



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on November 18, 2019

U.S. and South Korea Downsize Joint Training Event to Show “Good Faith” to North

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper said on November 17 that the United States and South Korea have indefinitely postponed a joint military exercise in an “act of goodwill” toward North Korea. Esper made the announcement during a joint news conference in Bangkok with Jeong Kyeong-doo, South Korea’s minister of national defense.



Esper said the postponement was not a concession to Pyongyang, but instead “a good-faith effort by the United States and the Republic of Korea to enable peace, to shape ... to facilitate a political agreement — a deal, if you will — that leads to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula,” reported the AP.

The defense secretary also reportedly stated that both the United States and South Korea urged Pyongyang to “demonstrate the same goodwill” and resume denuclearization talks “without precondition or hesitation.”

Esper added that the United States and South Korean militaries “will remain at a high state of readiness.” A November 18 Defense Department news release also stated that while at the Bangkok conference, “Esper reiterated the U.S. commitment to achieve the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea and complete abandonment of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles.”

When Esper made the announcement on Sunday, it was already dated news since a November 6 article in *Air Force Magazine*, citing a statement Korean officials told the government-funded Yonhap News Agency that the United States and South Korea will once again hold a scaled-down flying training event instead of the large-scale Vigilant Ace exercise. The report quoted Pentagon spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Dave Eastburn, who told the agency there will be an upcoming “Combined Flying Training Event.”

It is the second consecutive year that Vigilant Ace has been suspended. The exercise, first launched in 2015, regularly included hundreds of aircraft from both the U.S. Air Force and Republic of Korea Air Force, along with aircraft from the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. Last year’s exercise was suspended following President Trump’s summit with North Korea’s Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un.

Air Force Magazine reported in October 2018 that former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Jeong Kyeong-doo announced that decision during a meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Singapore. The explanation was that it was an effort to let the diplomatic process continue, with the end goal of denuclearization on the peninsula.



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“Both ministers are committed to modifying training exercises to ensure the readiness of our forces,” Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White said in a statement at the time. “They pledged to maintain close coordination and evaluate future exercises.”

Photo: [U.S. Air Force](#)

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