

# **NORTH KOREAN SUCCESSION AND THE RISKS OF INSTABILITY**

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## NORTH KOREAN SUCCESSION AND THE RISKS OF INSTABILITY

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transitions often present risks to authoritarian regimes, but the succession in North Korea has apparently passed with few problems. With no opposition from the military and China's clear support, there are no signs to suggest that Kim Jōng-ūn, the young leader who replaced his father, Kim Jong-il, following his death in December 2011, is anything but in charge in his own right. Far from creating a regency of older family members or generals, the North Korean system has maintained its focus on a single leader and projected an image of stability and unity as it celebrates the centenary of the birth of its founder, Kim Il-sung. While that image appears to be accurate, there is nothing to suggest that the new leader is or will become inclined to take measures that would either improve the lot of the country's citizens or reduce the regional frictions that Pyongyang is at the centre of.

Kim Il-sung invested considerable time and effort to ensure the transfer of power to his son, Kim Jong-il. The regime had two decades to prepare after Kim was anointed successor in 1974. In contrast, the second dynastic succession appeared to be rushed, leading many analysts to believe it would fail. However, though Kim Jong-il did not devote as much attention to succession as his father had, most North Korea watchers failed to recognise that the regime began internal preparations about a decade before his death. Many surmised that a committee of powerful figures, probably from the military, would step in and either oust Kim Jōng-ūn in a coup d'état or prop him up as a figurehead and rule behind the scenes.

Most of this analysis was based on flawed assumptions and misunderstandings of North Korean ideology and political institutions. Only a small number of individuals would have the capacity to conspire and execute a coup against the Kim family. Many analysts simply assumed the interests of the senior ruling elite and Kim Jōng-ūn diverge, but there are no clear signs that they do, despite the dismissal of Vice Marshal Ri Yōng-ho, the former chief of the General Staff, on 15 July 2012. Arguably, the interests of senior party and military officials remain almost perfectly aligned.

Kim's youth and inexperience often have been cited as reasons necessitating a regency of senior officials to rule

until he is up to the task. Some have argued that he could not wield the extraordinary powers of his father, and therefore power would devolve in an unavoidable decentralisation process. Whether the regime continues as a personalised dictatorship or assumes a decentralised leadership structure matters, because it could affect several important policy decisions, including the possibility of economic reform and the development or abandonment of nuclear weapons.

Despite widespread speculation, several factors support the continuation of an extremely concentrated, one-man dictatorship. Chronic insecurity, a command economy, a strong tradition of democratic centralism, a complex structure of political institutions and a well-developed indigenous ideology all reinforce the Kim family cult and concentration of power. The apparent result is a smooth succession with little prospect for reform in the near future.

Although the succession is complete, the leadership faces difficult dilemmas. The poor economy remains the greatest long-term threat to the regime. Simple reforms could improve resource allocation, efficiency and productivity but would require repudiation of a decades-old system and ideology that form the foundation of Kim Jōng-ūn's political legitimacy. Renouncing his grandfather's and father's legacies would not be rational if he wishes to remain in power.

Kim's youth and relatively charismatic personality suggest he could be in power for decades. But if the regime fails to reform, the costs in terms of human insecurity and food insecurity will remain high. Continued isolation and "military first" orientation would predispose the regime to maintain its confrontational posture. Without the resources to sustain a conventional arms race with its adversaries, however, it would need increasingly to rely upon asymmetric capabilities, including nuclear weapons, for its security.

This indicates a period of uncertainty just as several key countries – China, Russia and the U.S. – face leadership changes or elections. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) leadership seems to be feeling international pressure aimed at dissuading it from another nuclear test. However, as others increasingly focus on

domestic politics, Pyongyang might feel there is little risk in testing more long-range missiles or another nuclear device. If it is strongly motivated to do so, there is probably little that could dissuade it. The only realistic strategy would be robust deterrence and containment.

North Korea under Kim Jōng-ūn is stable. There is no sign of any opposition to the dynastic succession, and the barriers to change are tremendous. However, the system is not sustainable forever, and it is difficult to imagine a gradual transformation and peaceful integration with South Korea. Meanwhile, reinforcing the status quo will not bring prosperity, only more backwardness and oppression for millions of North Koreans.

**Seoul/Beijing/Brussels, 25 July 2012**

## NORTH KOREAN SUCCESSION AND THE RISKS OF INSTABILITY

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) has completed the second leadership transition since its foundation in 1948. Little was known about Kim Jōng-ūn, the third son of Kim Jong-il, prior to his investiture as supreme leader following the December 2011 death of his father. He studied abroad in Switzerland in the 1990s, so many analysts speculated that he could be more open and supportive of change and reform than his father. This speculation suffered a setback, when the first information from Pyongyang indicated the regime would maintain the "military first" policy orientation of Kim Jong-il.

While the regime has signalled it has no plans to abandon its strategic orientation, Kim Jōng-ūn has projected a much more extroverted and charismatic personality closer to that of his grandfather than of his staid father. During a military parade on 15 April, the 100-year anniversary of Kim Il-sung's birth, he gave the longest speech by a North Korean leader in decades – twenty minutes – extolling his grandfather and father, but giving no indication of any plans for reform. He declared that "military and technical superiority is no longer a monopoly of the imperialists, and gone are the days when the enemies could threaten and blackmail the DPRK with atomic bombs". Kim also stressed that the "final victory in the Korean revolution lies in advancing straight along the road of independence, the road of *sōn'gun* [先軍, military first] and the path of socialism indicated by Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il", and that the "Korean Workers Party [KWP] is resolved to enable the people to enjoy wealth and prosperity under socialism".

The celebratory parade, which followed a failed satellite launch by two days, also included the display of a previously unknown ballistic missile. The road-mobile weapon apparently is designed to have intercontinental range, but it has not been flight-tested, and foreign aerospace engineers have expressed doubts about the reliability of the system. The six missiles displayed at the parade were mock-ups, and it will take considerable time for Pyongyang to deploy a reliable road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), if ever. Nevertheless, their presence at the parade was a clear sign of the leadership's commitment to long-range missile development.

The attempted satellite launch and ICBM display have been accompanied by increasingly bellicose rhetoric against South Korea and its president, Lee Myung-bak. The media have expressed indignation over perceived insults to Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il and the current leadership. DPRK media and organisations have threatened to "wage a sacred war and destroy the Lee Myung-bak traitors". On 23 April, the Supreme Command of the Korean People's Army (KPA) threatened to unleash a "special operations action team to reduce to ashes the rat-like Lee Myung-bak group as well as several mass media firms in downtown Seoul".

This report analyses the factors behind the accession of Kim Jōng-ūn, including the characteristics of the North Korean regime that seem predisposed to produce a single powerful leader, and assesses their likely implications for the new leader's policies. It is based on interviews, and observations during recent Crisis Group visits to the DPRK, as well as open source literature and media. The identities of some interviewees have been withheld by request.

## II. POLITICAL TRANSITION IN PYONGYANG

The DPRK's first leadership transition occurred in July 1994, when Kim Il-sung died. He had ruled since the state's foundation in 1948 and taken considerable efforts to transfer power to his son, Kim Jong-il. By the late 1960s, he had purged all potential rivals and installed loyalists in the party, military and state bureaucracies. He also spent considerable time grooming his son for succession.<sup>1</sup> Kim Jong-il's position was secured at the KWP Sixth Party Congress in 1980 that appointed him to the Presidium of the Politburo and the Central Military Commission.<sup>2</sup>

Kim Jong-il did not devote as much time and effort to succession, but the first obscure signs appeared around April 2000, with reports of a publication on Kim Il-sung's "successful resolution of the succession issue".<sup>3</sup> The first hereditary transfer of power was described as an important accomplishment, and DPRK media subsequently published several reports of foreigners' praise. Another sign appeared in July 2001, when the party daily, *Rodong Sinmun*, carried an article entitled "A Brilliant Succession".<sup>4</sup> In January 2002, Ko Yǒng-hŭi, Kim Jǒng-ŭn's mother, appeared in the press for the first time in a subtle campaign to glorify her, much as Kim Jong-il's mother, Kim Chǒng-suk, had been for the first dynastic succession.<sup>5</sup> By 2005 or 2006, Kim Jǒng-ŭn was accompanying his father on state inspections.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kim Jong-il's first assignment after graduating college in 1964 was with the KWP's Organisation and Guidance Department (OGD). He then worked with the Guard Command (護衛司令部), which provides physical security for the senior leadership (see Section III.E.2 below) and the KWP Propaganda and Agitation Department before his official appointment as heir in 1974.

<sup>2</sup> 정성장, *현대북한의 정치* (서울: 한울, 2011) [Chǒng Sǒng-jang, *Contemporary North Korean Politics* (Seoul: Hanŭl Academy, 2011)], pp. 99-110; 이종석 *현대북한의 이해* (서울: 역사비평사, 2000) [Yi Jong-sŏk, *Understanding Contemporary North Korea* (Seoul: Yŏksabip'yŏngsa, 2000)], pp. 82-85; 통일부, *북한의 주요인물* (서울: 통일부, 2011) *North Korean Principal Personnel*, Ministry of Unification (MOU) (Seoul, 2011), p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> "Kim Il Sung's revolutionary exploits off press", Korean Central News Agency [KCNA], 14 April 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in "North Korean Media Campaign Suggests Long-Term Planning for Hereditary Successor", Open Source Center, 6 May 2009.

<sup>5</sup> The DPRK media referred to Ko, Kim Jong-il's fourth "wife", as "respected mother" and "mother of Korea", though she was born in Japan. She died of cancer in 2004. Ken E. Gause, *North Korea under Kim Chong-il* (Santa Barbara, 2011), pp. 58-63.

<sup>6</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Seoul, January 2012.

According to the DPRK literature, "succession is not just a matter of passing the torch of leadership to a new generation, but a matter of completing the revolution and building socialism in a new era". The revolution is said to be a "long-term task, because there are traitors and ambitious people in every generation"; "therefore, the succession issue surrounding the great leader's revolutionary work is critical for establishing socialism and independence for the people". The successor should be "someone who is endlessly devoted to the work of the great leader, a person who embodies the great leader in his revolutionary thought and leadership style".<sup>7</sup>

After his August 2008 stroke, Kim Jong-il accelerated preparations. The plan officially was announced internally on 8 January 2009, believed to be Kim Jǒng-ŭn's 26th birthday, when Ri Je-gang, director of the first bureau of the Organisation and Guidance Department (OGD), passed the directive down through the KWP's hierarchy.<sup>8</sup> The decision was then circulated to officers (colonels and above) by the Korean People's Army (KPA) General Political Bureau. In January and February, the KPA, the state security ministry (國家安全保衛部),<sup>9</sup> the people's security ministry, the KWP Central Committee and other organisations held mass meetings at which members signed oaths of allegiance to Kim Jǒng-ŭn.<sup>10</sup>

Planning continued in the spring of 2009, when the constitution was amended to elevate the status of Kim Jong-il but also to expand the powers of the National Defence Commission (NDC) to better manage state affairs in the event that he could no longer rule. Pyongyang attempted to place a satellite in orbit in April and the following month conducted its second test of a nuclear explosive device.<sup>11</sup> The timing of the satellite launch to rally nationalistic emotions was similar to the August 1998 launch just days before the constitution was amended to formalise Kim Jong-il's succession.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, see 윤명현, *우리식 사회주의 100문 100답* (평양: 평양출판사, 2004) [Yun Myǒng-hyŏn, *Our Style Socialism: 100 Questions and Answers* (Pyongyang: Pyongyang Publishing Company, 2004)], pp. 56, 57.

