

North Korea

The Politics of Regime Survival

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Kim Jong II's Military-First Politics

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The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which is commonly known as North Korea, has been transformed into a military-party state for the past decade since the death of Kim II Sung in 1994. From 1994 to 2004 the new leadership of Kim Jong II has successfully transformed North Korea from a party-state system to a military-first political system. During the Kim II Sung period (1948-1994), the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) played the central role in North Korean politics. However, the role of the KWP has been gradually diminished while the role of the North Korean military in politics has rapidly increased under Kim Jong II's leadership.

Kim II Sung was the revolutionary leader during the Japanese colonial rule of Korea from 1910 to 1945 and the founder of the DPRK in 1948. He is well known to the outside world because of his anti-Japanese revolutionary activities in Manchuria and Siberia in the 1930s and 1940s and also was recognized as one of the leaders of the Korean independence movement when Koreans ardently supported independence from Japanese colonial rule. The independence movement of Koreans abroad has been widely researched and documented by Korean scholars as well as foreign experts. Moreover, biographical studies on Kim II Sung (1912-1994) have been so polarized as either pro- or anti-Kim that an objective analysis of his rule in North Korea is scanty at best. However, the Western studies of Kim II Sung agree in general that the senior Kim had revolutionary ideas and organizational skills in recruiting Korean exiles in China and Siberia to carry out the movement for the independence of Korea.

This chapter will attempt to conduct an objective analysis and interpretation of Kim Jong II's military-first politics and contrast it with the *juche* politics of his father Kim II Sung, originator of the *juche* ideology. Among the issues to be discussed in this chapter are the origin and development of the military-first politics of Kim Jong II, the process of transition from the *juche* ideology of Kim II Sung, and the impact of this change on the government and the economic structures of North Korea.

Historical Background

Kim Jong Il emerged as the supreme leader of North Korea when his father died in July 1994 at the age of eighty-two. The groundwork for his accession began early on. Upon his graduation from the university in Pyongyang in June 1964, he became a cadre in the Organization and Guidance Department of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) Central Committee (CC). He rose quickly to chief of a section in its Cultural-Art Department in 1971. He was later promoted to candidate member of the Politburo and secretary in charge of organization, propaganda, and agitation for the KWP CC in 1973. His position as successor to his father, Kim Il Sung, was firmly established by the KWP CC session held in February 1974 and formalized at the Sixth Congress of the KWP in October 1980.

In May 1981, Kim Jong Il began his "practical leadership training" when he accompanied his father as he inspected the development projects in Myohyangsan region as well as other major industrial development projects. Moreover, Kim Jong Il authored the treatise entitled "On Juche Ideology" in March 1982, which further developed the philosophy into the political theory that would serve as the foundation for consolidating his leadership in various movements such as those dedicated to increasing industrial production, learning from hidden heroes, arming the entire membership of the KWP with the juche ideology, and starting the movement for abiding by the law in the 1980s.

In 1984 the junior Kim also provided leadership for the so-called August Third movement to step up production of people's consumer goods. At this time, the senior Kim and the junior Kim began to define the division of labor for providing leadership and guidance to the KWP in domestic and foreign affairs. Moreover, when the senior Kim prepared his lecture notes on "The Historical Experience of Building the Korean Workers Party" on the occasion of its fortieth anniversary on May 31, 1986, he spoke of "the problems of succeeding the supreme leader's political position and responsibilities" and asserted that "in our Party, the succession issue of revolutionary work has been resolved satisfactorily." It was the reaffirmation of the widely known fact that Kim Jong Il was his successor.

Kim Jong Il began to have full control of the military when he was elected to the first vice chair of the reorganized National Defense Commission (NDC) in May 1990 at the First Plenary session of the Ninth Supreme People's Assembly (SPA). He was also elected to the post of the Supreme Commander of the North Korean armed forces on December 24, 1991, at the Nineteenth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party. After attaining the rank of marshal in the North Korean armed forces on April 20, 1992, Kim Jong Il was elected chairman of the National Defense on April 9, 1993. Thus, he was able to consolidate his power as he took control of the KWP, the DPRK government, and the Korean People's Army as the supreme leader with the blessings of his father.

Were there any challenges or opposition to Kim Jong Il's quick rise to succeed his father? It was obvious in the early 1970s that the succession of Kim Young Ju, Kim Il

Sung's younger brother, was supported by one faction of the senior cadres of the KWP CC. However, the forces supporting junior Kim quickly suppressed the attempt.

The junior Kim laid the groundwork to shift North Korean politics from the control of the KWP to military-first politics after he took over the NDC. It was reported in the North Korean press that Kim Jong Il presented a wristwatch to all military personnel on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the North Korean People's Army on April 25, 1992. This story was an indication of how much Kim Jong Il valued the military personnel and paid them more attention than any other organized group in North Korea.¹

Kim Jong Il was reelected as the NDC chairman at the tenth session of the SPA on September 5, 1998. The elections of the SPA members were held in July 1998. Thus, he was able to consolidate his power in the military as well as in the KWP when he was appointed party general secretary by the KWP in 1997, which empowered him to control the party structure and make state policy. When the tenth session of the SPA amended the North Korean constitution by abolishing the post of presidency and making Kim Il Sung the "eternal president" in 1998, Kim Jong Il became the supreme leader of the DPRK as the chairman of the National Defense Commission, a position that has functioned as the center of political power in North Korea ever since—the most powerful position in the government of the DPRK.

