**North Korean People's Army Navy**

The navy, a separate branch of the KPA, is headquartered at P'yongyang. In 1992 the 40,000 to 60,000-person brown-water navy was primarily a coastal defense force. The navy is capable of conducting inshore defensive operations, submarine operations against merchant shipping and unsophisticated naval combatants, offensive and defensive mining operations, and conventional raids. Because of the general imbalance of ship types, the navy has a limited capability to carry out missions such as sea control or denial and antisubmarine operations.

Most [North Korean](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/dprk/navy.htm##) combat vessels, such as light destroyers, patrol ships, guided missile boats, torpedo boats, and fire support boats are small. Some 40 guided missile boats pose a substantial threat; they have the capability of launching missile attacks against large vessels and are equipped with two to four 46-km-range Styx anti-ship missiles. At present, over 60% of North Korean combat vessels are deployed in forward bases.

The primary offensive mission of the navy is supporting [army](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/dprk/navy.htm##) actions against South Korea, particularly by inserting small scale amphibious operations--SOF units--along the coast. The [navy](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/dprk/navy.htm##) also has a limited capability to conduct rocket and shore bombardment raids against selected coastal targets. However, any North Korean force attempting to engage in these operations would be at risk from both air and surface combatants because of limited air defense and detection capabilities.

[North Korea](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/dprk/navy.htm##) builds small- and medium-size submarines mainly in the Nampo and Wonsan Shipyard, but also in other small- and medium-size shipyards along the two coastal lines where naval and [military](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/dprk/navy.htm##) bases are scattered.

In the early 1990s the navy seldom operated outside the North Korean military exclusion zone, a zone extending some fifty kilometers off North Korea's coast from which it sought to exclude operations by any other navy. Although seaborne infiltration attempts into [South Korea](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/dprk/navy.htm##) are believed to have largely stopped by the 1990s, testimony of North Korean spies apprehended by South Korea in early 1992 indicated successful infiltration continues. Clashes with the South Korean navy and harassment of South Korean fishing boats once occurred with regularity, but such incidents were rare in as of mid-1993.

The Naval Command has two separate fleets: the East Sea [Fleet](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/dprk/navy.htm##) and Yellow Sea Fleet, with sixteen combatant groups. The fleets do not exchange vessels, and their areas of operations and missions determine their organizational structure; mutual support is difficult at best.

* The Yellow Sea Fleet, made up of six squadrons [versus five in the early 1990s] and approximately 300 vessels, is headquartered at Namp'o, with major bases at Pip'a-got and Sagot and smaller bases at Ch'o-do and Tasa-ri.
* The East Sea Fleet, with ten squadrons [versus nine in the early 1990s] and approximately 470 vessels [versus 400 in the early 1990s], is headquartered at T'oejo-dong, with major bases at Najin and Wonsan and lesser bases at Ch'aho, Ch'angjn, Mayangdo, and Puam-ni near the DMZ.

There are many smaller bases along both coasts. The submarine force is decentralized. Submarines are stationed at Ch'aho, Mayang-do, Namp'o, and Pip'a-got naval bases.

Approximately 60 percent of the North Korean naval force is deployed close to the front line area. They include 430 combat vessels, such as patrol boats, missile boats, torpedo boats and fire support vessels, 35 submarines including 9 small ones, and 335 supporting vessels such as landing ships and air cushion vessels. Support vessels are composed of amphibious vessels including personnel landing craft, landing craft air cushion (LCAC), surface patrol boats and mine countermeasure vessels. These support vessels, however, have a limited role in long-distance operations.

Submarines, most of which are of the 20-some Romeo-class, are outdated and slow, but they are sufficiently capable of blocking sea lanes. These vessels could attack ROK surface vessels, emplace mines anywhere within the ROK maritime territory, or secretly infiltrate commandos into the South.

The forward deployment of small high-speed boats such as torpedo and missile boats provides North Korea with an enhanced capability to launch a surprise attack on US combat vessels in the waters along the front line. In particular, the missile boats are equipped with Styx anti-ship missiles with a range of 45 km. The submarines could be used in conducting such missions as blocking sea lanes, placing mines or landing commandos. North Korea deploys 95 km-range Samlet and Silkworm ground-to-sea missiles on its eastern and western coasts. The Silkworm missiles are estimated to be capable of striking vessels near Inchon on the western coast and near Sokcho on the east.

