

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. Thank you for your steadfast and critical support to the servicemembers, civilians, and families of the “Tri-Command,” the ROK, and the 18 United Nations Command Member States who work tirelessly to create a future defined by security, freedom, and prosperity. The U.S.-ROK Alliance remains a beacon of stability and strength in the Indo-Pacific. Our two nations share common values and focus on advancing democracy, economic prosperity, security and technical innovation. The ROK sits at the heart of Northeast Asia, which remains a critical region among great powers and regional actors. China, Russia, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), and Iran are strengthening relations and conducting activities that undermine the security and stability of the Korean Peninsula and region writ large. These activities are growing increasingly insidious.

As the Commander of United Nations Command (UNC), the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command (CFC), and United States Forces Korea (USFK), I have a triple-hatted role with responsibilities that are inextricably linked. In UNC, we enforce the terms of the Armistice Agreement and support peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. In CFC, we deter aggression against any adversary to maintain regional security in Northeast Asia. In USFK, we act as the physical manifestation of the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty. Our unwavering commitment to the ROK remains steadfast. However, the Korea Theater of Operations (KTO) has undergone significant changes over the past five years, presenting new challenges and opportunities that require continued attention and adaptation.

Among those shifts include the DPRK’s status on the global stage, emboldened by its

international relationships and illicit gains. DPRK's chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programs and formidable missile force (ballistic and cruise) pose a threat to the U.S. homeland, U.S. forces in the Indo-Pacific, and allied nations. The DPRK claims to have the capability to strike major cities worldwide, including the United States and 17 of 18 UNC member state capitals. It has reinvigorated its relationship with Russia, its original major benefactor, providing forces and military equipment to support Russia's war efforts while maintaining cooperative ties with China. The DPRK signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreement with Russia in 2024, mirroring its ties with China through the long-standing Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship treaty, codified in 1961. The DPRK has shipped millions of artillery rounds and dozens of ballistic missiles to Russia over the last year as well as deployed more than 10,000 troops to fight against Ukrainian forces. In return, Russia is expanding sharing of space, nuclear, and missile-applicable technology, expertise, and materials to the DPRK. Russia's expanded cooperation will enable advancements of DPRK's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program across the next three to five years. Contrary to predictions of collapse due to food shortages, the DPRK is more stable than ever, bolstered by substantial resources generated through new revenue streams. These include the world's largest cryptocurrency heist in February 2025, valued at approximately \$1.5 billion, in addition to revenue from weapons exports, international trade, and the export of cheap labor.

Our complex strategic environment frames our missions and priorities. U.S. forces in the ROK represent the only American forces deployed on the Asian continent. This presence is critical in a region that remains significant to U.S. national interests. We meet any challenge, driving forward alongside our ROK allies and a growing trilateral relationship with Japan. Our presence in the region provides a robust deterrent to aggression on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia while promoting security and American prosperity. Building on this foundation, our missions are

guided by USFK's four Lines of Operation (LOO): Defend the Homelands, Strengthen the Alliance, Prepare for Combat, and Build Coalitions. These priorities continue to define our strategy, inform our decisions, and focus our efforts.

No matter how you look at it, our servicemembers, civilians, and their families are our single greatest and most precious resource and advantage. We can do none of our local and regional activities without them. I want to thank Congress and this committee for maintaining the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) language to maintain our presence of 28,500 U.S. servicemembers deployed to the Republic of Korea. This manpower floor demonstrates our unwavering commitment to the U.S.-ROK Alliance.

Recently, accompanied tour lengths in Korea were aligned with other overseas locations and approved for extension to 36 months. This change is part of an effort to modernize our assignment policies under a flexible, conditions-based model, which establishes 36-month or 24-month tours for accompanied personnel, 12-month tours for unaccompanied personnel, and a limited number of 12-month tours only when accompanied tour requests exceed capacity. This change will deliver significant returns on investment in readiness, continuity, and financial savings. It will reduce the burden on the Military Services to source 7,400 servicemembers for 12-month tours each year, resulting in up to \$104 million in annual savings on Permanent Change of Station expenses. To support this initiative, we are focused on ensuring service members and their families enjoy a high quality of life and make a constant effort to maintain Korea's status as a rewarding and attractive assignment location. While the analysis is ongoing, with these changes will come requirements for infrastructure updates and improvements to housing, schools, and commissaries.

