Airborne Units	Operational or Strategic	11th Storm Corps	7 (includes 3 brigades, 2 sniper brigades, and 1 battalion)	30,000
Navy Sniper Brigades	Operational	RGB	2 (1 on each coast)	9,000
Amphibious Brigades (Maritime)	Strategic	11th Storm Corps	3 (13 Battalions)	5,000
Light Infantry Divisions	Tactical	11th Storm Corps	7	50,000–60,000
Deep Artillery Reconnaissance Battalions	Operational or Strategic	Strategic Rocket Command; Artillery Bureau; 518th Artillery Division; Army Corps (mechanized divisions)	11	Unknown
TOTAL				184,500+

North Korea will use its SPF units to create an unconventional “second front” for the purpose of creating confusion, panic, and paralysis for the South Korean civilians as well as the Combined Forces Command/United Nations Command combat infrastructure.⁴⁶ Some KPA SPF units may contain unit

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members that are female, speak English, or may possibly wear US or allied uniforms to enable tactical/guerrilla operations, and are unlikely to surrender when cornered.⁴⁷ These SPF elements will arrive via the air, by sea, and through underground tunnels.⁴⁸ US forces must be prepared to deal with these SPF elements in friendly rear areas while concurrently fighting conventional KPA forces to their front. See the November 2017 [Red Diamond](#) for additional information on the KPA SPF.

Division Defensive Operations

The area defense is the KPA's principal defensive tactic, which it designs around stopping the enemy's armor, as the KPA leaders consider tanks as their enemy's most lethal ground-attack weapon. The defense in depth begins with the disruption forces forward of the main defensive line in what the KPA calls the security zone. In the general security area, forward observers can call in artillery and stay-behind forces would conduct ambushes. The general security area is in front of the first echelon units, where about 1/3 of the division will dig in behind the minefields and

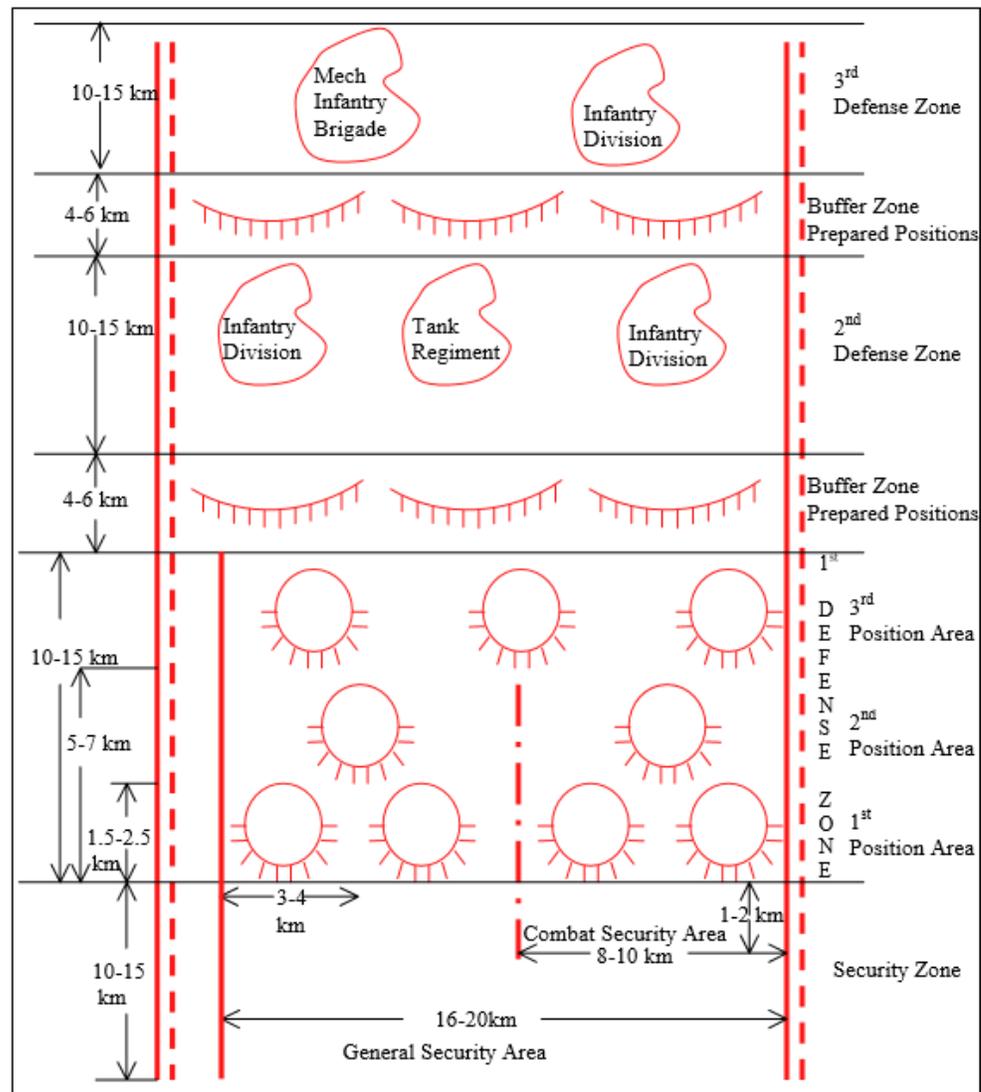


Figure 28. KPA field army area defense-zone formation

direct fire into designated kill zones. About 5/9 of the division will fight from defensive positions in the second echelon. The remaining divisional forces will serve as the division's counterattack force and antitank (AT) mobile reserve. If on the defensive, the KPA plans to fight an anti-armor battle along the



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most predictable routes that the enemy's vehicles, especially tanks, will travel. The KPA breaks down its AT defensive system into six phases: anti-armor obstacles, anti-armor fire plan, AT defensive positions, AT engagement areas, the AT reserve, and the counterattack force.⁴⁹ See Section 3 for details on what action occurs in each phase.

North Korean Underground Facilities (UGFs)

The majority of UGFs that will be encountered on the battlefield serve a military purpose, however, a threat country may be capable of building UGFs to support civilian factories. The more sophisticated threat countries will have a defensive plan for each of its UGFs.⁵⁰ Since the Korean War, North Korea has constructed over 11,000 UGFs throughout its country.⁵¹ Many of these UGFs can be found within 50 miles of the DMZ and include infiltration tunnels, hardened artillery sites (HARTS), C2 facilities, KPAAF runways, and underground nuclear test sites.⁵² The infiltration tunnels may be so large that small tanks could travel through them or 10,000–30,000 soldiers per hour could pass under the border throughout the peninsula to come up behind the US/ROK forward units.⁵³

If the KPA is forced to go on the defensive and defends just north of the DMZ, the soldiers will use the already-constructed tactical UGFs in their plans. The most numerous and dangerous of these UGFs will likely be the 200–500 HARTS located in

the western to central portion of North Korea, but there are HARTS on the east coast of North Korea as well.⁵⁴ HARTS can be manmade or a natural cave system modified for use by artillery.⁵⁵ A KPA HARTS will likely include a fire direction center (FDC) with a communication link to the integrated fires command (IFC), ammunition storage facilities, and a barracks for the UGF soldiers.⁵⁶ A KPA HARTS could contain a

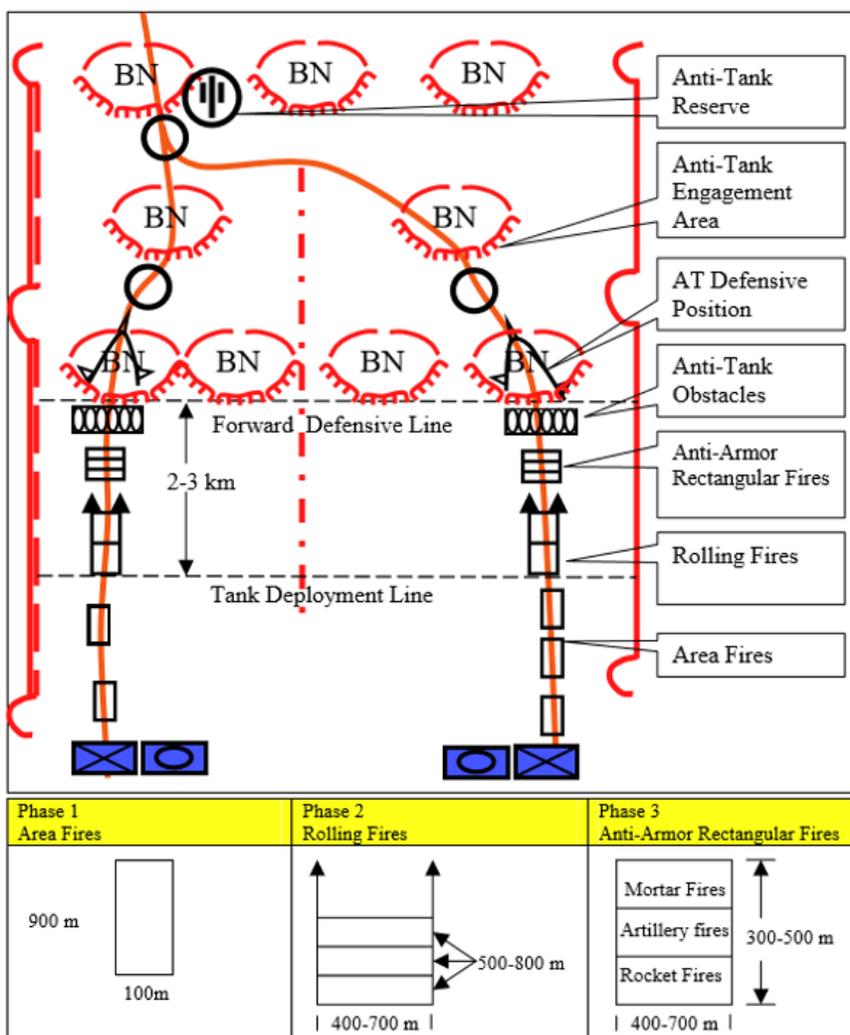


Figure 29. KPA antitank defense system



trench system, tunnels, reinforced doors, and internal self-defense measures against ground attack.⁵⁷ To protect against aerial attacks, a HARTS will likely feature a concealed anti-aircraft system such as a ZPU-2/ZPU-4, possibly mounted on an elevator system.⁵⁸ Figure 30 is a representative example of a KPA HARTS.

