

STATEMENT OF

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, 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. The Korean Peninsula is key strategic terrain vital to defending the American homeland and advancing American interests in the region. The ROK and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) exist in a state of Armistice, not peace. Our forces in Korea advanced U.S. goals since I took command in 2024. We have observed significant changes in the operating environment including Allied strategic leader transitions and the DPRK's deepening relations with Russia and China, and have modified our lines of effort accordingly to ensure stability in a region vital to American security.

Since taking command in December 2024, the Tri-Command made significant progress to advance security in Northeast Asia. We have committed to a path of holistic modernization that refocuses all three commands on the region's evolving strategic dilemmas. A year and a half ago, I spoke with this body about the importance of maneuvering in the information environment. As we have watched adversaries weaponize disinformation to erode trust between Allies in the region, I believe that proactive maneuver is more critical now, than ever. We are countering these narratives by actively communicating the centrality of Korea to a region essential for American security and prosperity. We have instituted "interagency teaming" to match interagency capabilities against regional challenges. FBI Director Patel's visit to Korea stands out as a prominent example where we improved partnership against a modernizing threat nexus in the region. Additionally, we are engaged in a campaign of learning that integrates lessons learned from global events to better posture our theater for success. I am grateful to our ROK Allies who enable innovative theater concepts such as the Regional Sustainment Hub and seek to take a

leading role in the conventional deterrence of the DPRK. During my second year of command, we will exploit the gains we have made to increase our readiness, lethality, and expand partnerships to meet the missions assigned in support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and the Department of War (DOW).

As our nation's Senior United States Officer Assigned to Korea (SUSMOAK), Commander of the U.S.-led United Nations Command (UNC), U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command (CFC), and United States Forces Korea (USFK), I am committed to deterring would-be adversaries in the region. It is an honor and privilege to lead those under my Command and to do so in lockstep with our Department, State, the Interagency, and our Allies and Partners.

The strategic environment in Northeast Asia has changed in ways that have significant impacts on American national security interests in the region. The most consequential and strategic changes are the leadership transitions of the United States, the ROK, and Japan. 2025 marked a consequential shift in national priorities for all ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral governments. The President of the ROK, Lee Jae-Myung's inauguration occurred in June 2025. President Lee espouses a platform of "pragmatic" foreign policy that includes goals for increased interaction between the ROK and DPRK. Prime Minister Sanae Taikaichi's ascension in Japan is another significant change among Allied leadership in the region that remains critical for trilateral cooperation. Enabled by the strategic clarity offered by the United States National Security and Defense Strategies, my commands strive daily to improve the ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral partnership that is vital to deterrence and defending the homelands for years to come.

While our Allied leaders in Northeast Asia transitioned, three developments across our adversaries stand out: continuity of leadership, Chinese military build-up, and active DPRK-Russian relations. Kim Jong-Un (KJU), Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping, still lead DPRK, Russia,

and China, respectively. Strategic continuity among adversary leadership has enabled several outcomes counter to United States objectives in the region. These challenges include an on-going build-up of Chinese military power in the region, that threatens to deny American access to vital global markets. Furthermore, cooperation between Russia and DPRK provides the Korean People's Army (KPA) valuable combat experience and technological support to enhance DPRK industrial modernization. These outcomes, when considered in relation to improvements to DPRK's military, including its WMD and ballistic missile threats, demands increased vigilance in defense of the United States homeland.

DPRK's pursuit of advanced military technology, improved international relations with Russia and China, military support to Russia's war effort in Ukraine, and sanctions evasion efforts pose risks to the United States' interests in the region. Kim Jong-Un's presence alongside President Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin during the 2025 Chinese Victory Day Parade is a stark reminder that KJU's relationships with Russia and China are vital for the Kim Regime's survival. DPRK's commitment of munitions and military units to the war in Ukraine demonstrates Kim's continued collusion with Russia against American interests. DPRK's 2025 record breaking theft of cryptocurrencies represents one of several illicit methods DPRK employs to evade sanctions and achieve Kim's objectives.

