

# BBC NEWS

## ASIA-PACIFIC

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## South Korea to bolster troops against Pyongyang

**South Korea says it will boost border security and be more flexible in response to threats from North Korea.**

A presidential spokesman said Seoul was concerned it had "become too passive".

North Korean shelling of a Southern island two days ago killed two civilians and two marines, and prompted an increase in regional tension.

Meanwhile, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao has held talks in Russia amid calls for China to use its influence on the North to calm the situation.

A planned visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi to South Korea has also been postponed, it emerged on Thursday. The delay was put down to "scheduling" issues.

The North has threatened further military action if South Korea continues on what it called a "path of military provocation", the North's official KCNA news agency reported.

Pyongyang also blamed the new level of hostilities on the United States - saying the US helped draw up the "illegal" western maritime border between the two Koreas.

**Troop increase**

After holding an emergency cabinet meeting, South Korea announced it would dramatically increase its troop levels and overhaul the way it acts in the face of threats from the North.

"[The government] has decided to sharply increase military force, including ground troops, on the five islands in the Yellow Sea and allocate more of its budget towards dealing with North Korea's asymmetrical threats," the presidential senior public affairs secretary, Hong Sang-pyo, told reporters.

"The government has decided to make new rules of engagement to change the paradigm itself of responding to North Korea's provocation," Mr Hong said.

The BBC's Chris Hogg says the cabinet had decided that in the existing rules of engagement there was too much emphasis on preventing a military incident escalating into something worse.

There is now an awareness that this thinking had to change, our correspondent says.

In future the South would implement different levels of response depending on whether the North Koreans attacked the military in the South or civilian targets, the spokesman said.

**China role**

In the Chinese leadership's first statement on the issue, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, speaking in Moscow, described the situation on the peninsula as "grim and complicated".

"China is firmly committed to maintaining the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula and opposes any provocative military acts," he said.

"Relevant sides should maintain the utmost restraint and the global community should do more to relax the tense situation," he said, in a statement issued by the Chinese foreign ministry.

China has been under pressure to use its influence over the North to ease tensions.

Mr Wen repeated his view that six-nation talks on the North's nuclear programme should be resumed as soon as possible, a position shared by North Korea.

South Korea, the US and Japan have said the six-nation talks should not re-start until the North stops uranium enrichment work and apologises for its alleged torpedoing of a South Korean warship in March, at the cost of 46 lives.

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