NORTH KOREA

KEY DATA

NO APMBC ARTICLE 5 DEADLINE:

State not party to the APMBC

AP MINE CONTAMINATION:

Unknown, but massive

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS

Release of AP mined area	Release in 2025 (km²)	Release in 2024 (km²)
Clearance	Not reported	Not reported
Technical Survey	Not reported	Not reported
Non-Technical Survey	Not reported	Not reported

Destruction of AP mines during clearance, survey, and spot tasks	2025	2024
AP Mines destroyed	Not reported	Not reported

MAIN AP MINE SURVEY AND CLEARANCE OPERATOR IN 2025:

- Korean People's Army engineers

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Reports that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) has, since 2023, been emplacing mines in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that separates North Korea from the Republic of Korea (South Korea) continued into 2025 and 2026. In 2025, North Korea extended its operations to fortify the border with South Korea, including landmine emplacement along the entire length of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) that separates North and South Korea. Following an investigation with the United Nations Command (UNC), South Korea attributed two explosions on the South Korean side of the DMZ on 21 September 2026 to resin-cased anti-personnel (AP) mines emplaced by North Korea in 2025. At least two additional AP mines were discovered at the site of the blasts. North Korea has denied any involvement. The same month, a media source reported that North Korea had ordered the re-emplacement of landmines on its northern border with China. North Korea is not known to have laid mines on its border with China since 2023. Little is known more broadly about contamination, and no survey or clearance of AP mines has been reported in North Korea in recent years.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- **North Korea should cease all use of AP mines.**
- **North Korea should resume mine clearance in the DMZ as soon as possible and permit independent verification of clearance.**
- **North Korea should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.**
- **North Korea should clear AP mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, consonant with its obligations under international human rights law.**

AP MINE SURVEY AND CLEARANCE CAPACITY

MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

- No functioning mine action programme

NATIONAL OPERATORS

- Korean People's Army engineers

INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- None

OTHER ACTORS

- None

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

The extent of North Korea's mine problem is not known. In 1998, North Korea admitted laying mines in the DMZ, a 1,000km^2 strip of land between the north and south of the peninsula believed to be one of the most densely contaminated areas in the world. Estimates have put the number of mines spread across the border with South Korea—an area 248km-long and 4km-deep—at 2 million. Mined areas are reported to be marked and fenced but mines are also believed to have shifted as a result of flooding and landslides.[1] Moreover, it has been claimed that both North Korea and South Korea have poorly managed their mine-laying and that they do not know exactly how many they emplaced nor exactly where they are.[2]

In September 2018, at the third inter-Korean summit, which took place amid a period of improving relationships between the North and the South, North and South Korea agreed to begin removing landmines from the Joint Security Area (JSA) at Panmunjom in the DMZ. North and South Korea completed clearance of the JSA a month later. In November, South Korea reported that North Korea had removed more than 600 AP mines from the area under the Comprehensive Military Agreement signed in September 2018.[3] Additional clearance was conducted in late 2018 around Arrowhead Hill (also known as Hill 281) in Cheolwon, Gangwon province, under a joint pilot project to recover human remains.[4] Both North Korea and South Korea conducted mine clearance in the area, with South Korea reportedly clearing 158 mines (not disaggregated by type) and 2,410 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) around Arrowhead Hill in 2020.[5]

In April 2022, South Korea resumed demining operations in the Baekmagoji area of the DMZ in Cheolwon, Gangwon province – part of the earlier peacebuilding initiative in 2018.[6] Operations were temporarily suspended on 1 April 2022 following threat of hostile action from North Korea in the border area, but resumed on 11 April 2022.[7] In November 2022, during a statement to the Twentieth Meeting of States Parties to the APMBC, South Korea reported it was "continuing with its mine clearing efforts, where possible, in a systemic and phased manner" and in line with International Mine Action Standards (IMAS), but it did not state where these activities were taking place.[8]