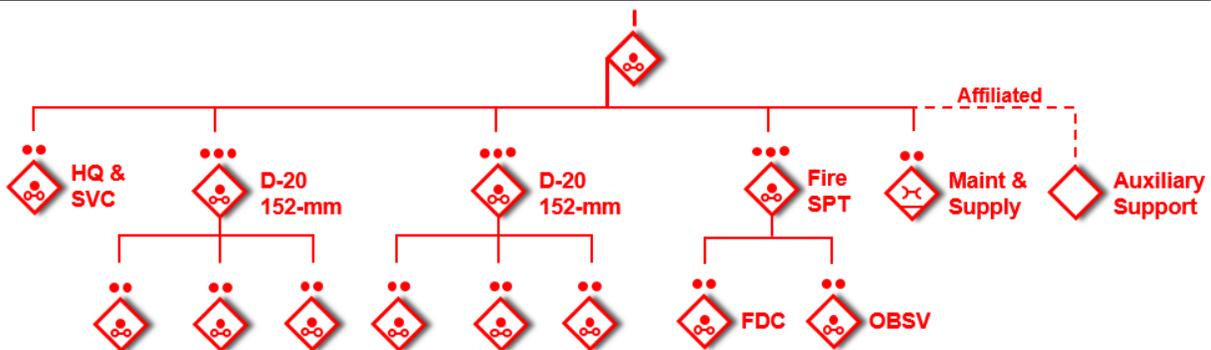
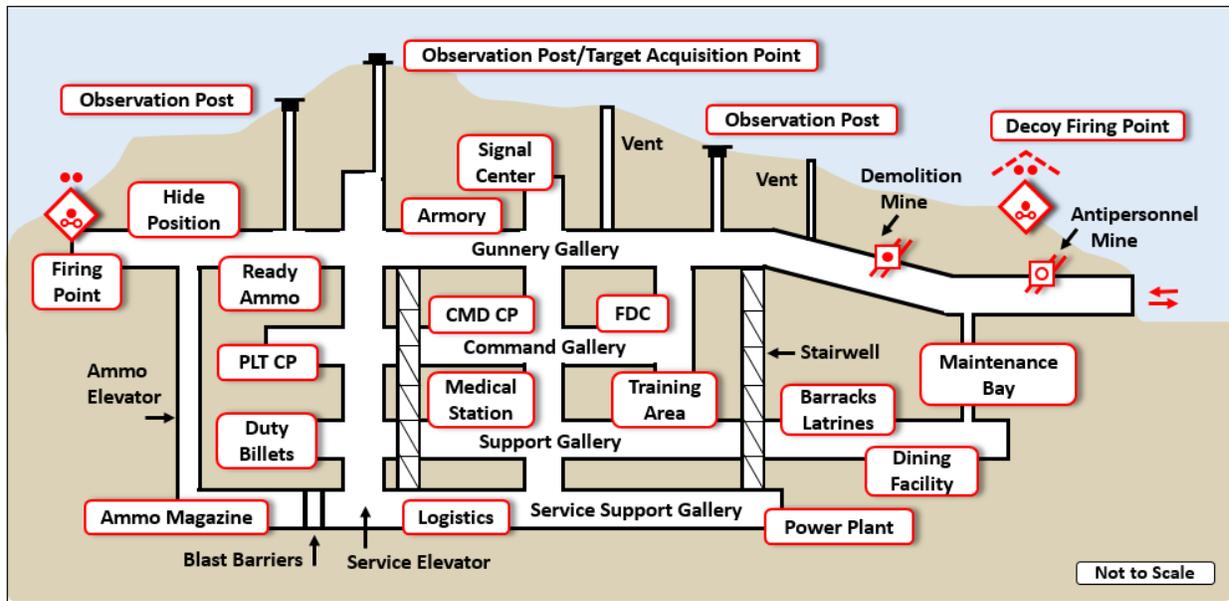


Figure 30. KPA HARTS

Defense Against Enemy Close Air Support

During Offensive Operations: The KPA will use various techniques to protect its ground forces during offensive operations to mitigate the superior joint fires of the US and ROK air forces and their more accurate artillery. Techniques may include the following:

- Avoiding the concentration of KPA ground forces until the last minute before an attack, so as not to become a lucrative target to the enemy;⁵⁹
- Conducting major troop movements at night or other periods of limited visibility in order to mitigate observation and/or destruction from enemy aerial or indirect fire weapons;⁶⁰

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- Camouflaging vehicles or units during movement or on rest breaks;⁶¹
- Staying close to enemy ground forces once engaged, so the enemy may elect not to use indirect or aerial weapons for fear of hitting allied forces;⁶²
- Using only designated weapons systems while on the move, in order to avoid revealing the presence of other units; and⁶³
- Assigning SPF units to attack airfields, artillery units, or C2 facilities, which could disrupt or influence effective indirect or aerial attacks on KPA conventional units.⁶⁴

During Defensive Operations: The KPA will use many of the techniques used during offensive operations to mitigate US/ROK joint fires superiority. In addition to these, techniques in the KPA defensive plan may include the following:

