

# **America's Korea Watchers Assess Developments on the Korean Peninsula**

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# **America's Korea Watchers Assess Developments on the Korean Peninsula**

**Peter M. Beck**

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A recent survey of Korea watchers in the United States finds broad support for engaging North Korea and an almost equally strong disapproval of the Bush Administration's approach to North Korea. *Dong-a Ilbo*, one of Korea's largest daily newspapers with a circulation of approximately two million, conducted a survey of America's Korea watchers from March 18 to March 29 on a full range of issues. A total of 72 individuals from America's leading universities, think tanks, the U.S. government, international financial institutions, and private sector participated in the survey. The survey is believed to be the largest of its kind ever conducted. The complete results of the survey follow this summary.

Two-thirds of the 24 questions focused on North-South Korean issues and the role of the United States on the Korean Peninsula. A dramatic 86.1% of respondents expressed support for the Kim Administration's Sunshine Policy toward North Korea. The most common reason for support cited was the belief that the Sunshine Policy is the most cost-effective and least risky way to deal with North Korea. Among the policy's achievements, Sunshine has reduced tensions on the Peninsula and

created the conditions which made the historic 2000 North-South Summit possible. Nevertheless, respondents expressed some areas of concern. The North's failure to change its basic attitude toward South Korea was seen as the policy's greatest short-coming, with the limited progress in implementing cooperation projects cited as the second most significant failing. More significantly, nearly six in ten respondents disapprove of South Korean government subsidies for the Kumgang-san tours because the tours are not economically viable and they do not contribute to broader exchanges between the two Koreas. Three-quarters of respondents believe Korea's next president should continue to engage North Korea, but only 9.7 percent thought the current policy should continue to be pursued. Nearly two-thirds thought the next administration should make some policy adjustments. 20.8 percent felt that a new North Korea policy based on strict reciprocity should be introduced.

America's Korea watchers were highly critical of the Bush Administration's handling of North Korea policy. An overwhelming 72.2 percent of respondents disapprove of the Bush Administration's policy toward North Korea. Slightly more than two-thirds object to the Bush Administration's designation of North Korea as a charter member of the "Axis of Evil" for a variety of reasons, including that the designation undermines the consensus forged with South Korea in dealing with North Korea and will push North Korea away from talking to the South and the United States. Korea watchers also think that North Korea's situation is different from Iran and Iraq's. The 21.7 percent who approved of the designation thought that the Bush Administration had correctly identified the nature of the North Korean regime. Slightly more than two-thirds of respondents felt that the United States should continue to abide by the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework. Slightly more than 20 percent thought the agreement should be re-negotiated. No respondent thought the United States should walk away from the agreement. The Bush Administration's hard-line approach toward North Korea was cited as the biggest reason for the stall in North Korea's relations with the United States and South Korea, but when asked what was the key to improving relations between the United States and North Korea, a slight plurality of 33 percent thought that above all else, North Korea should return to the negotiating table without preconditions.

On economic issues, Korea watchers were generally supportive of President Kim's reform efforts, but also expressed some concern. A full 90.3 percent felt that significant economic reforms had been implemented, but an almost equally large number believe that much remains to be done. Macroeconomic stabilization was cited as the Kim Administration's greatest achievement; labor and public sector reform received the lowest marks. The administration's proactive stance toward foreign direct investment was also viewed as a significant achievement, but FDI levels would be even higher were it not for disagreements in asset valuations and the lack of transparency at many *chaebol*. A slight plurality (38.9 percent) thought that President Kim should focus on the Korean economy during the remainder of his term of office rather than improving North-South relations (11.1 percent). Similarly, one-third of respondents thought that the economy would be the biggest factor in the presidential election (along with personality politics) rather than the state of North-South relations (4.2 percent).

Finally, two-thirds of Korea watchers are concerned about the rise of anti-Americanism in South Korea, with the largest source of the rise (32.6 percent) attributed to the Bush Administration's hard-line stance toward North Korea. 20.4 percent thought that U.S. trade pressure and protectionist policies were primarily to blame. An equal number pointed to the size and shape of America's military footprint in Korea. The best way to remedy this situation is for Americans to have a better understanding of the situation on the Korean peninsula, according to a plurality (41.7

percent) of respondents.

Survey notes: Of the 72 respondents, 32 represented universities, 24 think tanks, 6 current/former U.S. government, 5 international financial institutions and 5 consultants/private sector. The respondents included Charles Armstrong, Ralph Cossa, Stephen Costello, Bruce Cumings, Peter Hayes, Chalmers Johnson, Lawrence Krause, Larry Niksch, Marcus Noland, Robert Rich, Scott Snyder, David Steinberg, Richard Walker, and Larry Wortzel. A number of participants did not want their names used in the survey. Figures do not always sum to 100 percent due to respondents who did not mark an answer or marked more than one answer. Questions asking for a ranked answer only show the results for the top-ranked choice. The views expressed in the survey do not necessarily reflect the views of individual survey participants or KEI.

