



NATO Parliamentary Assembly

## SUB-COMMITTEE ON FUTURE SECURITY AND DEFENCE CAPABILITIES (DSCFC)

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# MISSION REPORT

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**SEOUL,  
REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

**11 – 14 SEPTEMBER 2017**

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. Amid escalating international tension over North Korea's missile programme, a delegation from the Defence and Security Committee (DSC) at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) visited Seoul and the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) from 11-14 September 2017. The parliamentary mission signalled strong solidarity between NATO member state parliamentarians and their peers in the Republic of Korea (ROK).

2. Delegation leader Xavier Pintat (France) told his Korean parliamentary interlocutors that "focused and earnest diplomatic efforts are the only way to resolve the growing antagonisms over Pyongyang's recent provocations." NATO PA President, Paolo Alli (Italy) said a diplomatic and peaceful resolution of the current regional and international standoff over the North Korean missile programme was essential. His participation in the visit underscored the importance the NATO Parliamentary Assembly attaches to peace and security on the Korean Peninsula.

3. The pace of North Korea's testing of new missile systems as well as a recent powerful subterranean nuclear test has unleashed a flurry of diplomatic activity and defensive measures across the region and the globe. In 2017, at the time of the Committee visit, North Korea had already conducted 15 missile tests and detonated one nuclear device underground. The impact of the escalation on the Korean Peninsula has global implications and has moved to the top of the UN's agenda.

4. The delegation from the Sub-Committee on Future Security and Defence Capabilities (DSCFC) consisted of 16 parliamentarians from 12 different NATO member states. The parliamentarians met with interlocutors from the ROK Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs, ROK National Assembly Committees and officials from United States Forces-Korea (USFK). The Committee also attended meetings at the French Embassy, the Asan Institute, and met with executives from The Hanwha Group.

## II. BACKGROUND TO THE VISIT

5. The principal driver of the DSCFC visit to South Korea was the escalating security tensions over the rapidly advancing ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programme of North Korea. The recent ballistic missile tests, coupled with paralleled nuclear testing, are deeply unsettling regional and global security. While Pyongyang conducted 17 missile tests and one nuclear test between 1994 and 2008, it conducted over 70 missile tests and four nuclear tests over the past eight years – including dozens of missile tests and a nuclear test in 2017. In mid-summer 2017, North Korea claimed the successful demonstration of its intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capacity.

6. North Korea's recent missile system advancements and nuclear weapons programme development not only threaten NATO Partners Japan and South Korea, but also the United States and Canada as well as Europe, given the reach of the more advanced long-range North Korean delivery systems. As a result, the United States is working with its regional Allies to build stronger missile defence architecture in Northeast Asia. NATO allies are also looking for ways to strengthen their security cooperation and bolster political support to the Republic of Korea and Japan as they weather the increasingly volatile Asia-Pacific security environment.

7. Neither the ROK nor Japan currently have nuclear weapons or strategic missiles. Instead, the United States provides these capabilities via bi-lateral defence treaties. Both countries do, however, operate Aegis-equipped destroyers in the region, which enable data sharing and cooperation for US regional ballistic missile defence (BMD) architecture. In the first half of 2017, the United States moved to install the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile battery system. THAAD is capable of intercepting short- and medium-range missiles during their initial or terminal phase of flight – and is seen by the US and South Korean governments as the most adequate means to

defend population centres, and to deploy forces and other resources to the Korean peninsula as well as in and around Japan.

8. Despite initial political wrangling over the decision-making and deployment schedule of THAAD during the executive transition in Seoul, President Moon's government decided to proceed with the completion of the system's installation on the peninsula following North Korea's continued ICBM testing.

9. In the immediate run-up to the NATO PA Defence Committee visit, North Korea conducted a very large nuclear test on 3 September 2017.

### III. NORTHEAST ASIA IN THE BALANCE?

10. An additional driver to the visit of the DSCFC to South Korea is the growing perception the region is at a critical inflection point. The post-WWII security settlement has brought peace and stability and, along with it, rapid economic growth and increased integration. Significant economic growth rocketed the likes of South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and China into the stratosphere, making Northeast Asia the most economically dynamic region in the world. As briefers at US Forces-Korea reminded the delegation, Northeast Asia accounts for more than a fifth of total global economic output, 19% of global trade, it includes four of the world's 12 largest economies, as well as four of the world's six largest militaries.