USFK has experienced historical challenges in Behavioral Health Care due to scarcity of providers, in addition to language and cultural barriers in referring patients to Korean providers.

Recently, Korea has been recovering from a year-long protest by their medical service providers which has exacerbated the already constrained health care system. To help mitigate these challenges, I appreciate Congress' effort to add Telehealth mental health services to the FY25 NDAA, encompassing every location, and maximizing coverage for our servicemembers and their dependents.

GAINING & MAINTAINING INFORMATION ADVANTAGE

The Tri-Command is always in contact with our adversaries through, and within, the information environment. Our ability to seize the initiative in the information environment is as critical during Armistice as it is during conflict. Our strategic approach synchronizes our public facing communication, OAI, and strategic intentions to contest unfavorable or false narratives. Our three-pronged effort to Inform to Educate, Inform to Engage, and Inform to Influence across the Tri-Command multiplies our efforts and allows us to gain and maintain information advantage.

Each component of the UNC/CFC/USFK provides a different function and capability needed to protect friendly and domestic audiences and prevent strategic miscalculation. While we can operate across all domains, it is vitally important that we continue to integrate and synchronize our strategic communication to counter adversary narratives. Because of increased adversary cooperation in the region, including initiatives being advanced by China, Russia, and the DPRK, the Tri-Command stands ready to support national narratives, conduct planning for operations in the information environment, and generate informational effects in support of each Tri-Command mission, deterrence, and USINDOPACOM. In the Tri-Command the LOEs are integrated into every single LOO and are critical to the success of that effort. The first, and most important, LOO is to "Defend the Homelands." I added an "s" to the end of homeland because I am also responsible for the 18 United Nations Command Member States currently operating in the Republic of Korea.

DEFEND THE HOMELAND(S)

As we continue to defend our homelands, recent developments offer a nuanced and evolving regional security landscape. In Korean history there have been periods of enhanced diplomacy which have reduced tensions on the Korean Peninsula, but DPRK has increased efforts to develop ballistic missile technology and WMD programs in violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions. It is critical to recognize that a potential conflict on the Korean Peninsula could have far-reaching implications for U.S. interests, regional, and global affairs. Recent developments have brought these concerns into sharper focus, with rising tensions between the ROK and DPRK over the past year. Contributing incidents include DPRK balloon launches carrying trash and waste into the ROK, the resumption of propaganda broadcasting along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), and GPS jamming in the West (Yellow) Sea. In response to the balloon launches and DPRK suspending the Comprehensive Military Agreement (CMA), Seoul subsequently suspended the same agreement in 2024. We must remember that the Korean War has not ended with the 1953 Armistice Agreement leading to a cessation of hostilities. It is still being fought in the diplomatic, information, economic, cyber, and technological development arenas of competition. At the 8th Party Congress in January 2021, Kim Jong Un (KJU) laid out a five-year plan and has since aggressively worked on advancing DPRK's missile and nuclear weapons program. In 2021, DPRK launched six ballistic missiles, conducted the first test of a Hypersonic Glide Vehicle (HGV), and the first test of a rail-launched missile system. The DPRK launched a record 70 ballistic missiles in 2022, achieving diversified land-launched platforms, and tested new Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) and Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) capabilities. In 2023, KJU unveiled ten nuclear warheads, a new solid-propellant ICBM, and advancements in underwater and cruise missile systems. The DPRK also launched 31 ballistic missiles and three satellites, including one that successfully entered

orbit. In 2024, the DPRK focused on cruise missile and HGV research and development (R&D) program advancements, launching 47 ballistic missiles and one failed satellite launch attempt. KJU also had two highly publicized visits to DPRK nuclear sites, supporting his stated intent to advance his nuclear weapon program. Over the past year and a half, the DPRK demonstrated a new ability to provide external support while simultaneously advancing domestic capabilities. So far this year, DPRK has launched at least eight ballistic missiles, including the most recent salvo on 10 March. In the coming year, we expect DPRK to work toward HGV and Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicle (MIRV) capabilities to complete KJU's 8th Party Congress goals. To counter this, we must dedicate our unwavering attention and investment.

This threat environment underscores the importance of Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) to defend against the DPRK's ballistic missile threats. The U.S. and ROK possess a robust, layered, and persistent IAMD network of sensors and shooters ready to defend military and civilian critical assets from ballistic missile and cruise missile threats. Along with Japan, we also now have a real-time trilateral missile warning data sharing mechanism against DPRK threats that enables communication of simulated and live adversary data. This sharing occurs across multiple platforms, including AEGIS ships and ground-based surveillance radars. U.S.-ROK Ballistic Missile Defense forces are rapidly enhancing their interoperability while fielding advanced sensors and weapon systems. The U.S. is scheduled to field and employ the IAMD Battle Command System during 2025-2026 which is a significant milestone toward enhancing IAMD across the region.

Moreover, USFK has established a nascent Strategic Integration Element (SIE) focused on extended deterrence cooperation. Since its activation, the element has supported the U.S. and ROK bilateral Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG), assumed increasing responsibility for bilateral Conventional-Nuclear Integration (CNI), including leading a series of CNI-focused tabletop

exercises (TTX), and built productive working relations with ROK Strategic Command. USFK has activated this new organization in response to an evolving threat and to support a tailored approach to meeting our commitment to the ROK. The Operations, Activities, and Investments (OAI) of this element will enhance strategic deterrence against the DPRK, the assurance of the ROK and regional allies, and USFK's contributions as the joint force integrator on the Korean Peninsula. My next LOO is "Strengthen the Alliance" and is focused on activities that deter the DPRK and regional adversaries, underscore to the DPRK that provocative actions will carry negative consequences, and positive actions will be met with positive responses, and assure the Korean people that the United States stands with them should that be required.

STRENGTHEN THE ALLIANCE

Our Mutual Defense Treaty with the ROK has remained in effect for over 70 years and serves as the linchpin for stability in one of the world's most significant economic regions. It commits both nations to provide mutual aid if either faces an external armed attack, but it does not specifically name an adversary. That fact is even more relevant in today's strategic environment and in this region, where authoritarian collusion presents evolving and growing threats to U.S. and ROK interests in the region. We must remain ready and proactive regarding enhancing our cooperation with the ROK government to better support the UNC mandate. These opportunities can include, but are not limited to, pursuing Defense Cooperation Agreements, Visiting Forces Agreements, and improved information sharing, so that we can fully integrate the capabilities of the UNC member states and optimize their effectiveness. The fellowship born out of the Korean War must be refreshed and revitalized should they be called upon again. Ultimately, our Alliance with the ROK and multinational partnerships will play a critical role in our efforts to maintain stability and prevent further escalation of these tensions toward a global crisis.

The persistent presence of U.S. military forces in Korea has modernized the ROK fighting force and defense industry. The ROK invests heavily in acquiring U.S. defense technologies which allows for multi-domain interoperability in a dynamic security environment. As a result, the ROK is familiar with an increasing number of major U.S. platforms, allowing the potential performance of Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) work. As of January 2025, the ROK has invested over \$30 billion in active government-to-government sales cases with the U.S. under the Foreign Military Sales system. These investments include MK 54 Lightweight Torpedoes, Precision Guided Munitions, the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, P-8A Patrol Aircraft, Patriot Advanced Capability-3 missile systems, Global Hawk Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, KF-16 aircraft Upgrades, Aegis Combat Systems, Harpoon and Hellfire Missiles, and AH-64E Attack Helicopters. This strength in our industrial partnership, backed by shared sacrifice and common purpose, ensures both our nations have the resources and capabilities to maintain peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and across the region.

