

# **North Korean Tactics**

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# **North Korean Tactics**

## **1. Introduction and Background**

As of my attendance at the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) College, I had spent the greater portion of the past nineteen years, as a U.S Army soldier either stationed in Korea, or assigned to military units whose primary wartime mission was to deploy and fight on the Korean peninsula. Though not an intelligence officer, I thought I understood the basis of North Korean (nK) military tactics. Certainly, I have had several opportunities with various units to be a key player during many Korean peninsula based exercises. However, until my attendance at the Korean Army College, I didn't know what I didn't know about North Korean military tactics. Therefore, the intended purpose of this paper is to provide further illumination on North Korean military tactics as taught by the ROKA College.

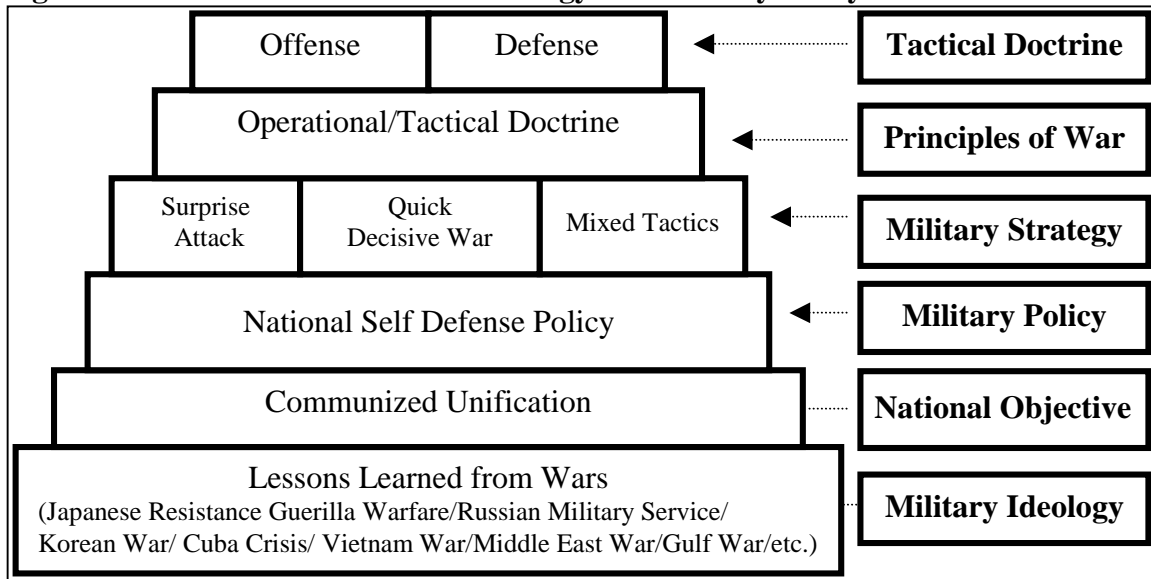
In 1985, the ROK Military, with the assistance of a North Korean defector and thirty procured nK related reference materials, began a revision of it's perceived understanding of nK military tactics. In 1997, with the procural of many important nK reference materials, the ROK Military refined it's interpretation of nK tactics, and with the publication of 30-7 Reference Manual series, dated 2000.1.31, Understanding the Enemy, the ROKA College has revised its teachings on nK tactics. This research paper is predominately based on Reference Manual 30-7-1, Understanding the Enemy (volume 1) – North Korean Military Tactical Doctrine, Regiment Level and Higher. Additionally, I have refined this paper as a result of many comments and facts contributed by Lieutenant Colonel Kim, Yong Bum, North Korean Tactics Instructor, Republic of Korea Army College.

## **2. North Korean National Strategy and Military Policy Foundation**

Kim Il Sung ruled the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) from its inception in 1948 until his death in 1994. During this period, based on his military and life experiences (some of which were contrived), Kim Il Sung assured his people that a country built upon the pillars of a strong political ideology, a strong military, and a strong economy, would ultimately become a powerful great nation. Now for over fifty years, with this emblazoned vision, the country has survived a major war, the death of its founder, and over a decade of continued hardships brought on by food and power shortages. Lacking the fiscal wherewith to build a technologically based strong military, the country has assimilated lessons learned from previous wars and has developed military strategies and tactics, which they believe will counter a technically superior force.

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**Figure 1. North Korean National Strategy and Military Policy Foundation**



### 3. Military Ideology

North Korean military ideological theory, based on military and life experience of Kim, Il Sung, takes its roots from his personal military experiences. In the 1930's, based out of Manchuria, Kim, as a resistance fighter conducted guerilla warfare operations against the Japanese occupation forces in Korea. In the early 1940's Kim served in the armed forces of the USSR, and from 1948 - 1994, as the ruler of the DPRK, Kim commanded the North Korean People's Army (NKPA). Since the 1960's, the DPRK has paid close attention to military conflicts, particularly those pitting an inferior force against a superior force. These analyzed conflicts have served as lessons learned and have been important factors in shaping the nation's military ideology. Below are some lessons learned that have had significant impact upon the DPRK's military ideology.

#### 3.1. Korean War – Lessons Learned

During the Korean War nK suffered from a shortage of reserve forces; leaders who were inadequately versed in strategy and tactics; and operational/tactical inefficacy, as manifested in their failure to plan operations that evoked the complete annihilation of the enemy. Since then, nK has amassed a reserve force of nearly 7.5 million personnel. In the area of education, North Korea has established a military training base to produce a tactically competent force.

#### 3.2. Cuban Crisis – Lessons Learned

The submission of the USSR to the USA during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis resulted in a loss of confidence between the DPRK and USSR. Awoken to the realization that the USSR could be made to back down to demands by the USA, Kim's "Juche" or Self-reliance Policy, took on greater sense of urgency. Within two years the government published its *Four-Point Military Guidelines*, a process designed to develop a militarily self-reliant nation.

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### 3.3. Vietnam War & Middle East War – Lessons Learned

Lessons learned from the Vietnam War and the Middle East War served as the foundation for establishing the DPRK's three pillared military strategy, *Surprise Attack, Quick Decisive War, and Mixed Tactics*. In 1967 the Israelis launched a surprise attack against their Arabic neighbors, and within 6 days their armored/mechanized forces had quickly maneuvered throughout the depths of the battlefield securing a quick decisive victory. Following this war, North Korea, in an effort to emulate this strategy, began a robust effort of mechanizing its military force. Today, nK bases its strategy to win a quick decisive war on its ability to launch a surprise attack, and maintain the attack momentum through the employment of its one armored and four mechanized corps<sup>1</sup>.

During the Vietnam War, through the employment of special operation force units, North Vietnam was able to successfully engage a technically superior force. Additionally, effect use of psychological operations complicated the South Vietnamese war efforts. Following this example, nK has amassed 100,000 special operation force troops<sup>2</sup> who are employed in concert with conventional forces creating an employment concept called *mixed tactics*.

### 3.4. Russia/Afghanistan War – Lessons Learned

In December 1979, a Soviet supported Afghanistan government was overthrown by a Soviet backed coup d'état that killed the Revolutionary Council Leader, Hafizullah Amin. Following the coup, the Soviet military occupied Afghanistan and installed Babrak Karmal, as president, a former vice president who had been purged and exiled the year previous. As the DPRK watched this international episode unfold, they ascertained that on the political stage friends one day can be enemies the next, and as the Soviet Union had turned on Afghanistan, that such a scenario could occur between the Soviet Union and the DPRK.

Additionally, the relatively weak response by the US to this crisis showed that during periods of "national vulnerability", such as presidential elections, US military involvement in international affairs could be abated.

### 3.5. Gulf War – Lessons Learned

From nK's analysis of the Gulf War they surmised that it takes a significant amount of time for the US to rally international support and to deploy its military power. Additionally, they learned the value of storing military equipment and personnel in underground facilities in order to protect them from air strikes.

### 3.6. Kosovo War – Lessons Learned

The Kosovo war provided nK an opportunity to evaluate US military operations in an area with similar terrain and weather as that of the Korean peninsula, and assessed that our high-tech arsenal is subject to weather and terrain constraints. Additionally, the

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to 5 mechanized/armored corps, nK has tasked organized its four forward corps with all self-propelled howitzers.

<sup>2</sup> It is expected that these SOF troops will be infiltrated into the forward and rear areas of the ROK. They may then attempt to destroy C2 facilities, sever LOC, assassinate key leaders and demolish or cripple major facilities such as airfields.

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American value of human life, and our hesitance to commit ground troops, suggested that like the Kosovo War, in lieu of committing ground forces to fight a bloody war in Korea, the US might chose to employ its high-tech arsenal of cruise missiles, precision bombs and jet fighters. This has prompted them to consider methods of avoiding and surviving air strikes, to include cyber-warfare directed at disrupting satellites, the Internet and radio waves.

### 4. National Objective

The national objective, as clearly stated in both the North Korean Constitution and the Workers' Party Convention<sup>3</sup>, is to bring about the communization of South Korea in order to establish a communist society on the Korean peninsula.

To further underscore the national objective, in April 1965, the North Korean Central Committee announced its proposal for a three-tiered revolution. Revolution 1 called for the revolutionizing of North Korea's military might. Revolution 2 called for the erosion of South Korea's foreign military alliances, particularly targeting the removal of US Forces and nuclear weapons from South Korea.<sup>4</sup> Revolution 3, the diplomacy turning strategy, was intended to align North Korea with various foreign countries while internationally isolating South Korea. In 1961, North Korea, China, and USSR signed a friendship and reciprocity assistance treaty, a big step in isolating South Korea with in the region.<sup>5</sup>

### 5. Military Policy

In December 1962, at the fifth plenary meeting of the fourth Korean Workers' Party Central Committee, the Four-Point Military Guidelines of the National Defense Policy<sup>6</sup> was adopted. By implementing these guidelines the government intended to create a military force capable of achieving its national objective, the communization of the Korean peninsula.

The contents of the Four-Point Military Guideline includes the following: #1 - militarizing of the populace, #2 - a stronghold-based fortified country, #3 - a cadre-based army, and #4 - the modernization of military equipment.

#### 5.1. Point 1, Militarization of the Populace

As one gigantic system of barracks society, nK, beginning in the early 1960s, has succeeded in arming the entire population. Civilians between the ages of 14 and 60, or

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<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from the Chosun Rodongdang (Korean Workers' Party) Pact: "The immediate goal of the Chosun Rodongdang is achieving a complete victory of socialism in the northern half of the republic, thereby successfully accomplishing its revolutionary mission of liberating the Korean people and establishing people's democracy. The ultimate goal of the party is to spread "Juche Thought" and construct a communist society throughout the world."

