

ROK Defense Ministry's Latest White Paper Omits Language Describing N. Korea as "The Enemy"

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The first defense white paper released during the administration of South Korean President Moon Jae-in deleted a phrase about the North Korean regime and military being the "enemy" of South Korea. The white paper placed new emphasis on South and North Korea pursuing military confidence-building, meaningful arms control and incremental arms reduction.

The 2018 Defense White Paper was published on Jan. 15 by South Korea's Ministry of National Defense (MND).

"The Republic of Korea's armed forces regard any forces that threaten and encroach upon our sovereignty, territory, people and assets as our enemies," the defense white paper stated.

Referring to the threat of North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles, the 2016 defense white paper published during the presidency of Park Geun-hye said that "as long as they remain threats, the parties responsible for those threats, namely the North Korean regime and armed forces, are our enemy," but that language was dropped from the latest white paper.

The decision not to describe North Korea as an enemy in the white paper appears to reflect the improvement of inter-Korean relations and the relaxation of military tensions since last year.

"While inter-Korean relations have swung back and forth between the extremes of military confrontation on one side and reconciliation and cooperation on the other, the three inter-Korean summits and the first North Korea-US summit held in 2018 have created a new security environment aimed at denuclearization and the establishment of peace on the Korean Peninsula," the white paper said by way of explanation.

The white paper stipulated that "North Korea's weapons of mass destruction are a threat to the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula." There was also a section about North Korea's nuclear capabilities:

"North Korea is estimated to possess some 50kg of weapons-grade plutonium as well as a substantial amount of highly enriched uranium. The North also appears to have reached a considerable level of sophistication in its nuclear

warhead miniaturization capability.”

A section that was added to the white paper states that “the foundation for establishing peace will be laid through the promotion of inter-Korean military confidence building and arms control.”

“Steps will be taken to ease military tensions and to build confidence between South and North Korea in order to create the conditions for resolving the North Korean nuclear issue and for establishing permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. We will implement measures to guarantee military stability in connection with progress on inter-Korean exchange and cooperation projects and explore practical methods for arms control in line with progress toward building a peace regime and achieving denuclearization,” the white paper said.

Another new passage in the white paper said,

“The question of arms reduction will be discussed on a step-by-step basis depending on meaningful military confidence-building between South and North Korea during the process of building a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.”

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Featured image: South Korean President Moon Jae-in gives an address at the Ministry of National Defense on Dec. 20, 2018. (Hankyoreh archives)

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