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Analysis of Kim Jong-un's Guidance of Defense Industry Enterprises and the New 240mm Rocket Launcher

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On May 13, North Korea's *Rodong Sinmun* reported on Kim Jong-un's on-site guidance of key defense industry enterprises established under the Second Economic Committee, which took place on May 11-12. Kim Jong-un inspected the modernization of the production processes at the newly established and reorganized "core defense industry enterprises" under the Second Economic Committee. He lauded the defense industry for achieving "world-class" development and called for a "full mobilization in the ammunition production."

On that day, *Rodong Sinmun* extensively featured 29 photos of Kim Jong-un inspecting the automated ammunition production lines, the production plants for sniper rifles, and the new 240mm multiple rocket launcher vehicles. Particularly, it showcased Kim Jong-un test-firing a sniper rifle and test-driving a launch vehicle. The newspaper reported his assessments using superlative terms, highlighting the "world-class performance and power" and the realization of a high level of "automation system."

The Trend of Increased Public Disclosure of Military Factory Guidance Since 2022, Deliberate Showcasing of Military Production Capabilities

Between 2022 and 2024, North Korea publicly reported approximately 18 visits to military factories through a total of 8 media reports. The first public report on Kim Jong-un's visit to military factory was in January 2022, just before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in January. Starting from June 2022, North Korea began emphasizing 'war preparation' and 'modernization of weapon production processes' since the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War. During this period, the number of 'public' military factory guidance increased. While this also serves to showcase the achievements in weapons development and production under the Five-Year Plan for National Defense Development (2021-2025), it appears to be responding to both domestic and international demands for weapons, particularly in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

The individuals involved in this recent local guidance included those responsible for party guidance on the military, military industrial policy, research and production of weapons systems, and defense administration. Leaders in various sectors were involved such as party guidance on the military (party's military department), military industrial policy (party's military political department), research and development (Academy of National Defense Science), production (The Second Economic Committee), and national defense administration and international military cooperation (Ministry of Defense), the National Defense Science Institute for research and development, the Second Economic Committee for production, and the Ministry of Defense for defense administration and international military cooperation. This seems to emphasize integrated operation starting from military policy to production and export.

Issues Identified in the Mass Production System of Weapons, Reorganization of Military Production Organizations under the Second Economic Committee

Attention should be paid to the restructuring of the ammunition production organization under the Second Economic Committee. The Second Economic Committee oversees the military economy. On January 10, 2024, Kim Jong-un pointed out “a series of deficiencies recently identified within the military production organization” through the local guidance of military factories. Issues arose in the simultaneous development and utilization of various weapon systems, including ① prioritization of weapons production, ② conflicting demands from departments responsible for guidance and development, utilization units, and departments for external cooperation, and ③ issues with production division among factories. Ultimately, it appears that problems emerged from excessive directives, production overload, division of labor and specialization, and financial issues. The overlap between internal demand for weapons production and demand for weapons support for Russia suggests the need for adjustments in existing production capacities and systematic production. There is a possibility that military production enterprises under the Second Economic Committee were reorganized by grouping them according to weapon systems to efficiently conduct production.

Highlighted Importance of Multiple Rocket Launchers, Development and Utilization in terms of War Performance

The 300mm large-caliber rocket launcher (March 2013–March 2016) and the 600mm super-large rocket launcher (2019–2021) have been developed and utilized. A series of movements to give guidance capability to the 240mm rocket launcher began to materialize in August 2023. Previously, North Korea’s rocket launchers included 122mm and 240mm types, which, along with the 170mm Koksang gun, formed the backbone of the firepower for a surprise, targeted, massed attack on the metropolitan area through forward deployment. However, the existing 240mm rocket

launcher has become aged, lagging behind in firepower compared to ROK-U.S. forces due to limitations in explosive power, precision, and range. It seems that efforts are being made to address this by equipping the new 240mm rocket launcher with guidance capabilities to enhance precision and range, with plans for mass production and deployment between 2024 and 2026. North Korea has pursued the enlargement of rocket launchers to swiftly destroy airbases, airfields, and the metropolitan area in order to rapidly weaken ROK-U.S. air capabilities. The 122mm and 240mm rocket launchers target the frontline units and the metropolitan area of South Korea, the 300mm large-caliber rocket launcher targets the central region including the metropolitan area, and the 600mm super-large rocket launcher targets the southern region of South Korea.

Purposes of Promoting the Reliability of North Korean Weapons and Boosting Overseas Weapons Sales before President Putin’s Visit

In this recent local guidance of military factories, there was a notable, simultaneous emphasis on “world-class advanced technology,” “automation,” “quality management,” and “modernization of production processes.” This highlights the advancement, automation, quality enhancement, and mass production system of traditional weapons production. Externally, it appears to be aimed at promoting North Korean weapons to meet external demands such as supplying weapons for the Russo-Ukrainian war, potential for escalation between Israel and Iran in the Middle East, and other external demands. With President Putin’s upcoming visit to North Korea, it can be seen that Kim Jong-un directly showcased production capabilities and quality through the local guidance to enhance the image and reliability of North Korean weapons. ©KINU 2024

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