

The 2021-2025 Mid-term Defense Plan for the Successful Completion of Defense Reforms and a Strong Innovative Military

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The Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense (ROK MND) announced its 2021-2025 Mid-term Defense Plan on August 10, 2020. To effectively respond to current and future threats and potential changes in security environments, the Mid-term Defense Plan contains financial investment plans for the maintenance and development of the ROK Armed Forces over the next five years.

The latest 2021-2025 Mid-term Defense Plan envisions the achievement of two main goals: to prepare for the future by successfully completing Defense Reform 2.0 and to revolutionize the ROK armed forces as an innovative force that “protects and creates peace.” For this, the plan set a total budget of KRW 300.7 trillion for the next five years (an average annual increase of 6.1 percent). Since exceeding the KRW 200 trillion mark for the first time for the 2014-2018 Mid-term Defense Plan at KRW 214.5 trillion total, within seven years, the budget has exceeded an unprecedented KRW 300 trillion. Therefore, this Mid-term Defense Plan embodies the determination of the Ministry of National Defense to realize a “responsible national defense” through fostering an unmatched, strong force that can withstand any uncertainties in the security environment. Specifically, the MND will invest KRW 100.1 trillion for force improvement programs (FIPs) expenses (with an average annual increase of 7.2 percent), used for strengthening state-of-the-art technology within the force, and KRW 200.6 trillion for force operation costs (with

an average annual increase of 5.6 percent), to provide stability to the implementation of FIPs. Through these investments, the MND aims for the following goals.

Goals of 2021-2025 Mid-term Defense Plan

The first goal of the 2021-2025 Mid-term Defense Plan is to successfully complete the ongoing defense reforms. Defense Reform 2.0 aims to enable the ROK military to effectively respond to dynamic changes in both the Korean Peninsula and the international security environment, and to adapt to social changes, such as a sudden drop in the population or the advancement of ICT. Therefore, it is necessary to invest a sufficient budget to finance the completion of the Defense Reform 2.0, which has been pursued since the beginning of the Moon administration. In addition, as non-traditional threats become increasingly critical and prevalent in recent years, as observed through the COVID-19 crisis, the plan needs to consider expanding the realm of national defense to protecting public safety. Therefore, the second goal of the Mid-term Defense Plan is to ensure that the ROK military proactively responds to changes and transforms into an innovative force with comprehensive security capabilities. To achieve these goals, the plan includes measures to reorganize the military structure into a technology-intensive structure so that combat power can be strengthened even with the reduction of standing troops. In addition, the plan contains the vision and implementation procedures for military modernization through the introduction of high-tech weapon systems, development of defense science and technology that will spearhead the Korean New Deal project, and support and promotion of the defense industry. There are also measures to provide support and stability to force operations even with the changes to the unit structure. The following looks at the main contents in detail by section.

Breakdown of FIPs

The force improvement programs (FIPs) emphasize enhancing the ROK armed forces' proactive response to omnidirectional security threats. In order to build an elite military force based on cutting-edge science and technology, the FIPs expenses have been distributed to focus on: 1) expanding strategic deterrence capabilities, 2) securing operational response capabilities, such as the reorganization of military structure and the transfer of wartime operational control, 3) reinforcing response capabilities for non-traditional threats, 4) developing defense science technology and the indigenous defense industry.

First, in order to acquire the ROK military's independent surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities and precision strike capability against strategic targets, the programs will procure military reconnaissance satellites, mid-altitude unmanned air vehicle (MUAVs), long-range air-to-ground missiles, and new-type missiles. These will simultaneously ensure the expansion of overall surveillance capabilities and long-range strike capabilities. In order to establish a Korean missile defense system, ballistic missile early warning radar systems and long-range surface-to-air missile (L-SAM) will be fielded, while the Patriot and Cheolmae-II will be upgraded to improve their ability to detect ballistic missiles and defend core facilities. Moreover, the programs will reinforce missile forces to secure dominant response capabilities.

Second, to secure core military capabilities related to OPCON transfer, the programs will strengthen counterfire warfare performance, precision guided munitions, and communication capabilities. Moreover, the programs will seek qualitative and quantitative advancements in ground, sea, and air operational capabilities through the procurement of 230mm class multiple launch rockets, wheeled armored vehicles, next-generation Aegis destroyers, Boramae (KF-X), and amphibious helicopters.

Third, in order to respond to non-traditional threats such as COVID-19, the ROK military will continue to improve their capabilities in counterterrorism, disaster relief, and protection of overseas Korean nationals. The programs will strengthen special strike and day/night surveillance capabilities to ensure the effective performance of counterterrorism units and chemical/biological (CBRN) defense units. Accordingly, it plans to secure customized equipment and materials, such as angled (CornerShot) guns, explosive ordnance detection and disposal robots, and new-type CBRN reconnaissance vehicles. In addition, the ROK military plans to reinforce their relief efforts and protection of Korean civilians and overseas nationals in the event of a disaster by fielding helicopters and large transport ships for medical evacuation.

Lastly, in order to secure core defense technologies and vitalize the defense industry, intensive investments will be made on the following: acquisition of new 4th-Industrial-Revolution-era technologies in the defense field, basic research and development of the designated eight core defense strategic technologies¹ (such as autonomous technology and artificial intelligence), and

¹ The eight key strategic technologies: autonomous/artificial intelligence-based surveillance and reconnaissance, hyper-connected/intelligent command and control, ultra-high-speed/high-power precision strike, futuristic propulsion and stealth-based platform, combined manned and unmanned combat, advanced technology-based personal combat system, active cyber response and future protection, futuristic

restructuring and improvement of infrastructure for R&D institutions to ensure creativity and innovations. Thus, the defense R&D share of the total defense budget will be expanded to 8.3 percent in the mid-term.

Breakdown of force operations

Force operations emphasize the provision of operational stability and support, even during the reorganization of unit structures to incorporate advanced technology. Force operation costs have been distributed for: 1) strengthening force support and reinforcing vigilance capabilities to maintain the ability to conduct warfare, 2) securing the ability to respond to non-traditional threats, 3) expanding smart defense operations, education, and training by incorporating 4th-Industrial-Revolution technology, 4) reorganizing manpower structure to focus on combat efficiency, 5) improvement of service conditions for military personnel, and 6) creating a safe and reliable environment in national defense.

As discussed above, the 2021-2025 Mid-term Defense Plan reflects the essential requirements for successfully completing Defense Reform 2.0 and fostering a strong innovation force prepared for the future. The plans provide comprehensive guidelines for a core force that will meet the conditions for national defense reforms and the OPCON transfer. The Ministry of National Defense will make every effort to successfully promote the Mid-term Defense Plan to realize a preeminent force true to its vision of “Competent Security and Robust National Defense.”