



PRESS RELEASE

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER

*Full Committee Hearing on the Strategic Implications of U.S. Troop Withdrawals
from Korea.*

I called this hearing today to explore the U.S. military posture on the Korean Peninsula—a critical element of the Department of Defense’s ongoing efforts to better tailor our global footprint to post-Cold War, 21st century realities.

Over fifty years after a cease fire interrupted war on that stretch of land, there are approximately 37,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea. These forces help deter an aggressor unwilling to renounce the use of force against its democratic neighbor to the south.

In June 2003, the United States and South Korea agreed to move 15,000 American soldiers 75 miles south of the Demilitarized Zone, beyond the range of 8,000 North Korean artillery pieces. At the same time, the U.S. decided to put billions of additional dollars toward improving its military forces on the Peninsula. Together, these two measures will ensure a greater capability to defend South Korea, which continues to improve its own forces.

Last month, U.S. officials confirmed that about 3,600 members of the 2nd Infantry Division will deploy to Iraq from South Korea sometime mid-summer. Last week, the Department announced it was negotiating the possible withdrawal of another 12,500 ground troops from Korea.

One might be tempted to view this as a reduction in the U.S. commitment to the alliance, but the reality is more complicated. The Department of Defense notes that the U.S. commitment to Korean security might be better served with a different mix of capabilities. To that end, the Department is considering improving certain capabilities on the peninsula targeted directly against particular North Korean military strengths. Increased missile defenses, for instance, help compensate for the North’s vast ballistic missile arsenal. In other words, rather than reducing its commitment, the United States is tailoring its forces more towards using our particular strengths to offset North Korean advantages.

With that in mind, we need to assess the redeployments in terms of the overall strategic situation in Northeast Asia, not just on the basis of sheer numbers. Our witnesses will provide this perspective.

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