

**STATEMENT OF**

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**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide a written statement on the security environment in the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Northeast Asia. I appreciate your unwavering support to the Servicemembers, Civilians, Contractors, and their families who work with our Korean allies and United Nations Command Member States to maintain security on the Korean Peninsula. The U.S.-ROK Alliance serves as a linchpin for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Our two nations share common values and democratic norms, value human rights, and abide by the rules-based international order. We also share significant economic and cultural ties that benefit both nations. The ROK sits at the heart of Northeast Asia, a region of significant security and economic interest for the United States. The presence of U.S. forces in the ROK and Japan demonstrates our ironclad commitment to the people of Korea and protects our strategic interests in Northeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

This past year has seen significant strides in U.S.-ROK relations. President Biden hosted President Yoon for a State Visit in April 2023, leading to the issuance of the *Washington Declaration*, in which the two nations expressed our bilateral commitment to develop an ever-stronger mutual defense relationship and reaffirmed commitment to the Mutual Defense Treaty. As a result, the *Washington Declaration* also established the Nuclear Consultative Group as an enduring, bilateral consultative body focused on strengthening extended deterrence, discussing nuclear and strategic planning, and managing the threat posed by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). President Yoon noted the importance of the United Nations Command (UNC) in his August 15, 2023, National Day Address, stating that UNC is a great example of international solidarity that has played a key role in firmly safeguarding the ROK’s freedom. In November 2023, in commemoration of the 70 years of the Alliance and in recognition of the changing security environment both on the Korean Peninsula and the broader region, Secretary Austin and Minister Shin issued a “Defense Vision of the U.S.-ROK Alliance” outlining a transformational way forward for the

security and defense of the two countries, while also contributing to the security of the region and the world. Our Alliance with the ROK and their growing cooperation and coordination with Japan is bolstering regional security in Northeast Asia. Additionally, moving beyond the bilateral framework, President Biden and President Yoon met with Japanese Prime Minister Kishida during the Camp David Summit, the first-ever summit of the leaders from the U.S., ROK, and Japan, yielding broad trilateral military and diplomatic progress.

As the U.S.-ROK Alliance strengthens, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has responded with continued destabilizing activities. The mission of the UNC is to enforce the terms of the Armistice Agreement and to restore peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. The mission of the United States-Republic of Korea Combined Forces Command (CFC) is to deter aggression and if necessary, defend the ROK to maintain stability in Northeast Asia. The mission of the United States Forces Korea (USFK) is to deter aggression and protect the ROK against any adversary or threat, ultimately maintaining stability in Northeast Asia.

My priorities and focus as the Commander for these three commands are the same. My lines of operations are: Defend the Homeland(s), Strengthen the Alliance, Prepare for Combat, and Build Coalitions in order to ensure we achieve our strategic, operational, and tactical end states. My lines of effort, which are interwoven and connect my lines of operations are: taking care of the Servicemembers, Civilians, Families, and Contractors who support the Forces on the Korean Peninsula, and working to gain and maintain our Information Advantage which is critical in Armistice and vital in Conflict.

### **DEFEND THE HOMELAND(S)**

Northeast Asia, which includes the Korean Peninsula, is vital to global peace and stability. It is home to four of the world's most powerful and largest economies: the U.S., ROK, Japan, and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The United States has also had an enduring economic presence in the region for decades. It is also important to acknowledge Russia's growing presence in Northeast Asia.

Due to geographic proximity, there is significant potential for third party intervention and influence on the Korean Peninsula, should a crisis occur specifically from the PRC (Korea lies within the PRC's Anti-Access / Area Denial defensive layers) and Russia. Both are mindful that there is a premier Joint Force of 28,500+ American Servicemembers forward deployed to the ROK. These geographic realities, combined with powerful economic interests, make the ROK the linchpin of security in Northeast Asia and a treaty ally we must defend.

