

Secretary Gates Holds Consultations with ROK Minister of National Defense

United States Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Republic of Korea (ROK) Minister of National Defense Kim Jang Soo met in Washington, D.C. on February 23, 2007. Secretary Gates welcomed Minister Kim to the Pentagon with an honor cordon, then hosted the Minister for an office call and working luncheon. During the 90 minute session, Secretary Gates and Minister Kim reaffirmed the basic tenets of the Alliance and reconfirmed fundamental understandings on Alliance transformation, including the importance of taking a forward-looking approach to the full range of Alliance management issues.

Secretary Gates and Minister Kim discussed the importance of combined readiness in the face of the North Korean conventional, nuclear and missile threat and assessed that the Alliance was capable of meeting any challenge posed by North Korea. The two agreed on the importance of training and exercises to maintaining this high level of combined warfighting capability.

After noting that the two sides agreed to the future command relationship structure at the October 2006 Security Consultative Meeting (SCM), Secretary Gates and Minister Kim agreed that the two sides will disestablish the current ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command on April 17, 2012 and complete the transition to the new supporting-supported command relationship between U.S. and ROK forces at the same time. In this regard, Secretary Gates and Minister Kim further agreed that implementation of the OPCON transition “Road Map” will commence in July 2007 immediately following agreement on the “Road map” and culminate in a Certification Exercise in March 2012.

Following on the successful bilateral Security Policy Initiative (SPI) talks of February 7-8, 2007, Secretary Gates and Minister Kim reiterated commitments to work closely to accelerate the relocation of USFK units and facilities and the full implementation of both the Yongsan Relocation Plan and the Land Partnership Plan. Secretary Gates expressed appreciation for the Minister’s efforts in this regard and noted that the relocation, including the return of valuable lands to the Korea people, was an important step for both nations. In this regard, the two sides expressed their **willingness** to expeditiously complete the return of USFK facilities in accordance with the ROK-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)

Finally, Secretary Gates noted the contributions of ROK forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and offered appreciation for the ROK efforts as an important partner in the Global War on Terror.