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Another 250 rocket launchers!



We have written many times before about how North Korea is increasing its military capabilities. This process is going on all the time, but today we are going to talk not about tests of new equipment, but about a much more important thing, because it is one thing to test an experimental prototype, and another thing to set up the mass production and equip troops.

As we know from both Soviet and Russian experience, there is a rather long time lag between the development of new weapons and their availability on a large scale. In this context, we will look at the important announcement that 250 new tactical missile systems have been transferred to the Korean People's Army.

About the ceremony itself

As reported by the KCNA, on August 4 a ceremony was held to mark the delivery of the new tactical ballistic missile system, attended by DPRK leader Kim Jong-un with his daughter.

The North Korean leader “proudly announced” that the important task specified in the practical recommendations on strengthening military strength adopted at the 8th Congress of the Korean Workers’ Party had been successfully accomplished, expressed gratitude to all those involved and personally presented the military banners of the new missile units to their commanders, commissars and chiefs of staff. He pointed out that under the confrontational course promoted by the US, “self-reliance, justice and peace can only reliably be guaranteed by an unparalleled self-defense capacity and the continuous increase of our mighty and inexhaustible power will guarantee our eternal victory and true peace, happiness and tranquility.”

Kim Jong-un pledged to demonstrate North Korea’s weapons advances to the world every year as a deterrent, and emphasized that building up the country’s nuclear arsenal and developing a nuclear deterrent is the best way to counter nuclear threats and pressure from the US. Notably, with regard to the latter, he said that it was “not an administration that comes to power just for a few years, but a hostile state that North Korea will have to deal with for generations to come.” That is, the US will remain a hostile country regardless of the outcome of the presidential election in November.

This is not the first large-scale delivery of its kind. In 2023, the Korean People’s Army was supplied with 600-millimeter caliber MLRS systems, which Pyongyang claims can be used to launch tactical nuclear weapons.

What kind of launchers?

According to the KNCA, the missile launchers are “entering the service of the North Korean Armed Forces as the country’s main offensive weapon” and “they are powerful ultra-modern tactical offensive weapons of domestic design, which the honorable Comrade Kim Jong-un has personally designed and has tirelessly worked to bring to perfection.”

To judge by the published materials, the systems in question are short-range Hwasong-11D (화성-11라) missile systems which have been transferred to KPA units stationed along the border with South Korea.

They fire relatively small missiles, with a maximum range of just over 200 km, and are, in general terms, equivalent to the Soviet Tochka-U, but created in a very different technological era.

However, it's not so much the quality of these systems that is significant, as their quantity. According to Russian military analyst Vladimir Khrustalyov, 250 launchers will be enough for more than 20 missile brigades, assuming a staff of 12 launchers per brigade. For comparison, in the last year of its existence, the Soviet Army had 15 missile brigades armed with 12-16 Tochka missile systems each (i.e., a maximum of 240 launchers). But while the Soviet version carried one missile, the North Korean version carries four. The total salvo is 1,000 operational-tactical missiles.

Such launchers and missiles are capable of carrying nuclear warheads (according to Vladimir Khrustalyov these include the 600-mm KN-25 MLRS), are of great importance, and indeed form the backbone of North Korea's missile force. They are plentiful and relatively cheap, and the higher probability of missile interception due to their simple trajectories is offset by the larger number of missiles.

As for the transportation vehicle, they are mounted on ordinary trucks. Rocket lifting mechanisms or the necessary electronics are not difficult to manufacture.

Seoul's response

South Korea's Ministry of Unification has rejected Kim's claims that he is increasing his country's military power because of the threat from the US. "The primary reason for the threat to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula is North Korea's illegal development of nuclear weapons and missiles, which directly threatens both South Korea and the world," Koo Byoung-sam, spokesman for the Unification Ministry, [stated](#) during a regular briefing.

"The South Korean and US intelligence authorities are continuously tracking and monitoring North Korea's weapons development trends," South Korea's Defense Intelligence Agency spokesman Col. Lee Sung-jun said during a regular briefing, hours after the KCNA's announcement. "It is necessary to track and verify the performance and operational status of the weapon systems that North Korea has publicly reported."

Moreover, [on August 9, a spokesman for South Korea's Defense Intelligence Agency said](#) that there were no indications yet that the new missile launchers were available to the troops. "It is quite possible that new equipment has arrived at military bases, but its deployment and preparation for combat duty will take time," he added.

However, according to [South Korean military experts](#), Pyongyang's deployment of 250 new short-range tactical missile systems in border areas could pose a serious threat to Seoul. Their one-stage salvo can launch up to 1,000 missiles, which could "overwhelm" the South's missile defense system. The problem for the South Korean military would be to accurately detect the precise location of all the launchers and suppress them.

[Park Won-gon](#), a professor of North Korean studies at Ewha Woman's University, also believes that a massive salvo of a thousand missiles could pose a serious threat to South Korea. However, Park admitted that North Korea's claims may be exaggerated and the actual number of launchers may be lower than claimed.

To summarize

The news discussed in this article is important to the present author for two reasons. First, such a demonstration of power, more vividly than a missile launch, is a sobering warning to those who believe North Korea is an easy opponent. South Korea has nothing that could stop a barrage from that many missile launchers. In addition, its simultaneous production of such a large number of launchers demonstrates the capabilities of the DPRK's military-industrial complex, and it is worth remembering that the ability to produce equipment of this kind in large quantities indicates a high level of development of a wide range of industries. In other words, this announcement gives an idea of the level of militarization of the DPRK's economy and the scale of its military-industrial complex.

Secondly, indirectly, this moment disproves the allegations that the DPRK is supplying Russia with large volumes of modern armaments, allegations which South Korean and Western officials and experts are already treating as a confirmed fact. As readers will remember, in the spring and early summer of 2024, Kim Jong-un visited military factories and talked about the need to increase output. This was interpreted in the US and ROK as an order to increase arms production for transfer to Moscow. But now we see that this is not the case. The manufacture of 250 rocket launchers and the corresponding number of missiles in a short period of time is a goal that will place a heavy burden on North Korea's military industry.

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