Koreas ‘on brink of war’: Pyongyang marshals troops after exchange of fire

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During an emergency meeting of the North Korean central military commission, Kin Jong-un reportedly ordered the North’s army to be *“fully operational and ready for any military action at any time”* from 5pm Friday local time, also putting the area along the border with the South *“in a semi-state of war,”* North Korean state media reported.

North Korea also delivered an ultimatum to the South demanding it stop broadcasting propaganda via loudspeakers across the two countries’ borders and setting a deadline of 5 pm on Saturday. The North threatened with *‘imminent’* military action if the demands aren’t met by Seoul.

“Psychological warfare against [North Korea] is, in essence, an open act of war against it," North Korea's state-run KCNA news agency said in a statement on Friday.

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"The situation on the Korean peninsula is now inching closer to the brink of war due to unending political and military provocations," Kim Hyun Joon, North Korean Ambassador to Russia told journalists in Moscow on Friday, blaming South Korea and the US for the escalation. *"We have strong military forces... so we would not use such primitive weapons as mines,"* he said. He called the incident *"Seoul's calculated stage play."*

South Korea, in its turn, shows no signs of backing down. The country’s Vice Defense Minister Baek Seung-joo told the parliament that the broadcasts would continue, adding the North was likely to fire at the areas of the Demilitarized Zone where broadcasting transmitters are stationed, as reported by Reuters.

"There is a high possibility that North Korea will attack loudspeaker facilities," Baek said.

The South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff called on North Korea to refrain from any *"reckless acts."*



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South Korean President Park Geun-hye held an emergency meeting of the country’s National Security Council ordering a *“stern response”* to any provocations from the North, as reported by AFP.

"Any provocations by North Korea will not be tolerated," Park said during the meeting.

"There is a possibility of North Korea launching provocations of a certain kind after 5pm [Saturday]," South Korean Defense Minister Han Min-koo said, adding the country would *“strongly retaliate against any kind of North Korean attacks,”* according to the Yonhap news agency.

The US, which has around 28,000 troops stationed in South Korea and leads the United Nations Command in Korea monitoring the truce at the border, says it is closely monitoring the situation and expressed deep concern over the growing tensions on the peninsula.

The Pentagon also stressed the US remained firmly committed to defending its ally. The two nations are staging annual joint military exercises, slated to run until August 28, despite the North’s threats *“to retaliate with the strongest military counter-action”* should the drills go ahead

on Monday.

However, amid mounting tensions on the Korean peninsula which are leading to to increasing uncertainty about the poential trajectory of the situation, the annual US and South Korean joint military exercises, known as Ulchi Freedom Guardian, were temporarily put on hold on Friday with US officials calling it “a pre-scheduled pause.” The drills resumed later the same day.

The US and South Korea have raised the alert levels for their troops, Stars and Stripes reported, referencing South Korean sources. The USA has also started mobilizing its troops stationed in South Korea , according to Telegraph reports. Some unconfirmed posts on twitter also show images of US military vehicles allegedly moving towards the border between the two Koreas.

The Chinese foreign ministry has also expressed “deep concern” about the situation on the Korean peninsula in a statement on Friday. China called on the two sides to stop all actions stirring up trouble, and to maintain “calm and restraint,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying said.

Tensions between the two Koreas started to spike this month, after two South Korean soldiers were wounded in a landmine explosion, which Seoul believes was planted by the North. Pyongyang denies the accusations.

In response, the South started setting up propaganda loudspeakers along the border between the two countries, which will be in place until the North *“apologizes for the mines,”* according to the South’s Vice Defense Minister Baek Seung-joo.

On Thursday, the North shelled the border area, apparently targeting one of the loudspeakers. The South retaliated with dozens of artillery shells, as reported by the Yonhap news agency.

Although, no casualties or damage was reported, the incident has escalated the unease, with South Korea evacuating civilians from the area along its border with the North.