Since 2023, however, there have been reports that North Korea has again been laying landmines. In late 2023, it was reported that the North Korean army had re-mined an unpaved road near Arrowhead Hill, roughly 50 miles north-east of Seoul.[9] Further reports that North Korea was emplacing mines in the DMZ followed in late 2023 and early 2024.[10] Early in 2024, South Korea noticed that North Korea was laying both AP and anti-vehicle (AV) mines in the DMZ, including at either end of the unofficial border.[11] This included mining a land route on the Gyeongui road in the west that connects the cities of Paju in the South and Kaesong in the North.[12] One report indicated that, in early December 2023, mine emplacement had started around the Gyeongui Line railroad and nearby guard posts, where North Korea had previously cleared mines in 2002.[13] North Korea is also reported to have laid mines on the Donghae road along the east coast.[14] Mining of the three roads (including at Arrowhead Hill) effectively cut off all land connections connecting the two States.[15] The cross-border sites were once targeted for modern train lines to improve economic integration between the two countries before the collapse of the 2018 agreement.[16]

1 Statement of North Korea, United Nations (UN) General Assembly, New York, 4 December 1998, UN doc. A/53/pv79, pp. 8–9; Choe Sang-Hun, "Koreas start clearing landmines at DMZ in effort to ease tensions", *The New York Times*, 1 October 2018.

2 "North Korean landmines could float into South Korea, South warn" *Associated Press*, 17 July 2024, https://bit.ly/4dwBwYj.

3 Email from Eum Soohong, member, Korean Campaign to Ban Landmines (KCBL), 14 August 2024; and Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, "North Korea", Last updated 16 November 2021.

4 Song Young-moo and No Kwang Chol, "Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain", National Committee on North Korea, 19 September 2018, Annex 2, p. 7, http://bit.ly/2XXbuXd; and "Korean leaders sign agreement for North Korea to take further steps to denuclearize", *ABC News*, 20 September 2018, https://tinyurl.com/jz7zub2v.

5 Untitled article [translated from Korean], *Maeil Business Newspaper*, 29 April 2024, https://bit.ly/3WEgyA4; and B. Jung "Unearthed 143 remains of this year's Arrowhead Bill", *Yonhap News Agency*, 19 November 2020.

6 Emails from Eum Soohong, KCBL, 5 January and 14 August 2024.

7 Emails from Eum Soohong, KCBL, 3 and 11 April 2022, and 14 August 2024.

8 Statement of the Republic of Korea, APMBC Twentieth Meeting of States Parties (20MSP), 24 November 2022.

9 "Map Shows Where North Korea Has Placed Land Mines in Demilitarized Zone", *Newsweek*, 30 April 2024, https://bit.ly/3LLpui2.

10 "Concentration of road blocking and fortification in the north… Joint Chiefs of Staff discloses surveillance and reconnaissance data on North Korea" (unofficial translation), *K-Force*, 10 October 2024.

11 "Map Shows Where North Korea Has Placed Land Mines in Demilitarized Zone", *Newsweek*, 30 April 2024.

12 Ibid.

13 "North Korea redeploys landmine near Gyeongui Line", *The Dong-A Ilbo*, 5 January 2024, https://bit.ly/3WVk4Y4.

14 Ibid.

15 Untitled article (translated from Korean), *Maeil Business Newspaper*, 29 April 2024.

16 "Map Shows Where North Korea Has Placed Land Mines in Demilitarized Zone", *Newsweek*, 30 April 2024.

In addition to laying mines along three roads in the DMZ, in mountains and fields,[17] and along inter-Korean railroads, including using AP mines in some areas,[18] it has been reported that tens of thousands of additional explosive devices have been used by North Korea to reinforce the border.[19] Mine explosions are reported to have caused multiple casualties among North Korean troops laying explosives along the heavily armed border.[20] In July 2024, it was reported that North Korea had sent more military personnel to the DMZ to speed up mine emplacement and other efforts to fortify the border.[21]

Although reports of North Korea emplacing new AP mines in the DMZ tailed off from July 2024, at least one report claimed that North Korean troops began emplacing landmines in the DMZ again in late 2024, "Since late 2024, Pyongyang has intensified its efforts to strengthen border defenses, including laying additional landmines and erecting anti-tank barriers".[22] Other media sources suggested that North Korea was again, at least sporadically, laying mines in the DMZ in 2025.[23] In March 2025, the South Korean military reported many casualties among the North Korean military in a mine explosion after it resumed work in the "front area" of the DMZ.[24]

