

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 15, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Secretary Esper:

We write today to express our disappointment that the Administration has failed to conclude negotiations over a Special Measures Agreement (SMA) between the United States and the Republic of Korea over four months after the expiration of the prior agreement. We are concerned about the implications for U.S. Forces Korea and for the United States' interests in the Indo-Pacific.

It is our understanding that the Republic of Korea recently made a significant offer to the United States to resolve the impasse in negotiations and conclude an agreement. However, it appears that the White House rejected the offer as well as a proposal to mitigate the impact of lapsed funding. Unfortunately, we understand negotiations are currently suspended until at least after the April 15th elections in the Republic of Korea.

We know that you appreciate the critical importance of the U.S.-Korea alliance. It is an alliance forged in the blood of shared sacrifice, and a healthy, strong, and robust alliance with the Republic of Korea is the linchpin for of U.S. national security interests in the Indo-Pacific. The Korean Peninsula is strategically vital to Northeast Asia and broader regional security and stability, including our China strategy in this "new era of strategic competition." Moreover, the emergence of the Republic of Korea as democracy and economic powerhouse in Asia is one of the great success stories of the past seventy years, and one for which the United States deserves some credit for our steadfast friendship and support of our Korean allies. It is for good reason that for over 70 years our alliance commitment has been exemplified by the words "katchi kapshida" – "we go together".

North Korea continues to move forward with its nuclear program and has made recent advancements to its ballistic missile capabilities that complicate missile defenses. North Korea's WMD and conventional military capabilities pose a significant threat to the Republic of Korea, Japan, and the United States. Accordingly, the United States maintains a significant posture on the Korean Peninsula and in East Asia to assure our allies and partners, deter the threat posed by North Korea, and to achieve United States objectives if deterrence fails.

We agree in principle that the Republic of Korea can and should take on additional responsibilities and meet an increased share of the burden of maintaining a robust alliance. The United States and Republic of Korea have worked together over several years to develop a shared approach to address capabilities and military platforms that the Republic of Korea needs

to acquire and support. As an example, South Korea has significantly invested in U.S. missile defense systems, namely Patriot and the Aegis BMD weapon system, to increase interoperability with U.S. capabilities and enhance shared security by countering regional threats.

Yet, we are deeply concerned that if we are unable to reach a fair and mutually acceptable agreement on a new SMA soon, then the continued friction will erode the proper functioning of the alliance itself. This could include readiness challenges and place the lives of United States service members, as well as our security interests, at increased risk. The only winners in that scenario are our adversaries.

These are serious concerns that we expect you share. We ask for your assessment of the increased risks created by the ongoing impasse in negotiations, your plans to mitigate those increased risks, the possible ramifications resulting from sustained mitigation efforts, as well as your plans to resolve this issue and reach a new SMA with the Republic of Korea at the earliest possible date. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



ROBERT MENENDEZ
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee



JACK REED
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee



ADAM SMITH
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee