

North Korea's 2007 New Year's Joint Editorial: Analysis and Prospects

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1. Analysis : Emphasizing the Construction of an Economically Strong Nation

- North Korea's 2007 New Year's Joint Editorial repeated its traditional form and substance overall, and at the same time designated 2006 as the year that 'the dawn of an economic strong nation' has risen, and advocated pushing forward towards 'the construction of an economic strong nation' based on its 'possession of nuclear deterrence capabilities' in 2007.
 - there was no mention of its nuclear weapons program, the six-party talks, the summit meeting between North and South Korea.
 - the term 'Military-first Chosun' has been used since 2003, and the term 'dawn' has also been in use for several years.

- On domestic policies, there were not much difference from those mentioned in last year's New Year's Joint Editorial, emphasizing on its military-first policies, economic development, efforts to strengthen its national defense capabilities, idolizing Kim Jong Il, strengthening ideological education for social cohesion and others. But this year, it was made explicit that North Korea's national resources will be focused on improving the lives of its citizens.
 - emphasizing its military-first policy was a farsighted choice.
 - but there were no mention of measures to improve economic management or plans to increase economic openness, but the message implicated that North Korea will achieve these goals on self-reliance through state-controlled measures.

- On its policy towards South Korea, North Korea presented the 'emphasis on the Korean nation,

the defense of peace, and cohesion' as the three major tasks for 2007. This shows the North's desire to create a breakthrough for the crisis it faces after the United Nations' resolution on economic sanctions in response to its nuclear test, to acquire material benefits through economic cooperation between North and South Korea, and to actively intervene in South Korea's coming presidential election.

- express explicitly to carry out a united-front tactics, including a national struggle for the withdrawal of US troops, and a re-emphasis on 'anti-conservative grand alliance'
- On foreign policy, North Korea presented its general principles of 'independence, peace, goodwill,' and at the same time emphasized the need to 'strengthen solidarity with progressive people.'
 - with regard to its policy towards the United States, the struggle 'against the US and for independence' and 'the withdrawal of US troops on the Korean peninsula' were re-emphasized.
- Therefore, in 2007 it is expected that based upon its confidence in military strength following the nuclear test, North Korea
 - may persist with its socialist principles and push forward for internal economic development that strives to acquire material benefits,
 - may actively carry out united-front tasks toward the South that encompasses both the upper and lower classes and also intervene in the South Korean presidential election, based on slogans of 'the importance of the Korean people, anti-conservative grand alliance,' and
 - may respond to US North Korea policies and the six-party talks with a tit-for-tat strategy under the slogan of 'defending peace.'

2. Prospects : 'Muddling-Through' Strategy based on Military-first Policies

- In 2007, North Korea's domestic, foreign, South Korea policies will be based upon military-first policy, adopting 'muddling-through' strategy: it will not give up its nuclear weapons program and will not carry out reforms and openness.

- On domestic politics, North Korea will continue to make Kim Jong Il an absolute being through its military-first policy.
 - a series of events are scheduled, such as the 65th birthday of Kim Jong Il (February 16th), the 95th birthday of Kim Il Sung (April 15th), the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Army (April 25th), the 15th anniversary of Kim Jong Il's inauguration as Marshall of the Republic (April 20th), the 40th anniversary of Kim Il Sung's teachings of May 25th, the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Union of Communist Youth (August 28th), the 10th anniversary of Kim Jong Il's inauguration as General Secretary of the Party (October 8th), all of which are designed to strengthen Kim Jong Il's power.
 - terms such as '3rd, 4th generation of the revolution' are not mentioned, implying that the issue of Kim Jong Il's successor will not be brought to the surface.
 - the emphasis on the 'teachings of May 25' may open up the possibility of 'censorship of the central party' in order to eliminate officials who are passive about Kim Jong Il's line of politics.

- On the economy, North Korea will re-emphasize self-reliance for building a powerful socialist economy based on its confidence as a military power.
 - in terms of the domestic economy, there are no mentions of economic reforms, and will likely pursue economic construction through self-reliance to deal with economic sanctions.
 - in terms of economic relations with South Korea, North Korea may probably be very active in trying to acquire economic assistance such as food and fertilizers, and show greater interests in revitalizing economic cooperation through projects such as the Gaeseong Industrial Complex and the Mount Geumgang tourism.
 - in terms of international economic relations, it is possible that North Korea will try to expand border trade with China, and be more actively involved in trading gold in the international market.

- On social and cultural issues, North Korea will most likely strengthen controls on ideology and education in order to keep regime stability through its military-first politics.
 - Aiming to deter the relaxation of social order caused by the aftermath of floods in 2006, exacerbation of economic problems after sanctions of the United Nations Security Council, and other problems
 - Reinforcing the idolization of Kim Jong Il

- On the military, it is highly likely that North Korea will fortify its military posture against the South under the cause of ‘the defense of peace.’
 - it may put an emphasis on political and ideological training to improve combat preparedness of the military and overall combat capacity, as North Korea is now capable of complementing its physical basis
 - if the six-party talks break down, then North Korea will use that opportunity to lay the blame on the US, and there is even the possibility that the North will eventually try to influence the South Korean presidential election by stressing America’s military threat against North Korea → physical confrontation → escalation of tension on the Korean peninsula → creating a ‘war or peace’ dichotomy.

- On its South Korea policy, it is highly likely that North Korea will engage in a double strategy that incorporates both cooperation and an aggressive united front.
 - the North may try to acquire a safety net against America’s hard-line stance against North Korea and economic assistance from South Korea by stressing the ‘importance of the Korean people,’
 - try to acquire the foundation of its struggle for the withdrawal of US troops in Korea through ‘defense of peace,’
 - may stress the struggle to ‘ostracize pro-American anti-Communist conservative factions through creating an anti-conservative grand alliance’ by ‘achieving cohesion,’ in preparation for the South Korean presidential election through.

- On foreign policy, North Korea is expected to maintain its ‘anti-imperial and independent struggle’ on the basis of its being a ‘nuclear power,’ but may also actively pursue pragmatic diplomacy based on ‘peoples diplomacy.’
 - the North is currently stressing the building of the economy based on the confidence that it has become a ‘nuclear power,’ and it is necessary to pursue pragmatic diplomacy to mobilize external resources.
 - therefore, it is likely that North Korea will reinforce relations with nations such as China and Russia that are friendly towards the North’s policy to expand foreign relations, and actively pursue ‘peoples diplomacy’ to acquire material benefits from Western nations as well.