<sup>4</sup> The intent being able to create a favorable condition to attack the South.

<sup>5</sup> Had the US Forces left Korea in the 1970's as President Carter had suggested, revolution 3 might have seen greater success.

<sup>6</sup> Article 60, Chapter 4 (Defense) of the Socialist Constitution, revised on April 9, 1992, justifies the Four-Point Military Guidelines, and the constitution revised in 1998 also specifies the same guidelines. "Article 60: Self-reliant national defense can only be achieved by first arming the military and the people with political ideology, and on this foundation, instilling cadre potential in every soldier, modernizing the entire military, arming the entire population and turning the whole nation into a fortress."

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approximately 30% of the entire population, are subject to mobilization. Currently, reserve troops number some 7.45 million and each reservist is subject to 30 days of annual training.

The reserve forces are categorized into four groups. Approximately 1.73 million reserves form the Reserve Military Training Unit (RMTU)<sup>7</sup> (men between 17 and 45, women between 17 and 30). The Worker/Peasant Red Guard,<sup>8</sup> mostly men between the ages of 46 to 60, resembles a civil defense force and numbers 4.14 million personnel. The Red Youth Guard, a military organization of high-middle school students (ages 14 to 16) has a membership of approximately 1.18 million, and Paramilitary Troops number some 390,000.

### 5.2. Point 2, Stronghold-based Fortified Country

North Korea has built an elaborate array of underground facilities throughout the country, particularly near the DMZ. These facilities allow the staging of units and equipment to facilitate a preemptive attack and provide protection for troops and equipment during artillery and air attacks. Additionally, sensitive to possible amphibious operations on their coast, nK has erected an elaborate coastal defensive system.

### 5.3. Point 3, Cadre-based Military

The nK military, with its active duty force strength of 1 million personnel, developed the cadre-based military policy for the purpose of rapidly expanding its combat strength during wartime mobilization. The principle of this guideline is the development of a professional cohort of leaders who have been trained in both government ideology and modern military tactics, and who are prepared to assume higher levels of responsibility. For example, the forward infantry corps' are designated to be elevated to field army status during wartime operations.

### 5.4. Point 4, Modernization of Military Equipment

North Korea's pursuit of equipment modernization over the past forty years has remained steady in spite of its economical hardship over the past decade. Because of fiscal restraint, nK seeks to increase its capabilities through minimal fund expenditure. This has been best illustrated in their development and procural of missiles, and chemical and biological munitions, as well as the continued pursuit for nuclear weapons capability.

## 6. Military Strategy

With the intent of fighting a *quick decisive war*, nK, in accordance with their military strategy, task organize with a mix of regular combat forces and special operation force teams in order to conduct a series of *surprise attack*. The combined employment of these two forces is called *mixed tactics*. In short, firmly founded on these three strategic pillars, nK believes they can successfully launch a surprise attack that simultaneously

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<sup>7</sup> There are 37 RMTU Divisions.

<sup>8</sup> The primary mission of the Red Guard is to provide homeland defense and farming and industry support, with a secondary mission of providing troop replacements for both conventional and non-conventional forces.



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overwhelms the ROK throughout the depths of the battlefield (employment of mixed tactics), and defeat their opponent and secure the Peninsula before the US can respond.

### 6.1. Surprise Attack Strategy

The concept of the nK *surprise attack strategy* is that by attacking the enemy at an unexpected time, place and employing unexpected means they can maximize time, speed, and secrecy. This strategy coupled with an effective deception plan is believed to yield maximum effects with minimum effort.

Based on this strategic concept, North Korea plans extensive and varied, asymmetrical large-scale operations throughout the depth of the peninsula. While conducting massive conventional and chemical cannon and missile bombardments, special operation force teams, composed of 100,000 elite soldiers, conduct simultaneous and sequential operations in the rear area.

The NKPA, organized around its light infantry military, believe it can exploit the advantages of a light force by unrestricted mountainous terrain maneuverability and stealthy nighttime mobility. Additionally, it see this as an opportunity to gain and maintain the initiative thereby dictating to their opponent where and when to fight, and by so doing intends to gain the psychological advantage as well.

### 6.2. Quick Decisive War

North Korea lacks the economical resources to successfully fight and win a protracted war. Therefore, there strategy is to defeat the South before the US Military and or international community can intervene. By launching an asymmetrical massive first strike, nK intends to lead the attack with its forward infantry corps/armies then exploit the initiative and maintain the momentum by surging deep into ROK territory with its armored and mechanized corps'.

### 6.3. Mixed Tactics Strategy

The DPRK military, originally trained and armed by the former Soviet Union, uses as its underlying doctrine the Soviet military model, adapted to conform to the Korean terrain and the DPRK's military structure. The NKPA special operation force guerilla tactics are derived from military principles of Mao Tse Dong learned during the Korean War. Today, conventional and unconventional forces, providing mutual support<sup>9</sup> are employed on the battlefield using former Soviet and Mao Tse Dong principles of war. This form of employment is called *mixed tactics strategy*.

## 7. Principle Fundamentals of War

North Korean operational and tactical doctrine is based on their five fundamental principles of war. This is the basis that every nK unit, from squad to corps/army uses to plan and conduct military operations.

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<sup>9</sup> Conventional forces are dependent upon Special Forces units for intelligence collection, and to facilitate setting the conditions for future operations. While Special Forces units rely heavily upon conventional forces for logistic support.

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### **7.1. Mass and Dispersion**

1. Concentrate combat power at the decisive time and place.
2. Weight the main effort, attack with at least twice the defenders combat power.
3. Assign the main effort a narrow front and disperse the supporting effort over a wide front, in order to hold and deceive the enemy, as well as to reduce losses from high casualty producing weapons.
4. Maximize terrain and consider the deception operation when dispersing.
5. Avoid excessive concentration and indiscriminate dispersion.

### **7.2. Surprise Attack**

By attacking in an unexpected place, time, and means with a bold a courageous force the NKPA employs the tactics of surprise attack. Below are the characteristics of a surprise attack.

1. Utilize inclement weather, hours of darkness and rugged terrain.
2. Develop clever deception plan and employ skilled infiltration units.
3. Conduct parachute and air assault operations.
4. Mass fires.
5. Quickly concentrate at the decisive area.
6. Employ large scale mechanized units.

### **7.3. Increase Maneuverability**

The central core of North Korean military strategy is to fight and win a quick decisive war. To facilitate this objective, combat units seek to use the terrain to their advantage while employing the following principles:

1. Employ both ground and air transportation assets to quickly maneuver infantry, artillery and armor on the battlefield.
2. Utilize existing high-speed road networks.
3. Conduct night moves and utilize minor roads and steep terrain to maneuver stealthily.
4. Hasten mobility by conducting raids and employing special operation force team.
5. Emphasize maneuverability as a basic element of combat power.

### **7.4. Cunning and Personified Tactics**

Because of militarily numerical superiority and a perceived technical superior political ideology, they believe they are able to develop and execute superior operations that are planned utilizing the “art of cunning.” Cunning is a standard form in planning and executing all military operations. The following is a list of cunning attributes.

1. Consider tactical cunning when employing combat troops.
2. Leaders exploiting the initiative.
3. Proactive aggressiveness.
4. Bold and perceptive leadership, no hesitation.
5. Close-held, perfect comprehensive plans.
6. Fast estimates and bold operations that facilitate a quick decisive war.

Basically, like US doctrine, nK believes that each plan should include a deception story. Below is a representative list of “cunning maneuvers.”

1. East Sound West Attack (Demonstration)

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2. East Strike West Attack (Feint)
3. Raid (Hit & Run)
4. Instigate Fratricide

### 7.5. Secure Secrets

The fifth principle of war is to *secure secrets*. To do this the NKPA maintains a close hold on classified materials while actively circulating false materials. Listed below are some of the methods employed.

1. Reconnaissance activities and security countermeasures.
2. Complete camouflage.
3. Clever deceptions and stratagem.
4. Counterintelligence activities.
5. Conduct operations in darkness and inclement weather.

## 8. Tactical Doctrine

### 8.1. Offensive Tactics

Offense, the nK basic form of combat, has two stated purposes: the first and foremost is the annihilation of opposing forces and the second is to secure terrain. While conducting consecutive attacks, and encirclement operations, they intend to deny ROK forces from being able to reorganize or reconstitute. Concurrently, SOF Teams are infiltrated throughout the rear area to conduct strikes and create confusion. Offensive operations are planned against three scenarios: attacking a defending ROK Military, attacking an attacking ROK Military, and attacking a retreating ROK Military. The NKPA employs seven forms of maneuver (see figure 2).

#### 8.1.1. Penetration

Unlike a US Army doctrinal penetration, which is intended to destroy the defending unit, the purpose of the nK first tactical echelon (1TE) penetrating force is only intended to develop a maneuver corridor (minimum 2 –3 km) wide enough to allow passage of the nK second tactical echelon (2TE). The nK 1TE penetrates the ROKA front line defense force and establishes a hasty defensive position along a forward slope. The 2TE maneuvers unhindered from the line of departure (LD) to the nK 1TE's limit of advance (LOA), where they continue to press the fight deep into the ROKA rear area.

