

Impact Players

Lee Sun-jin

By Chanil Jung

Who is he?

General Lee Sun-jin is the new Chairman of the Republic of Korea Joint Chiefs of Staff (ROK JCS). He was formerly the commander of the ROK's 2nd Operations Command.

General Lee started his military officer career as an instructor at Republic of Korea Army College. In the early years of his tour, he held positions of Regimental Commander at 163th Infantry Regiment and Chief of Education & Training at 2nd Operations Command. His senior leadership positions include Commander of 2nd Army Division (April 2009-April 2011), Director of Civil-military Psychological Operations, ROK JCS (April 2011-November 2012), Commander of Capital Corps (November 2012-April 2014), Commander of Aviation Operations Command (April 2014-August 2014), and Deputy Commanding General-Operations of 7th Infantry Division.



Born in 1954, General Lee graduated from Daegu High school and was commissioned as an army officer upon graduating from Korea Army Academy of Yeong-cheon (KAAY) in 1977.

Why has he been in the news?

The Ministry of Defense (MND) announced on September 14, 2015 that General Lee Sun-jin, the current commander of Korea's 2nd Operations Command, was named to become the new Chairman of ROK JCS, replacing Adm. Choi Yoon-Hee. On October 5, the Republic of Korea's National Assembly confirmed his nomination. Gen. Lee is known to be an expert in joint operations and education & training.

The appointment of Gen. Lee as a chairman of ROK JCS surprised many, for it was the first time an alumnus of KAAY will assume the office of Chairman of the ROK JCS, making Gen. Lee the third Chairman of ROK JCS to come from academies other than the Korea Military Academy (KMA). He is also the third person to become a four-star Army General among the graduates of KAAY. Furthermore, his selection was also largely unexpected because of his predecessor's nomination—Admiral Choi Yoon-Hee became the first Navy admiral to become the Chairman of ROK JCS. The two consecutive surprises in the nominations of the Chairman of ROK JCS may be been deliberate in order to balance a South Korea military that has traditionally favored graduates from KMA.

What can we expect from him?

The change of command ceremony will likely take place in the middle of October as his predecessor's term is ending on October 15. There are some tough challenges waiting for Gen. Lee. Inter-Korean military tensions could be heightened due to a possible missile or nuclear weapon test in North Korea to celebrate the 70th Workers' Party of Korea Foundation Day on October 10. The ROK and U.S. forces will have to maintain top vigilance and readiness, and Gen. Lee will have to demonstrate the strength and solidarity of the combined system in the face of North Korean threat. Internally, he has to garner support from KMA generals within the ROK JCS in order to transform the South Korean military that has been troubled by corruption charges in the defense industry. Also, he has already expressed his wish to push forward with the ROK-U.S. OPCON transfer process that already has been delayed many times. His experience in both field army and joint environment makes him an ideal candidate to deal with these challenges.

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