11. Several interlocutors highlighted the lack of a multilateral security organisation as a, or even *the*, principal dilemma in the Asian Pacific. Unlike in Europe, the United States could not bring together common security architecture in Northeast Asia to mitigate regional security dilemmas. A reading of Victor Cha's *Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia* tells the student of the region this is due to the tyranny of geography, deep cultural and historical divisions, and the challenges of dealing with the potentially volatile authoritarian post-war leadership in several key players. As a result, the United States built its regional allies via direct military control and bi-lateral economic and political cooperation, creating what is now known as the 'hub and spoke' approach – the United States as the central hub offering a security umbrella for all of its regional allies, which were managed discretely. The deep economic, political, and security relationships the United States developed with the ROK, Japan, and Taiwan since the end of WWII persist to this day.

12. Today, it is clear the region can go in one of two directions, a briefers at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies told the delegation. It either can continue to grow economically by effecting increased regional and global cooperation, or it can further sink into trade wars, territorial disputes, and arms races. The latter path, he indicated, is increasingly likely as political leadership in the region tends to lean on nationalistic rhetoric and revisionist geopolitics to curry favour with their populations. By way of example, he cited Abe Shinzo, Xi Jinping, and Moon Jae-in's tendency to regard the post-WWII regional security order and their respective country's relations with the United States as aberrant and in need of revision.

13. The rise of nationalism and balance-of-power geopolitics in the region, coupled with the threat of North Korean nuclearisation, is threatening to unleash an uncontrolled regional arms race, multiple briefers warned the delegation. As one interlocutor at the Asan Institute said, "The closer North Korea gets to being a confirmed nuclear power, the worse the spiral model in terms of a regional arms race will get." He continued by saying, "the regional miracle of post-war economic growth is at stake – this is really a critical juncture and Asia is going down the wrong road."

### IV. THE NORTH KOREAN THREAT

14. The Democratic People's Republic of North Korea (DPRK) is an almost completely autarkic, authoritarian military regime living under the same family's rule since the Korean War Armistice,

which split the Korean peninsula in half along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in 1953. The North Korean regime imposes isolation upon the state as a means of protecting the regime from the external influences of capitalism and democratisation and all their attendant changes in social and political structure. To survive, Pyongyang is actively hostile to the ROK, and diplomatically and strategically hostile to the United States and Japan. The regime remains vitally dependent on the small amount of diplomatic, political, and economic support it gets principally from China, but also from Russia.

15. Kim Jong-Un, a young, inexperienced leader who shares the paranoia of his forebears and rules confidently and through the imposition of fear, leads the regime. As briefers told the delegation, Kim views the nuclear and missile programmes as vital in the face of the ROK, which is substantially superior on all levels. To ensure the survival of the DPRK, the people of North Korea are expected to sacrifice for national security.

16. The North Korean military is large and forward-deployed (70% ground forces and 50% air and navy): the forces are composed of more than a million personnel, making it the 4<sup>th</sup> largest by number of forces in the world. Most of the DPRK's military equipment is soviet legacy; multiple rocket launchers and other artillery play a key role in its forward defensive positioning. The DPRK special forces (SOF) are the most well-equipped of the entire force and are the largest in the world.

17. As many briefers noted, the DPRK military remains quite lethal as a fighting force but would be hard pressed to sustain offensive operations once across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Perhaps the most worrisome aspect of the DPRK military threat is its capability for asymmetrical strikes – via missiles, SOF, or even cyberattacks – which could be quite destabilising on the peninsula and in the region.

18. The DPRK's asymmetric threats are wide-ranging and complex. As noted above, the country is developing nuclear-capable medium and long-range ballistic missile systems, which are a clear threat to the ROK, US allies in the region, and even the United States and Canada. In addition, the country is currently known to possess the world's largest chemical weapons stockpiles. In recent years, it has become clear the country has invested in a dangerous cyber capability, which actively targets the networks of the regime's purported enemies, namely the United States, the ROK, and Japan.

19. Clearly, the DPRK develops its asymmetrical capabilities as a means of counterbalancing against the technologically superior forces of the United States and its regional allies. Asymmetrical forces balancing is a means by which the DPRK can exert pressure abroad to obtain its strategic goals.

## V. THE ROLE OF UNITED STATES AND INTERNATIONAL FORCES ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

20. General Vincent K. Brooks, Commander of United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and US Forces-Korea briefed the delegation about the tri-command system on the Korean peninsula. The three commands, he noted, have one clear overall mission: defending the Republic of Korea. Specifically, the three commands are tasked as follows.

