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## Navy Positions Destroyer For Possible Intercept of North Korean Ship Suspected of Proliferating Missiles, Nukes

The USS John McCain, a Navy destroyer, is preparing in case of orders to intercept a North Korean when it leaves the vicinity off the coast of China, according to a senior U.S. defense official.

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The U.S. military is preparing for a possible intercept of a North Korean flagged ship suspected of proliferating weapons material in violation of a U.N. Security Council resolution passed last Friday, FOX News has learned.

The USS John McCain, a Navy destroyer, is positioning itself in case it gets orders to intercept the ship Kang Nam as soon as it leaves the vicinity off the coast of China, according to a senior U.S. defense official. The order to interdict has not been given yet, but the ship is moving into the area.

"Permission has not been requested. Nor is it clear it will be," a military source told FOX News. "This is a very delicate situation and no one is interested in precipitating a confrontation."

The ship left a port in North Korea Wednesday and appears to be heading toward Singapore, according to a senior U.S. military source. The vessel, which the military has been tracking since its departure, could be carrying weaponry, missile parts or nuclear materials, a violation of U.N. Resolution 1874, which put sanctions in place against Pyongyang.

The USS McCain was involved in an incident with a Chinese sub last Friday - near Subic Bay off the Philippines. The Chinese sub was shadowing the destroyer when it hit the underwater sonar array that the USS McCain was towing behind it.

This is the first suspected "proliferator" that the U.S. and its allies have tracked from North Korea since the United Nations authorized the world's navies to enforce compliance with a variety of U.N. sanctions aimed at punishing North Korea for its recent nuclear test.

The ship is currently along the coast of China and being monitored around-the-clock by air.

The apparent violation raises the question of how the United States and its allies will respond, particularly since the U.N. resolution does not have a lot of teeth to it.

The resolution would not allow the United States to board the ship forcibly. Rather, U.S. military would have to request permission to board -- a request North Korea is unlikely to grant.

North Korea has said that any attempt to board its ships would be viewed as an act of war and promised "100- or 1,000-fold" retaliation if provoked.

State Department spokesman Ian Kelly said that the resolution allows states to seek permission to inspect cargo.

"If permission is not granted, then the flag state, the owner of the ship, is instructed to send that ship to a port for -- for a formal inspection to be made," Kelly said, adding that he would not go into any details of any particular ship or the way inspections are conducted.

"We would hope that -- that North Korea would -- would comply with international law and -- and allow the inspection," he said.

Since the U.S. does not expect to be granted permission, it expects to be asked to interdict that it will have to shadow the ship until it runs out of fuel. At that point, the ship would likely have to be towed into the port.

The U.S. military may request that the host country not provide fuel to the ship when it enters its port. North Korean merchant ships usually need fuel as they approach Singapore and the ports of eastern India. When tipped off, Indian



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port authorities are stringent enforcers of UN sanctions against ships carrying contraband.

The U.S. Navy does not need to enforce the sanctions. Instead, it could "poison the host," a move that entails working behind the scenes with Indian Ocean port authorities to inspect and confiscate illegal cargos.

This move worked last year when U.S. officials reportedly warned Indian officials in advance of a North Korean transport aircraft that had requested permission to fly through Indian airspace on the way to Iran after stopping in Burma to refuel. The Indians refused to allow the aircraft to fly through their airspace. The aircraft reportedly was carrying gyroscopes for ballistic missiles.

The Kang Nam is known to be a ship that has been involved in proliferation activities in the past -- it is "a repeat offender," according to one military source. The ship was detained in October 2006 by authorities in Hong Kong after the North Koreans tested their first nuclear device and the U.N. imposed a subsequent round of sanctions.

"North Korea does not export anything other than weapons," a U.S. official told FOX News. "And this ship is presumed to be carrying something illicit given its past history."

The latest tension follows a Japanese news report that North Korea may fire a long-range ballistic missile toward Hawaii in early July.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Thursday the military is "watching" that situation "very closely," and would have "some concerns" if North Korea launched a missile in the direction of Hawaii. But he expressed confidence in U.S. ability to handle such a launch.

Gates said he's directed the deployment of the Theater High Altitude Area Defense, a mobile missile defense system used for knocking down long- and medium-range missiles.

"The ground-based interceptors are clearly in a position to take action. So, without telegraphing what we will do, I would just say ... I think we are in a good position, should it become necessary, to protect the American territory."

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*FOX News' Jennifer Griffin, Justin Fishel and James Rosen contributed to this report.*

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