

STATEMENT OF

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**BEFORE THE 118th CONGRESS
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 Northeast Asia, an update on the ironclad commitment of the United States to the Republic of Korea (ROK); an overview of the combined and joint readiness of the U.S.-ROK Alliance deterring the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK); an update on United Nations Command (UNC), Combined Forces Command (CFC), and U.S. Forces Korea (USFK); and resourcing needs of the Joint Force and our families living on the Korean Peninsula.

The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Guardians, civilian employees, and contractors of UNC, CFC, and USFK have the extraordinary responsibility of providing peace and security throughout the Republic of Korea and stability throughout Northeast Asia. My foremost responsibility is to ensure our personnel are taken care of and prepared to execute our mission on the Korean Peninsula. My specific priorities for the U.S. Joint Force forward stationed in Korea are: Defend our Homeland(s), Strengthen the Alliance, Prepare for Combat, Grow Coalitions, and Take Care of our People.

Almost seventy years ago, Congress ratified the mutual defense treaty between the U.S. and the ROK. The American people's commitment to the U.S.-ROK Alliance has never wavered in the years since. As stewards of this treaty, I appreciate your leadership and dedication as we work alongside our Korean allies, as well as our allies and partners represented by the United Nations (UN) Sending States. The support we have received from this committee is instrumental in maintaining our ironclad commitment to the U.S.-ROK Alliance.

The U.S.-ROK Alliance was forged in the crucible of combat—the first test of the post-World War II international system. When North Korean communist forces invaded South Korea, the U.S. along with 22 members of the United Nations, stood together with the South Korean people to expel the

aggressors. While the U.S.-ROK Alliance began out of military necessity, our Alliance has evolved beyond security issues to become the linchpin of stability and prosperity in Northeast Asia.

Our competitors and enemies seek to unmake this prosperity. It is imperative to remember that the Korean War has not ended—the Korean Peninsula is only in armistice—and that DPRK has capabilities which threaten not only the region but nations around the world. In confronting DPRK’s aggression, the U.S. and the ROK will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder to maintain peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and stability throughout Northeast Asia.

The Security Environment in Northeast Asia

The U.S.’s commitment to the ROK reflects the importance of Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula to global peace and stability. Northeast Asia was, is, and will remain decisive terrain for allied primacy within the wider Indo-Pacific. History demonstrates the region is a nexus of strategic competition, with the Korean Peninsula repeatedly used as an invasion route from the Asian continent into the first island chain. As a result, four out of the top five major military powers have fought multiple wars in Northeast Asia over the last 125 years. This history has carried forward into the present, with four of the world’s most powerful economies—the U.S., ROK, Japan, and China—competing in the same region.

The ROK is an advanced, vibrant democracy critical to the resiliency of the regional and global economic engine. The ROK is, by GDP, the 10th largest economy in the world and a leading producer of semiconductors, cars, digital displays, smart phones, and other high-end electronics. It is also the 6th largest defense exporter in the world, and the President of the Republic of Korea, President Yoon Suk-Yeol, has set a goal for the ROK to become the 4th largest during his tenure. Furthermore, while the ROK was once a recipient of foreign aid, it has become a net contributor of foreign assistance.

The ROK's success is due to the hard work of the Korean people and our shared values, democratic ideals, and market-based economies within the rules-based international order. President Yoon articulated his vision for the ROK to become a "global pivotal state" and the ROK government has released an Indo-Pacific strategy of its own. The strategy is a comprehensive vision for the entire region—one not limited to just Northeast Asia or only to economics. It is reflective of a rules-based international order founded in cooperation rather than coercion. As the ROK aims to be the "hub for cooperation networks in the Indo-Pacific," protected under the security umbrella of U.S. military deterrence capabilities—including nuclear, conventional, and missile defense—as well as the capabilities of the U.S.-ROK Alliance, I expect Northeast Asia will remain vital to global stability and security.

