

Newsletter No. 37 (March – April 2026)

1. Activities

A. IFES–Association of Contemporary North Korea Studies Joint Academic Conference (March 12, 2026.)

The Institute for Far Eastern Studies of Kyungnam University (Director Kwan-Sei Lee) hosted a joint academic conference with the Association of Contemporary North Korea Studies on March 12 (Thu) at 1 p.m. in the IFES Conference Room, Peace Hall, titled “Assessing the 9th Party Congress of North Korea and Outlook for Future Developments.”



The conference was convened to provide a comprehensive, multidimensional analysis of the outcomes of North Korea’s recent 9th Party Congress and to present an outlook on North Korea’s future domestic and foreign policy directions, as well as broader developments on the Korean Peninsula. In particular, the discussions offered an in-depth assessment across seven key areas: politics; foreign and inter-Korean relations; military affairs; the economy; society and culture; forestry, land and environment; and education.

The conference brought together around 20 experts on the Korean Peninsula, including Director Kwan-Sei Lee, President Sang Bum Kim, Dr. Seong-Chang Cheong (Sejong Institute), and Dr. Young-sun Jeon (Konkuk University). The academic conference opened with welcoming remarks by President Sang Bum Kim of the Association of Contemporary North Korea Studies, followed by opening remarks from Director Kwan-Sei Lee and a congratulatory address by Jong-soo Kim, Chairman of the South-North Korea Exchanges and Cooperation Support Association.

Director Kwan-Sei Lee emphasized that “The conference comes at a particularly critical moment, when North Korea’s strategic choices are poised to have an unprecedented impact on the Korean Peninsula.” He also added that “The insights shared by participating experts served as an important milestone in advancing an objective understanding of internal developments in North Korea and I hope that they will be helpful in shaping effective government policies on North Korea and unification.”



B. The 77th Unification Strategy Forum (March 26, 2026.)

The Institute for Far Eastern Studies of Kyungnam University (Director Kwan-Sei Lee) hosted the “77th Unification Strategy Forum” on March 26 (Thu) at 1 p.m. in the Jeongsan Hall, under the theme of “Exploring a New Paradigm for Denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula.”



In his opening remarks, Director Kwan-Sei Lee noted that “the omission of the phrase ‘denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula’ from key security documents such as the United States’ National Security Strategy (NSS) and China’s defense white paper reflects a serious erosion of established international principles.” He emphasized that “in response to North Korea’s emerging ‘Cold Peace’ posture, it is now imperative to move beyond legacy frameworks and develop clear-eyed, innovative approaches.”

■ Keynote Address: “A New Approach to a Nuclear-Free Korean Peninsula”

Former Minister of Unification Yeon-chul Kim, delivering the keynote address, argued that “denuclearization has largely disappeared from the discourse and that this reality must be acknowledged.” He also suggested that “while maintaining denuclearization as a long-term objective, there is an urgent need for a paradigm shift toward reducing nuclear risks in the near term through ‘operational arms control’, including the suspension of nuclear testing and related activities.” As a practical pathway, he proposed prioritizing the establishment of a peace regime in parallel with confidence-building measures in conventional forces and phased sanctions relief.

■ Session 1: “New Strategies for a Nuclear-Free and Peaceful Korean Peninsula”

Moderated by Director Kwan-Sei Lee, Session 1 featured Professor Seong-Ryoul Cho (Visiting Professor of Military Studies, Kyungnam University), who proposed a ‘a quid pro quo framework on hard security issues’, linking a North Korean nuclear freeze with a halt to the deployment of strategic assets. He also suggested the institutionalization of a ‘dual snapback’ mechanism, under which violations by North Korea would trigger the simultaneous reinstatement of sanctions and infrastructure restrictions by the United States, China, and Russia.

Honorary Research Fellow Sang Hyun Lee (Sejong Institute) argued that, in response to the transactional approach of the Trump administration, South Korea should leverage economic incentives, such as increased imports of U.S. LNG and expanded defense cooperation, to prevent ‘Korea passing’, or South Korea’s national interests being sidelined throughout the course of engagement and negotiations between North Korea and the U.S.

■ Session 2: “Strategic Options for Transforming Inter-Korean Relations”

Moderated by Professor Moo-Jin Yang (Chair Professor, UNKS), Session 2 opened with remarks by Vice President Yonghwan Choi (Institute for National Security Strategy), who argued that South Korea should break free from the ‘North Korea nuclear-first’ approach that is fixated on resolving the nuclear issue as a precondition, and instead focus on securing ‘strategic stability’, including the prevention of accidental clashes and arms control.