Currently, Kim holds the posts of marshal, general secretary of the KWP CC, chairman of the National Defense Commission, and supreme commander of the Korean People's Army. He is also a member of the Politburo of the KWP CC and the chairman of the KWP Central Military Committee. Thus, the question arises as to whether or not the position of chairman of the National Defense Commission is more powerful than the general secretary of the KWP. In the communist political system the general secretary of the communist party is traditionally most powerful, as is the case in China as well as in the former Soviet Union. It was also the case in North Korea prior to the constitutional amendment of 1998.²

The people and press in North Korea address Kim Jong Il as the chairman of the National Defense Commission instead of mentioning him as the general secretary of the Korean Workers Party. Kim himself directed the constitutional amendment on September 5, 1998, to make himself the chairman of the NDC, an action that a Japanese journalist called a military coup because the political system that was based on the political power of the KWP has been radically transformed into military-first politics.³ It is the general practice in a socialist and communist party-state system that the socialist or communist party directs military affairs, meaning the military is subordinate to the ruling party. But the junior Kim has carried out what amounts to a military coup so that the military may rule the party. Under the Kim Jong Il regime, the military directs party affairs as the superior. In fact, the military is so powerful that it is above the state. The military has now become the supreme commander of the state, the party, and society, turning North Korea into a military garrison state.

Under the new constitution of the DPRK, the chairman of the NDC is the most powerful person in North Korea since Kim has consolidated the powers exercised by

the party and the state organization. During the rule of Kim Il Sung, the chairman of the state and party central directed the political, economic, and social system. The National Defense Commission consists of all military leaders, either active or reserve, except for two civilians: Yon Hyung-mook, a former premier of the government, and Chon Byong-ho, a veteran party leader. Thus the leadership of North Korea has now been transformed into a military leadership system by promoting the military leaders above the party leaders. Cho Myong-rok, the first vice chairman of the NDC, was the seventh in ranking during the senior Kim period but was promoted to second to Kim Jong Il in his rank following the constitutional change. Most military leaders have now achieved higher rank and status than political leaders, a situation that never occurred under Kim Il Sung's leadership.

The Juche Ideology of Kim Il Sung

Because Kim Jong Il's military-first politics is based on his father's ruling ideology of *juche*, it may be necessary to discuss the origin and development of *juche* ideology. *The Dictionary of Philosophy* in North Korea defines *juche* ideology as "Kim Il Sung's revolutionary idea." The word *juche* was used for the first time on December 28, 1955, when the senior Kim made a speech entitled "On the Need to Repel Dogmatism and Formalism and to Establish Juche in Carrying Out Ideological Programs." However, North Korea actually began to use the term *juche ideology* after December 6, 1967, when Kim Il Sung gave a speech to the first session of the Fourth Supreme People's Assembly under the title "Let Us Materialize Our Self-Reliant, Independent, Self-Defensive Lines Completely," in which he said, "Our Juche ideology refers to the most correct Marxism-Leninism-oriented guiding philosophy designed to carry out our revolution and construction." Juche can be translated directly as "self-identity," but the idea of self-reliance is more appropriate in practice. Many Western analysts of North Korean politics in the 1960s concluded that the *juche ideology* was born as an independent and self-reliance ideology to cope with the Sino-Soviet conflict as it intensified.

North Korea claims that the origins of the *juche* ideology should be traced back to June 1930 when Kim Il Sung presided over a meeting of the "Down-with-Independence League" in Manchuria, and that it was further transformed into a theory of philosophy by Kim Jong Il. The DPRK constitution used to contain a phrase stipulating that *juche*, which is a creative application of Marxism-Leninism, must be upheld as the guiding principle of North Korean ideology. However, the word Marxism-Leninism was deleted from the constitution of 1992 in the aftermath of the collapse of the communist bloc of nations in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

In the post-Kim Il Sung era, especially following junior Kim's succession as the KWP general secretary and the chairman of the National Defense Commission, the usage of the *juche* ideology gradually declined. It may have had something to do with the defection of Hwang Jang-yop who claimed that he was the originator of the *juche* ideology and that he had taught the *juche* philosophy to the junior Kim at Kim Il Sung

University in the 1960s.⁴ Hwang Jang-yop, former secretary of the Korean Workers' Party Central Committee and professor of philosophy at Kim Il Sung University, who defected to South Korea in 1997, claimed that he had developed *juche* ideology under the direction of Kim Il Sung in the late 1950s.⁵

The *juche* ideology consists mainly of two parts—the philosophical theory, which maintains that the masses are the masters of history and revolution, and the guiding principle, or the "Revolutionary View of the Leader," which asserts that "nonetheless, the masses are not able to take up spontaneously any revolutionary courses unless they are organized into revolutionary forces and are led by the *Suryong* (great leader)." This is similar to what Mao Zedong called the mass-line approach during the revolutionary period of the 1930s and 1940s in China.⁶ More recently, North Korea maintains that Kim Jong Il developed a more theoretical and systematic concept of the "Revolutionary View" and strengthened it during the 1980s in a treatise entitled "Theory of the Immortal Sociopolitical Body." In the treatise, he stressed that physical life, given by the parents, is mortal, but political life, which is immortal, is given by the *Suryong* (the brain or center of the body politic).

