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Panel 3 – The R.O.K.'s Self-Reliant Military Policy and the CFC:
Replacing the Armistice

John Tilelli

President and Chief Executive Officer
Cypress International

Former Commander in Chief
United Nations Command, ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command, U.S.
Forces/Korea

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MILLER REPORTING CO., INC.
735 8th STREET, S.E.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20003-2802
(202) 546-6666

PROCEEDINGS

GENERAL TILELLI: I agree generally with my good friend Minister Kim. I will disagree with one thing because it's definitional. The U.S. forces in Korea are not a trip wire. They are a commitment of the United States of America to send their sons and daughters to Korea to die in the defense of Korea, and not just the forces there, but 600,000-plus more, if needed. So let's make sure we don't think of it as a trip wire, something that you fall over and it trips something, think of it as American lives to defend Korea.

Secondly, it is not a matter of "if" OPCON [operational control] changes, it's a matter of "when." And are we on a time line on a bus that is going to get us to change OPCON on a specific time, or are we on an event-driven time line? That means when you have capability to do what you think you need to do to continue the defense and deter in the Republic of Korea, that is when you change the OPCON. And what is the metric that you use to decide when?

I must say this is as a disclaimer: these are my own thoughts, nongovernmental, just an old soldier who thinks about the ROK as his second home, as a place I love. So in that construct, the ROK and the U.S. forces need to build a capability. As General Kim knows, I love country and western music, and there is a song that says, "Be careful what you pray for, because you might get it." So as we think about this, we need to think about it in a capability sense.

The Korean Peninsula still remains, in my mind's eye, one of the world's conventional theaters where interstate conflict, like it or not, is possible. And even as we all hope and pray that the six-party talks, the North-South rapprochement, the Kaesong Industrial Complex, increased tourism and others with North Korea, the American forces with their valued ally as a part of the CFC remains ready to defend and defeat any determined enemy, whether or not there is a perception that there is an enemy by the people who they defend. Consequently, in that construct, I will talk about CFC and wartime OPCON and what I think are the things that we should consider.

We all hope that there is reconciliation and reunification of the Peninsula and its people, and we all say that the alliance, both the national alliance and the military alliance, has achieved to this date in 50-plus years, peace and stability on the Peninsula even as we face the North Korean nuclear threat. Whether they have 1 or 101 nuclear weapons, it is a threat for whatever reason they have them. Since its establishment in 1978 – and I am going to talk a little bit about history – the mission of CFC has been clear: deter aggression and defeat attack. It plans and conducts joint combined exercises, it plans for contingencies, it makes recommendations for developing and supporting combined forces whether they be ROK-U.S., other nations, United Nations, et cetera. It complies with the Armistice, it supports the Commander of the United Nations Command, and the functions are achieved through the ROK-U.S. structure, not through

the U.S. structure only. It has been totally successful, and it has not been stagnant. It has matured over time, it matures every day, and it has been absolutely collaborative.

General Kim and I were Siamese twins when it came to the CINC and the DCINC in working with the ROK and the U.S. governments, totally collaborative in its responsibilities. The current alliance agreements provide that both the ROK and the U.S. place designated forces under the command of the Commander, ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command who responds to the strategic guidance of both governments.

What is happening now? The real question is, why is it happening now? Does it have to do with administration? Does it have to do with tragedy? Does it have to do with timing? Does it have to do with a new generation? It has to do with all those things. But that is not the point. The point is, the current ROK administration has repeatedly called for the return of ROK wartime OPCON of forces. This has been stated in public speeches, in comments, and has become an emotional issue in the ROK, among other things.

The issue culminated in a discussion between the U.S. SECDEF and the ROK MND at the Thirty-Seventh Security Consultative Meeting in October 2005 where there was agreement to fully examine a ROK-U.S. command relationship study. They are supposed to report out this year.

The issues is not “if,” but “when,” as I said, and the issue is truly understanding what are the second- and third-level consequences, and are we rushing to a time-driven rather than an event-driven change of OPCON. If the government of the ROK withdraws its forces from the combined authority of CFC, it essentially forces the disestablishment of the CFC. The alliance will likely move to some bilateral command relationship, and I believe that the ROK transformation supports a wartime OPCON of ROK forces by the ROK government.

Once that occurs, U.S. forces in Korea will assume a supporting role to the ROK Command. What are the issues, and General Kim talked about some of the issues, that must be resolved? I call them maybe second- and third-level consequences, maybe some are tactical, some are operational, and some are strategic.

The first one that General Kim said was going to occur, and in my time in Korea and since then I have not seen it occur, and when you compare it to the U.S. investment of tens of billions of dollars a year in the Republic of Korea to keep the capability going, the first question is, will the ROK government invest sufficient resources to make the ROK forces realize self-sufficiency? Someone has to peel that onion and decide that.

Secondly, will C4ISR modernization occur in time to shift OPCON? That is a critical capability. If U.S. forces remain on the Peninsula, how are indications and warning accomplished? A tactical issue. What roles, missions, and functions do U.S.

forces do in support of the mutual defense? What plan, whose plan, and who drives the effort as we look forward? That is a tactical issue, but it is a strategic issue. What does the U.S. commitment beyond OPCON change in light of current complementary capabilities?

As we think about the U.S. and ROK forces, we have to understand that they were developed over 50-plus years, and that the U.S. had capabilities, the ROK developed forces, and there were complementary capabilities, so that the sum of the parts was greater than either of the two. When you take away, essentially, the sum of the parts, and I assume that that will occur when you get self-sufficiency, you have to develop those capabilities that are going away or have some process to ensure that they are retained. That is a nuance that is easier said than done.

How does the new command relationship impact other alliances in the region? Minister Kim mentioned that. What does North Korea do to exploit a dual-command system, or do they? They have exploited seams in the alliance already. Now we are going to create maybe another seam. How does any new arrangement impact the United Nations Command in-theater, or is there one? Lastly, which maybe is the broadest question of all in solving this, is, why do U.S. forces remain on the Peninsula at all in the construct of a change of wartime OPCON and self-reliant ROK forces?

So during the half-century following the end of the Korean War, we all, the U.S. and ROK, have invested heavily and successfully in people and treasure to preserve peace on the Peninsula. Both nations have sacrificed lives dearly, and it has resulted in this safe and secure environment in Korea. South Korea, in my mind and heart, stands as an example of popular democracy and a free-market economy and it is respected as a leading national and responsible country in the international community. But at the same time, I think a continued credible Korean-U.S. alliance is an essential underpinning in not only the Republic of Korea, but throughout the region. Thank you very much, sir.

[End of Remarks.]