U.S., ROK navies sign new plan on close cooperation

By MC2(SW) Matthew Schwarz, U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs

In a fitting end to a military exercise in defending the Republic of Korea (ROK) against external aggression, a new maritime operational plan was signed March 20 shortly after allied "victory" was declared from the simulated conflict.

The commanders of both the U.S. and Korean naval forces during the simulation -- U.S. Navy Vice Adm. John M. Bird – and the deputy commander – ROK Vice Adm. Park Jung-hwa – signed the new war plan into effect during a reception aboard *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19), which served as the hub for maritime command and control during the annual exercise Key Resolve 2009.

The revised operational plan, commonly called OPLAN in military circles, was the result of nearly 18 months of close interaction between the two countries' navies.

"The close cooperation between the 7th Fleet and ROK Fleet is represented in the detailed planning and coordination that is described in this comprehensive plan of action," said ROK Capt. Park Sung Bae, who co-led the operational planning team with his U.S. counterpart, Marine Corps Col. Philip Lark.

"This is another example of the close relationship and teamwork between Koreans and Americans," added Lark, who serves as 7th Fleet's head planner and Fleet Marine Officer.

According to Lark, the process began after U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and ROK Minister of National Defense Kim Jang Soo signed an agreement that would transfer to Korea the lead for operational control of its forces by 2012. Under the current arrangement, the two nations' military forces are separately commanded in peacetime, but if a conflict broke out, the combined forces commander – a general in the U.S. Army – would take full operational control of all forces.

Commander U.S. 7th Fleet Vice Adm. John M. Bird and Republic of Korea Deputy Commander Vice Adm. Park Jung-hwa sign into effect a new maritime operational plan (OPLAN) during a reception aboard *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) March 20, marking the completion of exercise Key Resolve 2009.

U.S. Navy photo by MC1(SW) Ben Farone

Vice Adm. John M. Bird, who also commands the U.S. 7th Fleet, would serve as the combined naval component commander, giving him operational control over all the U.S. and Korean Navy forces in the conflict. The revised OPLAN shifts many maritime mission areas under the direct control of Park, his Korean counterpart and deputy, who commands the Republic of Korea fleet during peacetime.

By 2012 their roles will have shifted, with the Korean fleet commander leading the maritime fight with the U.S. 7th Fleet in a supporting role.

Bird stressed that the two countries' efforts are a powerful deterrent to aggression of any potential enemy, regardless of the command and control arrangement.

"Even though our operational control roles may reverse, our commitment to working together to defend Korea has not changed one bit," Bird said.

Park agreed and added that even though the operational plan details how to deal with a conflict, the overall goal is to avoid one.

"I am pleased to formalize this plan with our U.S. counterparts," said Park. "Our signatures here serve as a reminder to all that the U.S. and the Republic of Korea stand ready to fight side by side to defend this free nation."

Sailors needing break may consider career intermission

By Lt. Cmdr. Elizabeth Zimmermann, Task Force Life Work

Sailors can now take a break from active Navy service, courtesy of the new Career Intermission Pilot Program (CIPP).

Approved in the fiscal year (FY) 2009 National Defense Authorization Act, the CIPP offers a temporary inactivation from active duty - from one to three years - for top performing Sailors. The Navy is optimistic that this measure will enhance retention in critical skill sets, while allowing greater flexibility in career paths of service members.

"Our Navy continues to look at innovative approaches to retaining our best Sailors. Finding new ways to hold on to the leaders of tomorrow is a must," said Rear Adm. Dan Holloway, director, Manpower, Personnel, Training and Education. "Our millennial generation continues to tell us they want balance between their personal and professional life. This is one tool to provide flexibility for our Sailors and to help them positively integrate life and work."

The pilot program provides an opportunity for up to 20 officers and 20 enlisted participants each year in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. The CIPP will provide a one-time temporary transition for active-duty personnel to the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR). Participants will retain full active-duty Tricare health benefits for themselves and their dependents and receive a monthly stipend of one-fifteenth of their basic pay. To ease the transition, members may elect a Navy-funded permanent change of station move to anywhere in the continental United States when entering the program.

"This pilot program is for top performers who have the desire to 'Stay Navy,' but need some time off," said Holloway. "It could be for any number of reasons – to pursue a degree full-time, to take care of an ailing parent, or to start a family."

All program participants will return to active duty at the end of the period prescribed and will incur a two-to-one service obligation for every month in the program (served in addition to any previously existing obligation). Time spent in the IRR will not count toward retirement, computation of total years of commissioned service or high-year tenure limitations.

The break in service excludes participants from promotion consideration. Upon returning to active duty, officers will have their date of rank adjusted, and enlisted members will have their active duty service date adjusted in order to be competitive with others of similar time in grade on active duty.

"We are looking at career intermission as a possible permanent part of Sailors' 'menu of options' for a lifetime of Navy service," said Holloway. "It's just one of many flexible options we are implementing or considering as we respond to changing workforce and cultural needs."

The 'menu of options' includes ideas such as part-time work for part-time pay, more interchange between active and reserve status and other flexible work options such as telework and compressed work schedules.

Application packages are due to Pers-4 by May 1. Selectees and alternates will be announced by the end of June. Full pilot program details can be found in OPNAVINST 1330.2, and the instruction, NAVADMIN and related information are available on the Task Force Life/Work Web site at www.npc.navy.mil/commandsupport/taskforcelifework/.

The changing expectation of our work force and the entry into our ranks of a new and far more diverse generation of 21st century Sailors, demands an in-depth examination of how we routinely do business, how we deliver on their expectations for personal and professional development, and a positive work environment.

Accordingly, Task Force Life/Work (TFLW) is established to undertake this examination into how we carry out our enduring mission to ensure all our people achieve their full potential and sustain the heritage of our Navy.