

Observations on North Korea's Military Provocation and the Situation on the Korean Peninsula

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1. News Highlights

In response to the Korea-US and Korea-US-Japan joint navy exercises, North Korea launched eight medium- and long-range missiles and held three major military exercises (the order of events is shown in the table). On October 10, the 77th anniversary of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) publicized the details of two large-scale military exercises. The first was conducted by the "Tactical Nuclear Force of the North Korean People's Army" in northwestern North Korea from September 25 to October 9. This exercise used a South Korean air

base as a simulated target to test strategic and tactical movements, nuclear warhead transport, and missile launch capabilities.¹

The second exercise was a joint firepower drill on the western coast by the "Western Front Long Range Artillery Sector Detachment" (a battalion-level unit) and an "Air Force Wing" from October 6 to 8.²

According to the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Republic of Korea, the third exercise began at 10:00 PM on October 13. A formation of dozens of North Korean military aircraft from its East and West Air Force Divisions approached the truce line, after which the East and West long-range ground artillery units

1. <경애하는 김정은동지께서 조선인민군 전술핵운용부대들의 군사훈련을 지도하시였다>, 《조선의 오늘》, 2022年10月10日, <https://reurl.cc/Qbzklq>.

2. <경애하는 김정은동지께서 조선인민군 전선장거리포병구분대들과 공군비행대들의 화력타격훈련을 지도하시였다>, 《조선의 오늘》, 2022年10月10日, <https://reurl.cc/zNxjjN>.

began firing training toward the maritime buffer zone near the Northern Limit Line (NLL), and a short-range ballistic missile was fired from Pyongyang. The exercise lasted until the afternoon of October 14. North Korea's General Staff Department of the Korean People's Army said it was a "responsive military operation."³

2. Security Implications

2-1. North Korea's strategic forces may already have precision strike and maneuver capabilities

Through the exercises, North Korea has demonstrated its precision strike capability and determination to defend Pyongyang's metropolitan area, the country's capital. This year (2022) until October 14, North Korea has

launched 22 ballistic missiles and three tactical missiles, 14 of which were from Pyongyang, nine from the northwest or inland areas, and the rest from the northeast. Some launch sites are located at major transportation nodes, while others are military bases that have fired missiles in the past;⁴ the missiles were mostly launched from mechanized vehicles or modified missile trains.

There are two noteworthy points: The first is the two short-range ballistic missiles of different types launched on October 6, 2022. They were not from the Sunan Airport in the Sunan District but from the Samseok District adjacent to Daesung District, the political center. The Samseok District is the location of the Pyongyang Defense Command⁵ responsible for the security of the North Korean metropolitan area.⁶

3. <[연합시론] 9-19 합의 대놓고 위반한 북한, 진정 파국을 원하는가>, 《연합뉴스》, 2022年10月14日, <https://reurl.cc/5pjA0z>.
4. For example, the place "Mupyong-Ri, Chonchon County of Chagang Province" was once thought to have a vehicle assembly or weapons factory. North Korea launched two Hwasong-14 ballistic missiles on July 28, 2017, and one ballistic missile of an unknown type on September 18, 2021.
5. At present, it is known that the superior unit is the Security Command, which is directly under the National Council. Once known as the 91st Capital Defense Corps, the Pyongyang Defense Command conducted "large-scale joint force exercises" with the 105th Tank Division, the 425th Mechanized Infantry Division, and the 815th Mechanized Infantry Division during Kim Jong-un's tenure as the First Chairman of the Workers' Party of Korea. Source: <경애하는 김정은동지께서 조선인민군 대련합부대들사이의 쌍방실동훈련을 지도하시였다>, 《조선의 오늘》, 2016年2月21日, <https://reurl.cc/LMRzzK>.
6. <항모 재진입하자 이틀 만에 다시 탄도미사일>, 《MBC 뉴스》, 2022年10月6日, <https://reurl.cc/eO144j>.

The second is the short-range submarine-launched ballistic missile launched on September 25 from the catchment area of a reservoir in Taechon County, North Pyongan Province. Although North Korea claimed it was fired underwater, it could have been launched from a surface vessel,⁷ which is yet to be confirmed. This shows that North Korea already has a diverse and covert means of launch. It could also be an opportunity to validate their new submarine-based vertical launch technology, which would become a serious security threat to South Korea.

2-2. North Korea still has the capability of coordinated warfare of traditional multi-service forces

The North Korean Air Force, also known as the “Korean People’s Army Air and Anti-Air Force,” currently possesses 810 aircraft of all types. North Korea claimed to have deployed more than 150 aircraft simultaneously to participate in the October 8 exercise. Air-to-ground

attack training was conducted under Kim Jong-un’s inspection to demonstrate the logistic, fuel supply, and air traffic control capabilities.⁸ The Korean People’s Army’s “Western Front Long-range Artillery Sector Detachment” also conducted artillery training orchestrated with the Air Force on that day, probably using Russian M-1954 or M-1942 towed guns. Except for the senior commander accompanying Kim Jong-un, all the personnel was seen wearing the new individual gear that appeared at the military parade in the last two years. However, since North Korea only makes the news public with photos this time, the content is yet to be verified.

