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CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

**The Expanding U.S. – Korea Alliance:
Protecting Freedom and Democracy
in Asia**

**Testimony before
Committee on Foreign Affairs
United States House of Representatives,
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific**

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My name is Bruce Klingner. I am Senior Research Fellow for Northeast Asia at The Heritage Foundation. The views I express in this testimony are my own, and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

It has been said that the U.S. – Republic of Korea alliance was ‘forged in blood.’ That is surely true, because the true mettle of an enduring partnership...of a *friendship* such as that between our two countries, can only come when we have shared not only the best of times, but also of the worst of times.

Those tragic three years of conflict that began on June 25, 1950 have been referred to as “The Forgotten War.” It is an unfitting label since neither it nor American sacrifices will ever be forgotten by the people of the Republic of Korea. Nor should that shared ordeal ever be forgotten by those Americans who treasure freedom and the willingness to bravely fight for it even against seemingly insurmountable odds.

This alliance forged in blood has also been tempered by repeated crisis. The events of June 1950 are not merely a distant historical event. Last year North Korea conducted two unprovoked acts of war against our South Korean ally. These attacks, along with previous North Korean provocations, make all too clear that the need for vigilance has not diminished.

Even as the Republic of Korea participates in international efforts to further the causes of freedom and democracy overseas, it must maintain a strong military to protect those values at home against the North Korean threat.

The U.S.-South Korean alliance has been undervalued in recent years. The U.S.-Japan alliance is critical to American interests, but South Korea has capabilities that are not available to Japan. Tokyo is constrained in its security contributions by its historical legacies, constitutional limits, restrictive rules of engagement, and low defense spending.

U.S. Reception of Lee Myung-bak Reflects Strength of the Alliance

The United States took out all the stops during President Lee Myung-bak’s visit this month in order to demonstrate the strength of the bilateral relationship. Alliance managers in both countries describe the military, political, and economic ties as the best they’ve ever seen. President Lee was accorded a formal state visit, a state dinner, addressing a joint session of Congress, and even a road trip with President Obama to Detroit.

This treatment is not an accident. It is a reflection of how fulsome the relationship is which is the result of a lot hard work by both sides. With the approval of the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement, there are no major substantive areas of disagreement between Washington and Seoul. Indeed, much of the summit was to discuss additional areas of bilateral cooperation beyond the Korean Peninsula.

China and North Korea should take note of the shared values, visions, national interests, and objectives that this relationship is built on. Japan should see that the strength of the U.S.- Republic of Korea relationship is based on both past achievements and the likelihood of future progress. This goes beyond mere rhetoric or promises of action that repeatedly go unfilled.

Strong Alliance Supports Bilateral Objectives

The U.S.-South Korean security alliance has been indispensable in achieving Washington's strategic objectives and maintaining peace and stability in northeast Asia. The U.S. security guarantee has long deterred a North Korean attack while providing the shield behind which South Korea developed its economic strength and institutionalized democratic rule.

South Korea has devoted considerable resources to protecting itself against a daunting spectrum of North Korean security threats. Seoul has initiated extensive defense reforms to enable its military to protect the country more effectively while concurrently expanding its security reach beyond the Korean Peninsula. These reforms are commendable and will redress many of South Korea's security shortcomings.

South Korea does not bear its security burden alone, however, and its alliance with the United States will continue to play an irreplaceable role in maintaining peace and stability throughout East Asia. Despite its security reform initiatives, South Korea will remain heavily reliant on U.S. military capabilities.

Washington should therefore support Seoul's defense reform initiatives while continuing to ensure South Korea's security through U.S. military deployments and the extended deterrence guarantee.

South Korean Defense Reforms

On March 8, 2011, South Korean Defense Minister Kim Kwan-jin announced 73 short-, mid-, and long-term military reform objectives of a new defense reform plan DR to be implemented during 2011 to 2030. The DR 307 plan derives its name from the date—March 7, or 3/07—on which it was approved by President Lee Myung-bak.