<sup>8</sup> Ri died in a "traffic accident" on 2 June 2010, but many suspect he was executed. Choe Sang-hun, "N. Korea reports death of official guiding succession", *The New York Times*, 5 June 2010.

<sup>9</sup> The state security ministry is also referred to as the "state security department". It is not part of the cabinet but has been under the direct control of the National Defence Commission (NDC), headed by Kim Jǒng-ŭn as "first chairman".

<sup>10</sup> 정성장 [Chǒng Sǒng-jang], *현대북한의 정치*, op. cit., pp. 151-153.

<sup>11</sup> North Korean diplomats abroad were told Kim Jǒng-ŭn made the decision to conduct the nuclear test. Ibid, p. 153.

In April 2009, Kim Jōng-ūn reportedly initiated and commanded a 150-day mass mobilisation “speed battle” to increase labour inputs; he is suspected of also being responsible for the disastrous December 2009 currency reform, designed to resuscitate the formal state economy.<sup>12</sup> By the latter half of that year, the security apparatus and the KPA General Political Bureau were reporting directly to Kim Jōng-ūn, and in the first half of 2010, all reporting to Kim Jong-il had to go through the son first.<sup>13</sup> Kim Jōng-ūn was finally unveiled publicly as successor on 27 September 2010, when his father made him a four-star general.<sup>14</sup> The following day the KWP convened its third party conference to elect new officials to numerous party positions, many of which had become vacant through attrition since the previous major meeting, the Sixth Party Congress in October 1980. Kim Jōng-ūn was elected to the Central Committee and made vice chairman of the Central Military Commission.<sup>15</sup>

The younger Kim then began to appear regularly with his father during visits to military bases and other important sites. According to South Korea’s ministry of unification (MOU), he accompanied his father on 100 of 152 on-site visits during the year following the party conference.<sup>16</sup> In July 2011, local party committee elections gave another opportunity to put a new generation of Kim family supporters into leadership positions. Extensive purges down to the provincial level have been rumoured to be placing loyalists in important posts throughout the government.<sup>17</sup>

Shortly after Kim Jong-il died, the Politburo of the KWP Central Committee “proclaimed that the dear respected Kim Jōng-ūn assumed the supreme commandship of the KPA according to the behest of leader Kim Jong-il on 8 October 2011”.<sup>18</sup> He was elected formally first secretary of

the KWP at the fourth party conference on 11 April 2012; the conference also “decided to hold leader Kim Jong-il in high esteem as eternal general secretary of the KWP”.<sup>19</sup> Two days later, the Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA) elected Kim Jōng-ūn as first chairman of the National Defence Commission (NDC) and also “decided to hold leader Kim Jong-il in high esteem as eternal chairman of the NDC”.<sup>20</sup>

The official measures to transfer power to Kim Jōng-ūn were completed according to the wishes of Kim Jong-il. At the fourth party conference, close associates of the Kim family were appointed to powerful positions, and the KWP by-laws were revised to glorify Kim Jong-il. Kim Kyōng-hŭi, his younger sister, is now listed first on the fourteen-member Politburo and first among the ten-member Party Secretariat, which is even more powerful than the Politburo in managing national affairs. Her husband, Chang Sōng-t’aek, is listed third in the Politburo and is director of the Administration Department under the KWP Secretariat, as well as listed second in the sixteen-member Central Military Commission.<sup>21</sup> Ch’oi Ryong-hae, a former youth leader, also rose rapidly to a very prominent position in the Kim Jōng-ūn coalition. At the fourth party conference, he was named to the five-member Presidium of the Politburo along with Kim Jōng-ūn, Kim Yōng-nam, Ch’oi Yōng-rim, and Ri Yōng-ho. Ch’oi also was appointed vice chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), a member of the NDC and director of the KPA General Political Bureau.<sup>22</sup>

On the military side, two individuals, Kim Jōng-gak and Ri Yōng-ho, rose to prominence during the succession. Kim was promoted to vice marshal (one rank above four-star general) by the CMC and the NDC on 15 February 2012, the day before Kim Jong-il’s birthday.<sup>23</sup> On the same day, Kim Jōng-ūn issued an order to promote 23 general officers, including Pak To-ch’un and Kim Yōng-ch’ŏl, to

<sup>12</sup> 정성장 [Chōng Sōng-jang], *현대북한의 정치*, op. cit., p. 153; Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°101, *North Korea under Tightening Sanctions*, 15 March 2010; Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, “The winter of their discontent: Pyongyang attacks the market”, Peterson Institute for International Economics, policy brief no. PB10-1, January 2010.

<sup>13</sup> 정성장 [Chōng Sōng-jang], *현대북한의 정치*, op. cit., pp. 153-154; Crisis Group interviews, Seoul.

<sup>14</sup> “Kim Jong Il issues order on promoting military ranks”, KCNA, 27 September 2010.

<sup>15</sup> “Members and Alternate Members of WPK Central Committee”, KCNA, 28 September 2010; “Central Military Commission Organised”, KCNA, 28 September 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Kim Kwang-tae, “N. Korea’s leader-in-waiting increases public appearances”, Yonhap News, 26 September 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Jeong Jae Sung, “The meaning of the purge of Pyongan”, *The Daily NK*, 27 September 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Kim died on 17 December, and the Politburo proclaimed Kim Jōng-ūn’s appointment as supreme KPA commander on 30 December. “Report on Meeting of Political Bureau of C.C., WPK”, KCNA, 30 December 2011.

<sup>19</sup> “WPK conference elects Kim Jong Un as first secretary of WPK”, KCNA, 11 April 2012; “WPK holds Kim Jong Il in high esteem as Eternal General Secretary”, KCNA, 11 April 2012.

<sup>20</sup> “Kim Jong Un elected first chairman of NDC of DPRK”, KCNA, 13 April 2012; “Korean people hold Kim Jong Il in high esteem as Eternal NDC Chairman”, KCNA, 13 April 2012.

<sup>21</sup> 정성장, “북한 노동당 제4차 대표자대회와 파워 엘리트 변동”, *경제와 정책*, 2012년 5월호 [Chōng Sōng-jang, “North Korean Workers Party 4th Party Conference and Changes in the Power Elite”, *Chōngsewa Jōngch’aek*, May 2012].

<sup>22</sup> Ibid; “Fifth session of 12th SPA held”, KCNA, 13 April 2012.

<sup>23</sup> “김정각에게 조선인민군 차수칭호 수여” [“Kim Jōng-gak Conferred Title of Vice Marshal”], KCNA, 15 February 2012. According to the KWP Bylaws, the CMC controls or guides all military policies, but the DPRK constitution stipulates that the NDC “has the duty and authority to confer military titles above general grade officer”.

four-star general.<sup>24</sup> The former does not have a professional military background; the latter, a graduate of the Kim Il-sung Military University, has a long military career and is suspected of having commanded or participated in the operation that sunk the *Ch'önan* in March 2010.<sup>25</sup>

Vice Marshal Ri Yöng-ho, however, was dismissed abruptly from all his positions by the Politburo on 15 July.<sup>26</sup> He had served as a vice chairman of the CMC after being appointed to that position along with Kim Jöng-ün at the third party conference in September 2010. He also was on the Presidium of the Politburo and was the chief of the general staff. A graduate of the Kim Il-sung Military University, Ri often was mentioned as a mentor for Kim Jöng-ün on military affairs. His dismissal led to speculation about regime instability or factionalism within the military or between the party and the military, but purges are not uncommon during authoritarian transitions. Furthermore, there were signs that Ri was being reined in by the regime from the time he received his CMC and Politburo appointments at the third party conference, and he was not advanced at the fourth party conference.

Hyön Yöng-ch'öl replaced Ri as chief of the general staff, meaning he would command joint KPA operations in time of war. The shake-up included Kim Jöng-ün's promotion to marshal of the KPA on 17 July, a rank commensurate with his title "supreme commander of the KPA" that represents an assertion of his control over the military.<sup>27</sup> Officially, Ri was dismissed for "health reasons", but this is very unlikely. He appeared to be well during a public event only days before his dismissal, which occurred on a Sunday, an unusual day for a Politburo meeting. Furthermore, senior officials normally remain in office despite poor health, even terminal illness.

Ri could have been dismissed due to a dispute over policy, but in that case the party probably would not have dealt with the incident in such an abrupt manner. It is also unlikely that he was plotting against the Kim family; the discovery of a plot would have brought deadly retribution

and a media announcement that he had "died in an accident". The speculation that he may have been removed due to a corruption scandal is plausible, given the rent-seeking activities of the senior elite.<sup>28</sup>

In sum, despite the sudden dismissal of Ri Yöng-ho, there are no indications of opposition in the party, state or military to the North's second dynastic transfer of power. Although many North Koreans are dissatisfied with the government, the barriers to collective action make it very risky and nearly impossible to organise any resistance. Nevertheless, eventual internal opposition to the dynastic succession cannot be ruled out, and if the military becomes dissatisfied with the status quo, there are fears the regime could take provocative actions against the South. Many analysts believe the provocations in 2010 were linked directly to the succession process, to establish Kim Jöng-ün's military credentials.<sup>29</sup> Similar actions were taken during the 1980s, when Kim Jong-il was groomed for the leadership.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Pak and Kim were the only two promoted to four-star general; three were promoted to colonel general, and eighteen were promoted to lieutenant general. "Kim Jong-un issues order on promoting military ranks of KPA officers", KCNA, 15 February 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Kim also serves on the CMC. He is listed thirteenth among sixteen members. On his suspected involvement in the *Ch'önan* attack, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°198, *North Korea: The Risks of War in the Yellow Sea*, 23 December 2010.

<sup>26</sup> "Ri Yong Ho relieved of all his posts in DPRK", KCNA, 16 July 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Kim was promoted according to a joint decision by the CMC, the NDC and the SPA Presidium. "Kim Jong Un awarded title of Marshal of DPRK", KCNA, 18 July 2012.

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<sup>28</sup> Chang Se-jeong and Kim Hee-jin, "Jong-un may want business reins", *Korea Joongang Daily*, 18 July 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Foster, "North Korean attack on Yeonpyeong Island is worst against civilians in 20 years", *The Telegraph* (UK), 23 November 2010; "Yeonpyeong attack 'aimed to bolster Kim Jong-un'", *The Chosun Ilbo*, 1 December 2010; "We are ready for war, warns North Korea's Peace Commission", *The Daily Mail*, 12 December 2010.

<sup>30</sup> North Korean agents detonated a bomb in Rangoon on 9 October 1983, killing 21 and injuring 46 in a failed assassination attempt against ROK President Chun Du-hwan. In November 1987, they planted a bomb on a Korean Air flight, killing 115.



### III. STABILITY VS. INSTABILITY: KEY FACTORS

Many analysts and Korean specialists have raised doubts about the viability of the DPRK, at least since the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the demise of the former Soviet Union. While the regime weathered serious threats in the 1990s, analysts again began to seriously question its future following the 2011 Arab Spring and Kim Jong-il's sudden death in December. Dictatorships inherently are unstable at times of power transitions, but there is no reliable model with which to predict sudden political change.

The DPRK has survived more than two decades of economic deprivation, a famine that killed hundreds of thousands, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The state deploys a number of instruments to maintain control and prevent collective action against it. The social control system is a complex interlocking network of laws, economic incentives, institutions, ideology and social norms. All are under state control. Society is atomised, initially as a result of Japan's strict colonial rule and the mass migrations that followed the end of World War II and the Korean War; there is no civil society.<sup>31</sup> With Soviet assistance, the DPRK was established north of the 38th parallel in 1948 as a Marxist-Leninist state with a constitution, legal system, party, government, military and mass organisations modelled after their Soviet counterparts, but these have evolved to support the Kim family cult. Until cracks emerge in this system, significant political change is unlikely.

Any assessment of the variables affecting stability and instability in the North must be imprecise, because there are no trustworthy predictive models, policymaking is opaque and credible data are scarce. Nevertheless, the high policy stakes for the international community make the endeavour worthwhile.

#### A. THE ECONOMY

Economic malaise has been the main potential source of regime instability since the end of Soviet subsidies in the early 1990s. Pyongyang has contemplated economic reform since the 1980s but has consistently rolled back nascent initiatives. A foreign joint venture law was promulgated in the early 1980s to attract investment, and the 1998 constitution delegated more economic responsibilities to the cabinet, while Kim Jong-il devoted his personal efforts to the military and internal security. In 2000, the DPRK established diplomatic relations with a number of

European countries and agreed to host the first inter-Korean summit, which produced agreement to establish an industrial complex in Kaesŏng, about 6km north of the Military Demarcation Line, that led many to expect a process of opening and reform. However, while economic crises have forced many North Koreans to buy and sell in markets, and the leadership has periodically tolerated this to varying degrees, it has refused to abandon its command economy.

Economic reform would require liberalisation measures that contradict the orthodox planning principles espoused by Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il and would undermine Kim Jŏng-ŭn's legitimacy and risk his political survival. Planning enables the young leader to allocate and withhold resources according to regime loyalty, so he would be very unlikely to abandon this instrument as he solidifies his coalition. Nevertheless, he faces the delicate problem of giving economic rewards to his own loyalists while not alienating the old guard. This requires graceful retirement for the elite of his father's generation, something that is much easier when the economy is growing, not in long decline or stagnation. The danger is that some patrons of the Kim family could become dissatisfied or greedy, leading to splits within the regime.

Pyongyang does not publish any economic data, so it is very difficult to make accurate assessments of the economy. Nevertheless, it appears that the standard of living in Pyongyang has improved significantly in recent years. There are several new buildings, and the number of vehicles, shops and restaurants obviously has increased. Shops are well stocked, and citizens are well dressed. Some analysts and observers have interpreted this improvement as a sign of economic reform, but this is not the case. A subsequent Crisis Group briefing will provide a more detailed analysis of the economy under the new leadership.

#### B. CHINESE SUPPORT

China supports the succession and appears to have no intention of exerting serious pressure on the North to denuclearise. Although Beijing for years has encouraged adoption of economic reforms, it will not withdraw support if Pyongyang refuses. It values stability in the region and would not want to see a united Korea allied with the U.S. on its border.<sup>32</sup> The Chinese government would prefer that the North end provocative behaviour but can live with a nuclear DPRK at least as long as its arsenal is small,

<sup>31</sup> See Crisis Group Asia Report N°208, *Strangers at Home: North Koreans in the South*, 14 July 2011, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> For more information on China's policy toward North Korea, see Crisis Group Asia Reports N°179, *Shades of Red: China's Debate over North Korea*, 2 November 2009; and N°200, *China and Inter-Korea Clashes in the Yellow Sea*, 27 January 2011.

and its nuclear status does not result in an arms race or an expanded U.S. military presence in the region.<sup>33</sup>

China's support to North Korea remains robust. In December 2011, it reportedly decided to give 500,000 tons of food and 250,000 tons of crude oil to help "stabilise the new regime".<sup>34</sup> On 30 January 2012, the foreign ministry called on the international community to provide North Korea with humanitarian aid.<sup>35</sup> For ten days beginning on 9 January, witnesses reported seeing large numbers of trucks crossing the China-DPRK border, apparently filled with sacks of rice.<sup>36</sup> Bilateral trade was said to be up by 18 per cent that month compared to January 2011.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, Beijing is increasingly frustrated and concerned about waning influence over its neighbour.<sup>38</sup> During Kim Jong-il's last visit, in May 2011, President Hu Jintao urged him to "communicate with China on important issues".<sup>39</sup> Two incidents following Kim's death seem to indicate that the message fell on deaf ears. First, Beijing was surprised and angered when it discovered that Pyon-

gyang had informed Washington about its April 2012 satellite launch five months ahead of time, long before it notified China.<sup>40</sup>

Secondly, on 8 May, shortly after the failed launch, unidentified North Koreans detained 28 Chinese fishermen in the Yellow Sea.<sup>41</sup> Chinese state media reported the incident only five days later,<sup>42</sup> and for a week, it was uncertain whether the responsibility was Pyongyang's or merely local North Korean authorities, possibly in collusion with Chinese triads.<sup>43</sup> The men were released on 20 May,<sup>44</sup> and though the Chinese and many others have spoken of "kidnapping", they may well have been held for illegal fishing. The KPA controls fisheries and patrols for both security and economic reasons. It seems unlikely that local officials would be able to act in such a sensitive area without the central government's knowledge and approval. Yellow Sea fish stocks are being depleted rapidly, and there are several recent cases of illegal Chinese fishing in South Korean waters.<sup>45</sup> In response to the incident however,

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<sup>33</sup> Many Chinese analysts believe that Washington places much greater importance on non-proliferation than on denuclearisation. Crisis Group interview, Beijing, June 2012.

<sup>34</sup> "China decided on N.Korea aid after Kim death: report", Agence France-Presse (AFP), 29 December 2011. Russia has also given an unspecified amount of aid. Crisis Group interview, Beijing, June 2012. A Chinese analyst said, "the U.S. criticises that we don't worry about monitoring. But we believe in a 'flood the system' methodology, ie, even if some food goes to the military, more will have to go to the people. If we cut off food aid, the most vulnerable will be hit, because they will always feed the military first". Crisis Group interview, Beijing, December 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Kang Hyun-kyung, "Will China's food aid to N. Korea limit Seoul's policy options?", *The Korea Times*, 1 February 2012.

<sup>36</sup> "Truckloads of Chinese rice enter N.Korea: activist", AFP, 30 January 2012; "Rights group details evidence of Chinese aid shipment to North Korea", Voice of America (VOA), 31 January 2012. However, North Korea imports corn, rice and other grains from China, so the trucks could merely be "resumption of commercial imports" following the border closure after Kim's death. Stephan Haggard, "Food Update: Doubts on China, the WFP, and Ireson on Prices", North Korea: Witness to Transformation blog, 14 February 2012, [www.piie.com/blogs/nk/?p=5013](http://www.piie.com/blogs/nk/?p=5013).

<sup>37</sup> Chinese commerce ministry figure, in "N. Korea-China trade jumps 18 pct in Jan.: report", Yonhap News, 2 March 2012.

<sup>38</sup> A Chinese analyst said, "North Korea doesn't listen to China's suggestions now". Prior to the April attempted satellite launch, he said, "it's hard for China to talk North Korea out of it now". Crisis Group interview, Beijing, April 2012.

<sup>39</sup> "金正日对我国进行非正式访问并与胡锦涛举行会谈" ["Kim Jong-il conducted an unofficial visit to China and held talks with Hu Jintao"], Chinese government website, [www.gov.cn](http://www.gov.cn), 26 May 2011.

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<sup>40</sup> The U.S. was reportedly informed of the planned launch in December 2011; the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Liu Weimin said Beijing was not given detailed information on exactly when the satellite would be launched within the window of 12-16 April. "外交部称朝鲜卫星发射前未向中方通报" ["Chinese foreign ministry said North Korea did not inform China about the satellite launch"], China News Agency, 13 April 2012; "张琏瑰: 渔民遭扣事件反映中朝关系具体问题" ["Zhang Liangui: detention of fishermen reflects problems in Sino-DPRK relations"], Phoenix TV, 24 May 2012.

<sup>41</sup> The identity of the North Koreans is uncertain, but Chinese reports cited the fishermen as saying they were wearing military uniforms. "遭朝鲜扣押中国渔民回国, 称挟持者是朝鲜军人" ["Detained Chinese fishermen returned home, claimed to be detained by North Korean soldiers"], *People's Daily Net*, 22 May 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Crisis Group interview, Beijing, May 2012. In an interview with Phoenix TV, Zhang Liangui, a Sino-DPRK expert for the Party School of the China Communist Party Central Committee, said the Chinese government had hoped to settle the incident by discreet negotiations to maintain friendly relationship. But the media got hold of the information when it took Beijing too long. "朝鲜扣留中国渔船, 劫持者索270万赎金" ["North Korea detained Chinese fishing boats, kidnappers asked for 2.70 million ransom"], Phoenix TV, 18 May 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Crisis Group interview, Beijing, May 2012.

<sup>44</sup> "North Korea releases detained Chinese fishermen", Reuters, 20 May 2012.

<sup>45</sup> For example, in September 2008 and December 2011, two South Korean Coast Guard officers were killed by Chinese fishermen in the Yellow Sea. Between 2006 and the end of 2011, about 2,600 Chinese boats were caught fishing illegally, and about 800 fishermen were arrested by ROK authorities. "South Korean coastguard 'killed by Chinese fisherman'", Reuters, 12 December 2011; Robert Lee, "Chinese fisherman kills Korean coast guard officer", *The Korea Herald*, 12 December

analysts such as Zhang Liangui, a government adviser on Sino-DPRK relations, warned of the North's desire for a "new type of relations" in which it would be more independent of Beijing's influence.<sup>46</sup>

The incident sparked a more vocal public debate within China about North Korea, but there has been no indication of government intention to alter policy. Public dissent over that policy has always existed, and it produced an animated debate in 2009.<sup>47</sup> Before the fishermen's release, many users of Weibo, a popular micro-blogging service in China, criticised the North's lack of gratitude for economic and political support and called on the government to cancel economic aid.<sup>48</sup> China, however, is seeking further economic integration with North Korea, while anticipating the need to adjust to a more independent leadership in Pyongyang.<sup>49</sup> One recent effort is a plan to grant 20,000 North Koreans visas to work in the north-eastern province of Jilin.<sup>50</sup> Beijing's decision to retain its policies stems from a pragmatic desire to maintain stability, both in Pyongyang and along the shared border, so that the DPRK can continue to serve as a buffer between it and the U.S.<sup>51</sup>

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2011; Evan Ramstad, "Korean officer killed in Chinese Sea clash", *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 December 2011.

<sup>46</sup> "张璠：渔民遭扣事件反映中朝关系具体问题" ["Zhang Liangui: detention of fishermen reflects problems in Sino-DPRK relations"], Phoenix TV, 24 May 2012.

<sup>47</sup> See Crisis Group Report, *Shades of Red*, op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> "朝鲜'虐待'中国渔民激怒中国网民" ["North Korea mistreatment of Chinese fishermen angers Chinese internet users"], BBC Chinese, 22 May 2012.

<sup>49</sup> To learn more about the intentions of the regime, Chinese policymakers are asking relevant governments about requests for aid they may have received from North Korea. Crisis Group interview, Beijing, June 2012.

<sup>50</sup> "China gives visas for 20,000 North Koreans", *The Chosun Ilbo*, 28 May 2012.