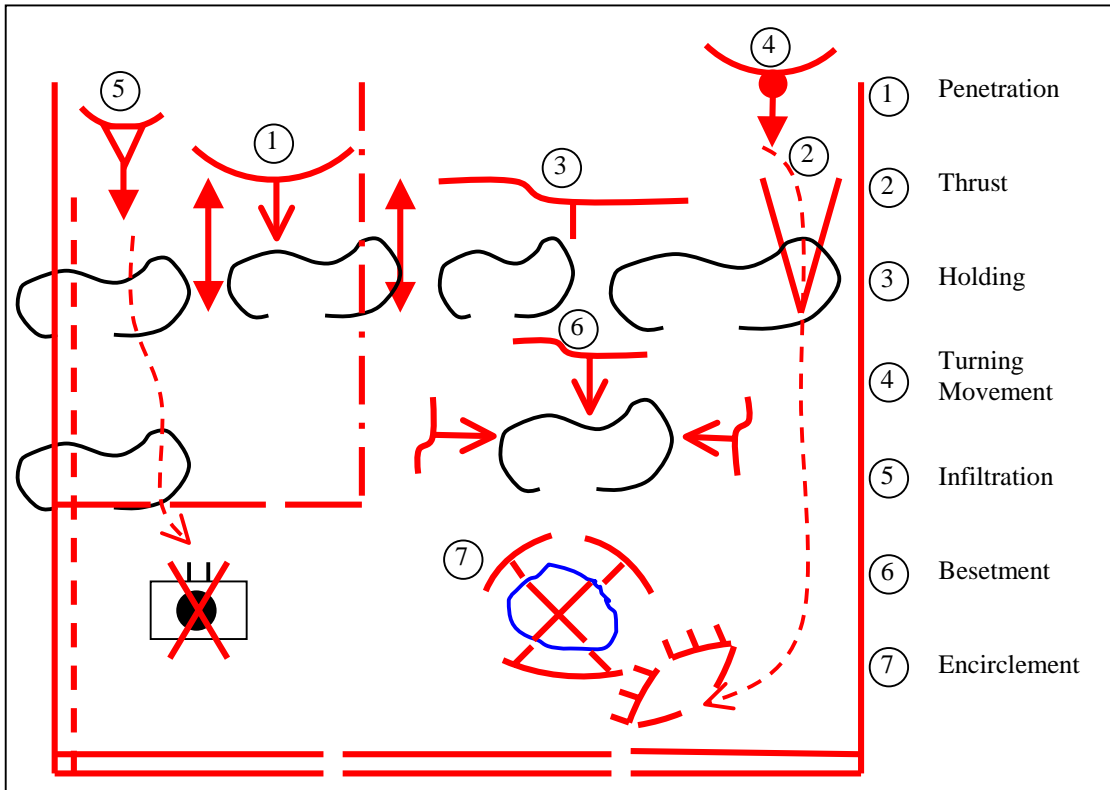
Penetration maneuvers are division level operations. In order to set the condition (STC) for a penetration, 50-80 tubes of artillery, mortar, and rocket fires are allocated for penetrating each kilometer (km) of a standard defensive position (minimum frontage 2-3 km) or 150-180 tubes when attacking through the current General Observation Post (GOP) Line (DMZ).

**Table 1. North Korean Standard Attack Frontage/Depth**

Area/ Unit	Army	Corps	Division	Regiment	Battalion
Front	40-60 km	20-40 km	10-16 km	3-6 km	1.5-2 km
Depth	80-100 km	40-50 km	10-15 km	5-7 km	2-3 km

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**Figure 2. Forms of Maneuver**



**Table 2. Penetration Width Requirements**

Follow on Force (2TE)	Regiment	Division	Corps
Penetration Width	2-3 km	4-6 km	8-12 km

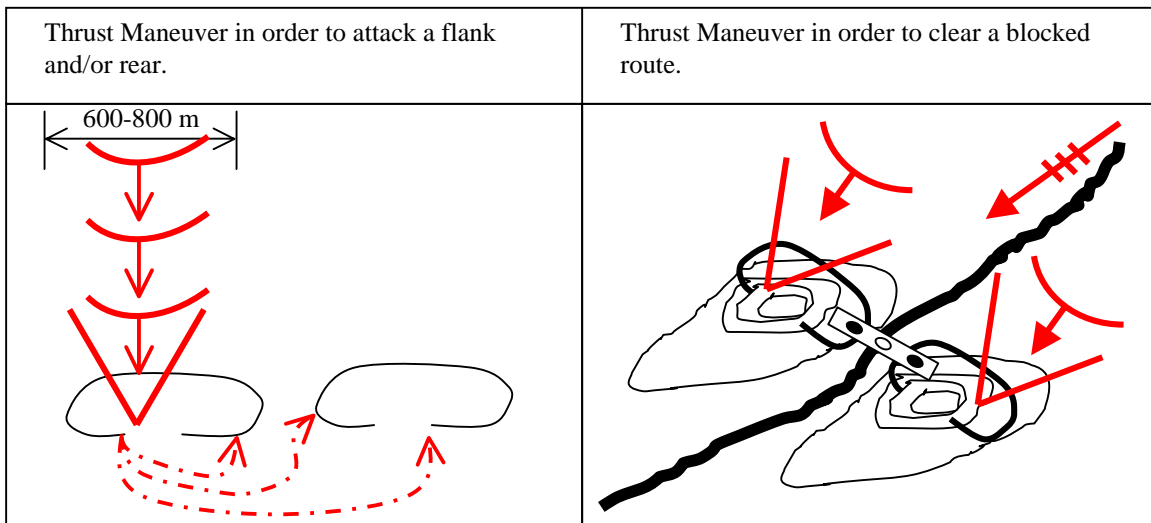
### 8.1.2. Thrust

Thrust maneuvers are planned for attacking strong points. This concept is easily understood when considering the use of a wedge for splitting wood. Like a wedge the nK forces uses a smaller force to pierce a portion of a defense. Once pierced, follow on forces exploit the situation for the purpose of conducting one of three missions. The first being to continue the attack by striking the flank or rear of an adjacent unit, or to pass through either a *turning maneuver* force (see paragraph 8.1.4), or a *besetment maneuver* force (see paragraph 8.1.6). This form of maneuver, when creating a large maneuverable gap may be executed in pairs, one on each side of the gap (see figure 3 thrust maneuver).

*Thrust* maneuvers, typically company, battalion, or regiment level operations, are executed by three attacking units. For example, during a battalion level operation, three companies in tandem will assault an area approximately 600-800 meters in order to puncture a gap in the defensive position (see figure 3 thrust maneuver). To set the condition (STC) for a thrust, 110-150 tubes (artillery/mortar /rocket) are allocated when attacking a strong point or 150-180 tubes when attacking through the current General Observation Post (GOP) Line (DMZ); regardless the maximum attacking frontage is only 1 km.

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**Figure 3. Thrust Maneuver**



### 8.1.3. Holding Maneuver

A *holding maneuver* is a form of attack that employs the principle of dispersion. The intent of this maneuver is to fix a larger force with a much smaller one, and by so doing induce the committal of the reserve force in this area. This operation is conducted by either feinting or demonstrating across a broad front, while the main effort, along a narrow front, conducts either a penetration or a thrust. As the main effort attacks to its limit of advance followed by the 2TE's attack deep into the ROKA rear area, the NKPA expects the forward ROKA elements to begin a rearward movement to reestablish its lines. At this point the holding force will attack forward pushing the ROKA force into the encirclement position (see paragraph 8.1.7).

Division through company level generally conducts this operation. Executing units employed along a standard defense frontage, avoid decisive combat by creating a credible deception through the affective employment of small unit raids and the massing of indirect fires.

**Table 3. North Korean Standard Defense Frontage**

Echelon	Division	Regiment	Battalion	Company
Frontage (km)	16-20	8-10	3-4	1-1.5

### 8.1.4. Turning Maneuver

Unlike the US doctrinal turning movement intended to maneuver in the enemy's rear thus causing him to abandon his defensive position and attack in an undesirable direction, the nK *turning maneuver* has a different objective. The purpose of a turning maneuver is to either establish an *encirclement* position in the enemy rear or conduct a *besetment* of a defensive position. Taking advantage of inclement weather (dark, rain, snow), and rough terrain (swamps, rice paddies, reservoirs, large rivers) this movement is conducted by maneuvering undetected through gaps between defensive units. In the absence of gaps the *turning maneuver* force will exploit the gap created by either a *penetrating* force or a *thrust* force.

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Corps and army level headquarters conduct operational *turning maneuvers*, while division and lower headquarters conduct tactical *turning maneuvers*.

**Table 4. Turning Maneuver Unit Employment Size/Mission**

Echelon	Mission	Size	Employment Area
Corps	Establish a blocking position to the rear of the encirclement position, and block reinforcements	1 Regiment	Vicinity of planned encirclement position and an area that is projected to block reinforcement
Division		1 Battalion	
Regiment		1 Company	
Battalion		1 Platoon	

### 8.1.5. Infiltration Maneuver

*Infiltration* Maneuvers use covert movement of forces through enemy lines (within visual sight and hearing range) to attack positions in the enemy rear. During an infantry corps level operation 2/3 strength from both the light infantry brigade and sniper brigade (4 battalions each) are employed to conduct raids upon command and control centers, artillery positions and to secure choke points along the axis of advance. Infantry divisions employ 4 of 6 light infantry companies from its organic light infantry battalion. Neither infantry regiments or battalions have organic light infantry units specifically designated for raid missions, therefore at these levels regular infantry units conduct raid operations on critical targets within each units area of operation. Regiments employ one infantry company and battalions employ one infantry platoon. Regardless of the operation, both offensive and defensive, these small unit teams (section to company size) are always employed to conduct infiltration operations.

**Table 5. Infiltration Maneuver Unit Employment Size/Mission**

Echelon	Mission	Size	Employment Area
Corps	o Destroy ROKA C2 nodes o Destroy weapons positions o Secure choke points	4 of 6 Bns from both the Light Inf & Sniper Bdes	Corps AO
Division		4 of 6 Companies from the Light Infantry Bn	Division AO
Regiment		1 Regular Infantry Co	Regiment AO
Battalion		1 Regular Infantry Plt	Battalion AO

### 8.1.6. Besetment Maneuver

Regiment and lower echelons, to destroy ROKA forces in strong points<sup>10</sup>, conduct a *besetment maneuver* similar in design to a US doctrinal encirclement. In an attempt to inflict maximum casualties direct-pressure forces maintain contact with the defender on multiple sides, preventing his disengagement and reconstitution. The four types of *besetments* are classified as attacks from the front and one flank; front and two flanks,

<sup>10</sup> Regiments attack battalion size strong points and Battalions attack company size strong points.

## North Korean Tactics

front and rear; and the front, two flanks, and rear. Regardless of the besetment type employed, indirect fires are used to seal the exposed flanks and to support the operation.

### 8.1.7. Encirclement Maneuver

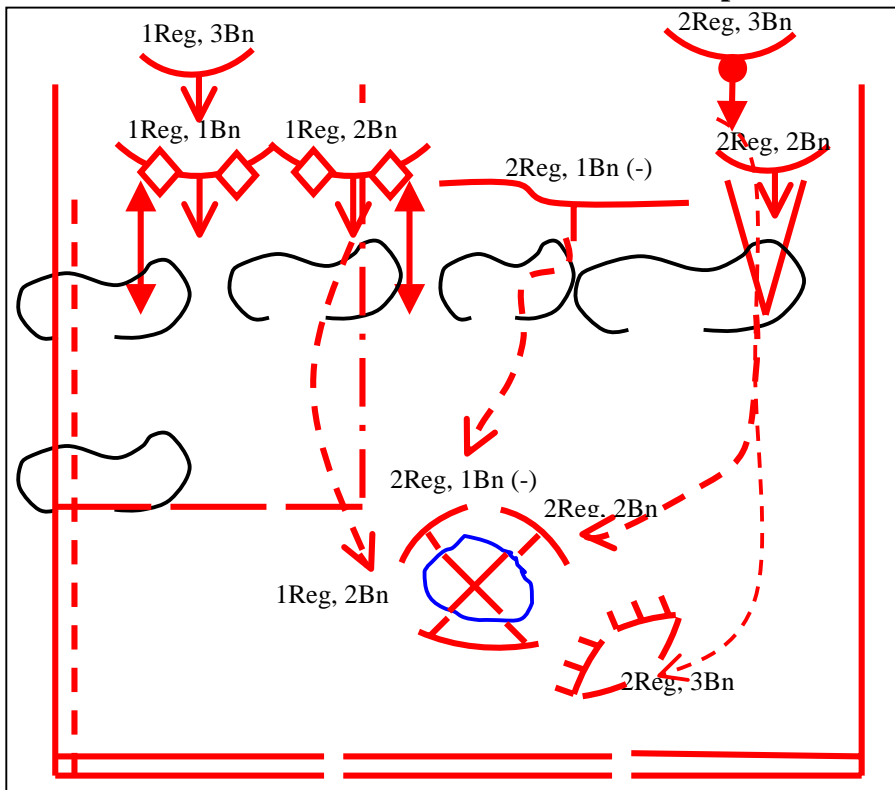
Routinely, offensive operations are planned with the intent of conducting *encirclement maneuvers*. *Encirclement maneuvers* are planned in areas where a majority of the retreating force can be intercepted, encircled and destroyed. This location is always positioned between the reserve force and the front line defense. It is expected that once either a penetration or thrust is successfully executed adjacent elements will withdraw to rearward positions. North Korea believes that during the withdrawal ROKA forces are most vulnerable and can easily be destroyed in *encirclement*.

Corps and army level headquarters employ up to two divisions when conducting operational *encirclements*, while tactical *encirclements*, conducted by division and lower headquarters, may employ total assigned combat strength in executing the operation. There are four types of *encirclement maneuvers* based on the situation.

1. Partitioned Destruction: for the encirclement of large forces.
2. Compressed Destruction: for the encirclement of smaller forces.
3. Fire Power Destruction: for the destruction of forces in narrow areas and while fighting encirclement operations.
4. Raid Destruction: for the destruction of forces in built up areas.

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**Figure 4. Division Encirclement Maneuver – Unit Participation**



### 8.2. Defensive Tactics

North Korean forces employ defensive operations as a temporary interval between attacks in order to gain time, and conserve troop strength. Defensive operations are specifically planned for the following purposes:

1. To repulse a superior strengthened attacking ROKA force.
2. To inflict grave casualties upon an attacking ROKA Force.
3. To defend key terrain.
4. To transition to a decisive attack.

#### 8.2.1. Mobile Defense

A withdrawing unit employs this form of defense as they trade space for time. The characteristics of a mobile defense is that the main combat power is concentrated in the second echelon while the first echelon fights a series of delaying actions disrupting the enemy until he is engaged in the decisive fight.

#### 8.2.2. Area Defense

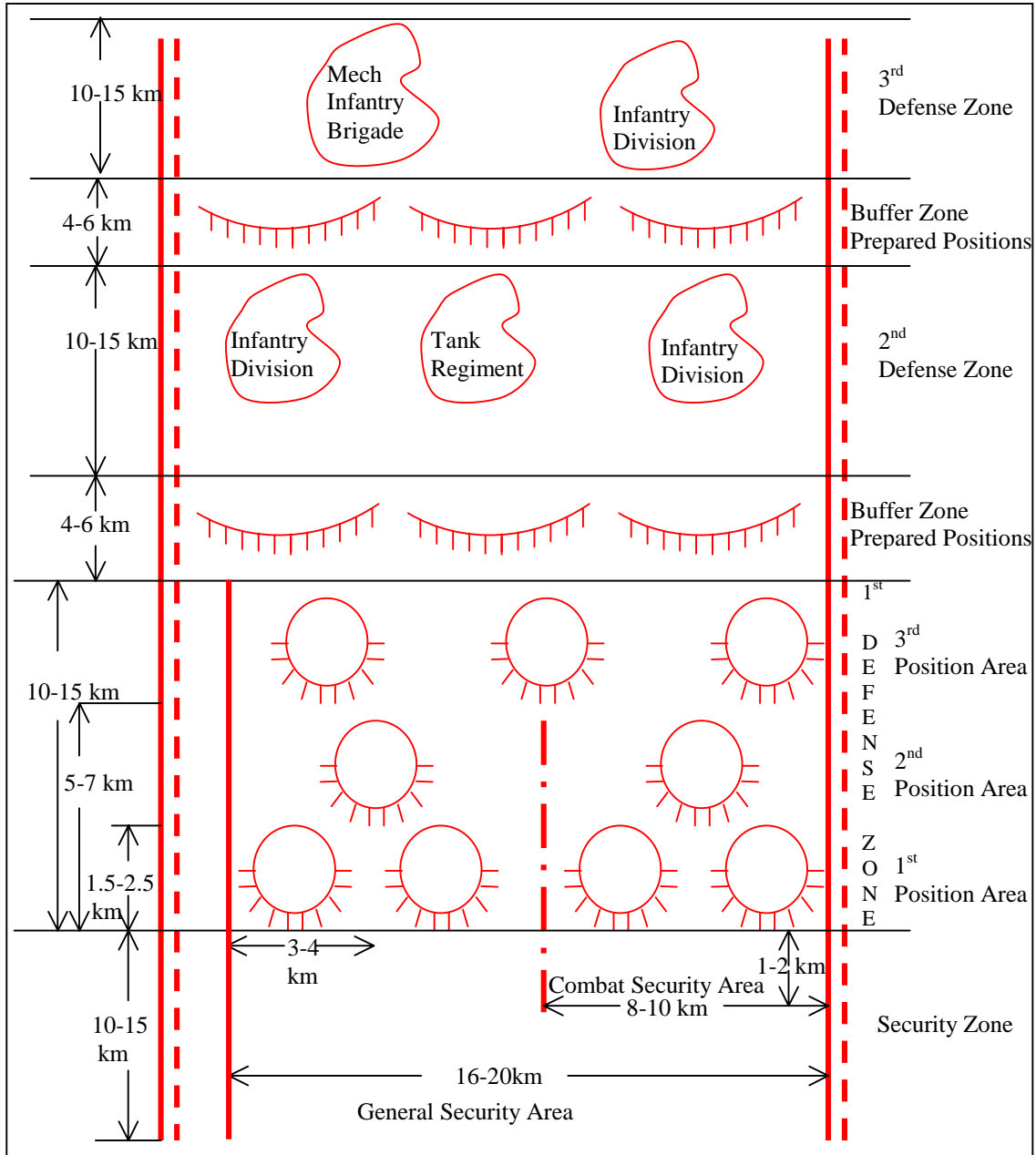
The basic defense structure includes multiple and layered anti-tank positions, and a planned location from which to counterattack the main attacking force. The first echelon is composed of 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the defending forces, while 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the force is arrayed in the second echelon. Additionally, 1/9<sup>th</sup> of the total combat force, tasked from the second echelon, makes up the reserve. While another 1/9<sup>th</sup> of the total combat force, tasked from the first echelon, make up the regimental/battalion security element.



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A field army area defense zone is organized into four zones: The furthestmost forward zone is the security zone, followed by the 1<sup>st</sup> defensive zone, 2<sup>nd</sup> defensive zone and the 3<sup>rd</sup> defensive zone.

**Figure 5. Field Army Area Defense – Zone Formation**



### 8.2.2.1. Security Zone

The *security zone*, divided into two sectors, has frontage equal that of the first echelon defensive zone (Division 16-20 km) and a 10-15 km depth.

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### 8.2.2.1.1. Combat Security Area

The *combat security area* extends 1-2 km in front of the 1<sup>st</sup> defensive zone, and is subdivided into two areas. The first area extends 200-400 meters in front of the forward battalions and is occupied by security outpost, security patrols and ambush teams. The second area extending up to 2 km in front of each forward regiment and is occupied by a company (+) sized unit arrayed in 3-4 combat observation posts (COP). The mission of these COPs is to provide early attack warning, prevent surprise attacks, and call for and adjust artillery fires.

### 8.2.2.1.2. General Security Area

The *general security area*<sup>11</sup>, an area employed during corps or division operations, is positioned in front of the combat security area and extends 10-15 kilometers in front of the 1<sup>st</sup> echelon defensive zone. During corps operations, the general security area is occupied by a regiment (+), and during division operations this area is occupied by a battalion (+) sized element. The mission of the general security outpost (GSOP) is to provide attack warning, and to conduct delaying and interdiction operations.

**Table 6. Security Area**

Security Area	Security Element	Purpose	Location (forward of defense)	Unit Size
General Security Area	General Security Outpost (GSOP)	Attack Warning, Delay, Interdiction	10-15 km	Corps: Regt (+) Div: Bn (+)
Combat Security Area	Combat Outpost (COP)	Attack Warning, Raid Prevention, Indirect Fires Observation	1-2 km	Regt: Co (+) Bn: Plt (+)
	Direct Security	Attack Warning, Raid Prevention	200-400 m	Sentry, Security Patrols, Ambush Patrols

### 8.2.2.2. 1<sup>st</sup> Defensive Zone

The 1<sup>st</sup> tactical echelon (1TE) division occupies the 1<sup>st</sup> defensive zone. This zone has a standard front of 16-20 kilometers and a 10-15 kilometer depth. This zone is further subdivided into three defensive areas. The four forward battalions of the two forward regiments occupy position area 1, while the two rear battalions of the forward regiments occupy position area 2. The division's 2<sup>nd</sup> tactical echelon (2TE) regiment, arrayed in three battalions abreast, occupies position area 3.

<sup>11</sup> The general security area, though a doctrinal templated zone, is not likely to be employed because of the anticipated closeness of enemy to friendly forces.

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**Table 7. North Korean Standard Defensive Area**

Echelon	Division	Regiment	Battalion	Company
Frontage (km)	16-20	8-10	3-4	1-1.5
Depth (km)	10-15	5-7	1.5-2.5	1

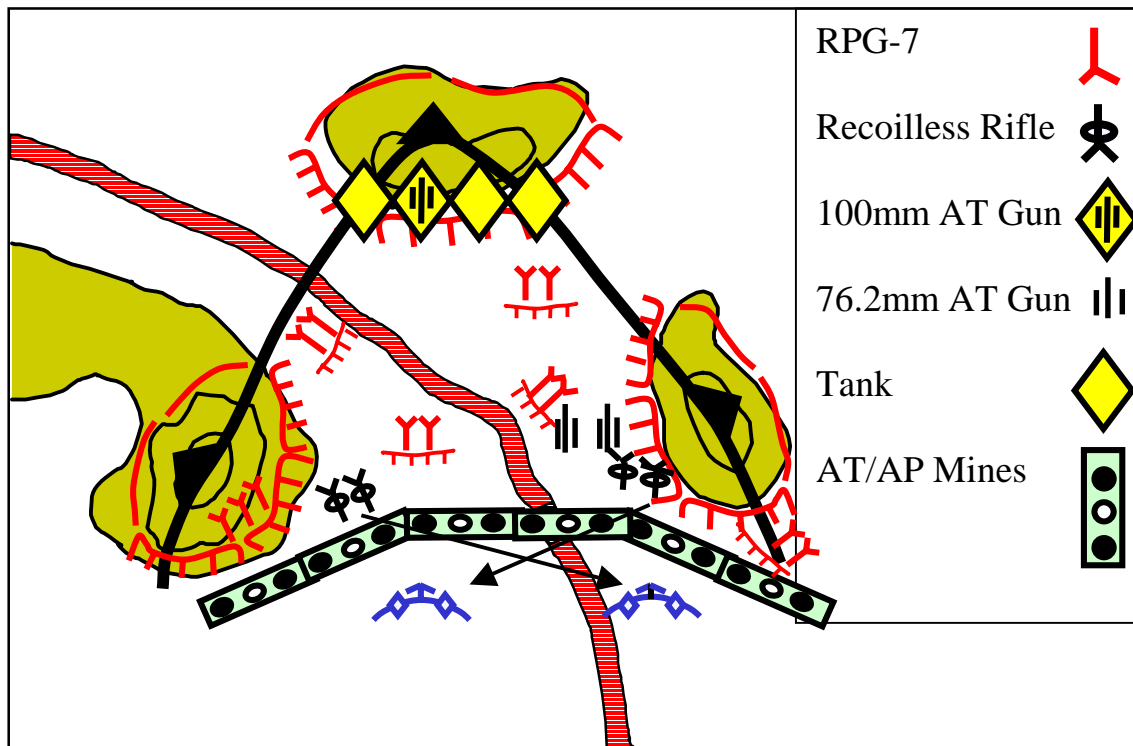
### 8.2.2.3. 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Defensive Zone and Buffer Zones

Divisions occupy the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> defensive zones during army and corps operations. The missions of these units are to reinforce the first defensive zone, and to conduct infiltration and counter attack operations. A four to six-kilometer buffer zone typically separates the defensive zones. These buffer areas include prepared positions intended for future occupation by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> defensive zone forces to either halt a ROKA penetration of the first defensive zone and/or in preparation to transition to the attack.

### 8.2.2.4. Anti-Tank Defense System

Defensive operations are designed to support the anti-armor battle. In other words defensive positions are selected based on the ROKA's predicted attack route and where along that route the NKPA plans to fight the anti-armor battle. This battle, divided into six phases (anti-armor obstacles, anti-armor fire plan, anti-tank defensive position, anti-tank engagement area, and employment of the counterattack force and employment of the anti-tank reserve) encompasses both the indirect and direct-fire fights.

**Figure 6. Anti-Tank (AT) Defensive Position**



## North Korean Tactics

### 8.2.2.4.1. Anti-Armor Obstacle Plan

Obstacles are planned in the combat security area, in front of the forward defensive positions, and within each anti-tank (AT) engagement area. The obstacle belts, tied into the terrain, have a mix of anti-personnel (AP) and AT mines intended to separate the ground forces from the mechanized forces. Additionally each obstacle belt is well camouflaged, observed and covered by fire. The obstacle belts are multi-tiered positioned at the maximum range of the various AT weapon systems, from about 1,000 to 400 meters.

### 8.2.2.4.2. Anti-Armor Fire Plan

The *anti-armor fire plan* is divided into four phases. The first three stages are fired by indirect weapon systems and direct fire weapons fire the fourth stage.

#### 8.2.2.4.2.1. Phase 1 Area Fires (Anti-Armor Fire Plan)

Phase 1 *area fires* are planned on choke points along the route of advance, approximately 2-8 km in front of the defensive position. These targets are fired by artillery, rocket and mortar weapon systems, and firing units are planned IAW the number of attacking tank companies. A planning figure of two artillery battalions per each attacking tank company is used. Additionally, battery/battalion target sizes are 100 x 900 meters.

#### 8.2.2.4.2.2. Phase 2 Rolling Fires (Anti-Armor Fire Plan)

Phase 2 *Rolling fires*, planned 2,000 meters in front of the defensive position, are employed to disrupt and destroy armor march units as they transition to battle formation. These fires, 400-700 meters in breadth, are fired every 500-800 meters for a maximum of four iterations.

#### 8.2.2.4.2.3. Phase 3 Anti-Armor Rectangular Target Fires (Anti-Armor Fire Plan)

Phase 3 *Anti-Armor rectangular target fires*, similar in purpose to phase two fires, are fired immediately following phase 2 fires. The major difference between phase two and three is the density of the fires. The width, 400-700 meters, is the same as phase two fires however; the depth of 300-500 meters is fired in three sequential volleys of artillery, rocket, and mortar fire. From the conclusion of phase 2 fires up to the obstacle belt, typically one to three targets are fired.

#### 8.2.2.4.2.4. Phase 4 Direct-fire Fight (Anti-Armor Fire Plan)

Phase 4 *direct-fire fight* begins at the forward defensive line obstacle belt where tanks, AT guns (100mm SU-100 and 76.2mm SU-76), recoilless rifles (82mm B-10), and man-packed, 40mm RPG-7s, begin firing at their maximum range, while NKPA infantry soldiers fight the advancing infantry troops. Final protective indirect fires are planned within 300 meters of the NKPA forces and are fired to disrupt and destroy units as they attempt to breach the defensive position.

Figure 7. Anti-Tank Defense System

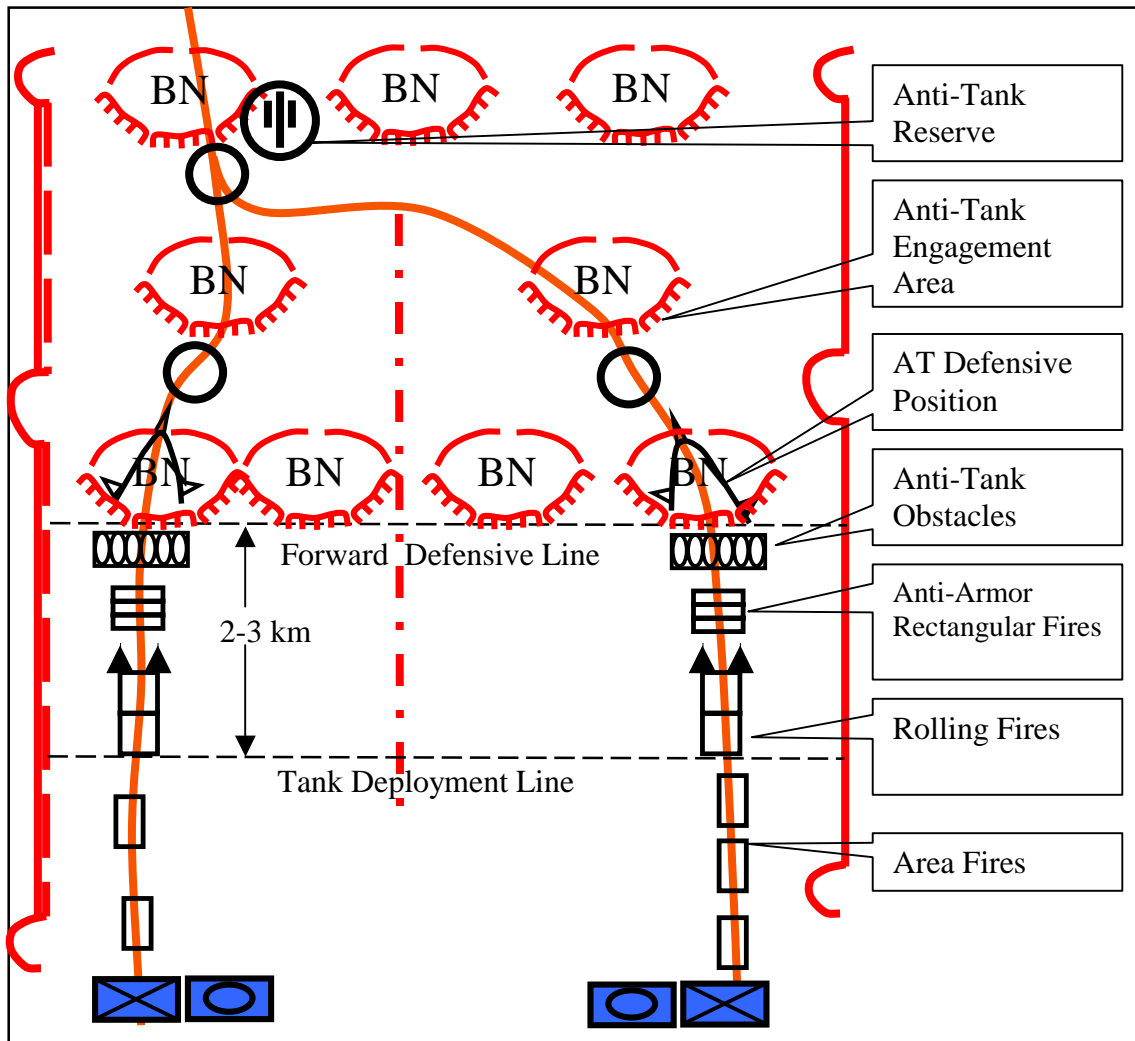


Table 8. Indirect Phase Fires

Phase 1 Area Fires	Phase 2 Rolling Fires	Phase 3 Anti-Armor Rectangular Fires
<p>900 m</p> <p>100m</p>	<p>400-700 m</p> <p>500-800 m</p>	<p>Mortar Fires</p> <p>Artillery fires</p> <p>Rocket Fires</p> <p>300-500 m</p> <p>400-700 m</p>

8.2.2.4.3. Anti-Tank (AT) Defensive Position

The main effort battalion *AT defensive position*, planned by the regimental commander, is typically situated on parallel forward ridgeline so that maneuvering tanks can be attacked in crossfire. Typical positions are task organized with one recoilless rifle platoon (three guns) (attached to the main effort company), one platoon of SU-76 AT

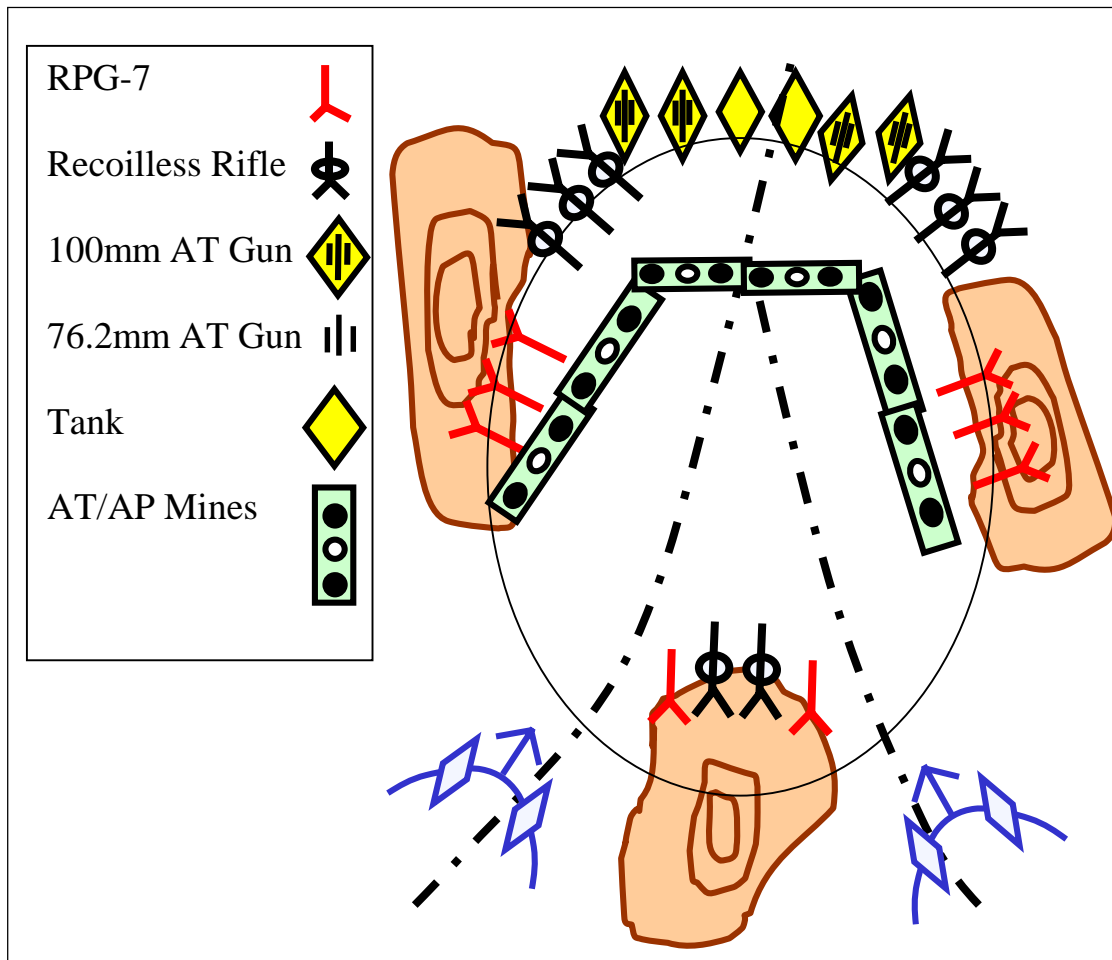
## North Korean Tactics

guns (two guns), and several RPG-7s employed in teams of two to three. As advancing armor formations enter the position, AT obstacles halt the column allowing the AT weapons to first engage the forward and rear vehicles followed by the other vehicles in the column.

### 8.2.2.4.4. Anti-Tank Engagement Area

The second stage of the AT direct-fire fight occurs in the AT engagement area. This engagement area is established at both the regimental and divisional level. Advancing formations not destroyed by the forward defensive positions are engaged in decisive combat here in the AT engagement area. Engagement areas, like defensive positions, are established in depth (1TE and 2TE). AT engagement areas are typically task organized with two platoons of SU-100 howitzers, and up to two RPG-7 platoons, additional weapon system might include tanks and recoilless rifles.

**Figure 8. Anti-Tank Engagement Area**



### 8.2.2.4.5. Anti-Tank “Mobile” Reserve

The Anti-Tank Reserve is a mobile reserve designed to destroy ROKA tanks that maneuver unexpectedly within the defensive system. Or in other words tanks that

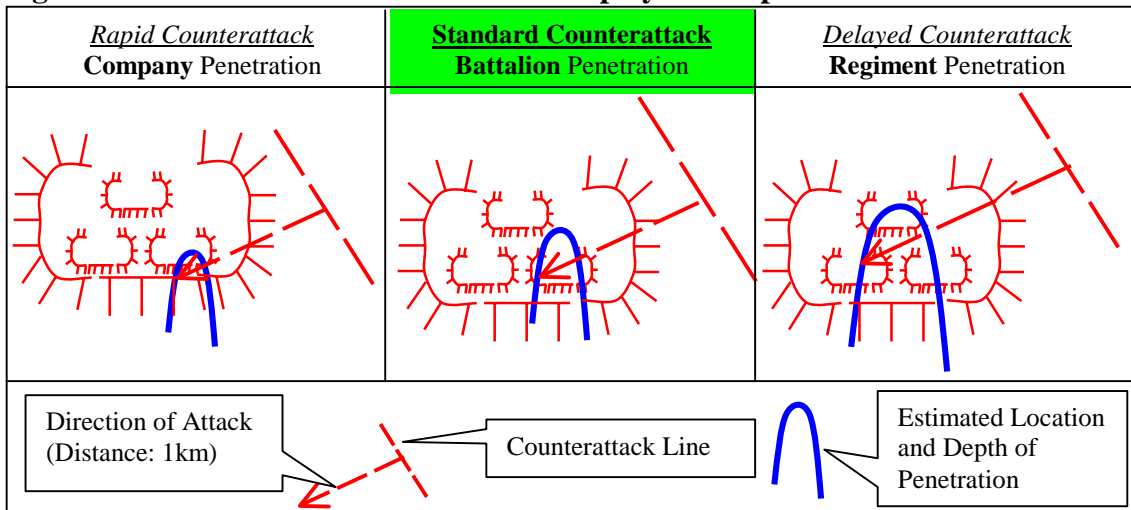
## North Korean Tactics

maneuver around the established AT Defensive Positions and the AT Engagement Areas (the areas that are preplanned for destroying the ROKA force). Division echelon units are task organized with two Reserve AT Companies positioned on the battlefield between the 1TE and 2TE.

### 8.2.2.5. Counterattack Force

Regiment and higher units, to halt and destroy ROKA forces that have penetrated the defense position plan *counterattack* operations. Additionally, successful counterattacks are intended to set the condition to transition to the attack. During the planning phase, the point of penetration is predicted and the Counterattack position is selected. The position is typically situated on a forward ridgeline, approximately 1 kilometer to the rear flank of the penetrated unit. Based on such factors as what terrain will best support the counterattack, and the criticality of the defensive positions, commanders select either a rapid, standard, or delayed counterattack location (see figure 9 and table 9). Typically, commanding headquarters second echelon forces conduct the counterattack (i.e. during a division operation the third regiment conducts the counterattack).

**Figure 9. Division Level Counterattack Employment Options**



**Table 9. Counterattack Type/Criterion**

Type/ Unit	Regiment	Division -Standard Operation-	Corps
Rapid Counterattack	1TE Platoon Penetration	1TE Company Penetration	1TE Battalion Penetration
Standard Counterattack	1TE Company Penetration	1TE Battalion Penetration	1TE Regiment Penetration
Delayed Counterattack	1TE Battalion Penetration	1TE Regiment Penetration	First Defense Zone Penetration

## **North Korean Tactics**

### **9. Artillery Grouping Tactics**

North Korean Artillery, including howitzers, mortars, rockets, and recoilless guns are organized by type and assigned to a specific unit in order to perform a specific mission. The basic mission of all artillery is to destroy/defeat personnel, equipment, and facilities and to support the maneuver (infantry and armor) operation.

#### **9.1. Regimental Artillery Groups (RAG)**

The RAG, composed of organic and attached units, typically have between 2-4 battalions. Generally, the mortar battalion is positioned, on the rear slope of a hill, up to 1.5 km to the rear of the front line. The 122mm and 152mm Artillery battalions are deployed forward of the regiments 2<sup>nd</sup> echelon battalions.

#### **9.2. Division Artillery Group (DAG)**

The DAG, composed of organic and attached units, typically has between 3-5 artillery battalions. The DAG is positioned forward of the division's 2TE regiments.

#### **9.3. Corps Artillery Group (CAG)**

The CAG, composed of organic and attached units, typically has between 3-6 artillery battalions. The CAG is positioned behind the lead divisions 2TE. When a corps has three divisions abreast, typically three CAGs of four battalions each are employed. However, if the corps is arrayed with two divisions abreast than a typical formation of two CAGs with six battalions each is formed.

### **10. Conclusion**

I would surmise that US Army leaders, as a whole, are well-versed in former Soviet tactics, and indeed that is the tactical basis for many militaries. However, because of the major differences in organization structures, employed equipment, and terrain constraints the NKPA, in many regards, employs vastly modified tactics. Both the US Army Schools and units in the field, based on my experiences, are unaware of North Korean tactics as discussed in this paper. I would offer, as a starting point that either this paper or a revised version of it be circulated to the training base and the field as a supplement to training leaders on North Korean tactics.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, I would recommend the future publication of a comprehensive North Korean Tactics, US Army Field Manual.

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<sup>12</sup> I authorize this paper and its associated briefing to be disseminated and used as deemed appropriate, without my prior consultation.