In April 2026, Human Rights Watch pointed to new use of AP mines by North Korea.[25] Media reports in June 2026 have also indicated that North Korea has continued to lay mines. One source reported that North Korea had been constructing fences within 80 metres of the line dividing the two Koreas and cleared ground for landmines just 5 to 10 metres from it. It also stated that North Korea had been erecting fences and laying mines since October 2024 within 100 metres of the MDL, and that ahead of the fences, minefields have been planted to keep its own soldiers and residents from fleeing south across the border.[26] Another media outlet suggested that since April 2025, North Korea had deployed large numbers of personnel to "install anti-tank barriers, lay mines, reinforce barbed wire, and build barren areas near the MDL" before a pause between December 2025 and March 2026 when work resumed sporadically and with only smaller groups of workers.[27]

In October 2026, the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff summarised mine emplacement by North Korea along the DMZ since 2024, stating that North Korean operations to fortify the border, including the construction of barren land and landmine emplacement, had been identified in some areas of the MDL, and that operations were extended to cover the entire length of the MDL in March 2025. In 2026, an average of 7,000 North Korean personnel were said to be deployed daily in these operations, which focused on minefield installation and barbed wire fences. The South Korean Ministry of National Defence has assessed minefield installation along the MDL as 40–60% complete and expected to be finished within two years. Several locations south of the MDL have been identified where North Korean forces are suspected of planting landmines, with the average intrusion by North Korean forces south of the MDL said to be approximately 20 metres, with daily North Korean intrusions reported since they were first identified in the eastern region in mid-August 2026. The situation is complicated by the fact that South Korea, North Korea, and the UNC, interpret the precise location of the MDL differently.[28]

In a recent development, two explosions on the South Korean side of the DMZ on 21 September 2026, close to a suspected North Korean minefield and ten metres from the MDL, injured three South Korean military personnel, two of them seriously. Following a joint investigation with the UNC from 26–29 September 2026, South Korea concluded that the explosions were the result of resin-cased AP mines emplaced by North Korea, buried to a depth of approximately 5–10cm, emplaced 12 months previously in a manner typical of a North Korean minefield.[29] South Korean officials found that at least four landmines had been emplaced by North Korea at the site of the blasts, including the two that exploded, and launched an operation in cooperation with the UNC to clear the site of any other North Korean-emplaced mines. North Korea has denied any involvement.[30]

The South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff have claimed that the emplacement of the AP mines by North Korea was in breach of the armistice agreement that ended the 1950–53 Korean War, and the UNC found that at least one of the AP mines discovered after the initial blasts constituted such a breach. South Korea has demanded an apology from North Korea and called on Pyongyang to cease its border fortification

17 International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), "International Campaign to Ban Landmines concerned at reported landmine use by North Korea", 20 May 2024 (updated 24 July 2024), https://bit.ly/4fnqDtL.

18 "Editorial: Resuming loudspeaker broadcasts demands preparedness for any N. Korean provocation", *The Chosun Daily*, 10 June 2024, https://bit.ly/3WMeg2V.

19 "North Korean landmines could float into South Korea, South warn", *Associated Press*, 17 July 2024, https://bit.ly/4dwBwYj.

20 Ibid.; and "Land mine blasts inflicted casualties on North Korean troops in DMZ in recent months, South says", *CNN*, 18 June 2024, https://bit.ly/3YBTLaK.

21 "N. Korea speeds up landmine and fortification work on inter-Korean border", *Daily NK*, 1 July 2024.

22 "Exclusive look at the DMZ drama shaking the Korean Peninsula", *Bulgarianmilitary.com,* 9 April 2025.

23 "North Korea notifies UN Command to resume work on barbed wire fence and barriers to cut off South Korea (unofficial translation), *Dong-A Ilbo*, 30 June 2025, https://bit.ly/4gco4eV; and "There is no answer to the repatriation of residents… North Korea notifies UNC to 'resume frontline work' after 8 months" (unofficial translation), *JoongAng Ilbo*, 30 June 2025, https://tinyurl.com/yc86p3tm.

24 "North Korea dispatched additional troops to Russia earlier this year… DMZ ship mine explosion kills many people", (unofficial translation), *K-Force*, 27 March 2025, https://tinyurl.com/yh26mdj9.

