

SOUTH KOREA



CLEARING THE MINES 2022

KEY DATA

ANTI-PERSONNEL (AP) MINE CONTAMINATION: MASSIVE

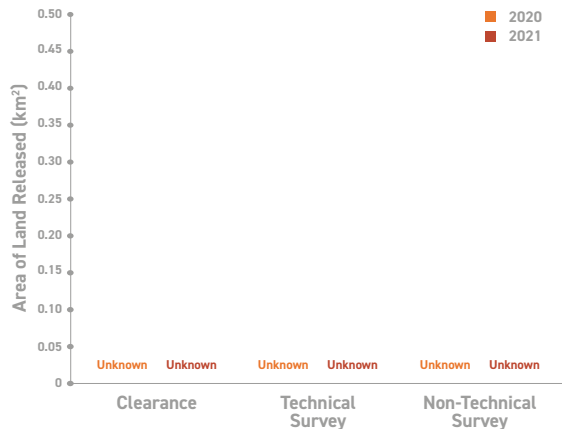
NATIONAL ESTIMATE

128km²

AP MINE
CLEARANCE IN 2021
UNKNOWN

AP MINES
DESTROYED IN 2021
UNKNOWN

LAND RELEASE OUTPUT



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- The Republic of Korea (South Korea) should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- South Korea should establish a national mine action authority to assume responsibility for planning and implementing mine clearance.
- South Korea should enact long-considered legislation permitting mine clearance by accredited civilian demining organisations.
- South Korea should clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, consonant with its obligations under international human rights law.

DEMINING CAPACITY

MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

- Ministry of National Defence

NATIONAL OPERATORS

- Army engineers

INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- None

OTHER ACTORS

- United Nations Command (UNC)

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

The Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) and the Civilian Control Zone (CCZ), immediately adjoining the southern boundary of the DMZ, remain among the most heavily mined areas in the world due to extensive mine-laying during the Korean War and in the 1960s, in 1978, and in 1988.

The Army's Joint Chiefs of Staff disclosed in October 2020 that South Korea had 1,308 confirmed hazardous areas (CHA) affecting a little over 128km² (see Table 1), 8% more than the area of contamination identified by the National Defence Committee in a 2020 report.¹

1 Yoo Hyun-min, "828,000 landmines buried nationwide...59,000 even south of the Civilian Control Line", *Yonhap News Agency*, 9 October 2020.

Table 1: Confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) in South Korea (at October 2020)²

	Total	Controlled Protection Zones		Restricted Protection Zones	Rear area
		DMZ	CCZ		
No. of sites	1,308	786	433	22	67
Area (m ²)	128,160,000	10,030,000	114,780,000	2,470,000	880,000
No. of mines	828,000	380,000	389,000	50,000	9,000

Contamination data were largely unchanged from previous years. A report presented to a side event at the 2019 Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) Intersessional Meetings also recorded 1,308 mined areas containing an estimated 828,000 mines.³ Information provided by the Army's Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2018, also showed 380,000 of these mines were emplaced in 786 sites within the DMZ.⁴ Mined areas in the DMZ include 771 emplaced minefields which are mapped and 15 undocumented mined areas covering a total of 10.03 km². CCZ contamination includes 257 defined mined areas and 176 undocumented sites covering a total of 114.79km².⁵

The Ministry of National Defence previously reported that it had emplaced some 53,000 M14 anti-personnel mines around 37 rear air defence bases between 1960 and 1980 and in demining operations conducted between 1998 and 2007 it had cleared around 50,000 of these mines. However, floods, landslides and changes in topography were believed to have caused mines to move and some 3,000 mines remained to be found and destroyed.⁶

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

The southern half of the Demilitarized Zone is controlled by South Korea but under the Armistice Agreement the area between the Demarcation Line and the Southern Line Limit is under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Command (UNC) and any mine clearance activities are conducted with UNC approval.

Mine action in the Civilian Control Zone (between the SLL and the Civilian Control Line) and the rest of South Korea is overseen by the Ministry of National Defence and conducted exclusively by South Korean army engineers.

There is no national mine action authority or mine action centre in South Korea and only the South Korean army is permitted to conduct clearance. Government ministries have discussed creation of a mine action authority but as of April 2021 had not decided whether or not to proceed and the idea reportedly remains in its infancy.⁷ South Korea's Ministry of Defence submitted a bill to parliament in 2013 that would allow civilian organisations to remove mines laid during the Korean War.⁸ As at April 2021, the National Assembly had not passed the bill. General Robert Abrams, Commander of US forces and the UNC, has reportedly explored the possibility of bringing in international non-governmental organisations as advisers.⁹

A document submitted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the National Assembly in 2020 identifying obstacles to mine action pointed to the absence of an institutional framework and the lack of a legal basis for mine clearance which can only be conducted with the consent of land owners. The memo said existing demining capacity was overburdened and recommended expanding capacity from one brigade to two or three brigades. It also called for quality assurance and post-clearance analysis.¹⁰