Defense Minister Kim stated that the plan's main priorities were “strengthening cohesion of the armed forces, obtaining active deterrence capabilities, and beefing up efficiency.” He commented that ROK forces had become bulky and inefficient during the past 20 years, degrading their ability to respond to North Korean provocations.

Deficiencies in the ROK military's response to the North Korean attacks in 2010 demonstrated the need to expand and accelerate ongoing efforts to improve South Korean joint operational capabilities. The Presidential Commission for the Advancement of National Defense recommended that a single commander have authority over all military services' combat assets.

After the attacks, South Korea shifted the main priority of its defense planning. Rather than preparing for a large-scale invasion and total war, Seoul focused on flexible, customized responses to localized military attacks. For example, defense planners placed greater emphasis on the navy and air force's role in retaliating against North Korean infiltrations and tactical provocations, particularly in the West Sea.

This shift marks a reversal from earlier assessments that predicted North Korea's conventional force threat would decrease, allowing Seoul to prioritize its navy and air force for missions away from the Korean Peninsula.

Following the Cheonan attack, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Kim Sung-chan redirected the navy's focus away from a decade-long emphasis on blue-water operations toward increased readiness against North Korean attacks. The navy increased procurement for anti-submarine warfare, including minesweepers, anti-submarine helicopters, and sensor systems.¹

While an earlier defense reform plan (DRP 2020) was focused primarily on future North Korean threats, the two attacks in 2010 prompted the Lee administration to redirect defense reform toward near-term security initiatives. Although DR 307 has mid- and long-term elements, Seoul will now be focused on enhancing military readiness against imminent North Korean asymmetric threats.

Defense Minister Kim explained that the aim of DR 307 was to “proactively deter current threats posed by the enemy rather than cope with potential threats in the future.” Kim added that with DR307, “it will take one or two days for our military to destroy North Korea's long-range artillery pieces, from the current one week.”²

Parameters of DR 307. The Ministry of Defense announced that DR 307 contained several changes in the Korean military command structure, unit structure, troop structure, and force structure. Specifically, DR 307 called for:

- **Command structure reform.** This reform creates an efficient military command system to take the initiative in war planning, preparing for theater operations after wartime OPCON transition, and establishing a new combined defense system for South Korean–U.S. combined operations.
- **Unit structure reform.** This reform reduces the number of units and streamlines the mid-tier command elements by augmenting combat capabilities of combat troop organizations.
- **Troop structure reform.** This reform shifts the military command toward a technology-intensive structure supported mainly by officers and NCOs—an attempt to address the current dearth of skilled soldiers.
- **Force structure reform.** This reform prepares the South Korean army to confront current and future North Korean threats by reinforcing jointness of forces and procuring necessary war capabilities.³

Improving Military Service Jointness. DR 307 improves interoperability and combat effectiveness of South Korea's armed forces by restructuring the top military command structure and better integrating the different service branches. The South Korean joint chiefs of staff have

¹ Jung Sunk-ki, “Navy to Focus on Littoral Warfare,” Korea Times, September 15, 2010, at http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/09/205_73102.html.

² Yonhap News, “Defense Chief Unveils Plans to Reform Military, Enhance Interoperability,” March 8, 2011, at <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2011/03/08/69/0301000000AEN20110308011300315F.HTML>.

³ Republic of Korea, Ministry of National Defense, 2010 Defense White Paper, May 5, 2011, p. 136, at http://www.mnd.go.kr/cms_file/info/mndpaper/2010/2010WhitePaperAll_eng.pdf.

been strengthened so that the chairman will now command all operations during war and peacetime following wartime OPCON transition.

The chairman, JCS will function as the theater operational commander with limited administrative authority (personnel, logistics, training) over the military services. Rather than concentrating only on administrative tasks, the service chiefs will be put into the operational chain of command under the chairman, JCS.

The operations commands of the Army, Navy, and Air Force will be merged, and each of the three armed services will command the unified operations units. These changes will transform the joint chiefs of staff into an inter-service operational command.

DR 307 also mandates enhancing early warning and real-time battlefield surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities both on the Korean Peninsula and in the surrounding areas. To have the capacity to fulfill this mandate, South Korea will need to boost its network-centric warfare capabilities by establishing a command, control, communications, computer and intelligence (C4I) system and battlefield network in order to secure its capacity for integrated combat.⁴

Defending Against North Korean Incursions. To boost defenses of the northwest border islands, Seoul will augment military forces and sensors in the area, increase alliance naval and combined-arms exercises in the West Sea, and establish a joint command headquarters.⁵ DR 307 reverses DRP 2020's planned reduction of 4,000 Marines and instead augments the Korean Marine Corps by 2,000 to 4,000 additional Marines.

Seoul will address long-standing logistical shortcomings by purchasing 40 more helicopters for the Marine Corps as well as additional amphibious ships and light-armored vehicles. Furthermore, in addition to accelerating the procurement of high-altitude spy drones, South Korea will secure advanced counter-battery radar systems and precision-guided munitions capable of attacking North Korean artillery systems.

DR 307 Improves South Korean Combat Capabilities. DR 307 lays a strong foundation for South Korea's planned transfer of wartime OPCON in 2015.⁶ Seoul should be commended for creating, for the first time, an organizational structure capable of assuming independent military command while the United States serves in a supporting role.

The plan will enable South Korea to develop a more flexible and joint military force. By redressing the divided military command and administrative structure, Seoul will be able to exercise more effective joint command.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 144.

⁵ Republic of Korea, Ministry of National Defense, "Defense Ministry Unveils New Defense Reform."

⁶ Wartime OPCON Transition will shift from a command system centered on the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command to a new combined defense system led by the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and supported by a to-be-created U.S. Korea Command. In 2006, President Roh Moo-hyun requested that the U.S. return wartime operational control (OPCON) of ROK forces. In 2007, the U.S. and South Korea agreed to OPCON transfer in April 2012. The transfer was subsequently postponed until 2015.

Revised Plan Still Faces Challenges. Without question, DR 307 will improve South Korea's ability to prevail in a major war against North Korea. However, DR 307 does not provide South Korea with the agility or military efficiency to respond to Pyongyang's tactical provocations. Furthermore, senior U.S. military officials have privately commented that South Korean forces are not currently organized for joint operations, particularly at the tactical level.

The South Korean military's tactical deficiencies are primarily the result of insufficient inter-connectivity between the various service branches. The military also lacks necessary tactical C4ISR and training to conduct cross-service operations. The Combined Forces Command (CFC), which will cease after the transfer of wartime OPCON authority in 2015, provides cross-integration and jointness at subordinate levels. All South Korean units are tied into the CFC, which serves as the overall coordinating body for Seoul's military.

With cessation of the CFC looming, South Korea needs to put into place agile command and control structures that enable the rapid application of appropriate joint military power at the tactical level with control at the operational or even strategic level. DR 307 does not fulfill this requirement—an oversight that must be addressed in the near future.

For all its improvements over earlier defense reform plans, DR 307 still faces fiscal challenges. DR 307 remains reliant on government funding for required defense resources. In the past, South Korea has often purchased “shiny baubles” (high-tech weapons) without also acquiring necessary logistics, sustainment, training, C4ISR enablers, and integration capabilities. Seoul must ensure that it does not repeat the same mistake as it moves forward with funding DR 307.

Current Missile Defense Inadequate to Defend South Korea

Despite North Korea's steadily increasing missile threat, previous South Korean Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun downplayed the danger in order to garner domestic support for their outreach toward Pyongyang. The presidents were fearful that deploying a missile defense system or even criticizing North Korea over its military provocations and human rights abuses would anger Pyongyang, lead to a collapse of the inter-Korean engagement policy, and strain relations with China.

President Roh resisted joining an integrated missile defense system with the United States and Japan. Instead, he limited the South Korean response to building a low-tier missile shield of older land-based Patriot-2 missiles and SM-2 Block III A/B missiles on Aegis destroyers without theater ballistic missile capability.