25 "Mine Ban Treaty Achieves Progress amid Challenges", Human Rights Watch, 4 April 2026, https://bit.ly/4fQxIW2.

26 "Demilitarized no more? North Korea's DMZ fortifications creep south as Seoul, UNC differ over significance", *Korea JoongAng Daily*, 23 June 2026, https://bit.ly/3TSPUWj.

27 "[Exclusive] North Korea notifies UN Command to resume construction of 'cut off from the South' barrier and barbed wire fence", (unofficial translation), *Donga.com,* 30 June 2026, https://bit.ly/4zaLNFi.

28 E-government website of the Republic of Korea, "Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Field Investigation Task Force Announces Final Investigation Results Regarding 25th Division DMZ Mine Explosion Incident" (unofficial translation), 5 October 2026, https://bit.ly/4icmkop.

29 Ibid.; and "Military Concludes N. Korean Antipersonnel Mines Caused Sept. 21 DMZ blast", *KBS World*, 6 October 2026, https://bit.ly/47a03kZ; and "Mines in the border zone as Kim treats South Korea as an enemy", *The Times*, 6 October 2026, https://bit.ly/4hCAGOI.

30 E-government website of the Republic of Korea, "Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Field Investigation Task Force Announces Final Investigation Results Regarding 25th Division DMZ Mine Explosion Incident", (unofficial translation), 5 October 2026; "Military Concludes N. Korean Antipersonnel Mines Caused Sept. 21 DMZ blast", *KBS World*, 6 October 2026; and "(2nd LD) S. Korea blames N.K. for DMZ mine blast; UNC cites armistice breach over active mine", *Yonhap News Agency*, 30 September 2026, https://bit.ly/4yvz8fn.

operations.[31] South Korea has said that if North Korea does not voluntarily remove the minefields installed south of the MDL, it will continue clearance operations to ensure peace in the DMZ.[32]

Furthermore, South Korea continues to highlight the risk that AP mines emplaced by the North could float into South Korea during heavy rains, and even that North Korea might intentionally float mines to South Korea.[33] There was particular concern about a small plastic mine, shaped as a leaf, containing 40 grams of explosive (approximately twice that of a typical AP mine), which had already been found in South Korea in July 2024, according to its armed forces. Another AP mine used by North Korea is a locally manufactured version of a Soviet box mine, with a wooden body. In the past, such box mines have been swept by water into South Korea and found on beaches and riverbanks.[34]

There have also been reports of North Korea emplacing AP mines on its northern border with China since 2020, when North Korean soldiers are reported to have laid BBM-82 fragmentation mines along parts of the 880km-long border with China to deter and prevent people from illegally leaving the country or entry by people who might bring in the COVID-19 virus. Troops reportedly sustained injuries from mine detonations as they emplaced mines in two provinces bordering China.[35] According to a media source in November 2023, North Korea had, since August 2023, again been emplacing landmines along the border with China to discourage potential defectors. This had resulted in casualties among citizens trying to cross into China from North Hamgyong Province.[36] According to a media source, a directive was issued by the North Korean authorities in August 2026, ordering the reburying of landmines on its northern border with China with the aim of deterring defections, smuggling, and the leaking of information beyond the country's borders.[37]

In August 2024, the Chinese authorities are reported to have warned local residents on the Chinese side of the border that landmines potentially buried on the North Korean side of the Yalu River along the North Korean-Chinese border may have been displaced into China following heavy rains at the end of July 2024.[38] No further specific reports of North Korea emplacing mines along the border with China have been identified since 2023, or of the Chinese authorities warning that North Korean landmines could be swept into China in 2025.

For more information on use, please see the country profile of North Korea on the *Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor* website.[39]

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

North Korea has no functioning mine action programme.

In September 2018, the Panmunjom declaration—a military agreement signed by the North Korean and South Korean Ministers of Defence—mandated North Korea, South Korea, and the UNC to "remove all mines in the Joint Security Area (of the DMZ) in Panmunjom within 20 days, beginning on October 1, 2018".[40] Diplomacy intended to improve relations between North and South Korea in 2019 did not lead to any additional action.