The Ministry of National Defence announced in 2019 that it had embarked on a three-year programme to complete the survey and clearance of rear areas by October 2021. The proposal called for expanding demining capacity from six teams with 200 personnel to 31 teams with 1,200 personnel. It also called for investment in upgrading detectors to detect plastic mines and in mechanical assets.¹¹ The extent to which the Army has progressed in implementing the plan remains unclear. A Joint Chiefs of Staff memo to the National Assembly reported an increase in the budget for mine clearance from KRW 180 million (approximately US\$161,000) in 2018 to KRW 330 million in 2019 and KRW 8.2 billion (US\$7.3 million) in 2020.¹²

2 Ibid.

3 PowerPoint presentation by Maj.-Gen. Han Cheol Ki (ret.), Side event to the APMBC Intersessional Meetings, Geneva, 24 May 2019.

4 South Korea Joint Chiefs of Staff (ROK JCS), cited in "Mine Action in the Korean Peninsula", unpublished paper by Eum Soohong, member, Korean Campaign to Ban Landmines, September 2019.

5 United Nations Command (UNC) South Korea PowerPoint presentation for Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) side event to the UN National Directors' Meeting, Geneva, 11 February 2020.

6 Ministry of National Defence press release, 16 October 2019.

7 Interview with Cho Jai Kook, Coordinator, Korea Campaign to Ban Landmines, and Eum Soohong, KCBL, in Geneva, 13 February 2020.

8 "S. Korea pushes to allow civilians to remove land mines", *Yonhap*, 14 November 2013.

9 Presentation by Col. J. P. Lloyd, UNC, GICHD side-event to the UN National Directors' Meeting, Geneva, 11 February 2020.

10 Memo from the Engineering Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to the National Assembly (unofficial translation by Eum Soohong, KCBL), October 2020.

11 Ministry of National Defence press release, 16 October 2019.

12 Memo from the Engineering Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to the National Assembly (unofficial translation by Eum Soohong, KCBL), October 2020.

In February 2022, 334 Korean non-governmental organisations (NGOs) demanded that demining of rear areas should be on the agenda during the presidential election and called for the ministry in charge of mine removal to be transferred from the Ministry of National Defence to the Ministry of Public Administration and Security, which is the ministry in charge of national disasters and public safety. In addition, there were calls for the application of the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) to mine clearance; public disclosure of information on the 37 minefields in the rear areas; the development of a

comprehensive plan of mine clearance; the establishment of a mine clearance committee reporting directly to the President; and the enactment of a Law on Mine Clearance.¹³ Several municipalities also called for demining in the rear regions and legislation on mine action with the adoption of resolutions on mine action following accidents in those areas.¹⁴

The Army was reported in February 2021 to have launched a two-week course training deminers to standards that for the first time are IMAS-compatible. The Army reportedly planned to train 500 people on the course during 2021.¹⁵

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ACTION

It is not known how, if at all, the environment is taken into consideration during planning and tasking of survey and clearance of mines in South Korea in order to minimise potential harm.

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

South Korea reported clearing 158 mines (not disaggregated by type) and 2,410 items of unexploded ordnance in the course of operations to exhume remains of Korean War casualties around Arrowhead Hill in the DMZ in 2020. North Korea did not conduct clearance in the DMZ as provided for in the September 2018 Panmunjom Declaration.¹⁶ In April 2022, South Korea resumed operations to exhume remains of Korean War casualties and conducted demining in the Baekmagoji area of the DMZ. Operations had been suspended following threat of hostile actions from North Korea in the border area.¹⁷

According to online media, the Army said in February 2021 that it planned to conduct mine clearance in 42 areas covering 630,000m² by November 2021. The areas targeted for clearance included 36 rear air-defence sites south of the CCZ.¹⁸

13 Jin-yong Cho, "Removal of rear mines such as in Naju and Boseong urged to be adopted as 'the presidential election task'", *Jnilbo*, 16 February 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3Qjju9D>.

14 See: "Goyang City Council: Necessary to revise the Special Act on Support for Victims of Landmine Explosion", *Newsis*, 21 January 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3xBudvd>; "Gimpo city council calls for realistic compensation for victims of landmine accident in Han River estuary", *Siminilbo*, 20 January 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3zZUtCr>; "Yeoncheon County Council, Resolution Calling for Enactment and Revision of Landmine-Related Laws", *Yonhap*, 15 February 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3MZS516>.

15 Choi Han-young, "The first military to meet international standards and train mine removal experts", *Kookbang*, 5 February 2021.

16 Jung Bitna, "Unearthed 143 remains of this year's Arrowhead Bill", *Yonhap News Agency*, 19 November 2020.

17 Emails from Eum Soohong, KCBL, 3 and 11 April 2022.

18 Maeng Soo-yeol, "Civil control line, public works, rear air defense camp mine removal operation", *Kookbang*, 1 April 2021.