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An Analysis of a Military Parade in Celebrating the 90th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army in North Korea

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A military parade marking the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army in North Korea was unprecedented in terms of its size with a focus on sending military messages toward the outside world. At this military parade, North Korea appeared to create symbolic effects about the historical continuity that links the tradition of armed struggle against the Japanese imperialist army and the strengthening of modern defense power. This parade seemed to mark a finale to a series of events held in April by mobilizing weapons on a scale never seen before and thus boasting its defense power, which is viewed as a significant achievement of Chairman Kim Jong-un. The essence of Chairman Kim's speech is that North Korea will pursue the sophistication of nuclear weapons at a maximum speed. Instead of sending a direct message toward South Korea and the US, North Korea pinpointed uncertainty in the international situation as a reason for advancing their nuclear weapons. That was an intentional change made at the security level transformed from an approach of deploying a circumstantial reason by taking an issue with the US. What deserves the attention is that North Korea vowed to 'implement the second mission' when 'national fundamental interests are in jeopardy.' It hints that North Korea could preemptively use nuclear weapons if it judges that the 'fundamental interests' are violated. It could be interpreted as an intention to set its doctrine in an aggressive tone while countering the following issues: the US's nuclear policy, the possibility of a preemptive strike by the US, the strengthening of the US-ROK extended deterrence and South Korea's reinforced military force. The DPRK seemingly intends to supplement its deterrent capability against the US with rhetorical tools by stating as if the barrier to the use of nuclear weapons is lowered.

North Korea's Korean Central Television (KCTV) aired recorded footage of a military parade marking the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army at 8 pm on April 26, 2022. An actual event, recorded in this footage of about two hours and 23 minutes, seemed to be held for nearly three hours from 9 pm on April 25 for a pre-event celebration, 10 pm for the main event, to midnight. The military parade, held for the fourth time at night since the military parade in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean Worker's Party, features colorful visual effects with Chairman Kim Jong-un in military uniform and Ri Sol-ju side-by-side along with the march of a massive column of army and weaponry. About 20,000 people participated in this parade, an unprecedented number of participation compared to a military parade celebrating the 75th anniversary of the party foundation in 2020 (15,000 people) and a military parade at the 8th Party Congress in 2021 (10,000 people). It shows exceptionally meticulous attention of North Korea to this event.

Chairman Kim Jong-un's speech, which garners the outside attention, consists of four messages: (1) tradition of revolutionary armed force, (2) political and ideological reinforcement for strong self-defense capabilities, (3) enhancement and development of nuclear force at the maximum speed, and (4) the mission for nuclear weapons (doctrine). Messages' main focus was on the history of revolutionary armed force and the strengthening of defense power, particularly revealing the intent to advance the nuclear arsenal. Last year's 8th Party Congress was intended to openly declare the sophistication of nuclear weapons. The Defence Development Exhibition "Self-Defence-2021" held in October 2021 showed a detailed plan and the willingness to implement nuclear advancement. This speech was intended to establish the will to 'advance and implement nuclear weapons at a maximum speed.' No direct messages toward the US and South Korea were found. Instead, messages mainly mentioned the uncertainty surrounding the international environment and changes in the international trends of military power and warfare. Rather than mentioning circumstantial logic, such as the hostile policy toward North Korea, North Korea cited the uncertainty surrounding the international and regional circumstances as

a reason for its nuclear sophistication.

The Background of Military Parade in Commemoration of the 90th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army in North Korea

A military parade designed to mark the foundation of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army was held for the first time.¹⁾ Why did North Korea hold a military parade to celebrate the foundation of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army instead of marking the 110th anniversary of the birth of Kim Il-sung on April 15? First is the possibility of considering other significant events slated for April. The second is to send messages internally and externally. In terms of the timing of the events, North Korea may have considered creating a dramatic effect in the leading-up to a series of events scheduled for April: the 10th anniversary of the Kim Jong-un regime, the 110th anniversary of the birth of Kim Il-sung, and the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army. The first two events are intended to foster the festive atmosphere to encourage people to participate in the event. The finale was intended to show off the defense power, the prided achievement of Chairman Kim Jong-un, by mobilizing weapons at an unprecedented scale. It also appears to create symbolic effects for a 'historical continuity that links a tradition of anti-imperialist Japan and the strengthening of modern defense power.

