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Good morning ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honor to be here at the International Seapower Symposium to speak with you about some of the pressing issues in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

I'd like to thank Admiral Um, Republic of Korea Chief of Naval Operations, for inviting me to speak with you today, and for fostering cooperation among like-minded allies, partners, and friends with this contribution to the ongoing maritime security dialogue.

Last week I had the opportunity to spend time on two occasions with MINDEF Song. As a previous Republic of Korea Chief of Naval Operations he has a deep and full understanding of the value naval forces bring to ensuring security, stability and prosperity from both a national and regional perspective.

On that point, it is important to note the Indo-Asia-Pacific region houses two of the three largest economies in the world, along with 10 of the 14 smallest; 15 of the 20 world's busiest container ports; 7 of the world's 10 largest militaries; and more than 50 percent of world population. It is a region dominated and defined by the maritime environment, and in an increasingly interconnected global economy, many nations across the globe have vested interests in resources and trade that transits these waters. Within that context, it is not surprising that the region attracts geostrategic interest from states both within and without its regional boundaries, resulting in considerable potential for both competition and cooperation between nations.

It is worth noting that economies throughout the Indo-Asia-Pacific continue to flourish today because of our collective respect for – and adherence to – international rules and standards that have produced the longest era of peace and prosperity in modern times.

Seventy-plus years of regional security and stability didn't just happen on its own; these conditions are not happenstance. Rather, they are the result of a commitment to a principled, rules-based international system which affords all nations, large or small, the opportunity to reap the collective rewards of cooperation. As U.S. Defense Secretary Mattis stated at the Shangri-La Dialogue last month, [QUOTE] “the international order was not imposed on individual nations; rather the order is based on principles that were embraced by nations trying to create a better world and restore hope to all.” [END QUOTE] These principles, which include freedom of navigation for military and civilian ships and aircraft, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and unimpeded lawful commerce, provide the foundation of the rules-based international order that has lifted millions out of poverty and benefitted so many nations over the last seven decades.

The continued acceptance of this system is being challenged, however, both at sea and ashore, in some cases by the very nations that it has most benefited. It's my sense that some nations - and the naval forces, coast guards and militia under their command - view the international laws that underwrite that system as up for grabs, especially at sea. They see opportunities to impose national laws in international space and choose instead to abandon the accepted framework of norms, standards, rules, and laws that support the international system and its inclusive security network, and instead pursue a more self-serving path.

China's unilateral provocations at the expense of its neighbors have prompted Admiral Harry Harris, Commander U.S. Pacific Command, to offer this assessment: [QUOTE] "China is using its military and economic power to erode the rules-based international order . . . [they] are building up combat power and positional advantage in an attempt to assert de facto sovereignty over disputed maritime features and spaces in South China Sea... where they are fundamentally altering the physical and political landscape by creating and militarizing man-made bases." [END QUOTE] Each nation gains security in concert with other nations, and we all stand to lose when one nation chooses to abandon those principles that supported our collective growth.

Other states, like North Korea, chose to reject the international system entirely. One only needs to make a comparison across the border between a free and prosperous Republic of Korea and a destitute North Korea to understand the damaging results of that choice. Faced with the reality of their choice to act outside the international rules based system they lash out with irrationally self-destructive actions and behaviors that defy logic and explanation. Their actions deepen the misery of the North Korean people while erecting self-imposed barriers to the critical regional and international assistance North Korea desperately needs.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are high as we meet this morning, driven largely by choices made and actions taken by the North Korean government in recent weeks and months. Kim Jong Un's regime continues to threaten the its neighbors, as well as the United States and our allies elsewhere in the region, with ill-advised ballistic missile launches and inflammatory warnings of impending nuclear attack.

Within the last two weeks, North Korea has conducted several missile launches in violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions, including one midrange ballistic missile launch across the Japanese island chain. Then, this weekend, they carried out their latest and largest nuclear test. These provocations only serve to increase the international community's resolve to counter the DPRK's prohibited activities.

I would have you note that though the Republic of Korea is the closest to the threat, they do not face this aggressor alone. The U.S.-Republic of Korea alliance is ironclad. The United States remains steadfastly committed to the defense of our allies here on the peninsula. Our alliance was forged in blood, in places like Incheon, Wonsan, and the Chosin Reservoir, where Koreans and Americans gave their lives in defense of freedom and democracy for generations to come.

Forged in blood has personal meaning to me. My father served in the US Navy during the Korean War, as did my wife's father. My wife's father was injured while conducting shore bombardment operations and was evacuated to a US Naval Hospital in Japan. After a six month recovery he was transferred back to the United States to continue his recovery. My family's story is not unique. This is why, today, our navies and our nations are closer than ever. This is what "ironclad" means to me.

So often, the crisis created by the Kim regime's actions is described as a conflict between the United States and the Hermit Kingdom, with American allies reluctantly drawn into the crosshairs. Admiral Harris dispelled this errant notion when he said [QUOTE] "The alarming behavior exhibited by the Kim Jong-Un regime is not just a threat to our friends in South Korea. It's a threat to Japan; it's a threat to China; it's a threat to Russia; it's a threat to U.S. allies in the Philippines, Australia and Thailand; it's a threat to the United States; it's a threat to the entire world, because North Korea's missiles point in every direction." [END QUOTE].

The international community continues to roundly condemn North Korean actions. Both the European Union and ASEAN have publicly denounced North Korea's actions as threats to international peace, security, and stability, as have many other regional and global voices. Even those nations with diplomatic and commercial ties to North Korea, like Russia, Indonesia, and the United Arab Emirates, have called for Pyongyang to end its provocations. Most telling is the unanimous United Nations Security Council resolution voted on last month imposing new sanctions on the Kim regime, underscoring the extent to which North Korea has chosen to isolate itself from the international community.

Make no mistake, the Kim regime's intransigence poses a threat to the world community well beyond just the United States and our allies. As U.S. Secretary of State Tillerson rightly said after a previous North Korea ICBM launch, [QUOTE] "global action is required to stop a global threat." [END QUOTE]

I leave it to political leadership to determine the course of global action taken to bring Pyongyang to its senses, but I recognize that as security practitioners, our role both in peace and in conflict is a significant one. In the maritime, U.S. Pacific Fleet provides the credible combat power that underscores Secretary Mattis' declaration that, [QUOTE] "The combined allied militaries now possess the most precise, rehearsed and robust defensive and offensive capabilities on Earth. The DPRK regime's actions will continue to be grossly overmatched by ours and would lose any arms race or conflict it initiates." [END QUOTE]

67 years ago, Pacific Fleet ships were dominating the waters surrounding the Korean Peninsula; today's Pacific Fleet continues that heritage born of victory. We will continue to deploy carrier strike groups, Up-gunned Expeditionary Strike Groups, AEGIS ships, the world's most capable submarine force, and advanced aircraft like the F-35, P-8, and MH60R to be prepared to respond decisively when called. We seamlessly integrate operations with our allies in the ROK Navy and Japanese Maritime Defense Force to provide overwhelming BMD and ASW capabilities, among others. Today, our platforms have longer reach, are more interconnected, and possess greater lethality than what has ever been fielded before.

Allies, partners, and friends need not question U.S. Pacific Fleet's ability to fight and win in the wake of recent tragedies onboard USS FITZGERALD and USS JOHN S. MCCAIN. Though we mourn the loss of our shipmates and grieve with our Navy families, our force remains strong and our commitment to defend our allies, partners, and friends is unwavering. Let our potential adversaries take pause and note that the only naval force more powerful than the U.S. Pacific Fleet is the entirety of the United States Navy. Nearly sixty percent of U.S. Navy assets are assigned to the Pacific Fleet, which translates to 200 ships and submarines, 1,180 aircraft; and more than 140,000 Sailors and Civilian Sailors that stand ready to be where it matters, when it matters, with what matters.

As America's Secretaries of State and Defense made clear, [QUOTE] "North Korea now faces a choice. Take a new path toward peace, prosperity and international acceptance, or continue further down the dead alley of belligerence, poverty and isolation. The U.S. will aspire and work for the former, and will remain vigilant against the latter." [END QUOTE] It is a choice between being a contributing member of the rules-based system, or being left out of the multitude of benefits that come with being lifted by the ever rising tide of prosperity, enabled by the international rules based system born out of the ashes of World War Two, that continues to support the ever rising tide of prosperity that continues to sweep across the Indo, Asia, and Pacific region.

North Korean provocations are a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions and continue to threaten the peace and security of the region. It is a testament to the strength of your people and your leadership that despite these obstinate threats facing the Republic of Korea, it remains a free country, indeed, a vibrant and prosperous nation, with unlimited potential to continue being a beacon of freedom and democracy in Asia and around the globe.

I remain convinced that the continued promotion of the rules-based system that evolved over the last 70 years, remains the best possible way forward for all nations in this region – large and small – to continue to rise peacefully, confidently, securely and economically.

Thank you. With that, I look forward to your questions.