



By: TA | AP Brief

South Korean leader calls for solid US alliance



South Korea's president said Tuesday a solid alliance with the U.S. strengthens the foundation of national security, as many South Koreans were baffled and concerned about U.S. President **Donald Trump's abrupt order** to "substantially reduce" joint military exercises.

Trump made the surprise announcement in a social media post just before U.S. and South Korean soldiers began Monday's annual **Ulchi Freedom Shield** exercises, which are largely designed to sharpen readiness against North Korean threats.

Trump cited what he said was a good relationship with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and South Korea's refusal to join the U.S. war against Iran.

Trump's move was apparently taken without consultations with South Korea and meant to reach out to Kim, deepening concerns about the reliability of the U.S.-South Korean alliance forged in the turmoil of the 1950-53 Korean War.

Confidence in the U.S. has already eroded among many South Koreans because of Trump's tariff war and last year's **immigration raid** in the U.S. state of Georgia that led to the detainment of hundreds of South Korean workers.

Trump's announcement "reveals the stark reality of a faltering Korea-U.S. alliance, fueling public anxiety," South Korea's Hankook Ilbo newspaper said in an editorial Tuesday. "It's absurd that the U.S. appears to treat North Korea more respectfully than its ally South Korea."

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In a regular Cabinet meeting, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung stressed the importance of a firm military alliance with the U.S., saying that "national security will be further strengthened when the alliance is solid."

"When we build up our strengths, our value and importance as an ally will further grow," said Lee, a liberal who has called for a stronger, **self-reliant defense posture**.

The drills are defensive in nature

It was unclear which parts of the 11-day South Korea-U.S. exercises were being downsized. The South Korean and U.S. militaries earlier said their drills this year would be similar in scale to previous years and incorporate lessons from recent conflicts such as North Korea's battlefield experiences in the Russia-Ukraine front.

They also said the drills are defensive in nature.

North Korea's Foreign Ministry accused South Korea and the U.S. of plotting **more provocative drills** this year and vowed to respond with "a new level of a deterrent."