1) A total of 11 military parades have taken place since Kim Jong-un took power in 2012. This is the second time that a military parade was held coinciding with the anniversary of the military, including the military parade marking the foundation of the Korean People's Army on February 8, 2018. Although a ceremonial military parade on a small scale was held on April 25, 2013, the date of the foundation of the Korean People's Army, it differed from a massive military parade.

<Table 1> Military Parades Held Under the Kim Jong-un Regime

Year Anniversary	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Sum
Day of the Sun (4.15.)	o					o						2
Army Day (2.8.)							o					1
Revolutionary Army (4.25.)		Ceremony									o	1
Victory Day (7.27.)		o										1
Republic (9.9.)		o					o			o		3
Party Foundation (10.10.)				o					o			2
Party Congress										o (1.14.)		1
Sum	1	2		1		1	2		1	2	1	11

* o refers to a night military parade

Another intent was to deliver messages internally and externally. That is to promote propaganda for the public and consolidate people in a bid to reflect demographic, generational changes ("replacement of revolutionary generation"). The epic of this military parade focused on recalling the tradition of struggle against anti-imperial Japan and highlighting the historical justification for the construction of nuclear-armed force. Chairman Kim Jong-un, in a speech, mentioned a "peculiarity of our revolution in a prolonged fight against the ever-growing atrocious imperialism amidst generational changes replacing the revolutionary generation. It indicates that North Korea faces generational changes and uncertainties both at home and abroad. In the same context, North Korea presented the 'strengthening of political ideology' as the first strategic task. This parade was also intended to offer some spectacles for people to enjoy who are frustrated and worn out by the pandemic and sanctions. It could also be said that the North attempted to use this parade as a venue to express an active will to advance its nuclear arsenal toward the outside world in response to the current international circumstance.

Maximum Visual Effect: a Military Parade as Image Politics of Kim Jong-un

Recent four-night military parades, including this military parade, increasingly featured 'attention-grabbing spectacles.' A military parade in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Party's foundation in 2020 marks the beginning of maximizing the visual effect, especially highlighted at night. Since then, the trend of displaying spectacles when unveiling items at a military parade have continued to this day. Rather than holding a stern military parade, North Korea appears to focus on providing spectacles for people to enjoy and effectively showing the image of the defense force through fashionable filming, involving pre-event ceremonies in the first half of the show with fast-beat music and various stage lighting, the rhythmic march of a massive column of army and weaponry, air show with a maximum visual effect, and weaponry captured and swiftly edited from various camera angles.

Recently North Korea's military parade was transformed into a stage as an aggregate of comprehensive performance and image politics designed to send policy messages at home and abroad. The essence of the image politics of Kim Jong-un can be summed up as 'multi-dimensional display' (more focus on the scenery), speed, and message. Other characteristics include making an urban space a stage using a camera through various angles, featuring rhythms via swift editing, and delivering visual and verbal messages. In that sense, a military parade can be viewed as a comprehensive embodiment of image politics.

<Table 2> The Number of Photos Published in the Rodong Sinmun under Kim Jong-un

(unit: number)

Anniv ersary	2022. 4.25.	2021. 9.9.	2021. 1.14.	2020. 10.10.	2018. 9.9.	2018. 2.8.	2017. 4.15.	2015. 10.10.	2013. 9.9.	2013. 7.27.	2012. 4.15.
Total # of photo s	152	73	100	127	94	100	78	38	12	18	42
Weap ons photo	60	0	42	62	14	41	25	8	2	4	11

The number of photos reporting this military parade in the Rodong Sinmun on April 26, 2022, was 152, the largest since Kim Jong-un came into power. The number of photos of weapons amounted to 60, similar to the unprecedented number on the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the Party in October 2020. The number of pictures of military parades published in newspapers has risen since 2017. It can be accounted for by the diversification of weapons revealed at the event and the desire for strategically showing off the enhanced weaponry. For instance, the more core strategic weapons or, the newer weapons they are, the more photos the Rodong Sinmun features in covering a military parade: an average of four pictures for each weapon, six photos for Hwasong-8 (hypersonic glide missiles), and 13 photos for Hwasong-17 (ICBM).