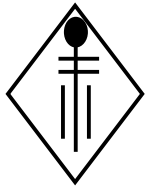










# North Korean Tactics

**Table 10. Organic Artillery Weapon (wpn) Systems**

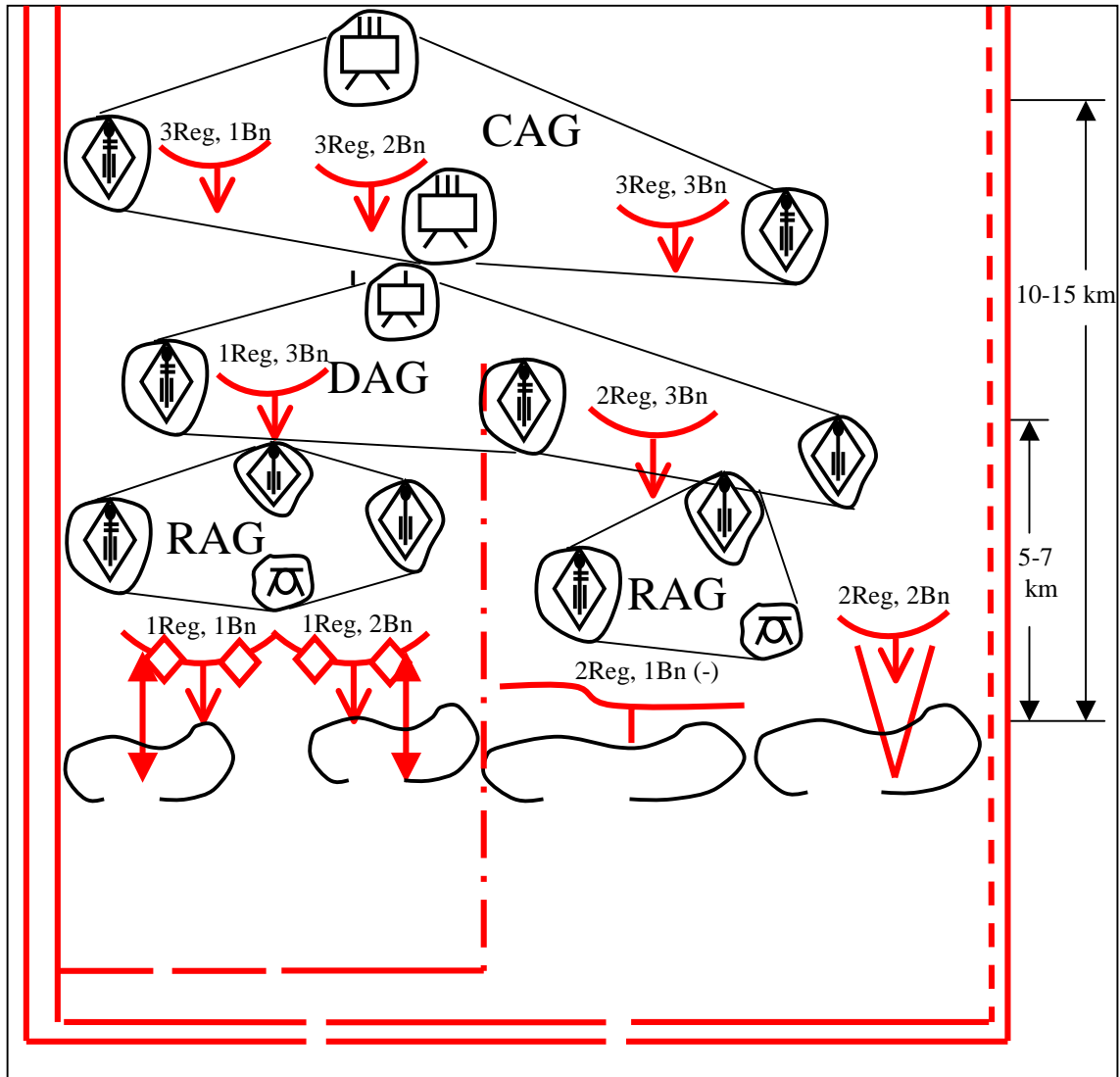
Section	Mortar	Recoilless Gun	AT Gun	Howitzer (high angle /low angle)	Rocket	ADA
Battalion Artillery	<b>82mm</b> 1 Co 9 wpns	<b>82mm</b> 1 Plts 3 wpns				
Regiment Artillery	<b>120mm</b> 1 Bn 18 wpns		<b>76.2mm</b> 1 CO 6 wpns	<b>122mm</b> 1 Bn 18 wpns	<b>107/140mm</b> 1 Company 9 wpns	<b>14.5mm</b> 1 Bn – 20 wpns
Division Artillery			<b>100mm</b> 2 COs 12 wpns <b>AT-1/3</b> 1 CO 12 wpns	<b>152mm</b> 2 Bns 24 wpns <b>122 mm</b> 1 Bn 18 wpns	122mm 1 Bn 12 wpns	<b>14.5mm</b> – 8 wpns <b>37mm</b> – 12 wpns <b>57mm</b> - 6 wpns
Corps Artillery				<b>170mm</b> 6 Bns 108 wpns	<b>240mm</b> 6 Bns 108 wpns	<b>14.5mm</b> – 8 wpns <b>57mm</b> – 36 wpns

**Table 11. Indirect Fire Systems Graphics**

Mortar	Rocket	Heavy Howitzer Self-Propelled High Angle	Medium Howitzer Self-Propelled High Angle	Howitzer Self-Propelled Low Angle
60mm 	107mm 	152mm & 170mm	122mm 	0-100mm 
82mm 	122-200mm 			101-150mm 
120mm 	240mm 			151 and higher 
160mm 				

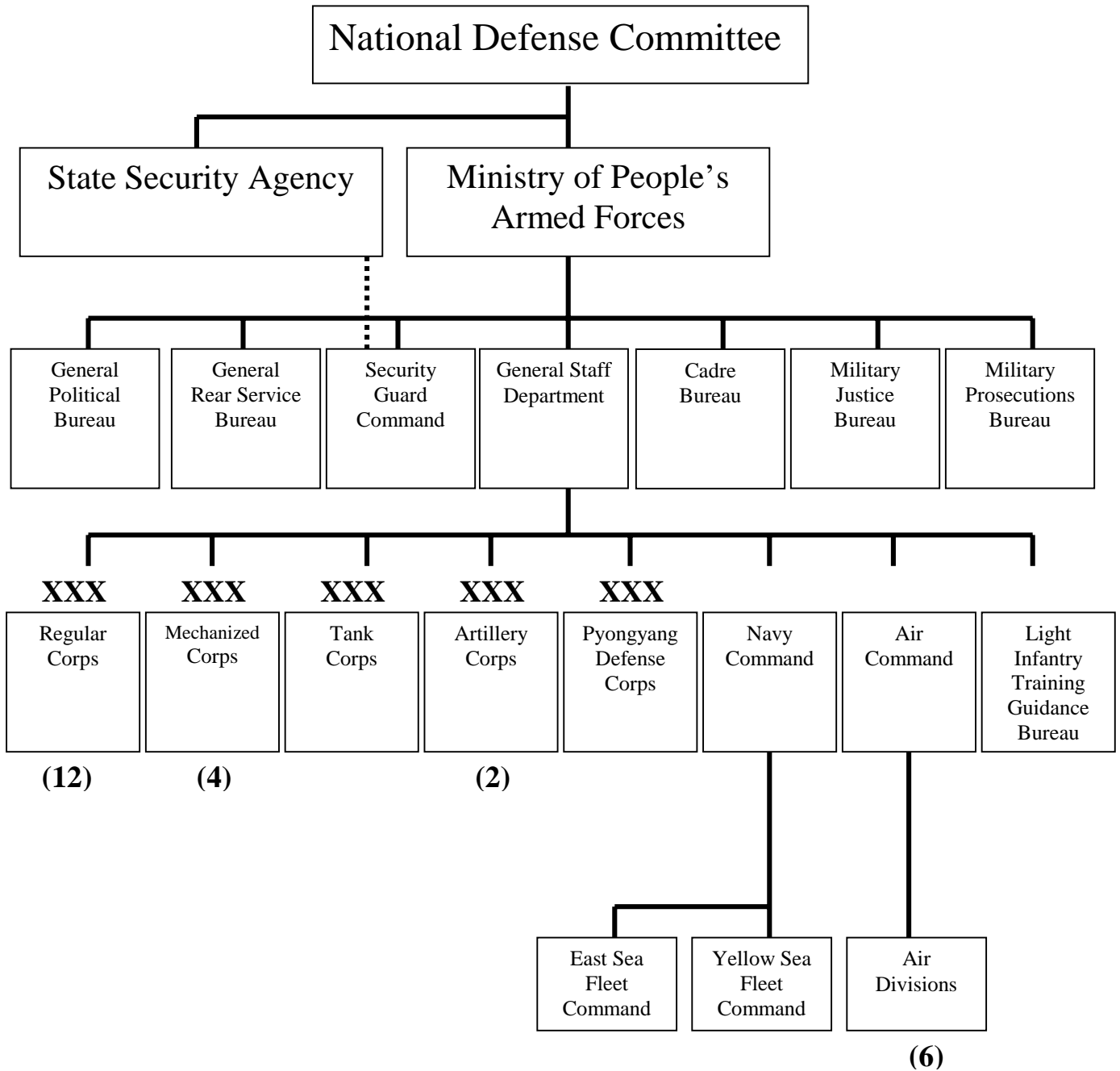
# North Korean Tactics

Figure 10. Standard Artillery Group Positioning (Attack)