The Tri-Command supports American national interests across three inextricably linked UNC, CFC, and USFK missions. The U.S.-led UNC enforces the terms of the 1953 Armistice Agreement and supports peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. CFC deters aggression by any adversary to maintain regional security in Northeast Asia. USFK embodies the American commitment to the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty. The centrality of our position within the region offers unique strategic military advantages during Armistice and conflict, while also

preventing adversaries from denying American access to the region. Maintaining our position within adversary anti-access/area denial corridors enables our nation to negotiate from positions of strength. Our posture on the Korean Peninsula sends a clear message in support of deterrence: “Ignore us at your own risk.”

Our new national security and defense strategies demand application of practical and flexible realism to maintain a favorable balance of power in the region. Our strategic approach applies these concepts across four lines of effort: Maneuver in the Information Environment, Defend the Homelands, Stand by Allies and Partners, and Set the Theater. Our forces implement this approach while recognizing that “People are Our Platform.”

Maneuver in the Information Environment

Maneuvering in the information environment is critical for deterrence against adversaries in the region. Through all levels of war, our teams work hand in hand with Allies and Partners in the CFC and UNC to establish trust and confidence in our commitment to the region. As stated by Secretary Hegseth during his visit to Camp Humphreys: our warfighters and their families (including the ROK and UNC Member States in attendance) “are the face of deterrence.” Our information maneuver emphasizes the following elements to support deterrence: advancing Alliance narratives through contest in the information environment, employing the “east-up” approach to contextualize the theater, and amplifying UNC’s role and successes to enforce the Armistice.

The Tri-Command contests actors in the information environment who seek to undermine the ROK-U.S. Alliance. Our efforts leverage U.S., ROK, and international media opportunities to inform, educate, and engage disparate cohorts of the significance of our Alliance. U.S. interests

in the region are bolstered by dialogue, fora, and media. These efforts combat disinformation in our operating environment. Routine Security Consultative and Military Committee Meetings (SCM/MCM) guide our national command authority dialogues. Regional defense forums, cultural exchanges, and everyday interaction between ROK citizens and members of the Tri-Command weave a tapestry of human and organizational relationships. This strategic system encompasses the U.S.-ROK Alliance, and 18 United Nations Command Member States (UNCMS) who stand ready to defeat aggression in the region.

Throughout 2025, we employed an “east-up” approach to contextually communicate the significance of our Alliance. We advanced the level of understanding for our theater among ROK media outlets, international media outlets, academics, and policymakers. The strategic narratives regarding Korea, DPRK, trilateral cooperation, the role of UNC, and the intrusions on ROK sovereignty by regional actors are all communicable through the “east-up” approach to the environment. The approach has proven successful in demonstrating to military counterparts across the region of the centrality of Korea to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

2025 also marked the 75th commemoration of the start of the 1950-53 Korean War. UNC invoked the spirit, will, and emotions of 1950 in its approach to public engagements and outreach. These emotions are critical today because the United States response to communist aggression sparked collective action from eventual UNC sending states. As more of our Allies and Partners take on greater roles in their defense, UNC remains a vehicle where U.S. Allies and Partners can deter regional aggression and nuclear coercion in a region vital to global economic interests. UNC serves as a symbol of collective action and U.S. leadership in a region vital to American interests.

Recently, attempts have been made to restore the ROK-DPRK Comprehensive Military Agreement (CMA) to reduce tensions on the Korean Peninsula. However, UNC continues to support stability and reduce tensions daily. UNC's enforcement of the Armistice through impartial investigations of Armistice violations provide ROK and DPRK an alternative to conflict and escalation. Coordination through UNC with the Neutral Nations Supervisory Committee (NNSC) involves non-aligned state supervision of Alliance compliance with the Armistice. UNC observation of the ROK-DPRK Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), daily communication with the KPA, and administration of the Joint Security Area (JSA) provide the necessary stability mechanisms in Armistice. We actively communicate all of the above to counter disinformation in the information environment.