The last feature is a change in displaying images of Chairman Kim Jong-un. He appeared in a military uniform for the first time in 11 times of military parades since he took power. In 2012~2018, he wore black people's clothes. During 2020~2021, he wore a grey suit. He wore black people's clothes and a coat in a military parade in commemoration of the foundation of the Korean People's Army in February 2018, which was the only military parade related to the military. It can be interpreted as intending to imitate his grandfather and father, Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, in their grey clothes, as seen in their portraits, or to show himself as the supreme composer of the nuclear-armed force. It is also noteworthy that Chairman Kim read the speech

faster, which can be attributed to a loss in weight.

It is also unusual that he accompanied his wife, Ri Sol-ju. It is the second time that he has accompanied Ri Sol-ju in 11 times of military parades. Chairman Kim and Ri received a red-carpet greeting by a military honor guard at a military parade in celebration of the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean People's Army in February 2018. Those two events coincidentally are military parades marking the anniversary of the military. Ri did not make an appearance in military parades celebrating the anniversary of the Party or the state but did appear in military-related military parades. Possible reasons may abound, but it is plausible that the role and symbolic effects of the first lady could be considered, similar to how Kim Jong-un's grandmother, Kim Jong-suk played a role in a struggle against the Japanese imperial army or the foundation of the military. Or, it could be to demonstrate an image of a leader who could offset military aggressiveness and abnormalities.

Mentioning the Uncertainty over the Circumstances as a Rationale for Nuclear Development and Arguing for 'Making Peace through Force' on North Korea's Terms

Chairman Kim Jong-un's message can largely be summed up as the following four: (1) tradition of revolutionary armed force, (2) political and ideological reinforcement for strong self-defense capabilities, (3) enhancement and development of nuclear force at the maximum speed, and (4) the mission for nuclear weapons (doctrine). The message itself focuses on the military front. What is noteworthy is the mentioning of the 'circumstance.' Other keywords include "the current world where the power collides with the power," "tumultuous political and military circumstances," "trends of the development of military power in the world," and "changing trends of warfare." This 'circumstance' may refer to the US-China strategic competition, US-Russia conflict, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, prevalent military armed race, changes in the weapons system, and changes in the patterns of the modern welfare. Chairman Kim concluded, "a country's dignity, national sovereignty, and trustworthy

and genuine peace can only be guaranteed by invincible and indomitable defense capabilities that could overpower all the enemies amidst this fierce collision of world powers."

At the core of the message lies in the will to develop and strengthen nuclear weapons at a maximum speed, equipped with deterrent power and preemptive and retaliatory strike capabilities to counter the rising nuclear strike capabilities of the US and Northeast Asia. In a nutshell, this is North Korea's 'claim for building peace through nuclear weapons,' which points to the nuclear advancement for peace and safety and to deter the outbreak of war. This line of argument has persisted since Kim Jong-un came into power and has been adopted as the basic policy direction since the 8th Party Congress in 2021. There is no mention of anything related to the US or the US's hostile policy toward the DPRK, which was traditionally presented as a reason for their nuclear development. This hints that North Korea shifted from finding faults with the US's specific policy to a general argument at the security level.

This could be viewed as a dual strategy of separating their nuclear advancement from North Korea-US negotiations. It means that North Korea now argues for nuclear development not only as a tool to counter the US's hostile policy but also to strengthen the national defense power, which is generally exerted by a normal country to safeguard the right of self-defense. North Korea wants to generalize and justify their nuclear development as an act to protect the self-defense right that is entitled to every country, instead of making the nuclear development limited to the counter-balancing of the US's hostile policy. To that end, the North strongly opposed the 'double standard' imposed on them or made a claim that the US and South Korea are not the main enemies. This could be viewed as an attempt to separate their nuclear development from the DPRK-US negotiations or to send a message that they will not accept a negotiation predicated on denuclearization.

At the Defence Development Exhibition "Self-Defence-2021" last October, Chairman Kim Jong-un stressed the need to be strong and highlighted the 'irreversibility' of nuclear development. It means that securing the 'irreversibility'

of nuclear development, which the US and South Korea cannot argue, is North Korea's primary goal. It sends a message that North Korea would try engaging in negotiations with the US or improving inter-Korean relations if no hostile acts or double standards are imposed with the completion of weapons development as its primary goal. This can be viewed as separating the track of nuclear development from the track of diplomatic compromise. The principle of 'responding to power with power and goodwill with goodwill' can be seen as a way to secure the room for maneuvering to coordinate this separation strategy.

