

Top US General Meets Allies in Seoul Over Defense Costs

July 11, 2025

— Categories: Defence & Security



General Dan Caine, the highest-ranking military officer of the United States and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, arrived in Seoul on July 10, 2025, for crucial meetings with his South Korean and Japanese counterparts. The visit comes at a delicate moment as President Donald Trump steps up demands that America's allies in Asia shoulder a larger share of defense costs.

On Thursday, General Caine met with Admiral Kim Myung-soo, South Korea's top military leader. The two discussed ways to strengthen their countries' military partnership and

reviewed ongoing security cooperation. Their talks are expected to set the tone for a broader trilateral meeting on Friday, when Japan's General Yoshihide Yoshida joins them. It marks the first visit in 15 years by Japan's highest-ranking military officer to South Korea, a symbolic step toward closer defense ties among the three nations.

The timing of these meetings is no accident. Just days before, President Trump publicly called for South Korea to pay more for hosting approximately 28,500 American troops on its soil. Trump also sent letters to leaders in Seoul and Tokyo proposing higher tariffs on their exports, although he delayed the tariff increases until August 1 to allow time for negotiations.

Cost-sharing has been a persistent flashpoint since Trump's first term, when he demanded that South Korea dramatically increase its contributions to U.S. defense efforts. Speaking about those talks, Trump recently said that Seoul "went crazy" when he requested billions more in annual payments. South Korea's National Security Adviser, Wi Sung-lac, confirmed that discussions are underway to expand the country's defense spending in line with broader international trends. Just last month, leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization agreed to raise defense budgets to 5% of their gross domestic product by 2035, a goal Trump has strongly encouraged.

These budget debates are unfolding alongside growing security concerns in the region. As North Korean leader Kim Jong Un strengthens ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin, speculation about the U.S. commitment to the Korean Peninsula has deepened. While the Pentagon has denied any plans to reduce American forces in South Korea, uncertainty remains.

The next round of meetings among U.S., South Korean, and Japanese officials will likely focus on preserving stability amid rising tensions and clarifying each country's role in shared defense.

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