21. The **United Nations Command** (UNC) ensures armistice maintenance and investigations; surveys military-to-military messaging to North Korea; and receives and controls international forces sent by over 17 participating nations. The United States is the executive agent of the UNC and its authorities are derived from UNSCR 84 to carry out the 1953 Armistice Agreement. The **Combined Forces Command** (CFC) is tasked with defending the ROK. The CFC maintains wartime operational control (OpCon) over US-ROK forces in the instance conflict would break back out on the peninsula. **United States Forces Korea** have a mission to support the UNC and CFC, as well as to train and control US forces in Korea. USFK uphold the US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty of 1953 and oversee all joint exercising in the region.

22. As General Brooks noted, the three-command structure is important as it underlines the multinational aspect of the Korean Peninsula security dilemma. The presence of the international community on the peninsula matters, he continued, as it enables the continued prosperity and security of the ROK. The entire Northeast Asia region is of vital importance to all countries contributing to the UNC. In light of the growing threat from the DPRK's asymmetrical capabilities and expanding weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programme, the international community's support is more important than ever.

23. During the afternoon following the meeting with US/ROK Combined Forces Command and the USFK, the delegation was escorted to the DMZ in Panmunjeom where it was given further briefings and a tour.

## **VI. SOUTH KOREA TODAY**

24. As the delegation learned from briefers at the French embassy, the particular story of the rise of the ROK is inspiring. The ROK's rise from the destruction of the Korean war to the modern, dynamic global middle power it is today occurred in three distinct phases: from early industrialisation and economic development, followed by democracy building, to today's efforts to build a domestic welfare system to match the status the nation has achieved globally. Today, South Korea is the world's 11<sup>th</sup> largest economy; it is a technology leader and has developed a dynamic trading economy.

25. As a briefer noted, the country seeks to be a contributor to global policy, from trade to aid. In the security realm, the Chairman of the National Defence Committee at the National Assembly, Kim Young-woo, told the delegation that South Korea also wants to be a global security exporter, not an importer. As a result, he told the delegation, the ROK is not only strong at home, it is always looking to broaden its impact in global peace and security operations – calling this 'Middle Power Leadership'.

26. The ROK is increasingly capable of being an important player at the international level as well – the nation is now the 10<sup>th</sup> largest defence spender in the world and supports the globe's 6<sup>th</sup> largest military. As representatives from the National Defence Committee of the ROK told the delegation, the ROK is increasing its defence budget by 6.9% in 2018, 30% of which will be dedicated to force improvement.

27. The delegation was given a briefing and tour at The Hanwha Group, a major defence contractor in South Korea. The Hanwha Group is a leader across several fields in the South Korean domestic defence market, its defence sector revenue reaching USD 3.8 billion last year. The company specialises in precision-guided munitions, land platforms (artillery systems, unmanned vehicles, air defence systems, and launchers), and defence electronics.

28. South Korea's efforts to bolster its international image as a stable, prosperous nation contributing to international peace and stability will be on display as it hosts the 2018 Winter Olympics.

## **VII. ON THE GROUND IN KOREA**

29. The delegation was well received by its ROK interlocutors. As Chung Sye-Kyun, Speaker of the ROK National Assembly, told the delegation: "Your presence in Korea today demonstrates the resolve and support of the international community for the Republic of Korea during this time of heightened tensions."

30. Of particular importance for the delegation was the show of inter-parliamentary solidarity for the ROK as it undergoes a particularly challenging moment to the security of the Korean Peninsula. As NATO PA President Paolo Alli noted: “The NATO Parliamentary Assembly works on the principles of transparency and dialogue; we are in South Korea not only to understand the current dilemma on the Korean peninsula first-hand, but also to encourage new international diplomatic initiatives to resolve the current crisis.” The chairman of the DSCFC and delegation leader, Xavier Pintat, also underscored NATO PA’s support via the visit of the DSCFC delegation: “We believe strongly in the continued relevance of the Non-proliferation Treaty and the commitment to a nuclear-free Korean peninsula,” he told members of the Defence Committee of the Korean National Assembly.

31. In remarks to Mr Chung, President Alli stressed that in today’s complex international security environment, security on the Korean peninsula has a strong impact on NATO security as well. “It is important we all understand this and work together to find a way forward to promote peace and security throughout the Asia-Pacific region.” All interlocutors stressed the importance of the international community, and particularly NATO in upholding the current sanctions regime on the DPRK, which is the only really effective means available to compel Pyongyang back to the negotiating table. Once there, they all stressed, hopefully, diplomacy backed by a strong-willed international community will allow the DPRK to realise the only way forward is to abandon its nuclear and missile system programmes and come out of the ‘cold’ of international isolation to engage in the regional and global economy responsibly, which would be of benefit to all its people.

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