Seoul has instead focused on an independent South Korean missile defense system which remains at the preliminary stage. The most capable missile defense systems on the Korean Peninsula are the 64 PAC-3s operated by the U.S. Army.

Since Lee Myung-bak was elected president, South Korea has been more receptive to augmenting missile defenses, but has not followed through with requisite actions. Most notably, Seoul continues to resist joining a comprehensive regional network with the United States and Japan.

Noh Dae-lae, the head of the Defense Acquisition Program Administration, told a National Assembly hearing that Seoul would be unable to properly counter North Korea's ballistic missiles capable of carrying chemical or even nuclear warheads for the next 10 years.⁷

Calibrating South Korean Defense Capabilities to the Threat. To adequately defend itself against the ballistic missile threat, South Korea must deploy a more sophisticated missile defense system, including PAC-3 and SM-3 missiles. To implement a regional missile defense network, Seoul and Tokyo would need to establish new military relationships, including sharing security information. Linking sensors would improve defense capabilities against short-range ballistic missiles.

Such cooperation would also be an effective way to augment nascent trilateral military operations among the U.S. and its allies, which, to date, have been hampered by historic animosities and unre-solved political issues between South Korea and Japan.

Expanding the Alliance Role: Bigger Is Better

To respond more effectively to the 21st century threat environment, it is important that the alliance begin the evolution from a singularly focused mission to a more robust values-based relationship that looks beyond the Korean Peninsula.

The alliance is currently focused on the North Korean threat, but "heightened nationalism, historical animosities, territorial disputes, resource competition, and historical struggles for regional hegemony all come together to pose long-term regional security challenges in this area which is so critical to our economy and other national interests."⁸

The U.S. and South Korea should develop a strategic, multifaceted, values-based alliance that addresses peninsular, regional, and global security requirements. It is in America's interest to have South Korea as a global partner in responding to regional and global security issues.

South Korea is already purchasing some capabilities that would allow it to assume a larger regional role. Some recent military acquisitions are better suited to addressing post-unification threats than to dealing with North Korean threats. These include King Sejong-class 7,600-ton Aegis destroyers, Type 214 submarines, and indigenous long-range cruise missiles such as the 1,500 km-range Hyunmoo 3C.

South Korea could expand its global role include counterterrorism, counterproliferation, regional stability, natural disaster relief, humanitarian operations, and protecting sea lanes of communication.

What South Korea Should Do

⁷ Lee Tae-hoon, "South remains defenseless against North's missile threats," *The Korea Times*, October 24, 2011, <http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/include/print.asp?newsIdx=97240>.

⁸ General Burwell B. Bell, testimony in hearing, Fiscal Year 2009 National Defense Authorization Budget Request for U.S. Pacific Command and U.S. Forces Korea, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives, March 12, 2008.

- **Fully fund defense requirements.** Budget shortfalls have always undermined attempts to reform South Korea's military. For any defense reform initiatives to take hold, Seoul must ensure legislative approval of necessary laws and sufficient budgetary resources.

The new defense reform plan should be implemented without delay to ensure a strong national security posture. If Seoul does not fully fund DR 307, it should reduce the pace of planned force reductions.

- **Procure proper equipment.** As the South Korean military continues to modernize, it must procure the right equipment, weapons, and force mix to provide strong deterrent and combat capabilities. Seoul should acquire:
 1. Improved command, control, communication, computer, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities to enable integrated combat capabilities down to tactical level. This improvement requires sensors such as AWACs and high-altitude UAVs as well as integrating command and communication systems.
 2. Enhanced long-range precision-strike capabilities, including fifth-generation fighter aircraft, attack helicopters, precision-guided munitions, extended-range surface-to-surface missiles, and counter-battery radar and artillery systems.
 3. Target-location and target-designation equipment for ground tactical teams' control of aerial delivered precision guided munitions.
 4. Increased sealift and airlift for the Marine Corps by purchasing more amphibious ships, transport helicopters, and light armored-vehicles.
 5. Flexible systems to fulfill multiple missions and enhance interoperability among services. For example, the Dokdo helicopter transport ship improves sealift, enables Marine amphibious assaults against North Korea, and supports overseas HADR and peacekeeping missions.
- **Create a joint task force headquarters for crisis response.** In order to conduct smaller-scale strike missions, the ROK should establish, equip, and train a standing joint task force headquarters directly subordinate to C/JCS. Similar to a U.S. Joint Task Force, there would not be a large number of units assigned to the headquarters. Instead, varying units would be assigned temporarily to the headquarters to conduct training for limited attack scenarios.

