



International Boundary Study

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Korea “Military Demarcation Line” Boundary

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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KOREA "MILITARY DEMARCATION LINE"

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Korea "Demarcation Line" is not an international boundary in the traditional sense; rather it is considered to be a provisional military demarcation line. As such, it should never be shown on official maps by the standard symbol for an international boundary.

The "military demarcation line" represents the partitioning of Korea effected by the July 27, 1953 Panmunjom Agreement ending the Korean hostilities. Approximately 148.5 miles long, the "demarcation line" follows a sinuous path over generally rugged terrain. The eastern terminus of the line is situated on the coast of the Sea of Japan about 2.5 kilometers south of Kosong while the western terminus is located near the junction of the Imjin and Han rivers. It has been demarcated by 1,292 markers. There is a demilitarized zone measuring two kilometers deep on each side of the line. Wire fences have been erected along both edges of the zone and these are patrolled, by the troops of the northern Korean regime and by the forces of the United Nations Command on their respective sides.

II. BACKGROUND

Korea was virtually a colony of Japan from 1910 until the end of the second world war. As early as December 1, 1943 (the Cairo Declaration), the western allies pledged themselves to work for the future independence of Korea. This declaration was reiterated in the Potsdam Proclamation of July 26, 1945 which stated that "in due course" Korea would become "free and independent."

A purely military decision was made after the Russian entry into the Pacific war to effect the surrender of Japanese forces in Korea. Soviet military troops were to accept their surrender north of the parallel of 38° North and American troops to the south of this parallel. After this decision was carried out in September 1945, the 38th parallel became a de facto occupation zone boundary as the result of an arbitrary interpretation by the Soviet military authorities. In spite of many efforts by U.S. military and diplomatic circles to bring about a bilateral reunification of Korea, it became necessary in September 1947, as a result of continued Soviet tactics, to lay the question before the General Assembly of the United Nations. The U.N. created a Temporary Commission on Korea to observe and consult with the elected representatives of the Korean people to facilitate the establishment of a national government. Unfortunately, the U.S.S.R. refused to cooperate with the Temporary Commission and it was denied entry into the Russian-administered "zone" north of the 38th parallel. Nevertheless, the U.N. endeavored to discharge its duties by overseeing elections in that part of Korea in which the Commission has access, i.e., south of the parallel. Elections were held on May 10, 1948 and the Republic of Korea was formally inaugurated on August 15, 1948.

At almost the same time, the Soviet authorities established on September 9, 1948 the so-called "Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea" in their zone of administration, thus perpetuating the division of Korea along the 38th parallel. Ten days later the Soviet Foreign Office announced that all U.S.S.R. forces would be withdrawn from Korea by the end of December 1948. While U.S. forces were withdrawn shortly afterwards, a solution to the main problem of a divided Korea had not been found.

On June 25, 1950, the armed forces of the regime established in the north invaded the Republic of Korea. The United Nations condemned the invasion, ordered the withdrawal of the invading forces, and requested U.N. members to render every assistance to that end. As a result, the United States authorized the use of American military forces to support the Republic and on July 7, the United Nations requested that the U.S. appoint a supreme U.N. military commander. Other member states sent troops to aid in the three year military action. Eventually, truce talks were initiated leading to the Panmunjom agreement.

III. TREATIES

Hostilities were ended and the "military demarcation line" was established by the following acts:

A. Agreement concerning a Military Armistice in Korea, and Annex, signed at Panmunjom (Korea) July 27, 1953, by the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command; the Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army; and the Commander of the Chinese People's Volunteers; entered into force July 27, 1953 (TIAS 2782).

B. Temporary Agreement supplementary to the Armistice Agreement, signed at Panmunjom (Korea) July 27, 1953 ... (TIAS 2782).

Both the provisions of the Armistice Agreement and the annex (of maps) affect the allocation of territory resulting from the creation of the "military demarcation line". The annex, the most important document for the map compiler, is composed of five maps.

Map 1 - Nine sheets at a scale of 1:50,000 depicting the "military demarcation line" and the demilitarized zone;

Map 2 - One sheet showing the area of the Han estuary under the supervision of the Military Armistice Commission;

Map 3 - One sheet at a scale of 1:250,000 showing control of coastal islands on the west coast of Korea;

Map 4 - One sheet at a scale of 1:1,000,000 showing main lines of communication (for Neutral Nations Inspection Teams); and

Map 5 - Ten sheets illustrating ports of entry.

The first map, No. 1, depicts at the relatively large scale of 1:50,000 the agreed upon "military demarcation line" and should be utilized as the basic source for large-scale map compilation. From the western end of the "military demarcation line" near the confluence of the Imjin and Han rivers westward to the Yellow Sea, the estuary of the Han River divides the territory of the Republic of Korea from that under the control of the northern Korean regime. Provisions of the Armistice Agreement state that the estuary shall be open to the civilian shipping for both sides. The agreement further stipulates (and illustrates in Map No. 2) that the disposition of the islands in and to the west of the estuary shall be as follows:

All the islands lying to the north and west of the provisional boundary line between Hwanghae-Do and Konggi-Do (see map) shall be under the military control of the Korean People's Army and the Commander of the Chinese People's Volunteers, except the following five island groups:

Paengyong-Do	Lat 37°58' N	Long °124 40' E
Taechong-Do	Lat 37°50' N	Long °124 42' E
Sochong-Do	Lat 37°46' N	Long °124 46' E
Yonpyong-Do	Lat 37°38' N	Long °125 40' E
U-Do	Lat 37°36' N	Long °125 58' E

The above five island groups shall remain under the control of the Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command. All the islands on the west coast of Korea lying south of the above-mentioned boundary line shall remain under the Military Control of the Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command.

A symbol other than the one normally utilized on official maps to show a land boundary may be utilized, if desired, to separate administrations in this coastal area.

IV. SUMMARY

The overwhelming majority of the population of the demilitarized zone was evacuated after the signing of the Agreement in 1953; as far as is known only two small villages, one in the northern half of the zone and one in the southern half, are still inhabited. In recent years, however, people living in villages near the zone have been permitted to cultivate a limited amount of land in those parts of the zone contiguous to the territory of each side. In May 1956, a sector of the wire fence marking the northern edge of the demilitarized zone was displaced southward a distance ranging from 200 to 500 meters in order to reclaim farmland located within the zone. This incident, the only reported case involving a displacement of the zone boundary, occurred at Taeryong-Ni (37°51' N. 126°39' E.).*

* not an approved change – show in accordance with original treaties. 9/16/76

As has been stated, the "military demarcation line" is not considered by the United States Government to be an international boundary. As a result, it should not be represented on official maps with a standard symbol for international boundaries. A distinctly different symbol should be utilized when the scale of the map permits.

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared by the Geographer, Office of Research in Economics and Science, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16, Exhibit D.

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Geographer, Room 8744, Department of State, Washington 25, D.C. (Telephone: Code 182, Extension 4508).