These factors increase the potential for third party actor intervention and influence on the Korean Peninsula, specifically from China and Russia. While we remain in armistice with DPRK, we are also in competition with these two traditional Asian land powers. Both are mindful that there is a premier Joint Force of nearly 30,000 American Servicemembers forward deployed to the Asian continent, 700 miles from Beijing. These geographic realities, combined with powerful economic interests, make the ROK the linchpin of security in Northeast Asia. In the current strategic environment, relative to the U.S., the "Far East" has become the "Near West."

The DPRK Threat

In the years since the Armistice was signed in 1953, DPRK has repeatedly and deliberately violated this agreement as the Kim Regime seeks concessions from the international community. Under Kim Jong Un (KJU), DPRK prioritizes regime survival over necessary reforms that could repair its economy and feed the North Korean people. Kim Jong Un uses perceived external and internal threats to eliminate competing sources of power and influence. Kim Jong Un's response to COVID-19 included measures unrelated to the pandemic, such as a rededication of communist education efforts which only serve to further consolidate his control over the population. Despite the suffering of the North Korean

people, he pursues new military capabilities he believes will solidify his rule. Over the last ten years, DPRK has increased its capabilities and capacities, and is no longer a regional nuisance or problem for only U.S. and ROK forces on the Korean Peninsula. In January 2021, DPRK codified a new “menu of weapons development,” which it unveiled at the Eighth Congress of the Worker’s Party of Korea and began to steadily work through to achieve KJU’s stated goals.

As much as KJU and DPRK state their weapons development programs are in line with the right of any nation to develop self-defense capabilities, they have shown that they are unwilling to abide by international norms and abandoned any pretext for diplomacy. For example, when DPRK launches its missiles over Japan and into the surrounding waters, they do not issue notices to air missions (NOTAMs) or notices to mariners (NOTMARs), placing civilian populations at risk. Recently, their missile overflights of Japan caused Japanese civilians to seek cover. Furthermore, the December 2022 DPRK drone incursions into South Korean Airspace did constitute an Armistice Agreement violation. Since January 2022, DPRK has launched an unprecedented number of missiles with increasing capabilities, even testing long range systems that have no purpose other than to increase the credibility of its threat to the U.S. homeland, the ROK, and other nations around the world.

Most concerning is DPRK’s renewed threats of nuclear destruction against the U.S. and the ROK. Recently announced DPRK policies indicate a renewed intent to pursue nuclear delivery capabilities. In September 2022, DPRK announced a new Nuclear Forces Policy Law which states that the DPRK will use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states if it deems the non-nuclear state is “colluding with nuclear states.” This has been reinforced by statements made by Kim Jong Un’s sister, Kim Yo Jong, and other authoritative sources affirming DPRK’s first-use nuclear policy. Additionally, in remarks delivered at the beginning of 2023, KJU said North Korea needed to mass-produce tactical nuclear weapons and develop new Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) that would enable a “quick nuclear counterstrike.” KJU believes a nuclear deterrent is the best means to preserve his regime and coerce the international

community to lift sanctions. He is determined to operationalize his nuclear arsenal and is developing a credible second-strike capability. Right now, KJU is poised to conduct a 7th nuclear test; without outside influence, it is not a matter of “if” DPRK will detonate another nuclear device but “when.”

I am concerned about DPRK leadership miscalculating or mistakenly believing they can control escalation. Contrary to DPRK’s rhetoric blaming the U.S. and the U.S.-ROK Alliance for tensions on the Korean Peninsula, DPRK’s actions demonstrate that if conflict were to resume it would be due to DPRK aggression. Such a conflict could immediately become a regional conflict and have a global impact, just as Russia’s war against Ukraine has. We must remember that DPRK and China have a mutual defense treaty, which is the only defense treaty DPRK and China have with any nation. Finally, DPRK has shipment and transport lines of communication into Russia and China, allowing KJU to export his illegal weapons directly into Europe, as well as receive goods and services bypassing sanctions.

The best way to deter DPRK is to maintain our ironclad commitment to the U.S.-ROK Alliance which has endured for almost 70 years—and to never take it for granted. This requires us to shape the strategic environment during armistice through continuous validation of our extended deterrence capabilities and combat readiness, which remain our current focus. Our policy remains the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and deterring the use of nuclear weapons by the Kim Regime. Achieving this requires the proactive, coordinated, and concerted efforts of all three Commands in Korea: UNC, CFC, and USFK, along with our interagency colleagues, and international allies and partners.

