Prepared Testimony
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Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, members of the Committee, my distinguished fellow panelists – it's an honor to testify today on one of our most vexing national security challenges – North Korea. Given the potential for historic conflict with North Korea, this hearing provides a much-needed public discussion of the stakes involved.

First, I should be clear about one thing: North Korea poses a serious threat to the United States and our allies. North Korea is the country violating multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions. And Kim Jong Un is a ruthless tyrant building nuclear weapons on the backs of his oppressed people.

I worked the North Korea challenge every day in my years at the Department of Defense, so I am deeply familiar with the adage that North Korea is the land of lousy options. They are no easy solutions or silver bullets. But I do believe there are some basic ingredients to a sound strategy:

- Clear and consistent strategic messaging;
- Sustained high levels of international pressure;
- Diplomatic persistence, clarity and creativity;
- Strong alliance management;
- Credible deterrence with responsible risk management; and,
- Healthy skepticism about the intentions of China.

To its credit, the Trump Administration has had some important achievements on increasing pressure on North Korea, including strong UN Security Council sanctions resolutions and pushing China further along. In some ways, these are extensions of the Obama Administration's strategy and I believe more can be done to increase pressure. However, the Trump Administration's strategy has also been plagued by incoherence and neglect on many of these other fronts – and as a result, the sum has not been greater than its parts.

With tensions high and increasing talk of preventive U.S. military action, I am deeply concerned about the prospect of war with North Korea – whether by miscalculation or by design. The question we should be asking ourselves is whether initiating armed conflict with North Korea is necessary or advisable to advance long-term U.S. national security interests. I believe that after a thorough analysis of the likely costs of preventive war, and a careful examination of the alternatives, it is nearly impossible to conclude that the preventive use of force is advisable or even the least bad option in terms of advancing our interests and minimizing risk.

There is a role for the military instrument to play – it is essential for deterrence credibility, the defense of our allies and to back up diplomacy. But use of force should always be of last resort. If there is an imminent threat to U.S. forces in Korea or Japan or elsewhere in the region, or against the U.S. homeland, our right to self-defense is clear and absolute. However, there are sound reasons that multiple Administrations have refrained from using force preventively – it would likely be catastrophic in human, economic and strategic terms, not to mention illegal.

The Human Costs:

Estimating the human costs of war is always an imperfect exercise. Much depends on assumptions and scenarios. However, even a limited military strike would likely escalate quickly into a regional conflagration. South Korea would likely face an artillery barrage on Seoul, if not a nuclear or chemical attack from the North. According to the Congressional Research Service, between 30,000 and 300,000 people could die within days of the conflict. In addition to 28,500 U.S. military personnel and thousands of their dependents, there are approximately 100,000-500,000 American citizens living in South Korea. North Korea's ballistic missiles can also range Tokyo, the world's largest city, putting millions at risk. Hawaii and Guam– where millions of American citizens reside -- are at the top of the North Korean target list.

Inside North Korea, a major humanitarian crisis would likely unfold in the aftermath of use of force. Food supplies and basic health care would be scarce, exacerbated by massive refugee flows numbering in the millions. Hundreds of thousands of political prisoners and detainees would also need critical attention.

Post-conflict security demands would be similarly daunting. North Korea has the fourth largest military in the world: over a million strong with more than seven million reservists. Including troops and reservists, that is nearly 25 times the size of the Iraqi army in 2003. Even as foreign forces worked to seize nuclear sites and materials, stocks of chemical weapons would be scattered around the country, along with caches of conventional weapons in underground tunnels and facilities. Surviving factions could ignite civil war and insurgency. As a result, according to some estimates, stabilization and peacekeeping tasks could require more than 400,000 troops.

This does not even begin to address the complex governance issues that would instantly emerge. We have encountered questions on unification, demobilization, and transitional justice in prior conflicts and have not acquitted ourselves well in dealing with them. Members of this Committee certainly remember these lessons from our experiences in Iraq.

The Economic Costs:

On the potential economic costs of war, let's start with a few simple facts:

- The Republic of Korea (ROK) is the 12th largest economy in the world and is deeply integrated into global supply chains.
- Japan is the 3rd largest economy in the world by nominal GDP, and deeply integrated into global supply chains.
- The ROK and Japan account for approximately 7% (or $1.14 trillion) of global merchandise exports and 6% (or $1.01 trillion) of global merchandise imports. Japan is the world's 4th largest exporter and 5th largest importer of merchandise; South Korea is the world's 8th largest exporter and 10th largest importer of merchandise.

