

US and South Korea begin military drills aimed at strengthening their defense against North Korea

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — U.S. and South Korean troops kicked off a large-scale exercise Monday aimed at strengthening their combined defense capabilities against nuclear-armed North Korea, which again accused the allies of practicing an invasion.

The annual summertime exercise comes amid heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula as the pace of both North Korea's weapons demonstrations and the U.S.-South Korea combined military exercises have intensified in a cycle of tit-for-tat.

The exercise began hours after North Korea's Foreign Ministry issued a statement repeating the North's contention that such exercises are "provocative war drills for aggression." It said the North's nuclear ambitions are thus justified, adding that it is crucial to "constantly maintain the balance of power for preventing a war by stockpiling the greatest deterrence."

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