

US and South Korea to scale back major military exercise

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In October the US and South Korea cancelled a major exercise, Vigilant Ace, that was to be conducted in December (Representational photo/Reuters)

Washington: The United States and South Korea will scale back a major military exercise next spring to avoid setting back diplomacy over North Korea's nuclear weapons, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has said.

Mattis told reporters at the Pentagon that the exercise, known as Foal Eagle and conducted each spring in South Korea to keep ground, air, naval and special operations forces prepared for combat, will be "reduced in scope." "Foal Eagle is being reorganised a bit to keep it at a level that will not be harmful to diplomacy," he said.

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In October the US and South Korea cancelled a major exercise, Vigilant Ace, that was to be conducted in December, and after President Donald Trump's June summit in Singapore with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, the US dropped a major summertime exercise, Ulchi Freedom Guardian, which Trump derided as wasteful and provocative.

Mattis did not provide details about how Foal Eagle will be reorganised and tone down, but the decision is an extension of efforts by Washington and Seoul to encourage progress in stalled negotiations over the North's nuclear program.

- AP