



Online Series

2018. 09. 11. | CO 18-38

Survey on Perception of Korean and Foreign Experts Regarding Peace Regime and Denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula

Chung, Sung-Yoon

(Research Fellow, International Cooperation Research Division)

The major outcomes of this survey can be boiled down to the following six points. First, South Korea's policy on North Korea scored the highest points of evaluation both at home and abroad. China's policy toward North Korea was better received by respondents compared to that of the United States. Second, the experts have shown reservations about the result of the North Korea-U.S. summit in June, 2018. Third, the foreign experts outnumbered those of Korea in a response that North Korea would maintain its current nuclear capabilities and that the U.S. might take coercive measures in response. Fourth, a majority of experts responded that North Korea's denuclearization process may not be resolved in a package deal and that instead it can be carried out in a phased and synchronous manner. In the process, those experts believed that inspection and verification is highly likely to become the most challenging task to be dealt with than measures to guarantee North Korea's regime security. Fifth, a majority of experts predicted that the most thorny issue with regard to the conclusion of a peace treaty would be the dismantlement of the United Nations Command and that the signatories of the peace treaty should be South Korea, North Korea, the U.S., and China. Finally, a majority of the experts said that the peace regime on the Korean Peninsula could be expanded into the regional peace regime of Northeast Asia.

Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) conducted an in-depth survey on expert groups both at home and abroad with regard to topics such as denuclearization and establishment of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula and the future of the two Koreas.¹⁾ The survey lasted from June 15 to August 15, 2018 right after the North Korea–U.S. summit, covering a total of 151 experts including 73 Korean nationals. Out of 78 foreign experts, 25 was from the U.S., followed by 11 from China, 8 from Japan, 12 from Russia, 11 from Europe, and 11 from the Asia Pacific region.²⁾ The survey was divided into four sections including Perception on North Korea, Denuclearization and Peace Regime, Unification on the Korean Peninsula, and Role and Expectation of the International Community, with a total of 47 questions addressed to those who took part in the survey.³⁾

【 Evaluation of Policies toward North Korea for Each Country and Region 】

- △ South Korea's policies on North Korea received the strongest international support.
- △ Foreign experts viewed China's policies on North Korea more positively than those of the U.S.

The survey looked into policies on North Korea implemented by major

-
- 1) The survey was carried out as part of 2018 KINU general research project of *Denuclearization Strategy for a Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula*, commissioned to Ilmin International Relations Institute of Korea University, of which the author is currently engaged as a researcher in charge.
 - 2) The existing surveys on issues of the Korean Peninsula with a target of experts have often been carried out with a handful of experts mostly from four major countries—the U.S., China, Japan, and Russia. This survey, however, includes experts from Europe, Australia, India, and ASEAN member states in addition to those from the above-mentioned four major powers. Considering the fact that there are only few experts on North Korea outside South Korea and the U.S., the author believes that the existing expert groups exert significant influence on shaping an international perception on issues of the Korean Peninsula. In particular, this survey is evaluated as having produced meaningful results in that it allows the comparison of perception on the changing circumstances between experts groups at home and abroad and among major countries.
 - 3) The complete outcome of the survey on the perception of Korean and foreign experts and the questions asked to them (both in Korean and English) will be made public through the upcoming *KINU Insight*. At the same time, the comprehensive analysis on the survey, its policy implications, and response strategy will be described in 2018 KINU general research project of *Denuclearization Strategy for a Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula*, which is due to be published during the second half of 2018.

countries and each region. As shown in Table 1 below, experts gave the highest points of 6.42 to South Korea's policies toward North Korea. Japan's policies on North Korea received the lowest point at 3.4. The U.S. received 5.34 points, followed by 5.1 of China, 4.48 of the European Union, 4.26 of Russia, and 4.23 of ASEAN.⁴⁾ Korean experts gave the highest points to South Korea and then to the U.S. Their foreign counterparts also gave the highest points to South Korea but they evaluated China's policies more positively than those of the U.S. In fact, experts both at home and abroad appear to think that South Korea is playing a positive role as a mediator of promoting peace in the form of diplomacy between North Korea and the U.S. with their ongoing intensive negotiations. At the same time, China's consistent diplomatic role in facilitating peaceful denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula seems to have been highly regarded by experts.