Continuing to build attack warships, North Korea has tried to enhance its naval capabilities through developing new ground-to-sea missile systems, such as extending the striking range of the Silkworm missiles. North Korea also deploys 80-95 km-range ground-to-ship Samlet and Silkworm missiles on both east and west coasts. Silkworm missiles, deployed in the forward area, are able to launch anti-ship attacks as far as Tokjok-do in the Yellow Sea and Sokcho and Yangyang on the east coast. Coastal defense artillery includes 122-mm, 130-mm, and 152-mm systems.

To date, the DPRK has indigenously produced over 200 personnel landing craft. This includes approximately 100 NAMPO personnel landing craft based on a former Soviet P-6 torpedo boat hull. The NAMPO has a maximum speed of 40 knots and a radius of 335 nm at 28 knots. The NAMPOs provide a limited amphibious capability, each carrying up to 30 troops with a basic combat load. Amphibious assaults against CFC probably would be small, clandestine landings involving two to six NAMPO craft; CHAHO or other naval craft could provide fire support. Other amphibious craft include 8 HANTAE medium landing ships, which can carry 3 to 4 light tanks, and approximately 125 KONG BANG amphibious hovercraft.

The DPRK has a credible mine warfare capability. There are numerous small surface ships that are capable of delivering mines within both the navy and civilian sectors. Mines will be used to defend against amphibious assaults, defend strategic ports, and provide seaward flank protection for land forces. Defensive mine fields will be monitored by coastal observation teams and radar, and they will be supported by well emplaced artillery and missile batteries. This will make close approach and mine clearing operations extremely hazardous. DPRK has a large inventory of older technology mines, significant historical experience with their effectiveness, and, most importantly, the willingness to use them.

Also operated by the navy are two amphibious surface sniper brigades. The North Korean navy has built over 140 hovercraft capable of carrying platoon-size units ashore in surprise landing operations. These landing craft can maneuver not only at sea, but also on tidal and mud flats and are capable of landing alongside the piers in most parts of the eastern and western coasts. They would be especially useful in areas where there is a wide difference between high and low tides along the western coast. These vessels also have a high survivability due to their good speed at 50 nautical miles per hour, and their forward deployment in both the East and Yellow Seas would greatly enhance North Korea's surprise landing capability in the early stages of a war.

In addition to naval units, there also are noncombatants in the North Korean merchant marine, including ten cargo ships operating directly under the KWP and the Ministry of People's Armed Forces. There are sixty-six other oceangoing vessels in the merchant marine operating under the flag of the Ministry of Sea Transportation.

On November 20, 1998, a North Korean vessel was detected and captured off the waters of the Kangwha Island in an attempt to infiltrate spies, who subsequently escaped to the North. On December 17, 1998, one semi-submersible under control of the Nampo Liaison Office was sunk by the ROK Navy while trying to infiltrate the coast near Yosu. The infiltration was detected by night surveillance equipment of our guard units prior to the infiltration, and a navy¡©[air force](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/dprk/navy.htm##) joint operation sank the semi-submersible about 56 miles south of Yokji-do while it was making its way back to the North in the early morning of December 18.

Between June 7 and June 15, 1999, twenty North Korean fishing boats and seven to eight patrol boats crossed the NLL in the name of "fishing and protecting one's fishing rights." They were met by the ROK Navy which tried to block their intrusion. The two sides confronted each other for eight days. At around 9:28 p.m. on June 15, North Korean patrol boats fired first at ROK Navy vessels. The two sides exchanged gunfire. As a result of this battle, a number of North Korean vessels and persons aboard the vessels were seriously damaged or hurt; this included the sinking of one motor torpedo boat. They retreated back to North Korea.

**Navy Order of Battle, 1992**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Number** |
| Strength | 40,000-60,000 |
| Organization Fleets | 2 |
| Squadrons |  |
| East Sea | 9 |
| Yellow Sea | 5 |
| Equipment |  |
| Frigate | 1 |
| Corvettes | 2 |
| Submarines |  |
|  |  |
| Whiskey class | 4 |
| Romeo class | 19 |
| Missile attack boats (PTG) | 39 |
| Coastal patrol boats |  |
| PT | 200 |
| PC/PCS/PB | 120 |
| PCFS | 60 |
| Unspecified | 20 |
| Amphibious craft |  |
| Nampo | 100 |
| AVC | 40+ |
| LCM/LCU | 32+ |
| Unspecified | 23 |
| Mine warfare craft | 23 |