

Team Spirit



The Team Spirit exercise, held between 1976 and 1993 by the U.S. and South Korean militaries, was canceled in hopes North Korea would abandon its nuclear program and allow international inspections. Team Spirit continued to be scheduled from 1994 to 1996 but was canceled each year as an incentive to improve relations. About 200,000 U.S. and South Korean service members participated in Team Spirit.

Team Spirit was usually held in late March, Team Spirit, is a joint/combined exercise designed to evaluate and improve the interoperability of the ROK and U.S. forces. In-country forces are augmented for training purposes by U.S. Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force units from outside the ROK. The exercise is defensive in nature. In the past, as dates for Team Spirit exercises are announced, prior notification is given to north Korea. The success of Team Spirit as an essential training vehicle in a joint/combined environment adds significantly to both its deterrent value and the command's war fighting capabilities.

Team Spirit is an annual field maneuver exercise initiated in 1976 in order to deter North Korean war provocations and fortify ROK-US security cooperation. Purely defensive in nature, Team Spirit is basically a combined exercise and is regularly held between the two allies. This is, then, quite different from what the North criticized the exercise as being-offensive training-and we have even invited the North to observe the training. Team Spirit is a mandatory exercise needed to evaluate the ROK-US alliance and to foster combined operations and military capabilities for defending South Korea.

The Team Spirit exercise began in 1976. The North Korean response to first Team Spirit exercise in 1976 was the proximate source of the "tree-cutting" incident that led to Operation Paul Bunyan. In 1991 the exercise was scaled down in light of the Persian Gulf War and US defense budget cuts. In 1992 Team Spirit was canceled in the interests of promoting North Korean cooperation on nuclear inspections. In late 1992, North Korea unilaterally withdrew from the South-North High-Level Talks on the pretext of the '93 Team Spirit Exercise, resulting in a complete suspension of inter-Korean dialogue until October 1993. The United States and South Korea offered to suspend the Team Spirit '94 military exercise on the premise that North Korea would full implement the IAEA inspection and exchange envoys with the South to discuss the nuclear issue. Subsequently, no Team Spirit exercises have been held since 1993. Team Spirit continued to be scheduled from 1994 to 1996 but was canceled each year as an incentive to improve relations. About 200,000 U.S. and South Korean service members participated in Team Spirit.

On March 6, 1997 it was announced that the government of the Republic of Korea and the United States had decided not to hold the Team Spirit exercise in 1997. The decision was made taking into account the recent overall security situation on the Korean Peninsula. The cancellation will have no impact on the defense readiness of the ROK-U.S. forces on the Peninsula. The decision to cancel Team Spirit was part of efforts by our two governments to build confidence and to create an atmosphere conducive to the reduction of tensions on the peninsula.