If nuclear conflict were to occur, the RAND Corporation estimates that such an attack would cost at least 10 percent of the ROK's GDP in the first year alone and that those loses would likely be extended for at least ten years. And these estimates don't even include a strike on Hawaii or Japan.

Further, direct costs to U.S. taxpayers of a war with North Korea would be significant. According to another 2010 RAND report, estimates for long-term reconstruction of the Korean Peninsula top $1 trillion.

The Strategic Costs

The strategic costs of preventive war with North Korea would be quite consequential for long-term U.S. interests, even assuming military success. Three questions factor most in my mind:

- **What will be the long-term impact on our alliances?** If a military strike is conducted without the concurrence of the Republic of Korea and Japan, you can expect an end to the alliance relationships as we know them in Asia and probably around the world. A preventive war without the full support of our Asian allies would likely do lasting damage to trust in America – not just in Asia but globally. Without our alliances and partnerships, the United States role as a Pacific power would be fundamentally diminished for the long term.

- **What will China and Russia do?** China will almost certainly intervene into a destabilized North Korea, creating both military and political obstacles for the United States. It is likely that China will seek to occupy North Korea, at a minimum to prevent a complete state collapse and to secure nuclear sites. A long-term Chinese presence in North Korea – and it would almost certainly be long-term -- has implications for our alliance with the Republic of Korea and our interests in Northeast Asia. And in a worse-case scenario, absent substantial strategic and tactical deconfliction in advance, a potential U.S.-China conflict could easily materialize. Russia, which shares a small land border with North Korea, will most certainly oppose U.S. intervention and continue to play spoiler alongside China.

- **What would be the opportunity costs for the U.S.?** This question never gets enough attention. War with North Korea would become the central preoccupation of the President and his national security team for the duration of his term – crowding out all other issues and limiting strategic bandwidth for the United States to deal with challenges like Russia, China and Iran. If great power competition with China and Russia are indeed central to U.S. national security strategy, then war with North Korea would almost certainly distract U.S. resources and focus and increase China's opportunities in the region. From a basic force management perspective, hard trade-offs would need to be made with respect to forces and capabilities in other theaters.

Examining the Argument for Preventive Use of Force

There are some who argue that preventive use of force is the least bad option. They predicate this view in part on an assumption that Kim Jong Un is not a rational actor and therefore deterrence is not a reliable option for preventing a nuclear first strike against the United States. They also suggest that once North Korea achieves a full ICBM capability, Kim Jong Un will use that capability to hold the U.S. homeland at risk while forcibly unifying the Korean Peninsula. While no one can credibly predict North Korean intentions and the possibility of nuclear coercion is real, there are some empirical weaknesses in this line of argument. Let me break it down:

- **First, history shows otherwise**. While reunification remains the stated objective of both North and South Korea, the credible threat of American and ROK firepower has prevented North Korea from pursuing that reunification by force since 1953. More than 28,000 U.S. troops remain on the Peninsula today, backed up by our extended deterrence commitment that would bring to bear the full spectrum of American power. Strengthening our deterrence credibility starts not with an overt demonstration of U.S. power in defense of our own citizens and interests, but with the credibility of our commitment to defend the citizens and interests of our allies. A preventive attack will undermine America's deterrence strategy by showing that we are willing sacrifice our allies, essentially decoupling them ourselves.

- **Second, there are the basic military realities**. There are some that have suggested that "war over there is better than war over here." But let's be honest: North Korea already has the capability to hold U.S. interests at risk in the Pacific – with nuclear-tipped missiles ranging Hawaii and Guam where millions of American citizens live, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of American civilians living in both Korea and Japan. So, war over there would also potentially costs millions of American lives.

- **Third, the arguments for preventive use of force are predicated on ultimately unknowable determinations on Kim Jong Un's rationality**.

What would be the objective and how would we effectuate the desired outcome, especially if he is irrational? Much will depend on Kim Jong Un's perceptions of our intentions. So if we assume Kim Jong Un is indeed an irrational actor, why would we think that he would exercise restraint when presented with a limited U.S. military strike? This is the central flaw in argument for the "bloody nose" approach. Escalation is extremely likely and deterrence cuts both ways.

- **Finally, there are real questions about the effectiveness of preventive use of force.** What would a limited strike ultimately seek to achieve? If it is to show we are serious and force Kim Jong Un to the negotiating table, it is unlikely that he will oblige. If the objective of a strike is to take out his nuclear and ballistic missile programs, then that is not a limited military option. In my judgment, that would be a full-scale war and in that case, we would need to have high confidence that we were able to hit everything and that the nuclear, chemical and ballistic programs could not be reconstituted. In fact, in a letter to Congress last year, the Pentagon itself estimates that eliminating all of North Korea's nuclear capabilities would require an actual ground invasion.

What are the other options?

National security decision-making often forces us to choose the least bad option. Make no mistake that with North Korea there are no good options and all carry risk, but by far the worst is war. In my view, the least bad option is to contain, deter, pressure, and vigorously try to open a genuine diplomatic process. So where does that leave us?

- **First, there is the need to refresh our approach to diplomacy and make clear to North Korea that the door is open**. We all know that diplomacy with North Korea has a checkered past, but it must be the leading line of U.S. effort if for no other reason that diplomacy is the necessary predicate to all other options. And while North Korea has demonstrated little interest in meaningful diplomacy over denuclearization, we need to be clear, persistent and creative about how we approach any negotiations. There has been significant confusion over U.S. intentions in this regard. We also need to consider that at the heart of the North Korea problem is a security dilemma, not just an arms control and proliferation problem. We need to think creatively about how to address that dilemma in concert with our allies – including what assurances we would be prepared to offer in exchange for meaningful and verifiable limits on their nuclear program. Diplomacy will also likely only have a chance if it begins without preconditions and moves in stages of confidence-building. We should also be positioning ourselves to shape any negotiations to our advantage and not allow the North Koreans to seize the initiative. For this to be possible, I would encourage the

Administration to appoint an experienced high-level envoy that has the unambiguous backing of the White House to coordinate diplomacy and messaging with our allies and who would be dedicated full time to the pursuit of negotiations.

- **Second, we should consider a shift in our strategy vis-à-vis China**. While the Chinese do not share our long-term interests on the Korean Peninsula, they do worry about two things: secondary sanctions and American encirclement. On the sanction front, the Administration has only just begun to get serious with China, and the United States should pull every non-military pressure lever it has over North Korea before putting American lives on the line. Critically, China can cut off North Korea's oil supplies, but it has not yet done so. The Administration should substantially ratchet up the costs Beijing bears by continuing to supply fuel not only for the North Korean economy but to its military as well.

  Further, the Chinese need to look out around the region and see the negative effect that a nuclear-armed North Korea will have on their long-term objective to impose a sphere of influence in their near periphery. We should consider what additional force posture is necessary to contain and deter a nuclear-armed North Korea and we should not hesitate to move forward with it, whether that is an additional THAAD battery on the Peninsula, support for Japanese acquisition of key capabilities, or additional U.S. air, naval and ground forces around the region. As the United States bolsters deterrence and containment against North Korea, U.S. policy must send the unmistakable signal to China that, if the threat from North Korea remains, the United States will strengthen its military posture in Northeast Asia. We also need to work harder to improve Japan-ROK relations and further operationalize trilateral cooperation – not just to prevent North Korea from driving wedges, but also China.

- **Third, we are likely to find ourselves in a containment and deterrence scenario and we should begin conceptualizing what would be necessary in that scenario to limit risk.** This is obviously no one's preferred outcome and it certainly carries risks. But given the challenges of diplomacy with North Korea and given the overwhelming risks of war, I think we also need to be realistic. What would an active containment and upgraded deterrence strategy look like that would minimize risk, protect our long-term strategic interests and could be executed in concert with our allies? We need to be thinking hard about how to upgrade our extended deterrence commitments to our allies, how to improve conventional deterrence, as well as a much more integrated and enhanced counter-proliferation framework.

Conclusion

A war of choice with North Korea would be the option of highest risk and unlikely to advance U.S. long-term strategic interests, and in my view, would potentially mortally wound them. Given the stakes involved with the use of force, the Administration owes our military and the American public the planning and preparation that was frankly absent with Iraq in 2003. Congress can help drive more public debate on the choices before us. This hearing is an important step in the right direction and I am grateful for the opportunity to present this testimony. I look forward to your questions.