

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 22, 2019

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Mark Esper
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Secretary Esper,

The Department of Defense's Indo-Pacific strategy emphasizes the United States' network of allies and forward-postured forces as critical elements to deterring adversaries and achieving peace in the Department's "priority theater": the Indo-Pacific. We are concerned that recent reports of negotiations on the Special Measures Agreement with South Korea, and reports that the Administration has similar intentions regarding negotiations with Japan, contradict these key principles and undermine U.S. efforts to affirm an enduring commitment to the region.

Key national security challenges in the Indo-Pacific—including China's efforts to undermine the rules-based international order, Russia's efforts to challenge U.S. policy, and North Korea's continued development of illicit weapons programs—call for strengthened alliances and partnerships in the region. Appropriately, the Department of Defense's *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* refers to the U.S.-South Korea alliance as "the linchpin of peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia, as well as the Korean Peninsula." Ensuring the interoperability of U.S. and South Korean forces serves as an important force multiplier that acts to deter reckless, provocative actions by competitors and adversaries.

Contrary to President Trump's statement that "we protect wealthy countries for nothing", the presence of roughly 28,500 U.S. servicemembers on the Korean Peninsula is not solely about protecting South Korea. In fact, the primary purpose of our forward presence is to enhance U.S. national security.

We agree that our allies and partners should fairly contribute to the cost of our presence overseas. In 2019, South Korea agreed to increase its contribution to \$924 million for one year. After the announced increase, a Department of Defense witness testified that current burden-sharing agreements are fair and mutually beneficial.

We are concerned by multiple reports that the administration is currently asking South Korea to exponentially increase its annual contribution to roughly \$5 billion per year, or more than five times its current contribution.

At a time when the United States, South Korea and Japan should be working jointly to counter regional security threats ranging from increased North Korean provocations to growing Chinese assertiveness across the region, U.S. demands for a massive increase in South Korean annual contributions serves as a needless wedge between us and our allies.

As such, we request you provide responses to the following questions within two weeks:

- What is the total annual cost of maintaining U.S. military forces on the Korean Peninsula, including but not limited to costs associated with exercises and training, operation and sustainment, base operation support, construction, and sustainment, repair, and modernization of infrastructure, delineated by military service and appropriation categories?
- What costs are the Administration asking the South Koreans to cover and what contributions by the South Koreans are the Administration willing to count towards such costs?
- What is the basis for the requested increase from \$924 million per year to roughly \$5 billion per year?
- If no agreement is reached in the negotiations, what will be the impact to the operations and readiness of U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula and U.S. national security in the region?
- What mitigation measures, if any, is the Department currently considering or planning for in the event no agreement is reached?

We reiterate our support for a burden-sharing agreement that is fair and mutually beneficial, but we must not undertake negotiations in a manner that jeopardizes our alliance relationships or continuity of presence. Negotiations must emphasize the irrefutable benefits to U.S. national security that our forward presence on the Korean Peninsula provides. We look forward to your prompt response.



Adam Smith
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee

Sincerely,



Eliot L. Engel
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee