



Written by on August 9, 2010

N. Korea Fires Artillery into Sea Near Tense Border

According to South Korea's Defense Ministry, on August 9, North Korea fired more than 100 rounds of artillery into the Yellow Sea near the disputed sea border with the South.

AP reported that the incident occurred shortly after South Korea ended five days of naval drills off the west coast that the communist North described as a rehearsal for an invasion. The Pyongyang regime vowed to retaliate for the maneuvers.

A South Korean Joint Chief of Staff officer was initially cited in an AP report on condition of anonymity that all the artillery shells harmlessly landed into the North's waters and caused no damage to the South. But the *Los Angeles Times* later reported: "Contrary to earlier reports, some of the artillery shells fired Monday fell on the southern side of the northern limit line, officials said."



South Korean officials reported that North Korea fired approximately 10 shots around 5:30 p.m., then 120 additional shots between 5:52 and 6:14 p.m.

Earlier in the day on August 9, South Korean officials demanded the release of the *Daeseung 55*, a 41-ton squidding boat that had been detained after entering the North's exclusive economic zone, where foreign fishing boats are banned. The boat carried a crew of four South Korean and three Chinese sailors. South Korean officials said the next day that they were trying to determine if the boat had entered North Korean waters.

The *New York Times* reported that when South Korean fisheries authorities contacted a crewman on the boat by satellite phone on the day of its capture, he said that the boat was being towed to Songjin, a port on the eastern coast of North Korea, where the crew would be interrogated. But communication was then cut off, South Korean coast guard officials said.

"Our government hopes for the safe return of our ship and crew according to international laws," the coast guard's statement said.

The Chinese state-run Xinhua News Agency reported on the night of August 9 that the Chinese government had expressed concern over news of the seizure of the boat, but said its diplomats in North Korea were in communication with authorities there. Xinhua predicted that once the incident is confirmed, the North Koreans should treat the Chinese crew members well, guarantee their rights and inform Chinese officials. The report cited Chinese consulate officials in Chongjin, North Korea.

The *Los Angeles Times* quoted Daniel Pinkston, described as an expert in North-South relations for the



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International Crisis Group think tank, who said: "That's what [the North Koreans] said they were going to do, come back with some physical response, but if that's what they had in mind, it's too hard to tell at this point." Pinkston said it was important to know where the fishing boat had been taken into custody.

A reporter in the *Washington Post* observed: "The firing of the artillery, which threatens to further raise tensions along the 38th Parallel, came shortly after South Korea concluded five days of naval drills — something the North had threatened to counter with "strong physical retaliation."

The incident was yet another — though less serious — incident fueling tensions between the two Koreas. A more critical incident took place on March 26 when the South Korean ship, *ROKS Cheonan*, was sunk on by a torpedo determined to be of North Korean origin. The ship had a crew of 104 men at the time of sinking, with 58 crew members being rescued and another 46 members unaccounted for and presumed dead.

The Korean peninsula has been one of the world's most tense areas since fighting of the Korean conflict ceased in 1953 with a truce that did not officially end the state of war. The United States maintains a force of almost 20,000 Army personnel, 8,800 Air Force, and several hundred Navy and Marine forces in South Korea.

Photo: South Koreans watch a TV program broadcasting a report about North Korea fired artillery off west coast, at Seoul train station in Seoul, South Korea, Aug. 9, 2010: AP Images



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