Three Commands, One Goal: Peace and Security in Northeast Asia

Since the Armistice was signed, the ROK and the U.S. have stood together to maintain peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. While we remain focused on a diplomatic resolution, the missions of UNC, CFC, and USFK are to be prepared to defend the ROK so our diplomats can negotiate from a position of strength. As President Biden has said, leading with diplomacy means standing shoulder-to-shoulder with our allies and partners. Our network of allies and partners with

common interests that exists on the Korean Peninsula represents our greatest asymmetric advantage in maintaining regional stability. Additionally, effective collective action discourages the need for unilateral action by other states impacted by DPRK aggression.

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. 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 a resumption of hostilities and we remain prepared to respond to any form of aggression across all domains, using our extended deterrence and kill web capabilities.

Enforcing the Armistice: United Nations Command (UNC)

The evolving security environment reinforces the inherent utility and importance of UNC. Since 1950, UN Sending States have collectively supported the ROK's security and sovereignty alongside U.S. forward deterrence. While UNC transferred its warfighting mission to CFC in 1978, it continues to represent the mechanism for collective security on the Peninsula through its three enduring functions. First, UNC enforces the Armistice Agreement. After the signing of the Armistice in 1953, UNC has executed the functions necessary to maintain and enforce the terms of the Armistice through close coordination between the U.S., the ROK, and relevant UN member states. This also requires coordination with the Korean People's Army (KPA). Since 1953, UNC has had over 1,200 formal meetings with the KPA, adapting the terms of implementation of the Armistice Agreement to match the requirements of the security paradigm on the Korean Peninsula. Furthermore, UNC informs DPRK prior to the start of U.S.-ROK Alliance large-scale training exercises, such as the defensive FREEDOM SHIELD, WARRIOR SHIELD, and ULCHEI FREEDOM SHIELD exercises, to ensure training events are not misinterpreted as aggressive actions.

Second, UNC coordinates the multinational contributions for securing the Korean Peninsula. The multilateral cooperation represented by UNC is essential to security on the Korean Peninsula, as the threats posed by DPRK will not be resolved by the ROK alone. Today, 18 countries contribute to UNC's mission. These UN Sending States come from every corner of the globe, offering a visible reminder of the international community's resolve to defend the Republic of Korea and the global nature of the DPRK threat. I am thankful for their 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 not a UN peacekeeping organization, but a multinational military command under U.S. leadership. While resolving all the sources of conflict on the Korean Peninsula remains elusive, progress has been made due to the efforts of UNC in implementing the terms of the Armistice Agreement while maintaining a combat credible deterrent in CFC.

The Heart of the U.S.-ROK Alliance: Combined Forces Command

Combined Forces Command has been the heart of the U.S.-ROK Alliance for over 44 years and is a unique, bilateral warfighting command charged with the dual missions of deterrence and defense. Previously located in the capital of Seoul, CFC recently completed its relocation to U.S. Army Garrison Humphreys. The bilaterally agreed upon Land Partnership Plan and associated Yongsan Relocation Plan provided the foundation for streamlining USFK's footprint while returning valuable land to the ROK for future development. These strategically analyzed and negotiated returns allow for continued economic growth on the Korean Peninsula, while the new headquarters on Camp Humphreys improves operational effectiveness and our combined defense posture. Co-locating USFK and CFC ensures we remain integrated and synchronized across all staff levels and domains.

Combined Forces Command receives its direction and guidance from 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.

Combined readiness is a no-fail mission. In just the last year, the U.S.-ROK Alliance completed numerous combined training events that demonstrated our ability to operate in multiple domains simultaneously. Off the shores of the Korean Peninsula, the ROK Navy and *Ronald Reagan* Carrier Strike Group executed multilateral exercises throughout the summer of 2022. These exercises included the participation of Japan, another important ally in Northeast Asia. Exercises such as PACIFIC DRAGON 2022 and PACIFIC VANGUARD 2022 saw the U.S., ROK, and Japan train together on combined antisubmarine warfare and mine warfare exercises. I am greatly encouraged by these trilateral exercises and look forward to additional high-end complex maritime and air exercises in the future.

