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Kim Jong Un calls for exponential increase in North Korea's nuclear arsenal amid threats from South, US

Кім Чен Ин закликає до експоненційного збільшення ядерного арсеналу Північної Кореї на тлі загроз з півдня та США

Лідер Північної Кореї Кім Чен Ин закликає до «експоненційного збільшення» арсеналу ядерної зброї своєї країни у відповідь на погрози з боку Південної Кореї та США. Коментарі Кіма прозвучали після того, як Північна Корея двічі за вихідні провела випробування великої ракетної системи залпового вогню, здатної нести ядерну зброю, яка могла б поставити в зону досяжності всю Південну Корею. Виступаючи напередодні Нового року в заключний день шестиденного пленарного засідання, на якому розглядався 2022 рік, Кім Чен Ин сказав, що Південна Корея стала «безперечним ворогом», а її головний союзник, США, посилив тиск на Північ до «максимуму» рівня в порівнянні з минулим роком, часто розміщуючи свої військові сили на Корейському півострові. "У перспективі, як ключова наступальна зброя наших збройних сил, він виконуватиме власне бойове завдання щодо розгрому противника", - сказав Кім Чен Ин.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/31/asia/north-korea-kim-jong-un-nuclear-expansion-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is calling for an “exponential increase” in his country’s nuclear weapons arsenal in response to what he claims are threats from South Korea and the United States, Pyongyang’s state media reported Sunday.

Kim’s comments come as North Korea twice over the weekend [tested what it claimed was a large, nuclear-capable, multiple-launch rocket system](#) that could put all of South Korea in its range, according to a report from the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

Speaking on New Year’s Eve on the final day of a six-day plenary session that reviewed 2022, Kim said South Korea has become an “undoubted enemy” and its main ally, the US, has increased pressure on the North to the “maximum” level over the past year by frequently deploying its military assets to the Korean Peninsula.

In response, Kim said in the coming year that Pyongyang must mass produce tactical nuclear weapons while developing a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that would give the North a “quick counterstrike capability,” according to the KCNA report.

Kim's comments come at the end of a year that saw his regime [test more missiles than at any time in North Korean history](#), including an ICBM that could in theory strike the US mainland.

On Saturday, in its 37th day of missile tests in 2022, [North Korea](#) fired at least three short-range ballistic missiles from a site south of Pyongyang, according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

It followed that early Sunday with another test. North Korea said both Saturday's and Sunday's tests were of a 600mm multiple-launch rocket (MRL) system. Most multiple-rocket launch systems in service around the world are around 300mm in size.

The 600mm MRL was first introduced three years ago, and production has been increased since late October of 2022 for deployment, Kim said in his speech to the plenary session on Saturday, according to KCNA. He later added that an additional 30 of the 600mm MRL will be deployed to the military simultaneously.

Kim said the weapon is capable of overcoming high landforms, can consecutively strike with precision, has all of South Korea in its shooting range and can be loaded with tactical nuclear warheads, according to the KCNA report.

"Prospectively, as a key offensive weapon of our military forces, it will carry out its own combat mission to overwhelm the enemy," Kim said.

South Korea's Defense Ministry later responded to Kim's comments, calling them "provocative language that seriously harms peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula."

The ministry urged Pyongyang to "immediately stop" developing nuclear weapons and return to the path of denuclearization, warning that the "Kim Jong Un regime will come to an end if North Korea attempts to use nuclear weapons."

The ministry vowed to maintain its military readiness posture to "firmly respond" to any North Korean threats, adding that the military will strengthen its "three-axis" defense system designed to counter North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

The three-axis defense system consists of the Kill Chain preemptive strike system, the Korea Air and Missile Defense system and the Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation plan, an operational plan to incapacitate the North Korean leadership in a major conflict.

South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol said on Sunday during a phone call with military chiefs that North Korea will continue to conduct constant nuclear and

missile provocations, and South Korea's military should respond with clear retaliation, his office said.

"Its recent missile launches were not technically impressive. Instead, the high volume of tests at unusual times and from various locations demonstrate that North Korea could launch different types of attack, anytime, and from many directions," Easley said.

Easley also noted that it's not just missiles that North Korea is using to up the military pressure on the South. Last week, [Pyongyang flew five drones into South Korean airspace](#), forcing Seoul to scramble fighter jets and helicopters to track them and later to send its own drones into North Korean airspace.

It all leads to an escalation of tensions, according to Easley.

"Such provocations, including drone incursions, appear excessive for deterrence and may be intended to scare South Korea into taking a softer policy. But with Kim disavowing diplomacy and threatening to mass produce nuclear weapons, the Yoon administration is likely to further increase South Korea's defense capabilities and readiness," Easley said.

For its part, South Korea is beefing up forces, too.

Seoul's Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) announced last month it will spend more than \$2.7 billion over 10 years to strengthen the mission capabilities and survivability of its fleet of F-15K fighters, jets that would play a key role in any possible strikes on North Korea.

Washington is also not standing still. As well as deploying assets like F-22 fighters and B-1 bombers to the exercises around the Korean Peninsula, the US military recently [activated its first Space Force command](#) on foreign soil in South Korea, with the unit's new commander saying he is ready to face any threat in the region.

The new unit "will be tasked with coordinating space operations and services such as missile warning, position navigation and timing and satellite communications within the region," according to US Forces Korea.

Even before Kim's latest remarks, experts had noted the big strides Pyongyang had made in its missile forces over the past year.

Ankit Panda, a nuclear policy expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [told CNN in mid-December](#) that Pyongyang has emerged as a missile power.

“The bigger picture is that North Korea is literally turning into a prominent operator of large-scale missile forces,” Panda said. “The word test is no longer appropriate to talk about most North Korean missile launches.”

“Most of the missiles they’ve launched this year are parts of military exercises. They are rehearsing for nuclear war. And that, I think, is the big picture this year,” Panda said.