

**Address by President Yoon Suk Yeol on the 75<sup>th</sup> Armed Forces Day**

September 26, 2023

My fellow Koreans, our men and women in uniform, distinguished guests,

I wholeheartedly congratulate you on the 75<sup>th</sup> Armed Forces Day.

I am deeply grateful for the dedication and hard work of our men and women in uniform who are fulfilling their duty to defend our country's land, sea and air at this very moment.

I would also like to thank our service members who are deployed in distant foreign countries, devoting themselves to promoting world peace.

In addition, I would like to express my profound respect and gratitude to our fallen heroes as well as the founding members of our military, our veterans and reservists who defended the freedom of our nation.

I also deeply thank the parents, wives and husbands, sons and daughters who silently dedicate themselves to supporting our service members as well as members of the United States Forces Korea and their families who have contributed to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and together with us forged the 70-year-long history of the ROK-U.S. alliance.

Fellow Koreans, members of the Armed Forces,

Since its founding 75 years ago, our military has carried out its mission with a tremendous responsibility to defend our homeland as the last bastion of freedom and democracy in the Republic of Korea.

Our Armed Forces defended our country against the North Korean communist invasion with their blood.

They have also built the foundation for remarkable economic development by unwaveringly protecting our national security against continuous provocations from North Korea.

Our military was under-armed and in an awful state at its founding after liberation. Feared by enemies and trusted by our people, it has now grown into one of the mightiest military forces in the world.

We have developed a cutting-edge fighter jet and built a world-class Aegis destroyer with our own hands and are exporting high-performance tanks, self-propelled howitzers and combat aircraft in record amounts.

During the Korean War, many young people from the free world rushed to the Republic of Korea to defend its freedom. Now our young men and women are deployed to many parts of the world to protect freedom and peace.

As Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, I feel an overwhelming sense of pride as I see how our military has grown into a strong force globally.

Fellow Koreans,

Despite repeated warnings from the international community over the past several decades, North Korea has been upgrading its nuclear and missile capabilities. Moreover, it has been blatantly threatening to use nuclear weapons.

This constitutes an existential threat to our people and a grave challenge to world peace.

The North Korean regime's obsession with the development of nuclear weapons aggravates the North Korean people's suffering. It continues to exploit and oppress its people and violate their human rights.

The North Korean regime must clearly realize that nuclear weapons will never be able to guarantee its security.

Based on battle-ready combat capabilities and a solid readiness posture, our military will immediately retaliate against any North Korean provocation.

If North Korea uses nuclear weapons, its regime will be brought to an end by an overwhelming response from the ROK-U.S. alliance.

Upon the foundation of the ironclad ROK-U.S. alliance, our government will further strengthen security cooperation between the Republic of Korea, the United States and Japan. Furthermore, we will establish a strong security posture by standing in close solidarity with our partner countries.

On top of this, our people will never be deceived by the fake peace tricks of North Korea's communist regime and its followers.

Members of the Armed Forces,

Our military is arming itself with an overwhelming response capability and retaliatory posture, including the ROK 3K Defense, and will soon establish the Strategic Command to integrate and command our relevant assets.

Recently, the Drone Operations Command was launched to oversee military actions against North Korean provocations that come via drone.

Above all, the cornerstone of our robust national defense lies in your unwavering military spirit, strong commitment, and a clear definition of who your enemies are.

I strongly urge you to train hard every day with the discipline demanded in real combat situations.

Fellow Koreans,

President Joe Biden and I announced the "Washington Declaration" this April to substantively address the escalating North Korean nuclear threats.

Now, the ROK-U.S. alliance has become a more sophisticated nuclear-based alliance.

We will establish a unified response system that combines U.S. nuclear assets and our non-nuclear assets through the ROK-U.S. Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG).

The U.S. strategic assets to be deployed frequently within the Korean Peninsula will strengthen our deterrence against North Korea's nuclear weapons.

Moreover, the scope of cooperation of the ROK-U.S. alliance will be expanded to include outer space and cyber domains, and our combined exercises and training will be bolstered further.

The framework of ROK-U.S.-Japan cooperation forged at Camp David will help further reinforce our deterrence against North Korea's nuclear program.

In order to prevail over the polycrisis facing us and prepare for future security threats, we must promptly employ cutting-edge science and technology and innovate our national defense.

We must swiftly enhance capabilities that will shape the battlefields of the future, including AI-based Manned-Unmanned Teaming System and space, cyber and electromagnetic weaponry. Additionally, we cannot build a strong military without properly investing in our men and women in uniform.

We will assist our soldiers by significantly improving their service and living conditions, so they can attain the highest level of combat capabilities.

Solid support will be provided to our soldiers in all areas, including wages, military supplies, meals, housing and medical care, to improve their combat capabilities.

Our defense industry is making inroads around the world, and many countries have commended us on the excellence of our weapons.

The government will double its support so that the defense industry – a future growth engine that is driving the cutting-edge industries – can contribute to national security and grow into a leading sector that drives economic progress.

Fellow Koreans, our proud men and women in uniform and distinguished guests from home and abroad,

We have learned from history that only a strong military can guarantee true peace.

The public's trust in and affection for the military is essential to building strong armed forces.

As Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, I will do all I can to build a strong military that instills fear in the enemy and trust in the people.

Along with the people, I congratulate you once more on the 75<sup>th</sup> Armed Forces Day.

Thank you.

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