



Top 10 Risks Threatening Peace in Northeast Asia

July, 2023

**Evaluated by foreign policy and security experts
from Japan, the US, China, and South Korea**



The Genron NPO

Cooperation by China Foundation for International & Strategic Studies (CFISS),
Grandveiw Institute, Asan Institute for Policy Studies, Pacific Forum



Top 10 Risks Threatening Peace in Northeast Asia

**Evaluated by 143 experts on foreign policy and security
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**The greatest risk to peace in Northeast Asia in 2023 deemed to be
North Korea's missile launches and other military provocations.
Issues connected to the US-China conflict also appear in the top four.**

Between June 5 and July 12, 2023, The Genron NPO conducted a survey of diplomacy and security experts in Japan, the US, China, and South Korea on the top ten risks threatening the peace in Northeast Asia. A total of 143 individuals from the four countries evaluated and scored the items therein, and the results were compiled in the 2023 edition of the Top 10 Risks Threatening Peace in Northeast Asia.

The greatest risk to peace in Northeast Asia in 2023 was judged by the experts to be North Korea, with its missile launches and other military provocations in first place, followed by North Korea's status as a nuclear power.

Filling out much of the top ten were risks associated with the US-China conflict and its escalation, with the deepening conflict between the two countries in third place, the struggle between the US and China for digital hegemony in fourth, the increased focus on economic security and exclusion of China from supply chains in sixth, and the lack of functional "guardrails" in the US-China crisis management dialogue in tenth place.

Meanwhile, the occurrence of accidents in the Taiwan Strait, which was in fourth place last year, fell to 18th place, and potential emergencies over Taiwan fell from eighth place last year to 21st place this year.

**143 diplomacy and security experts from the US, China, Japan, and
South Korea collaborate on evaluating the issues**

Assessment of the ten risks threatening peace in Northeast Asia was conducted in two stages.

First, a questionnaire was distributed to 500 Japanese experts (with 333 respondents) who participate in discussions and other activities regarding Asian diplomacy conducted by Genron, and this allowed us to narrow the list of items used to assess security risks in

Northeast Asia to 25. Next, the survey was distributed to diplomacy and security experts in Japan, the US, China, and South Korea who evaluated each item according to two criteria (with Chinese respondents evaluating 24 items).

The two criteria used to assess each item were A, the likelihood of that risk resulting in conflict in Northeast Asia, and B, the impact and severity of any such conflict on peace in Northeast Asia.

This assessment was conducted between June 5 and July 12, 2023. Each was evaluated using a score out of four, and the two scores were then added together. A maximum of eight points was possible.

The scoring was conducted in collaboration with the thinktanks and security experts from the four countries participating in the Asia Peace Conference. Participants from Japan included former government officials and diplomacy/security experts; from the US, former military personnel and representatives from security-related thinktanks; from China, representatives of thinktanks affiliated with the People’s Liberation Army and other organizations; and from South Korea, representatives of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

A total of 143 experts participated in the survey: 52 from Japan, 33 from the US, 51 from China, and 7 from South Korea.

Risks in Northeast Asia in 2023		Score (of 8 points)
1	Missile launches and other military provocation by North Korea	6.19
2	North Korea as a nuclear power is already occurring	6.00
3	Deepening of the US-China conflict	5.94
4	The struggle between the US and China for digital hegemony	5.86
5	Increasingly frequent cyberattacks	5.76
6	Increased economic security and exclusion of China from supply chains	5.60
7	Too late to stop global warming, increase in extreme weather events	5.34
8	Growing Chinese nuclear arsenal/military power and lack of transparency	5.24
9	The growing conflict between China and Japan/US/South Korea	5.19
10	No functional "guardrails" in US-China crisis management dialogue	5.01
	(runner-up)	
11	Domestic US political situation in the run-up to the presidential election	4.93

***Reference: Ranking in 2022**

Rank	Risks in Northeast Asia in 2022
1	Deepening of the US-China conflict
2	North Korea as a nuclear power
3	Battle for digital hegemony between the US and China
4	Occurrence of accidents in the Taiwan Strait
5	Continued increase of Chinese military power
6	Economic security and supply chain fragmentation
7	Conflict over territorial islands and waters in the South China Sea
8	Potential for an emergency over Taiwan
9	Normalization of cyberattacks
10	Conflict in the Indo-pacific between China and the QUAD (Japan, USA, Australia, India) and AUKUS (USA, UK, Australia)
	(runner-up)
11	China's increasing influence in Asia

Risks under Two Criteria

About the Two Assessment Criteria

◆Criteria A : What is the likelihood of a conflict erupting regarding below twenty five risks?

- 4 points:** Conditions are highly likely to result in regional conflict or damage (extreme impact)
- 3 points:** The potential for conflict/damage is high, but the situation is not yet critical (major impact)
- 2 points:** There is concern about effects on regional peace (medium impact)
- 1 point:** Not directly connected to regional peace, or impact would be insignificant (minor impact)
- 0 point:** No impact

◆Criteria B : What impact would conflict over an issue have, and how extensive would that impact be?

- 4 points:** Conditions are highly likely to result in regional conflict or damage (extreme impact)
- 3 points:** The potential for conflict/damage is high, but the situation is not yet critical (major impact)
- 2 points:** There is concern about effects on regional peace (medium impact)
- 1 point:** Not directly connected to regional peace, or impact would be insignificant (minor impact)
- 0 point:** No impact

Evaluation Criterion A: Likelihood of the risk resulting in conflict in Northeast Asia

Criterion A was used to evaluate the likelihood that the risk could actually cause a conflict to erupt in Northeast Asia in 2023.

Four out of four points on the scale indicated that the risk has already resulted in conflict, with three points indicating that it is likely to occur in 2023 and therefore requires caution. Two points indicated a 50-50 chance of occurring in 2023.

Under this criterion, the item given the highest score by the combined evaluation of experts from the four countries was North Korean's missile launches and other military provocations at 3.39 points, followed by the struggle between the US and China for digital hegemony at 3.33 points, increasingly frequent cyberattacks at 3.18 points, and increased Japanese defense spending at 3.05 points.

