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The South Korea-US joint military exercises that began on April 12, 2022 was held amid tense relations between North Korea and the US, with Pyongyang continuing its missile provocations while declaring to “respond to power with power.” Thus, the joint military drills will only be met with hostility from North Korea, which will most likely use the military exercises as an excuse for further provocations. The first South Korea-US joint military exercise was held in 1954, and since then the combined forces have consistently pursued the following goals: deterring and responding to North Korean armed provocations; improving the operational capability of South Korean and US soldiers; and further solidifying combined defense posture. The historical development of the joint military drills has been influenced by changes in the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. The title, scale, and features of the joint military exercises have been modified according to the diversified provocations of North Korea, diplomatic efforts for denuclearization,

preparations for the transfer of wartime operational control, and the need to enhance South Korean military readiness posture.

North Korea, South Korea-US alliance, and South Korean military readiness posture are the three factors that have determined the features and significance of the South Korea-US joint military exercises. Regarding the South Korea-US alliance, the purpose of the recent joint military drills is to enhance extended deterrence by deploying strategic assets such as the USS Abraham Lincoln, and also to prepare for the transfer of wartime operational control to South Korea. Considering South Korean military readiness posture, the joint exercises gain more importance in the wake of the Russian-Ukraine war and its lessons, and also with the rising demand for countermeasures against North Korea's advancing nuclear threat.

The following should be considered for South Korea-US joint military exercises in the future: First, the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is at a stalemate, and North Korea has yet to show a genuine change in attitude. Thus, South Korea and the US must take precautions when defining the features of the joint military exercises as a conciliatory gesture for the sole aim of resuming dialogue with North Korea. Second, intensified efforts must be made to establish an operation

plan that reflects an effective extended deterrence to North Korea's nuclear threat. Third, substantial joint military drills must be devised to include a training system based on advanced technology. Also, additional joint military exercises with other allies should be held to strengthen South Korean military readiness posture.

Keywords: South Korea-US joint military exercises, North Korea, South Korea-US alliance, South Korean military readiness posture, extended deterrence, transfer of wartime operational control