<Table 1> Evaluation of Countries' Policy on North Korea

Policy	No. of Respondents	Average	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
1. South Korea	151	6.42	2.23	1	10
2. U.S.	151	5.34	2.23	0	10
3. China	151	5.1	2.29	0	10
4. Japan	151	3.40	1.98	0	9
5. Russia	151	4.26	2.08	0	9
6. EU	151	4.48	2.07	0	9
7. ASEAN	151	4.23	2.05	0	9

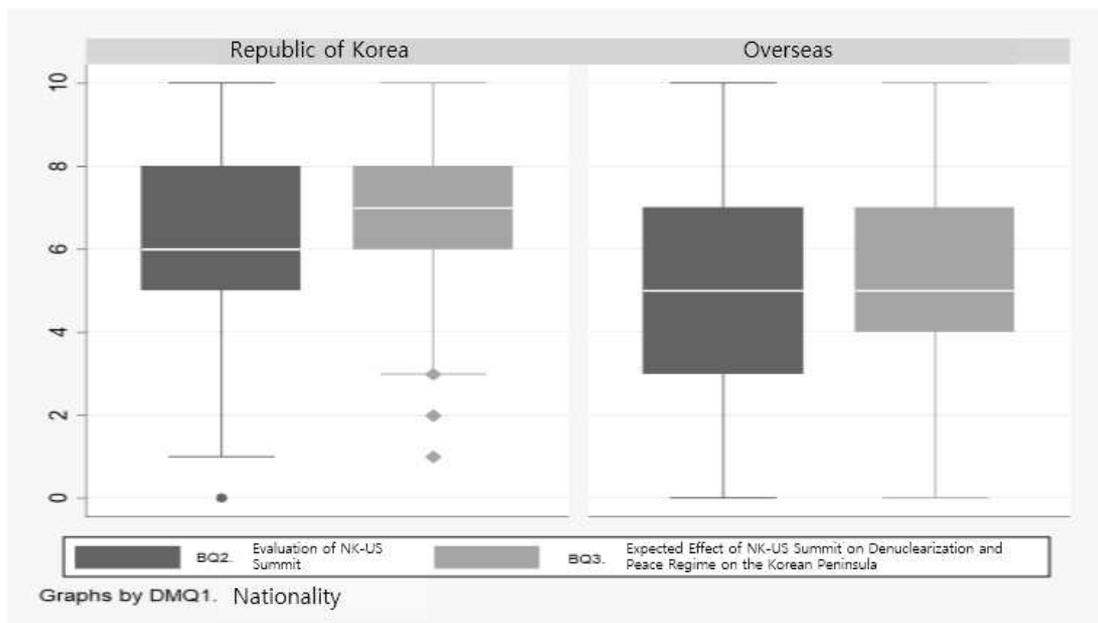
【 Comprehensive Evaluation of the North Korea-U.S. Summit 】

- △ The score of North Korea-the U.S. summit remained at the average level in the comprehensive evaluation. Respondents expected that North Korea's promise for implementation of denuclearization will rely on the fulfillment of promises made by the U.S.
- △ With regard to a possibility of North Korea maintaining the status quo with its nuclear weapons program, foreign experts appear to be a lot more suspicious than their Korean counterparts.

4) Experts were asked to answer questions on a scale of zero (very inappropriate) to ten (very appropriate). "Neutral" was five points.

Regarding the influence of the North Korea-U.S. summit on the establishment of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, Korean experts turned out to be more positive than their foreign counterparts (Korean experts: 6.14/6.78 vs. foreign experts: 4.83/5.03). This can be explained by two factors. To begin with, Korean experts belong to a country directly involved with denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and thus have higher hopes for the future. Second, Korean experts have stronger belief in the South Korean government's will for denuclearization and the establishment of a peace regime.

