

US ARMY NEWS

Organization leads Fight Against IEDs



A Soldier displays a cell phone used to detonate radio-controlled IEDs. JEIDDO's Counter Radio-Controlled Electronic Warfare vehicle-mounted, man-portable and fixed-site jamming systems prevent these devices from detonating.

WASHINGTON (Army News Service, April 1, 2008) - If America allows the improvised-explosive device to control its strategic decisions, IED will become the weapon of choice for all of America's enemies, according to the director of the organization charged with its defeat.

"We need to figure out where the enemy is going to go next, because the enemy is going to remain in a very disruptive, irregular-warfare pattern," said Lt. Gen. Thomas F. Metz, director of the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization.

"He will not attack us conventionally and we've got to figure out what technology he's going to use and how he's going to employ that technology, because he will not give up anytime soon," Metz said. "I sincerely believe that if we are not successful, (IED) will become the weapon of choice and it will be far beyond just the CENTCOM area of responsibility. It won't be just in the Middle East. It will be about everywhere that people are fighting, and has the potential to come to the homeland."

JEIDDO leads the Department of Defense actions for anything related to IEDs, from developing and fielding new technologies to defeat IEDs to training servicemembers to identify dangers in the road. It has a three-part strategy for attacking IEDs - which Metz said has been partially responsible for the recent decline in incidents - Attack the Network, Defeat the Device and Train the Force.

Attacking the terrorist network is especially important, he continued, because it prevents the IED at the source. It can include disrupting movement between financiers, IED makers, trainers and their infrastructure, as well as providing surveillance and intelligence to commanders.

"Some parts of the network may not be as fruitful to attack," Metz said. "For example, the young person who goes and places the IED may just...get paid \$100 a night to put in the IED and they do it to feed their family. They're not ideologically motivated, they're a laborer. The bomb maker's got to be a little bit more skilled and thoughtful about what he does and maybe the financier is a determined radical who has the wherewithal to fund the network. So that's why it's so important to understand the network and attack those vulnerabilities in the network."

If an IED does make it into the field, JEIDDO, Soldiers and commanders rely on both new and very basic technologies such as jamming systems that prevent cell-phone and other remote-control IEDs from detonating, route-clearance blowers that remove debris from roadways and robots that dismantle IEDs.

According to JEIDDO's top enlisted advisor, Sgt. Maj. Anthony Semento, many of these ideas, such as the blower, have come from servicemembers in the field who couldn't wait for the development and fielding process to combat IEDs. He tries to visit Soldiers in-theater quarterly to find out what's working and what isn't, especially as insurgents often develop new techniques overnight.

Sometimes, Metz said, the solution to combating a new IED is as simple as a change in tactics or procedures and takes a matter of hours or days, but if new equipment needs to be fielded, the response can take significantly longer.

"(Soldiers) came up with things to try and defeat the enemy, just thinking about what would work and what won't work and making things happen," Semento said. "The intelligence of our Soldiers nowadays is beyond anything I think anyone really understands. They're not waiting for solutions. They're trying to come up with their own on the ground."

"We learn so much from them and that's why I try to get out there as much as possible and pick their brains. That way I know what the problem is, what they're trying to do, and I can relay that to my boss who will go out and try to have people come up with solutions for them. Whenever a Soldier is put up against something that they don't really know about or something that they do know about, they're going to come up with a solution."

Soldiers' training and experience, he added, are critical to the IED fight because the number-one way they find IEDs is with their eyes, not equipment. Although JEIDDO has a Joint Center of Excellence, headquartered at Fort Irwin, Calif., that works with large training venues to train units about to deploy, Semento said the focus is on home-station training because commanders best know what their Soldiers need.

A major component of both the training at installations and training centers are IED-training lanes, and Soldiers either walk or drive over paths laden with training IEDs. If the Soldiers see the IED, they'll follow procedures to clear it, and if not, the practice IED will explode with the signature of a real one, but without injuring the Soldiers. Then, they'll have to follow the same procedures they would if it was a real explosion.

JIEDDO also shows servicemembers and leaders how to operate new equipment and detect new forms of IEDs, as well as ways to attack terrorist networks. Metz stressed that it's crucial for Soldiers to know how to properly search buildings and protect themselves from IEDs they find without actually detonating them. Keeping the IEDs intact can preserve valuable forensic evidence, he said.

"Soldiers need to be trained to a point where they don't believe the IED is a show-stopper for them," said Semento.