All four of the previous items scored higher than three, meaning that they have reached the stage where caution is required. Japan's defense spending was evaluated as higher than three points due to the strong opinion among Chinese experts that there is a high possibility of it causing issues, with those experts scoring it an average of 3.82 points, making it the highest scored item in this survey.

Looking at other countries, US experts scored two items at over three points or "high likelihood of a conflict occurring": the Xi regime seizing power at the CCP congress at 3.15 points, and the presumption of increasingly frequent cyberattacks from China at 3.0 points.

A number of items related to China's behavior and to the conflict with China scored relatively high, but most remained between 2.5 points and under 3.0 points.

Last year, the US experts gave the highest score to the possibility of an accident in the Taiwan Strait at 2.86 points, but that item fell to 18th place this year with only 1.97 points. Furthermore, potential emergencies over Taiwan fell from 2.14 points to 1.79 points this year. Being below two points, both Taiwan-related items were therefore assessed as having a 50-40 chance of occurring.

In contrast, whereas Chinese experts scored zero items at higher than three points last year, ten items did so this year, showing that those experts perceive risk to be high.

The highest scoring of those items was increased Japanese defense spending at 3.82 points, followed by Japan engaging in unbalanced, unipolar, US-leaning diplomacy at 3.78 points. Both are quite close to four points, or "already occurring."

In the three-point range also included the struggle between the US and China for digital hegemony (3.55 points), and the domestic US political situation in the run-up to the presidential election (3.39 points). The two items related to North Korea also scored higher this year than last, and both lie in the top ten.

Japanese experts rated eleven items at more than three points in terms of potential for occurring, a large jump over the six items scoring that high last year.

The highest at 3.73 points was the item regarding missile launches and other military provocations by North Korea, followed by North Korea's status as a nuclear power at 3.67 points. The two items related to Taiwan were ranked lowest in terms of their potential for occurring in 2023 at under two points each.

In comparison, South Korean participants placed six items at over three points, with the greatest threat being perceived as the missile launches and other military provocations by North Korea at 3.71 points. Also at over three points were two items connected to China: the Xi regime seizing power at the CCP congress held at the end of last year at 3.29 points, and the growing Chinese nuclear arsenal/military power and lack of transparency at 3.0 points.

Different perceptions of North Korean military provocation between the US and Japan + China+ South Korea

Missile launches and other military provocations by North Korea were considered to have the highest threat of resulting in conflict by Japan at 3.73 points, South Korea at 3.71 points, and even China rated the risk at over three with 3.22 points. However, US perception of the issue seems to differ from that of North Korea's neighbors, reaching a score of only 2.91. Meanwhile, the other item on North Korea was regarding its status as a nuclear power, and

for that item Japan assessed it at 3.67 points and China at 3.29, showing that both countries see the risk as high. However, after South Korea and the US agreed in April to a policy of expanded nuclear deterrence, their experts scored the potential North Korean nuclear threat at 2.57 and 2.33 points, respectively.

A cautious outlook on the prospects of conflict breaking out in Taiwan

One noteworthy result regarding criterion A is that the perceived risk of an actual conflict erupting over Taiwan has dropped significantly since last year.

Considering the combined result of the four countries, perception of the risk of the two Taiwan items resulting in conflict has fallen under two points, therefore suggesting the possibility is “low” or “50-50”. The potential for a Taiwan emergency has dropped from 1.85 to 1.37 points, while the possible risk of accidents in the Taiwan Strait has dropped from 2.08 to 1.66 points.

By country, the potential for a Taiwan emergency was scored at 1.18 points in China (down from 1.83 points last year), 1.14 points in South Korea (down from 1.87), 1.38 in Japan (down from 1.54), and 1.79 in the US (down from 2.14).

The perceived risk of an accident in the Taiwan Strait has also fallen, with Japan scoring it at 1.85 points (down from 1.96 points last year), the US at 1.97 points (down from 2.86), South Korea at 1.57 (down from 1.84), and China at 1.25 (down from 1.64).

Japan and China are strongly aware of trends in each other’s countries

Another noteworthy element of this year’s survey is that both Japan and China are strongly aware of security trends in each other’s countries. Japanese experts perceive a strong threat in China’s growing nuclear arsenal/military power and its lack of transparency at 3.40 points, higher than the already significant scores given by the US (2.88 points) and South Korea (3.00 points).

On the other hand, Chinese experts scored increased Japanese defense spending at 3.83 points and Japan engaging in unbalanced, unipolar, US-leaning diplomacy at 3.78 points, placing those items in the first and second spots and close to a maximum score of four. However, it should be noted that the risk of a deeper US-China conflict was perceived as the highest risk in 2022 at 2.69 points, but it fell significantly in this year’s survey to 1.59 points.

Evaluation Criterion B: Impact and severity of that impact on peace in Northeast Asia

Criterion B evaluated the impact the above risks could have on peace in Northeast Asia, and the severity of that impact. It was also scored out of four points. Four points was defined as “extremely likely to cause conflict or damage in the region” or “extreme impact,” three points was defined as “likely to cause conflict or damage in the region but is not yet serious” or “major impact,” and two points signified “a concern that the situation may affect peace in the region” or “moderate impact.”

The US-China conflict, a potential Taiwan emergency, and North Korea have transcended the crisis management phase and require concrete measures

Of the 25 items measured under the criterion, the combined score of the experts from the four countries placed three at the “major impact” level with over three points: deepening of the US-China conflict stands at 3.31 points, a potential Taiwan emergency at 3.1 points, and North Korea’s status as a nuclear power at 3.03 points.

The experts evaluated these three items as genuine risks with potentially serious impacts that must be avoided.

All of these items rose from the two-point to the three-point level since last year’s survey. In addition, a potential accident in the Taiwan Strait is quite close to the above three items with its score of 2.96 points, so the challenge becomes how to manage these four risks so they do not evolve into real threats to peace.

The US experts gave the highest score to the impact of a Taiwan emergency at 3.36, higher than Japan (3.08 points), China (2.96 points), and South Korea (3.00 points).

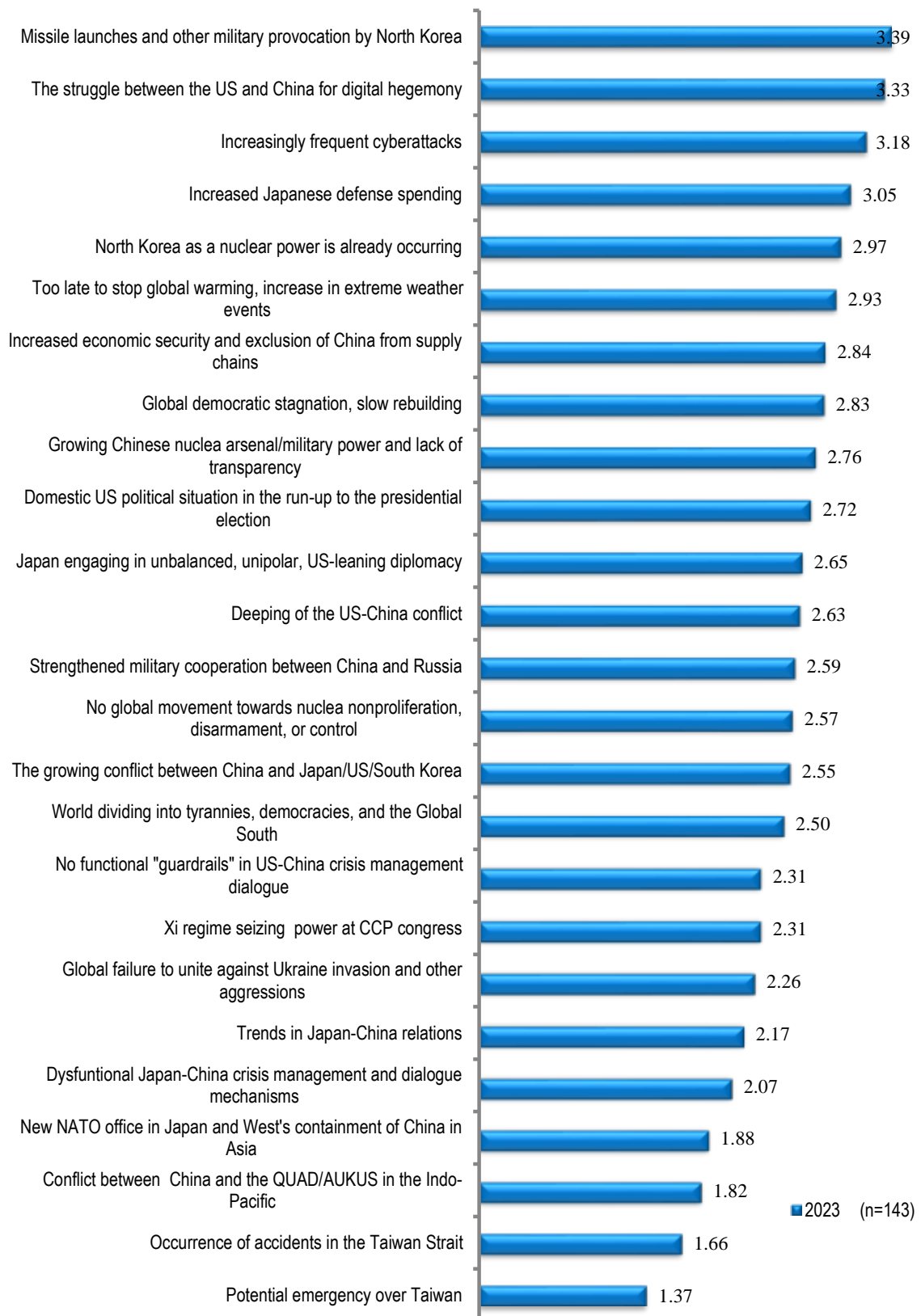
However, South Korean experts determined that the highest risk is North Korea’s status as a nuclear power and gave it a score of 3.57 points, significantly higher than Japan (3.12 points), the US (2.76 points), and China (2.67 points) and highlighting the strong sense of crisis South Korea feels towards its most immediate neighbor.

Both the Chinese and Japanese experts gave the highest score to the deepening of the US-China conflict, and this is particularly true for the Chinese survey participants who scored it at 3.67 points, higher than Japan (3.25), the US (3.03), and South Korea (3.29).