Developing a clearly defined unified command structure would enable Seoul to synchronize selected combat power from all of South Korea's military services. In doing so, the South Korean military could conduct limited but powerful retaliatory strike missions in response to North Korean military provocations and aggression.

- **Expand the South Korean Marine Corps.** The first step in any such expansion would be to fulfill the presidential task force's recommendation to add 4,000 Marines to the Marine Corps. Expanding the ROK Marine Corps would have several important benefits: It would enhance any defense of the northwest islands; it would increase full-spectrum attack capabilities against the North; and it would support Seoul's "Global Korea" strategy by

permitting greater off-peninsula participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations and other international security missions.

- **Improve the reserve mobilization system.** Currently, all ROK reserve military units are mobilized at Defcon 2; a more tailored mobilization structure could allow some units to be mobilized at Defcon 3. Also, the ROK should improve reserve training to ensure that it is able to respond to North Korean rear area attacks or regime collapse.
- **Deploy a multilayered missile defense system.** Such a system should be interoperable with a U.S. regional missile network to provide for a more coherent and effective defense of allied military facilities and the South Korean populace. This system would include purchasing and deploying PAC-3 ground-based missiles and SM-3 missiles and augmenting missile defense planning and exercises with the U.S. and Japan.

What the U.S. Should Do

Although defense reform is an internal South Korean issue, America's national interests remain at stake, as any reforms affect the alliance's capabilities against the multi-faceted North Korean military threat. It is therefore important for the United States to remain fully engaged in the evolution and implementation of DR 307.

- **The U.S. Congress and the South Korean National Assembly should hold public hearings regarding peninsular security issues.** These hearings should address what steps need to be taken to ensure that the alliance is still able to deter, defend, and defeat any North Korean aggression. Maintaining transparency between the allies and the populaces of both South Korea and the United States is necessary to secure strong public support for defense reform initiatives and U.S. military forces on the Korean Peninsula.

These hearings should also provide a threat assessment of North Korea's military; the roles, missions, and capabilities of South Korean forces; their relationship with U.S. forces both pre- and post-transfer of wartime OPCON; and requisite funding levels. Both countries should determine necessary defense funding levels, identify any potential shortfalls, and review the plans to redress them.

- **Washington should accept South Korea's request to extend its ballistic missile range.** As South Korea prepares to assume greater responsibility for its own defense, it makes sense for Seoul to be able to hold all North Korean targets at risk. Seoul does not have a ballistic missile capability to target all North Korean missile units because of self-imposed range limits on South Korean missiles. Currently, Seoul's surface-to-surface ballistic missiles are limited to a range of 300 kilometers; this should be extended to 1,000 km.⁹

⁹ In 1979, South Korea signed an agreement with the U.S. to limit its ballistic missile capabilities to 180 km (112 mile) range and 500 kilogram payload. In 2001, the U.S. and South Korea modified the agreement to allow Seoul to develop missiles to the export limit of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), i.e., a range of 300 km (186 miles) with a 500 kilogram payload.

South Korea's voluntary self-restriction did not prevent North Korea from developing missiles that exceeded the MTCR ranges. Seoul should have a sufficiently robust indigenous force to deter, defend, and defeat North Korean hostile actions, including a ballistic missile attack.

- **Washington must maintain a robust forward-deployed military presence in South Korea.** Such a presence is necessary to defend a critical ally and maintain peace in Northeast Asia. The Obama Administration should therefore emphasize its commitment both to maintaining U.S. forces at the promised 28,500 troop level and to augmenting those forces during a crisis in order to deter, defend against, and defeat security threats to the region.

