

Lieutenant Colonel Nate Michaels, CBRN Officer for the 8th Army in Seoul South Korea, tells *CBRNe World* about how they are preparing for the high-intensity NBC conflict.

The land that CBRN forgot

CW: Can you give us an idea of what is the role of US Army chemical soldiers in Korea? South Korea (or Republic of Korea, ROK) still faces a Cold War-style opponent in the shape of North Korea – which is expected to still have traditional Chemical Warfare Agents (CWA) and their delivery mechanisms – artillery delivery of thousands of gallons of agent. Is it this still the case, a throwback to Korean war models or has it been updated?

NM: A lot has happened since the Korean War! Our equipment and quality of Soldiers has improved significantly but more notably, CBRN Soldiers assigned to Korea are prepared to fight and win in a chemical environment if called upon on the Korean Peninsula. CBRN Soldier's roles and responsibilities in Korea vary from a Battery CBRN Room Specialist in an Artillery Battalion, a Decon Squad Leader of a Heavy Decon Platoon in 4th Chemical Company, to a Special Staff Officer on a Heavy Brigade Combat Team (HBCT) staff. No matter what position they hold, they are considered the CBRN experts and advise Commanders at all levels.

The ROK CBRN Defense capabilities have rapidly matured over the past 20 years and have markedly reduced their tactical and operational dependence on the United States. Consequently, U.S. Army CBRN Soldiers stationed in Korea in 2008 play a significantly greater roll in facilitating the development of ROK Combating WMD policies, technologies and theatre strategic capabilities than they did just 5 years ago. The ROK/U.S. alliance has benefited enormously from the transformation taking place within the U.S. CBRNe community and is adopting many of the concepts the U.S. Army has validated during the Global



Old-fashioned decon the Korean way! ©DoD

War on Terrorism. The GWOT has forced CBRN Soldiers to think differently about Combating WMD, and our new, more multi-dimensional way of thinking applies surprisingly well to the Cold War threats we face while stationed in the ROK.

CW: While that is the overview, are you still looking at the Cold War threat, gallons of CWA, rather than the CBRN threat, which spans biological and radiological agents, as well as toxic industrial chemicals etc.

NM: Yes, we are probably the last theatre that still fights the high-intensity conflict. The last time it was topical was prior to the Berlin Wall coming down in 1989 and the Soviet Union existed. Here we are still fighting the traditional, generation one agents, while defending against it in a conventional Chemical Corp way: Large Area Chemical Reconnaissance and

Heavy Decontamination. It is much standardised and, while not necessarily "old school", it is the way that we have traditionally been trained.

CW: In that way you are probably in dissonance with the rest of the US military, who have moved on from that threat. How do you ensure that your mission remains catered for, that new TTPs for dealing with CWA are devised in the same way threats in OIF and OEF are – dealing with chlorine, for example? How do you ensure that equipment and training for your mission is given equal priority?

NM: There is constant exchange between 8th Army, USFK, the ROK, 2ID (Second Infantry Division) and the CBRN School for updated and relevant TTPs and equipment. The threat from North Korean WMDs is different than the threat our Soldiers are facing in Iraq and Afghanistan, but no less

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The land that CBRN forgot

relevant to the U.S. Army. Soldiers assigned to the Republic of Korea train to defend against what the U.S. would consider a very traditional WMD threat from North Korea. For first term CBRN Soldiers, the training we provide establishes a solid baseline understanding of CBRN Defence Principles. We stay relevant and updated against non-standard precursors by receiving additional training, such as the hazmat training that is being taught at the CBRN School in Fort Leonard Wood and cross training with the installation fire departments. Additionally, as CBRN Soldiers rotate into the Korean Theatre of Operation (KTO) from CONUS based units, they bring valuable skills they have learned elsewhere.

CW: In light of the Army's transformation plan, has the latest CBRNE Defense Equipment been fielded to the Korean Theatre of Operation at the same rate as elsewhere in the world?

NM: I would suggest that Kim Jung Il is not the only world leader who presides over enormous stockpiles of Chemical and Biological weapons. Despite its limited application in Iraq and Afghanistan the development and procurement of the Nuclear Biological and Chemical Reconnaissance Vehicle (NBCRV) and its modifications to be a useful enabler, is an indication that the Army has an enduring and healthy concern for any number of countries who possess the ability to create large areas of gross contamination using rockets, missiles and artillery. Our ability to think beyond the current conflict will continue to serve our Army and our allies well.

Joint Program Managers are receptive to our specific theatre requirements, which allow us to leverage emerging technologies that may apply uniquely to threats in the KTO. As an example, Heavy Decontamination and Wheeled Reconnaissance remain relevant CBRN Defense missions in the KTO. As a result, Program Managers are eager to establish test bed relationships to further develop and enhance the systems that support these missions.

CW: In terms of your role on the Korean peninsula, are you there to be a large-scale liaison point for ROK CBRN forces, to provide a specific capability (such as bio detection), to have a role in Korean homeland security, or just to provide CBRN defence to US assets?

NM: Our relationship with ROK forces is very strong; our Chemical Company routinely trains side by side with the ROK Chemical Companies and Battalions exchanging Decon and Recon TTPs. The CBRN Cell Staff members at Brigade, Division, and Army level frequently conduct CPX (Command Post Exercises) with our ROK counterparts. These CPXs exercise the ROK and US CBRN Cells since there is a great deal of Chemical and Biological scenarios injected. Moreover, side by side on a daily basis are the Korean Augmentation to the US Army (called KATUSAs) – these KATUSA Soldiers are with us 24/7 for two years at a time. I have two CBRN KATUSAs in my cell that have been trained on the Joint Warning and Reporting (JWARN) Software which provides a Common Operational Picture of contamination on the battle field. USFK and the Combined Forces Command are charged with working with our ROK partners to develop theatre strategic level plans and policies. Two recent examples of ROK/US efforts include the development of a combined WMD consequence management working group and combined Pandemic Influenza response planning. These initiatives integrate ROK and U.S. Military, Civil and Interagency authorities and capabilities to optimize our ability to respond to shared threats.

CW: What do you think are the challenges that are facing your force in the next 5-10 years? What are your priorities in terms of training and equipment?

NM: We will continue to train with the ROK Army – that is the number one priority – we must maintain our well established strong alliance. The alliance has been going on for years and we have gained a lot from it, an ongoing exchange of TTPs in decontamination

and equipment technology improvements. The number two priority would be increased hazardous materials training. This training will come when the Chemical Company in Korea will be fielded the light reconnaissance package, which will enable the company to conduct site characterization and assessments. Lastly, a key to continued success beyond 2012 is the establishment of the Combined Joint Task Force Elimination (CJTF-E), whose wartime mission is to Locate, Characterize, Secure and Disable WMDs. The ROK's interest in developing their own WMD Elimination capability has led to recently established team training and participation in theatre level exercises. As the ROK transitions to assuming wartime authority of its military forces, our challenge will be to maintain the momentum of current priorities, policies and initiatives critical to the safety of the Korean people and their infrastructure. Defending the Republic of Korea will continue to be the U.S. priority for as long as there is a threat to defend against.



US forces and ROK forces have very close collaboration ©DoD

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