- Avoiding excessive concentration and indiscriminate dispersion of forces in defensive positions;⁶⁵
- Ensuring effective camouflage or concealment at all unit levels to avoid aerial detection and aerial/indirect fire;⁶⁶
- Emphasizing the use of UGFs, especially within 50 miles of the DMZ, to improve the survivability of its forces from aerial or indirect fires;⁶⁷
- Constructing decoy bunkers and fortifications to draw fire from enemy aircraft and artillery to induce the enemy to waste ammunition against false targets;⁶⁸
- Deploying its arsenal of up to 11,000 air defense guns of various calibers, from 14.5 mm to 100 mm, with emphasis on the protection of key forces and facilities to include any designated counterattack forces.⁶⁹ These air defense weapons will be in depth in circles around high-value targets;⁷⁰
- Establishing an aerial warning net to alert KPA forces of inbound enemy aircraft;⁷¹
- Using only designated weapons systems to avoid revealing the presence of other KPA defensive units; and⁷²
- Using SPF or bypassed units to attack enemy artillery or C2 units that pass through a KPA unit's defensive zone, in order to disrupt effective indirect fire on other KPA defensive forces.⁷³



Section 3: KPA Division versus US/ROK Forces

Fundamentally, a KPA division in the future will most likely fight the combined US/ROK forces on the Korean peninsula using the same tactics and techniques currently planned by the North Korean military. KPA doctrine is similar to old Soviet doctrine, with massive artillery fires and avoiding combat units to attack CS/CSS units in its enemy's rear area. While the equipment that the KPA fields in the future may be different than what it currently uses, a KPA division will likely attack and defend basically the same way that a current KPA unit division would do so if it went to war tomorrow.

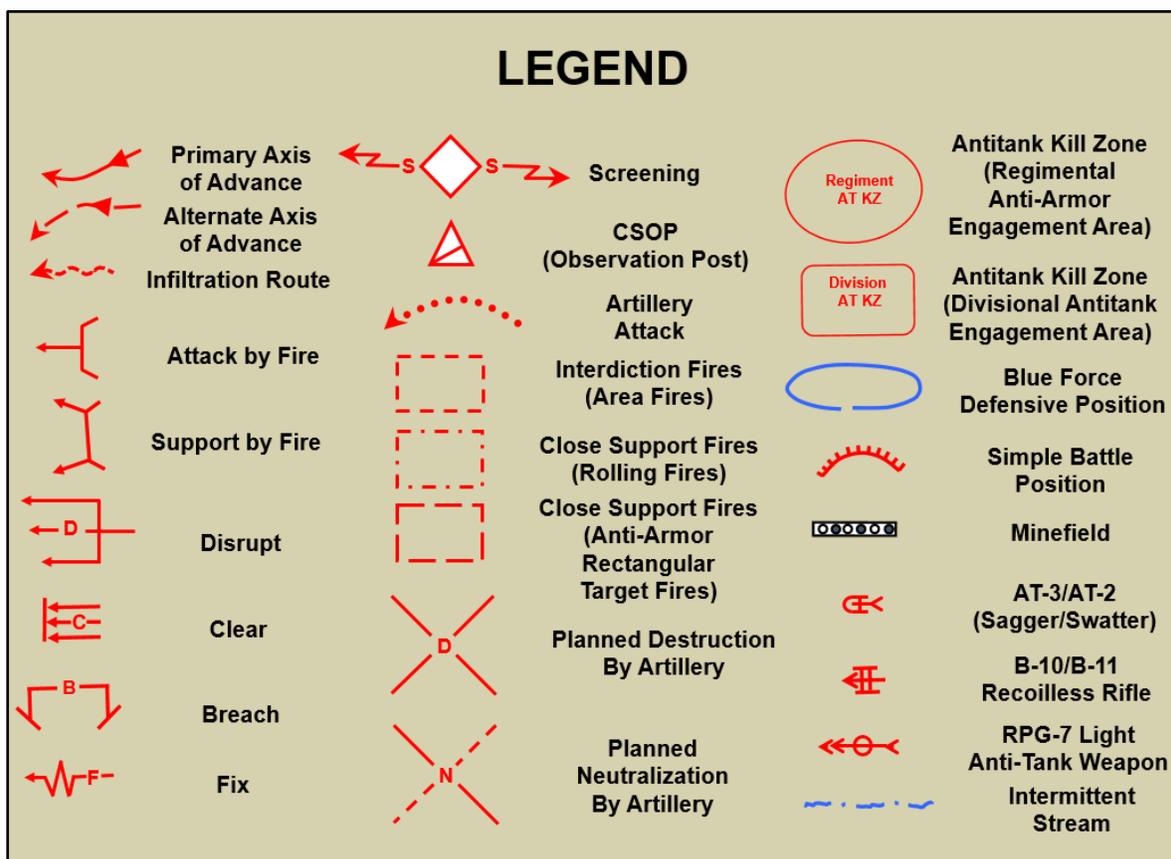


Figure 31. Legend for Section 3 diagrams

In addition to the KPA SPF attempting to start a second front in the rear of the US/ROK forces, the KPA will likely use some of its divisions for irregular warfare. After observing the US performance in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001, the KPA has seen what techniques have been most successful against US forces in those countries. Beginning in 2003, the KPA converted seven infantry and mechanized infantry divisions into divisions that focused on irregular warfare tactics and techniques. The KPA stripped these divisions of most of their organic support elements, including artillery, armor, and air defense, along with most of their transportation assets. These units received specialized training to operate in urban and mountainous terrain using unconventional warfare tactics and techniques based on the KPA's



observations of successful actions against the US in the Middle East.⁷⁴ It is possible these changes may have been enacted by the KPA in part because of a chronic lack of fuel for training purposes, poor maintenance procedures, and/or a shortage of spare parts from the years of sanctions against the rogue nation.