The U.S. investment in ROK security yields returns over several areas. Economically, the ROK, backed by American strength, has grown to support nearly 450,000 American jobs and 2,100 U.S. companies located in Korea and in the United States. Militarily, ROK contributions reduce the U.S. costs by as much as 18% across all military expenditures. The ROK provides over \$500 million annually to USFK military construction needs, covering most non-relocation program construction requirements. Korean labor contributions in support of American military activities costs around \$412 million, accounting for 85% of appropriated-funded Korean labor costs on the Peninsula. Additionally, the Korean Logistics Cost Sharing program is valued at around \$145 million and offsets the supplies and services costs associated with USFK and its components. These strategic investments underscore the enduring partnership between our two nations, demonstrating a

shared vision for economic cooperation and collective prosperity.

Critical to the defense of Korea is readiness. Across the Tri-Command, activities and investments are designed to contribute to our ability to fight, as U.S. servicemembers, as an alliance, and as a coalition of like-minded states. My third, and most noticeable LOO, is to “Prepare for Combat.”

PREPARE FOR COMBAT

CFC has dual missions of deterrence and defense and receives its guidance from ministerial and general officer level forums. Our Alliance is defensive in nature, but if we must fight, CFC must be ready to win. To that end, our readiness, developed through combined training on the peninsula, is essential to deterring aggression. We accomplish this by conducting constructive, live, and virtual training during our exercises, such as FREEDOM SHIELD (FS), ULCHI FREEDOM SHIELD (UFS), and FREEDOM EDGE. These exercises ensure U.S. and ROK forces are postured to respond to any threat. In our most recent exercise, FS 25 in March, we conducted approximately 53 combined field training exercises covering tactical to strategic activities. The KTO is uniquely complex, with a combined, joint, all-domain, and interagency operating environment. To maintain CFC’s forward momentum, we must continue to adapt to shifting dynamics of the regional security environment, economic development, and combined military advancements to outpace any adversary.

As the premier Joint Force, USFK operates in all domains with our allies and partners, demonstrating the United States’ unwavering commitment to the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty. USFK deters DPRK aggression, builds combat readiness, plans and executes joint operations, and pursues interoperability with the ROK military. We also protect U.S. forces and citizens on the Korean Peninsula and serve as the primary conduit for ROK military relationships

with the U.S. Combatant Commands. As the USFK Commander, I lead and oversee the support that the U.S. component commands provide to the ROK.

Last year, we took a significant step forward in our combat readiness when the new combined Operations Plan (OPLAN) was signed. Over the past several years, Alliance planners worked diligently to construct and develop this plan, constantly testing and validating its concepts through execution during our bi-annual FS and UFS exercise events. In response to the evolving security environment, where the DPRK's WMD and missile capabilities are increasingly sophisticated, the new OPLAN better prepares CFC prior to armed conflict. We will continue to use this plan, refine it, conduct exercises, and develop our OAI's to support it. As we continue to shape and refine our exercise program in accordance with our new OPLAN, we look for additional opportunities to improve integration and interoperability.

Our combat readiness within the Alliance is further strengthened by the active participation of both military and civilian national security leaders including senior ROK leadership, enabling us to maintain a strong combined defense posture. The high level of participation in our large-scale UFS and FS exercises, demonstrates our warfighting capabilities and sends a clear message of U.S. and ROK resolve to our adversaries. This, in turn, underscores the importance of a regional defense posture, where like-minded nations work together to address common threats and challenges. The U.S. bilateral defense treaties with the Philippines and Japan, the Mutual Defense Treaty with the ROK, and global cooperation with the UNC Member States form a critical foundation for this posture. Operating under the nuclear shadows of China, Russia, and DPRK, the U.S. extended deterrent, coupled with multinational forces and capabilities, enables a more robust and coordinated deterrence strategy. Combined training further enhances interoperability and ensures rapid and

effective responses to emerging threats in the region. By working together, we can leverage our collective strengths, share best practices, and present a united front against aggression.