Indicating a Shift of Nuclear Doctrine: The Second Mission of Nuclear Force will be Exerted upon the 'Violation of Fundamental Interests'

What warrants the attention in a speech of Chairman Kim Jong-un is an indication of a shift in nuclear doctrine. Chairman Kim said that our "basic mission of nuclear force" is to deter war but could not only be limited to the prevention of war if an unwarranted situation is created. That situation is when "the fundamental interests of our nation are about to be infringed upon," and, as a consequence, when our 'second mission' will be put into practice. Although Kim Jong-un did not elaborate on the specifics of what the violation of that 'fundamental interests' and the 'second missions' refer to, it hinted that North Korea could preemptively use a nuclear arsenal when 'fundamental interests' are judged to be violated, as opposed to using nuclear weapons to prevent war.

In April 2013, North Korea fleshed out its nuclear doctrine by adopting the 'Nuclear Weapons State Law.' The Law stipulates that "nuclear weapons are used to take down on the aggression or attack of hostile nuclear power and of launching a retaliatory attack," and that "North Korea will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons for a non-nuclear state who is not engaged in aggressive or striking acts in collusion with adversarial nuclear power." At the performance assessment report of the 7th Party Congress in 2016, North Korea remarked that "we will not preemptively use nuclear weapons unless an aggressive, adversarial force violates

our sovereignty with nuclear weapons." This doctrine has thus far not undergone an official change.

In sum, North Korea's nuclear doctrine is, on the surface, characterized by 'deterrence' and 'retaliation' as follows: (1) to deter the opponent not to attack, and (2) to strike the opponent when being attacked or to launch a retaliatory strike. This speech opens up the possibility of (3) being able to use nuclear weapons preemptively when interests are violated. Some parts are not crystal clear, though. What remains unclear is whether they mean nuclear weapons attack or non-nuclear weapons attack when they mention the counterpart's 'attack' and the enemy's 'attack,' which allows North Korea to go nuclear. Judging by the just-released doctrine and the speech, North Korea appears to hint that they can use nuclear weapons not only for a non-nuclear attack but also for a specific situation when the 'fundamental interests' are infringed upon or triggered by a specific behavior of counterpart.

Aggressive Nuclear Doctrine and a Mix of Confidence for Nuclear Diversification and Anxiety over the US-ROK Force

The speech reveals a change in North Korea's nuclear doctrine toward an aggressive direction. However, when examining the background, North Korea may attempt to shift to an aggressive doctrine in response to the US's nuclear policy, the strengthened ROK-US extended deterrence, and the reinforced armed force of the ROK. An executive summary of the nuclear posture review (NPR) of the Biden administration, unveiled last March, specifies, "the US will consider using nuclear weapons only under a extreme environment that necessitates the defense of core national interests of the US's allies and cooperative nations." During the presidential campaign process, President Biden's original stance was supporting the idea of a 'single purpose of using nuclear weapons,' which means limiting the use of nuclear weapons in case of an attack from enemy states. His changed stance stands at the ambiguity that opens up the possibility of using nuclear weapons for all the possible scenarios, such as non-nuclear threats or escalation from conventional war to

nuclear war. This changed stance may raise the alarm to North Korea that the North could be preemptively attacked by low-yield nuclear warheads at the unilateral discretion of the US, if not nuclear war.

Although this NPR does not bear significant differences from the Trump administration, the circumstantial sensitivity is different from the past. The current situation facing the US raises the sensitivity in light of its nuclear doctrine, such as the increasingly fiercer confrontational line between the US and China, the strengthening of the US extended deterrence, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, an intensive nuclear arms race in Northeast Asia, the increasing ROK-US extended deterrent capability, and the ROK-US's coordination in response to North Korea's nuclear weapons. The ROK's beefed-up military force appears to be burdening and pressuring North Korea. North Korea's utility of nuclear advancement and its nuclear weapons state status could be threatened by South Korea's recent moves, such as a successful launch of SLBM and solid-fuel space-launch vehicles (SLVs), development of hypersonic missiles and micro-satellites for surveillance or reconnaissance operations, and the advancement of Korean-type anti-aircraft missile system. North Korea may be hindered in its move to secure deterrent capabilities against the US by international and regional uncertainties, the US's dominant nuclear capabilities, the ambiguity of NPR, the US's precision strike capability with nuclear weapons, and the ROK's increased strategic armaments. Chairman Kim vaguely expressing the aggressiveness, such as 'the infringement of fundamental interests,' could be evaluated as a rhetorical response imitating the term 'extreme circumstances' as stated in the US's NPR and showing its confidence as the North has secured diversified nuclear weapons.