Beginning in 1998, due largely to the defection of Hwang Jang-yop, North Korea replaced *juche* with the doctrine of military-first politics. It is debatable whether or not the *juche* ideology is a theory of revolution as North Koreans claim it to be. It is rather a strategy of revolution in North Korea just as Maoism was a strategy of revolution rather than a theory of revolution in China. The transition from the *juche* ideology to military-first politics thus coincided with the peaceful transition of power from the father Kim Il Sung to the son Kim Jong Il with the blessings of a new revolutionary strategy developed by the successor.

When we compare the political system that Kim Jong Il created with that of Kim Il Sung, we find the fundamental change to be the increased military role in the political process. In the wake of the collapse of the communist system in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, coupled with the death of Kim Il Sung and the mounting economic crisis at home, it was inevitable that Kim Jong Il would search for a new strategy to overcome North Korea's unprecedented political and economic crisis. The junior Kim's solution to the problem was simply to upgrade the role of the military, gradually increasing their power in the 1990s following the death of his father. Since then, Kim Jong Il has attempted to militarize the whole of North Korean society by giving priority to the military, a process that has been termed military-first politics.

The Nature of Military-First Politics

The emergence of a dominant military-oriented strategy first appeared in an editorial of the KWP newspaper *Rodong Shinmun* (Workers' Daily) on April 7, 1997, under the headline, "There Is a Victory for Socialism in the Guns and Bombs of the People's Army." The editorial defined the military-oriented thinking as "the revolutionary philosophy to safeguard our own style of socialism under any circumstances," and credited the concept to Respected General Kim Jong Il. Though Kim Jong Il has never

served in the military or had any experience of military training, he is regarded as the supreme military commander, and he routinely demonstrates the superior position in which he holds the army through frequent visits to the military units. Reflecting his military-oriented politics, for example, two-thirds of Kim Jong Il's public activities in 1997 were devoted to visiting the units of the Korean People's Army. It is also possible that the senior Kim's power relied upon the support of the old revolutionary cadres of the Korean Workers' Party but that the junior Kim does not trust them and increasingly relies upon the support of the younger generation of military commanders in the Korean People's Army.

The joint editorial of the KWP theoretical journal *Kulloja* (Worker) and the *Rodong Shimun* on June 16, 1998, entitled "Our Party's Military-First Politics Will Inevitably Achieve Victory and Will Never Be Defeated," emphatically pointed out that "Military-First Politics is the leadership method under the principle of giving priority to the military and resolving the problems that may occur in the course of revolution and construction as well as establishing the military as the main body of the revolution in the course of achieving the total tasks of socialism."⁷ In the editorial, "our party" was mentioned but it was not necessarily referring to the Korean Workers' Party as an organization but rather was clear that "our party" meant Kim Jong Il. Moreover, the editorial made it clear that "Military-First Politics was perceived as being able to resolve any problems that might occur in a revolution or reconstruction."⁸

As discussed, under the constitutional revision of September 5, 1998, the National Defense Commission (NDC) became the most powerful political organization headed by Kim Jong Il as its chairman. "The office of the Chairman of the National Defense Commission is a very important post: It is in charge of the whole of North Korea's political, military, and economic powers and is the top post of the republic," President Chairman Kim Yong-nam said when he nominated Kim Jong Il as chairman of the NDC at the first session of the Tenth Supreme People's Assembly on September 5, 1998. The National Defense Commission's ranks at the time included First Vice Chairman Cho Myong-rok, Vice Chairmen Kim Il Chol and Li Yong-mu, and members Kim Yong-chun, Yon Hyong-muk, Li Ul-sol, Paek Hak-rim, Chon Byong-ho, and Kim Chol-man.

More recently, the first plenary session of the Eleventh Supreme People's Assembly on September 3, 2003, reelected Kim Jong Il for a third five-year term as the chairman of the NDC. The NDC is now composed of First Vice Chairman Cho Myong-rok, Vice Chairman Yon Hyong-muk, Vice Chairman Li Yong-mu, and five regular members who are Kim Yong-chun, Kim Il-chol, Chon Byong-ho, Choi Yong-su, and Paek Chae-bong. Apparently, Li Ul-sol and Paek Hak-rim were not reelected to the NDC due to their ages (both are in their eighties). They were replaced by the new generation of military leaders. Moreover, the former prime minister and economic expert Yon Hyong-muk was elected to serve as one of the vice chairmen, indicating that the economic leadership is being shifted from the KWP to the NDC and that the KWP would confine its leadership to the sphere of ideology and ideological training.

