

# US, S.Korea to hold big exercises with focus on N.Korea 'aggression'

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SEOUL — The United States and South Korea will conduct more than 10 days of large-scale military exercises in March, including amphibious landings, officials from the two countries said on Friday.

The “Freedom Shield” drills will be held from March 13 to March 23 to strengthen the allies’ combined defensive posture, the two militaries said in a statement released at a briefing in Seoul.

“Freedom Shield is designed to strengthen defense and response capabilities of the Alliance by focusing within the exercise scenario on things such as the changing security environment, DPRK aggression and lessons learned from recent wars and conflicts,” the allies said, referring to North Korea by the initials of its official name.

South Korean officials have noted North Korea is also conducting annual winter drills.

Freedom Shield will feature field exercises on a scale not seen since about 2017, before former U.S. President Donald Trump scaled back public drills to facilitate diplomacy with North Korea.

Talks with North Korea later stalled and COVID-19 restrictions kept drills small in recent years.

With a record number of missile launches from North Korea last year, and South Korea’s lifting of anti-pandemic measures, the allies are returning to large-scale drills.

Over the past month South Korean and U.S. special operations troops conducted a live-fire drill named “Teak Knife,” which included a U.S. AC-130J gunship that participated in joint drills for the first time, firing guided missiles and bombs as well as 30 mm and 105 mm guns. (Reporting by Josh Smith; Additional reporting by Hyunsu Yim; Editing by Tom Hogue, Robert Birsell)