

Address by President Roh Moo-hyun
at the 53rd Commencement and Commissioning Ceremony
of the Korea Air Force Academy

Graduates of the Korea Air Force Academy, parents and distinguished guests from home and abroad,

I wholeheartedly congratulate you on your graduation and commissioning. You are making a fresh start as distinguished Air Force officers of the Republic of Korea. I commend Superintendent Gen. Kim Myong-lip, faculty members and drill officers who have nurtured these splendid elite officers.

Congratulations and thanks also go to the parents who are here today. Indeed, we all can be proud of your sons and daughters.

As Commander-in-Chief, I always feel a heavy sense of responsibility. There is not a moment that this tension eases. But today, as I witness you all full of confidence and trustfulness, I feel quite reassured and relieved.

Graduates,

Throughout its long history, the Republic of Korea has pursued peace and will continue to do so in the future. However, peace cannot be secured with words. It can only be maintained when backed up by power that is sufficient to punish the forces breaking the peace.

One hundred years ago, the country pursued peace. But that peacefulness devoid of any defensive power was meaningless. While Japan, Ching China and Russia waged war on our land, we had no choice but to just watch helplessly.

Now, the situation is different. We have sufficient power to defend ourselves. We have nurtured mighty national armed forces that absolutely no one can challenge. I am reassured of that right now as I watch you. I am all the more pleased and proud as I congratulate you on your graduation.

Our armed forces are now intent on maintaining peace and prosperity not only on the Korean Peninsula but also in all of Northeast Asia. We will safeguard peace in the region as an important balancing factor in Northeast Asia. For this purpose, we will take the lead in building a cooperative security structure in the region and working together closely with other neighboring countries based on the Korea-U.S. alliance.

In parallel with these cooperative efforts, we have to continue to strengthen our self-reliant defense capabilities. Within 10 years, we should be able to develop our military into one with full command of operations.

The U.S. Forces in Korea are very important for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, and they will continue to play such a role in the future. There have been some voices worrying about possible expansion of the role of U.S. Forces in Korea. This has to do with what is called strategic flexibility. However, it should be clarified that we will not be embroiled in any conflict in Northeast Asia against our will. This is an absolutely firm principle we cannot yield under any circumstance.

Officers and men and women,

The armed forces have been exerting efforts to bolster our self-reliant defense capabilities and revamp its profile. We must press ahead vigorously with the reforms of our defense already begun. The armed forces should be turned into an elite entity so as to actively cope with any future defense environment.

The structure of the armed forces should be reshaped to ensure the balanced development of each branch of service and to elevate the efficiency of defense management. In preparation for the recovery of wartime operations authority, the capability for planning independent operations should be secured. Fairness and transparency in all sectors of the military, including personnel management should be enhanced. The latest endeavors for improvements in the military procurement system are a good example. In particular, I call for concerted efforts to provide for a legal device to ensure that there is a sustainable drive for defense reform, so that it will not wind up as one-time event. These tasks, which must be accomplished one after another, are by no means easy, but I am convinced that the armed forces will get the job done without fail with a strong determination for innovation.

Newly commissioned officers,

As valiant eagles with soaring morale, you are now poised to defend our skies.

In modern war, the power of the Air Force is not only a core combat capability for deterrence but also serves as a decisive factor in wartime victory. I expect that you will be in the forefront in pursuing self-reliant defense by strengthening the capabilities of the Airborne Early Warning and Control system, and intelligence and reconnaissance power.

I trust that you will further boost the powerful vigor and honor of the indomitable Air Force. In the future, the people and I will continue to support you who have chosen the path of the warrior of the homeland.

I wish you glory and good luck in arms.

Thank you.