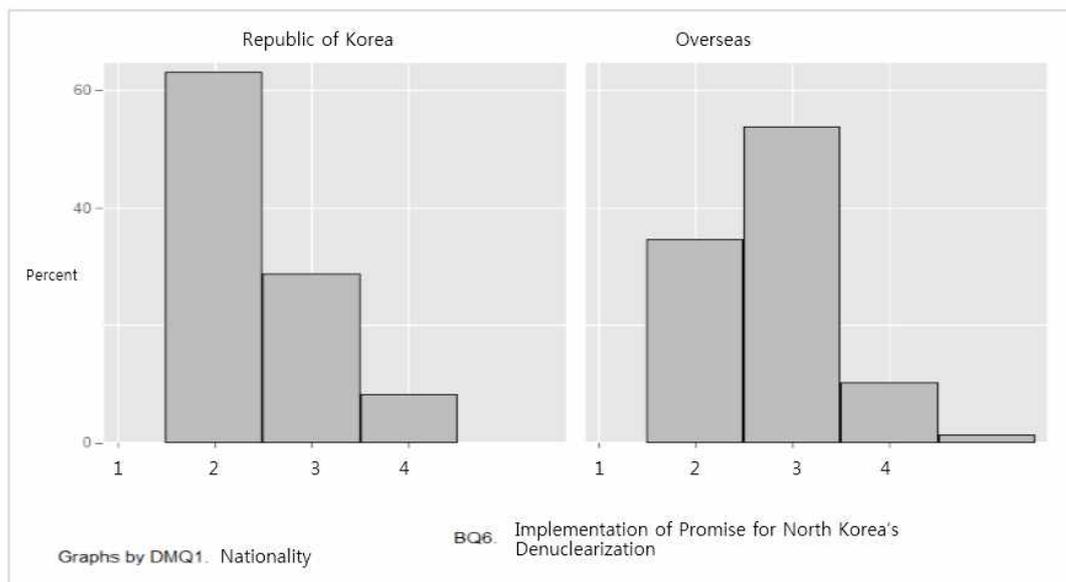
<Figure 1> Comprehensive Evaluation of the North Korea-U.S. Summit



Regarding a question on North Korea's faithful implementation of its commitment to denuclearization, 48.43% of the experts said that North Korea would adjust its level of denuclearization in accordance with the fulfillment of promises made by the U.S. Meanwhile, 41.73% of the respondents predicted that North Korea would seek to maintain at least some of its current nuclear capability regardless of the U.S. implementation of its promises. However, 9.27% responded that North Korea will faithfully implement its denuclearization process independent of the progress to be made by the U.S. Among those who predicted that North Korea would

maintain some of its current nuclear capability regardless of the U.S. implementation of its promises, Korean experts accounted for 28% while their foreign counterparts carved out 53% of the total. The result indicates that foreign experts still remain more doubtful about North Korea's commitment to denuclearization than their Korean counterparts.

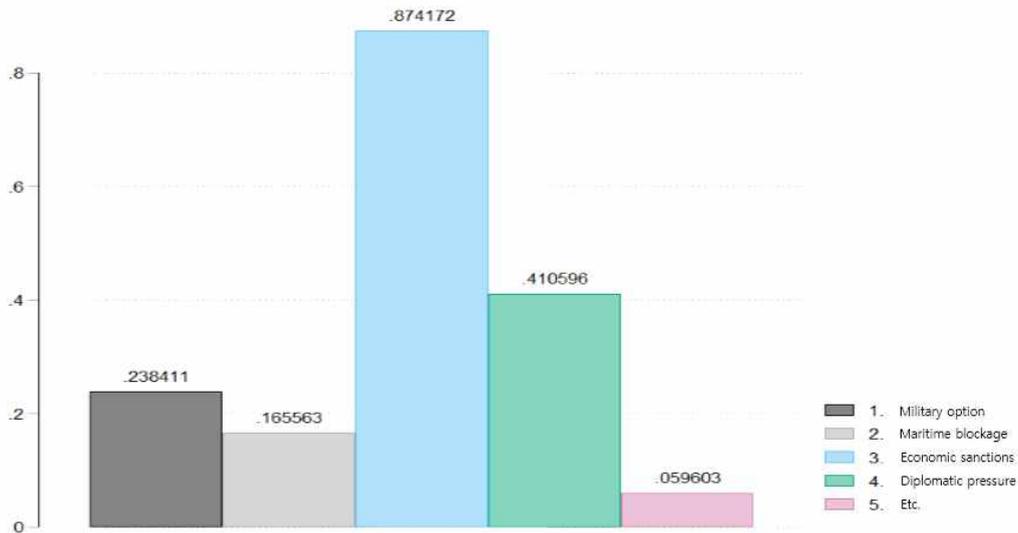
<Figure 2> Evaluation of North Korea's Fulfillment of Its Promise to Denuclearize the Korean Peninsula Agreed in the North Korea-U.S. Summit



1: Unconditional denuclearization, 2: U.S. implementation-denuclearization, 3: Possession of some nuclear weapons, 4: Strengthening of nuclear capability

Those who took part in the survey were asked which measures the U.S. government would take if North Korea fails to keep its promise to abandon its nuclear weapons program. Most of the respondents said that the United States would strengthen economic sanctions on North Korea and there found no significant difference between Korean and foreign experts regarding this question. All in all, most of the respondents predicted that the U.S. would take coercive measures including military options, maritime blockage, and economic sanctions instead of ratcheting up diplomatic pressure.

