

North Korea slams US-South Korea-Japan military cooperation

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea on Sunday slammed the United States, South Korea and Japan for pushing to boost their trilateral military cooperation targeting the North, warning that the move is prompting urgent calls for the country to reinforce its military capability.

North Korea has long cited what it calls hostility by the United States and its allies as a reason to pursue a nuclear program. Sunday's statement comes as North Korea's neighbors say the country is ready for its first nuclear test in five years as part of its provocative run of weapons tests this year.

"The prevailing situation more urgently calls for building up the country's defense to actively cope with the rapid aggravation of the security environment of the Korean Peninsula and the rest of the world," the North Korean Foreign Ministry said in a statement, without elaborating how it would boost its military capacity.

The statement took issue with a trilateral meeting among the U.S., South Korean and Japanese leaders on the sidelines of a NATO summit last week, during which they underscored the need to strengthen their cooperation to deal with North Korean nuclear threats.

"The chief executives of the U.S., Japan and South Korea put their heads together for confrontation with (North Korea) and discussed the dangerous joint military countermeasures against it including the launch of tripartite joint military exercises," the statement said.

North Korea views U.S.-led military exercises in the region, particularly ones with rival South Korea, as an invasion rehearsal, though Washington and Seoul have repeatedly said they have no intentions of attacking the North.

During the recent trilateral meeting, U.S. President Joe Biden said he was "deeply concerned" about North Korea's continued ballistic missile tests and apparent plans to conduct a nuclear test. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said the importance of trilateral cooperation has grown in the face of North Korea's advanced nuclear program, while Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said

joint anti-missile drills would be important to deter North Korean threats.

Earlier in June, the defense chiefs of the U.S., South Korea and Japan agreed to resume their combined missile warning and tracking exercises as part of their efforts to deal with North Korea's escalating weapons tests.

The North Korean statement accused the United States of exaggerating rumors about North Korean threats "to provide an excuse for attaining military supremacy over the Asia-Pacific region including the Korean Peninsula."

U.S. officials have said Washington has no hostile intent toward Pyongyang and urged it to return to disarmament talks without any preconditions. North Korea has rejected the U.S. overture, saying it would focus on buttressing its nuclear deterrent unless the United States drops its hostile policies toward the North, an apparent reference to U.S.-led economic sanctions and its regular military training with South Korea.

North Korea claimed the recent NATO summit proves an alleged U.S. plan to contain Russia and China by achieving the "militarization of Europe" and forming a NATO-like alliance in Asia. It said "the reckless military moves of the U.S. and its vassal forces" could lead to dangerous consequences like a nuclear war simultaneously taking place in both Europe and Asia-Pacific.

Pyongyang has often released similar warlike rhetoric and warned of the danger of nuclear war in times of heightened animosities with Washington and Seoul.

Source:

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