In 2019, a North Korean delegation went to Cambodia to study mine clearance techniques.[41] Following a request from North Korea to the UNC, the Korean People's Army engineers also received training in use of US detectors using ground-penetrating radar for tackling box mines.[42] US army engineers trained South Korean army engineers, who in turn provided the training to the Korean People's Army.[43]

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

It is highly unlikely that North Korea takes into consideration gender and diversity during planning and tasking of survey and clearance of mines in North Korea, even when it occurs.

31 E-government website of the Republic of Korea, "Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Field Investigation Task Force Announces Final Investigation Results Regarding 25th Division DMZ Mine Explosion Incident", (unofficial translation), 5 October 2026; and, "UNC cites armistice breach over active mine", *Yonhap News Agency*, 30 September 2026.

32 E-government website of the Republic of Korea, "Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Field Investigation Task Force Announces Final Investigation Results Regarding 25th Division DMZ Mine Explosion Incident", (unofficial translation), 5 October 2026.

33 "North Korean landmines could float into South Korea, South warn" *Associated Press*, 17 July 2024.

34 ICBL, "International Campaign to Ban Landmines concerned at reported landmine use by North Korea" 20 May 2024 (updated 24 July 2024); and "Joint Chiefs of Staff Urge Caution Over Washed-Away Landmines", *The Chosun Daily*, 7 July 2026.

35 S. Kin, "Soldiers injured as North Korea deploys landmines at Sino-Korean border to stop escapees", *Radio Free Asia*, 22 October 2020; "N. Korea lays landmines in border areas to fend off coronavirus: NIS", *Yonhap*, 3 November 2020; and Lee Chae Un, "Storm Corps trooper killed in landmine explosion on border with China", *Daily NK*, 10 November 2020.

36 "N. Koreans maimed or killed by landmines during defection attempts", *Daily NK*, 7 November 2023, https://bit.ly/46DQpG7.

37 "North Korea orders sweeping rebuild of northern border blockade", *Daily NK*, 5 September 2026, https://bit.ly/4r7qq48.

38 "Chinese authorities warn of possible North Korean landmine displacement due to floods, notify residents 'Do not go to the riverbank'", *Rimjin-Gang*, 13 August 2024, https://bit.ly/3ST8ZnU.

39 https://the-monitor.org.

40 "Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain", 19 September 2018, Annex 2, p. 7; and "Korean leaders sign agreement for North Korea to take further steps to denuclearize", *ABC News*, 20 September 2018.

41 Landmine Monitor, "North Korea", Last updated 16 November 2021.

42 Presentation by Col. J. P. Lloyd, Command Engineer, UNC, Side event, National Directors' Meeting, Geneva, 11 February 2020.

43 Emails from Col. J. P. Lloyd, UNC, and Maj. M. S. Born, UNC, 14 April 2020.

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 North Korea even when it occurs.

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

In October 2016, North Korea, in explaining its position at the UN General Assembly, stated that it "shares the humanitarian concerns associated with the use of AP mines, but due to the unique security environment of the Korean peninsula, especially regarding the United States' insistence on the use of landmines there, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is not in a position to give up the use of landmines". It stated that the use of AP mines was "strictly for self-defence purposes".[44] It has not taken any steps to accede to the APMBC, and has not participated in efforts to ban AP mines,[45] and in May 2009, a North Korean official based in Geneva told the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) that North Korea was "not interested in engaging" on the landmine issue.[46]

No mine clearance or land release by North Korea is thought to have occurred in recent years. Reviving tensions between North Korea and the United States in 2019 have precluded any progress in demining and may continue to do so in the future. As the relationship between North Korea and South Korea deteriorated, the mine situation has regressed further since 2023, with North Korean troops emplacing new AP and AV mines in the DMZ, re-contaminating areas that had previously been cleared. In 2026, the situation further deteriorated when North Korea was found to have planted AP mines on the South Korean side of the DMZ, in violation of the 1953 armistice agreement between North and South Korea. There were no further reports of North Korea emplacing landmines on the border with China in 2025, but a September 2026 media source reported that North Korea had ordered the re-emplacement of landmines on its northern border with China.

44 Landmine Monitor, "North Korea", Last updated 16 November 2021.

45 Landmine Monitor, "North Korea", Last updated 22 September 2024, https://bit.ly/45cB1l6.

46 Landmine Monitor, "North Korea", Last updated 18 December 2025, https://bit.ly/3RFz3Ws.