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North Korea Condemns US-Led Bomber Drills Over Korean Peninsula

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North Korea has issued a sharp rebuke to the United States, accusing it of destabilising the region through a recent trilateral military exercise involving strategic bombers over the Korean Peninsula. The drill, which saw participation from US, Japanese, and South Korean air forces, was framed by the US military as a demonstration of collective resolve to address

regional security challenges. However, Pyongyang views these actions as a direct threat to its sovereignty, escalating tensions in an already volatile area.

The exercise, conducted last Friday, involved a pair of US B-52H Stratofortress bombers escorted by four Japanese F-2 fighters and four South Korean KF-16 jets. According to the US Indo-Pacific Command, the flight took place over the East China Sea, west of Japan's Kyushu Island and near South Korea's Jeju Island. Official imagery released by the allied forces depicts six aircraft flying in tight formation, a clear signal of military coordination. This marks the third such joint operation this year, underscoring the deepening ties between Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul in response to North Korea's expanding military ambitions.

North Korea, one of nine nations possessing nuclear capabilities, is estimated to hold around 50 warheads, with long-range missiles capable of striking the US mainland. Kim Jong Un, the country's leader, has repeatedly pledged to pursue the "unlimited expansion" of his nuclear arsenal, a stance that has alarmed neighbouring powers and their Western allies. In response, Japan and South Korea rely on the US's extended deterrence, often referred to as the nuclear umbrella, which commits American forces to counter nuclear threats, potentially with nuclear weapons.

The B-52H bomber, a cornerstone of US strategic airpower, can carry up to 70,000 pounds of ordnance, including bombs and missiles. Data from the Federation of American Scientists indicates that 46 of the 76 B-52H bombers in the US fleet are nuclear-capable, each able to carry up to 20 AGM-86B air-launched cruise missiles configured for nuclear or conventional strikes. It remains unclear whether the bombers involved in last week's drill were nuclear-armed, a detail that has further fuelled North Korea's rhetoric.

In a statement released on Sunday, the chief of the Policy Office of North Korea's Defence Ministry condemned the joint exercises as the "main danger factors" intensifying military tensions on the peninsula. The statement, carried by state media, asserted that such actions by the US and its allies constitute "provocative military moves" that threaten regional security. It further warned that North Korea's armed forces are in "constant military preparedness" to counter what it described as "collective provocations" and to respond decisively to any "acts of war."

Pyongyang's response reflects its long-standing narrative of framing US-led military activities as aggressive encroachments on its sovereignty. The regime has consistently used such rhetoric to justify its military buildup, including advancements in missile

technology and nuclear capabilities. The trilateral drills, while defensive in intent, are seen by North Korea as a direct challenge to its strategic interests, particularly as they involve advanced US assets like the B-52H.

The growing frequency of these joint exercises highlights the broader strategic contest in the region. For Japan and South Korea, the US alliance remains a critical bulwark against North Korea's unpredictable behaviour. Yet, for Pyongyang, these displays of military unity only reinforce its determination to bolster its arsenal, perpetuating a cycle of escalation that shows little sign of abating.

As tensions simmer, the international community watches closely. The delicate balance of deterrence and diplomacy on the Korean Peninsula remains fraught, with each military manoeuvre carrying the potential to tip the scales toward confrontation or dialogue. For now, North Korea's warnings serve as a stark reminder of the challenges in managing one of the world's most intractable security dilemmas.