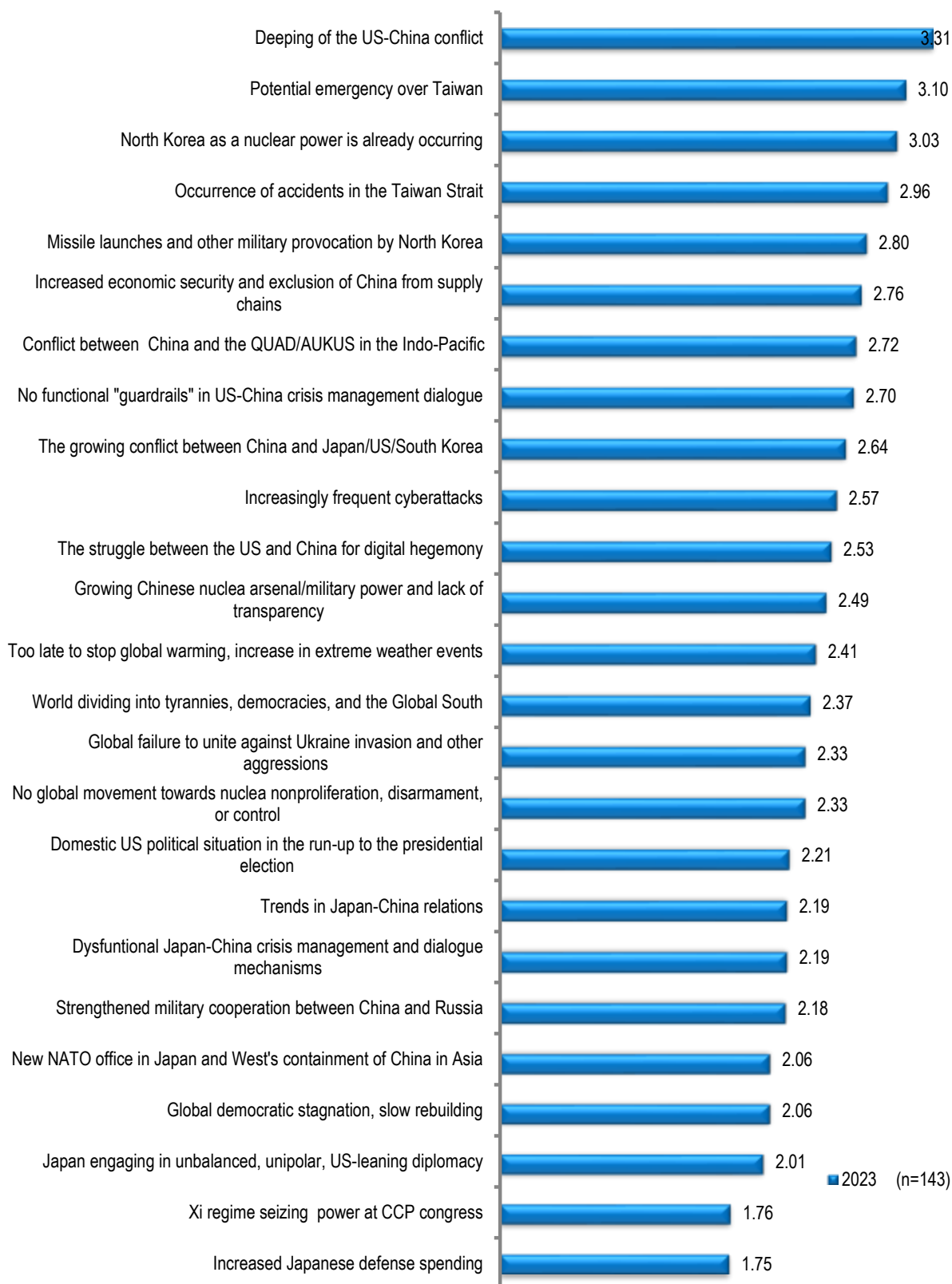
Under criterion A, or the likelihood the issue will result in conflict, Chinese experts demonstrated their belief that the conflict will not escalate further by giving it a score of only 1.57, but the results show that they are strongly concerned about the impact and severity of such a conflict were it to actually occur.

Ranking in Criteria A :

What is the likelihood of a conflict erupting regarding below twenty five risks?

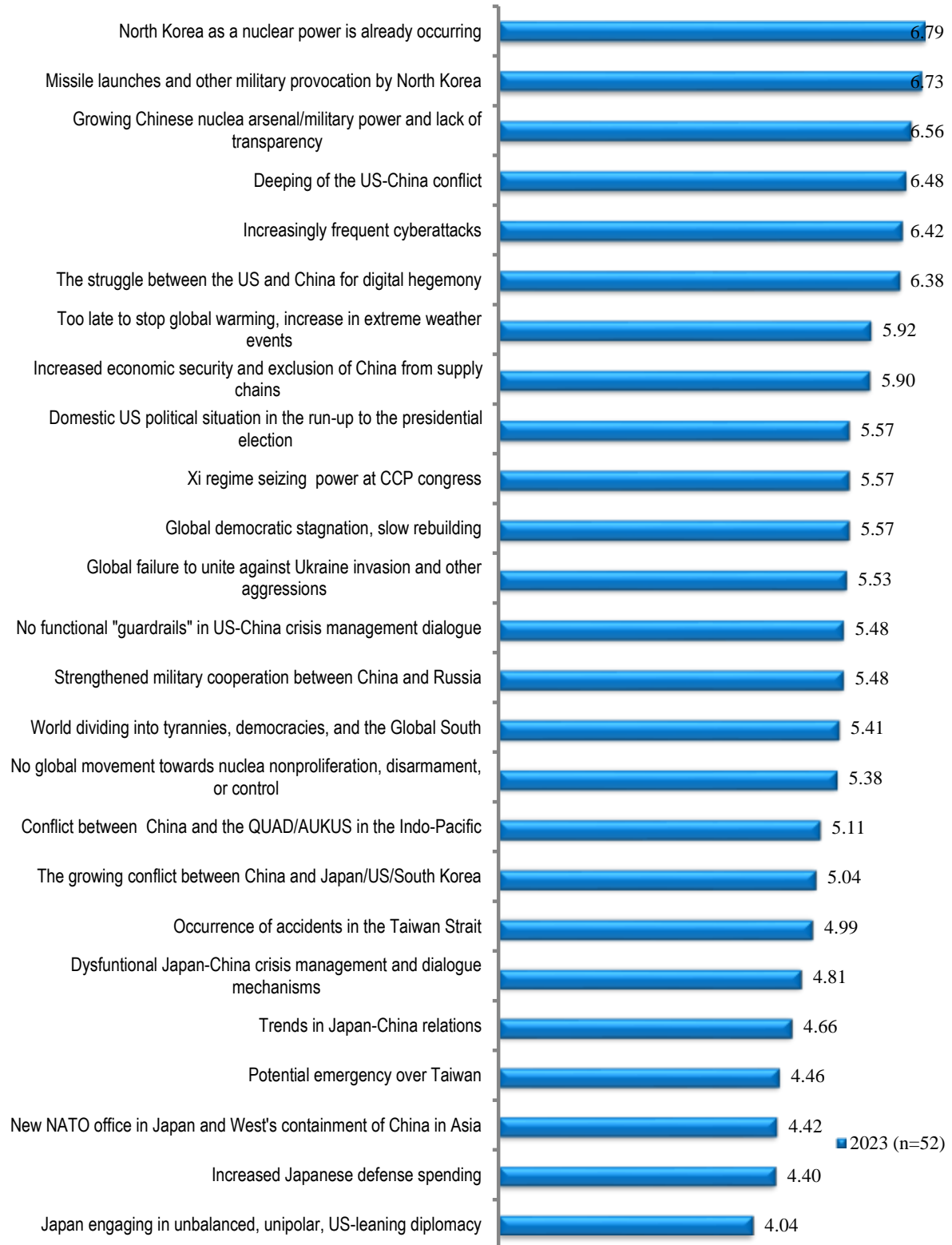


Ranking in Criteria B: What impact would conflict over an issue have, and how extensive would that impact be?

