



By: TA | AP Insight

Pyongyang indifferent to Trump's flattery



North Korea said Wednesday that a U.S. decision to scale back **military exercises** with South Korea does not change what it sees as the provocative nature of the drills, dampening hopes for a resumption of diplomacy between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and U.S. President Donald Trump.

The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made the comments Wednesday night in her country's first reaction to **Trump's moves** to drastically cut back the annual U.S.-South Korean military drills.

"We think it's not worth making comments on that and we have no interest in it at all," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by state media. "The provocative, aggressive nature of the drills won't change even though their duration and size were reduced."

She also cited a series of other military drills carried out by the U.S. and South Korea earlier this year and South Korea's push to introduce nuclear-powered submarines.

Kim Yo Jong denied that there are any communications between Trump and Kim.

Earlier pressed by reporters on whether he had a conversation with Kim Jong Un, Trump said that Kim has responded to his request for a conversation.

Kim Yo Jong's statement did not contain North Korea's typically harsh rhetoric. She briefly said relations between her brother and Trump are "great," mentioning her brother's past comments that he still has "good memories" of Trump.

This suggests North Korea may be trying to manage relations with Trump, while seeking bigger concessions to restart talks.

US and South Korea confirm drastic slashing of drills

Her statement came hours after the South Korean and U.S. militaries confirmed they

were scaling back their 11-day Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises. Trump earlier ordered the Pentagon to "substantially reduce" the exercises, citing what he said was a good relationship with Kim and South Korea's refusal to support him over Iran.

South Korean officials said Trump's announcement came without prior notice, baffling many people in the Asian country and raising concerns about joint defense readiness.

South Korea's military said the allies agreed to adjust the duration and scale of the exercises at the request of the U.S. It said the **ongoing drills** would end Friday, not Aug. 27 as initially planned. It added that the allies also agreed to downsize some joint field training exercises.

The Pentagon said that it was "continuing training that enhances tactical capability" but certain events have been canceled or converted to simulations.

"These adjustments preserve essential readiness and training objectives. There will be no degradation to U.S. training objectives," a Pentagon statement said.

A reduction or suspension of military drills matters because military commanders change periodically.

A one-year suspension of drills would mean commanders unfamiliar with the procedures of the drills would be taking part when they resume, according to Yang Uk, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

Ulchi Freedom Shield is largely a computer-simulated command post exercise meant to hone the allies' ability to deal with potential North Korean aggression.

The drills and a similar springtime exercise are a central pillar of the U.S.-South Korea alliance, which dates to the 1950-53 Korean War

The two countries usually hold a set of field training exercises during the command post

exercise period.

The drills and a similar **springtime exercise** are a central pillar of the U.S.-South Korea alliance, which dates to the 1950-53 Korean War.

But it's also a long-running source of **tensions with North Korea**, which has denounced the exercises as a rehearsal for an invasion and responded with provocative missile tests.

Days before this month's drills began, North Korea launched two ballistic missiles into the sea.

This month's drills were initially supposed to be held in two phases in simulation of North Korean attacks — the first part until this Friday on defensive operations and the second part until Aug. 27 on counteroffensive operations.

North Korea is extremely sensitive to counteroffensive drills, according to South Korean media.

Prospects for Trump-Kim summit unclear

Earlier Wednesday, North Korea's state news agency, KCNA, published a commentary slamming the U.S.-South Korean military drills as “frantic” and “extremely dangerous” and vowing to completely frustrate its rivals' hostilities.

Many experts said Kim, now emboldened by his advancing **nuclear program** and expanding military **cooperation with Russia**, won't likely embrace Trump's overture and return to talks anytime soon unless he's promised bigger concessions.

In response to Trump's previous outreach, Kim suggested last year that he can only return to talks if the U.S. drops its demand for North Korean denuclearization as a precondition for diplomacy.

Trump and Kim met three times from 2018-2019 but their high-stakes diplomacy eventually fell apart

Trump and Kim met three times from 2018-2019 but their high-stakes diplomacy eventually fell apart over wrangling over a North Korean demand for extensive sanctions relief in return for limited denuclearization steps.

On Monday, the office of South Korean President **Lee Jae Myung** expressed hope that a “friendly relationship” between Trump and Kim would lead to “meaningful dialogue” to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula. Lee is a liberal who wants better ties with North Korea.

But his office's statement drew a strong backlash from conservatives, who alleged Lee's government was prioritizing the resumption of Kim-Trump diplomacy over security concerns caused by Trump's move.

Trump's move may focus on South Korea over Iran

In his social media post, Trump said the drills are not only costly but “send a signal that is totally inappropriate and hostile” to North Korea, which he said “has been unthreatening and respectful” during his time in the White House.

Trump said he asked Lee if South Korea would join the U.S. in the “denuclearization” of Iran, “and they said, ‘No thanks!’”



Neither South Korean nor U.S. officials were informed of Trump's move before his social media post - Cho Hyun

The U.S. and South Korea have since canceled or reduced other joint drills to support diplomacy with North Korea and cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.

At separate parliamentary hearings Wednesday, South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun and Defense Minister Ahn Gyu-back said neither South Korean nor U.S. officials were informed of Trump's move before his social media post.

Cho said the **alliance remains strong**, while Ahn said South Korean and U.S. defense officials were maintaining close consultations.

Some experts say Trump's cut of the drills was more likely designed to apply pressure on South Korea to give him substantial support over the Iran war than to reach out to North Korea.

"Trump's message is that if you don't cooperate with us on Iran, we're not cooperating with you" on the drills either, said Yang, the analyst. "It's like he's asking South Korea to show it's helping him over Iran" by taking steps like sending warships or reinforcing missile defenses in some areas.

South Korean officials said South Korea and the U.S. are closely discussing practical and military contributions that South Korea can make to help restore freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.

It wasn't the first time that the U.S. and South Korea have scaled back or canceled their drills.

In 2018, Trump abruptly announced the cancellation of a major war game with South Korea, after his first summit with Kim.