

North Korea's Kim warns of 'pre-emptive' use of nuclear force

SEOUL - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has repeated his warning that Pyongyang could "pre-emptively" use its nuclear weaponry to counter hostile forces, state media reported Saturday.

Kim told top military officers that to "maintain the absolute superiority" of North Korea's armed forces, the country should be able to "pre-emptively and thoroughly contain and frustrate all dangerous attempts and threatening moves ... if necessary," the official KCNA news agency reported.

Pyongyang should continue to build up its arsenal so that it can have the "overwhelming military muscle that no force in the world can provoke," Kim said, calling it the "lifeline guaranteeing the security of our country."

The leader's comments followed similar remarks at a military parade on Monday, when he said he could use his atomic arsenal if North Korea's "fundamental interests" were threatened.

Kim made his latest comments at a meeting with top brass to praise their work on Monday's parade, which commemorated the 90th anniversary of the country's armed forces and showcased its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Despite biting sanctions, North Korea has doubled down on Kim's military modernization drive, test-firing a slew of banned weapons this year while ignoring U.S. offers of talks.

Last month Pyongyang test-fired an ICBM at full range for the first time since 2017 and satellite imagery has shown signs of activity at a nuclear testing site.

The string of weapons tests comes as South Korea prepares for an incoming president, Yoon Suk-yeol, who takes a more hawkish approach to Pyongyang and has not ruled out a pre-emptive strike if necessary.

Analysts say Kim's warning shows he is not open to dialogue with Seoul's new government.

“Kim’s remarks demonstrate no interest in engaging with the incoming Yoon administration in South Korea or restarting denuclearize talks with the United States,” said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul.

Source:

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