South Korea

Country Profile

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Landmines/UXO Overview

The ROK produces two known kinds of mines. In 1999, the country produced 1,363 new AP mines. There is no evidence that the government has exported any mines. After a 1998 meeting with Vice Minister of Defense Lee Jung-Rin, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) estimated that the number of landmines in the ROK stockpile is at least 2 million. Since then, however, the government has refused to allow a count of all of its stockpiled (non-self-constructing) mines to be counted.

The Korean War left behind what is possibly the most heavily mined area in the world. The ROK government has reported an estimated 1.2 million mines buried in the 151-mile Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) along the North-South Korean border. The buried mines are not adequately mapped and are difficult to detect.

Casualties

The Korean War resulted in thousands of landmine casualties to both soldiers and civilians. People continue to be victimized by landmines in the ROK. There were 91 reported victims between 1992 and 1999. Of this number, 34 were civilians. The actual number of victims is likely higher since there are unreported victims. The Korea Campaign to Ban Landmines (KICBL) estimates that since the end of the war there have been more than 3,000 civilian mine victims and 2,000-3,000 military mine victims.

Demining

The ROK Air Force began a mine-clearance program in April 1999 to remove landmines laid in and around 10 Air Force defense sites. The first phase targeted four sites on the outskirts of Seoul. A large concern in mine clearance is the threat of floods and landslides that wash mines from storage areas or fields into open civilian areas. Since the 1980s, only 10 percent of 1,430 washed-away mines have been recovered.

The Defense Ministry has said it will clear mines through 2003 in five rear areas: Mount Sumo, Mount Hongyong, Kangchon, Kwangchon and Anhung. The KICBL has produced a brochure and picture books and has conducted workshops and campaigns to promote mine awareness. There is no government-sponsored mine awareness program to date.

Reality Check

ROK has one of the most vocal governments about the legitimacy and military necessity of AP landmines. ROK officials have said that landmines are the best deterrent against attacks by tanks and special troops from the North. Although they acknowledge the humanitarian consequences of AP mines, they firmly believe that they are under the constant threat of war and therefore do not have the option of a complete ban of AP mines.

Casualties

In 1999, Mao Tse-Tong's Communist regime forced General Chiang Kai-shek's 2 million Chinese Nationalists to retreat to Taiwan and the surrounding islands. Later that year, the Chinese Communist Party attacked Kinmen Island (also known as "Quemoy"), Kinmen Island, closer to mainland China than Taiwan, is an island occupied by the Chinese Nationalists. The engagement, known as the Ku-Ning-Tou, lasted only 56 hours. The Chinese Nationalists defended the island and sent the Chinese Communists back to mainland China. Since this quick and decisive battle, the Chinese Communist Party have not set foot on Taiwan land. The Taiwan-controlled islands closest to Kinmen and Matsu were then declared military zones. While Kinmen has since been opened to the public, Matsu remains a military zone. Since losing its seat in the United Nations to the People's Republic of China in 1971, Taiwan has lost almost all formal diplomatic relations with the world. While Taiwan is not acknowledged as a nation state, it also does not acknowledge China's claim that Taiwan is part of their "one" nation.

Landmines/UXO Overview

In March 1999, Taiwan announced that it had stopped the use and production of AP mines. Taiwan has never exported AP mines. Due to the history and location of Kinmen, this island was heavily mined during the 1950s. A number of other small islands off the coast of China were also mined. Because Kinmen is no longer a military zone and is currently being transformed into a national park, the presence of landmines poses a very serious threat to civilians and hinders economic development.

Demining

In 1996, the Ministry of National Defense conducted a mine field survey of Kinmen Island. The survey prioritized the clearing of six mine dumps and two mine fields. During the entire demining process, the army was unable to provide data on the number and types of mines, the pattern in which mines were laid or the exact location of the mined areas. Because no relevant data exists, there is very little certainty that demining has been completed in the prioritized areas of Kinmen.

Reality Check

While China has not entered Taiwanese land since 1949, the presence of the military defenses in the Strait separating the two countries indicates the looming threat of a possible conflict between China and Taiwan.

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