<Figure 3> Expected Reactions of the U.S. in Case North Korea Fails to Fulfill Its Commitment to Denuclearization



【 Definition and Methods of Denuclearization 】

- △ Most of the experts at home and abroad believe that ‘complete denuclearization’ claimed by North Korea does not mean CVID.
- △ Many of them predicted that rather than a package deal, the denuclearization process would proceed in a phased and synchronous manner.
- △ Respondents also answered that in the denuclearization process, inspection and verification would be much more of a challenging task than coming up with measures to guarantee the regime security for North Korea.

Regarding the meaning of ‘complete denuclearization’ consistently mentioned by North Korea, most of the respondents (62%) said that it meant ‘denuclearization of the entire Korean Peninsula.’ 50% of the experts answered that it meant a mere ‘diplomatic expression of North Korea’s will to dismantle its nuclear arsenal.’ In a question, to which respondents were allowed to give multiple answers, only few Korean and foreign experts (9%) answered that the term ‘complete denuclearization’ used by North Korea could equate with the realization of CVID. Most American and

European experts said that it was just ‘North Korea’s diplomatic expression of its willingness to denuclearize.’ In short, the experts thought that the term ‘complete denuclearization’—came out as a result of the North Korea–the U.S. summit—does not automatically guarantee North Korea’s actual dismantlement of its nuclear weapons program.

For the most plausible reason for North Korea’s acceptance of denuclearization negotiation: 30.46% of the experts responded that economic sanctions against North Korea have taken an effect; 28.48% pointed out the change of a national goal to turn North Korea into a normal state; and 20.53% said that it was North Korea’s strategy to buy more time to complete its nuclear weapons program. Only 5.96% choose pressure from military options of the U.S. The Korean and foreign experts all recognized the effect of economic sanctions against North Korea positively. However, the foreign experts who believed that North Korea is strategically seeking to buy more time to finish building up its nuclear arsenals outnumbered their Korean counterparts in the ratio of four to one (32% of foreign experts vs. 8% of Korean experts). Experts’ positive recognition of the effect of economic sanctions may justify the rationale of continuing the current sanctions against North Korea to press the North to keep its promise of denuclearization. At the same time, a number of the experts also believed that North Korea might have changed its national goal to turn itself into a normal state. In particular, experts from Korea and China were way more likely to opt for this answer than their counterparts from the U.S., Japan, Europe, and other regions. This indicates that there will be fierce disputes over North Korea’s willingness for denuclearization and feasible methodologies thereof in the denuclearization process down the road.

When asked about a time-span required to achieve complete denuclearization, 45.03% said ‘ten years and more,’ 29.8% of them ‘from five to ten years,’ and 19.87% ‘from three to five years.’ Only 5.3% responded that it could be done within three years. Those responses show the recognition of the experts that a compressed denuclearization in a short period of time, which has been publically proclaimed by the Trump administration, is very unlikely to take place in the future. It also calls for our attention that most of the Korean experts predicted