KPA Attack to Gain Freedom of Movement

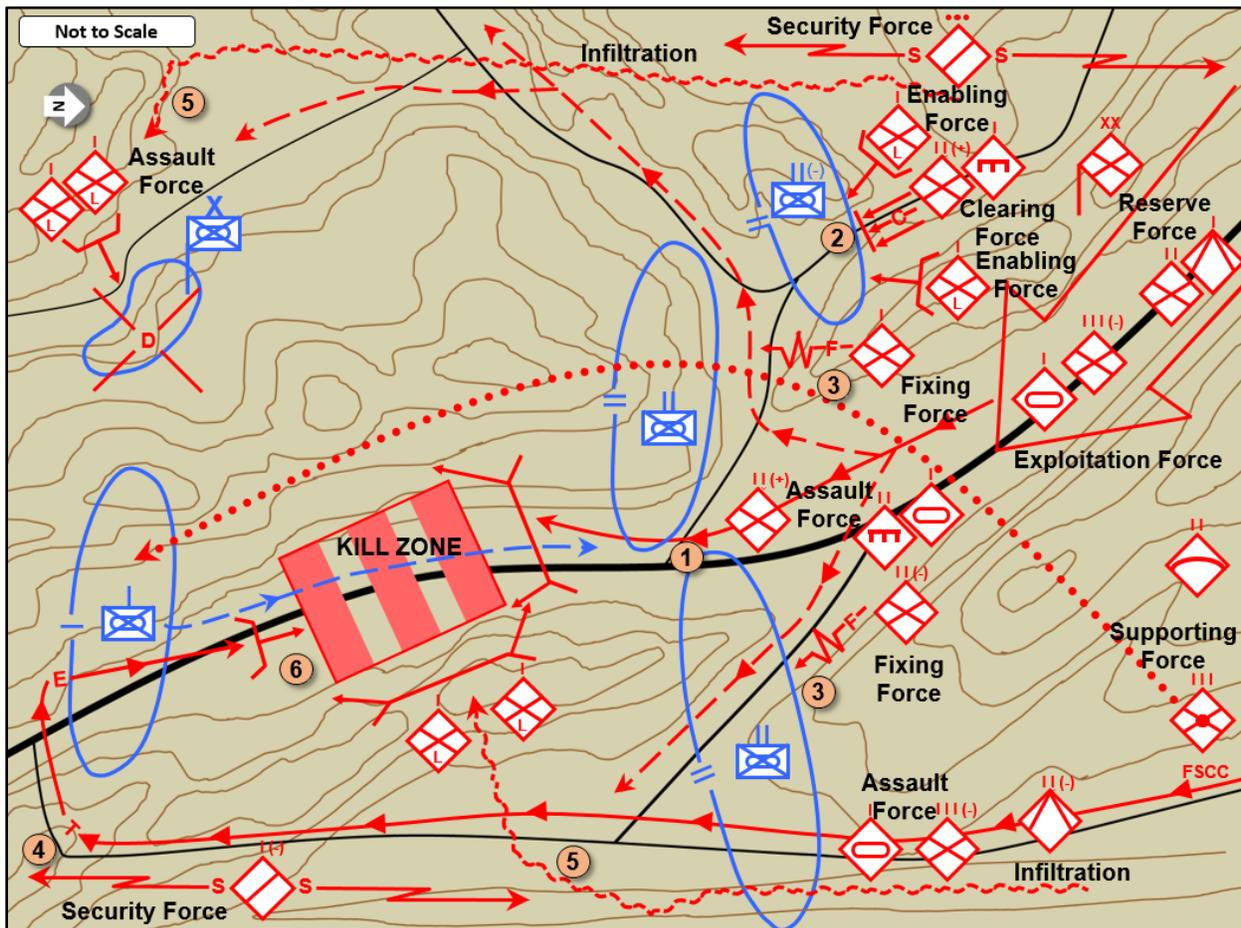


Figure 32. KPA division attack against an enemy brigade to gain freedom of movement

In the following description, the numbers in parentheses refer to the numbers in Figure 32 and correspond to the maneuvers in Section 2. KPA terms are in *italics* if equivalent US terms are not available or adequately descriptive. Although a KPA division may conduct an encirclement movement at its designated/prescribed level (i.e., operational-level division attack), many of its subordinate units are simultaneously involved in other forms of military movements that KPA offensive doctrine prescribes for lower echelons. In Figure 32, the assault forces on the east flank also conduct a turning movement (4) before becoming part of the besetment/encirclement (6) forces.⁷⁵

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The division attack will often begin with an artillery attack against vital enemy units and command posts. (For clarity, only one artillery round is shown in the diagram). The division's fire support coordination center (FSCC) through the *DAG* is tasked to provide sufficient indirect fire support to achieve neutralization of the enemy brigade's reserve; disrupt the brigade and battalion command posts; and harass as a minimum, or neutralize if possible, the opposing front line units.⁷⁶

