
The Mutating Demilitarized Zone (DMZ): Layers of Spatial Negotiations

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Like the obscure North Korea behind the veil, many frequently misunderstand the infamous Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The DMZ is a dynamic entity that mutates over time contradictory to its common perception of being a fixed fortified border. By consciously deconstructing and reconstructing the DMZ through layering, it attempts to uncover the DMZ's alternative future. It further attempts to emancipate one's perception normally dominated by preconceptions.

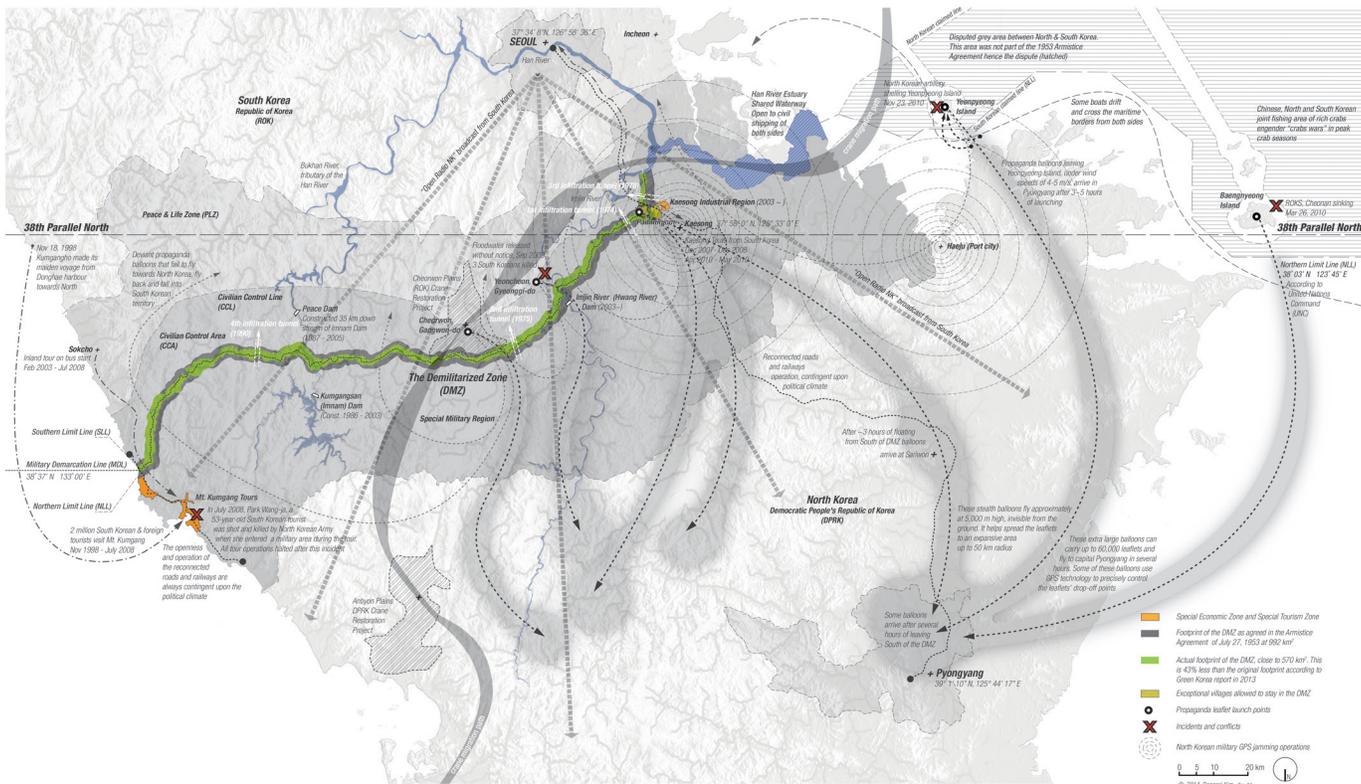
One of the most ironic aspects of this terrifying military infrastructure is the fact that, since the Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953—despite the DMZ being a stereotypical symbol of extreme conflicts of the Cold War—both Koreas consciously, subconsciously, and “collaboratively-constructed” the DMZ together into their national identity and territory. The construct here refers both to the physical and the symbolic, but also the ongoing processes of “constructing” one's identity through such. These spatial negotiations in the DMZ successfully enabled and contributed to the construction of the Korean identities over time. In this respect, the physical and the symbolic construction of the DMZ through the processes of including ‘us,’ and excluding ‘them,’ was an inevitable imperative for both Koreas in constructing their respective national identities, particularly in their competitive post-colonial modernization efforts.

It must be recognized that the DMZ was constructed over the last sixty years with North and South Korea playing the protagonist

and the antagonist at the same time in their own tragedy. During the last sixty years of its existence, the DMZ has experienced scores of dynamic spatial negotiations, some more visible than others. In order to further understand the DMZ's full potential, the map acts as an active palimpsest and excavates some of these spatial negotiations, rendering new interpretations of these perpetuating conditions. These new interpretations then can become foundational knowledge, instrument, and medium to transcend the persisting sixty-year old dichotomy and schism; thus allowing one to imagine a renewed productive future for the DMZ.

The mapping exposes multiple ongoing subversions that occur in circumventing the DMZ as a barrier. “Exceptional Villages” that were agreed to stay in the no-man's land, the reduced DMZ foot-print due to military aggressions on the surface, infiltration tunnels under the surface, aerial flows of migratory birds, and propaganda balloons above the surface, and flows of waterways illustrate and destabilize the conventional North and South divide. This allows a new perspective to emerge on top of the existing binary confrontation of the two Koreas. These processes uncover the realities of the DMZ, how it is used, transgressed, mutated, thickened, expanded, contingent on the lenses they are perceived over time. They vividly remind us of how the fences are futile in fending these processes and the absurdity of such installations. It investigates, uncovers, and critically questions the ongoing

complexities and contradictions of who the DMZ was designed for, and who in reality it serves. Using new paradigms that leap beyond the limits of existing conventions, this deconstructed palimpsest mapping starts to construct alternative realities, opening up new potentials and visionary imaginations for the DMZ.



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This upside-down mapping exposes multiple ongoing subversions that occur to circumvent the DMZ as a barrier. The reduced DMZ foot-print due to military aggressions on the surface, infiltration tunnels under the surface, aerial flows of migratory birds and propaganda balloons above the surface, and flows of waterways, illustrate and destabilize

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