

Wartime Interoperability Problems Posed by Differences in South Korean and United States Army Tactics

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During the Korean War, the Republic of Korea places its military under the control of then United Nations commander, General Douglas MacArthur. The United Nations Command (UNC) headquarters, overwhelmingly made up of foreign officers, was responsible for the defense and military strategy of the Republic of Korea (ROK). By the mid-1960s, the UNC looked to increase ROK participation in order to improve military planning. In 1978, the combined Forces Command (CFC) was established as the headquarters for ROK-U.S. forces in South Korea and the responsibilities of the UNC were taken over by the CFC. The CFC's mission was to enhance interoperability, but few steps have been taken to study and reduce problems caused by differences between the two country's tactics.

This report explores the differences between South Korean and U.S. Army tactics looking at historical factors, social influences, psychological influences and physical influences by exploring conventional attack operations, defense tactics, "special" operations and unconventional warfare operations. The report then examines the degree to which differing tactics pose problems to combined operations and provides recommendations to resolve these problems.

Simpson writes:

"One weakness in the American forces' relations with the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army over the past several decades has been an assumption that the Koreans have patterned themselves after the Americans. Although the Korean Army has patterned many of its tactical concepts after American tactics, in an attempt to achieve a degree of interoperability, they are independent thinkers and have developed a form of fighting which is consistent with the Korean personality, terrain and perceived threat. To achieve the tactical interoperability which is no envisioned to be the cornerstone of allied operations in Korea, it is essential that these differences be recognized and that a concerned attempt be made to reconcile differences which could endanger combined operations." [page 3]

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