The KPA division uses its light infantry units (one battalion with six companies) for infiltration missions that are initiated during hours of darkness, periods of inclement weather, or through difficult terrain. This example shows all six light infantry companies in the division taking part, with only two companies participating in the actual main *encirclement* movement to gain control of key terrain, personnel, or equipment. On the western flank, two light infantry companies and the division engineer company assist the infantry battalion in clearing a mountain pass that forms a natural terrain chokepoint (2). The task of the light infantry company and the infantry battalion is first to clear the pass to gain freedom of movement, and then to enable possible exploitation by follow-on units. Two other light infantry companies on the same flank infiltrate farther to the south to attack the enemy's brigade command post by fire in order to destroy it, if it has not been already eliminated by the artillery fire (5). On the eastern flank, the remainder of the light infantry battalion—two companies—infiltrate over the mountain ridge to serve as the supporting force on the eastern side of the planned kill zone for later operations (5). Even though there are adjacent KPA divisions also attacking, the division's reconnaissance company still protects the eastern flank of the main attack, especially as the main assault force makes its turning movement to the west and then north again in an attempt to force the enemy to move or dislocate his forces (4). A single platoon protects the division's western flank by screening to prevent a surprise attack from any enemy force that may approach from the adjacent division's area of operation.

Some distance removed from the main attack and the light infantry battalion activities, three other attacks occur almost simultaneously. These include the above-mentioned *thrust* movement on the west flank in an attack to gain freedom of movement for possible exploitation forces (2); a *holding* movement to the east and west of the main attack by fixing forces to deceive and disrupt the enemy (3); and a *penetration movement* in the center of the division's advance to provide freedom of movement for the main effort—the follow-on exploitation forces (1). The division engineer battalion and a tank company are prepared to follow the main attack along the major road or along possible secondary avenues of approach toward the east. The engineer battalion is prepared to assist with any breaching operations that may be required by the assault force (1), either along the main axis of advance, or the secondary axis located to the east (4). The exploitation units, consisting of a tank company and an infantry regiment (minus one infantry battalion) mounted on whatever transport is available, are positioned farther back, allowing them to follow any assault unit that successfully penetrates the enemy defenses. The planned exploitation is along the main axis of advance in the center of the diagram, but could possibly go through the cleared chokepoint to the west. Alternatively, if the attack in the east has been more successful than the main attack, the exploitation could occur at that location (4).

The main attack has many moving parts. One tank company, an infantry regiment (minus one infantry battalion), and most of the AT battalion conducts a nearly simultaneous *turning* movement from the east to attack the enemy's brigade reserve to force the reserve to dislocate (4). This mobile force's task is to get behind the enemy's brigade reserve in order to drive it into the planned kill zone. If possible, the timing of this attack would occur just after the enemy's brigade reserve initiated its movement from its assembly

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area in a move to reinforce a gap in the front lines to its north. The planned KPA kill zone for the *besetment* is located between the front line units and the brigade reserve force (6). If executed correctly, the units would attack by fire from the south; one infantry battalion with possibly a tank company would support by fire from the north. The intent is for the main assault force to annihilate the brigade reserve at its most vulnerable moment, just as it begins to move out of the reserve assembly area. The two light infantry companies that infiltrated earlier support by fire from the east, to prevent the enemy reserve from escaping in that direction. The kill zone's fourth flank (to the west) is blocked by high ground. Indirect fire from artillery and rockets coordination by the FSCC could cover the western flank area if not covered by direct fire from ground units. In addition to the exploitation units that will attempt to follow up on the success of the initial assault units, the division will keep approximately one battalion with some AT assets in reserve for other contingencies. The division's organic air defense battalion will provide sector coverage for the entire area of operation.⁷⁷

After completing the annihilation of the enemy brigade reserve and any front-line units that have fallen back into the kill zone, the KPA units would continue their movement to the south. Based on its experiences during the Korean War, the KPA expects that, if a significant penetration of the enemy's front occurs, adjacent enemy units will likely conduct retrograde operations to maintain contact with their flanking elements to avoid being cut off. If the KPA initial combat forces still maintain adequate strength and momentum, they would continue to press the attack southward. Depending on the situation, if these initial combat units lacked sufficient strength to remain a viable force on the battlefield, the KPA division's exploitation forces could then pass through to attack the enemy's CS, CSS, and C2 units in his division and/or corps rear areas. In keeping with the tradition of old Soviet doctrine, the KPA will reinforce success, and any KPA division plan will contain different route options for exploitation and reserve units to follow, dependent on the success of the forward units.⁷⁸

Division Defensive Operations

When forced to go on the defensive, the KPA focuses on the destruction of its enemy's most dangerous weapon—tanks—and plans accordingly. The forward division serves as the mainstay of the KPA complex battle position system. Numbers in this section correspond to those in Figure 33. The first phase of a KPA AT complex battle position is the antitank minefields in front of the contact force positions and within each kill zone (1). The KPA will emplace these obstacle belts in ways that tie into the terrain and leverage a combination of AT and antipersonnel (AP) mines. The KPA will cover each concealed AT/AP obstacle belt with observers to capitalize on indirect fire as well as direct fire weapons. The obstacle belts will consist of several layers positioned to take advantage of the KPA's various AT weapons' ranges, normally from 400 to 1,000 meters.⁷⁹

The second phase of the AT complex battle position is the AT fire support plan, which contains four sub-actions conducted by disruption forces. These sub-actions are based on the enemy's location, as observed by KPA combat security outposts (CSOP) located in the disruption zone in front of the contact force (2). One of CSOPs' missions is to call in indirect fire for the purpose of preventing an effective attack by the enemy. The KPA plans indirect interdiction fires at potential chokepoints along the suspected enemy avenues of approach, often along main roads (2a). For this purpose, the KPA allocates two artillery battalions for each enemy company approaching its front. The KPA will fire mortars, artillery, or rockets at these chokepoints. The normal dimensions for a battery-level target encompass an area approximately