Washington should also affirm its unequivocal commitment to defending South Korea by maintaining the threefold U.S. promise of extended deterrence comprised of conventional forces, missile defense, and the nuclear umbrella.

- **Congress should fully fund ongoing U.S. military realignment plans in South Korea and Japan.** These plans include the Yongsan base relocation, land partnership plan, and family housing for accompanied tours. Constructing the Futenma Replacement Facility on Okinawa for U.S. Marine Corps air units is critical for maintaining U.S. military capabilities, including for Korean contingencies.

Proposed cuts by the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee would undermine years of carefully crafted diplomacy that achieved U.S. strategic objectives and resolved contentious issues with allies.

Potential additional draconian cuts of \$500 billion to the defense budget would have a devastating impact on U.S. ability to deter security threats in Asia, protect American national interests, and fulfill our defense treaty obligations to critical allies in the region.

- **The United States should augment deployments and training exercises in South Korea by:**
 1. Increasing training deployments of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (stationed on Okinawa) to South Korea to facilitate improvement of South Korean Marine capabilities as part of DR 307 and Northwest Island Command;
 2. Demonstrating that the strategic flexibility strategy also works to South Korea's advantage by including U.S. combat units deployed from the United States and U.S. forward bases in Asia in future training exercises on the Korean Peninsula;
 3. Increasing the scope and frequency of naval exercises, including U.S. carriers, particularly in the West Sea;

The Missile Technology Control Regime is a voluntary arrangement among countries to control the export of ballistic missiles (and their components) capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction. The only specific restriction in the MTCR is a prohibition on the transfer of missile production facilities. The agreement permits cooperation among member countries, including missile transfers, as long as the recipient country pledges not to modify any transferred systems to deliver weapons of mass destruction.

4. Returning an Army attack helicopter battalion to South Korea; and
5. Forward deploying an additional U.S. Air Force combat fighter squadron to South Korea.¹⁰

A Critical Journey Begins

South Korea has begun a necessary though difficult journey to modernize its military structure and implement a more effective command structure. For this, America's ally should be strongly commended. The benefits of such reform are impressive: DR 307 will enable South Korea to assume the mantle of wartime operational control in 2015 more effectively. The defense reform plan also improves Seoul's ability to conduct large-scale military operations in response to a North Korean invasion.

Yet questions remain about Seoul's ability to respond to North Korean limited attacks and provocations, such as those against the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong Island. Washington should work with its ally to ensure that South Korea can respond to any future attack.

While North Korean threats will remain the paramount focus of the U.S.–South Korean alliance, neither country should lose sight of the benefits of Seoul's "going global" with its political, economic, and military capabilities. Seoul should be encouraged to assume a greater role on the world stage that is commensurate with its growing capabilities.

The Joint Vision for the Alliance announced by Presidents Obama and Lee in June 2009 called for building a comprehensive strategic alliance that addressed not only bilateral concerns, but regional and global issues as well.¹¹

U.S. policy statements that imply a secondary status for American military relations with South Korea vis-à-vis Japan are a disservice to the stalwart military bonds forged during 50 years of the bilateral alliance with Seoul.

South Korea serves as a shining example of how a small nation can benefit from the international community. In turn, this "miracle on the Han River" can now reach out to assist other nations.

¹⁰ General B.B. Bell, "What Must Be Done About North Korea," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Office of the Korea Chair, December 14, 2010, at http://csis.org/files/publication/101214_What_must_be_done_about_North_Korea_Platform.pdf

¹¹ The White House, "Joint Vision for the Alliance of the United States of America and the Republic of Korea," June 16, 2009, at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Joint-vision-for-the-alliance-of-the-United-States-of-America-and-the-Republic-of-Korea.

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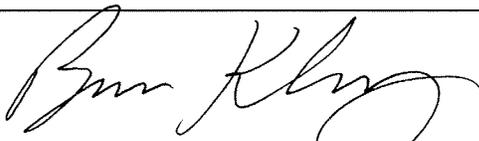
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