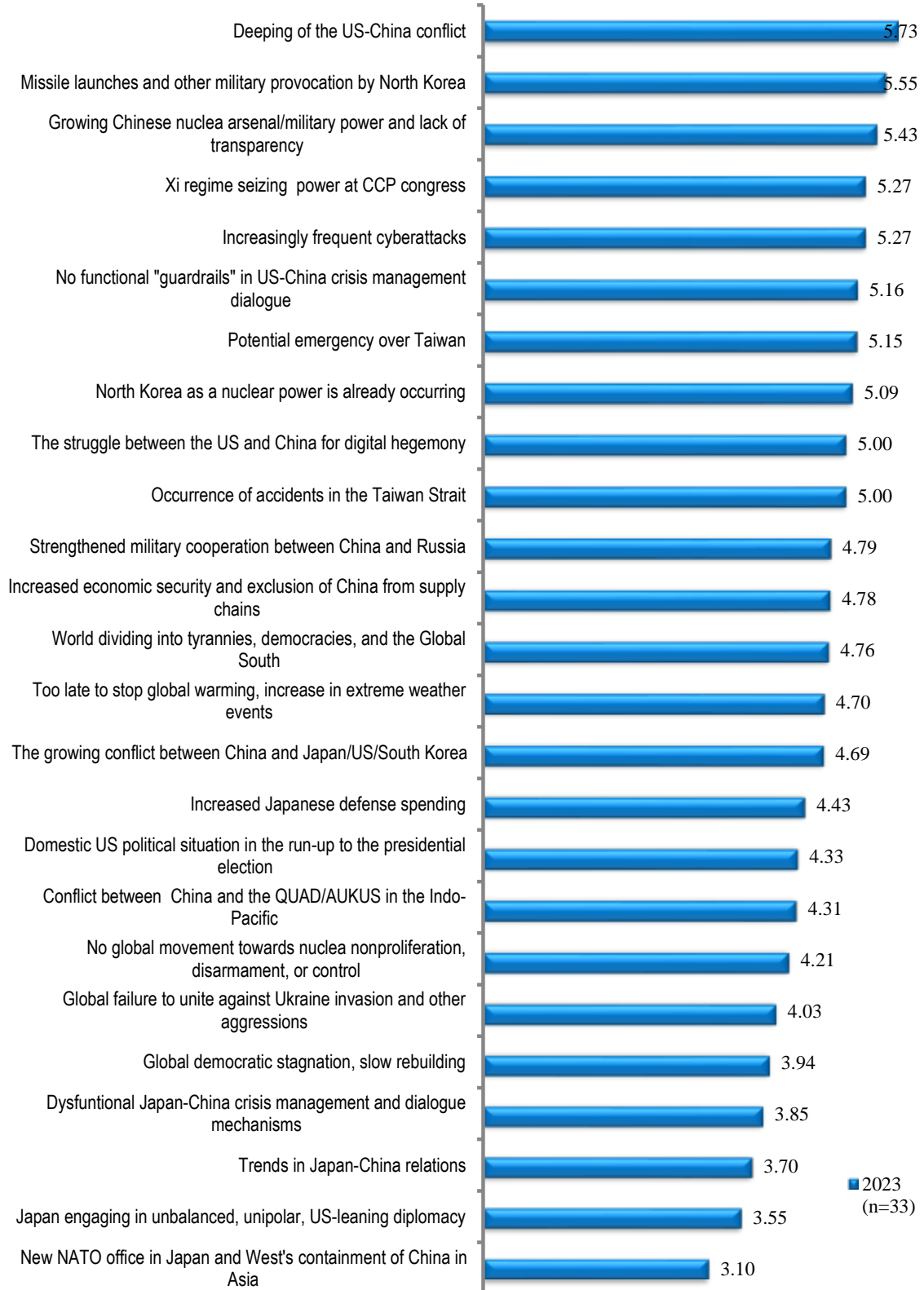


Ranking by country

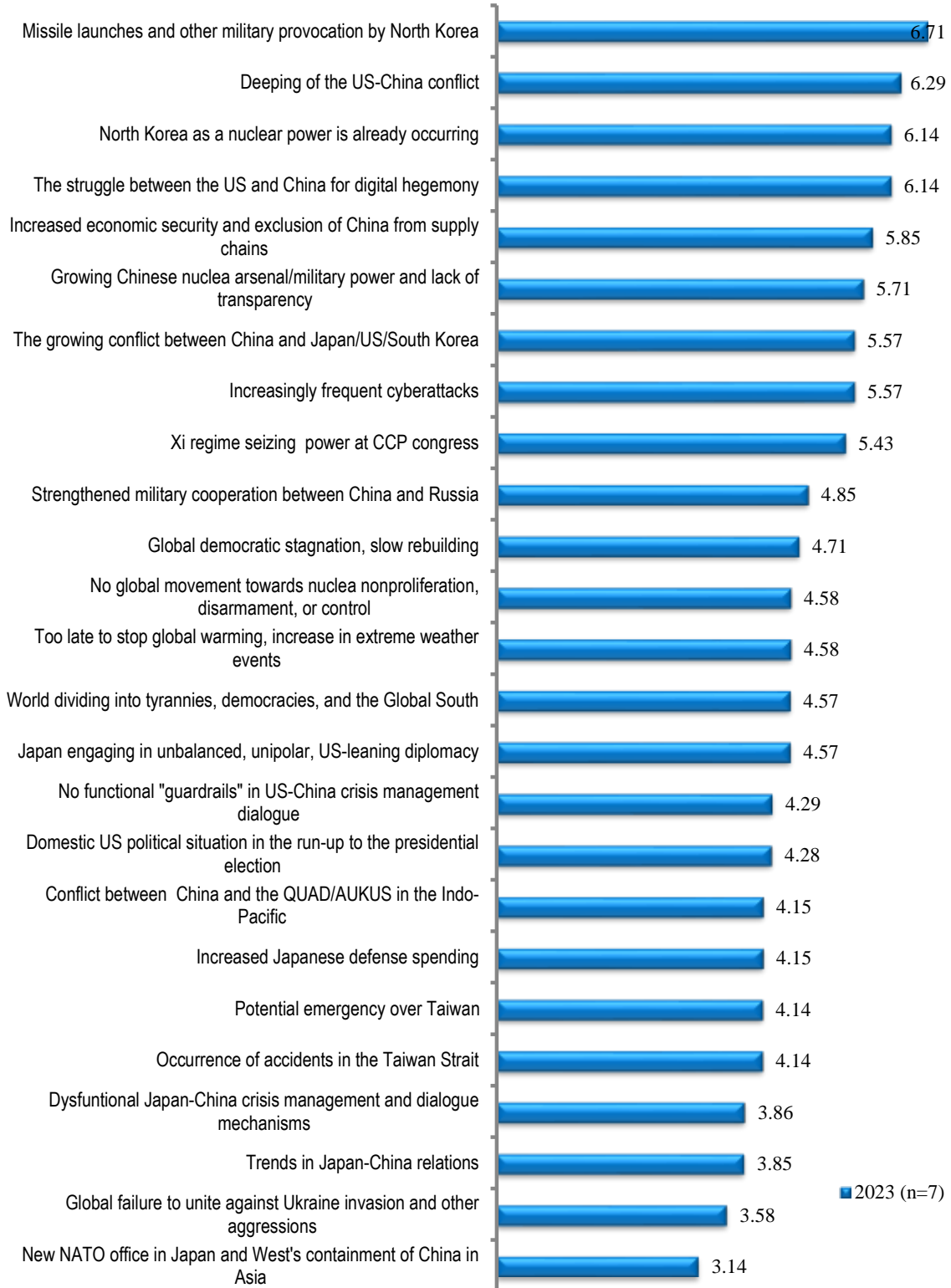
Japan



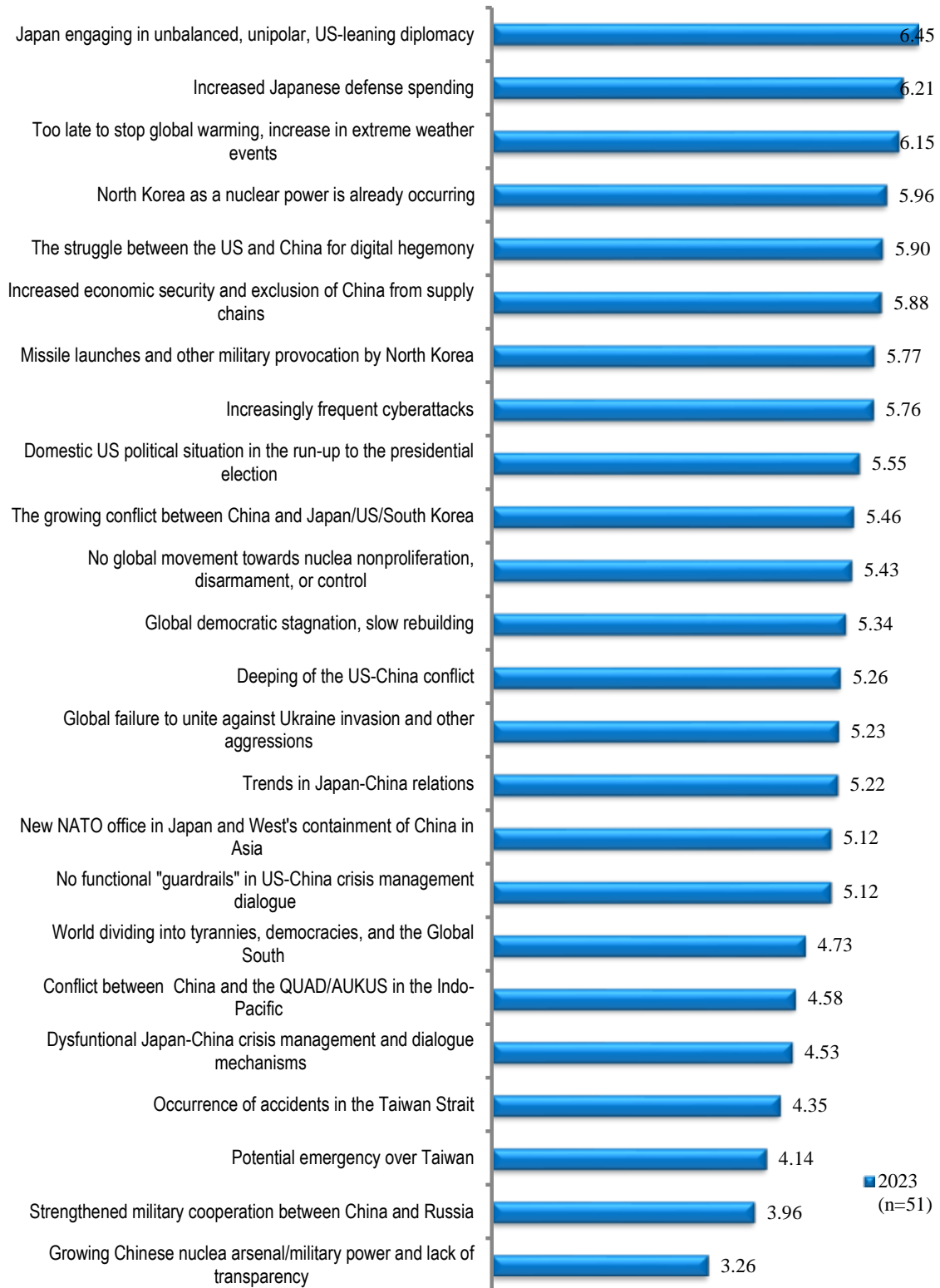
U.S.



South Korea



China

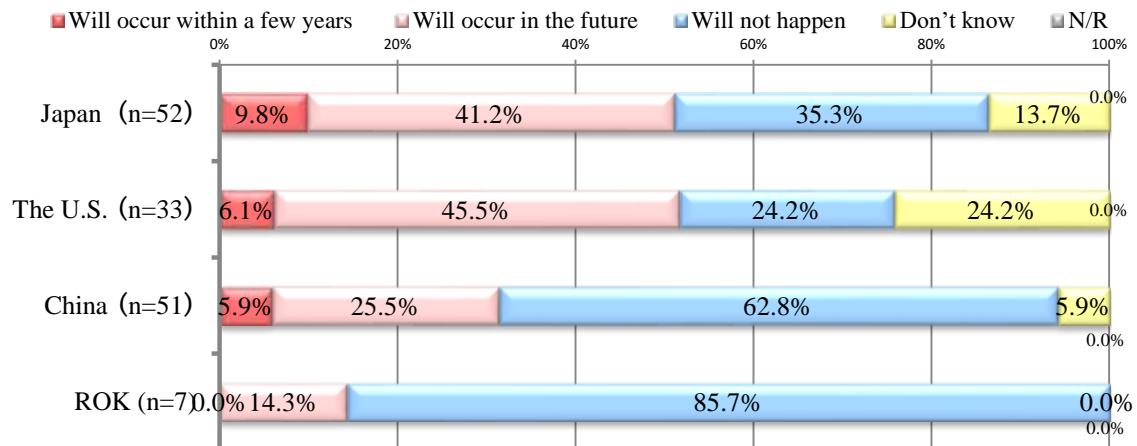


Four Countries' Experts View on Other Security Related Issues

Senkaku Island

How likely is military conflict or confrontation near Senkaku Islands?

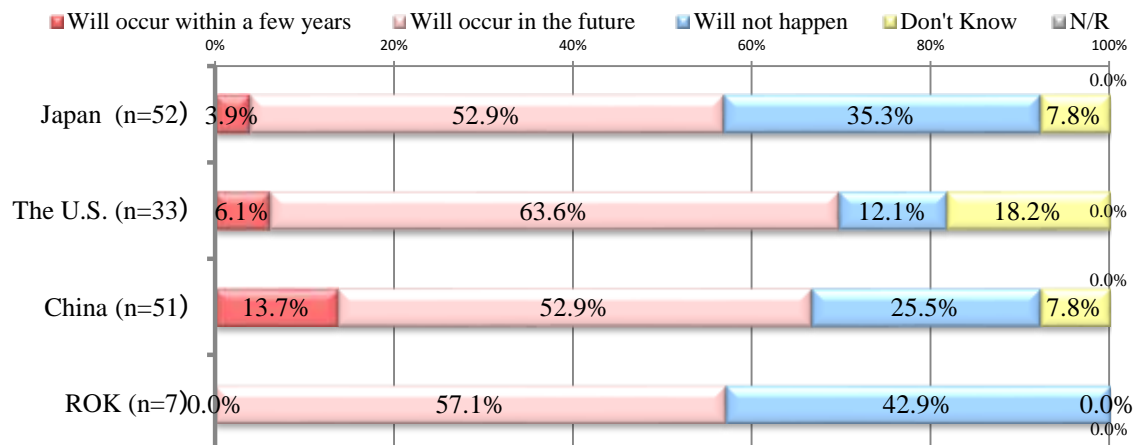
(Select one)



Korean Peninsula

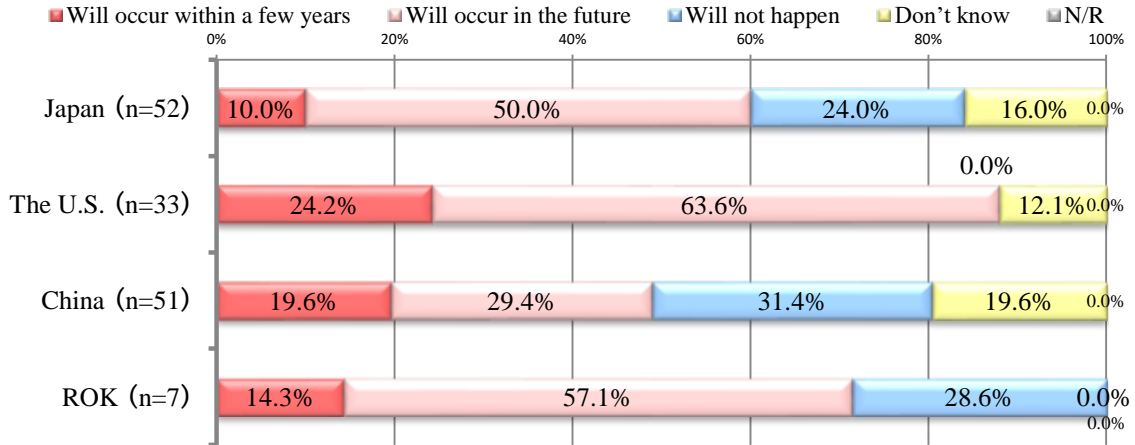
How likely is military conflict or confrontation in Korean Peninsula?

(Select one)



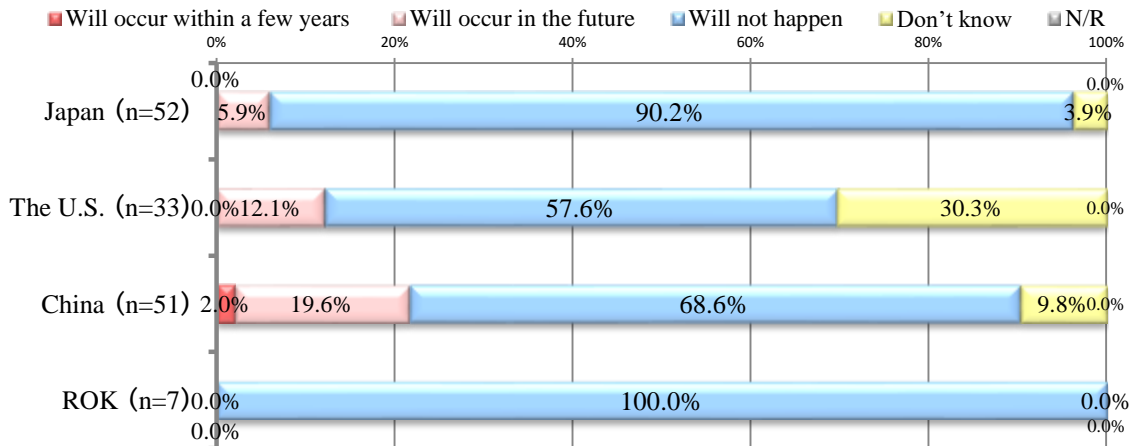
Taiwan Strait

How likely is military conflict or confrontation in Taiwan Strait?
 (Select one)



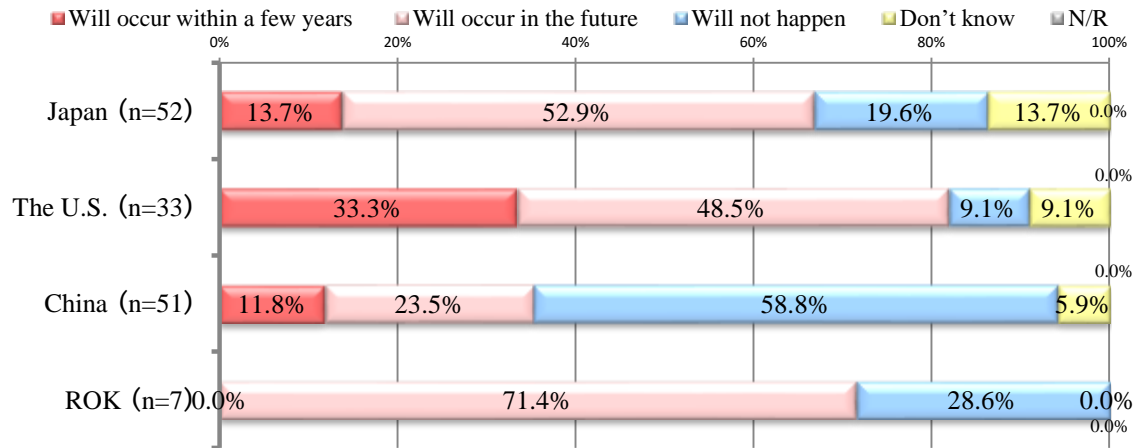
Takeshima/Dokdo

How likely is military conflict or confrontation in Takeshima/Dokdo?
 (Select one)



South China Sea

How likely is military conflict or confrontation in South China Sea?
(Select one)

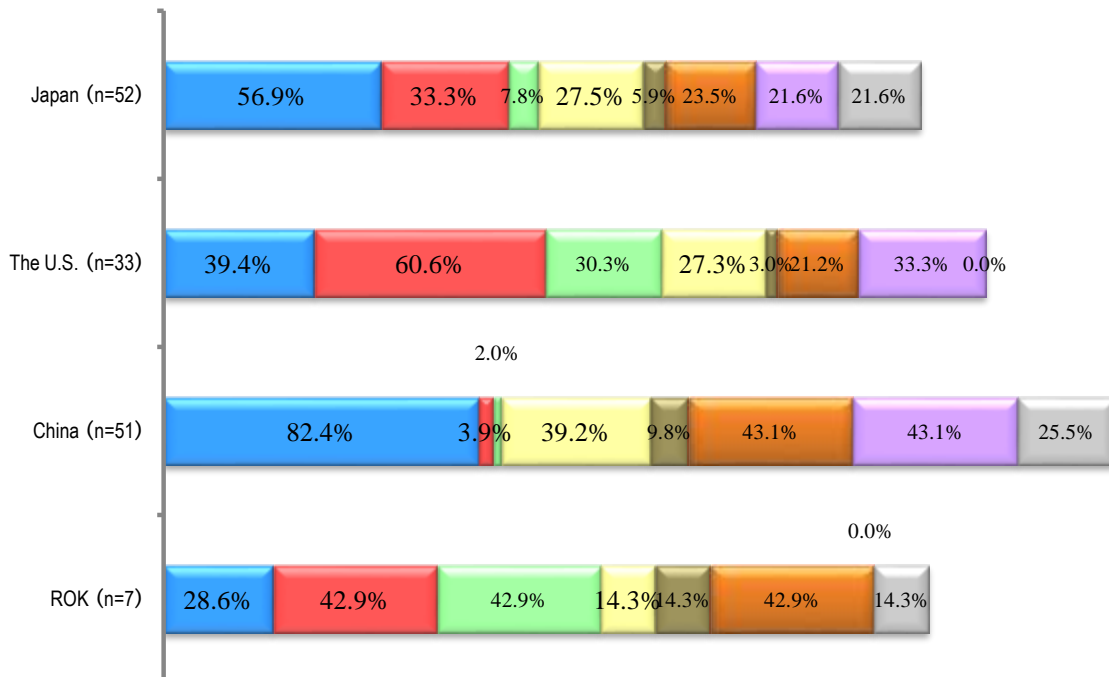


Sustainable Peace for the Future

What issues must be addressed to maintain the current peace, and to avoid conflict and achieve sustainable peace for the future?

(Select two)

- Stabilize relations between Japan-China, Japan-Korea, US-China, and other major powers
- Improve US-Japan, US-Korea, and other US-led deterrence against China's military rise
- Ensure thoroughness of US extended deterrence
- Improve functionality of crisis management mechanisms through better communications for preventing incidents and better accident prevention agreements
- Take action towards denuclearization of North Korea
- Military management regarding whole Northeast Asia area
- Increase crisis management efforts in Taiwan, the East China Sea, and other hotspots
- Engage in multilateral dialogue for disarmament, arms control, and sustainable peace throughout the regio



How should the world tackle North Korea's actions now as a nuclear power

How should the world tackle North Korea's actions now that it is a nuclear power? Please select the option that you think should be given the highest priority.

(Select one)

- Continue working on the denuclearization of North Korea, and working on resolutions and sanctions through the UN Security Council and General Assembly condemning North Korea's actions
- Increase US extended deterrence immediately, and enhance the US-Japan-Korea security structure
- Make the effort to build a system to deter North Korea's actions that includes China
- Increase efforts to build a dialogue with North Korea itself
- Offer de facto recognition of North Korea as nuclear power while countering it with a collective Japan-US-Korea nuclear regime