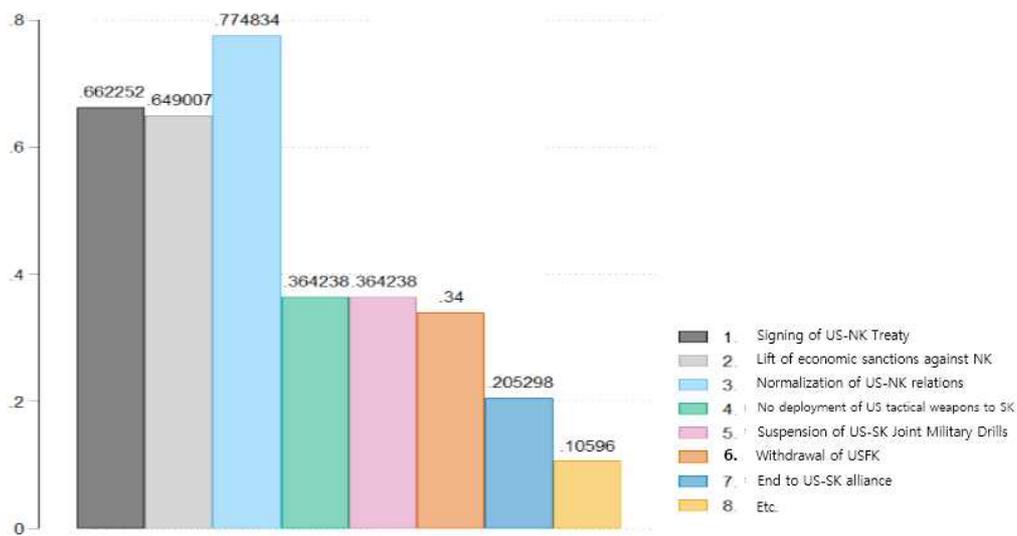
five to ten years but their foreign counterparts generally believed that it would take ten years or more.

With regard to the future denuclearization process, 47.68% of the experts predicted ‘a phased and synchronous process’; 35.1% said ‘a phased and synchronous process after striking a package deal’; 11.92% thought something else as a viable process; and 4.64% opted for ‘a compressed process after striking a package deal.’ Most of the experts believed that the denuclearization process is highly likely to take place in a phased and synchronous manner. However, they thought that an compressed process following the conclusion of a package deal would be unlikely. The difference between Korean and foreign experts did not seem to be significant regarding this question. When it come to the most challenging problem to be tackled in the process of North Korea’s denuclearization: 48.34% of the experts pointed out ‘inspection and verification’; 23.84% ‘measures to guarantee North Korea’s regime security’; 14.57% ‘the level and scope of denuclearization’; and 10.6% ‘the level of compensation at each stage of denuclearization.’ For most part, foreign experts predicted that it would be difficult to ‘devise measures to guarantee North Korea’s regime security.’ In particular, experts from China and Russia tended to answer this way than those from other countries.

The experts were asked a question that allowed multiple responses—what would be the method that North Korea wants to guarantee the regime security. Most of them picked out ‘normalization of the diplomatic relations between North Korea and the U.S.,’ ‘lift of the economic sanctions against North Korea,’ and ‘conclusion of a peace treaty’ as a feasible method. It is noteworthy that the Korean experts believed that the following measures would not affect the process of guaranteeing North Korea’s regime security: ‘limited operation of the U.S. strategic assets,’ ‘suspension of the ROK-U.S. joint military exercises,’ ‘withdrawal of the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK),’ and ‘breaking off of the ROK-U.S. alliance.’ On the contrary, the foreign experts listed the above-mentioned measures as the second most important methods to guarantee the regime security after ‘lift of the economic sanctions against North Korea’ and ‘normalization of the North Korea-U.S. relations.’ The difference of perceptions between the Korean and foreign respondents should be importantly

considered in addressing the controversy over the methods of denuclearization into the future.

<Figure 4> Anticipated Measures that North Korea May Want to Guarantee Its Regime Security