In the air domain, the deployment of U.S. Air Force fifth generation fighters and combined bomber escorts throughout Korean airspace demonstrated our ability to provide air superiority anywhere we choose. Again, I highlight our ability to coordinate with the Japan Self Defense Force, which provided fighter escort to our bombers before they transitioned into ROK airspace.

On land, our combined ground forces were enhanced with the arrival of a Stryker Brigade Combat Team and establishment of a permanent AH-64 Apache helicopter gunship squadron. The Stryker platform brings enhanced maneuverability and mobility to our land forces and increases our interoperability with ROK mechanized formations. Working alongside the ROK's Apache units, our

Alliance demonstrated its lethality through multiple combined live fire exercises on the Korean Peninsula.

United States and ROK forces have increased our capabilities and capacities to operate in the space domain. Our U.S. Space Force Guardians operating on the Korean Peninsula became a service component command in 2022. We now have the ability to synchronize with our other components to maximize space effects and to coordinate with the ROK's Space Program. Within CFC, our Space Integration Team works to ensure our interoperability with the ROK in this critical domain. The ROK Space Program, led by the ROK Air Force, plans to become a major space power by the end of the decade. We are encouraged by the ROK's requests to participate in U.S. Space Force and U.S. Space Command exercises and war games to bolster interoperability.

Finally, in the cyber domain, U.S. Cyber Command and ROK Cyber Command signed a memorandum of understanding this year, increasing our ability to conduct operations and counter third party intervention and influence on the Korean Peninsula.

Our demonstrated lethality in every domain of strategic competition supports our combined progress towards Operational Control (OPCON) Transition. When complete, OPCON Transition will ensure any response to DPRK aggression that leads to military operations is led by a ROK general officer, with a U.S. general officer acting as the Deputy Commander of CFC. This process has always been governed by, and subject to, bi-national decision-making. We appreciate the ROK government's support in progressing through the mutually agreed upon conditions required to complete this transition. The previous major defensive exercise on the Korean Peninsula, ULCHI FREEDOM SHIELD, demonstrated the progress being made toward Future CFC. ULCHI FREEDOM SHIELD included a Full Operational Capability evaluation of OPCON Transition, with ROK General Ahn Byung Seok acting as the Future CFC Commander.

Exercises such as ULCHI FREEDOM SHIELD and FREEDOM SHIELD are routine, defensive training events critical to our ability to provide extended deterrence in Northeast Asia. Combined Forces Command was precluded from conducting large scale exercises in recent years due to COVID-19 and the political environment. Going forward we are making a concerted effort to reintroduce live training into our combined exercise program with our ROK Allies. As we increase our combined training, however, a large portion of the training remains unfunded. Despite an increased demand, there have been no additions to FY23 theater exercise programs. Training is perishable and must be continuously conducted to maintain an appropriate level of combat readiness.

Resourcing the U.S. Commitment: U.S. Forces Korea

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

Our ability to provide forward deterrence is dependent upon conducting regular, robust, and challenging training. Due to space constraints, collective live-fire training opportunities are limited. Any reduction in funding levels will degrade 7th Air Force and Eighth Army's ability to execute these types of training events on- and off-peninsula. Current funding levels, therefore, should be viewed as a "floor" rather than a "ceiling."

United States Forces Korea continues to demonstrate new and innovative capabilities that provide our forces advantages across all 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. The DOD’s Chief Data and Artificial Intelligence office prioritized USFK near the top of commands to invest in to enhance Sensor-to-Shooter and Combined Kill Web analytics. Our Digital Operational Plan (Digital OPLAN) will incorporate machine learning and artificial intelligence to move USFK forward in data analytics. Additionally, we are 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 (C5ISRT). Improving C5ISRT will enhance our situational awareness, decision making, and communication readiness from our national command authorities to our forces in the field. To avert network isolation of our C5ISRT capability, we are pursuing replication of our coalition network off peninsula. Furthermore, USFK is collaborating with the DOD Joint Program Office for counter Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) and established a counter small-UAS experimentation lab last summer. Our first experiments began in August 2022.

