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Analysis on the Military Parade Marking the 75th Anniversary of the WPK Foundation

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The military parade celebrating the 75th anniversary of the WPK of North Korea contains different messages from previous events. It was timed at night to maximize visual effects. This was to console people who are suffering from adversities and to effectively show off the regime's image to the international community amid the global spread of COVID-19. Chairman Kim made a speech to express his gratitude to the people, highlight victory in the battle against COVID-19, send a friendly message to South Korea and strengthen the war deterrence capability. One third of the speech was devoted to expressing appreciation to the people and military who sacrificed themselves to fight the "harsh, long-lasting sanctions," "emergency quarantine" and "severe natural disasters." Unprecedentedly, a short but resounding message was sent to South Korea. A toned-down expression of "war deterrence" was used without directly mentioning nuclear weaponry, which reflects Kim's intention to manage uncertain external political circumstances in the future. At the same time, Kim intended to pressure the U.S. indirectly by showcasing its new missile system.

On October 10, 7:00 p.m., North Korea aired recorded footage of the military parade celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK). The edited footage lasted for 2 hours 16 minutes, and the actual event seems to have lasted for over 3 hours until the early morning on October 10. With directions from North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to prepare a “distinctive” event, the military parade was arranged as a rare nighttime event with colorful visual effects and images with a 30-minute long speech delivered by Kim who unprecedentedly sent messages to the people and the outside world, and showcased new weaponry. Overall, great efforts seem to have been made to present a parade that was different from the previous ones.

The speech by Kim was largely composed of four messages: expressing gratitude to North Korean people, highlighting victory in the battle against COVID-19, sending a friendly message to South Korea, and strengthening war deterrence capability. One third of the speech was devoted to expressing appreciation to the people and military who sacrificed themselves to fight the “harsh, long-lasting sanctions,” “emergency quarantine” and “severe natural disasters.” Unprecedentedly, a short but resounding message was sent to South Korea. A toned-down expression of “war deterrent” was used without a direct mentioning of nuclear weaponry, which reflects Kim’s intention to manage uncertain external political circumstances in the future. At the same time, Kim intended to pressure the U.S. indirectly by showcasing new weaponry.

Focus on a “Distinctive” Event that Maximizes Nighttime Visual Effects

When it comes to the way the parade was staged, the most noticeable feature of the recent military parade was the careful display of visual effects and colorful images. Unlike the nine such other events organized under the Kim Jong Un regime, this was the first military parade held at night. Male and female narration and a variety of camera angles and lights were utilized as if a descriptive documentary film was shot. Drone and air shooting techniques were also employed to show landmarks in Pyongyang, such as the Daedong River fountain, Yeomyung Street,

Mirae Scientists Street (Future Scientists Street), the Arch of Triumph, Mansudae Hill, the Juche Tower, and Kim Il-Sung Square. The speedy march of a massive column of army and weaponry was contained in the footage. The visual merits of a nighttime event with the use of gun salutes and fireworks were fully utilized. The stands which used to be full of foreign guests and media were filled with Pyongyang citizens and representatives from different regions. And the event was shown on a large electric display.

<Table 1> Number of Military Parade Photos Published in Rodong Shinmun under Kim Jong Un

Date of celebration	Oct 10, 2020.	Sep 9, 2018	Feb 8, 2018	Apr 15, 2017	Oct 10, 2015	Sep 9, 2013	Jul 27, 2013	Apr 25, 2013	Apr 15, 2012
Number of photos	127	94	100	78	38	12	18	2	42
Number of photos of arsenal	62	14	41	25	8	2	4	0	11

Rodong Shinmun on October 10 published 127 pictures, which is an overwhelmingly large number compared to 94 on the anniversary of the foundation of the Republic held on September 9, 2018; 100 on Military Foundation Day in February 8, 2018; and 78 on April 15, 2017. This implies that North Korea has actively worked on promoting the visual aspects of the event. The increasing number of event photos published since 2017 also seems to be related to an increasing number of strategic weaponry development and types of arsenal. 62 photos of weapons take up about half of the 127 military event photos. It seems the event was timed at night to highlight the weapons with lights so that they stood out and looked more impressive. An air show with fighter jets flying over the sky and fireworks created a more festive atmosphere, which was seemingly intended to console the citizens of Pyongyang who feel disheartened by COVID-19 and floods. As North Korea did not invite the foreign press or guests due to COVID-19, it probably intended to let the outside world see the parade via effectively edited footage full of images of magnificent spectacles and events.