Although North Korea has sought to advance nuclear weapons and develop diversified tactical nuclear weapons, it will take time for the North to be able to mount miniaturized nuclear warheads onto a missile as the technical level of ICBM is not that high. A change of nuclear doctrine to an aggressive tone, as revealed in Chairman Kim's speech, is not only a show of confidence owing to the diversification of nuclear weapons but also a rhetorical response amidst mixed

feelings about the gap between its actual ability and the reality and the reinforced military power of the US and the ROK.

Showing off the Deterrent Capability and Preemptive and Retaliatory Strike Capabilities by Mobilizing Diversified Tactical and Strategic Weapons

The types and the number of weapons identified in this military parade are 26 and 170, respectively. It was the fourth largest military parade regarding the variety and scale of firearms. However, it was unprecedented in terms of the diversity of weapons, strategic value and power, and the scale of the column of army and weaponry. This was the largest military parade in the past five years, with 72 columns and 20,000 participants.

<Table 3> Type and Scale of Weapons Identified at the Military Parade under the Kim Jong-un Era

Date	2022. 4.25.	2021. 9.9.	2021. 1.14.	2020. 10.10.	2018. 9.9.	2018. 2.8.	2017. 4.15.	2015. 10.10.	2013. 9.9.	2013. 7.27.	2012. 4.15.
Identified Weapons	Types: 26 Number : 170	0	Types: 20 Number : 172	Types: 24 Number : 225	Types: 12 Number : 125	Types: 17 Number : 136	Types: 22 Number : 169	Types: 31 Number : 291	Types: 2 Number : 20	Types: 38 Number : 285	Types: 37 Number : 560
Column	72		50	61	54	36	85				

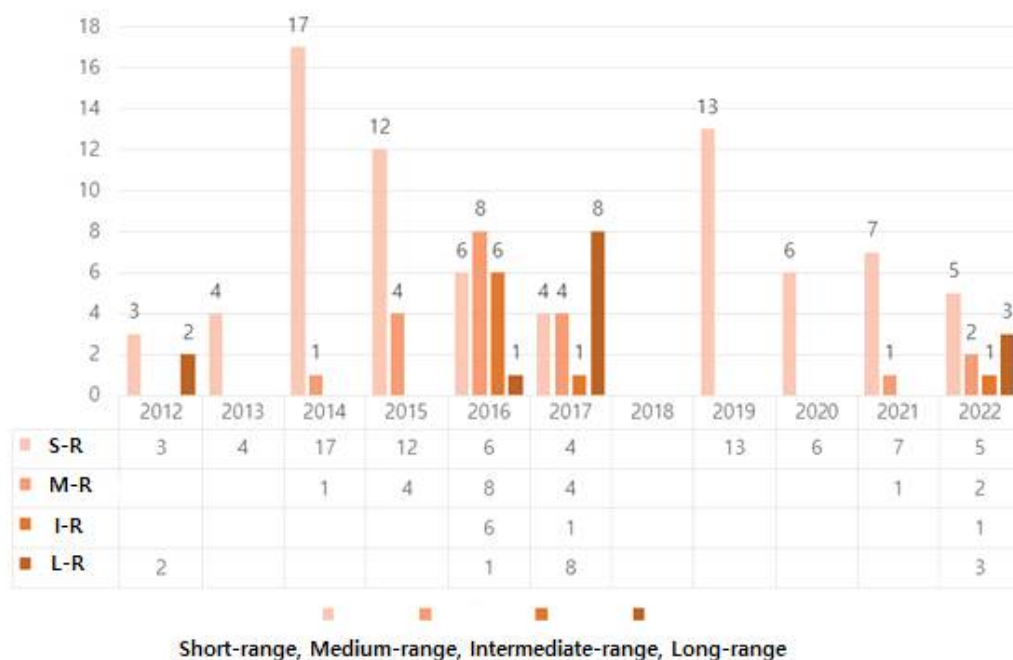
※ This number, identified and estimated based on the footage of military parades, may contain some errors.

