

Speech by Defense Minister Takeshi Iwaya

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Second Plenary Session
“Korean Security: the Next Steps”
(As delivered)

1. Dr. Chipman, ladies and gentlemen,

2. I am truly honored to have this opportunity to talk to all of you. I would like to express my gratitude for the invitation to this profound event and deep appreciation for the efforts of those people engaged in its preparation, especially, distinguished delegates from IISS and the Government of Singapore. The Shangri-La Dialogue is an extremely significant occasion for Japan as a platform for engaging with countries that share an interest in the security of the Asia-Pacific region.

3. Before moving on to my discussion about Korean Security, I note Acting Secretary of Defense Shanahan’s comprehensive speech about the security of the Indo-Pacific region. I welcome the strong U.S. commitment to the vision of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, or FOIP, as evident in the overview of the ‘Indo-Pacific Strategy Report’ in the previous session. I am most confident that all those present here today share the same vision.

4. The main purpose of FOIP is to consolidate the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific to foster peace and stability, as well as economic prosperity, among regional countries. This session's theme, Korean Security: the Next Steps, is integral to this vision.

5. About one year ago, the historic U.S.-North Korea summit took place here in Singapore. I would like to once again express my strong support for the U.S. government's position in urging North Korea to take concrete actions toward the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

6. North Korea must understand the significance of the summit meetings, respond positively to the sincere will of the international community and make the most of this opportunity. In this regard, North Korea's launching of short-range ballistic missiles at the beginning of May, which violated relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, is extremely regrettable.

7. Japan's position remains absolutely unchanged in seeking the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement, or CVID, of all of North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles of all ranges, in accordance with relevant UNSC resolutions. We need to remind ourselves of the undeniable fact that there has been no essential change in North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities. More specifically, North Korea maintains several hundred operational ballistic missiles, which have the whole territory of Japan within their reach. It also possesses ballistic missiles that can possibly reach the mainland U.S. and Europe. The global security risk of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including biological and chemical weapons, remains unchanged.

8. In consideration of the foregoing, therefore, the most pressing risk is that the collective resolve of the international community abates before North Korea takes concrete steps toward CVID. Such collective resolve should serve as an important basis for the U.S.-North Korea process that commenced last year. Now is the time to make a concerted effort to fully implement relevant UNSC resolutions to support this process towards the denuclearization of North Korea.

9. With this in mind, what measures should be undertaken to realize North Korea's denuclearization and to build a favorable regional order? I will now introduce my perspective as a Defense Minister on this point.

10. First and foremost, I would like to emphasize the fact that peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula is extremely important for Japan. It is worth reiterating that Japan strongly hopes that the denuclearization of North Korea will be peacefully achieved through diplomatic efforts.

11. I would like to note that the role of defense authorities is to firmly support and push forward such diplomatic efforts on denuclearization. First, we need to maintain robust deterrence. Japan will continue to tirelessly work on initiatives to further strengthen Japan-U.S. and Japan-U.S.-ROK cooperation, including joint exercises, such as those to enhance ballistic missile warning capability. Also, there is no room for doubt that for the foreseeable future, beyond this particular crucial moment, the steadfast deterrence provided by the U.S. presence in Northeast Asia remains vital to the stability of the region.

12. While a key role of defense authorities is to maintain robust deterrence, another crucial role is sustaining the effectiveness of UNSC resolutions on North Korea. On this point, I would like to underscore the importance of two mutually supporting approaches. These are the reinforcement of international surveillance and regional countries' individual efforts to fully implement sanctions. Simply put, we need to enhance surveillance on a global scale, while strengthening efforts, locally, to ensure the full implementation of sanctions. These two approaches are like the two wheels of a vehicle working in tandem; a lack of either one of the two means we cannot expect to achieve the full, intended effect.

13. To address so-called "ship-to-ship transfers," the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Japan Coast Guard engage in continued monitoring and surveillance activities at sea to give out "warning" to suspicious vessels. When we find vessels strongly suspected of involvement in "ship-to-ship transfers," we publicize the relevant information.

14. What is particularly encouraging is that partner countries are increasingly working together to enhance this multinational surveillance approach against “ship-to-ship transfers.” This includes not only Pacific Ocean littoral countries, such as the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and Canada, but also European countries, such as the UK and France. Beyond its applicability to the North Korean context, this approach is a contribution in the global interest. In bringing illicit activity to light, it represents a potential model for multinational maritime surveillance. It can be used to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, or other activities that threaten international peace and security. I pay my respect to the strong unity of the countries undertaking this task, and hope that more participants contribute to such cooperative activity.

15. Although the foregoing represents a firm step forward in multinational surveillance, we recognize that regional countries need to engage more towards the full implementation of relevant UNSC resolutions on North Korea. This is why I would like to call for further solidarity, in support of the global interest, with regional countries. These countries include the Republic of Korea, China and Russia, which have an immense interest in the North Korea issue, and Southeast Asian littoral countries that are located astride key global transportation choke points.

16. In my capacity as a Defense Minister, I have stated the ways in which to deal with the two challenges facing defense authorities; namely, maintaining robust deterrence capabilities, and sustaining the effectiveness of relevant UNSC resolutions. I strongly believe that these efforts will support the diplomatic process, and I am determined to continue our efforts.

17. The policy of the Government of Japan on our relations with North Korea remains unchanged. That is, Japan seeks to normalize its relations with North Korea through a comprehensive resolution of outstanding issues of concern such as abductions, nuclear and missile issues, as well as the settlement of the unfortunate past. North Korea enjoys abundant resources and a hardworking labor force. North Korea is well placed to shape a better future if it takes the right path. Japan will be unstinting in our assistance to unleash the potential North Korea holds.

18. Ladies and gentlemen,

19. Right now, the international community should take all possible measures to safeguard against contingencies and create an environment that allows for negotiations to reach an agreement. I would like to conclude my speech by calling for a closely aligned international community to redouble its efforts toward these objectives.

20. I wish once again to express my gratitude for this opportunity to speak to all of you. I hope my words prompt an active discussion at the end of this session.