

## Denuclearization of North Korea and Security in the Indo-Pacific Region

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Distinguished guests, it is my great pleasure to join defense ministers and security experts from all over the world, here at the internationally recognized Shangri-La Dialogue—one of the largest security conferences in Asia.

Allow me to offer my special thanks to IISS Director General and Chief Executive Dr. John Chipman and his team, and Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore—His excellency Teo Chee Hean—for their many efforts to resume the Shangri-La Dialogue, following a two-year hiatus from the COVID pandemic. It is my honor to deliver a speech at this profound occasion.

The Government of the Republic of Korea that newly took office last month has laid out a “global pivotal state” initiative, to play a responsible role for freedom, peace, and prosperity beyond the Korean Peninsula—to the Indo-Pacific region and the world.

Distinguished guests, let me take this opportunity to share with you the security landscape on the Korean Peninsula and the Indo-Pacific region, as well as the role of the Republic of Korea as a “global pivotal state.”

Right now, the Indo-Pacific region is drawing the attention of the entire world. The Indo-Pacific is home to half of the world population, accounting for two-thirds of international trade. Major military powers around the world are also located in the region. As such, nations off the

region, including European countries, are seeking to enhance their presence in the Indo-Pacific through various economic and security consultative mechanisms. In such circumstances, instability in the Indo-Pacific region can leave an enormous impact on global economy and international security order.

Furthermore, Republic of Korea's political, economic, and cultural status—as well as the distinctive geopolitical character of the Korean Peninsula—are inseparable from the stability in the Indo-Pacific region. This means instability on the Korean Peninsula can lead to instability in Northeast Asia, and in the overall Indo-Pacific region.

The international community pointed out “North Korea's nuclear and missile program” as one of the major challenges that destabilize the Indo-Pacific, and is closely coordinating to head off such challenges. The ROK-U.S. Alliance is also dedicating its utmost efforts, leveraging all available efforts and assets to deter North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

Yet unfortunately, North Korea is behaving in a way that betrays our expectations. And now, its nuclear and missile threats have become more than a simple threat. From short-range to intercontinental ballistic missiles, North Korea's repeated missile provocations this year are advancing in quantity and quality, not to mention its preparations to conduct the 7<sup>th</sup> nuclear test. This is a grave challenge, threatening peace and stability of not only the Korean Peninsula and the Indo-Pacific region, but also the international community. North Korea's nuclear and missile provocations are clear violations of UN Security Council Resolutions that the international community agreed upon, breaking existing agreements from Inter-Korean and U.S.-DPRK summits. If North Korea continues its provocations, the security of Northeast Asia and the region will be further destabilized, which will also negatively affect the stability of the Indo-Pacific.

Meanwhile, the Government of the Republic of Korea will not give up its goal to establish peace on the Korean Peninsula through the denuclearization of North Korea. Our goal to denuclearize North Korea in a complete, verifiable manner, and our principle to establish a sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula will remain firm and robust. To this end, we will set forth clear corresponding measures with the international community to pursue the denuclearization of North Korea.

And to echo President Yoon's remarks, should North Korea make substantial progress in denuclearization throughout the course of such endeavors, the Government of the Republic of Korea will pursue a “bold plan” that can yield groundbreaking improvements for North Korea's economy and its citizens' quality of life. That said, all this plan must require a position of strength.

To this end, the Government of the Republic of Korea will strengthen capabilities to better implement U.S. extended deterrence, and will dramatically enhance response capabilities of ROK military to deter North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

Moreover, we seek to strengthen ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation to respond to North Korea's nuclear and missile threats. While many bilateral issues remain unsolved

between the ROK and Japan, we not only intend to have the two sides put their wisdom together to reach reasonable solution in a way that is in line with the two countries' shared interests, but also intend to engage in a serious dialogue with Japan, not just to normalize ROK-Japan security cooperation, but also to strengthen ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation. As a matter of fact, we held our first ROK-U.S.-Japan Trilateral Defense Ministerial Meeting in 2 years and 7 months. During our trilateral meeting, we mainly discussed options to responds to North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

We also held our first ROK-PRC Defense Ministerial Meeting in 2 years and 7 months. Both sides pledged to work toward new ROK-PRC relations, based on spirits of mutual respect and cooperation. In particular, the two sides shared a common view in the need to enhance strategic communication for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. We

During the ROK-U.S. Summit last May, the Government of Republic of Korea announced that Korea will formulate its own Indo-Pacific strategy framework. And through this announcement, the ROK made it clear that it will now go beyond its diplomacy that was focused on Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asian affairs, to play its necessary role as a “global pivotal state.” This is not a near-sighted response; rather, it is a commitment aimed at playing a global role, with a firm ground on our long-term vision. To this end, allow me to elaborate as the Defense Minister several initiatives for Republic of Korea's regional security contribution.

First, security cooperation with ASEAN is an important key agenda for the new government. Therefore, we will expand cooperation in more domains more proactively, while respecting ASEAN centrality. We will dedicate our efforts, so that our participation in multilateral consultative bodies, including ADMM-Plus, ARF, and Shangri-La Dialogue, can result in tangible contributions. To this end, we will engage in joint response against non-traditional security threats such as cyber threats and terrorism—threats that ASEAN is facing in reality. Also, we will look into defense industry cooperation and other various options together, to strengthen maritime security capabilities with ASEAN member states.

Second, the Republic of Korea is a key partner state for security cooperation, forging partnership with multiple nations off the region including European countries. As such, we will proactively expand cooperation with all nations on and off the region that seek to cooperate with us, not only for traditional areas of security cooperation, such as maritime security, but also for non-traditional areas of security cooperation.

Third, based on principles of openness, transparency, and inclusiveness, we seek to expand cooperation with various security consultative bodies that are currently active in the Indo-Pacific region. We can say the ultimate purpose of mini-lateral and multilateral consultative bodies, such as ROK-ASEAN cooperation and QUAD, is to faithfully implement rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Republic of Korea will seek to play a constructive role as a “global pivotal state,” so that rather than ruling out a certain country, it can unlock the great amount of security benefits for the greatest number of countries.

Before I finish my speech, let me briefly touch on the ongoing war in Ukraine. Even now, the level of tensions on the Korean Peninsula remains higher than any other place in the world, with continued confrontations between South and North Korea. In this situation, we cannot help but to have mixed feelings as we watch the reality of Ukraine unfold. The situation in Ukraine is more than somebody else’s issue from a land afar, which can just be simply forgotten.

I sincerely hope peace can return again to Ukraine. I also hope North Korea can promptly cease its nuclear and missile program, and wish for the establishment of real peace on the Korean Peninsula. Thank you for listening.