

Gen. James D. Thurman's opening statement to the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee.

Washington D.C., March 28, 2012

“Chairman McKeon, Congressman Smith, and distinguished members of the committee: thank you for this opportunity to update you on United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and United States Forces Korea. It is a great honor to lead the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines serving our country in the Republic of Korea, and I thank the members of the committee for their support for our warriors. The relationship with South Korea is the finest military partnership I have experienced in my thirty-seven year career. Together, our militaries deter aggression and maintain peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.

U.S. military presence in the Republic of Korea supports U.S. national interests and a key ally in the northeast Asia region. Since the U.S. and the Republic of Korea forged an alliance in battle over 60 years ago, the Republic of Korea has become a vibrant democracy, economic success, and global security partner, currently serving beside us in Afghanistan and off the Horn of Africa. In stark contrast, one of the world's poorest, most closed, and most militarized countries, North Korea, lies less than 20 miles from the northern districts of Seoul, a city of 24 million people.

The change in North Korean leadership has led to a period of increased uncertainty on the Korean peninsula. The new leader appears to be following the same pattern as his late father and grandfather. Examples of this are North Korea's recent announcement of their intention to launch a satellite with a ballistic missile and their rhetoric denouncing both the Nuclear Security Summit and Alliance military exercises. These actions are increasing tensions on the peninsula.

Additionally, North Korea continues to adhere to its “military first” policy. They maintain the fourth largest conventional military force in the world, the world’s largest special operations force, and significant long range artillery capabilities. Over 70% of this combat power is arrayed within 90 miles of the Demilitarized Zone. North Korea also continues to pursue asymmetric capabilities, especially in the areas of nuclear, missile, and cyber. The development of these asymmetric capabilities and the forward stationing of its conventional forces provide North Korea the ability to attack or provoke the Republic of Korea with little warning. Kim Jong Un’s recent public appearances, including a visit to the Joint Security Area, continue to stress his role as military commander and further reinforce the importance North Korea places on its military first policy. It is undetermined at this time whether or not he will change any North Korean strategies or policies in the future.

An Armistice Agreement keeps our forces separated from North Korean forces. The 16 sending state members of the United Nations Command maintain the Armistice from the Republic of Korea, promoting stability and investigating any alleged Armistice violations. The participation of the sending states in the Republic of Korea demonstrates the commitment of the international community to stability on the Korean peninsula and enhances our ability to successfully deter aggression.

Our deterrent capability is based on U.S. and ROK military readiness, and this is my primary focus. I have conducted a thorough review, including two combined exercises, and I have determined our forces remain ready to defend the peninsula. The ROK military is a modern, well-led, well-trained, and ready force. It is also essential that we maintain U.S. force readiness at the highest level given our requirement to “fight tonight”.

Congress asked me to review and assess Tour Normalization and force relocation initiatives at my confirmation hearing. It is my assessment that expanding Tour Normalization

beyond our current authorization of 4,645 is unaffordable under the current construct. Our two force relocation plans are on track, and I intend to execute them. I will continue to review these plans to ensure they place the right capabilities in the right places to meet operational requirements.

The charge to maintain the Armistice, deter aggression, defend the Republic of Korea, and take care of our warriors and their families is my primary concern. Again, I thank you for your support of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, DoD civilians and Families serving in Korea. I now look forward to your questions.”