

US-South Korea military drills begin after North Korea submarine missile tests

SEOUL, South Korea — The South Korean and U.S. militaries launched their biggest joint military exercises in years Monday, as North Korea said it conducted submarine-launched cruise missile tests in apparent protest of the drills it views as an invasion rehearsal.

North Korea's missile tests Sunday signal the country likely will conduct provocative weapons testing activities during the U.S.-South Korean drills that are to run for 11 days. Last week, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ordered his troops to be ready to repel its rivals' "frantic war preparation moves."

The South Korean-U.S. drills include a computer simulation called the Freedom Shield 23 and several combined field training exercises, collectively known as the Warrior Shield FTX.

South Korean and U.S. authorities didn't immediately disclose details of Monday's drills.

But they said earlier the computer simulation is designed to strengthen the allies' defense and response capabilities amid North Korea's increasing nuclear threats and other changing security environments. They said the field exercises would also return to the scale of their earlier largest field training called Foal Eagle that was last held in 2018.

A recent U.S. military statement said the field exercises are to further enhance the two militaries' "cooperation through air, land, sea, space, cyber and special operations, and improve upon tactics, techniques and procedures."

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North Korea said in state media that its launches of two cruise missiles from a submarine off its east coast showed its resolve to respond with "overwhelming powerful" force to the intensifying military maneuvers by the "the U.S. imperialists and the South Korean puppet forces."

The North's official Korean Central News Agency on Monday called the missiles "strategic" weapons and said their launches verified the operation posture of the country's "nuclear war deterrence." This implies that North Korea aims to arm the cruise missiles with nuclear warheads.