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100 meters wide by 900 meters deep. The next phase of the AT fire plan envisions a set of planned close support fires (sub-categorized by the KPA as *rolling fires*) covering an area that reaches out approximately 2,000 meters in front of the KPA forward battle positions (2b). Its purpose is to disrupt or destroy moving armored units as they transition from traveling columns to line-of-battle formations. The normal width for these barrage boxes varies from 400 to 700 meters, and they may be situated serially every 500–800 meters with up to a maximum of four target areas. The third type of indirect fire is another type of close support fire (*anti-armor rectangular target fires*) and is normally conducted immediately following the

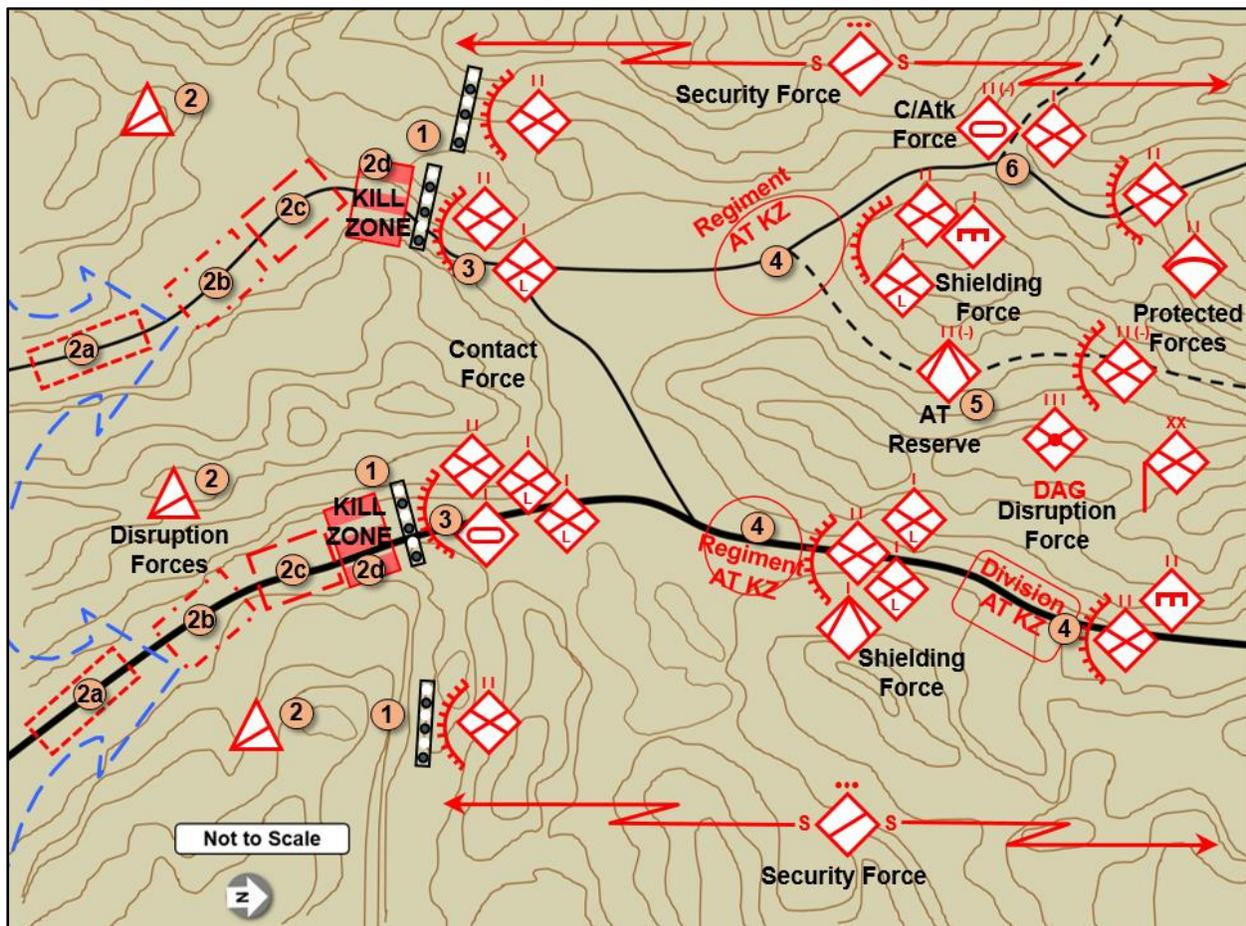


Figure 33. KPA division area defense

previous indirect fire (2c). Although the width covered by both types of close support fires is approximately the same (400–700 meters), the depth of the first type is less, 300–500 meters, and is concentrated into three sequential volleys: first by rockets, then by artillery, and lastly by mortars, as the enemy force draws nearer the obstacle belts (2b). The second type of close support fires will cease at the obstacle belt along the forward defensive battle positions (2c). The fourth piece of the AT fire support plan is the direct-fire fight that begins at the forward defensive obstacle belts where tanks, AT guns, recoilless rifles, and RPGs are fired at their maximum ranges while KPA soldiers fight the enemy's infantry