## ***Dong-a Ilbo* Survey of America's Korea Watchers**

### **Results**

1. Relations between the United States and North Korea as well as North-South relations have stalled. What are the major reasons for this? (please rank from 1 - 4, with 1 being most important reason)

31. North Korea's refusal to hold talks with the U.S. and South Korea. **31.9%**

32. The Bush Administration's hard-line approach toward North Korea. **45.8%**

33. South Korea's Sunshine Policy has led the North to develop unreasonable expectations. **5.6%**

1. Despite many meetings, North Korea, South Korea and the U.S. have failed to develop mutual confidence. **16.7%**

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the Bush Administration's policy toward North Korea?

12. Fully approve. **12.5%**

13. Somewhat approve. **11.1%**

14. Neither approve nor disapprove. **4.2%**

15. Somewhat disapprove. **30.5%**

16. Completely disapprove. **41.7%**

3. Do you agree or disagree with President Bush's designation of North Korea as part of an "axis of evil?"

13. Completely agree. **13.9%**

14. Somewhat agree. **6.9%**

15. Neither agree nor disagree. **6.9%**

16. Somewhat disagree. **22.2%**

17. Completely disagree. **45.8%**

4. If you answered A or B in Question 3, why do you agree with President Bush's designation?

53. President Bush has correctly identified the nature of the North Korean regime. **53.3%**

## **B. Placing such pressure on North Korea may force it to come to the table for talks with**

South Korea and the United States. **13.3%**

1. President Bush needed to have the Kim Dae-jung Administration clearly understand

U.S. policy toward North Korea. **0%**

33. All of the above. **33.3%**

5. **If you answered D or E in Question 3, why do you disagree with President Bush's designation?**

6. North Korea's situation is different from that of Iran and Iraq. **8.1%**

7. Such a hard-line posture will lead North Korea to close the door on talks with South

Korea and the U.S. **10.2%**

1. The remarks undermine the consensus with South Korea on how to deal with North Korea. **10.2%**

69. All of the above. **69.4%**

6. Do you support or oppose President Kim's Sunshine Policy?

37. Strongly support. **37.5%**

38. Somewhat support. **48.6%**

39. Neither support nor oppose. **9.7%**

40. Somewhat oppose. **4.2%**

41. Strongly oppose. **0%**

7. **If you answered A or B in Question 6, why do you support the Sunshine Policy?**

8. The policy has contributed to North-South reconciliation and promoted exchanges between the two Koreas. **12.9%**

6. The policy has helped build confidence between the two Koreas. **6.5%**

7. In long run, Sunshine Policy is the most cost-effective approach with the least amount of risk. **25.8%**

51. All of the above. **51.6%**

8. **If you answered D or E in Question 6, why do you oppose the Sunshine Policy?**

9. The policy allows North Korea to unilaterally set the tone of North-South relations. **0%**

10. The policy has led North Korea to develop unreasonable expectations. **0%**

11. The policy has failed to produce a consensus on how to deal with North Korea. **0%**

12. President Kim has only used the Sunshine Policy for domestic political purposes. **0%**

13. All of the above. **33.3%**

14. None of the above. **66.6%**

9. What have been the greatest accomplishments of the Sunshine Policy? (rank from 1 to 5 with one being the greatest accomplishment)

- 48. Tension reductions on the Korean Peninsula. **48.6%**
- 49. The 2000 North-South Summit. **40.3%**
- 50. Increased cultural exchanges. **1.4%**
- 51. Family reunions. **4.2%**
- 52. The Mt. Kumgang tours. **1.4%**

**10. What have been the greatest short-comings of the Sunshine Policy? (rank from 1 to 5 with one being the greatest short-coming)**

- 11. The lack of a return visit to Seoul by Chairman Kim Jong-il. **15.3%**
- 12. The limited progress in implementing the cooperation projects contained in the 2000 Summit Joint Declaration. **20.8%**
- 5. A North-South peace treaty has not been signed. **5.6%**
- 6. North-South dialogue has not been institutionalized. **19.4%**
- 7. North Korea's failure to change its basic attitude toward South Korea. **34.7%**

**11. The South Korean government is now subsidizing Hyundai's Kumgang-san tours due to the venture's financial difficulties. Do you approve or disapprove of the government's involvement?**

- 12. I approve. **38.9%**
- 13. I disapprove. **59.7%**

**12. If you answered A in Question 11, why do you support the government's involvement?**

- 13. The tours are necessary not only to maintain the Sunshine Policy but also to promote exchanges between the two Koreas. **17.9%**