According to the General Staff Department of the Korean People’s Army, the military exercise on October 13-14 was in response to a 10-hour MLRS firing exercise conducted by the United States Forces Korea (USFK) on the morning of October 13 in Cheorwon County, Gangwon Province, South Korea, near North Korea’s Pyeonggang County, Gangwon Province front line where the

7. <북한, 세계 최초로 저수지서 SLBM 발사… 우리 군 김세 못 됐다>, 《한겨레》, 2022年10月11日, <https://reurl.cc/O4OvVX>.

8. <북 전투기 150 대가 동시 출격… 이례적 훈련 나선 까닭은>, 《한겨레》, 2022年10月10日, <https://reurl.cc/5pYyWV>.

North Korean 5th Army Corps is deployed. This should be one of North Korea's rare "cross-regional, multi-service exercises" in recent years, and the number of recent North Korean Air Force sorties has also surpassed past records. In the future, there may be similar large-scale military exercises.

A review of the public records of Kim Jong-un's visits to the Air Force reveals that he has personally presided over the North Korean Air Force's "parade flight training"⁹ and the "Air Force Commanders' Tactical Flight Competition;"¹⁰ he has inspected the MiG-29 fleet and the training process several times and could have piloted an Antonov An-148 jet airliner himself. Kim Jong-un cares no less about the Air Force than he does about the strategic forces and long-range artillery units.

3. Trend Observation

3-1. South Korea will continue to expand its military power to counter North Korean threats

In response to the rising military threat from North Korea, South Korea may be forced to upgrade or expand its military power to cope with it. South Korea has currently expanded the Army Missile Strategic Command and Naval Aviation Command, while the Army Missile Strategic Command and Air Force Missile Defense Command are expected to integrate into a single Strategic Command in 2024 to establish a complete missile response system.¹¹ South Korea released a video of a suspected test launch of the Hyunmoo-5 domestic-made medium-range missile¹² at a military parade marking the 74th anniversary of "Armed

9. <김정은 제 1 위원장, 北공군 검열비행훈련 지도>, 《통일뉴스》, 2014年10月30日, <https://reurl.cc/le17xq>.

10. <북한, 공군 지휘관 전투비행술 경기대회… 김정은 참관>, 《연합뉴스》, 2017年6月5日, <https://reurl.cc/3YvIE0>.

11. <국방부 일일 정례 브리핑>, 《대한민국 정책브리핑》, 2022年9月15日, <https://reurl.cc/O4ONXv>.

12. The missile that failed to launch and exploded at the Gangneung Air Base on October 5 was a Hyunmoo-2C tactical missile.

Forces Day” on Oct. 1, and President Yoon Suk-yeol declared that North Korea would receive an “overwhelming response” if it were to launch an attack.¹³

In response to a possible seventh North Korean nuclear test, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol said on October 11 that he would consider re-deploying tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea, a statement that immediately sparked a debate among the ruling and opposition parties since it could deepen the confrontation between the two Koreas. The US did not express any specific viewpoint but only emphasized the established non-nuclear principle and its willingness to strengthen the cooperative Korea-US and Korea-US-Japan relationship. It means that the US still prefers the deterrent force based on conventional weapons and diplomatic approaches to addressing the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula.¹⁴ Most US think tanks also oppose the idea

of “nuclear for nuclear.” David Maxwell, a senior researcher at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), who served as the combat staff of the US-Korea Joint Command, argues that “the current conventional force is sufficient to defend Korea” and that “the US and Korean conventional forces are capable of destroying the People’s Army wherever it may be in North Korea.”¹⁵

3-2. The deception and reality of the North Korean media

According to information from South Korean Joint Staff Headquarters, North Korea launched formations of eight fighter planes and four bombers of unknown types on October 6 from the vicinity of Koksan County, North Hwanghae Province, to the airspace near Hwangju County for air-to-ground attack training.¹⁶ Since the training was close to the “Tactical Action Line” near the truce

13. <[단독] 괴물 미사일은 현무 -5... 지하 100m 김정은 벙커, 한 방에 파괴>, 《조선일보》, 2022年 10月3日, <https://reurl.cc/3YzV4j>.

14. <미, 전술핵 배치 논란에 원론 답변... 모든 확장역지 약속>, 《연합뉴스》, 2022年 10月 12日, <https://reurl.cc/eO142W>.

15. <전문가들 「한국내 전술핵 재배치, 군사적 실익 적고 미한 동맹에 부담만 가중」>, 《미국의 소리》, 2022年 10月 12日, <https://reurl.cc/pMOjNb>.