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(2d). The KPA plans indirect final protective fires when the enemy closes to within 300 meters of the KPA's front line forces.⁸⁰

Phase three of the AT complex battle position is an AT ambush, planned by the regimental commander and executed by the battalion commanders (3). The battalion AT ambush is not shown in detail on this map; see the October 2015 [North Korea Threat Tactics Report](#) for details on a regimental AT ambush executed by a battalion commander. The AT ambush will be established along the most likely enemy armor avenue of approach into the forward-most KPA infantry regiment's area. Any personnel in the forward units that are not killed by the enemy will likely remain behind to set up stay-behind ambushes of enemy CS, CSS, or C2 units as they enter the overrun unit's area of operations.⁸¹

Phase four of the AT complex battle position AT kill zone is similar to the AT ambush, but planned and executed at regimental or divisional level (4). Any enemy forces that pass successfully through the forward regiment's battalion AT defensive positions will likely run into an AT kill zone set up by a neighboring unit (4). If available, the KPA division commander will likely allocate two platoons of SU-100 howitzers for use in a direct fire role, and up to two RPG-7 platoons to cover a regimental- or divisional-level AT kill zone. Any additional weapons systems that might be available, such as tanks and recoilless rifle, can also be used. The regimental or divisional commander will select a location that canalizes the enemy force, rendering it vulnerable to attack from three, if not four, sides. This type of attack is similar to the AT ambush described in the October 2015 [North Korean Threat Tactics Report](#), but on a larger scale.⁸²

The fifth component of the AT complex battle position is the AT reserve, designed to destroy any enemy tanks that appear unexpectedly within the KPA's defensive system, especially in the vulnerable rear areas (5). This AT mobile reserve would confront any enemy units that manage to get through the AT ambushes, the regimental kill zones, and the divisional kill zones. Each KPA division normally keeps two AT companies in reserve for this role, and locates them between the contact forces and the protected forces.⁸³

The counterattack conducted by the counterattack force is the sixth and final piece of the KPA complex battle position plan (6). All regimental and higher units will develop a plan for counterattacking to eliminate any enemy penetrations into friendly lines. Only the division counterattack force (two tank companies and an infantry company, possibly mounted on any vehicles available) is shown on the diagram, but each battalion, regiment, and corps also designates a counterattack force. Once a penetration becomes a possibility, the appropriate KPA commander will attempt to predict the direction from which the penetration will occur and then typically select a counterattack position located about one kilometer to the rear of the penetrated unit. The type of counterattack chosen by the KPA commander will depend on the depth of the penetration of the endangered unit and the criticality of the position penetrated by the enemy. The normal KPA procedure is to conduct a *rapid* counterattack for a company-level penetration, a *standard* counterattack for a battalion-level penetration, and a *delayed* counterattack for a regimental penetration. Variations among different types of counterattacks relate to how fast a particular mission can be executed. The key to understanding the counterattack selection is in Table 3. For example, a KPA infantry regiment that receives the mission to stop a penetration of one of its *first-echelon* battalions would need to conduct a delayed counterattack. Planning for such a counterattack mission would necessarily take into account the time required to execute it. A division might be able to respond more quickly with a standard counterattack against the same depth of penetration, while a corps might take the fastest action and use a rapid counterattack. The situation developing on the ground at a particular time and the quantity and availability of a potential counterattack force would also dictate the

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allocation of resources for supporting a counterattack mission. Once unit(s) are chosen for the counterattack, the depth of the penetration into the KPA's lines would determine what method the counterattack force would employ.⁸⁴

Table 3. KPA counterattack type/criteria⁸⁵

Counterattack Type	Regiment	Division	Corps
Rapid Counterattack	<i>1st Echelon Platoon Penetration</i>	<i>1st Echelon Company Penetration</i>	<i>1st Echelon Battalion Penetration</i>
Standard Counterattack	<i>1st Echelon Company Penetration</i>	<i>1st Echelon Battalion Penetration</i>	<i>1st Echelon Regiment Penetration</i>
Delayed Counterattack	<i>1st Echelon Battalion Penetration</i>	<i>1st Echelon Regiment Penetration</i>	<i>1st Defense Zone Penetration</i>

Conclusion

The KPA prefers the offense over the defense and will stay on the defensive only until it can gather the strength to attack again. The KPA will attempt to avoid US/ROK combat units and will attempt to attack CS, CSS, and C2 units and vulnerable high-value targets in the rear areas in order to reduce the effectiveness of the US/ROK combat units. With assistance in creating a second front via the KPA SPF making these attacks in the US/ROK rear areas, the KPA believes the US/ROK combat units will become combat ineffective, making them vulnerable to KPA follow-on forces.

When forced to go on the defensive the KPA will concentrate its efforts in eliminating its enemy's tanks. Any units bypassed by enemy forces are directed to continue to fight as a unit or, if the unit becomes combat ineffective, the soldiers are expected by their leaders to continue resistance by conducting irregular warfare operations against any enemy units in their area. Prepared UGFs exist throughout North Korea, especially within 50 miles of the DMZ. If forced on the defensive in these areas, the KPA will fight from these previously prepared positions.

US/ROK units will face intense indirect fire including chemical munitions, conventional KPA units to their front, and SPF elements in their rear areas. US/ROK units will need to simultaneously defeat the KPA divisions attacking their combat units, while defending all units from KPA SPF or stay-behind forces in their rear areas.

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