<sup>51</sup> "China is deeply concerned about the potential collapse of the North Korea government. There would be a large number of refugees in northern China if this happens. That's why China wants to see a stable region, for North Korea to open to the outside world and normalise relations with the outside world". Crisis Group interview, Beijing, April 2012. Of U.S. and Chinese goals in North Korea, another analyst stated: "The U.S. and China have a common interest in non-proliferation and keeping the Korean peninsula nuclear-free. This is not lip-service for China. But China and the U.S. have not agreed on the approach. It seems that the U.S. believes that the complete solution to North Korea would be regime change. China thinks otherwise. So this is the disagreement. The two countries cannot agree on this issue". Crisis Group interview, Beijing, April 2012.

## C. IDEOLOGY

Twentieth century totalitarian regimes developed elaborate ideologies to mobilise mass support. These needed to be simple enough for the average citizen to understand, yet incorporate a logical, scientific or emotional component to lend sufficient credibility to persuade people to sacrifice in the present for a better future. Inherently, such ideologies were utopian, often closely tied to a charismatic individual, and thus not easily transferable to subsequent leaderships. After the initial ideological appeal weakens, revolutionary regimes tend to settle into a stable bureaucratic equilibrium – or break apart, partly under the weight of ideological contradictions.

While fascism and Marxism-Leninism failed to adapt to a changing world environment, however, North Korean ideology has adjusted, albeit imperfectly, to international conditions. When the DPRK was founded in 1948, the nominal national ideology was Marxism-Leninism, but Kim Il-sung based his leadership upon nationalist credentials as an anti-Japanese guerrilla during the colonial period, and the North became a strongly nationalistic regime, combining elements of Stalinism, imperial Japan's nationalism (*kokutai*, 國體) and Confucian paternalism. It always differed significantly from the Eastern European communist regimes that had relatively little national legitimacy and were dependent upon Moscow for survival.

Kim Il-sung utilised the Soviet Union's de-Stalinisation campaign in the mid-1950s to consolidate power and eliminate his political rivals, but also to establish an indigenous ideology, *chuch'e* (主體, literally "self-reliance"). It is simple in its anti-colonial appeal, yet ambiguous and amorphous. According to *chuch'e*, man is the "master of his destiny"; his class and fate are not determined by the political economy of human productive efforts as described by Marxism. It seeks to give the masses hope for the future without having to wait for systemic forces to eliminate class struggle and exploitation, though it contains a great contradiction, namely that despite man's supposed control over his destiny, he is a social being, and every individual is said to be part of a collective. Individual achievement and utility can thus be maximised only by collective action and unity, which according to *chuch'e*, require a great leader to guide the collective effort. The "great leader" – the "brain" of the nation – issues directives on behalf of the masses through the party (the "nerve system"). The concept is justified and reinforced through democratic centralism, which requires strict obedience to directives from above.

*Chuch'e* gave the Kim family the means to claim exceptional status and the space to modify the state ideology when it found that necessary. It freed the regime in the early 1990s, for example, to "explain the shortcomings or failures" of Marxism-Leninism, all references to which

were purged from the constitution in 1992.<sup>52</sup> Around that time, political officers in the KPA and KWP officials began to lecture about the “corruption of leaders like Gorbachev and other traitors who sold out the Soviet Union and socialism”, telling North Koreans “they should be thankful for their strong and wise leadership that saved them from the fate of capitalist imperialism”,<sup>53</sup> and the media began to promote “the superiority of our style of socialism”.<sup>54</sup>

When North Korea suffered a devastating famine in the mid-1990s, the state sought a new ideological narrative to explain the crisis. In August 1995, the media introduced a discussion on the need to “hold up the red banner”, as an effort to lift the national spirit and reinforce commitment to Kim Il-sung’s vision of socialism. The concept transformed into “red banner ideology” (붉은기사상) but did not replace *chuch’e* and was dropped from the media in 1998 in favour of the concept of building a “strong and prosperous nation” (强盛大國).<sup>55</sup> That goal was supposed to be achieved by April 2012 but was revised, as the target date approached, to “the opening of the era” leading to a strong and prosperous nation.

Kim Jong-il turned to the military, and the KWP’s role diminished with his introduction of “military first politics” [先軍政治, *son’gun chǒngch’i*].<sup>56</sup> This term did not enter the public domain until December 1997,<sup>57</sup> but DPRK literature and media continue to push the date of its creation back in time, though always within the bounds of the Kim family ancestry, in order to enhance its status as an ideology.<sup>58</sup>

*Son’gun* rejects the Leninist and Maoist principles of the party commanding the military; the North Korean party and military meld into one at the pinnacle. In the Soviet Union and China, the communist party was established before the army. In North Korea, the military, in the form

of a guerrilla band, preceded the party.<sup>59</sup> Kim Il-sung’s direct control of the KPA meant the party did not have to be placed above the military to control senior officers who might have ambitions. Kim relied upon his close guerrilla comrades in a symbiotic control structure for both KWP and KPA. After his death in 1994, Kim Jong-il relied more on the military. The famine posed such a threat to the regime that the KPA was mobilised in every possible way, resulting in greater militarisation of the country. The result is a system in which party and military leaderships increasingly have co-existed, with many senior figures wearing multiple hats.

According to a KPA defector, the topics during indoctrination sessions changed with Kim Jong-il’s rise to power. From that point on, military personnel had to recite passages about *son’gun*, emphasising “Kim Jong-il ideology”, and they were told “the military would have to take the lead for the people in economic construction”.<sup>60</sup> A former KPA officer said “military first politics” created friction between the military and civilians. Whatever claims the state made, she said, people thought they were designed to protect Kim Jong-il and his rule.<sup>61</sup> A former KPA naval officer told Crisis Group “military first politics” means “the KPA is supposed to be the vanguard and rise up with Kim Jong-il as its leader to take the South and unify Korea”.<sup>62</sup>

In sum, *son’gun* was an innovation that served multiple purposes, especially during the difficult 1990s, including:

- ❑ bolstering Kim Jong-il’s status as a “great leader” and nationalist to help consolidate his coalition;
- ❑ providing governance and public goods, however limited, when the party was paralysed during the famine;
- ❑ offering an example of discipline and perseverance to society and providing a modified ideology to fit a changing international environment and serious internal crisis;
- ❑ ensuring the military received sufficient resources as threat perceptions increased;
- ❑ supplying military labour for national economic projects and earning foreign exchange through arms exports after traditional socialist trade ties and Soviet subsidies ended; and

<sup>52</sup> Dae-Kyu Yoon, “The Constitution of North Korea: Its Changes and Implications”, *Fordham International Law Journal*, vol. 27, issue 4, 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Crisis Group interviews, North Korean defectors, Seoul, 2010-2012.

<sup>54</sup> 정성장 [Chǒng Sǒng-jang], *현대북한의 정치*, op. cit., p. 167.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pp. 167-170.

<sup>56</sup> For a short overview of *son’gun*, see Han S. Park, “Military-First Politics (Songun): Understanding Kim Jong-il’s North Korea”, Korea Economic Institute Academic Paper Series, vol. 2, no. 7, September 2007.

<sup>57</sup> 통일연구원, *2009 북한개요* [Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU), *2009 North Korea Summary* (Seoul: KINU, 2009)], p. 37.

<sup>58</sup> For example, DPRK literature asserts that *chuch’e* and *son’gun* both originated when Kim Il-sung was a boy, and his father, Kim Hyōng-jik, gave him two handguns and inspired him to lead the armed struggle against the Japanese colonial authorities. 강희봉, *선군정치문답* [Kang Hui-bong, *Military First Politics: Questions and Answers*] (Pyongyang, 2008).

<sup>59</sup> Although the KPA formally was begun with Soviet help in 1948, the DPRK now claims its foundation date is 25 April 1932.

<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group interview, North Korean defector, Seoul, 22 November 2011.

<sup>61</sup> She also said close friends or family members expressed this sentiment, but it is impossible to extrapolate from her experience how widely it was expressed in society. Crisis Group interview, Yi Yōng-hŭi, Seoul, 23 November 2011.

<sup>62</sup> Crisis Group interview, Yi Myōng-suk (pseudonym), Seoul, 17 November 2011.

- establishing redundant institutions for repression and control of potentially subversive elements.

If the Kim Jōng-ūn era follows the previous model, the new leader will likely be credited with making ideological improvements to his grandfather's *chuch'e* and his father's *son'gun*. In May, the DPRK media were already reporting his "historic work on Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the guiding ideology of the KWP". According to KCNA, the "Korean people have long combined Kim Il-sung's idea with Kim Jong-il's, calling them Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism and recognising it as the guiding ideology of the KWP, but ... the leader [Kim Jong-il] sternly prohibited his name from being associated with the guiding ideology of the KWP, saying that nothing would be seen other than Kimilsungism, no matter how one delves into Kimjongilism". Kim Jōng-ūn reportedly has said that "to imbue the whole society with Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism is the highest program of the KWP".<sup>63</sup>

Kim Jōng-ūn's expected effort to put his own stamp on the ideological evolution of "Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism" logically would focus on the economy and might be built around the concept of "CNC" (Computer Numerically Controlled). That term is generally used in the context of modernisation and technological advancement, but with indigenous development in "our own style". It emerged in 2009 when two "speed battles" were implemented to boost production.<sup>64</sup> These mobilisation campaigns were accredited to Kim Jōng-ūn and preceded the disastrous currency reform of that year. Around this time, the media began to modify its science and technology propaganda to include references to CNC. This was very unusual, because it contradicted the policy established in the 1960s to eradicate Chinese characters and foreign vocabulary. Although the first references were in the context of machine tools, the acronym has taken on new meanings, such as "putting factories on a CNC basis", and is being used as a catch-all phrase for modernisation and development.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> "Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism, Guidelines for Korean Revolution", KCNA, 15 May 2012.

<sup>64</sup> "Speed battles" are campaigns to increase the intensity of labour and economic output. The term originates from a slogan Kim Il-sung coined at a 1956 party meeting. He referred to the speed and energy of a *ch'ollima* (천리마, "winged horse"), a mythical animal believed to be capable of covering 1,000 *ri* (里, about 500km) in a day. Subsequently, "speed" was inserted into war recovery plans and construction projects, and by the late 1950s, the *ch'ollima* movement was well under way as a mass mobilisation campaign. The two 2009 mobilisation campaigns were for 100 and 150 days.

<sup>65</sup> See "Kim Jong-il inspects Pyongyang cornstarch factory", KCNA, 25 August 2010. The fourth party conference in April 2012 reported that the "DPRK is becoming widely known as a dignified powerful country in CNC technology", unification

## D. INFORMATION INFLOWS

Totalitarian ideologies are utopian and rife with contradictions, and the North Korean variant is no exception. Its ideological problems are exacerbated by its affluent rival on the peninsula. Pyongyang must maintain strict control over all media in order to prevent challenges to its official narrative about its superiority to South Korea and the West. While access to media is still highly restricted, and those possessing contraband materials face harsh punishment,<sup>66</sup> a significant number of North Koreans access foreign DVDs and radio or TV broadcasts, or use technology such as Chinese mobile phones to get outside information. The authorities are "no longer the sole providers and interpreters of information".<sup>67</sup>

According to a recent report, the most popular way for North Koreans to consume outside information is through foreign DVDs smuggled across the Chinese border. In a 2010 survey for the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), almost half the defectors and travellers to China said they had viewed such DVDs. Though possession of a tunable radio is a crime,<sup>68</sup> those with access can hear Seoul-based stations such as Radio Free Chosun, Open Radio for North Korea, North Korea Reform Radio and Free North Korea Radio, with varying levels of entertainment and political broadcasts, as well as Washington's Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Asia.<sup>69</sup> The BBG survey found 27 per cent of North Koreans had listened to foreign radio in the country. It also said 24 per cent had watched television programs from China and South Korea that can be received near the border.<sup>70</sup>

ministry, 18 April 2012, [http://unibook.unikorea.go.kr/?sub\\_num=132&state=view&idx=3176](http://unibook.unikorea.go.kr/?sub_num=132&state=view&idx=3176).

