

Gen. James D. Thurman's opening statement to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations; Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies subcommittee.

Washington D.C., March 29, 2012

"Chairman Culberson, Congressman Bishop, and distinguished members of the subcommittee: 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.

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. Together, our militaries deter aggression and maintain stability on the Korean peninsula.

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".

However, the nature of the security challenges that our Alliance faces are ever changing. When Kim Jong Un became the ruler of North Korea following his father's death, uncertainty on the peninsula increased. North Korea's recent announcement and intent to launch a satellite with a ballistic missile increased tensions on the peninsula. Additionally, North Korean rhetoric protesting and denouncing the Nuclear Security Summit and Alliance exercises indicate that

Kim Jong Un is pursuing policies and strategies similar to those of his late father and grandfather.

For example, 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. As North Korea further develops these asymmetric capabilities, the nature of the security challenges facing our Alliance will change.

In order to posture U.S. forces and the Alliance to meet any future security challenges, we have undertaken three major transformation initiatives: Tour Normalization, the Land Partnership Plan, and the Yongsan Relocation Plan. It is my assessment that expanding Tour Normalization beyond our current authorization of 4,645 families is unaffordable under the current construct. However, our two bilateral force relocation initiatives - the Land Partnership Plan which relocates 2nd Infantry Division from north of Seoul to a consolidated footprint at Camp Humphries, and the Yongsan Relocation Plan which moves U.S. forces out of Seoul - are on track. The expansion of Camp Humphreys to support the consolidation of US forces in Korea is sized to accommodate the service-members and accompanying families within the 4,645 authorized command-sponsored positions. I continue to review these plans to ensure they are operationally focused, placing the right capabilities in the right places to meet operational requirements.

There are four Military Construction Projects in the Fiscal Year 2013 President's Budget Request that support our future force posture by modernizing and increasing our capabilities in the Pyeongtaek-area enduring hub. Osan and Kunsan Airbases will both receive modernized

and expanded medical facilities which improve the ability of these bases to meet their wartime requirements and provide quality, modern medical care to their assigned military personnel. The replacement of the 29 year old Osan Elementary School is part of the Department of Defense Education Activity's world-wide program to replace substandard schools. Finally, the new battalion headquarters at Camp Humphries is for a unit relocating from outside Korea to provide capabilities required in our war plans. These projects are designed to support service-members and those families authorized within the 4,645 cap, and will ensure our service-members have the infrastructure they need to be prepared to do their wartime mission.

The charge to maintain the Armistice, defend the Republic of Korea, and take care of our warriors and their families is my primary concern. I thank the members of this subcommittee for their support in providing our warriors the key infrastructure they need to execute their wartime mission in Korea. I also thank you for your support of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Department of Defense Civilians, our veterans, and their families. Your actions over the years have improved the quality of life for our nation's most valuable treasure. I am now ready to answer any questions you may have."