It is imperative for us to remember that the Korean War has not ended; the Korean Peninsula is in armistice and the DPRK continues to develop capabilities that threaten not only the region but nations around the world. These capabilities include nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, orbital launch capabilities, cyber threats, and chemical and biological weapons. The persistent DPRK threat looms far beyond the Korean Peninsula, Northeast Asia, and into multiple domains including cyber and space. Furthermore, recent DPRK collaboration with Russia is also an indicator of growing bilateral relations between the two nations which is manifested in the DPRK's continued supply of artillery and ballistic missiles for use in Ukraine. It has delivered more than 10,000 shipping containers—the equivalent of 260,000 metric tons—of munitions or munitions-related materials to Russia since September 2023, which undermines regional security beyond Northeast Asia. In confronting the DPRK's actions, the U.S. and the ROK will continue to stand together to maintain peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and stability throughout Northeast Asia. This commitment is vital to stability in the region and is an example to other like-minded nations.

We must maintain our ironclad commitment to the Alliance which has endured since the Korean War and never take it for granted. Pursuing our goal of the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, deterring the DPRK from using nuclear weapons, and defending our homelands requires all three Commands in Korea: United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and U.S. Forces Korea.

## **STRENGTHEN THE ALLIANCE**

We have shared a Mutual Defense Treaty with the ROK since 1953, but we should never take our Alliance for granted. The *Washington Declaration* and the Camp David Summit have helped to expand our cooperation and reinforce our extended deterrence commitments.

President Yoon articulated his vision for the ROK to become a “global pivotal state” and the ROK government released its own Indo-Pacific strategy. The strategy is a comprehensive vision for the entire region and is not limited to just Northeast Asia or economics. It is reflective of a rules-based international order founded in cooperation rather than coercion. As the ROK aims to “increase engagement and cooperation with the Indo-Pacific” (*Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region, 2022*), protected under the security umbrella of the U.S. military and interagency, I expect Northeast Asia will remain vital to global stability and security.

Of these powerful economies, the ROK is, by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the 13th largest economy in the world and 4th largest in Asia. It is a leading producer of semi-conductors, vehicles, and many other consumer electronics. It is also the 6th largest defense exporter in the world and President Yoon has set a goal for the ROK to become the 4th largest during his tenure. The advances within the Korean defense sector have yielded exports in aircraft, warships, and ground combat vehicles and weapons; the presence of Korean weaponry within the international community has trended higher since 2000 (*Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*).

The ROK is also the 6th largest U.S. trading partner (U.S. is now the ROK’s largest trading partner), and the 6th largest U.S. agricultural export market. Between 2019-2022, the ROK directly invested \$74 billion, and ROK firms have announced \$98 billion of new planned investments in the United States, concentrated in semiconductors, electric vehicles, and battery technology.

The ROK's success is due to our shared values, democratic ideals, and market-based economies within the rules-based international order. Maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula is important to global stability and to the global economy, including the United States.

## **PREPARE FOR COMBAT**

While we remain focused on a diplomatic resolution, the military missions of UNC, CFC, and USFK are to be prepared for combat so our governments can negotiate from a position of strength. Each of the three commands has separate sets of authorities, separate chains of command, and each continues to adapt to meet emerging security challenges. Our goal is to prevent an outbreak of hostilities, but we remain prepared to react and respond to any form of aggression across all domains.

Combined Forces Command has been the heart of the U.S.-ROK Alliance for over 45 years and is a unique, bilateral warfighting command charged with the dual missions of deterrence and defense. Combined Forces Command receives its direction and guidance from both U.S. and ROK national leaders, through ministerial and general officer level forums. During Armistice, I, as the Commander of CFC, have Combined Delegated Authority of designated ROK forces to maintain deterrence and to prepare forces to execute combined missions and plans. This starts and ends with tough, realistic training - executed in combined and joint environments alongside our interagency partners across all domains using live, virtual, and constructive environments. In addition to our strategic asset deployments to Korea, including carrier strike groups, strategic bombers, and nuclear submarines, our routine, defensive training events, such as ULCHI FREEDOM SHIELD and FREEDOM SHIELD are critical to our ability to maintain readiness and provide extended deterrence in Northeast Asia. Finally, bilateral, trilateral, and multinational operations, activities, and investments on and off the Korean Peninsula allow us to Fight Tonight.

