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# VIGILANT ACE-18

## Maximizing partnership and interoperability



From clockwise: Airmen gather to prepare a F-15C Eagle for takeoff Dec. 5, at Gwangju Air Base, Republic of Korea during Exercise Vigilant Ace-18. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Kristen A. Heller) / Four F-15s from Kadena Air Base, fly over Gwangju Air Base, Dec. 1. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Jessica H. Smith) / 18th Wing Commander from Kadena Air Base, Brig. Gen. Case Cunningham and Mayor of Gwangju, Jang Hyun

Yoon walk to a static F-22 Raptor, Dec. 7. Yoon visited during the routine exercise Vigilant Ace. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Jessica H. Smith) / Staff Sgt. Andrea Miles, 18th Aerospace Medicine Squadron technician, Kadena Air Base, assists a patient with fastening a seat belt on a C-130 Hercules cargo aircraft member, assigned to Yokota Air Base, Japan during exercise Vigilant Ace 18 at Osan Air Base, Republic of Korea, Dec. 6.

(U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Franklin R. Ramos) / A maintenance Airman and an F-15C Eagle pilot have a discussion prior to takeoff Dec. 5, at Gwangju Air Base, during Exercise Vigilant Ace-18. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Kristen A. Heller) / An F-15 from Kadena Air Base, lands at Gwangju Air Base, Dec. 1. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Jessica H. Smith)

### By Senior Airman Jessica Smith

18th Wing Public Affairs

**12/10/2017 - GWANGJU AIR BASE, South Korea** — Over the last week, U.S. and Republic of Korean Forces across South Korea participated in an annual bilateral exercise, Vigilant Ace-18. The exercise focuses on interoperability within the alliance between the United States Air Force and ROK Air Force.

Although this is an annual exercise, two major differences this year were the participation of fifth-generation aircraft and the standing up of Gwangju Air Base. Despite the fifth-generation fighters being new to the ROKAF, and the

challenges of creating a fully functional collocated operating base, the exercise still went off without a hitch.

“We have learned a lot of the limitations that are here currently and how to work around them,” said Maj. Joshua Ramirez, director of inspections, 18th Wing, Kadena Air Base. “Obviously we don’t have all of the comforts of home here—that includes equipment and personnel, we found very creative ways to get around that stuff and still get jets in the air.”

With U.S. military units from all over coming together as one team, including Alaska, Japan and the Republic of Korea, Vigilant Ace-18 allows the USAF to employ the agility of airpower away from

home stations as well as an opportunity to get to know our ROKAF counterpart’s capabilities.

“In order for us to really be able to project the force that we need, we really have to come together and learn how to work together and understand what each base brings to the fight,” Ramirez said. “It gets them to see how we do things and it gets us to see how they would do things and find a common ground to make it a unified front.”

While the exercise has a heavy emphasis on air power and deterrence, it’s also about building relationships.

“Specifically with our ROKAF partners, it allows us to continue to strengthen

and build the alliance which ultimately is the key to deterrence and keeping the peace on the peninsula,” explained Brig. Gen. Case Cunningham, commander, 18th Wing, Kadena Air Base. “That opportunity is incredibly important for us.”

Maximizing interoperability and partnership, was tested first-hand when a snowstorm resulted in aircraft unexpectedly landing at Gwangju Air Base.

“For this skeleton crew that we have—compared to what we have back home—to be able to catch all those personnel would have been impossible,” Ramirez said. “The ROKAF stepped up like champions and they were out there catching  
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