Moreover, U.S. strategic asset deployments to the Korean Peninsula allow training opportunities with multinational forces, operationalize extended deterrence, and signal U.S. commitment to the security of the ROK. Further, our role in the USINDOPACOM trilateral FREEDOM EDGE exercise seeks to enhance strategic coordination between the U.S., Japan, and Korea. This exercise brings our trilateral security cooperation to the next level and further fosters peace and security in the Indo-Pacific. Combined and Joint All-Domain training confirms our readiness and must be achieved through integration with Carrier Strike Groups, through trilateral air operations, employment of bomber task force missions, and joint, combined ground live fire exercises. We continue to see increased ROK participation in multilateral exercises as well as the involvement of U.S. personnel from multiple Combatant Commands. These efforts demonstrate U.S. commitment to the region and reinforce our shared commitment to stability by enhancing our collective defense capabilities across all domains.

It is essential that we draw upon the capabilities and capacities of our coalition of allies, partners, and friends to be prepared for any potential conflict. My last LOO is to “Build Coalitions.”

BUILD COALITIONS

To leverage our alliance network and partnerships on the Korean Peninsula, UNC hosts a monthly Round Table, where Ambassadors from member states gather to share perspectives on key issues affecting the ROK and engage in dialogue. This effort is part of our broader strategy to Build Coalitions, which provides a unified framework for engagements with bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral allies, partners, and friends. As the UNC’s international legitimacy is vital to maintaining regional stability, I am committed to reinforcing its role. Ultimately, the KTO must include the 18

United Nations Command Member States whose diverse resources, capabilities, and expertise are essential to advancing peace and security through demonstrated strength and unparalleled cooperation.

Operating under the UN flag, UNC enhances the ability to deter aggression, respond to crises, and oppose actions that are incongruent with international norms. UNC provides the following two enduring functions: First, UNC enforces the Armistice Agreement and maintains communication with the DPRK. Nothing is more tested than the Armistice Agreement and the weight of our international commitments in preserving security, freedom, and prosperity in the Republic of Korea.

Second, UNC coordinates the multinational contributions from the 18 countries that contribute forces and capabilities to the Command's mission. UNC Member State coalition building fosters multinational cooperation and offers strategic depth. We have observed growing contributions of our member states, including their continued participation in FS/UFS exercises with over 100 reinforcements for FS 25. Additionally, Germany joined UNC Headquarters in 2024, and we anticipate potential additions from other nations in the future. These efforts are examples of increased "buy-in" to the KTO that we need to maintain our advantage in the region.

Underscoring the need for continued innovation and adaptation in our strategy, the DPRK's capabilities to target command-and-control nodes, satellites, undersea communications cables, and infrastructure pose a significant threat to regional stability. To stay ahead, we must prioritize the integration of artificial intelligence-enabled common operating pictures, command-and-control, mission partner environment cloud-based communications, and enhanced data interoperability. The Tri-Command is committed to deepening trilateral and coalition cooperation to strengthen collaboration, defense technology sharing, and supply chain integration while also pursuing rapid access to the frequency spectrum for advanced surveillance and battle management systems. By

doing so, we can ensure the necessary speed and agility to respond to emerging threats and maintain our strategic advantage in the region.

The collective action by our allies and partners ensures we are strategically predictable, while being tactically and operationally unpredictable. We appreciate the interest of new nations to join UNC or contribute additional capabilities to our mission and thank those nations who have consistently demonstrated their commitment through their ongoing support and partnership in the defense of the ROK.

CONCLUSION

The security environment on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia requires untiring attention and a multi-faceted approach. The DPRK's evolving nuclear and missile programs, coupled with its strengthening ties with Russia and China, necessitate a united front among allies. The U.S. remains dedicated to its unwavering commitment to the combined defense of the ROK, continuously modernizing defense strategies, enhancing interoperability with regional partners, and employing advanced technologies to counter emerging threats. Through surgical diplomacy, robust posture, and an unyielding commitment to peace, the U.S. and its allies will continue to safeguard stability and prosperity in this critical region. We remain focused on maintaining readiness and strengthening deterrence. In Korea, we train and operate in a combined, joint, and all-domain environment every day. The U.S.- ROK alliance is stronger than it has ever been. Thank you to the U.S. Congress, Service Components, USINDOPACOM, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Under One Flag!

“Katchi-Kapshida” We Go Together!

Fight Tonight!