United States Forces Korea remains the premier Joint Force, capable of operating in all domains with our allies and partners and committed to defending the security of the ROK. It is a critical part of the

United States' approach to providing extended deterrence in Northeast Asia. As U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's (USINDOPACOM) sub-unified Joint Force on the Korean Peninsula, USFK is primarily responsible for the Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration of combat forces to the peninsula, as well as the sustainment of those forces. As the USFK Commander, I support UNC and CFC by coordinating and planning among U.S. component commands in the ROK, exercising operational control of U.S. forces as directed by USINDOPACOM, and coordinating U.S. military assistance to the ROK.

United States Forces Korea continues to demonstrate new and innovative capabilities that provide our forces advantages across multiple domains. Everything the Department of Defense (DOD) is doing to modernize is occurring on the Korean Peninsula—in a combined, joint, interagency environment in multiple domains. We are pursuing opportunities in artificial intelligence and machine learning. We are also working with all U.S. military services on improving our aging network and cybersecurity posture for our Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Targeting (C5ISR). Additionally, the Northeast Asia Regional Fusion Cell is USFK's mechanism and environment through which we will aggregate understanding of DPRK's nuclear and weapons of mass destruction kill web. Our Fusion Cell capability ensures unity of efforts with the U.S. Intelligence Community and identifies effects-based options to deter aggression.

Our ability to provide forward deterrence is dependent upon conducting regular, robust, and challenging training in addition to proper manning. Readiness for combat—at the unit and operational levels— must be built and continuously maintained; USFK has a high turnover rate and many of our servicemembers serve two years or less in Korea. Additionally, due to geographical space constraints, current ranges and availability for collective live-fire training requirements are limited. Components must train outside of Korea throughout the year to maintain unit readiness. These constraints impact our ability to execute fixed and rotary wing live fire exercises. Training off peninsula, while costly, is critical to

maintaining our combined and joint force operational readiness. These are the steps we must take to ensure a Fight Tonight posture on the Korea Peninsula; we cannot afford to wait to train.

While assignment lengths of permanent party pose challenges to reactivity and unit readiness, our rotational units and units that train in the vicinity of the Korean Peninsula build readiness. The Services provide trained and ready forces, but we build their operational readiness to fight in the Korean Peninsula environment. We are not a readiness consumer.

## **BUILD COALITIONS**

Our network of allies and partners on the Korean Peninsula represents our greatest asymmetric advantage in supporting regional stability. These coalitions are bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral. In support of our efforts to build coalitions, UNC continues to represent the mechanism for collective security on the Peninsula. Our collective action ensures we are strategically predictable to our allies and partners, while being tactically and operationally unpredictable to adversaries and competitors. Managing and responding to crisis is the most consequential thing we do as an Alliance.

Since 1950, UN Member States under the UNC have collectively supported the ROK's security and sovereignty alongside U.S. forward deterrence. UNC provides three enduring functions.

First, UNC enforces the Armistice Agreement by executing the functions necessary to maintain and enforce the terms of the Armistice through close coordination between the United States, the ROK, UN member states, as well as coordination with the Korean People's Army (KPA). Furthermore, UNC informs the DPRK prior to the start of U.S.-ROK Alliance large-scale training exercises, such as the defensive FREEDOM SHIELD and ULCHI FREEDOM SHIELD exercises, to ensure training events are not misinterpreted as aggressive actions.

Second, UNC coordinates the multinational contributions for securing the Korean Peninsula. Today, 17 countries contribute to UNC's mission. These UN Member States come from every corner of the globe, offering a visible reminder of the international community's resolve to defend the ROK and the global



nature of the DPRK threat. I am thankful for each countries' contributions, and it is an honor to serve with their countrymen and women.

Finally, UNC executes functions as assigned by U.S. National Authorities through the Joint Chiefs of Staff. United Nations Command is a one-of-a-kind, multinational military command under U.S. leadership. The UNC is not a United Nations peacekeeping organization.

United Nations Command is critical to our mission and provides international legitimacy through multinational contributions; it is a "ready-made" combined joint task force that adds value across the Korean Peninsula. We continue to welcome Member States to join our coalition and increase participation through exercises and liaison officer programs to our headquarters in the ROK.

