

US Urges Trilateral Unity vs North Korea, China Buildup

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The highest-ranking military officer of the United States is urging closer defense ties among South Korea, the United States, and Japan in response to what he called an “unprecedented” military buildup by North Korea and China.

General Dan Caine, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, delivered this message during the Trilateral Chiefs of Defense meeting in Seoul with South Korean Adm. Kim Myung—soo and Japanese Gen. Yoshihide Yoshida marking the first Chiefs—level trilateral gathering held in Seoul, following a July 18, 2024, meeting held in Tokyo.

“Our focus in the United States remains on reestablishing deterrence,” Caine stated. “Doing so requires the trilateral cooperation between our three countries.” He stated that “North Korea and China are undergoing an unprecedented military build—up with clear and unambiguous intent,” quoting General Caine directly.

General Caine stressed the importance of unity and trust at every level of leadership. “We need to demonstrate resolve and be proactive in our partnerships,” he said. “We must bring together the best combat capabilities of our nations so that we can fight together and win together if necessary.”

South Korea’s Admiral Kim echoed these concerns, pointing out that the meeting itself was a strong signal to the Indo-Pacific region that their security partnership is solid and growing. He emphasized that it is crucial to keep building on this momentum, especially as North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats continue to evolve.

General Yoshida of Japan also underlined the need to advance and formalize their cooperation further. He called for “rock-solid unity” to strengthen deterrence and ensure regional stability.

During the meeting, the chiefs reaffirmed plans to expand Freedom Edge, the trilateral multi—domain exercise launched in June 2024, and institutionalize regular joint training across air, maritime, cyber, missile defense, and other domains. They also condemned North Korea’s continued weapons development and its growing military ties with Russia.

General Caine recalled that over a decade ago, former United States Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Martin Dempsey spoke about lighting a new path of partnership among the three countries. “It’s on the shoulders of those three that we move forward today into an incredibly delicate chapter in our nation’s history,” Caine reflected.

This visit marks the first by a U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman since General CQ Brown visited Seoul in November 2023, signaling a renewed Washington commitment to trilateral security cooperation amid escalating regional threats.

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