

North Korea to South Korea, 21-08-2015

The 1950-1953 Korean War ended with a fragile armistice between South and North Korea which was occasionally erupted by violent cross border incidents, often resulting from brinkmanship behavior of North Korea. In early August 2015, two South Korean soldiers patrolling along the demilitarised zone (DMZ) were injured by a mine explosion. South Korea claimed that these mines had been laid there by North Korea. In response, South Korea resumed broadcasting anti-North Korea propaganda through loudspeakers stationed on its side of the DMZ on 10 August. On the weekend of 14-15 August, North Korea called the broadcasts a 'declaration of war' and demanded that South Korea turn off its loudspeakers or otherwise face military action.¹ On Monday, North Korea turned up its own broadcasts. Then three days later, on Thursday 19 August, it fired a series of shells on a South Korean border town. South Korea immediately responded in kind and fired back. The cross border exchange of fire did not produce any casualties.² That same day, North Korea issued an ultimatum to South Korea. The ultimatum, was delivered in a letter to the South Korean ministry of defence. As reported by the official state news agency, it stated that that the North Korean armed forces 'would launch a strong military action unless it [South Korea] stops psychological broadcasting towards the north and dismantle all means for psychological warfare within 48 hours.'³ This was 5 p.m Seoul time.⁴ The state news agency accused South Korea of being guilty of 'undisguised and surprise aggression' and reported the declaration of a 'semi-war state' by North Korean leader Kim-Jong Un.⁵ South Korea ordered its armed forces to the highest level of military readiness. The South Korean President Park Geun-hye appeared on television in military uniform stating that 'provocations by North Korea will not be tolerated'.⁶ In a written response to the ultimatum, South Korea urged North Korea 'to completely give up reckless acts' to asserting its readiness to 'strongly retaliate as a self-defence measure and all responsibilities that may arise from it will be fully on the North.'⁷ South Korea would stop the broadcasts only if North Korea apologised for the incident with the mines.⁸ Park Geun-Hye stated that 'we need a clear apology and measures to prevent a recurrence of these provocations and tense situations.'⁹ China urged both parties to exercise restraint. Japan expressed its concern. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon called upon the

¹ Justin McCurry, 'Kim Jong-Un Puts Troops on "war Footing" after Two Koreas Exchange Artillery Fire', *The Guardian*, 21 August 2015, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/21/kim-jong-un-puts-troops-on-war-footing-after-two-koreas-exchange-artillery-fire?CMP=EMCNEWEML6619I2>.

² 'North Korea Goes on War Footing against South Korea as Deadline Looms | Top News | Reuters', accessed 25 August 2015, <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCAKCN0QQ08H20150821>.

³ Simon Mundy, 'North Korea Orders Troops on to High Alert', *Financial Times*, 21 August 2015, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/c40f93c4-47b9-11e5-b3b2-1672f710807b,Authorised=false.html?_i_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2Fs%2F0%2Fc40f93c4-47b9-11e5-b3b2-1672f710807b.html&_i_referer=&classification=conditional_standard&iab=barrier-app#axzz3jotPqFIZ.

⁴ 'Kim Jong Un Guides Emergency Enlarged Meeting of WPK Central Military Commission', accessed 25 August 2015, <http://kcnawatch.nknews.org/article/fcrr>.

⁵ 'Kim Jong Un Guides Emergency Enlarged Meeting of WPK Central Military Commission'.

⁶ Agence France-Presse, 'North Korea Prepared to Risk "all-out War" as Kim Jong-Un Puts Troops on Alert', *The Guardian*, 22 August 2015, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/22/north-korea-prepared-to-risk-all-out-war-as-kim-jong-un-puts-troops-on-alert>.

⁷ McCurry, 'Kim Jong-Un Puts Troops on "war Footing" after Two Koreas Exchange Artillery Fire'.

⁸ France-Presse, 'North Korea Prepared to Risk "all-out War" as Kim Jong-Un Puts Troops on Alert'.

⁹ Jack Kim and Ju-min Park, 'South Korea Talks Tough amid Heightened Tensions with North', Reuters India, accessed 25 August 2015, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2015/08/24/northkorea-southkorea-idINKCN0QR02H20150824>.

parties to defuse the situation. The United States, which had over 28,000 forces deployed in South Korea, let it be known that it would stand by its ally South Korea, and US and South Korean armed forces continued their annual military exercise.¹⁰ The UNSC did not meet to discuss the situation.¹¹ But the North Korean UN Deputy Ambassador An Myong-Hun warned that 'if South Korea does not respond to our ultimatum, our military counteraction will be inevitable, and that counteraction will be very strong'.¹² Meanwhile, North Korea seemed to be making preparations for war, dispatching 50 of its submarines and deploying 20 hovercraft landing vessels close to the South Korea border.¹³ The two countries seemed poised for war. Shortly after the expiration of the deadline, however, the two countries agreed to meet and discuss the issue. Close aides of the two countries' leaders met in marathon negotiations that lasted until early Tuesday morning 25 August. In the agreement that was reached, South Korea agreed to halt its anti-North Korea propaganda broadcasts while North Korea 'expressed regret' over the mine explosion of early August and promised to ending the semi war state. Both countries committed furthermore to encouraging more NGO exchanges, to reuniting separated families, and to engaging in further talks to improve bilateral relations.¹⁴ The following week, North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un, was quoted by the official national news agency as stating that North Korea had 'put under control the situation, which inched close to an armed conflict, thereby clearing the dark clouds of war', which, Kim Jong Un asserted, was the result of North's 'tremendous military muscle' based on its 'nuclear deterrent for self defense'.¹⁵ While the incident had passed peacefully, the wider Korea conflict was far from over.

¹⁰ France-Presse, 'North Korea Prepared to Risk "all-out War" as Kim Jong-Un Puts Troops on Alert'.

¹¹ McCurry, 'Kim Jong-Un Puts Troops on "war Footing" after Two Koreas Exchange Artillery Fire'; 'North Korea Goes on War Footing against South Korea as Deadline Looms | Top News | Reuters'.

¹² France-Presse, 'North Korea Prepared to Risk "all-out War" as Kim Jong-Un Puts Troops on Alert'.

¹³ Vice News, '50 North Korean Submarines Have Reportedly Vanished in an "Unprecedented" Deployment', *Vice*, 24 August 2015, <https://news.vice.com/article/50-north-korean-submarines-have-reportedly-vanished-in-an-unprecedented-deployment>.

¹⁴ 'North-South High-Level Urgent Contact Held', accessed 25 August 2015, <http://kcnawatch.nknews.org/article/fc3t>. Reuters, 'North Korea Steps Back from War Footing after South Halts Border Propaganda', *The Guardian*, 25 August 2015, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/25/north-korea-steps-back-war-footing-south-halts-border-propaganda>. Kim and Park, 'South Korea Talks Tough amid Heightened Tensions with North'.

¹⁵ Choe Sang-hun, 'Kim Jong-Un Says North's "Military Muscle" Made Korean Deal Possible', *The New York Times*, 28 August 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/29/world/asia/kim-jong-un-says-norths-military-muscle-made-korean-deal-possible.html>.