A Sense of Crisis and the Pressure of Leadership Found in Kim's Expression of Gratitude to the People

Kim Jong Un's speech consists of four messages: (1) gratitude to the people, (2) successful quarantine, (3) a reconciliatory message to South Korea, and (4) defensive war deterrence capability. The speech was differentiated in terms of content, in that the speeches made to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the WPK foundation or made at the previous military parades were focused on history and the achievements of the Party, Republic or military. Another previously unseen feature of the event was that one third of the speech was devoted to expressing gratitude to the people who are struggling. Kim also repeatedly "thanked" and "expressed sincerest respect" to the people and military. The recent parade focused on consolations and building solidarity among the people suffering from the trilemma of COVID-19, natural disaster and international sanctions. The expressions of gratitude by Kim, who became a bit emotional, can be interpreted as sympathy, regret and a sense of responsibility towards North Koreans.

Under the surface, however, it also can be interpreted as expressions of hardship, burden and stress coming from ruling the regime. One could get a glimpse at Kim's distress from his honest acknowledgement of the current grave situations, which was described as "tremendous challenges and hardship," "all kinds of disasters," "unprecedentedly severe calamities," and "worries and troubles." Kim pointed out the factors behind challenges as "harsh, long-lasting sanctions," "emergency quarantine," and "recovery efforts from severe natural disasters." Sincere appreciations expressed towards the people revealed Kim's concerns over people who may feel frustrated or a sense of weakening solidarity. The same concern can be read from Kim's self-examinations on his leadership: "It is a shame that I have not really repaid what I owe to the people," or when he asked for absolute trust and support although the livelihoods of people have not improved because "my efforts and sincerity still fall short."

Managing External Uncertainties via a Reconciliatory Message to South Korea

Above all, the highlight of Kim's speech is the reconciliatory message sent to South Korea: "I express my warm heart to fellow South Koreans and wish that this public health crisis is over as soon as possible and the two Koreas can hold each other's hands again." This message was short but significant in terms of the political aspect. Considering the hostile and hawkish actions of North Korea, such as the official announcement made in June on the plans for working against the enemy (South Korea), demolition of the inter-Korean liaison office, and the fatal shooting of a South Korean fisheries official by the North Korean military, it can be interpreted as a "transition" in North Korea's policy towards South Korea. In line with recent exchanges of letters between South and North Korean leaders and an apology made by Kim about the fatal shooting of the fisheries official, the recent message took the form of an announcement made in the North Korean leader's voice that inter-Korean policy is effectively transitioning towards "reconciliation."

It is stated through the voice of the North Korean leader that the plan announced in June to work against the enemy was withdrawn and, depending on circumstances, the inter-Korean relationship can be facilitated again. Behind it must be North Korea's calculation to keep the card of improving the inter-Korean relationship alive in order to resolve difficulties and uncertainties. Given that uncertainties regarding the outcome of the U.S. presidential election in November and the next U.S. administration's North Korean policy may well linger until the first half of 2021, North Korea intends to respond to the uncertainties by maintaining the inter-Korean relationship in a reconciliation mood. North Korea's calculation is that South Korea may have a role to play when North Korea negotiates its position with the U.S. as the next U.S. administration inherits the Joint Statement of June 12 and existing structure of North Korea-U.S. negotiations. The South Korean government's consistent call for reconciliation and the end-of-war declaration also seem to have had an effect.

However, it is not expected that the inter-Korean relationship will move towards reconciliation anytime soon. As North Korea mentioned overcoming the "public

health crisis” as the condition for an inter-Korean dialogue, the start of the dialogue is expected to be timed in line with the global developments in addressing COVID-19 (vaccination and treatment development) at the end of this year or early next year. With the maximum quarantine in place, the level of controlling COVID-19 can work as the basis for determining the resumption of dialogue. Following the U.S. presidential election and inauguration ceremony, which will decide the personnel responsible for North Korean policies in the administration and set the outline of North Korean policies, North Korea is likely to weigh the timing and level of inter-Korean dialogue in an effort to create the circumstances necessary for U.S.-North Korea dialogues. Banking on this, the South Korean government should facilitate its role as a guide and bridge in partially clearing uncertainties surrounding North Korea and the U.S. between the U.S. presidential election and the first quarter of next year. In this process, the government needs to solicit support from neighboring countries and the international community for the Northeast Asian cooperation initiative for infectious disease control and public health to overcome the “public health crisis” and the end-of-war declaration, based on which it can generate North Korea’s interest and find a point of agreement between the U.S. and North Korea.

Emphasizing War Deterrent and Sending an Implied Message to Pressure the U.S.

In his speech, Kim refrained from directly mentioning nuclear weapons and used “war deterrent” instead. The war deterrent in this context means the same as a nuclear war deterrent and strategic weapons development. As a message sent to the U.S., North Korea stated it would strengthen its war deterrence capability if no definitive change in U.S.-North Korea talks is made by the U.S. In fact, Kim’s message suggests that its war deterrent is a means of self-defense to deter and control the threats from enemies and keep peace and will not be abused or preemptively used. This is not a new message as it is in line with the decision made at the 5th Plenary Meeting of the 7th Central Committee of the WPK held on December 28, 2019 to continue developing strategic weaponry in a long-term battle with the

U.S. Furthermore, the statement is a repetition of the nuclear doctrine upheld by North Korea until 2017 that it will not use nuclear weapons unless it is invaded.

Kim's address is also intended to pressure the U.S. in that it clearly stated its intention to develop its military might as scheduled in terms of speed, quality and quantity if the U.S. does not change. Kim mentioned the "hostile enemy" without directly referring to the U.S., but that was a message directed to the U.S. to remind the next U.S. administration of its position. It also should be noted that unlike the speech, the Rodong Shinmun report on the event used terms like "defensive nuclear deterrent," "state-of-the-art strategic weapon system," "intercontinental ballistic rockets," and "nuclear strategic might," which raised the level of pressure to some degree. The number of weapon types showcased in the military parade cannot be said as having increased compared to those displayed in the military parades since 2015, but the parade focused on the newly developed weapons to effectively exert pressure.

A Stage Showcasing an Evolution of Strategic Weapons and Armed Forces Structure Change

It has been confirmed that the recent military parade displayed 220 weapons of 26 types. The scale itself is relatively smaller than the parades arranged on July 27, 2013 or October 10, 2015. Yet, in terms of diversity and might, the showcased weaponry was of the highest level.

<Table 2> Types and Scale of Weapons Featured in Military Parade under Kim Jong Un

Date of celebration	Oct 10, 2020	Sep 9, 2018	Feb 8, 2018	Apr 15, 2017	Oct 10, 2015	Sep 9, 2013	Jul 27, 2013	Apr 25, 2013	Apr 15, 2012
Number of weapons (roughly)/types	220/26	140/17	130/17	160/22	290/31	20/2	280/38	0	560/37
Number of photos of arsenal	62	14	41	25	8	2	4	0	11

- ※ The figures above may have an error as they are assessed/estimated based on the parade footage.
- ※ The weapon types and quantities include aircraft.
- ※ The event held on April 25, 2013 was a cultural event in the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun to celebrate the Korean People's Army without showcasing the arsenal.

Three aspects are worth noting. First, a new inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) was unveiled. The ICBM is three meters longer than the Hwasong-15 missile and larger in diameter. The Transporter Erector Launcher (TEL) has 11 axes and 22 wheels, which is larger than the previously largest Hwasong-15, which has 9 axes and 18 wheels. Based on the observation of the size, the ICBM on display can be assessed as the largest in the world. From the shape of the warhead, the ICBM is probably capable of carrying multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) nuclear warheads.

The ICBM, however, has not been tested yet, so it is hard to consider it to be a complete missile system. Presumably, it is possible that the weapons in the mid-level development going through a variety of engine tests in the Saneum-dong missile research center in Pyongyang were showcased. As North Korea agreed to suspend its nuclear and missile tests under the Joint Statement of June 12 between the U.S. and DPRK, it did not carry out ground testing. Unveiling missiles that have neither been ground-tested nor loaded and arranged seems to be a way to strategically signal a possible advancement of ICBMs both in quality and quantity. For the past few years, Iran announced that it has successfully developed an ICBM capable of carrying MIRA warheads. If North Korea and Iran still have their missile connections,¹⁾ North Korea's development of ICBM carrying MIRA warheads is likely to be feasible especially when the denuclearization talks with the U.S. get stalled. When the ground testing materializes, this ICBM may well have larger impact on

1) Refer to the U.S. Congressional Research Services, *Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies*, March 2019. Regarding the possibilities of Iran and North Korea developing missiles carrying MIRA warheads, refer to KINU, 2020, *Prospects on the Korean Peninsula* (Seoul: KINU, 2019), p. 79; North Korean Research Division at KINU, Analysis of the 5th Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the 7th Workers' Party of Korea and the Future Prospects (Online Series CO 20-01, 2020. 1. 2.), p. 5.

the state of affairs than any other weaponry.

The second point to note is the Pukguksong-4A missile. It was introduced during the parade as “underwater strategic ballistic missiles,” implying that it was the submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM). This SLBM is a new type of arsenal as it has a wider body diameter than Pukguksong-3 (1.5-1.6 meters in diameter), which was test fired on October 2, 2019. It is assumed that the SLBM is designed to be loaded in a new submarine, not the previous submarine. Based on the warhead shape, the possibility of carrying MIRA warheads cannot be excluded. As with the case of the ICBM, no test fire has been made, and it is probable that the SLBM on display is still in its development stage. It seems it will take a while to reach the completion stage as building the submarine to house the missile also takes time. Ground engine testing or test firing will not take place anytime soon both for the new ICBM and Pukguksong-4A SLBM. These arsenals carry a high level of threat, and such testing may send the wrong message to the incoming U.S. administration that North Korea intends to walk away from the agreement to suspend nuclear and missile tests. The evolution of the North Korean missiles towards MIRV seems logical considering the recent nuclear arms race in Northeast Asia, which encompasses the submarine-launched cruise missile (SLCM), supersonic low altitude missiles and MIRVs. The latest U.S. nuclear policies and arms race in Northeast Asia make the ICBM and SLBM with a single warhead strategically limited. Regarding this, the third aspect to pay attention to is the missile systems, such as the super large multiple rocket launchers (the Joint Chief of Staff ID no.: 19-5), newly-developed large-caliber multiple launch guided rocket system (19-2, 19-3), new tactical ballistic missile system (19-1, KN-23, North Korean version of Iskander), short-range ballistic missile system (19-4, North Korean version of ATACMS), and the ground-to-air missile system (thunder series, North Korean version of S-400), which were unveiled through missile tests in 2019 and 2020. These missiles were developed in an effort to change its military structure focusing on the artillery. At the same time, those missile systems were developed to respond to South Korea’s adopting and developing weapons and the U.S. military forces on the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, the current increase in diversity and advancement of weapons is likely

to continue, and missile testing cannot be ruled out depending on how politics unfold in the first half of next year.

Promise of New Economic Policies and Internal Innovation via WPK 8th Congress

Chairman Kim Jong Un stated in his speech that a “new phase” of battle will be proposed at the 8th Congress of the WPK. Historically, a “strategic line” to uphold for the next five years is presented at the Congress, and North Korea set six strategic lines at the 7th Congress. In his speech marking the 75th anniversary of the WPK’s foundation, Kim proclaimed that the concrete goals and measures to realize the “superior policies to enhance welfare of the people and provide greater benefits” would be proposed at the 8th Congress. Furthermore, he pledged that he would “bring about innovation, advancement and substantial changes that can be felt by everyone.”

The 8th Congress will likely focus on presenting new economic policies to be in line with building defensive military capabilities. Kim did not mention a “head-on breakthrough” or “self-reliance” at all in his 30-minute speech. This gives the impression that the newly formulated economic policies will possibly entail innovative changes to running the economy. The external strategic line, however, will remain the same as it includes head-on breakthroughs, the long-lasting battle with the U.S., and the continued development of strategic weapons, which were adopted at the 5th Plenary Meeting of the 7th Central Committee of the WPK. North Korea will achieve a symbolic completion of several construction projects that were planned for this year but have yet to be completed in the 80-day battle and will focus on promoting solidarity through the 8th Congress.

8th Congress Possibly to be Held on January 1, 2021, and Variables Anticipated after the U.S. Presidential Election

There is a possibility for North Korea to have the 8th Party Congress on January 1, 2021. Chairman Kim announced the start of an “80-day battle,” which will end on December 29 this year if the days are counted right after the WPK

Foundation Day. In light of the 7th Congress, which was held three or four days after the completion of the 70-day battle, the 8th Congress will possibly be held on January 1, 2021. Also, the first day of the year seems a viable option considering that the Congress covers the yearly span of five years or one year, and by doing so, this can be made into a future practice. If the 8th Congress is held on January 1, North Korea will not be in a position to express its external strategy outright, especially the message to the U.S. The Congress will be held before the U.S. presidential inauguration on January 20, and remaining variables would include the results of the presidential election and how promptly the new administration determines its position on North Korea. There is also the possibility of a political mess in the U.S. if the defeated candidate refuses to accept the election outcome or if the new administration must go through various troubles before starting to govern the country. Against this backdrop, it will be a burden for North Korea to send any message at the Party Congress before the U.S. does.

ROK Needs to Control Developments based on the Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative for Infectious Disease Control and Public Health and End-of-war Declaration

In several parts of his speech, Chairman Kim highlighted a role of his leadership in having successfully fended off COVID-19. He emphasized repeatedly that there is no confirmed case and his people are healthy, and he expressed gratitude for staying healthy. The soldiers and citizens did not wear masks, demonstrating their confidence in the regime's quarantine program. The recovery efforts from floods and the COVID-19 quarantine were pointed out as the foremost achievements in the year of marking the 75th anniversary of the WPK foundation. It is highly likely that the 8th Congress would highlight again its success in quarantine as an achievement. In this light, the inter-Korean relationship will be closely linked to building the capabilities to control COVID-19 globally. Interest generated within international community in the Northeast Asian cooperation initiative for infectious disease control and public health and the end-of-war declaration as proposed by



South Korean President Moon Jae-in should be actively utilized. Overcoming the “public health crisis” and promoting peace on the Korean Peninsula should become the two axes of managing anticipated political uncertainties going into the first half of next year. ©KINU 2020

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