

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 7, 2020

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The upcoming Security Consultative Meeting between the United States and the Republic of Korea provides a critical opportunity for the United States to make clear its enduring commitment to the freedom and security of the Republic of Korea. As you know, over the past four years North Korea's dangerous nuclear and missile programs have continued to progress without constraint. Adding to that, North Korea continues to present a significant conventional military threat to the Republic of Korea, and the US-ROK alliance has come under considerable stress, including friction in diplomatic coordination, challenges to military readiness due to adjustments to bilateral exercises, and the failure to conclude the Special Measures agreement negotiations.

The Security Consultative Meeting, therefore, presents a critically important opportunity for the United States to make clear the depth, extent, and endurance of our commitment to the Republic of Korea. Central to that commitment, we believe, is a clear and forthright statement of support for maintaining the current level of at least 28,500 U.S. military service members on the Korean Peninsula.

Congress's position on this matter has been made clear. Most recently, in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, the Congress prohibited the use of funds to reduce the number of U.S. Forces serving on active duty in South Korea below 28,500 subject to a stringent Congressional certification and 90-day waiting period. The Congress should be consulted prior to any adjustment to our force posture.

A robust forward-deployed posture by the Alliance, including US forces, is crucial to maintain our deterrence posture with North Korea and assure that the alliance remains prepared to "fight tonight" to deter our adversaries. Anything less risks eroding the alliance's deterrent posture with dangerous implications for destabilization on the Peninsula, and will make only success in pursuing peace, stability and denuclearization with North Korea more challenging to

The Honorable Mark Esper  
October 7, 2020  
Page Two

achieve.

We wish you every success with the SCM and look forward to a Joint Communique that is clear, strong, and precise in reiterating America's commitment to the freedom and prosperity of the Korean people.

Sincerely,



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ELIOT L ENGEL  
Chairman  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs



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ROBERT MENENDEZ  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Foreign  
Relations



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ADAM SMITH  
Chairman  
House Committee on Armed Services



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JACK REED  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Armed  
Services