【 Regarding Peace Treaty 】

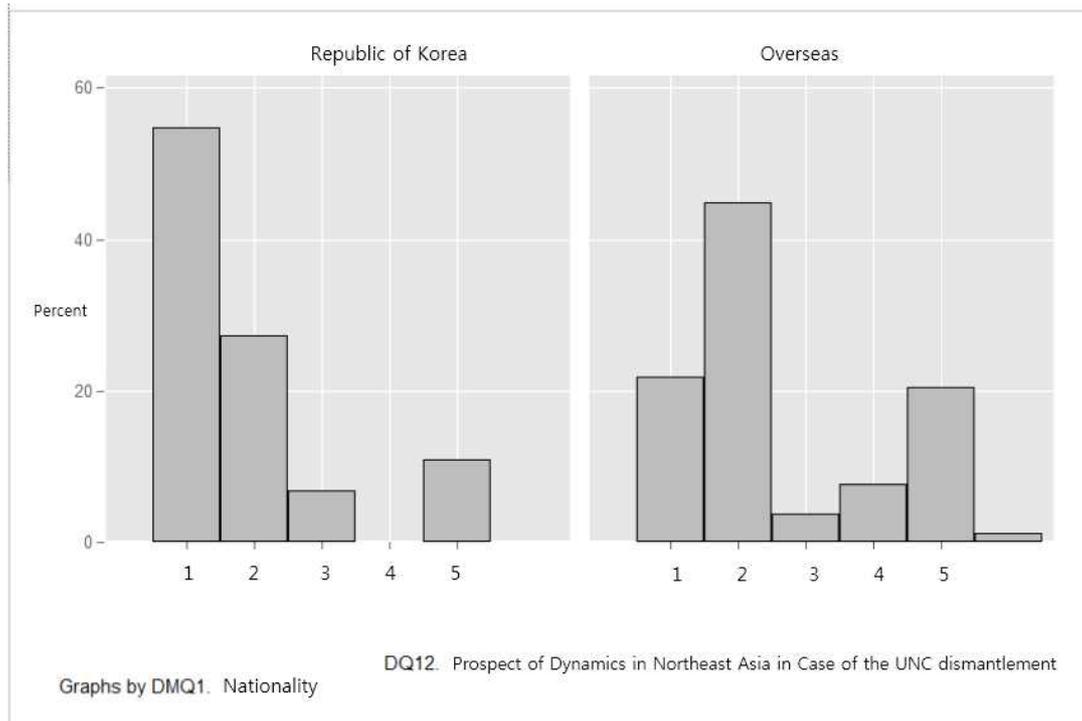
- △ The role and scale of the USFK is highly likely to go through fundamental changes when a peace treaty is concluded. Moreover, the dismantlement of the United Nations Command (UNC) will be the most challenging issue in negotiations between North Korea and the U.S.
- △ Although the dismantlement of the UNC will make little difference in political and diplomatic dynamics of Northeast Asia, the U.S. will lose some of its footing in the region.
- △ The signatories to a peace treaty are expected to be South Korea, North Korea, the U.S., and China.

The survey dealt with four major issues regarding the declaration of the end of the Korean War and a peace treaty. First of all, the experts predicted that

the greatest change to be brought about by the conclusion of a peace treaty would be the dismantlement of the UNC when they were asked to elaborate on major changes in South Korea's security environment when a peace treaty is signed. At the same time, many of them cited the breaking-off of the ROK-U.S. alliance and a fundamental transformation of South Korea's strategies for national security and defense as possible consequences of a peace treaty. While the Korean experts said that the ROK-U.S. alliance is mostly likely to be broken off, the foreign experts listed the dismantlement of the UNC and the change in South Korea's strategies for national security and defense as more likely scenarios. With regard to a question about a change in the role and scale of the USFK following the conclusion of a peace treaty, 127 experts (84%) said that the role of the USFK will go through changes and 88 respondents (69.3%) answered that its role and scale will be adjusted. Only six of them (4.72%) predicted that the U.S. would withdraw its force from South Korea. Those responses show that most of the experts expect a significant change in the role and scale of the USFK and this will in turn have a tangible impact on each country's negotiation strategies.

As many of the experts predicted that the UNC would be dismantled when a peace treaty is concluded, 37.8% of them thought that there would be no great change in political dynamics of Northeast Asia, whereas 36.4% predicted that the U.S. would lose some of its political and diplomatic influence in the region, revealing a marked disagreement among experts regarding the matter. Most of the Korean experts answered that there would be no noticeable changes down the road but their foreign counterparts saw that the U.S. would lose some of its footing in the region. In this regard, the respondents from Asia Pacific region pointed out that China would exert more influence in the region. As the UNC was founded by a resolution of the United Nations Security Council during the Korean War, matters regarding the dismantlement of the UNC will become the most challenging issue in the process of officially declaring an end to the Korean War that has emerged as one of the thorny issues in negotiations between North Korea and the U.S.

<Figure 5> Expected Political and Diplomatic Dynamics of Northeast Asia When the UNC is Dismantled



1: No big difference, 2: Decrease of U.S. influence, 3: Increase of U.S. influence, 4: Decrease of China's influence, 5: Increase of China's influence

Finally, when asked which countries should sign a peace treaty, a great majority of the experts—116 of them (76.82%)—said that the parties to the treaty should include South Korea, North Korea, the U.S., and China. Meanwhile, 11.92% of them said that signatories should be South Korea, North Korea, and the U.S. Those who answered that all of the countries that took part in the Six-Party Talks should be included accounted for 7.95% of the respondents. Only 3.31% responded that the U.S. and North Korea should sign the treaty. There was no disagreement among the Korean and foreign experts that South Korea, North Korea, the U.S. and China should be the parties to the treaty.