# North Korean Tactics

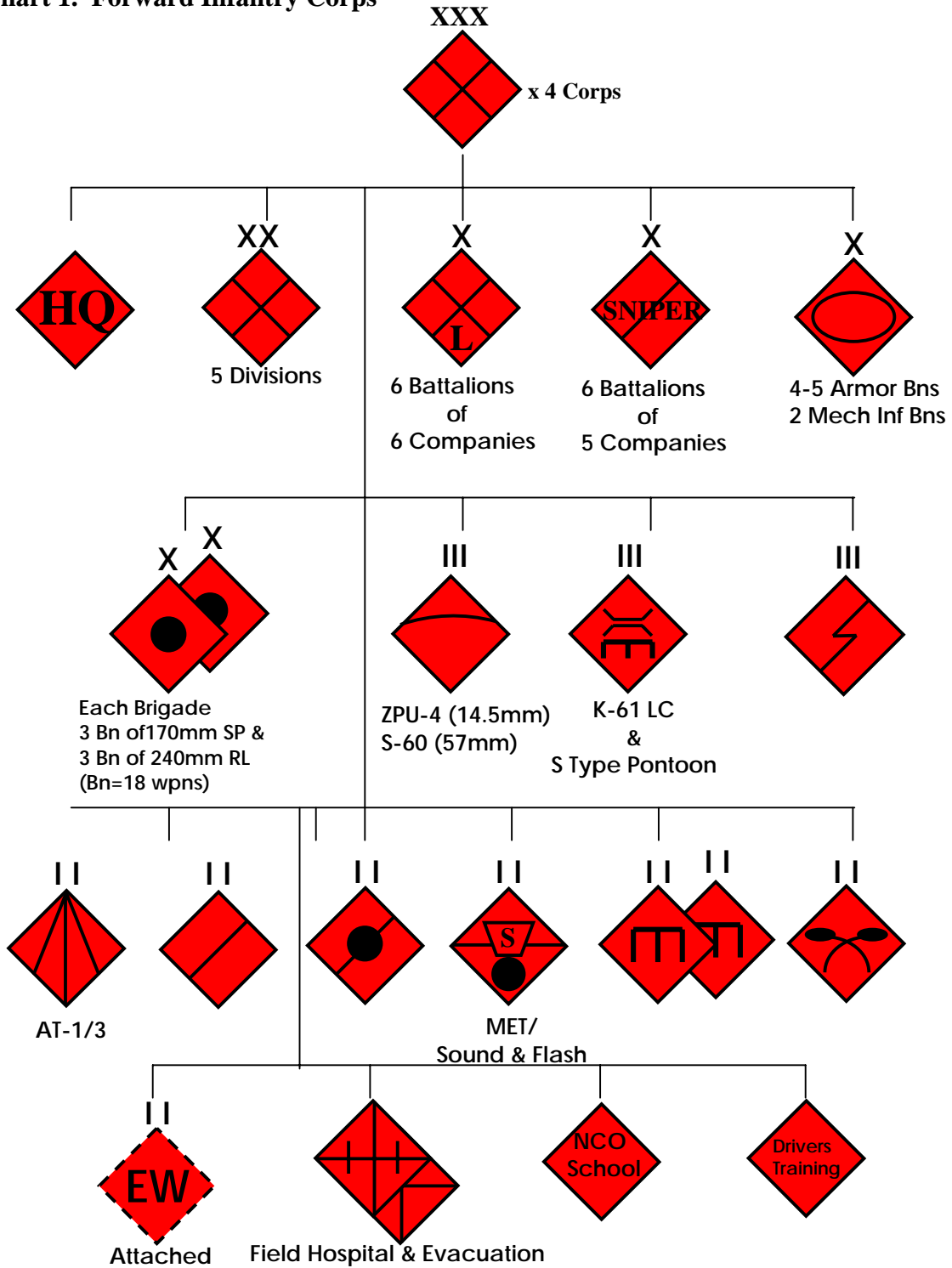
## Annex 1. North Korea's Military Command Structure



# North Korean Tactics

## Annex 2. North Korean Military Organization Chart

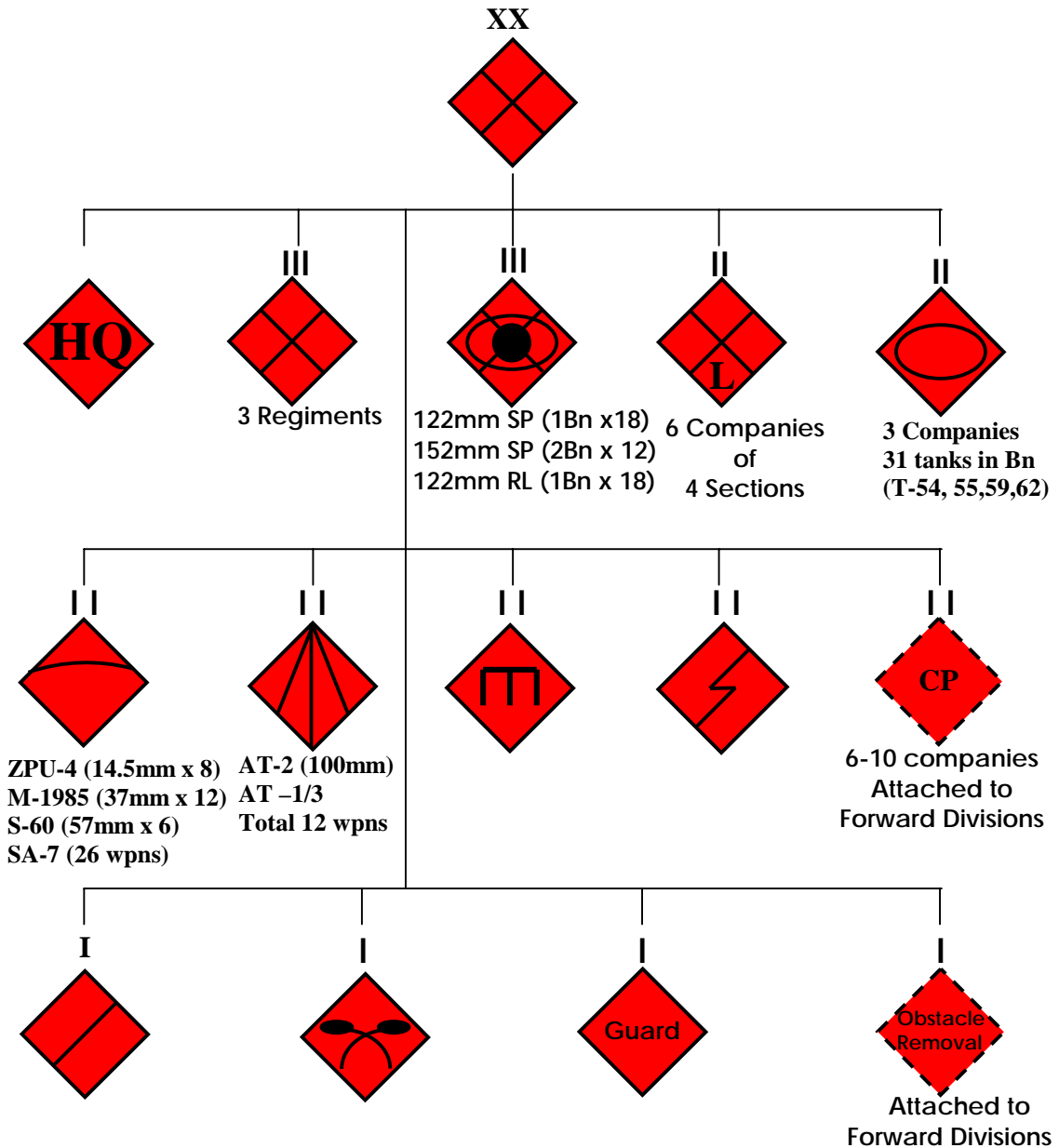
Chart 1. Forward Infantry Corps<sup>13</sup>



<sup>13</sup> The Light Infantry Brigade is tasked organized and can function similar to infantry regiments. However, these units are typically employed to conduct infiltration missions. The Sniper Brigade is a light force specifically organized to conduct reconnaissance missions and to attack command and control nodes

# North Korean Tactics

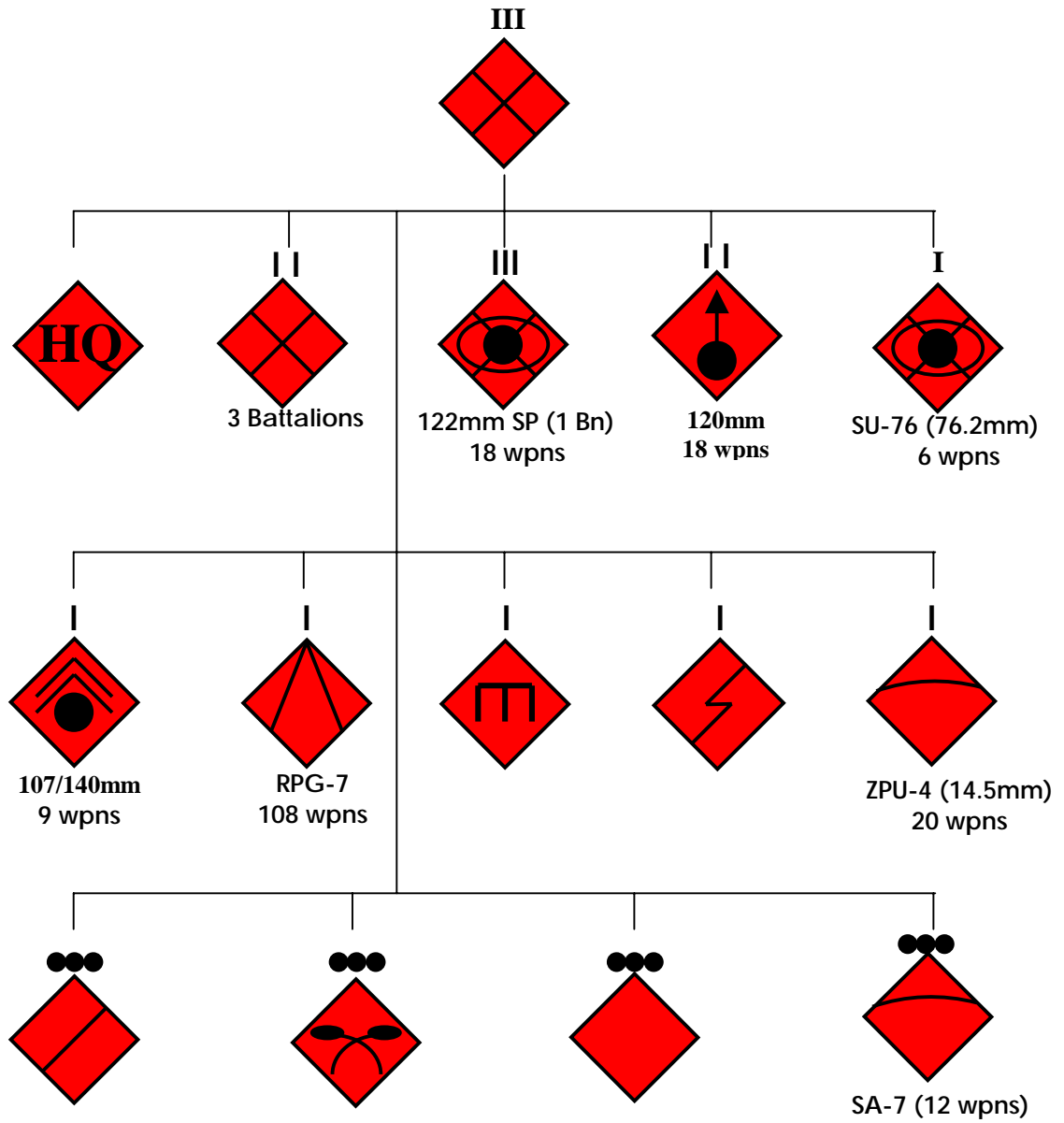
## Chart 2. Infantry Division<sup>14</sup>



<sup>14</sup> The Civil Police (CP) currently operate within the northern sector of the military demarcation line and are attached during combat to the forward division. Because of these units habitual association within this sector, during combat, they will be assigned the mission of securing the ROKA General Support Observation Posts (GSOP) and guiding the forward divisions through the DMZ. The Obstacle Removal Company is assigned to the forward division for the purpose of removing mines within the DMZ.

# North Korean Tactics

## Chart 3. Infantry Regiment



## **North Korean Tactics**

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