Defend the Homelands

DPRK is in the midst a multi-year force modernization program to establish capabilities that threaten the ROK and U.S. homelands. DPRK's technological advancement, aided by Russia, continues despite highly punitive and restrictive sanctions. I implore our military leaders in Korea to consider posture from the perspective of: "capabilities over numbers." Defending the homeland is only possible when the capabilities match threats. We are making significant progress to match capabilities to threats by employing the "Three Kings" modernization framework, advocating for advanced information sharing and passive defense measures to mitigate DPRK long-range fires, and improving Conventional-Nuclear Integration (CNI) planning and coordination.

To this end, we have made steady progress across what I refer to as the "Three Kings of Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific:" Posture, Protection, and Sustainment. Modernizing our posture to defend the U.S. Homeland employs an all-domain capabilities-based approach to the theater.

Our vision to employ capabilities in Korea requires U.S. and ROK authorities to support military competition in the region, while empowering the ROK to lead conventional deterrence against DPRK. Our modernized posture must include sustainment capabilities that provide staying power in the region. Modernizing Tri-Command capabilities within the “Three Kings” framework supports a more lethal and capable U.S. presence able to defeat threats to our homelands.

The number one threat in the theater remains DPRK’s steadily advancing long range fires capability. DPRK’s long-range fires complex includes a multitude of launchers, delivery vehicles, and payloads that hold the U.S. homeland, the ROK, and UNC Member State homelands at risk. To mitigate this risk, we support increased information sharing among trilateral partners. We are pursuing several opportunities and investments across our joint warfighting functions that improve our ability to find, fix, track, and destroy missile threats before they reach their targets. While we strive to maintain pace with adversary munitions build ups, we also employ passive and economically efficient defense measures to erode DPRK’s confidence in its arsenal.

One of the most critical aspects of extended deterrence is America’s top tier nuclear forces commanded by United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM). During 2025, USFK established a Strategic Integration Element/Joint Directorate-10 to facilitate coordination between the ROK and U.S. Strategic Command. Our J10 is one of our newest organizational solutions designed to re-establish deterrence in the region. Developed as an outcome of the 2023 Washington Declaration, the J10 represents USFK in American policy dialogue with the ROK through participation in Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) activities. The NCG is an important symbol of U.S. extended deterrence and a critical vehicle for understanding ROK policy

objectives related to deterring nuclear strikes on the ROK-U.S. homelands. The NCG principals met in December 2025 to set forth an updated NCG agenda for 2026. Of the six different NCG planning priorities, USFK's most significant priority is support to refining CNI concepts in response to an adversary nuclear strike. Our J10 professionals embody the reality that our operations, activities, and investments involving U.S. nuclear forces are American planned, led, and executed in support of theater requirements.

Stand by Allies and Partners

Our Allies and Partners are vital to the success of the Tri-Command. Without the support of the ROK, Japan, and the 18 UNCMS, our mission would be more costly to the American people, our troops would face greater dangers, and risks to our national interests would be higher. Conversely, changes in the strategic environment are driving our adversaries closer thereby increasing their capability to compete with the United States' network of Alliances. Our Allies and Partners contribute extensively to prevent our adversaries from gaining advantages. First, the U.S.-ROK Alliance is modernizing in ways that result in transfer of wartime operational control for forces, second, USFK in coordination with the ROK is optimizing its posture to support ROK-led conventional deterrence of the DPRK with critical but more limited capabilities, and third, UNC remains engaged with the ROK to maximize multinational contributions to support stability in the region.

The United States' network of Alliances has served as a springboard for military power projection since the end of World War II. Our Allies and Partners remain critical for assuring a favorable balance of military power in Northeast Asia. The ROK-U.S. Alliance is modernizing to meet this moment. Militarily, the ROK is increasing its investments in military spending and seeks to assume wartime operational control per our bi-laterally agreed Conditions-based

OPCON Transition Plan (COTP). The ROK is pursuing conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines and the U.S. will work closely with the ROK to advance the requirements for that project, including avenues to source fuel. These commitments are indicative of the ROK's investment in security as a model ally.

