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N Korea deploys over 50 subs as talks resume in truce village

AUGUST 20, 2015

South and North Korea resumed rare high-level talks Sunday on defusing heightened tensions, an official said, as Pyongyang appears to be gearing up for possible strikes against Seoul.



North and South Korean officials greet at the truce village of Panmunjom before talks Saturday

The talks are under way between South Korea's National Security Adviser Kim Kwan-jin and Hwang Pyong-so, the North Korean military's top political officer, at the border village of Panmunjom that separates the two Koreas, a South Korean presidential official said.

Hong Yong-pyo, Seoul's point man on Pyongyang, and his northern counterpart, Kim Yang-gon, joined the talks.

The top officials resumed the talks more than 13 hours after they paused the session to “review each other’s position.” On Saturday, the two sides had marathon negotiations through early Sunday morning to discuss how to resolve the crisis and how to improve inter-Korean relations.



Seventy percent of North Korea’s submarines have left their bases

The latest session came as more than 50 North Korean submarines apparently left their bases for unknown locations, fueling speculation that the North could be gearing up for a surprise attack in case the talks collapse.

“Seventy percent of North Korea’s submarines left their bases, and their locations are not confirmed,” the South Korean military official told reporters.

The North is known to have around 70 submarines.

North Korea has also doubled the number of its artillery troops on the border, with the command to be combat-ready, according to South Korea’s military.

The North’s conflicting signals underscored challenges in dealing with an unpredictable communist country, which has a track record of staging provocations against South Korea.

On Thursday, North Korea gave a 48-hour ultimatum for South Korea to end propaganda broadcasts along the heavily fortified border and dismantle all loudspeakers, saying it otherwise will launch “strong military action.”

North Korea also warned Friday that it is prepared to engage in “all-out war.” The Pyongyang-set deadline for defusing the crisis passed without a military clash.

Propaganda broadcasts have become a bone of contention between the two Koreas after South Korea resumed them earlier this month for the first time in 11 years.

South Korea took the measure in retaliation against North Korea for a recent landmine attack that maimed two South Korean soldiers. South Korea accused the North of planting the mines inside the demilitarized zone that separates the two Koreas, a charge denied by North Korea.

North Korea views the broadcastings critical of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un as an insult to its dignity. The isolated country is also concerned that an influx of outside information could pose a threat to Kim.

Still, South Korea has vowed to continue the psychological warfare tactic.

Tensions between the Koreas have risen dramatically since Thursday's exchange of artillery fire.

The North fired one artillery shell across the border Thursday afternoon before firing several more rounds later in apparent anger over South Korea's resumption of the propaganda broadcasts. South Korea fired back dozens of shells.

The North later claimed that it never started Thursday's exchange of fire with the South and accused Seoul of fabricating the allegations that the communist nation fired first.