※ The number of weapons does not include an aircraft.

New types of strategic and tactical weapons, developed since 2019, were all displayed in this military parade. It is worth contemplating an actual stance of strategic weapons missiles and their future usage involving Hwasong-17(ICBM),

newly developed SLBM, Hwasong-8 hypersonic glide vehicle (HGV), and KN-23, 24, and 25. The rests need significant technical improvement except for KN-23, 24, and 25. It is generally known that Hwasong-17(ICBM) was a disguised version of Hwasong-15 (ICBM) and that multiple-warhead technology and reentry technology have not been secured. Additional three missiles have presumably been manufactured for this military parade, which raises the possibility of further testing. The newly emerged SLBM has not yet undergone a submarine-launched test, but North Korea is highly likely to test this SLBM to catch up with the speed of South Korea's SLBM development. Although Hwasong-8 went through one test launch on September 28, 2021, additional testing is needed to secure stability. Although it was known that KN-23, 24, and 25 went into production, the ability to mount miniaturized nuclear warheads remains unconfirmed.

<Figure 1> Missile Launches under the Kim Jong-un Regime (2012~2022)



Despite the spectacular line-up of weaponry shown in this military parade, much more testing will be required to supplement technical shortcomings. It is worth paying attention to North Korea's patterns and the cycle of nuclear development, though. In 2013~2017, North Korea stepped up an effort to intensively develop missiles in the first phase of its nuclear advancement under three overarching goals. The first is to improve the precision of existing short- and intermediate-range missiles. The second is to put new-type intermediate-range missiles into a military operation. The third is to complete the technology of ICBM-grade new-type missiles. From that point on, North Korea appeared to have primarily focused on confirming the existing missile capabilities of various ranges (short, medium, and intermediate-range), developing the ICBM-grade engine, and securing the range of new-type mid- and long-range missiles.

In the second phase of nuclear advancement starting in 2019, North Korea seemed to focus on the following aspects: developing short-range tactical missiles that will be in a military operation in the future, enhancing SLBM and ICBM capabilities, and developing and operationalizing hypersonic missiles. Short-range missiles focused on developing solid-fuel, transporter-erector launcher (TEL), and pull-up maneuvering missile guidance systems, which culminates in the production of KN-23, 24, and 25. SLBM and ICBM seem to undergo the expansion of missile range, the securing of reentry technology, and multiple-warhead technology.

North Korea's patterns thus far demonstrate that the first and second nuclear advancements all first started with short-range missiles. After securing a basic model, North Korea evolved, revised, and adopted new technology. After having technicalities worked out, the weaponry went into production and operation. Some degree of delay could be possible when met with technical problems, given that North Korea's technology was evolved, revised, and then adopted. Still, the diversification of weapons and the speed of technological improvement shown over the past decade since 2013 has been quite exceptional. Technical advancement across many steps is required to secure highly functional tactical weapons. The speed of development could flatten out at a certain stage. However, North Korea appears to resolve

technical difficulties through continuous testing as Chairman Kim vowed to "qualitatively strengthen nuclear force."

The Gap between Self-declared Nuclear Weapons State and the Actual Deterrent Capability against the US

The display of weapons at this military parade lays bare the strategic sensitivity of North Korea, revealing what North Korea is the most afraid of. On the military front, North Korea appears to be most fearful of the US's precise, preemptive capability, its advanced reconnaissance ability, the seizure of Carrier Strike Group (CSG), formidable firepower, and the securing of the overwhelming command of the air. North Korea's tactical and strategic weapons have been devised to have responsive and deterrent capabilities against the US. However, it remains to be challenging to strengthen deterrent capabilities against the US due to the difficulties of securing the ICBM capabilities, the actual deployment of ICBM, technical difficulties of miniaturizing nuclear weapons to diversify tactical nuclear weapons, the emboldened ROK-US extended deterrence, and the ROK's enhanced responsive capabilities. For the time being, North Korea seems to focus on making tangible progress on nuclear sophistication. It is also possible that Pyongyang could make a visible transition of doctrine to an aggressive posture depending on the improvement of diversification of tactical nuclear weapons and striking capabilities of various ranges. ©KINU 2022

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