

# Sejong Policy Brief



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## *Executive Summary*

### **OPCON Transition: Issues and Tasks**



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*This article is written based on the author's personal opinions  
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## **Executive Summary**

- OPCON (Operational Control) Transition: Progress and Evaluation
  - The ROK government is committed to swiftly carry out the Conditions-based OPCON Transition Plan (COTP), but additional adjustment and reassessment is necessary related to several key issues.
  - In particular, the government needs to reevaluate the ROK-U.S. command structure, adjust the conditions of transition and criteria for verification, and reexamine the command system within the ROK military after the OPCON transition.
  
- Problems of the ROK-U.S. Command Structure and Reinforcement of the ROK Military Leadership
  - The current OPCON transition plan has fundamental limitations considering the purpose of the OPCON transition lies on the achievement of full military sovereignty.
  - The COTP has a symbolic meaning as it calls for a South Korean four-star general to take the future wartime operational command authority. Nevertheless, it maintains the old structure of the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) system, which indicates an insufficient level of change to assert that OPCON has been “transferred” to South Korea.
  - Therefore, the future command system should take a parallel structure led by the ROK and supported by the U.S. However, if the situation does not allow that, it is necessary to prepare supplementary measures such as the adjust-

ment of the future CFC organization, so that the significance of OPCON transition can be realized by securing the leadership role of the ROK military.

Conditions of OPCON Transition and Adjustment of Verification Process

- Despite its plan to maintain the present CFC system, the current COTP highlights strict conditions and verification process for the OPCON transition. Such strictness signals a possible discordance between the “contents” and “methods” of OPCON transition.
- Notably, excessive rigidity of conditions and verification process for OPCON transition may expose vulnerabilities within the process due to unpredictable external factors and may result in disruptions of schedule.
- It is necessary to adjust the conditions of OPCON transition and reset criteria for verification process by focusing on essential tasks in relation to the establishment of the future CFC.

Initiative for Unified Command System in Both Wartime and Peacetime: Establishment of Joint Military Command

- It is vital to appropriately reorganize the ROK-U.S. command system and accordingly coordinate the relationship between the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and the future CFC in preparation for the aftermath of OPCON transition.
- If a South Korean four-star general takes the role of future commander in chief of CFC but does not serve as a chairman of the JCS concurrently as the present plan stipulates, there exist a problem of duplication of operational command

in the front and rear area and a possibility of confusion and overlap during the process of transition between wartime and peacetime.

- It is necessary to unify operational command in both the front and the rear and secure continuity within the transition between wartime and peacetime by consolidating military authority to the future commander in chief of CFC.♣

*※ Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.*