

Remote



Kunsan F-16s form up after a training mission. Although air-to-ground attack capabilities are crucial, Kunsan pilots are also well-versed in air-to-air missions, as the AIM-120 AMRAAMs on the wingtips attest.

The image shows two F-16 fighter jets in flight, viewed from a low angle. They are flying over a coastal region with mountains and a bay. The sky is clear and blue. The jets are grey and have missiles mounted under their wings. The text 'and Ready at Kunsan' is overlaid on the top half of the image. The word 'and' is in a bold, sans-serif font, while 'Ready at' is in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font. 'Kunsan' is in a large, elegant, black script font. Below the title, the text 'Photography by Jim Haseltine' is written in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the image, the text 'North Korea is but a short flight away.' is written in a bold, sans-serif font. The overall tone is serious and military.

and Ready at *Kunsan*

Photography by Jim Haseltine

North Korea is but a short flight away.

The Korean War is—technically—still going on. With some newsworthy exceptions over the last 60 years, however, the cease-fire between North and South Korea has held. But North Korean leaders continue to amass troops, missiles, and artillery on its side of the demilitarized zone and frequently threaten violence in rants against the US and its southern neighbor. Recently, the rhetoric has centered on North Korea's nuclear weapons program and its progressing long-range missile capability. Kunsan Air Base—and its sister Osan Air Base—maintain a high state of readiness to help blunt and repel any potential North Korean assault on the South. Airmen at Kunsan practice constantly in nuclear-chemical-biological protective gear and at delivering ordnance. Given the threat of missile attack, fighters huddle in hardened aircraft shelters designed to withstand all but a direct hit. The F-16s at Kunsan are the youngest and most capable in USAF's inventory, available at an instant's notice if the war should resume at full volume. [1] During a preflight inspection, Capt. Nick Ilchena looks over an ALQ-184 electronic warfare pod on his F-16. [2] A 35th Fighter Squadron F-16 inside a hardened aircraft shelter. Several live GBU-31 JDAM bombs (at right) sit ready for loading in a hurry. [3] Two F-16 pilots offer the "Snakes" salute before they taxi off for a combat training sortie.



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[1] Visiting F-16s of the 421st Expeditionary Fighter Squadron from Hill AFB, Utah, prepare to roll out to the Kunsan runway during a high-velocity arming and readying exercise of every available fighter for a no-notice launch. It results in an "Elephant Walk," a mass taxi after the breakneck preparation. The routine exercise ensures the wing can get off the ground quickly for combat in case of a surprise attack from the North, which would almost certainly mean tactical ballistic missiles targeting the base. [2] Capt. William Parks, 35th FS, conducts a preflight on a GBU-24 before a training mission. [3] South Korean soldiers guard the outer entrance to Kunsan Air Base. To differentiate it from the base, the Air Force refers to the local town as Gunsan. [4] F-16s of Osan's 51st Fighter Wing fly in formation with an 8th Fighter Wing jet (at left) from Kunsan.



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[1] Air Force pilots refer to the frequent murky weather in Korea as “the schmeeze” or “the milk bowl.” It presents a tough flying challenge in a mission largely dedicated to precise strikes on moving targets. Here, 51st FW and 8th FW jets of 7th Air Force fly in formation. **[2]** Kunsan is a busy airfield with USAF and South Korean Air Force aircraft constantly on the move. Here (l-r), TSgt. Steven Lathem, SrA. Sean Greenwell, and SSgt. Jeremy Sebesta keep on their toes, monitoring activity during an afternoon launch. **[3]** SrA. Carlos Ortiz (l) and SrA. Dennis Morrison work on an F-16 hydraulics system. **[4]** F-16s from South Korea’s 38th Fighter Group, also stationed at Kunsan, joined four USAF squadrons for the Elephant Walk. The host country’s F-16s wear a lower-contrast paint scheme than the USAF jets.





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[1] Part of the 8th FW's mission statement is to "Take the Fight North." Both the 35th and the 80th Fighter Squadrons train to do this day and night. Here, F-16s prepare for a night sortie. [2] An 80th FS F-16 releases two inert GBU-12 500-pound laser guided bombs during a training mission. Prominent is the tailcode WP, for "Wolf Pack," a name with roots in the 1950s war. [3] 35th FS Life Support Technician SSgt. Gerald Myles helps Lt. Col. Shamsher Mann, director of operations for the 35th, adjust his night vision goggles. [4] Two F-16s in aircraft shelters as night falls on the peninsula. [5] An F-16 pilot waits for the salute that will signal it's time to push the throttle forward and ascend into the night sky.

[1] SrA. Bradley Denny (l) and SSgt. Jose Sanchez install practice GBU-12 laser guided bombs on an F-16's pylon. Practice versions of AIM-120 AMRAAM and AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles have already been mounted. Prepping and arming this 80th FS aircraft takes place inside one of Kunsan's many hardened aircraft shelters. **[2]** A 35th FS F-16 pops defensive flares while flying an air-to-ground training mission. **[3]** 8th Civil Engineer Squadron firefighters monitor flight activities on the runway at Kunsan. **[4]** SSgt. Jason Sallee (l) and SSgt. Shiloh Bell of the 8th Security Forces Squadron and their dogs patrol the perimeter of Kunsan. North Korea boasts that its war plans include infiltration, sabotage, and assassination at South Korea's bases. Miles of North Korean dug tunnels under the DMZ have been discovered over the decades since the cease-fire and the threat of enemy infiltration is very real.



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[1] Two 55th FS F-16s await attention from maintenance crews during a nighttime shift. **[2]** In this impressive lineup for the Elephant Walk are F-16s from five units: the 35th, 55th, 80th, and 421st FS from USAF and from South Korea's 38th FG. The aircraft can marshal with a fast response time—classified, of course. **[3]** Capt. Jonathan Ballard from the 35th FS—nicknamed the “Pantons”—offers the squadron’s “Push It Up” salute. **[4]** SSgt. Kevin Tasker (l) and SrA. Stephen Caseman prepare to load an AIM-9X missile on an F-16. The AIM-9X is the best short-range missile in USAF’s arsenal and is aimed using a helmet-mounted cueing system. It’s all part of keeping the tip of the spear razor-sharp. ■