Kim Jong Il thus transformed the National Defense Commission into a command

post of the ruling elite in North Korean politics. He might have learned from his experiences while working in the organizations of the KWP Central Committee that the old cadres, who were recruited and promoted by his father, continued to maintain their allegiance and loyalty to his father rather than to him. Moreover, following the defection of his former professor-mentor of *juche* ideology at Kim Il Sung University, Hwang Jang-yop, to South Korea in 1997, Kim Jong Il seemed to have lost confidence in the old cadres who had been associated with his father. Thus, he decided to make a transition from the *juche* ideology to military-first politics by transforming the National Defense Commission into the pivotal center of political power for ruling the 23 million people of North Korea.

It was not until October 20, 1998, that North Korea introduced the term "*songun-chongchi*" (military-first politics). The Supreme People's Assembly placed the office of the NDC chairman on the apex of North Korea's ruling elite. In June 1999 North Korea also began to develop theories to justify and propagate among the people the validity of military-first politics. In an editorial of the KWP newspaper *Rodong Shimun* published on June 16, 1999, "Our Party's Policy of Giving Priority to the Army is Invincible," it was stressed that military-first politics is a cure-all in this era of ideological, military, and economic confrontation with the imperialists.

It also pointed out that Great Leader Kim Il Sung established an army before he inaugurated the party organization into the course of his revolutionary activities. "The socialist cause inevitably goes with a fierce face-off with imperialism, and the party's policy of giving priority to military affairs is instrumental in winning a victory in the serious ideological stand-off with imperialism," the editorial stressed. It continued to assert that, "giving priority to military affairs is not a mere tactical issue, but a strategic issue in close relations with the fate and future course of the revolution." This editorial was reprinted in *Kulloja* for wider circulation and discussion. Thus, the theoretical groundwork was laid in the late 1990s to meet the challenges of the most powerful forces of the United States and its allies in the twenty-first century.

Moreover, an editorial of *Rodong Shimun* on December 21, 2001, went one step further to justify military-first politics. "The army-based policy of the Party embodies the *Juche* idea, the revolutionary doctrine for the defense and realization of the independence of the popular masses mirrors the lawful demands for the accomplishment of the socialist cause that is launched and pushed forward in a fierce confrontation with imperialists. Indeed, it is a political mode that makes it possible to carry to completion the cause of independence of the popular masses, the cause of socialism." This editorial was also carried in the December issue of *Kulloja* in 2001, saying that military-first politics alone can defend and protect the fatherland as it is faced with the most powerful military forces in South Korea.

What then is the hidden motive behind Kim Jong Il's military-first politics? During Kim Jong Il's four decades of work in the party organization, he discovered the party machine was becoming increasingly bureaucratic and losing its dynamism. He also witnessed the cadres who were aging lose their revolutionary zeal. They were unable to provide the dynamic and innovative leadership that the revolution and con-

struction work required. He realized that corruption was rampant in the party organizations and the heretical behavior of the rank and file was out of control. Moreover, Kim Jong Il reached the conclusion that it was impossible for him to resolve the organizational problems of the KWP by simply revamping the party organizations or reshuffling the leadership positions of tired, aging cadres.

Therefore, when Kim Jong Il succeeded his father as the general secretary of the KWP and chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC) in 1998, he launched the restructuring of the NDC by means of constitutional amendment, thereby placing the NDC above the KWP Central Committee that had, in the past, been the traditional power center. As Mao Zedong asserted, "political power grows out of the barrel of the gun." Kim Jong Il determined that political power should be derived from the support of the North Korean military forces. The military is better organized and better disciplined than the KWP and is comprised of a younger generation of North Korean society, unlike the KWP. Furthermore, the military men are patriotic and dedicated and willing to sacrifice their lives for the defense of the fatherland. In short, it was easier and more comfortable for Kim Jong Il to identify with the military rather than the KWP bureaucracy because the military was more responsive to his command than the party organizations.

Following Kim Il Sung's death on July 8, 1994, North Korea attempted to develop new slogans and ideology to reflect the new politics and new leadership. They tried the "Red Flag Ideology," which was designed to step up ideological indoctrination, and emphasized the "Politics of Benevolence and Virtue" to pave the way for Kim Jong Il to succeed his father. When the three-year mourning period ended in 1997, military-first politics emerged as the new slogan and ideology of North Korean politics under the leadership of Kim Jong Il. Military-first politics simply meant that the Korean Workers' Party, which controlled North Korea for almost four decades, would be replaced by the military. The KWP will be subordinate to and under the control of the North Korean military, which is headed by the junior Kim. North Korea is attempting to prevent the collapse of its socialist system in the aftermath of the breakdown of the communist system that swept through East Europe and eventually the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. In short, the choice of military-first politics has been put in place to avoid the upheavals of leadership change and suitably transform North Korean economic and political systems into more competitive vehicles for modern times by elevating younger generations to positions of power to ensure the continuity of Kim Jong Il's leadership.