<sup>66</sup> The Seoul-based NGO Good Friends reported on crackdowns on mobile phone users and those who facilitate illegal border crossing, as well as inspections for materials containing South Korean music and movies from January to June 2011 and again beginning in September 2011. "People vanish after charges of espionage – Crackdown September 2011", *North Korea Today*, no. 421, 21 September 2011; "Tough crackdown on South Korean goods", *ibid*, no. 430, 23 November 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Nat Kretchun and Jane Kim, "Quiet Opening: North Koreans in a Changing Media Environment", *InterMedia*, May 2012, p. 37.

<sup>68</sup> Andrei Lankov, "Changing North Korea", *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2009, pp. 95-105.

<sup>69</sup> Donald Kirk, "Media and North Korea under Kim Jong-eun Regime: an American Perspective", presentation at The Media and North Korea – Old Styles, Evolving Strategy in the Kim Jong-eun Era, Open Radio for North Korea and Korea Communications Society, 22 November 2010, [www.donaldkirk.com/\\_b\\_the\\_media\\_and\\_north\\_korea\\_under\\_kim\\_jong\\_eun\\_\\_b\\_\\_105114.htm](http://www.donaldkirk.com/_b_the_media_and_north_korea_under_kim_jong_eun__b__105114.htm). These radio broadcasts are only available at certain times of the day.

<sup>70</sup> Kretchun and Kim, *op. cit.*

While there are an estimated 500,000 to 700,000 mobile phones in North Korea, the network does not have international access. Those near the border can illegally make use of the Chinese mobile network, which can reach up to 20km inside the DPRK.<sup>71</sup> There are approximately two million computers in the country,<sup>72</sup> but it is not possible to disseminate information through the internet. Essentially none are connected to the internet, and home computers are not even connected to the DPRK's intranet, which is reserved for government offices, academic institutions, and research institutes. Foreign media can be shared through USB drives and MP3 players, but much information dissemination remains low-tech; 84 per cent of defectors, refugees and travellers said they received unsanctioned information by word of mouth.<sup>73</sup> While difficult to quantify, knowledge of the prosperity in the South must have a somewhat destabilising effect on the regime.

The authorities took great pains to control the flow of information about the Arab Spring in 2011. According to South Korean media, approximately 200 North Koreans living in Libya during the uprising there were told not to return home, in an attempt to prevent word of the protests from reaching the population; the North's media did not mention Qadhafi's death.<sup>74</sup>

Uncontrolled information inflows are deeply subversive and pose a long-term threat to regime survival, but the introduction of new information into society does not transfer immediately into political change. The process must go through six steps, each with its own particular obstacle or barrier:

- ❑ introduction and dispersion of new information;
- ❑ change in thinking;
- ❑ reformation of policy preferences;
- ❑ collective action;
- ❑ holding leadership accountable; and
- ❑ executing political change.

Information is beginning to seep into North Korean society, but it probably will take considerable time before inflows might cause regime change or transformation.

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<sup>71</sup> "North Korea: Frontiers of Censorship", Reporters Without Borders, 2011. The North reportedly cracked down on mobile phone users during the 100-day mourning period for Kim Jong-il. Julian Ryall, "North Korea threatens to punish mobile-phone users as 'war criminals'", *The Telegraph*, 26 January 2012.

<sup>72</sup> Reporters Without Borders, op. cit.

<sup>73</sup> Kretchun and Kim, op. cit.

<sup>74</sup> "N. Koreans in Libya banned from returning home", Yonhap News, 26 October 2011. A ROK official said some may have gone to Tunisia, but their general status and whereabouts is unknown. Crisis Group interview, Seoul, June 2012.

## E. INSTITUTIONS

Institutions within the party, state, military and mass organisations serve four main regime survival purposes. First, they provide resources and rent-seeking opportunities to regime loyalists who form the core coalition of support. Secondly, they impose punishment for those who violate state laws, norms and objectives. Failure to comply is considered a "political crime" against the regime. Thirdly, mass organisations under the direction of the party serve as a "transmission belt" to indoctrinate citizens with *chuch'e* and *son'gun* ideology, instrumental in sustaining the Kim family cult. Finally, all institutions and individuals are responsible for monitoring the behaviour of others to ensure ideology purity.

### 1. The party

According to the constitution, "the DPRK shall carry out all its activities under the leadership of the Korean Workers Party".<sup>75</sup> The party calls Kim Il-sung its founder and eternal leader and claims to represent the interests of all Koreans. The by-laws praise the revolutionary exploits and ideology of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, but mention Marxism-Leninism only once. However, the party is organised according to Leninist principles, with strict discipline consistent with democratic centralism. The highest authority is the party congress, originally supposed to be held at least every five years; however, the most recent, the sixth, was in October 1980. Between congresses, the Central Committee has the authority to convene a party conference.<sup>76</sup>

The Central Committee's 124 members elect a general secretary and the secretaries, the Politburo and its Presidium and the members of the Central Military Commission and the Central Inspection Committee. It meets at least once a year, but between sessions, the Politburo or the Secretariat can act on its behalf. While party institutions were convened regularly in the early years, the frequency declined as the Kim family cult was solidified. The third party conference in September 2010 was the first major party meeting in 30 years.

Although party institutions have been replenished with new members during the last two party conferences, the KWP is still structured to support a dictatorship. The general secretary previously had the authority to manage the Secretariat and the departments underneath it that operate the system. Now that Kim Jong-il is the "eternal party general secretary", Kim Jōng-ūn has that authority as first secretary.

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<sup>75</sup> Article 11, Chapter I.

<sup>76</sup> Four party conferences have been held: March 1958; October 1966; September 2010; and April 2012.

The Secretariat has twenty functional departments, including the Organisation and Guidance Department (OGD) and Office 39. Functional departments relay party directives to party committees at the provincial and local levels and ensure compliance. The OGD maintains the personnel files and controls appointments throughout the party hierarchy. It is believed to be led by First Department Director Kim Kyōng-ok, a four-star general who also sits on the CMC.<sup>77</sup> OGD, with its power of appointment, and Office 39, through its power to reward, are the lynchpins of the positive incentives used to sustain the Kim family regime.

## 2. The security apparatus

In addition to providing positive incentives for loyalists, the regime monitors and punishes malcontents or potential challengers through an elaborate security apparatus. Several agencies are responsible for state security, with some overlap and competition aimed to prevent any single entity becoming too powerful or a potential challenger to the Kim family regime. The structure makes a successful coup d'état very unlikely. The following organisations provide the foundation of the state's security apparatus:

**The people's security ministry.** The state maintains prosecutor offices and courts to prosecute crimes such as theft or homicide. The people's security ministry (MPS) is responsible for law enforcement, directly subordinate to the National Defence Commission. Ri Myōng-su, a four-star general, has been minister since April 2001 and as of mid-2012 concurrently director of the NDC's Administration Department.<sup>78</sup> The MPS conducts investigations related to the *sōngbun* (social classification) of citizens and issues state identification cards.<sup>79</sup> While primarily responsible

for internal law enforcement, the First Department cooperates with China's public security ministry.<sup>80</sup> The extent and nature of this cooperation is unknown, but the two agencies probably share information and coordinate extradition of criminal suspects and repatriation of convicted criminals upon release from detention.

At the local level, the Socialist Justice Livelihood Committees (社會主義法務生活委員會) coordinate inter-agency law enforcement and security. They were established following a 1977 directive by Kim Il-sung, consist of five or six members and include the local KWP secretary, the head of the local people's committee and officials from the security and law enforcement agencies. They seek to maintain law and social order in schools, enterprises and neighbourhoods.<sup>81</sup> Defectors know little of their activities given the secrecy surrounding state security.<sup>82</sup>

**The state security ministry.** Also under the NDC's direct supervision, the state security ministry (SSM) is responsible for countering threats to the regime. Its methods include monitoring and surveillance, detention and repressive measures against "political crimes".<sup>83</sup> The minister's position was vacant or its occupant unknown between the death of Ri Jin-su in 1987 and the appointment of Kim Wōn-hong at the fourth party conference in April 2012. The ministry had been led by First Department Director U Dong-ch'ūk since his appointment in September 2009. A four-star general and career officer, he was named to the NDC in April 2009, becoming a CMC member and alternate Politburo member at the third party conference in September 2010.<sup>84</sup> However, in April 2012, he was

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Studies] (ed.), *북한의 사회* [North Korean Society] (Seoul, 2006), p. 120.

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<sup>77</sup> Some analysts believe that Kim Jōng-ūn or Kim Kyōng-hūi direct the OGD. Kim Kyōng-hūi was appointed as the "organisation secretary" in the KWP Secretariat at the fourth party conference, and she is first on the list of ten secretaries. 정용수및이원진, "김경희·장성택 '넘버2' 압력 인정 강화" ["Chōng Yong-su and Yi Wōn-jin, "Kim Kyōng-hūi and Chang Sōng-t'aek seated 'number 2' as rule strengthened"], *The Joongang Ilbo*, 13 April 2012.

<sup>78</sup> Ri is a career military officer who previously served as director of the Operations Department under the KPA General Staff. He was elected to the SPA in 1998 during the formal institutionalisation of "military first" and has directed the NDC's Administration Department since October 2007. He has been a member of the Central Committee since September 2010. "북한 주요인" ["North Korea's Principal People"], MOU, Information Center on North Korea, [http://unibook.unikorea.go.kr/?sub\\_num=54](http://unibook.unikorea.go.kr/?sub_num=54).

<sup>79</sup> 정영철, "북한의 사회통제와 조직생활" [Chōng Yōng-ch'ōl, "North Korea's Social Control and Organisational Life"], in 북한연구학회 [The Korean Association of North Korean

Studies] (ed.), *북한의 사회* [North Korean Society] (Seoul, 2006), p. 120.

<sup>80</sup> In November 2011, the First Department was directed by Col. General Ri T'ae-ch'ōl. "Chinese minister of public security meets with KPISF delegation", KCNA, 9 November 2011; "중국 공안부장 중조친관계는 그 어디에도 비교할수 없는 관계라고 강조" ["China's Minister of Public Security emphasises the incomparable friendly ties between China and North Korea"], KCNA, 9 November 2011; "北中 공안기관 수뇌부 회동[연합]" ["Heads of North Korean and Chinese public security organisations meet"] Yonhap, *The Joongang Ilbo*, 10 November 2011.

<sup>81</sup> 정영철, "북한의 사회통제와 조직생활" [Chōng Yōng-ch'ōl, "North Korea's Social Control and Organisational Life"] in 북한연구학회 [The Korean Association of North Korean Studies] (ed.), *북한의 사회* [North Korean Society] (Seoul, 2006), p. 1,119.

<sup>82</sup> Crisis Group interviews, North Korean defectors, Seoul, 30 April 2012.

<sup>83</sup> The SSM is also known as "KPA Unit 10215" [朝鮮人民軍 第 10215 軍部隊].

