

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



## Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

*Intel for Advocacy*

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SL: No excuses on landmines

### **The Takeaway:**

- While it is a positive development that President Biden reversed the position of the Trump administration's loosening of restrictions on the U.S. military's use of landmines, the policy allows for a dangerous and unnecessary exception on the Korean Peninsula.
- Almost 70 years after the end of the Korean War's active hostilities, mines and explosive remnants of war still remain on the peninsula today and have killed and wounded hundreds of civilians.
- The "Korean exception" is antithetical to U.S. promises for peace in Korea; instead, the U.S. should pursue a transformative approach, including landmine removal, humanitarian assistance, and formally ending the Korean War with a peace agreement.
- Landmines are not essential for defense on the Korean Peninsula and only endanger U.S. and South Korean troops.
- For U.S. national security and global human security, the Biden administration must abandon the Korea exception and join the Mine Ban Treaty.

### **The "Korean Exception" on Landmines: Dangerous and Unnecessary**

*We bring you a special edition of the Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief, guest authored by Colleen Moore, Advocacy Director at Women Cross DMZ. We're excited to bring you her account of how the global movement to ban anti-personnel landmines intersects with her organization's efforts to achieve a just and durable peace on the Korean Peninsula:*

On June 21, President Biden [reversed](#) the Trump administration's policy on the use of anti-personnel landmines, once again renouncing the use of these deadly weapons and bringing the United States closer into alignment with the Mine Ban Treaty. However, the policy leaves open the possibility of the use of landmines on the Korean Peninsula. While it is overall a positive development that President Biden reversed the dangerous position of the Trump administration, which loosened restrictions on the U.S. military's use of landmines, the "Korean exception" is dangerous and unnecessary.

### **The inexcusable human costs of landmines**

Anti-personnel landmines still maim and kill people every day. Long after wars end, these weapons stay in or on the ground until they are removed. Landmines [violate](#) international humanitarian law, as they are indiscriminate and inhumane weapons. To stop this long-term

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damage, the use of landmines anywhere must be banned, and more resources should be devoted to mine removal and victim assistance.

On the Korean Peninsula, mines and explosive remnants from the Korean War [remain today](#), almost 70 years after active hostilities of the conflict ended. The demilitarized zone between the two Koreas has one of the highest concentrations of landmines in the world, with hundreds of thousands of landmines still threatening villagers in nearby towns. It is [estimated](#) that roughly 1,000 civilians have been killed or wounded by the landmines left from the war.

## **Landmines are antithetical to promises for peace**

As we saw during the 2018-2019 diplomatic engagement between the United States, South Korea, and North Korea, landmine clearance can serve as a trust-building measure. In 2018, North and South Korean forces worked together to [demine](#) a small portion of their border area. Jody Williams, the chair of the Nobel Women's Initiative who shared the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, [met with soldiers](#) in South Korea who described how the process of demining with North Korean soldiers led to a greater understanding of their shared humanity.

While active hostilities of the Korean War ended in 1953, the armistice agreement was never replaced with a peace agreement. In its North Korea policy review, the Biden administration reaffirmed the [Singapore Agreement](#), in which President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un committed to working together to "establish new U.S.–DPRK relations" and "build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula." This provides an opening for a new approach in which the United States should actively work towards peace and disarmament, including landmine removal, humanitarian assistance, and formally ending the Korean War with a peace agreement. The "Korean exception" is a senseless impediment to embracing that new approach.

## **The "Korean exception" serves no military purpose**

Even U.S. military leaders have admitted that landmines are [not militarily necessary](#) for the defense of South Korea. If anything, landmines would put U.S. and South Korean ground troops in more danger. The late Lt. General Jim Hollingsworth, who designed the Korean war plan, [said](#) that anti-personnel landmines' "minimal utility" to U.S. forces is "offset by the difficulty ... [they] pose to our brand of mobile warfare...not only civilians, but U.S. armed forces, will benefit from a ban on landmines. U.S. forces in Korea are no exception."

Nor should the mines be a legal hurdle to the U.S. joining the Mine Ban Treaty. South Korea has long had [control](#) of the mines along and near the demilitarized zone and [has not laid new landmines](#) since 2000. The mines are not the responsibility of the United States and should not prevent the U.S. government from joining the treaty. Yet U.S. presidents dating back to [Bill Clinton](#) have used the mines as an excuse to avoid global action on landmines, citing as

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justification the fact that if active fighting were to break out again on the Korean Peninsula, the United States would assume operational control over South Korean forces.

## **The Mine Ban Treaty is important for global human security**

The “Korean exception” excuse looks particularly inexcusable when considered next to the global progress that would be protected if the United States joined the [Mine Ban Treaty](#). One hundred and sixty-four countries have signed onto the treaty. As a result, the use and global production and trade of landmines has dropped dramatically, large areas have been cleared of anti-personnel mines, and states are paying more attention to the needs of landmine victims. The United States has no reason not to join the treaty; its military has [not used landmines](#) since 1991, except for one incident in Afghanistan. It is in the best interests of the United States — and the world — to abandon the “Korean exception” and join the Mine Ban Treaty.

Furthermore, the Biden administration needs to pursue a transformational, peace-first approach toward North Korea if it wishes to make progress toward a peaceful and stable Korean Peninsula. Decades of policies focused on sanctions, isolation, and military threats have not only failed, but strengthened, North Korea’s resolve to build up its defenses, while exacerbating the security crisis. The administration must change its approach — and that includes disavowing the use of landmines in Korea.

## **Buried Ledges**

**Nuclear weapons:** [unsafe](#) at any speed.

The same week that the Biden administration trumpeted yet another drone strike in Kabul, Human Rights Watch released a [report](#) on the **horrific humanitarian impacts of U.S. policy toward Afghanistan**.

Talks on the Iran nuclear deal resumed in Vienna this week, backed by new [polling](#) showing **overwhelming support for the U.S. rejoining the deal**. 78% of voters, including strong majorities across the political spectrum, prefer diplomatic engagement with Iran over its nuclear program to military action.

**Congratulations to the Lionesses** on their [victory](#) in the Women’s Euros – hopefully this will end the “is football coming home?” discourse once and for all.

A **walrus named Freya** is [redefining](#) “charismatic megafauna” for the age of anti-hero storytelling.

**Yemeni American artist Sally Almaklani** will have her [painting](#) hanging in the U.S. Capitol – as a high school sophomore.

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