

KEY DATA

ANTI-PERSONNEL (AP) MINE CONTAMINATION: MASSIVE

(NATIONAL ESTIMATE)

128 km²

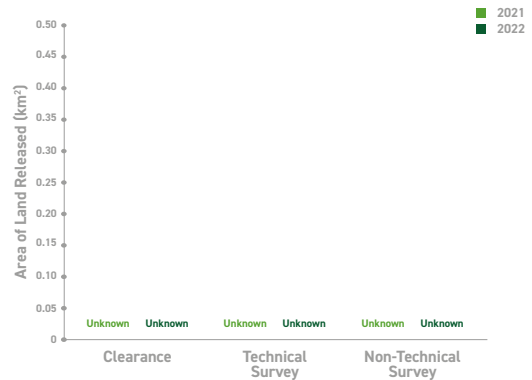
AP MINE CLEARANCE IN 2022

UNKNOWN

AP MINES DESTROYED IN 2022

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-awaited legislation permitting mine clearance by accredited civilian demining organisations.
- South Korea should clear anti-personnel (AP) 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 (CHAs) 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

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

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

Contamination data were largely unchanged from previous years. A report presented to a side event at the 2019 APMBC intersessional meetings also referred to 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 10.03km². 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 AP 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 are 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 is conducted with its 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 is 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 creating a mine action authority but no decision has been taken whether to proceed and the idea reportedly remains in its infancy.⁷ In November 2022, the

Ministry of National Defence resubmitted a bill for an Act on Mine Response Activities, including Mine Clearance. The bill proposed that the Ministry of National Defence establish a strategy for mine clearance, forms a Mine Response Activity Committee, which will become the national mine action authority, permits qualified non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to conduct clearance alongside the military, sets national standards aligning with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS), and creates an information management system for mine action. The bill requires National Assembly approval for enactment, which was pending at the time of writing, and if it is not approved by the end of 2023 it will automatically be repealed.⁸

A document submitted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the National Assembly in 2020 identifying obstacles to mine

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

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 (KCBL), September 2019.

5 United Nations Command (UNC) South Korea PowerPoint presentation in Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) Side event, 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, KCBL, and Eum Soohong, KCBL, in Geneva, 13 February 2020.

8 Emails from Eum Soohong, KCBL, 9 November 2022 and 26 August 2023.

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. It also called for quality assurance and post-clearance analysis.⁹

The Ministry of National Defence announced in 2019 that it had embarked on a three-year programme to complete survey and clearance of rear areas by October 2021. The proposal called for demining capacity to be increased from 6 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.¹⁰ 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 KRW180 million (approximately US\$161,000

in 2018 to KRW330 million in 2019 and KRW8.2 billion (US\$7.3 million) in 2020.¹¹ In 2021, the Army Engineering School launched a demining training programme in demining in which 249 officers participated.¹²

In February 2022, 334 Korean NGOs demanded that demining of rear areas should be on the agenda during the presidential election and called for responsibility for mine clearance to be transferred from the Ministry of National Defence to the Ministry of Public Administration and Security, which is the body in charge of national disasters and public safety. In addition, there were calls for the application of IMAS to mine clearance; public disclosure of information on the 37 minefields in the rear areas; development of a comprehensive mine clearance plan; creation 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 mine action legislation to be passed following incidents in those areas.¹⁴

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 (UXO) 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.¹⁵ According to online media, 120,000m² of minefields in rear air-defence sites south of the CCZ were cleared from April 2020 to July 2023 with 180 mines found and destroyed.¹⁶ In October 2019, the Ministry of National Defence declared its intent to clear all mines from the rear area, although this task remains unfinished to date.¹⁷

From April to November 2022, South Korea resumed operations to exhume remains of Korean War casualties, with a total of 45 bodies found, 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.¹⁸ In November 2022, during a statement to the Twentieth Meeting of States Parties (20MSP), South Korea reported it was "continuing with its mine clearing efforts, where possible, in a systemic and phased manner" and in line with IMAS, but did not provide information on the area cleared or number of mines found and destroyed.¹⁹ In 2023, the Ministry of National Defence was planning to conduct exhumation operations in the Baekmagoji area from April to November and further demining around seven rear air-defence sites south of the CCZ.²⁰ The Agency for KIA Recovery & Identification under the Ministry of National Defense (MAKRI) is responsible for these operations. MAKRI is also collaborating with the US Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency to recover the remains of American soldiers from the DMZ.²¹

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

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

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

12 Statement of the Republic of Korea, Twentieth Meeting of States Parties to the APMB, 24 November 2022.

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/3Qjtu9D>.

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

16 "Civilian, Government, and Military Collaborate for Public Verification... 'Beyond Normal' National Safety", Ministry of National Defense, 10 August 2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3Phqc9I>.

17 Email from Eum Soohong, KCBL, 26 August 2023.

18 Emails from Eum Soohong, KCBL, 3 and 11 April 2022 and 26 August 2023; and "We will not forget the noble sacrifices of our national heroes", Ministry of National Defence, 30 November 2022 at: <https://bit.ly/3szd2LQ>.

19 Statement of the Republic of Korea, 20MSP, 24 November 2022.

20 Email from Eum Soohong, KCBL, 4 September 2023.

21 Email from Eum Soohong, KCBL, 26 August 2023.