

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 27, 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 Secretaries Pompeo and Esper,

We write today to express our concern about the still unresolved Special Measures Agreement (SMA) negotiations between the United States and the Republic of Korea, one of our closest allies. It is almost a month since the lapse of the previous SMA, and no resolution appears in sight, creating increasing diplomatic and military risk on the Peninsula.

A fair and mutually-beneficial burden sharing agreement that reflects the realities of the twenty-first century is an essential element to strengthen a strong and durable US-ROK alliance. The Administration's fixation on its notion of burden-sharing belies a fundamental misunderstanding of the value of our alliance with the Republic of Korea and the importance of the US strategic position in the Indo-Pacific, and is almost-guaranteed to fail.

We note that the Department of Defense's Indo-Pacific Strategy emphasizes the unique benefits and critical importance of these alliances that the United States has led and nurtured for the past several decades. These critical alliances enable a cost-effective and strategically-vital forward-deployed posture and presence in the region for U.S. national security.

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." Our alliance with Korea is critical to deter adversaries, provide stability to the region, shape the environment, and endows US forces in the region with leverage that enhances our nation's security, extends our values, and enables our prosperity.

Yet the current US negotiating position appears to contradict these key principles and undermines our enduring commitment to the Republic of Korea.

We agree that there are significant areas where the Republic of Korea can and should make a greater contribution to its own defense and to the alliance. We note, however, that following the conclusion of the 2019 agreement wherein the Republic of Korea agreed to increase its contribution to approximately \$925 million for one year, the Department of Defense testified before Congress that the current burden-sharing agreement was fair and mutually beneficial.

The United States and the Republic of Korea face shared challenges, from the grave and growing threat presented by North Korea's on-going nuclear, ballistic, missile, and conventional military programs to the necessity of forging a unified approach to China's growing regional assertiveness. Achieving a fair and mutually beneficial SMA is essential to these ends. It should bind us closer together, not serve as a wedge that drives our ally away.

We reiterate our support for a burden-sharing agreement that is fair and mutually beneficial. But given the clear and overwhelming benefits for our own national security, we urge you to reconsider the administration's current negotiating posture, which threatens to jeopardize our alliance relationships, our posture, and our presence in the Indo-Pacific. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,


Robert Menendez
United States Senator


Jack Reed
United States Senator