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Congratulatory Remarks from Senator Roger Wicker

Roger Wicker

U.S. Senator (R-MS)

Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee

Good morning and greetings from the United States.

I'm U.S. Senator Roger Wicker, representing the state of Mississippi in the U.S. Senate and serving as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

I am honored by your invitation and regret that I cannot join you in person. Thanks for allowing me to offer some brief remarks from the United States.

You've gathered to discuss international alliances and ways they must adapt to the modern day. I can hardly think of a timelier and more important topic.

Your gathering comes during a time of turmoil: wars rage in Europe and the Middle East. Those conflicts dominate the headlines and rightfully so. But amid those wars, we must still remember this: China is challenging the global balance of power, and we cannot ignore the implications of XI Jinping's aggression.

We also recognize the danger posed by nuclear-armed and now battle-hardened North Korea. That threat is rightly front and center for forces on the Korean Peninsula.

The U.S. enjoys a strong network of alliances. For decades, those bonds have given us a comparative advantage over authoritarian states like China and Russia. They continue to do so. Together with our allies in the Indo-Pacific, we push back on Chinese coercion against Taiwan and the South China Sea and even here in Northeast Asia.

South Korea, Japan, and the United States are growing closer. North Korea wants to divide us, but our trilateral partnership makes clear that those efforts will fail.

And our NATO allies have taken the political, military, and economic risk of helping to deter Russia even as they help our heroic Ukrainian partners defend their homeland.

I have long understood the political, strategic, and moral benefits of America's alliances. I support what we have for decades called “burden sharing,” a joint effort to shoulder the load.

But some in Washington have spoken of this kind of alliance with derision. They've suggested that our allies have become little more than dependencies. These officials have begun eschewing mutual burden sharing and propose a new term they call “burden shifting.”

In such an arrangement, America would abruptly transfer conventional deterrence responsibility away from the United States, and we would give it to our allies. I do not agree with these officials.

Of course, I'm glad to see America's allies stepping up as they are doing all over the world. Alliances are about collective defense, but burden shifting suggests the opposite. It suggests that the United States has a limited stake in conflicts that erupt or could erupt in key regions. It suggests abdication, not collective responsibility.

And if there are any words to describe the alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea, those words are “collective responsibility.”

Our alliance began as a military pact, but as the years have passed, it has grown so much more. Today, we share deep cultural ties, and we share a thriving trade relationship. We are committed to a free and open Indo-Pacific. We partner in shipbuilding, critical minerals, artificial intelligence, and energy. Our alliance has matured, but it has never wavered from its original mission to deter and defend against aggression.

The U.S.-South Korea relationship boasts America's only bilateral, integrated military alliance. To be sure, we need to modernize our alliance to match today's

threats and capabilities. These reforms should leave us stronger and safer.

They should not detract from our focus on North Korea. Kim Jong Un rarely misses an opportunity to remind the world that he is our main enemy on the Korean Peninsula, although China comes in close to second.

The best way to counter them both is to keep our alliance focused on North Korea. The United States will continue to do its part. We will continue by credibly extending deterrence to South Korea and our other treaty allies. We will use all the means available to us, including our conventional forces, our missile defenses, and our nuclear arsenal.

Thank you for your partnership, and thank you again to The Asan Institute for Policy Studies for offering me the opportunity to address you.

I look forward to reviewing the findings from the Plenum.

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