Alliance Modernization faces substantial challenges. One of these challenges is the simultaneity problem outlined in our National Defense Strategy. While the U.S. is committed to the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty our joint forces must remain flexible to meet global challenges. Alliance Modernization will result in enhanced trust, expectations, and processes that enable the U.S. to support the ROK with critical but more limited capabilities.

Accelerated COTP is a feature of the modernized ROK-U.S. Alliance. Accelerated COTP is not time-based. As the bilaterally agreed-to framework dictates, the ROK military must possess specific capabilities to meet conditions for COTP. I continue to engage our ROK Allies on COTP capabilities requirements as they decide their investments in defense. Even though the ROK is significantly increasing its defense spending as a model ally, it is imperative that the ROK government achieve the capabilities necessary prior to transfer.

While Alliance Modernization is an inflection point in the history of U.S.-ROK relations, the U.S. maintains other relationships vital to security in the region. 2025 UNC efforts included UNC Ambassador Day and Ambassador Round Table events where I personally engaged senior representatives from the UNC member states in the ROK (monthly) and Japan (quarterly). During these events, we discuss the security situation and enhance coordination for non-combatant evacuation operations (NEO). Evacuation operations are critical to the safety of our citizens abroad and are more complex when conducted under the specter of nuclear, chemical, and ballistic missile threats. Continued multinational coordination among the UNC member

states today saves lives should deterrence fail. I am grateful for the continued support from our fellow UNC member states: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

Set the Theater

Setting the theater for competition, crisis, or conflict is essential. Lessons learned from COVID, wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and technological innovations render supply lines more susceptible to disruption and interdiction. USFK, supported by partners from Department of State, our military services, and industry is establishing a regional sustainment hub in support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. Our efforts to set the theater maximize our position in the ROK by: leveraging the ROK industrial base to support maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO), leveraging support from DOS teammates to inform ROK acquisitions, expanding special authorities for maintenance, requesting additional assigned multi-domain forces, maintaining investments by the ROK through Special Measures Agreement (SMA) funding, and integrating more UNC Member State capabilities into the theater. These efforts mitigate the “tyranny of distance” across our theater significantly when implemented.

The ROK defense industrial base has developed into one of the finest military production capabilities in the world. The ROK has maintained the ability to conduct depot level maintenance on common platforms since 1978. These platforms include fighter aircraft (F-16, F-15), cargo aircraft (C-130), and rotary wing aircraft (UH-60, CH-47, CH-53). More recently, the ROK industrial base has expanded its service to U.S. maritime assets including four U.S. Naval Ships (USNS): Charles Drew, Carl Brashear, Wally Shira, and the Yukon. The ROK government is also

pursuing agreements with the United States regarding co-sustainment for other systems like the PATRIOT and repair for T-55 aircraft engines.

Partnering with ROK military industrial firms requires lock-step coordination between our Department of State and Department of War leaders. As an example of this cooperation, we hosted the Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Product Support, Ms. Lisa Smith, in July 2025. Coordination with the U.S. Embassy in Seoul through the Joint U.S. Military Affairs Group (Korea) (JUSMAG-K) also ensures that we speak with one voice to our ROK Allies about desired acquisitions outcomes. Outside of the interagency, we hosted several Congressional and Staff Delegations to communicate the vision for leveraging our positional advantage to improve our ability to sustain the “fight.”

In addition to establishing interagency permissions and agreements with ROK firms, special repair authority from Congress is necessary to enable ROK repairs on select U.S. platforms. While these investments cannot replace the industrial capacity of the U.S. homeland, they enable setting the theater while also providing the benefits of strategic redundancy.

In addition to sustainment and medical capacity, we are requesting an increase in multi-domain forces over the next five years. As our services continue to modernize, resulting in leaner, but more capable formations, our military staffs coordinate these requests with USINDOPACOM and the Secretary’s staff to bring all domain capabilities to Korea to reestablish deterrence. Since these capabilities are in limited supply, I will also pursue episodic and enduring operations and activities in support of USINDOPACOM in competition.

