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## **N Korea Torpedoes, Sinks Large S Korean Navy Ship**

From NewsOfTheForce.org

3-26-10

North Korea 'torpedoes and sinks' South Korean navy ship with 104 sailors on board

A massive rescue operation was underway this evening to save the crew of a South Korean navy ship feared to have been hit by a North Korean torpedo.

Several of the 104 crew were reported to have been killed and others are missing from the ship which sunk in waters near Baengnyeong island, close to the disputed maritime border between the two Koreas.

South Korea's president President Lee Myung-bak convened an emergency meeting of security ministers amid concerns the incident could become the flashpoint to draw the countries closer to renewed conflict.



**Torpedo strike: A South Korean naval coast defence ship patrols the country's northern coast (file picture)**

A South Korean ship is said to have fired in apparent retaliation at a vessel in the north but there were no details of whether it was hit.

Officials in the South Korean capital Seoul reported 59 people had been rescued from the unidentified 1,500-tonne naval vessel which was said to have begun to sink after an explosion at the rear.

The ship was on a routine patrolling mission when it was rocked by an explosion believed to have been caused by a torpedo strike, possibly fired from a submarine.

"The cause is not certain and an investigation is underway - our priority is the rescue operation," a South Korean official said.

Six naval ships and two Coast Guard vessels were rushed to the waters to try to save the crew, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported. Rescue helicopters and ambulances also sped to the scene.

Police in Seoul were placed on heightened alert in case of attack.

Baeknyeong Island, four hours by boat from the port of Incheon, is the westernmost point of South Korea and is a key military post for South Korea because of its proximity to the North.

Flashpoint: The ship went down off the island of Baengnyeong, in the Yellow Sea

The sudden escalation between the two countries comes after North Korea warned it was increasing its defences in response to joint South Korean-U.S. military drills earlier this month.

North Korea has already threatened "unprecedented nuclear strikes" against its southern neighbour and the U.S. over claims they are planning to topple the regime of Kim Jong-il.

Last month, North Korea declared four naval firing zones near the disputed sea border, deploying multiple rocket launchers close to the frontier. Two of the zones are in the Yellow Sea where this incident happened.

The Yellow Sea border was the scene of deadly naval battles in 1999 when 17 North Korean sailors died - and 2002 when four South Korean sailors and an estimated 30 North Koreans died.

In November the two navies fought a brief gun battle that left one North Korean sailor dead and three others wounded. A North Korean ship was also left in flames.

And in January, North Korea fired artillery in to the disputed zones at a time of mounting international pressure to re-start nuclear talks. Some analysts say the firing zones - and recent escalation of military activity - may

be a way of strengthening its hand in any talks.

With international talks aimed at ending the communist nation's nuclear ambitions stalled for months, economic ties have also been hit with disputes over cross border tourism and a joint economic zone.

The western sea border has been a constant source of military tension between the two countries and has triggered three deadly exchanges in the past decade.

South Korea recognizes the Northern Limit line, drawn unilaterally by the U.S.-led United Nations Command to demarcate the sea border at the end of the 1950-53 Korean War. the line has never been accepted by the North.

In 2002, then-President George Bush named North Korea as part of an 'axis of evil' alongside other 'rogue' states such as Iraq and Iran.

But Kim Yong-il was not deterred. Instead, Pyongyang made regular announcements on its arsenal and in July 2003 claimed it had enough plutonium to begin making nuclear bombs.

Three years later, North Korea test fired a long-range missile and last year Pyongyang claimed it had carried out an underground nuclear test, prompting protest from the US, Russia and China.



**Action: South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, center, talks with officials today after the sinking of one of the country's naval ships**

At the end of the Second World War, Korea was a united country under Japanese occupation. But after Japan's defeat, the island was effectively split with Soviet troops occupying the north and American forces in the south.

The stage was set for a long-running and bitter confrontation between the capitalist west and the communist forces of Russia.

In 1948, leaders in the north proclaimed the Democratic People's Republic

of Korea and the Soviets withdrew. Two years later, the south declared independence. North Korea invaded.

The ensuing war lasted three years, left two million dead and laid waste to the country's economy and infrastructure.

Hostilities finally ceased when the two sides agreed to a three-mile buffer zone between the two states.

But despite the ceasefire, sporadic hostilities continued, the two tiny countries fighting a bitter offshoot of the Cold War in a remote and neglected corner of the world.

The south - propped up by the Americans - thrived. However, the north has had a far rockier history.



**North Korean leader Kim Jong-il visits the Daeheungsan Machinery Factory in North Korea today.**

Originally ruled by Kim Il-song, the country's supreme leader is now his son, Kim Jong-il.

Whereas his father had abided by the terms of the 1953 ceasefire, his successor reneged.

In 1996, against a backdrop of devastating famine, Kim Jong-il announced he was sending troops into the demilitarised zone

In 2006, North Korea test-fired a long-range missile. Relations with the West deteriorated again last year when neighbours accused the country of

carrying out another long-range missile test. Pyongyang, however, claimed the rocket under scrutiny was carrying a communications satellite.

Later last year, the country admitted it had carried out its second underground nuclear test, prompting protest from the US, China and Russia.

And while the nuclear brinkmanship continued, there were regular spats with South Korea over border incursions and hostile intent.

The sea boundary has been the cause of particular tension in the last few months. South Korea claims the north has designated four areas as military firing zone and deployed four rocket launchers close to the sea in response.

Although South Korea still recognises the Northern Limit Line, which was drawn up in 1953, the north has never accepted the boundary.

## THE KOREAN ARSENAL

### NORTH KOREA

Active Military Personnel: 1,170,000 (including 60,000 special forces skilled in infiltration and asymmetric warfare).

Active Military Reserve: 4,700,000.

### ARMY

Believed to have nuclear warheads, though numbers are unknown.

13 types of chemical and biological warheads, amounts unknown.

5,000 tons of chemical weapons, believed to include mustard gas, phosgene and sarin. Among its biological agents are cholera, yellow fever, smallpox, typhus, typhoid fever and dysentery.

Total Land-Based Weapons: 16,400.

Tanks: 3,700.

Armored Personnel Carriers: 2,500.

Towed Artillery: 3,500.

Self-Propelled Guns: 4,400.

Multiple Rocket Launch Systems: 5,000.

Mortars: 7,500.

Anti-Aircraft Weapons: 11,000.

### NAVY

Warships: 708.

Submarines: 97.

AIR FORCE

Total Aircraft: 1,778.

Helicopters: 612.

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