

**20<sup>TH</sup> ASIA SECURITY SUMMIT**  
**THE SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE**

**THIRD PLENARY SESSION**  
**SATURDAY 3 JUNE 2023**

**LEE JONG-SUP**  
**MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE, REPUBLIC OF**  
**KOREA**

**Dr John Chipman, Director-General and Chief Executive, IISS**

Minister, the floor is yours. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

**Lee Jong-Sup, Minister of National Defence, Republic of Korea**

Good afternoon. This is the Minister of National Defence of the Republic of Korea. It is my great pleasure to be standing here again this year from last year, and I would like to make my speech on resolving regional tensions. First of all, I would like to extend my congratulations on the 20th anniversary of the Shangri-La Dialogue. Allow me to offer my special congratulations and thanks to IISS Director-General and Chief Executive Dr John Chipman and his team, and the Coordinating Minister for National Security of the Republic of Singapore, His Excellency Teo Chee Hean.

Due to recent complex security challenges, the tension in the region is rising. As a result of the continuation of the war in Ukraine and historical and geopolitical factors, the security environment of the international community is facing many uncertainties. In addition, unconventional security threats such as infectious diseases, climate change, cybercrimes, and terrorism are deepening the uncertainties. Amidst such circumstances, North Korea, despite the strong oppositions by the international community, is adhering to its nuclear and missile developments. The advancing nuclear and missile capabilities of North Korea are threatening the rules-based order, which we jointly protect to this day.

North Korea developed missiles with various ranges and types, and carried out provocations in an unprecedented frequency and intensity from last year to the beginning of this year. On top of that, three days ago on May 31st, violating UNSC resolutions, it fired a space-launched vehicle using ballistic missile technology. In particular, completing its preparation for the seventh nuclear test, North Korea made explicit the threats to use nuclear weapons, suggesting the possibility of pre-emptive nuclear attack through its announcement of nuclear force policy in September last year.

North Korea is the only country that threatens a pre-emptive attack with nuclear weapons against a specific country. Such a behaviour is a point-blank violation of UN Security Council resolutions. It is also a breaking of a promise made in 1991 between the two Koreas that declared denuclearisation on the Korean Peninsula. Not to mention, this is also an unlawful action that directly undermines the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty, preserved by the international community since the Second World War.

The reckless nuclear and missile development of North Korea is increasing concerns of nuclear proliferation, causing regional arms race. As a result, the security dilemma of rising security costs for each country is expanding. Strengthening the ROK-Japan, and ROK-US-Japan security cooperation is also an inevitable measure taken to protect regional freedom and peace from the advancing North Korean nuclear and missile threats.

North Korean threats are in-fact a major challenge that deeply agitates the structure of regional security. In addition, North Korea's human rights problems, turning graver by the day, pose critical threats to universal values and rules of humanity. The Kim regime, obsessed solely with advancing nuclear and missile capabilities, is turning a blind eye on the lives of its people who suffer from food shortage and economic crisis. Had the Kim regime used money on purchasing food instead of spending it on developing nuclear weapons and missiles, including 34 launches of ballistic missiles last year, the North Korean people would not be starving as they do today.

Infringement of human rights of the North Korean people is also at a severe state. Even as I speak, North Koreans are living under the harshest reality of human rights violation, with their basic

freedom and rights set forth by the UN unguaranteed. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind. The abysmal human rights conditions of North Korea regress from the universal values that the international community seeks to uphold, and damage the values of freedom, rule of law, and human rights in the Indo-Pacific.

North Korean human rights challenge is no longer a problem of an individual country. Rather, it is a collective task for which all members of the Indo-Pacific must together condemn and look for solutions. For the past few years, the ROK government attempted to solve North Korean problems by relying on the good faith of North Korea, that if we offered kindness, North Korea will embark on the path of denuclearisation.

However, the then-advocated denuclearisation and lasting peace turned out to be fake and unveiled itself to be undeniably false. Even when denuclearisation talks and discussions for improving relations were in progress, North Korea was operating plutonium and uranium enrichment programmes, and continued illegitimate activities of nuclear and missile capability development. This, indeed, has been proven by various missiles and other weapons recently revealed by North Korea.