Resourcing the Tri-Command is a collaborative process between the U.S. and the ROK as well as between USFK, USINDOPACOM, the Department of War, and the United States

Congress. United States Forces Korea receives substantial funding by the ROK in accordance with their Special Measures Agreement commitments. Our ROK-funded construction efforts provide our forces with some of the newest facilities in the DOW. Likewise, our host nation employees, who support the fight with minimal cost to the U.S. taxpayer, are critical to our success. I am grateful to the DOS negotiators and national leadership on both sides of the Pacific for providing our forces with this support.

USFK continues to work with the services, USINDOPACOM, the Office of the Secretary, and our ROK Allies to increase capability on the peninsula. As we improve our posture on the Korean Peninsula, the Tri-Command accounts for U.S., ROK, and UNC Member State contributions that provide the strategic depth necessary to deter adversaries in the region.

People Are Our Platform

The Tri-Command's success is the result of the efforts of our talented service members, government civilians, and their families. Our human talent provides strategic advantage. We exploit this advantage to ensure a ready and lethal presence in Northeast Asia. Our most prominent effort to cultivate human talent across the peninsula is implementing the "3-2-1 Tour Normalization" policy and expanding capacity for the three pillars of Command Sponsorship: housing, medical care, and family education.

This year, we implemented tour normalization, sometimes referred to as "3-2-1 Tour Normalization." This change is a significant shift to the USFK personnel and talent management paradigm. Over the next several years, we will see returns on this implementation across all commands. Tour normalization ensures that our warfighters at tactical, operational, and strategic levels serve in roles along similar timelines as forces stationed in other theaters. This enables

improved continuity among American staffs while supporting our national strategic objectives, higher levels of battlefield integration across our joint components, and more avenues to build readiness and lethality at the tactical level among our combined-joint forces in Korea.

Throughout implementation, we ensure that our entire joint military community has access to the three pillars of the Command Sponsorship Program (CSP) necessary to implement this policy: Housing, Medical Support, and Education. Our service members implement this approach deliberately in close coordination with the Department of War and the United States Congress.

Tour normalization must maintain pace with available housing. One benefit of tour normalization is that by increasing the length of currently supported command sponsorship billets from two to three years, we expect to achieve greater readiness outcomes prior to increasing the number of CSP billets. The flexible nature of two-year and one-year options also enables us to fill critical shortages while preserving CSP resources to support servicemembers and their families.

Similarly, the Tri-Command improved access to the Medical Support pillar. For example, this year, leaders within our medical services community opened a walk-in clinic and implemented unit level changes to improve support to the community. These efforts reduced wait-times for medical appointments from several weeks to days. In addition to improved access, we hired more Korean local national employees across provider, nursing, and medical administration disciplines to make healthcare more accessible across our community.

The Department of War Education Activity (DoWEA) remains an excellent partner and leading advocate for our youth in Korea. Their professionalism and commitment to educating our

children continues uninterrupted and remains essential for drawing talent from not only the United States, but also from UNCMS who deploy servicemembers to Korea in support of the U.S.-led UNC. DoWEA in Korea has capacity to increase enrollment. As capacity grows, Camp Humphreys stands to benefit from a third elementary school that will open, as well as additional staff hiring windows during the 2026-2027 calendar year.

Conclusion

The Tri-Command stands ready and capable to support a favorable balance of power across the region that deters aggression and supports American prosperity and security. Our presence in the region is a driving force that has evolved our Alliances over decades from dependencies to true partnerships. We are vigilant and committed to maintaining the Armistice and deterring large scale conflict through our readiness, cooperation, and commitment to the region. Together, with the Department, our interagency teammates, the United States Congress, and our multinational Allies and Partners, we demonstrate American strength in the region so that a peace favorable to American interests prevails.

Under One Flag!

“Katchi-Kapshida” We Go Together!

Fight Tonight!