

Shots fired: North and South Korean ocean territory dispute heats up

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Northern Limit Line

Hailey Brown - The continued [territorial clashes](#) between North and South Korea escalated early Monday morning when the two states fired warning shots along their western sea boundary. Ocean territory off of the Western peninsula has been a subject of conflict between the two states since the boundary was established by the U.N. in 1953 at the end of the Korean War.

North and South Korea are the product of conflict, their respective territories, both on land and sea, decided by the Korean War. [Territory](#) is the geographical area which a country exercises sovereignty over. The control of ocean or sea areas is known as the [territoriality](#) of national and international waters. At the end of the Korean War the U.N. decided a maritime boundary on the Western side of the Peninsula, known as the Northern Limit Line. However, North Korea objected and claimed a greater territory than they were given. This ongoing dispute has perpetuated conflict in the area. However, in 2018, the two countries attempted to quell this by creating a maritime peace zone that acts as a buffer against military drills in the area. So while their respective territory remains the same, the zone is meant to decrease direct military conflict. In this instance of escalation, South Korea's navy fired warning shots and broadcasted warnings in response to a North Korean merchant ship's violation of the sea boundary. North Korea later fired warning shots toward their territorial waters on the premise that the South Korean navy ship encroached on their territory. South Korea called these shots a violation of the maritime peace zone.

An analyst from a South Korean think-tank, Cheong Seong-Chang, labeled the North Korean merchant ship's movement into South Korean territory as a deliberate move, intended to challenge the boundary. The [boundary](#) is closed, preventing movement of ships from either country across it. Just as with land boundaries, ocean boundary disputes can foreshadow escalation of conflict. As both countries amp up military demonstrations, the question of what is next in their ongoing conflict lingers.