Kangsong Taeguk and Economic Reform

The ultimate goal of military-first politics is to achieve a "Strong and Prosperous Great State" (kangsong taeguk) in order to cope with the security threat from the outside world, including the allied forces of the United States and South Korea, as well as the problems created by the collapse of the communist system in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Confronting the challenges posed by the powerful

states in the South, Kim Jong Il had to build up a strong and prosperous nation just as neighboring Japan had achieved the status of powerful nation with the slogan "Fukoku Kyohei" (Rich Country with Strong Army) after the Meiji restoration in 1868. Moreover, although the southern part of Korea was lagging behind North Korea economically in the late 1940s and 1950s, the military coup of 1961 ushered in rapid economic development and industrialization that ultimately surpassed the North. Thus, the economic development model of a South Korean military revolution seems to have influenced Kim Jong Il and his followers to launch military-first politics as the means to achieve their goals.

The idea of constructing a strong and prosperous great state (kangsong taeguk) emerged early in 1998 when Kim Jong Il carried out "on-the-spot-inspections" through August 15, 1998. The KWP newspaper *Rodong Shinmun* published an article on the kangsong taeguk on August 22, 1998, widely circulating it as the slogan of the Kim Jong Il leadership. When North Korea succeeded in launching the satellite Kwangmyong No. 1 on August 31, 1998, Pyongyang began to propagandize it as the signal for moving toward its goal to achieve development through a strong ideology, a strong military, and a strong economy. Having a strong ideology means achieving the ideological unity of the party and revolutionary cadres, while a strong military state refers to the goal of victory in every battle, militarization of the entire population, and fortification of the whole nation by acquiring strong offensive and defensive capabilities as well as by repelling any attack launched by enemy forces. Having a strong economic state means revitalizing economic production to provide a self-reliant and prosperous economic life for everyone in the nation.

There are several reasons why North Korea decided to launch the slogan of a strong and prosperous great state. First, domestically they needed a new slogan that would give hope to the North Korean people on the occasion of Kim Jong Il's succession, opening the new era with a new generation. Second, externally North Korea intended to alleviate the misperception that it is on the verge of collapse, and to prove to the world that it is still strong and surviving despite the collapse of the socialist systems in other countries. Third, it was important that the North Korean system be seen as still viable and able to sustain itself for a long time under Kim Jong Il's leadership.

In his conversations with South Korean newspaper publishers in 2001, Kim Jong Il stressed that "My strength is derived from the military's strength. Without military strength nothing can be done. In our relations with foreign countries our strength grows out of that strength."⁹ From these statements we can surmise that Kim Jong Il maintains his political power and governing system on the basis of military power. The military has contributed to the survival of Kim Jong Il as the political leader, preventing the collapse of the North Korean state system. Kim's thinking is that the military is essential not only for the purpose of national defense but also for the maintenance of his power structure as well as the economic and social systems. In the former communist systems of Eastern Europe and Russia, the party organizations were plagued by power struggles or factional rivalries among their leaders. Kim Jong Il intends to transform such a traditional practice into a new system of controlling the

ruling party by using the military's power. This is the essential feature of military-first politics in North Korea.

Economic reform has also been emphasized by the Kim Jong Il regime. A major economic reform program was launched on July 1, 2002, known as the July First Economic Management Improvement Measures (hereafter July 1 measures). A market economy was gradually introduced in 2003, opening the comprehensive market for general goods, which strengthened the private economic system in North Korea. Moreover, a private cultivation system was experimented with in the farmland of Hamkyong province in 2002 under the July First Economic Management Measures and was expanded to the entire nation by 2004. This system is similar to the Chinese model of the household responsibility system in agriculture by which farmers lease a certain portion of the collectively owned farmland to cultivate privately.

Under the system, the farmers will sell their excess produce on the free market after delivering their assigned quota of the crops from the leased farmland. The household responsibility system in China increased grain production more than twofold and some farmers became rich. In the past, North Korean peasants were allowed to plant vegetables on small plots around their houses and to sell them on the free market. Under the new lease system of state-owned land for private cultivation, it is estimated that the production of food grains has doubled. The private cultivation system will be expanded in 2005 to increase the production of food grains in North Korea, which is a drastic departure from the collective farm system that retarded them previously.

"The more I sell, the more money I make." This remark from a woman in her late thirties, who was running a sidewalk cart on the streets of Pyongyang, was quoted in the *New York Times* in October 2002, indicating the economic change that took place after the July 1 measures were introduced. Following more than a decade of isolation from the market-oriented economic reform in East Europe and Russia after the collapse of planned economic systems, North Korea is now beginning to carry out radical economic reform. Under the reform measure, North Korea instituted an overhaul of its rigid wage and pricing systems, increasing monthly wages 200-fold, from 110 North Korean won to 2,000 won. The July 1 measures allowed the application of the guiding principle of a market economy, that is, to depend on the free market's "invisible hand" to govern supply and demand, and a tighter application of a self-reliance accounting system for all business firms. In short, under these new measures the achievements of plants are weighed not by the quantity of goods they produce, but by the amount of their income. The more a company earns, the more it can pay to its employees.

North Korea has also transformed its farmers' market, in an effort to introduce more market functions in agriculture, which emerged spontaneously with government's tacit approval in the mid-1990s during the nation's serious food shortages. The farmers were permitted to sell their agricultural produce as well as manufactured goods and other commodities to expand the market economy to include rural society. The

new measures also allow manufacturers to sell their products in the market, directly or indirectly, to help them recover operating costs. Thus, the July 1 Economic Management Improvement Measures have laid the groundwork for a market economy system in North Korea similar to the Chinese model of economic reform in the 1980s.