United States Forces Korea continues to enhance our existing capabilities, such as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) ballistic missile defense system. This defensive capability provides protection for U.S. forces and the ROK against DPRK’s ballistic missile program. President Yoon’s administration has supported improved access to the THAAD site over the last year. The normalization of THAAD operations and unfettered access to this site are critical to maintaining the overall readiness of the system, as well as the health and safety of the Servicemembers at this location.

While we can operate across all domains, I am concerned about our ability to compete in the

information environment in Northeast Asia. China, Russia, and DPRK's aggressive investments in information warfare technology and operational practices outpace DOD investments and challenge U.S. influence in Northeast Asia. 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. The price of operations during armistice to deter, degrade, and disrupt adversaries is orders of magnitude less than the cost of combat operations designed to challenge revisionist states and authoritarian regimes.

Serving Together: Taking Care of our People

Servicemembers, civilians, families, and contractors who support the Joint Force are our most precious resource and taking care of our people is a no-fail task. Those who bring their families to the Korean Peninsula will spend at least two years here, defending the ROK and deterring DPRK. The families who live alongside their Servicemembers in the ROK do so without many of the conveniences of living in the continental United States. Ensuring those personnel and their families are afforded the best quality of life while they are away from the U.S. homeland is of paramount importance and is something I stress with leaders at every echelon. 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 people live and work across the entire ROK, from Panmunjom near the Demilitarized Zone to the port of Busan. Being a responsible ally means being good stewards of the Korean land and environment. 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.

Thanks to Congressional support, we have transferred the center of gravity for the U.S.-ROK Alliance out of Seoul and are actively improving our facilities across the Korean Peninsula. To help combat climate change, USFK is using the most current unified facility mechanisms to reduce

downstream maintenance, improve quality of life, and maintain force protection. We are nearing the completion of Camp Humphreys' \$10.6 billion transformation to the new center of gravity for the U.S.-ROK Alliance and the headquarters of UNC, CFC, and USFK. As we begin the third year (CY23) of a five-year Special Measures Agreement with the ROK, we appreciate the Committee's continued support to ensure we can synchronize ROK funding and U.S.-appropriated funding to improve our facilities as quickly as possible. This support will ensure new facilities such as the U.S. Space Force Complex on Osan Air Force Base remain projected to break ground earlier than traditional military construction projects with the help of cost-sharing with our ROK Allies. It is also critical in improving our existing facilities, such as the ongoing repairs to the piers at the port of Busan.

Providing support and medical care to our Servicemembers, civilians, and families at our installations across the ROK remains a challenge. For example, the Brian D. Allgood Community Hospital on Camp Humphreys is not sufficiently staffed to provide care for the installation's population. Very few of the staff are assigned solely to the hospital; most of the staff are borrowed from operational units which have frequent field training requirements. These shortfalls are exacerbated at smaller outposts and locations. To provide the highest quality and most reliable care for our Servicemembers, civilians, and their families, additional permanent staff should be recruited, retained, and assigned to all our deployed locations in the ROK. Particular attention should be given to the fields of behavioral health, nursing, and primary care.

Finally, my focus remains on the wellbeing of our Servicemembers. Our families include the dependents of UN Sending States who live on our installations. We are working with the DOD Education Agency to draft language into the future National Defense Authorization Act to allow these UN Sending State dependents status commensurate with U.S. Servicemember dependents. 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 harms 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.

Moving Forward

While DPRK prepares for a 7th nuclear test, our resolve remains unmoved: we will deter and, if necessary, defeat our adversary; and we are committed to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. 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 to the Asian mainland alongside our ROK Allies. Cooperatively, we are focused on maintaining a robust combined readiness cycle, strengthening deterrence through strategic asset deployments, and conducting multi-domain operations while DPRK continues its provocative weapons development activities.

I am grateful for this Committee's continued support. I am honored to serve this dedicated multinational, combined, and Joint Force deployed to the Asian mainland.