Meanwhile, the livelihoods of the North Korean population were jeopardised, and human rights further aggravated. In order to solve North Korean problems substantively, we have to consolidate our intent and convince North Korea to change the thoughts and behaviours in the right direction. Doing so would bring about genuine peace on the Korean Peninsula and in the region.

Since the Yoon administration took office in May last year, the Republic of Korea has striven to change North Korea's miscalculation and misbehaviour by pursuing peace on the Korean Peninsula. First, we are strengthening the capability and posture of the ROK military, and deterring North Korean nuclear and missile threats based on a strong and overwhelming capability with our ally, the United States. These efforts are endeavours to deter North Korean threats and dissuade its nuclear development.

Furthermore, our government proposed the Audacious Initiative, which pledges a substantial improvement of the economy and livelihood of North Korea in return for choosing denuclearisation and opening the door of dialogue and diplomacy. However, some countries are ignoring North Korea's unlawful behaviours that violate the rules-based international order. This creates holes in sanctions against North Korea passed at the UN Security Council. And due to objections by countries with important responsibilities, despite North Korea's unprecedented number of missile launches last year, not a single additional UNSC resolution was able to pass.

Meanwhile, by stealing cryptocurrencies, dispatching workers overseas, and conducting illegal maritime transshipment activities, the Kim regime is securing nuclear and missile development funds, further increasing the threats. Choosing inactivity to North Korea's unlawful behaviours will worsen the security landscape of not only the Korean Peninsula and the Indo-Pacific region, but also the entire world. This will, of course, increase our security costs, hence, along with the Republic of Korea, I ask that we convene the strength to create a change against threats by North Korea, a state turning the Pacific into its firing range.

First of all, based on the understanding that the North Korean issue is a shared challenge. We must condemn its unlawful activities together. Disregarding or defending its nuclear and missile development goes against the international order we together maintain. Also, we must blockade North Korea's unlawful activities by faithfully implementing existing UNSC resolutions agreed upon

by the international community. In order to stop the inflows of funds and supplies for North Korea's nuclear and missile development, we should further reinforce the cooperation of the international community in the form of cyber cooperation and PSI.

If North Korea conducts additional provocations such as nuclear tests or ICBM launch, we must demonstrate the international community's resolute and united strength by passing UNSC resolutions. With such a united action, we need to change the Kim regime's calculation as following. We must make North Korea understand that the costs of making nuclear threats and coercions far exceed the benefit of doing so, and that if they continue the illegal activities as they do today, they will only become more isolated, and that they will not be able to solve the problems that they face.

We also need to make the regime realise that coercion and threats will never be rewarded, as showcased through the war in Ukraine. At the same time, if they open the door for dialogue and choose a noble path, bright future will wait ahead. So far, the process of mankind development entails the endless journey for universal values of freedom, human rights, and the rule of law. The reason the ROK government announced a strategy for a free, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region in December last year and contributes to the regional peace and stability is to pitch in on the same journey.

Nonetheless, North Korea is regressing from this journey. The instability on the Korean Peninsula, caused by its actions, is now evolving into the instability in the Indo-Pacific and the global security. Solving the North Korean challenge is our joint security interest that will enhance freedom and peace of the international community, including the Indo-Pacific.

Going forward as well, my government will deter North Korea's nuclear and missile threats with strong power and actively drawing North Korea towards its complete denuclearisation through dialogue and diplomacy. Peace on the Korean Peninsula is directly interconnected with the security interests of all of us. I once again ask that the international community continue to assemble the strength so that North Korea will open the door for dialogue and choose a new path. Thank you for listening.

### **Dr John Chipman, Director-General and Chief Executive, IISS**

Thank you very much, Minister Lee, for that very clear explanation of how the Yoon administration has moved from what might have been styled in old-fashioned speak a Sunshine Policy to what might be styled a dual-track policy where the Yoon administration is strengthening ROK's capability while at the same time making an economic offer to the DPRK for peace should it follow denuclearisation, and also for reminding us of an acronym that we haven't, perhaps, heard enough of in the last year or so, PSI, the Proliferation Security Initiative, which binds a lot of countries together in order to ensure that DPRK doesn't gain the means to further threaten your country and the region. Many thanks for that.