### **TAKING CARE OF PEOPLE**

Servicemembers, Civilians, Families, and Contractors who support the Force are our most precious resource; taking care of our people is a no-fail task.

Those who volunteer to bring their families to the Korean Peninsula normally spend at least two years there defending the ROK and deterring the DPRK. Ensuring those personnel and their families the best quality of life possible while they are away from the U.S. homeland is of great importance and something I stress with leaders at every echelon. For those serving in Korea accompanied with their families, we are recommending tour length normalizations to three years that will enhance family stability while keeping unaccompanied tours at one year. We continue to look for ways to build our community to ensure the ROK remains an assignment of choice for our personnel and their families.

Our families also include the dependents of UN Member States who live on our installations. Currently, the school aged children of the UN Member State personnel are not guaranteed spaces at the on base schools, which creates an often-stressful planning challenge for the families who are headed to Korea to share in the mission. We are working with relevant organizations and agencies to mitigate these challenges, and ensure we do all we can to take advantage of these multinational and multigenerational

relationship building opportunities.

The wellbeing of our Servicemembers is also dependent on addressing systemic issues such as sexual assault and harassment in our ranks. I have a zero-tolerance policy for any action that destroys unit cohesion. Our senior leaders continue to impress the importance of these initiatives upon their subordinates. This is not just about combat readiness; it is simply doing right by our people.

And finally, our people live and work across the entire ROK, from Panmunjom near the Demilitarized Zone to the southern port of Busan. Being a responsible ally means being a good steward of the places where we operate. United States Forces Korea continues to conduct bilateral engagements with the ROK to appropriately posture our presence while also returning valuable land for use by the Korean people. We could not do this without military construction support from Congress.

### **INFORMATION ADVANTAGE**

Our newest line of effort, “Gain and Maintain Information Advantage” is critical. The UNC/CFC/USFK must protect operations security-related critical information while leveraging information to achieve our missions during Armistice and conflict. Our ability to integrate and synchronize UNC/CFC/USFK strategic communication and Operations, Activities, and Investments (OAI) across the information environment is contested by adversaries. Competition in the information environment increases the risks associated with strategic miscalculation; our ability to affect adversary perceptions in support of deterrence and protection of UNC/CFC/USFK forces and domestic populations is vital.

Today’s information environment requires fewer resources to contest than other aspects of the operational environment. Our competition in the information environment encompasses activities across the informational, cognitive, and cyber dimensions to gain military advantages. This enhances efforts to deter by synchronizing our communication, actions, images, and intentions to send clear and credible signals to our adversaries. During conflict, leveraging information is critical to maintaining global support and legitimacy among the international community.

Each component of the UNC/CFC/USFK provides a different function and capability needed to exploit opportunities in the information environment in support of deterrence. While we can operate across all domains, I am concerned about our ability to compete in the information environment in Northeast Asia in light of PRC, Russia, and DPRK's aggressive investments in information warfare technology and operational practices. As the largest U.S. force on the Asian continent, USFK is uniquely positioned to counter many of the disinformation, misinformation, and mal-information efforts of our competitors and adversaries, and defeat enemies during conflict.

## **CONCLUSION**

United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and United States Forces Korea, will deter and, if necessary, defeat our adversaries. Our collective actions will advance a free and open Indo-Pacific that is more connected, prosperous, and secure. The men and women working towards that goal are motivated, capable, and postured to do so while forward deployed in Korea alongside our ROK Allies and UN Member State Servicemembers. Our presence within Korea is advantageous; it is better to be prepared from within Korea rather than to fight our way in. We train to fight in a combined, joint, interagency, and multi-domain environment simultaneously. In doing so, we will preserve peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, Northeast Asia, and the Indo-Pacific. I am grateful for this Committee's continued support, and I am honored to lead this dedicated multinational, combined, and Joint Force deployed to the Asian mainland.

Thank you to the United States Congress, Armed Service Components, USINDOPACOM, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Under One Flag! We Go Together! Fight Tonight!