【 Impact of the U.S. Midterm Election and Repercussions of Sino-American Relations 】

- △ The U.S. midterm election is expected to make the U.S. government put more engagement efforts in improving relations with North Korea, instead of putting more pressure.
- △ However, the Korean experts predicted that the U.S. government would become more deeply involved in important affairs on the Korean Peninsula following the elections. But the American and Chinese experts thought that it would be more likely for the U.S. government to ratchet up pressure on the North Korean regime.
- △ The experts also thought that conflicts would more likely arise than cooperation between the U.S. and China over North Korea's nuclear issue.

The survey asked the experts about a possible impact of political events (such as the midterm election and the presidential election) in the U.S. on the Trump administration's policies toward North Korea. About half of the experts or 49.66% predicted that the above-mentioned elections would have a serious impact on the administration's policies on North Korea, making the U.S. government more engaged in diplomacy with North Korea. Meanwhile, 23.49% of the respondents said that the political events would prod the U.S. government to put more pressure on North Korea. However, 16.11% of the experts answered that the consequences could not be predicted for now and 10.74% pointed out that the elections would have nothing to do with the administration's policies toward North Korea. The fact that more than half of experts on North Korea believe that the domestic political events are intertwined in one way or another with the Trump administration's policies toward North Korea will give some useful clues to predict the timetable of the denuclearization process. It indicates that the political landscape after the midterm election slated for November 2018 and the dynamics of political change during the presidential election that will begin in earnest from June 2020 would set significant landmarks in the process of the denuclearization process. The Korean experts believed that the U.S. elections would press Washington to actively engage itself

in diplomacy with North Korea. However, the American and Chinese experts thought that the political events would prod the Trump administration to put more pressure on North Korea. Given that the American experts are generally well-versed in political affairs in their country, the differences in predictions between the Korean and American experts appear to be understandable. Those differences should be taken into account when South Korea and the U.S. try to roll out cooperative measures toward North Korea.

The survey also asked how the diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China would fare in connection with North Korean nuclear crisis. In this regard, 44.37% of the experts said that Sino-American relations would get more strained and only 14.7% of the respondents answered that cooperation between the two countries would be expanded and strengthened. 37.5% predicted that it will remain the same as it is now. Considering that Sino-American cooperation is critical in North Korea's complete denuclearization, the outcome of the survey should be taken seriously. In other words, South Korea needs to play a role as a mediator not just between North Korea and the U.S. but also between the U.S. and China. At the same time, South Korea should take appropriate measures to prevent challenging external factors from getting in the way of the denuclearization process, such as an ongoing trade war between the U.S. and China.

【 Relationship between Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula and the Regional Peace Regime of Northeast Asia 】

△ The peace regime on the Korean Peninsula is highly likely to bring about a lasting peace regime of Northeast Asia.

With regard to a question on a possibility of a peace regime to be established on the Korean Peninsula developing into a more extensive peace regime of Northeast Asia, 60.93% of the experts answered that the peace regime on the Korean Peninsula is likely to grow into the one that encompasses the entire Northeast Asia even on a limited scale. Considering that 23.84% of the respondents presented a very

optimistic view, it can be said that most of the experts believed that the peace regime on the Korean Peninsula would have a positive impact on regional peace in general. Only 13.91% of those who took part in the survey predicted that the peace regime on the Korean Peninsula would make almost no difference in regional peace. In this regard, South Korea needs to make efforts to turn and expand the peace regime of the Korean Peninsula into that of Northeast Asia when the Korean War is officially ended in line with the conclusion of a peace treaty.

<Table 2> Possibility of Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula
Developing into the Regional Peace Regime of Northeast Asia

Response	Frequency	Ratio
Almost no possibility	21	13.91
Limited but positive impact expected	92	60.93
Very positive impact expected	36	23.84
Cannot figure out	2	1.32
Total	151	100.00

©KINU 2018

※ The views expressed in this paper are entirely those of the author and are not to be construed as representing those of the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU).