

Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Issues

Discussion

In recent years, U.S. forces have increasingly conducted military operations other than war. This category of operations includes such missions as humanitarian assistance, military support to civil authorities, peace operations, and noncombatant evacuations. Increased interaction between friendly troops and friendly, neutral, or hostile civilian populations has become an inevitable feature of the contemporary landscape. The tactical application of non-lethal weapons (NLWs) is often useful in such scenarios.

Non-lethal weapons are explicitly designed and primarily employed to incapacitate personnel or materiel, while minimizing fatalities, permanent injury to personnel, and collateral damage to property and the environment. NLWs must be compatible with, easily integrated with, and complementary to, current and planned conventional weapons. They must be capable of achieving the desired effects on targets instantaneously without degrading the tactical posture of friendly forces.

NLWs reinforce deterrence efforts and expand the range of options available to commanders. They enhance our capability to discourage, delay, or prevent hostile action; to limit escalation; to isolate the battlefield. They also allow military action in situations where use of lethal force is not the preferred option. The DoD is now in the process of fielding NLWs capability sets. NLWs were employed during the withdrawal of United Nations forces from Somalia and during the intervention in Haiti. They are currently deployed in the former Yugoslavia. The current systems include non-penetrating projectiles (rubber bullets and bean-bag rounds), flash-bang grenades, pepper spray, aqueous foam barriers, and caltrops.

In 1996, the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Technology (A&T) appointed the Marine Corps DoD Executive Agent for NLWs. Leadership in this area transitioned from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) to the Joint NLW Directorate (JNLWD) in 1997. The JNLWD continues to review and harmonize joint requirements, Service funding, and program execution. The JNLWD has negotiated a Memorandum of Agreement among all Services and the U.S. Special Operations Command for effective management and coordination of non-lethal efforts.

Marine Corps Position

This joint concept supports the Marine Corps as the designated DoD Executive Agent for NLWs. It establishes a set of guiding principles to ensure common direction of the Services and agencies (both Defense and non-Defense) and efficient use of resources in the development of non-lethal capabilities. The Marine Corps believes that NLWs provide commanders increased options for resolving complex problems encountered across the range of military operations and expand policy choices. They provide a credible capability to use discriminate, measured force to influence pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict situations.