1. Maintaining programs like the Kumgang-san tours will ultimately be helpful for the unification of the two Koreas. **32.1%**

3. The tours give South Koreans a better understanding of the North. **3.6%**

4. All of the above. **46.4%**

**13. If you answered B in Question 11, why do you oppose the government's involvement?**

14. Giving cash to North Korea will only help it to increase its military capabilities. **4.6%**

15. The tours do not contribute to broader exchanges between the two Koreas. **25.6%**

16. North Korea will halt the tours when there is a change of government in South Korea. **0%**

17. The tours are not economically viable. **27.9%**

18. All of the above. **30.2%**

**14. What stance should South Korea's next administration take toward North Korea?**

15. Continue the current policy. **9.7%**

16. Make some adjustments while maintaining the basic principle of engagement. **65.3%**

17. Pursue a new approach toward North Korea based on reciprocity. **20.8%**

18. Cease all efforts to engage North Korea. **1.4%**

**15. What is your assessment of the Geneva Agreed Framework?**

16. The U.S. should continue to abide by the framework. **69.4%**

17. The U.S. should renegotiate the framework. **22.2%**

18. The U.S. should abandon the framework and pursue a "package deal." **0%**

19. The U.S. should abandon the framework and not try to reach a new agreement. **0%**

**16. What should be the top priority for improving relations between North Korea and the U.S.? (rank from 1 to 4 with 1 being the top priority)**

17. The Bush Administration should abandon its hard-line approach toward North Korea.

**25.0%**

1. The Bush Administration should remove North Korea from the list of the countries

supporting terrorism. **18.1%**

1. North Korea must give up the development and export of weapons of mass

destruction. **13.9%**

33. North Korea should return to the negotiating table without any preconditions. **33.3%**

**17. What is your assessment of the economic reforms taken by the Kim Administration since the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997?**

18. South Korea has made great progress in reforming its economy. **12.5%**

19. There has been some reform, but much more needs to be done. **77.8%**

20. There have not been any significant reforms. **5.5%**

21. Economic reforms have actually made the situation worse than it was in 1997. **1.4%**

**18. Looking back at the Kim Administration's economic policies, what do you think has been the greatest accomplishments and failures? (rank from 1 to 6 with 1 being the greatest accomplishment and 6 being the greatest failure)**

19. Macroeconomic stabilization. **55.5%**

20. Foreign Direct Investment policy. **12.5%**

21. Corporate reform. **4.2%**

22. Financial reform. **2.8%**

23. Labor reform. **1.4%**

24. Public sector reform. **1.4%**

**25. A number of foreign direct investment proposals by American firms have either fallen through or been slow to materialize. How would you rank (from 1 to 5) the following factors, with 1 being the most important problem?**

26. Lack of transparency. **29.2%**

27. Labor issues. **12.5%**

28. Government red tape. **5.5%**

29. Debt relief. **1.4%**

30. Asset valuation disagreements. **33.3%**

**20. What do you think President Kim should focus on during his remaining time in office? (rank from 1 to 5 with 1 being the highest priority)**



- 21. Improving North-South relations. **11.1%**
- 22. Improving the economy. **38.9%**
- 23. Promoting diplomatic relations, particularly with the U.S. and Japan. **4.2%**
- 24. Holding impartial local and presidential elections. **31.9%**
- 25. Successfully hosting the World Cup and Asian Games. **7.0%**

**21. Koreans will elect their next president in December. How would rank (from 1 to 4) the salience of the following factors, with 1 being most salient?**

- 22. North-South relations. **4.2%**
- 23. The economy. **33.3%**
- 24. Personality politics. **33.3%**
- 25. Regionalism. **19.4%**

**22. Are you concerned about the potential rise of anti-Americanism in South Korea?**

Yes. **68.0%**

No. **29.2%**

**23. If your answer to the previous question was yes, what are the causes of anti-Americanism? (rank from 1 to 5, with 1 being most serious)**

- 24. The Bush Administration's hard-line stance toward North Korea. **32.6%**
- 25. U.S. trade pressure and protectionist measures. **20.4%**
- 26. The 2002 Winter Olympics Short Track controversy involving South Korean and US skaters. **4.1%**

20. The location of U.S. military bases in highly populated areas. **20.4%**

21. Incidents involving the U.S. military or individual U.S. soldiers. **8.2%**

**24. What should be the top priority for improving relations between South Korea and the U.S.? (rank from 1 to 4, with 1 being the top priority)**

- 25. Americans need to better understand the situation on the Korean Peninsula. **41.7%**
- 26. Koreans need to better understand President Bush's policy toward North Korea and

how much the U.S. has changed since September 11. **8.3%**

1. The leaders of both countries need to exchange views more frequently and intensively.

**26.4%**

11. Koreans should try to be less nationalistic and emotional. **11.1%**

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