16. There is one airport with a 2,500m concrete runway in Koksan and Hwangju Counties, respectively, in North Hwanghae Province, while there are five airports with concrete runways of over 2,000m in southwestern North Korea (North and South Hwanghae Provinces).

border, and the South Korean Air Force scrambled 30 F-15K fighters in response.¹⁷ Reviewing the information from North Korea and South Korea's subsequent announcement that F-35A fighters were dispatched on October 8, South Korea may not have released the full information due to certain considerations.

The North Korean air force might have deployed its few remaining MiG-29 fighters, Su-25 attack aircraft, or Il-28 tactical bombers on October 6. As quoted by SBS TV, Korean government sources said North Korea had dispatched only about 100 military aircraft on Oct. 8; many failed to complete their missions and landed at nearby airports, some could not take off, and at least one had crashed.¹⁸ Although North Korea still has many military aircraft from the former Soviet Union and some from China, the aging fleet, fuel shortages, and inadequate training may have forced North Korea to respond to the unexpected situation, such

as the USS Ronald Reagan's visit to South Korea, with a "bluffing" attitude.

The photos of the "Tactical Nuclear Force" firing a missile that hit a target on September 25, published by the North Korean newspaper "Rodong Sinmun" on October 10, were found to be old images from January 27, 2022. In the past, the North Korean media had been found to use old or manipulated photos; the purpose was probably to avoid precise interpretation by the US and South Korea or attempts to exaggerate for propaganda effects.¹⁹

3-3. The Korea-Japan relationship becomes a factor of uncertainty for Korea-US-Japan alliance

With a range of 4,500 kilometers, the North Korean intermediate-range ballistic missile launched on October 4 could reach the continental US and offset the influence of its "nuclear umbrella" in Northeast Asia. To avoid a domino effect,

17. <美항모 왔는데도 北 공세적 모드... 미사일 이어 무력시위 비행도>, 《연합뉴스》, 2022年10月6日, <https://reurl.cc/kE619K>.

18. <[단독] 북, 사상 첫 150대 출격?... 「수치 부풀리고 추락」>, 《SBS》, 2022年10月11日, <https://reurl.cc/D3GQr6>.

19. <북한 전술핵부대 타격 사진 또 재활용... 「김정은 업적 부풀리기 무리한 과장 선전」>, 《미국의 소리》, 2022年10月12日, <https://reurl.cc/QbzKZ>.

it is necessary for the US to strengthen its security alliance with South Korea and Japan.

Korea has conducted anti-submarine and missile defense exercises with the US and Japan. This is the most significant breakthrough in Korea-Japan relations since April 2017, and it is imperative that the three countries raise the level of cooperation on regional security issues and resume high-level exchanges in the future. However, there are still some

historical issues between Korea and Japan that need to be resolved. In the joint South Korea-US-Japan anti-submarine exercise on September 30, 2022, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) destroyer JS Asahi DD-119 conducted a drill 150 kilometers from Dokdo (Liancourt Rocks); drew strong criticism from South Korean opposition parties and will become a serious challenge to the Yoon Suk-yeol administration and the ruling party, whose support is quite low.

Table: Timetable of North Korea's recent military provocations (September 25 to October 14)

Date	Description	Location	Background
September 25	Two short-range ballistic missiles	Reservoir catchment area in Taechon County, North Pyongan Province	1.USS Ronald Reagan arrives in Busan (9/23) 2.North Korean Tactical Nuclear Force training (9/25~10/9)
September 28	Two short-range ballistic missiles	Near Sunan District of Pyongyang City	Korea-US Joint Navy Exercise (9/26~9/29)
September 29	Two short-range ballistic missiles	Near Sunchon City of South Pyongan Province	1. US Vice President Kamala Devi Harris visited DMZ 2. Korea-US-Japan Navy anti-submarine exercises
October 1	Two short-range ballistic missiles	Near Sunan District of Pyongyang City	South Korea's "Armed Forces Day" commemorative parade
October 4	One medium-range ballistic missile	Mupyong -Ri, Jeoncheon County of Jagang Province	Flew 4,500 kilometers over Hokkaido of Japan and landed in the Pacific Ocean beyond Japan's economic waters.

Date	Description	Location	Background
October 6	Bombing training of North Korean Air Force	Over the airspace of Koksan County and Hwangju County of North Hwanghae Province	1. South Korea-US-Japan Navy missile defense training 2. North Korean long-range artillery and Air Force strike training (10/6~10/8)
October 9	Two short-range ballistic missiles	Near Muncheon City of Gangwon Province	77 th Anniversary of Workers' Party of Korea (10/10)
October 12	Two long-range strategic missiles	Near Kaechon County of North Pyongan Province	Flew 2,000 kilometers and hit the target in a figure-eight trajectory over the West Sea.
October 14	One short-range ballistic missile	Near Sunan District of Pyongyang City	1. MLRS firing training of USFK (10/13) 2. Land-air joint exercise of North Korea's east and west regions (10/13~10/14)

Source: Information compiled by Chih-Hao Lin from public sources in South Korea and North Korea.

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