<sup>84</sup> "북한 주요인물" ["North Korea's Principal People"], MOU, op. cit.

stripped of all positions.<sup>85</sup> U was the same age as Kim Jong-il and a graduate of Kim Il-sung University, so he probably was a classmate of the late leader. His sudden disappearance led to speculation he was purged, possibly after falling out with Chang Sŏng-t'aek.<sup>86</sup> However, later reports revealed that he was incapacitated by a stroke.<sup>87</sup>

At the fourth party conference, Kim Wŏn-hong, a four-star general and former commander of the Defence Security Command (保衛司令部), was appointed SSM minister and Politburo member.<sup>88</sup> He has held several positions in the KPA's General Political Bureau (GPB; 總政治局), including director of the OGD. He was appointed to the Central Committee and the CMC at the third party conference in 2010.

**The Defence Security Command.** Responsible for internal KPA security and the conduct of investigations into criminal or subversive activities by military personnel, the Defence Security Command (DSC) may be controlled by the people's armed forces ministry, but more likely is under the SSM. Cho Kyŏng-ch'ŏl, a former GPB officer in the air force, leads the command, having replaced Kim Wŏn-hong when Kim was appointed SSM minister.<sup>89</sup>

**KPA General Political Bureau.** The General Political Bureau maintains the military commissar system of political officers and is responsible for monitoring the "political work" and ideological indoctrination of military units. Personnel suspected of violating party directives or ideological impurity can be reported to the DSC for detention and punishment or prosecution. As of June 2012 the GPB has been led by Ch'oi Ryong-hae, a vice marshal and son of a former defence minister, who served in several party

positions and held senior leadership positions in the Korean Socialist Labour Youth League (朝鮮社會主義勞動青年同盟).<sup>90</sup> At the third party conference in 2010, he was appointed a secretary in the KWP Central Committee, a member of the CMC and an alternate member of the Politburo. At the fourth party conference, he rose to the Presidium of the Politburo and vice chairman of the CMC.<sup>91</sup> In April 2012, he was made a vice marshal and appointed to the NDC.<sup>92</sup>

**The Guard Command.** Also known as KPA Unit 963, the Guard Command (護衛司令部) provides personal protection for the Kim family and senior leadership, as well as visiting dignitaries. It reportedly has about 120,000 personnel, who are screened to ensure their loyalty to the Kim family regime.<sup>93</sup> Any coup or challenge to the senior leadership would require its penetration, capture or neutralisation. Yun Jŏng-rin, a career military officer, was promoted to four-star general and given the command in April 2010. He was appointed to the KWP Central Committee and CMC at the third party conference in 2010.<sup>94</sup> The Guard Command is backed up, or held in check, by the Pyongyang Defence Command (平壤防禦司令部), also known as the 966th Joint Corps (第966隊聯合部隊).<sup>95</sup>

**The *inminban*.** Although not part of the security apparatus per se, the *inminban* (人民班, "neighbourhood units") monitor the activities and movements of all citizens. They are managed by the local district office people's committee (洞事務所人民委員會), which passes down KWP directives on the teachings and activities surrounding the Kim

<sup>85</sup> 정성장, "북한 노동당 제4차 대표자회와 파워 엘리트 변동", *정세와 정책*, 2012년 5월호 [Chŏng Sŏng-jang, "North Korean workers party 4th Party Conference and changes in the power elite", *Chŏngsewa Jŏngch'aek*, May 2012]; "Brief history of member of presidium, members and alternate members of political bureau of C.C., WPK elected to fill vacancies", KCNA, 11 April 2012; "최고인민회의 제12기 제5차회의" ["5th meeting of the 12th SPA"], KCNA, 13 April 2012.

<sup>86</sup> U was one of eight people who walked with the hearse carrying Kim Jong-il's body in December 2011. "北, 우동측 '토사구팽'" ["North, U Dong-chŭk hunted and cooked like a rabbit?"], *The MesTimes*, 17 April 2012.

<sup>87</sup> 김승재, "김정은 최측근 우동측, 뇌출혈로 쓰러져" [Kim Sŭng-jae, "Kim Jŏng-ŭn's close aid U Dong-ch'ŭk collapses from a stroke"], YTN, 29 April 2012.

<sup>88</sup> "보선된 당중앙위 정치국 상무위 위원, 정치국 위원, 후보위원들 략력" ["Biographies of elected members of Central Committee Politburo Presidium, Politburo, and alternate members"], KCNA, 11 April 2012.

<sup>89</sup> "이용수, 北 장성 잡는 저승사자 3인방" ["Gang of three North Korean generals takes position as hangmen"], *The Chosun Ilbo*, 23 March 2012.

<sup>90</sup> He was appointed chairman of the league's central committee in August 1986. Ch'oi appears to have little military experience but was appointed a four-star general in September 2010. He has held several senior positions in national sports committees. "북한 주요인물" ["North Korea's Principal People"], MOU, op. cit.

<sup>91</sup> 정성장, "북한 노동당 제4차 대표자회와 파워 엘리트 변동", *정세와 정책*, 2012년 5월호 [Chŏng Sŏng-jang, "North Korean workers party 4th party conference and changes in the power elite", *Chŏngsewa Jŏngch'aek*, May 2012].

<sup>92</sup> "Title of KPA vice marshal awarded to Choe Ryong Hae, Hyon Chol Hae", KCNA, 10 April 2012; "Fifth session of 12th SPA held", KCNA, 13 April 2012.

<sup>93</sup> 강미진, "北 김정일·정은, 호위사령부 예술공연 관람" [Kang Mi-jin, "North's Kim Jong-il·Jŏng-ŭn view an arts performance at the Guard Command"], *The Daily NK*, 10 February 2011; "김문, "[초점] 북한 경호시스템 호위총국의 실체" [Kim Mun, "[Focus] North Korea's guard system: the essence of the Guard General Department"], *Seoul Shinmun*, 21 April 2000.

<sup>94</sup> "북한 주요인물" ["North Korea's Principal People"], MOU, op. cit.

<sup>95</sup> 노재현, "김정일, 평양방어사령부 타격훈련 참관" [No Jae-hyŏn, "Kim Jong-il views Pyongyang Defence Command strike training"], Yonhap News, 13 December 2011.



family; these occasionally include orders for households to make simple products such as gloves for the military. Citizens are mobilised through the *inminban* to do basic repairs or maintenance and clean up the neighbourhood.<sup>96</sup>

The typical *inminban* includes about 25 households, some 100-125 people. The leaders are women, selected by local party officials for unlimited terms after a review of their personal background (*sōngbun*) and loyalty. A leader usually has three team leader assistants (for sanitation, daily life and heads-of-household). The *inminban* leader must account for any disappearances or visitors who sleep over night in the neighbourhood. She keeps a roster and can visit households at any time of day or night if she has reason to be suspicious. A representative from the state security ministry meets with her once a week to exchange information. The *inminban* leader has a strong incentive to cooperate because of the many security informants operating in the community.<sup>97</sup>

### 3. Mass organisations

Mass organisations have been a fundamental aspect of communist systems since the founding of the Soviet Union. The North's constitution enshrines the responsibilities for indoctrination: "The DPRK shall, by thoroughly carrying out the cultural revolution, train all people as builders of socialism". The state also "shall eliminate the outdated society's mode of life and establish a new socialist mode of life in full measure in all fields". Furthermore, "the state shall implement the principle of socialist pedagogy, and thus raise the younger generations as resolute revolutionaries who struggle for the society and the people, and as new *chuch'e*-type people of knowledge, virtue, and physical health".<sup>98</sup>

The KWP by-laws assign all mass organisations to the party's guidance, with the Workers Organisation Department under the Secretariat in charge of overall management and operation. "The worker organisations established by the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il-sung are mass political organisations and ideological education organisations. Worker organisations are auxiliary organisations of the party and a transmission belt that connects the party and the masses". The by-laws also state that workers organisations must specify that they are to conduct all activities according to party directives. Workers and youth organisations are required to indoctrinate members with *chuch'e* and *sōn'gun*

and lead "shock troops" (突擊隊) in building a "strong and prosperous socialist country".<sup>99</sup>

The organisations structurally resemble the KWP, with a top-down arrangement from a central committee through geographic districts (provinces, counties (郡) and local municipalities or villages). They are at the same time support mechanisms for the party and mass mobilisation instruments for construction, war or whatever the party deems necessary, while also providing an apprenticeship for those who desire to join the KWP.

North Korean mass organisations were established in the Soviet occupation zone north of the 38th parallel shortly after liberation from Japanese colonial rule and before the founding of the DPRK. They were modelled on Soviet counterparts, but there are important differences. In particular, while membership and participation were strongly encouraged in other communist countries, North Koreans, for all practical purposes, are required to participate.

Citizens become eligible to join the KWP itself after middle school graduation. Yet, unlike the Korean Children's Union and the Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League, which all must join, party membership is selective, with a one-year candidacy. Recommendation letters from two current members are required for candidacy, and membership must be ratified by the local committee. Those who join the party automatically leave the Youth League; those who do not remain in the Youth League until age 30 or marriage, at which point they join either the General Federation of Trade Unions of Korea or the Union of Agricultural Workers of Korea depending on their type of employment. Women who are full-time homemakers and reach age 30 without a party membership join the Korea Democratic Women's Union.

There is a mass organisation for everyone according to social position, age, gender or vocation. In general, all serve to indoctrinate citizens with *chuch'e*, *sōn'gun*, and "North Korean style socialism"; maintain ideological discipline; mobilise citizens to support work projects as directed by the party; increase productivity; act as general supports for the party; assist those who desire to become KWP members; promote unification with the South according to Pyongyang's model; and provide another surveillance mechanism for state security. The main ones are:

<sup>96</sup> Crisis Group interview, former *inminban* leader, Seoul, 30 April 2012.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Articles, 40, 42, Chapter III.

<sup>99</sup> 이운죽 및 이인정, *김일성사회주의청년동맹과 조선민주녀성동맹* [Yi On-juk and Yi In-jōng, *The Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League and the Korea Democratic Women's Union* (Seoul, 2010)]; Articles 56, 57-58, KWP by-laws.

**Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League** (義青年同盟金日成社會主). The KISSYL, begun in 1946 as the Korea Democratic Youth League and renamed as the Korea Socialist Labour Youth League in 1964, received its current name in 1996 to honour the deceased Kim Il-sung. Estimated membership is five million, 22 per cent of the population. Students are eligible to join at fourteen and must leave at 30, after first joining the Korean Children's Union (KCU) at seven.<sup>100</sup>

The Youth League was first used to indoctrinate its members to accept the eventual dynastic transfer of power to Kim Jong-il in the 1970s. Its 1996 name-change occurred in the midst of famine that triggered a mass migration in search of food and resources and caused a breakdown in governmental institutions, including the Public Distribution System (PDS). While that collapse led to greater reliance on markets and reduced incentives to join or actively participate in formal state institutions such as the party, the regime emphasised the importance of ideology and indoctrination, instead of pursuing economic reform.

The KISSYL also was reorganised in 1996, with a central committee first secretary instead of a chairman. That official has some ten subordinate secretaries for functional departments such as organisation, propaganda, international affairs and publications. The KISSYL shifted its focus after Kim Il-sung's death and expanded its ideological indoctrination to include the "revolutionary accomplishments" of Kim Jong-il and the "brilliance" of *son'gun*. In March 2012, it held its 47th congress, and the central committee elected Chŏn Yong-nam as first secretary, replacing Ri Yong-ch'ŏl, who was dismissed due to age. Little is known about Chŏn, but he can be assumed to have the confidence of the senior KWP leadership. His predecessor was the son of Ri Hwa-sŏn, a former department director in the KWP Organisation and Guidance Department.<sup>101</sup>

The Kim Jŏng-ŭn regime continues to emphasise youth indoctrination. On 6 June, Kim delivered his second public speech at an event to mark the 66th anniversary of the establishment of the KCU. The media provided extensive coverage of the event, including photographs of emotional children in Kim's embrace. Kim thanked his grandfather

and father for "selfless contributions to the lives of children" and promised the North would adhere to socialism, *chuch'e* and *son'gun*, and the children would inherit a strong and prosperous Korea.<sup>102</sup>

**Korea Democratic Women's Union** (朝鮮民主女性同盟). Women are an integral part of the mass mobilisation and indoctrination. The KDWU began in November 1945 as the Democratic Women's Union of North Korea, which joined the Women's International Democratic Federation in October 1946. It acquired its current name in January 1951, and in 1983 eligibility was restricted to married women and unemployed women over 30, to avoid overlapping memberships with other mass organisations. Membership is an estimated 1.2 million to two million.<sup>103</sup> Kim Il-sung argued that such a union was needed because women were doubly suppressed by colonialism and patriarchy, so had a more acute revolutionary consciousness. Initially, it appeared the KDWU had a special mission to emancipate them. Today the primary objective is to promote state ideology and party policies, with emphasis on women's role in enhancing their family's allegiance to the Kim family and supporting production.

**General Federation of Trade Unions of Korea** (朝鮮職業總同盟). The first trade union, the Council of Trade Unions of North Korea, was established in November 1945, merged with its South Korean counterpart in January 1951 and adopted its current name. Made up of ten trade unions with estimated membership around 1.6 million, the GFTUK has provincial, city, and town committees.<sup>104</sup> Citizens normally join after military service and assignment to a civilian work unit. The party controls the election of GFTUK central committee members and indirectly oversees their

<sup>100</sup> 정성장, "제1 장 김일성사회주의청년동맹", 북한연구센터, *조선로동당의 외곽단체* [Chŏng Sŏng-jang, "Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League"], chapter 1 in *Subsidiary Organisations and the Korean Workers' Party*, North Korea Research Centre (ed.), (Seoul, 2004), p. 27. Although nominally independent, the KCU is controlled by the KISSYL.

<sup>101</sup> Ri became first secretary in December 2007. 이용수, "北, 청년동맹 1비서에 전용남 임명" [Yi Yong-su, "Chŏn Yong-nam appointed first secretary of the North's Youth League"], *The Chosun Ilbo*, 22 March 2012.

<sup>102</sup> "김정은동지께서 조선소년단 전국연합단체대회에서 하신 축하연설" ["Comrade Kim Jŏng-ŭn congratulatory address at the Korea Children's Union national meeting"], KCNA, 6 June 2012; "Kim Jong-un makes congratulatory speech at joint meeting of KCU organizations", KCNA, 6 June 2012.

<sup>103</sup> In 1988, an encyclopaedia listed membership at about 200,000, probably a typographical error for two million; see 방완주, *조선개관* [Pang Wan-ju, *Korea Survey*] (Pyongyang, 1988), pp. 106-107; 이온죽 및 이인정, *김일성사회주의청년동맹과 조선민주여성동맹* [Yi On-juk and Yi In-jŏng, *The Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League and the Korea Democratic Women's Union* (Seoul, 2010)], pp. 163-164.

<sup>104</sup> The ten are metal and machine industry; mining and power; light industry; chemical engineering; commercial workers; transport and harbour; maritime; construction and forestry; educational, cultural and public health; and public servants. 방완주, <조선개관> (평양: 백과사전출판사, 1988) [Pang Wan-ju, *Korea Outline* (Pyongyang, 1988)], pp. 106-107.

operations. All activities must be in accordance with KWP directives.

**Union of Agricultural Workers of Korea** (朝鮮農業勤勞者同盟). The predecessor, the Farmers' Union of North Korea founded in 1946, was by November 1947 the largest and most significant mass organisation with over 2.5 million members. In 1951 it integrated with its South Korean counterpart, the General Federation of National Farmers' Unions, and changed its name to the Farmers' Union of Korea. This in turn was replaced by the current organisation in 1965 to reflect changing rural conditions, namely, that the introduction of collective farms made a union structured around individual farms and farmers obsolete. The main mission is to promote ideological, technological and cultural revolutions in rural communities, the revolutionary goal being emphasised even more than in other mass organisations because the original union was founded on the basis of property-owning farmers considered ideologically inferior to the working class.

## F. THE MILITARY BALANCE

The North's attacks in 2010 (the sinking of the South Korean naval vessel *Ch'ōnan* and the artillery attack against Yōnp'yōng Island) triggered South Korean countermeasures, including an increase in military expenditure and deployments, exercises and surveillance; the creation of a new command to defend the ROK's north-western islands; and the expansion of military cooperation with the U.S. Seoul also explored ways to cooperate militarily with Japan. None of this directly affects DPRK internal political dynamics, but the conventional military balance, which continues to deteriorate for the North, may worry professional KPA officers. If the regime miscalculates and continues provocative behaviour that undermines military security or triggers military responses from the South, generals might become wary of adventurism that ultimately weakens their capacity to defend the state. Moreover, if China perceives North Korean actions to be the cause of a regional arms race or serious instability, it conceivably could reduce support for the Kim regime.

The South has been working to upgrade its military hardware to defend against DPRK provocations. It has obtained additional stealth air-to-surface missiles and advanced cluster bombs and is developing deep-penetrating "bunker-buster" bombs capable of destroying fortified artillery in the event of a new shelling attack.<sup>105</sup> It wants to revise

an agreement with the U.S. that has limited the range of its ballistic missiles to 300km, and the defence ministry has requested ₩2.5 trillion (about \$2.1 billion) over five years to improve missile capabilities.<sup>106</sup> In June 2011, the South established the Northwest Islands Defence Command to bolster security near the Northern Limit Line (NLL).<sup>107</sup> In October 2011, it held the large annual "Hoguk" exercise off Paengnyōng Island in the Yellow Sea and live-fire drills on or near the five north-western islands.<sup>108</sup> Following the *Ch'ōnan* sinking, the navy established new posts in the chain of command and carried out numerous anti-submarine exercises.<sup>109</sup>

One month before the Yōnp'yōng Island artillery attack, the U.S. and ROK agreed to form the Extended Deterrence Policy Committee (EDPC) to institutionalise deterrence cooperation.<sup>110</sup> The EDPC held a tabletop strategy exercise in November 2011 and further discussed the counter-provocation agreement (the "Strategic Planning Directive", SPD) in January 2012.<sup>111</sup> In Washington in April, the two militaries discussed operational scenarios for possible nuclear attacks by North Korea at the first Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD), which is to oversee the EDPC, the Strategic Alliance 2015 Working Group

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<sup>106</sup> Song Sang-ho, "Seoul cautiously optimistic on missile range extension", *The Korea Herald*, 16 May 2012. "S. Korea plans to 'drastically' beef up missile arsenal against N. Korea", *Yonhap News*, 22 May 2012.

<sup>107</sup> "S. Korea sets up defense command for Yellow Sea islands near N. Korea", *Yonhap News*, 14 June 2011. The NLL is the disputed extension of the Military Demarcation Line into the waters of the Yellow Sea.

<sup>108</sup> "Military drill planned on anniversary of Yeonpyeong shelling", *Yonhap News*, 22 November 2011. Live fire exercises were held in eight months between December 2010 and February 2012. Park Chan-Kyong, "S.Korea live-fire drill enters second day", *AFP*, 7 December 2012; "S. Korea conducts live-fire drill on Yeonpyeong Island", *The Korea Herald*, 30 March 2011; "S. Korea conducts live-fire drills on border islands", *Yonhap News*, 3 May 2011; "S. Korea holds live-fire drill near N. Korea sea border", *Channel News Asia*, 6 October 2011; "South Korea holds live-fire drills in Yellow Sea", *VOA*, 29 November 2011; "Marines hold live-fire drills in Yellow Sea", *Yonhap News*, 12 December 2011; "South Korea stages first live-fire artillery drill since death of Kim Jong-il", *The Telegraph*, 26 January 2012; "S. Korea conducts live-fire drills despite N. Korean threat", *Yonhap News*, 20 February 2012.

<sup>109</sup> Choi He-suk, "Navy boosts anti-sub capabilities in wake of Cheonan", *The Korea Herald*, 25 March 2012.

<sup>110</sup> Kwon Hyuk-chul, "S. Korea-U.S. to organise a joint committee for extending nuclear deterrence", *The Hankyoreh*, 9 October 2010.

<sup>111</sup> "S. Korea, U.S. to conduct exercise on deterrence", *Yonhap News*, 4 November 2011; Lee Chi-dong, "S. Korea, U.S. mapping out new plan to counter N. Korea", *Yonhap News*, 24 January 2012.

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<sup>105</sup> Lee Tae-hoon, "Korea to purchase 170 stealth cruise missiles next year", *The Korea Times*, 6 December 2011; Lee Tae-hoon, "Seoul to buy 350 advanced cluster bombs", *The Korea Times*, 13 December 2011; "S.Korea Developing 'Bunker-Buster' Bomb", *The Chosun Ilbo*, 16 December 2011.

and the Security Policy Initiative.<sup>112</sup> Bilateral security exercises such as “Key Resolve” and “Foal Eagle”.<sup>113</sup> “Max Thunder”, the largest combined air defence exercise to date with 60 military aircraft, was held in May.<sup>114</sup> South Korea has been participating in U.S. missile defence exercises for years and intends to establish its own missile defence system by 2015.<sup>115</sup>

While there have been concerns that U.S. defence budget cuts could potentially weaken bilateral cooperation and lead to a reduction of U.S. forces on the peninsula, senior U.S. officials have emphasised that Washington will continue security cooperation. 28,500 U.S. troops are stationed in the South, and it has been agreed that number will remain unchanged for the foreseeable future, and combined military exercises will be strengthened.<sup>116</sup>

Japan and South Korea have recognised the need to increase military cooperation against the North Korean threat. After the attack on Yōnp’yōng Island, defence ministers discussed two proposals.<sup>117</sup> The General Security of Military Information Agreement would allow sharing of information on issues such as the North’s nuclear and missile programs. The Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) would allow exchanges of logistical supplies and support. South Korean Defence Minister Kim Kwan-jin was to sign the agreements in Tokyo in May 2012, but the signing has been delayed due to a domestic backlash over military cooperation with Japan.<sup>118</sup>

In sum, the North’s provocative behaviour has triggered responses that have worsened the military balance for it. Since it lacks capabilities to compete in a conventional arms race with Seoul and its allies, it must rely even more on asymmetric capabilities, such as weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missiles. Pyongyang’s determination to maintain its WMD assets look to pose increasingly difficult challenges to international security and the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

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<sup>112</sup> Lee Chi-dong, “S. Korea, U.S. discuss N. Korea in high-level meeting”, *Yonhap News*, 27 April 2012.

<sup>113</sup> “Key Resolve” was held 28 February-9 March 2012. “Foal Eagle” tactical field training exercises were conducted 1 March-30 April. The “Ulchi Freedom Exercise” was held 16-26 August 2011. Ashley Rowland, “U.S. carrier reportedly to join Key Resolve/Foal Eagle exercise”, *Stars and Stripes*, 15 February 2011; Walter T. Ham, “Eighth Army maintains readiness with Key Resolve, Foal Eagle”, U.S. Eighth Army Public Affairs Office, 9 March 2012, [www.army.mil/article/75355/](http://www.army.mil/article/75355/); “North Korea vows to launch ‘sacred war’ over US-South naval exercises”, *The Telegraph*, 25 February 2012; Terri Moon Cronk, “U.S., South Korea to begin Ulchi Freedom Guardian exercise”, American Forces Press Service, 15 August 2011.

<sup>114</sup> Choi He-suk, “Allies begin largest-ever joint air defense drill”, *The Korea Herald*, 7 May 2012.

<sup>115</sup> “S.Korean troops took active part in U.S. missile defense drills”, *The Chosun Ilbo*, 30 April 2012.

<sup>116</sup> Ser Myo-ja, “Panetta vows no troop drawdown from Korea”, *The JoongAng Ilbo*, 29 October 2011.

<sup>117</sup> Chico Harlan, “Japan and South Korea hold first military talks in nearly two years”, *The Washington Post*, 10 January 2011.

<sup>118</sup> Choi He-suk, “South Korea, Japan to sign defense pacts”, *The Korea Herald*, 8 May 2012; “Genba still hoping to ink S.

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Korea military pacts”, *The Japan Times* (Kyodo News Agency), 19 May 2012.

#### IV. THE NEW LEADER'S STYLE

Since assuming leadership of the DPRK, Kim Jōng-ūn has shown a very different leadership style from his father. State media has portrayed the young Kim as a benevolent leader who cares about his people, just like his grandfather, and in a more affectionate and direct manner than his father. It quoted his instructions to officials during visits to military bases, industrial sites and public facilities to emphasise “the continued devotion of the Kim family to the people”.<sup>119</sup> This is a significant contrast with Kim Jong-il, who seemed very reserved and somewhat disconnected in public. The son appears much more communicative and exudes confidence despite his youth and inexperience.

The DPRK moved very quickly to bolster Kim Jōng-ūn after his father's death – unlike the first succession, when Kim Jong-il remained in seclusion during a three-year mourning period before formally assuming power in 1998. On 3 January 2012, state television broadcast footage of Kim's first official public activity: a visit to the 105th Seoul Ryu Gyōng-su Guards Tank Division on New Year's Day, just two days after becoming Supreme Commander of the KPA. Kim smiled several times while talking with field commanders and held hands with soldiers for a photograph. Television also aired a documentary on his birthday, 8 January, showing him riding a horse and a tank, inspecting a fighter plane and laughing at a carnival ride. But Kim also has demonstrated the ability to be stern. It was reported that he reprimanded officials at a Pyongyang amusement park for poor management:

Seeing the weeds grown in between pavement blocks in the compound of the fun fair, he, with an irritated look, plucked them up one by one. He said in an excited tone that he has never thought that the fun fair is [in] such a bad state and a proverb that the darkest place is under the candlestick fits the funfair. He scolded officials, saying why such things do not come in their sight and querying could the officials of the fun fair work like this, had they had the attitude befitting master, affection for their work sites and conscience to serve the people. Plucking up weeds

can be done easily with hands as it is different from updating facilities, he added.<sup>120</sup>

The new leadership style was evident in the twenty-minute speech on the centennial anniversary of Kim Il-sung's birth, and in a speech at the national meeting of Korea Children's Union organisations. Kim Jong-il spoke only one short sentence in public in his whole life; his voice was never heard on television or radio. Some analysts argue that the departure from the father's practices is part of an effort to emulate Kim Il-sung and bolster public support.<sup>121</sup>

While North Koreans are probably impressed with Kim Jōng-ūn's public personality and leadership style, the positive effects are likely to wear off over time. In the short term, his image is likely welcome in a country where most people are fatigued from mass mobilisation campaigns, frequent indoctrination and self-criticism sessions and the atmosphere of fear and chronic insecurity in which the media constantly warns that war could break out at any moment. Kim projects an image of confidence and hope, but economic recovery requires policy change, and there is no sign the regime intends to vary its economic development strategy. As memories of Kim Jong-il fade, Kim Jōng-ūn's more extroverted leadership will not help regime survival unless he is able to address the economic insecurity that is the greatest long-term threat to the Kim family dynasty.

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<sup>119</sup> For example, KCNA reported: “It was leader Kim Jong-il's noble outlook on the people that the masses are almighty and the Korean people are great. With this outlook he had devoted all his life to the people's happiness. His history of love for the people steadily continues in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, thanks to the dear respected Kim Jōng-ūn”. “Kim Jōng-il's history of love for people continues in DPRK”, 16 May 2012.

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<sup>120</sup> “Kim Jong-un tours Mangyongdae funfair”, KCNA, 9 May 2012.

<sup>121</sup> “New leadership style on display in North Korea”, *AsiaOne*, 16 April 2012; “N. Korea builds benevolent image of leader Kim Jong-un”, *Yonhap News*, 17 May 2012.

## V. CONCLUSION

Despite predictions that Kim Jong-il's death would cause a leadership vacuum or transform the DPRK into a collective leadership or military-run regime, the transfer of power to Kim Jōng-ūn is already complete. He relies upon several powerful and trusted advisers, but the senior leadership appears united. No person or group is likely to challenge him. The succession went faster and smoother than many had expected. While Kim Jong-il did not spend as much time readying it as his father, the regime had about a decade to prepare; it learned from the first succession and adjusted the process to avoid the mistake of waiting too long to formalise the transition.

The DPRK can be described as a failed state due to chronic inability to solve food insecurity and widespread economic problems, as well as to provide other public goods adequately, and its inadequacies are magnified by the existence of a more successful Korea south of the DMZ. This has led to revival of the "collapsist school" in vogue among Pyongyang watchers at the time of Kim Il-sung's death. Predictions of collapse, instability or coup, however, underestimate the regime's resilience. When it comes to institutions usable for social control, the DPRK is a hyper-developed state. Kim is young and inexperienced, but the instruments of control have been established by his grandfather and father, and he has pledged to adhere to their policy line. This means reform prospects are dim. He could well be around for decades –and with a growing nuclear arsenal.

Any process for reform and transformation in North Korea could take a very long time. The two potential drivers of change are information inflows and marketisation, but the regime recognises the dangers of these subversive elements and expends extensive resources to prevent them from contaminating "our style socialism". If change does come, the rigid institutional structures and entrenched interests mean the elite are unlikely to go quietly. The Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1910), to which some compare the regime in the North, was stable for centuries, its structures, institutions and ideology beginning to change only late in the nineteenth century, when it was too late to withstand the geopolitical rivalries that led to its downfall. Something like that could be in store one day for Pyongyang, which is being left far behind its neighbours by failure to reform and modernise.

**Seoul/Beijing/Brussels, 25 July 2012**

## APPENDIX A

### MAP OF THE KOREAN PENINSULA



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Courtesy of University of Texas at Austin.

## APPENDIX B

### CENTRALISED AUTHORITY OR LEADERSHIP BY COMMITTEE?

Many analysts believed that North Korea after Kim Jong-il would be led by a committee, or that Kim Jōng-ūn would simply be a figurehead for powerful generals. Others predicted that a “regency” with senior figures such as Chang Sōng-t’æk would govern until Kim gained sufficient experience to lead. However, rule by committee is very unlikely in the DPRK. Several issues in North Korea tend to support a concentration of power in a single individual, and this is reflected in the relatively rapid and smooth dynastic succession. The following issues are intertwined in an elaborate system that has sustained centralised dictatorship and makes rule by committee extremely unlikely.

**National security threat.** The division of the Korean peninsula has created chronic insecurity for the DPRK. Countries facing extreme security threats tend to delegate authority to one individual who can make quick decisions regarding the use of military force. Although committee rule theoretically is possible under such conditions, it is more time consuming and vulnerable to indecision during a crisis.

**Command economy.** Centrally planned economies allocate resources according to centralised directives, not market forces, relative scarcities and opportunity costs. Producers respond to directives from above and are rewarded according to political loyalty and their ability to fulfil planned targets. Economic actors seeking resources must participate in a game of patronage with superiors, and ultimately the chain ends at the pinnacle of the system. Planning commissions and economic bureaucrats make most routine decisions, but major decisions, especially those regarding significant resources or investments, tend to be “kicked upstairs”. Command economies tend to evolve into systems whereby allocation decisions are ultimately made by an individual.<sup>122</sup> The command economy enables the leadership to reward supporters of the Kim family cult with material rewards or rent-seeking opportunities – the positive incentives or glue that holds the coalition together.

**Democratic centralism.** The DPRK constitution and KWP by-laws explicitly stipulate that state governance is based

on democratic centralism.<sup>123</sup> Strict party discipline permeates the whole society; failure to obey directives is met with harsh retribution. Those who reach the highest levels of the KWP are accustomed to following orders. Theoretically, decisions could be made and passed down by committees, but orthodox communist regimes that begin with committee rule drift towards individualistic dictatorships. That has been the case with the DPRK, which is an extreme case of personalistic dictatorship. A shift to committee rule would be awkward and unnatural.

**Institutions.** The DPRK is often described as a “failed or failing state”. Economic decline and chronic food insecurity among other problems support this assessment, but in political terms the DPRK is *very* developed. Inter-locking institutions within the party, military, cabinet or government and the mass organisations perform many similar or complementary functions including extensive surveillance. Institutions must compete to demonstrate their loyalty to the regime, which means total obedience to the leader, in return for personal security and resources. Authoritarian systems are plagued by the failure of lower echelons in the system failing to carry out the orders from above.<sup>124</sup> However, institutional redundancy, expanded in the 1990s under Kim Jong-il’s “military first politics”, leads to competition among institutions (or agents) that reduces this problem. In other words, failure to obey directives from above can lead to replacement and punishment.

**Ideology.** “Totalitarian” political systems are characterised by ideologies designed to unify society behind common goals. Political ideologies must be simple enough for common citizens to understand, but they also must include some logic or intellectual substance in order to persist. The main totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century – Nazism, fascism, and communism – were utopian and rigid. Their proclaimed goals were impossible to achieve, and their failure to transform and adapt led to their demise. North Korea, while sharing the common totalitarian goal

<sup>122</sup> Paul R. Gregory, *The Political Economy of Stalinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>123</sup> According to Chapter 1, Article 5 of the 2009 DPRK Socialist Constitution: “All State organs in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea are formed and function on the principle of democratic centralism”. The KWP By-laws, revised in September 2010, elaborate on this concept, specifying that all party members must obey orders from the Central Committee, and implement all directives and policies from above.

<sup>124</sup> These are called “principal-agent problems” in the social science literature.



of making a “new man”, has slightly modified its state ideology to offer explanations for changes in the international environment. It also attempts to resuscitate the mass social appeal and enthusiasm that is commonly found in new revolutionary societies.

In sum, North Korea has a strong tradition of personalised dictatorship; a dissimilar leadership structure would be a divergence from past practices. Kim Jōng-ūn could stumble, but all the instruments for centralised control are at his disposal. The likelihood of a bottom-up rebellion or revolution against the Kim family cult is extremely low, and the senior elite very likely will support the status quo for the foreseeable future. The prospects for change, reform and decentralisation are very remote until power is passed from the Kim family, but it could take considerable time before the necessary social forces emerge to effect such a change.