Professor Jeong-Chul Lee (Department of Political Science and International Relations, Seoul National University) proposed that South Korea take on an active ‘pacemaker’ role by facilitating a ‘direct visit by former President Trump to Pyongyang or Wonsan’, thereby opening a pathway for renewed U.S.–North Korea dialogue.

Director Kwan-Sei Lee concluded by noting that “the forum served as a platform to generate strategic insights aimed at securing South Korea’s policy autonomy amid a complex crisis shaped by North Korea’s legal codification of its nuclear status and the transactional approach of the Trump administration.” He expressed hope that “the concept of a ‘multilateral, comprehensive security governance framework’ discussed at the forum would serve as a meaningful milestone in transitioning the Korean Peninsula from a zone of confrontation to an era of peaceful coexistence.”

2. Publications

A. Book (3 Issues)



The North Korean Nuclear Issue and Internal Regime Change
February 27, 2026. Kab-woo Koo et al.



A Study on North Korea's Two-State Theory: Focusing on the Case of East and West Germany
March 20, 2026. Bongki Lee



The Impact of AI on Nuclear Deterrence and Strategic Stability, and Its Policy Implications
February 3, 2026. Byong-Chul Lee

B. Strategic Analysis of Korean Peninsula (8 Issues)

Tasks for South Korea-China Cooperation for Peace and Stability on the Korean Peninsula
February 3, 2026. Yeon-chul Kim [Former Minister of Unification / Professor, Inje University]

※ Read the Full Paper



Analysis and Assessment of Two South Korea-China Summits Following the Inauguration of the Lee Jae Myung Administration

February 6, 2026. Dongchan Kim [Assistant Professor, Graduate School of International Studies, Yonsei University]

※ Read the Full Paper



Linking Stability on the Korean Peninsula with South Korea–China Cooperation: A Phased Approach to the Four Major Cooperation Projects

February 11, 2026. Eunju Choi [Research Fellow, Sejong Institute]

※ Read the Full Paper



North Korea’s Healthcare Conditions and the Need for Inter–Korean Cooperation

February 11, 2026. Sungeun Cho [Research Fellow, Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs]

※ Read the Full Paper



North Korea’s Nuclear New Normal and South Korea’s Non–nuclear Peace Strategy: The “Uncomfortable Reality” and an “Uncomfortable Solution”

March 9, 2026. Bong–Geun Jun [Visiting Research Fellow, Sejong Institute / President,
Korea Nuclear Policy Society (KNPS)]

※ Read the Full Paper



North Korea’s 9th Party Congress and External Strategy

March 11, 2026. Kyungmo Ahn [Professor, Korea National Defense University]

※ Read the Full Paper



Iran War and North Korea's Choices: Future Scenarios and Responses

March 30, 2026. Yongkun Cho [Visiting Professor, Kyungnam University]

※ Read the Full Paper



The U.S.–China Summit and the Korean Peninsula

March 30, 2026. Jihwan Hwang [Professor, University of Seoul]

※ Read the Full Paper



C. IFES Brief (5 Issues)

The End of New START and the Nuclear Age: A Prelude to the Collapse of the Global Nuclear Order

February 10, 2026. Byong–Chul Lee [Director of Research, IFES / Director of the Center for North Korean Nuclear Studies]

※ Read the Full Paper



The Results of the Japanese House of Representatives Election and South Korea–Japan Relations

February 10, 2026. Jin–Goo Cho [Director of Research, IFES / Director, Center for Japanese Studies]

※ Read the Full Paper



Evaluation of the Economic Sector at the 9th Party Congress: Core Objectives, Implications, and Prospects

March 1, 2026. Eul-Chul Lim [Director of Research, IFES]

※ Read the Full Paper



'The Revolutionary Ideology of Comrade Kim Jong Un' and the Party Rules of the 9th Party Congress

March 10, 2026. Sang Bum Kim [Director of Research, IFES / Director, Center for North Korean Studies]

※ Read the Full Paper



The 4th Session of China's 14th NPC and CPPCC: Economic and Foreign Policy Directions and Implications

March 23, 2026. Hyunjoo Oh [Research Fellow, IFES]

※ Read the Full Paper



D. IFES Forum (2 Issues)

How can Korea and the U.S. overcome together emerging challenges in technology?

March 17, 2026. Ho-Young Ahn [Former Ambassador to the U.S. / Chair Professor at Kyungnam University]

※ Read the Full Paper



Kim Jong Un's First-Strike Fear Dynamics and U.S. Decapitation Signaling:
Policy Implications for Crisis Stability on the Korean Peninsula

March 18, 2026. Tae-Hwan Kwak, Ph.D. [Professor Emeritus, Eastern Kentucky
University / Former President, Korea Institute for National Unification]

※ Read the Full Paper



//END//