In the aftermath of his father's death, Kim Jong Il encountered enormous problems in the agricultural economy and North Korea suffered from an acute shortage of food grains due to the lack of food production incentives. Furthermore, three years of natural disasters like drought, famine, and flood in 1994-1997 led to an economic crisis. It was inevitable that Kim would turn to the military to maintain political order and resolve the economic problems of feeding the starving people (two million people were reported to have died due to the famine during this period). Under the circumstances, Kim Jong Il had no choice but to carry out the Chinese model of economic reform and open-door policy. The decline in economic output in the 1970s and 1980s was caused by structural problems, as well as mismanagement by the bureaucracy. To alleviate the economic crisis in the 1980s, North Korea attempted a piecemeal reform and opened its economy to foreign investment. Kim Jong Il took a trip to China in June 1983 to learn more about the Chinese model of structural reform and open-door policy. He was particularly interested in the Special Economic Zone in Shenzhen.

Upon his return from the China trip, Kim experimented with the Joint Venture Law in 1984 to solicit foreign investment and to improve relations with capitalist countries like the United States and Japan. However, his attempts to reform the economic system did not yield positive results due in large part to the opposition of an older generation of conservative cadres who resisted any change in the economic system or the adoption of a new policy to deal with a hostile international environment. As a result, efforts by capitalist countries to have joint venture enterprises in North Korea were stymied, while meager investments from Western European countries and the efforts of Korean residents in Japan did not bring in sufficient investment to enable North Korea to take off economically.

Following the collapse of the communist system and the end of the Cold War, North Korea introduced a reform program in December 1991 when the cabinet adopted reform bill no. 74, which established the Rajin-Sonbong Free Economic and Trade Zone and made Chongjin a free-trade port. These measures were similar to what China attempted in 1978 as a prelude to economic reform and their open-door policy. To facilitate such a reform program, North Korea adopted more than thirty new laws, including the Foreign Investment Law in 1992. In March 1993, a comprehensive plan for national reconstruction was proclaimed to support economic reform and an open-door policy. After the death of Kim Il Sung and the three-year mourning period (1994-1997), there were clear indications of policy changes in North Korea as it became evident that economic reform and opening to the outside world were the most urgent tasks of the new leadership of Kim Jong Il.

Following the announcement of Kim Jong Il's appointment to the post of the KWP general secretary on October 8, 1997, North Korea moved to establish private enterprises for the purpose of attracting foreign investment, introduced an independent

accounting system in public enterprises, and expanded the Rajin-Sonbong Free Economic and Trade Zone. These measures were similar to the policies that the Chinese government implemented in the 1980s. However, debate in top policymaking circles did not end with implementation of these new measures. Faced with the challenges of the conservative generation of cadres, it was imperative for Kim Jong Il to transform the outdated *juche* ideology into military-first politics to avoid repeating the historical mistakes of his father.

Kim Jong Il has replaced most of the old guard with a younger generation of leadership in the KWP, the military, and the government structure, thereby paving the way for structural reform and an open-door policy. A number of changes have already taken place since 1998, such as the historic summit meeting with South Korean President Kim Dae Jung held from June 12 to 15, 2000, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Australia, Canada, Italy, New Zealand, and other countries of the European Union. Kim Jong Il also made his third official visit to China in January 2001, and toured the industrial complex in Shanghai to learn more about the Chinese model of economic reform and its open-door policy. There is a clear indication that Kim is willing to open North Korea to the outside world for foreign investment and to restructure their outdated economic system in the twenty-first century.

North Korea developed the theory of military-first politics to reiterate that the driving force of the revolution is not the working class, but the army. This argument is a complete rejection of the classic Marxist theory of proletarian dictatorship. Furthermore, a *Rodong Shinmun* editorial on March 21, 2003, stressed that "The military-first idea means, in a word, the idea of giving priority to military affairs in all matters and the line and strategy and tactics of putting the army before the working class, as it calls for projecting the army as the pillar and main agent of the revolution." The lengthy editorial under the headline "The Military-First Idea Is an Invincible Banner for the Cause of Independence in Our Era" went on to emphasize that "This is a revolutionary idea in an era of fierce anti-imperialist struggle when imperialism has become extremely reactionary and militarized and revolutionary theory has reached a new, higher stage of development for human society as all countries and all nations work hard to build independent, powerful states."

Lessons of the Past

In the process of succeeding his father, Kim Jong Il encountered many problems, including the challenges of factional rivalries. The task of selecting a successor to a ruler in any country is an enormous responsibility for the decision makers. In a democratic society, the successor to the president or prime minister is usually decided by the electoral process. However, in a feudal society, the rule of the kingdom is hereditary and dynastic cycles determine who succeeds. Korea was no exception to the dynastic rule and has had a long history of dynastic cycles. The Chosen dynasty (1392-1910) was rampant with factional struggles among various groups vying for the throne. The recent history of Korea was so afflicted with factionalism that the

Chosun dynasty was greatly weakened and eventually fell under Japanese colonial rule. After thirty-five years of Japanese colonial rule, Korea was liberated at the end of World War II. However, it was divided into two halves, North and South Korea, at the thirty-eighth parallel. The power struggle to establish Kim Il Sung as the sole leader in North Korea took almost a decade, entailing a series of bitter factional infights.

When the North Korean Bureau of the Korean Communist Party was organized in October 1945 in North Korea, the first leader was not Kim Il Sung but Kim Yong-bom, a well-known revolutionary leader of the 1930s. However, the official history of North Korea recorded Kim Il Sung as the first chairman of the Organizational Committee of the North Korean Communist Party. In addition, the founding date of the organization was changed from October 13 to October 10, 1945. The North Korean Bureau recognized the fact that it was a branch of the Korean Communist Party Central Committee, the headquarters of which was located in Seoul until 1946 and headed by the anti-Japanese revolutionary Park Hon-young. Kim Il Sung served as the top leader of the government organization when he returned to North Korea from Manchuria in September 1945.

Kim Il Sung became chairman of the North Korean Provisional People's Committee (the People's Government) in August 1946 under the auspices of the Soviet military government, functioning as the head of the North Korean government. However, in August 1946 when the *Simmin-tang* (New People's Party) and the North Korean Communist Party merged to create the North Korean Workers' Party under the direction of the Soviet Union, Kim Tu-bong, a well-known Korean linguist and revolutionary leader of Koreans in China became its chairman and Kim Il Sung served as the vice chairman. Kim Il Sung became premier of the DPRK in 1948 and the bona fide chairman of the Korean Workers' Party in June 1949 when the North Korean Workers' Party and the South Korean Workers' Party merged.¹⁰

In 1948 when the Supreme People's Committee (legislature) elected its Standing Committee (the cabinet of the government), Kim Tu-bong became its first chairman and functioned as head of state for ten years. The New Year's Message, which is comparable to the State of the Union message in the United States, was delivered by Kim Tu-bong, SPC Standing Committee chairman, not by Premier Kim Il Sung. Thus, Kim Tu-bong served as the nominal head of the state until he was purged in 1958. Although Kim Il Sung was premier and general secretary of the KWP, he did not achieve the top leadership position in North Korea until 1959. The senior Kim had gone through a decade of factional struggles to reach the status of supreme leader. The junior Kim learned from the lessons of history. He began to consolidate his power by expanding his ruling circle and eliminating potential opponents to his succession. In the process of consolidating his power, Kim Jong Il turned to the North Korean military, which was the most disciplined, dedicated, and loyal to him among the contending political groups in North Korea, including the Korean Workers' Party. The creation of military-first politics in North Korea was thus an invention of Kim Jong Il in order to reorganize the political institutions he inherited from his father so that he might effectively govern North Korea.

Recently, the South Korean press reported that Kim Jong Il has directed a broad reorganization of the KWP structure. As the chairman of the NDC as well as the general secretary of the KWP, Kim carried out the restructuring of the KWP in September and November of 2004 by purging his brother-in-law Chang Song-taek, second-highest cadre to Kim Jong Il in the KWP power hierarchy. It was reported that Chang was removed in February 2004 from his position as deputy director as the result of a conflict with Prime Minister Park Bong-ju, the head of the North Korean cabinet in charge of economic reform measures. However, it is generally accepted that Chang was purged because his political ambition began to displease Kim Jong Il. Chang was reported to have spread the rumor that he would succeed Kim Jong Il as the chairman of the NDC as well as the KWP general secretary. Moreover, Hwang Jang-yop, the highest-ranking member of North Korean leadership to defect to South Korea, publicly predicted in Seoul that Chang would succeed Kim Jong Il and no one would challenge him. Chang was thus purged from his leadership positions and charged with factionalism and rumor mongering to satisfy his personal ambitions.

Kim Jong Il is reported to have eliminated three bureaus of the secretariat of the KWP Central Committee, the top policymaking body in the nation. The secretariat is composed of twenty-two bureaus, each with separate responsibilities including selecting the cabinet members, reviewing economic policy, and formulating military policy. The bureaus in charge of military affairs, economic policy, and agricultural policy have been abolished in the restructuring process. It is plausible that the policymaking role of the KWP is greatly reduced following the restructuring and that the policymaking power of the NDC has been greatly enhanced. The reorganization resulted in the reassignment of 40 percent of the secretariat personnel because the economic policy review bureau is one of the largest groups in the KWP bureaucracy. This is the first major attempt by Kim Jong Il to restructure the KWP since the death of his father.

Some South Korean analysts of North Korean affairs have speculated that the military bureau of the KWP was abolished because Kim Jong Il wanted to eliminate KWP meddling in military affairs. In short, the party's policymaking power is greatly reduced, while the military role in policymaking has expanded enormously. It is also speculated that North Korea's economic and political systems will undergo further restructuring after Kim's birthday on February 16, 2005. Economic and agricultural policies of North Korea will be administered by the cabinet under the premier in order to implement the economic reforms that were introduced on July 1, 2002. Yon Hyong-muk, former prime minister and a veteran economic policymaker, has been appointed to the post of the vice chairman of the National Defense Commission, which is an indication that Kim will closely monitor economic reform as carried out by the cabinet.¹¹ The KWP will be in charge of the ideological sphere, while the government cabinet will be in charge of economic reform. It is the National Defense Commission that will provide the leadership for the operations of the KWP, the government cabinet, and the military.

Conclusion

Kim Jong Il created new slogans and institutions to replace such old ones as the *juche* ideology and the Korean Workers' Party of his father's generation. He had begun to transform the *juche* ideology into that of military-first politics in order to achieve a strong and prosperous great state (*kangsong taeguk*) for North Korea in the 1990s, when he was preparing to succeed his father as supreme leader. Kangsong Taeguk functions as the goal of a strategy of strong ideology, an indefatigable military, and a prosperous economy, while military-first politics functions as the tactics for reaching that goal.

Military-first politics, in essence, gives priority to the military as well as strengthening it to defend the nation during times of crisis. Following the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, North Korea encountered various crises such as the succession problems, the economic crisis caused by drought, flood, famine, and structural issues, and the security crisis of defending itself from possible attack by hostile countries. The function of military-first politics was thus to cope with the external crisis posed by the collapse of other socialist systems as well as to alleviate domestic economic crisis and the factionalism among old cadres who had been entrenched in party and government organizations for the almost five decades of Kim Il Sung's rule. Military-first politics has enabled Kim Jong Il to consolidate his power by replacing the old cadres in the party, government, and military with a younger generation of military leaders. Through this new strategy, he has been able to pave the way for economic reform and an open-door policy.¹²

Having given the priority to its military to defend its national security, North Korea is preparing to launch a drastic reform program at home and open itself to the outside world in 2005. The year 2005 is the sixtieth anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule and also the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Korean Workers' Party. Furthermore, the year 2005 is the tenth anniversary of the initiation of military-first politics by Kim Jong Il. The anniversary date of such important events in North Korea is usually celebrated with a special announcement of a political event or program. It is expected that 2005 will mark the reinforcement of military-first politics with particular emphasis on economic reform and an open-door policy in order to achieve their goal of *kangsong taeguk*.

Notes

1. The *Joong-Ang Daily News*, November 28, 2004.
2. For the text of "Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," adopted on September 5, 1998, see Ilpyong J. Kim, *Historical Dictionary*, 147-173.
3. Shigemura, *Kita Chosen*.
4. Hwang, *Memoir*, and his second book entitled *Kaein eui Saengmyong bota gwijsonghan Minjok eui Saengmyong* (The Nation's Life is More Important than the Individual's Life). Also see Park, "The Nature and Evolution of *Juche* Ideology," 9-18.
5. Hwang, *Memoir*.

6. Kim, Ilpyong J., *Politics of Chinese Communism*, particularly chapter 5 on "Mass Mobilization Policies and Organizational Techniques."
8. Shigemura, *Kita Chosen*, 74.
9. Shigemura, *Kita Chosen*.
10. Quoted in Shigemura, *Kita Chosen*, 75.
11. See more details in Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*; Suh, *Kim Il Sung*.
12. See the *JoongAng Daily*, December 8, 2004.
13. For a detailed analysis of military-first politics, see Chong, "Kim Jong-Il's Military-First Politics," 2-8; Chong, "North Korean Leadership After Kim Il-Sung," 2-9; Kim, Keun-sik, "Kim Jong Il Sidae Bukhanui Dang-Jeong-Gun Gwangye Byeonhwa" (The Change in North Korea's Party-Government-Military Relationship in the Kim Jong Il Era: The Implications of the Changes of the "Great Leader" [Suryong] System), 349-365; Kwon, "State Building in North Korea," 286-295; and Suh, "Military-First Politics of Kim Jong Il," 145-167.

Reconciling Nuclear Standoff and Economic Shortfalls

Pyongyang's Perspective

C. Kenneth Quinones

Perceptions of a problem define the context for its resolution. The same can be said about the persistent problem of nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia. Nations with keen interest in the region—the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States—agree that nuclear proliferation on the peninsula, if not halted, will have a potentially devastating impact on their shared goal of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and throughout the region. Since at least 1991, these nations have invested continuous effort in trying to prevent nuclear proliferation there, but their efforts have thus far failed.

A contributing factor may well be the persistent gap in the respective perceptions of the two primary antagonists, the United States and North Korea. As the title of this chapter implies, the Korean nuclear proliferation problem seems directly linked to North Korea's economic woes. Washington and Tokyo, more than Pyongyang, subscribe to this perception. The present and past U.S. administrations have sought to induce or coerce North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons activities and related materials in exchange for future prosperity.

Much to Washington's dismay, Pyongyang so far has rejected these overtures. Consequently, the problem persists. Here we assess North Korea's perception of the nuclear problem. Our aim is to better comprehend why a small, impoverished nation like North Korea would prefer to continue arming itself with weapons of mass destruction rather than voluntarily trade this pursuit for promises of prosperity.

Claashing Perceptions

Since 2001, the United States and Pyongyang have wrangled inconclusively over the cause of and solution to the proliferation problem. Washington sees the problem in