



# Online Series

2021. 10. 06 | CO 21-29

## Analyses and Prospects of the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly in North Korea

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On September 28-29, Chairman Kim Jong-un gave a speech at the Supreme People's Assembly - North Korea's highest sovereign entity and legislative body. To recapitulate, the speech mainly has set the agenda on 'managing the situations during the final months of 2021' according to the changes of the international arena and to the level of first yearly achievements decided by the 8<sup>th</sup> Congress. Especially, the Chairman has given specific policy agendas through his administrative speech. This article analyzes the recent Supreme People's Assembly ('the Assembly' hereafter)'s major decisions and administrative speeches, and projects North Korea's future steps.

Important end-of-the-year events include △ encouraging high officials' administrative and leadership capacities to drive results, △ strengthening the demand for self-reliance of institutions on raw materials, power, and equipment, △ major dispatching of the people's army for land management operations such as preparing for natural disasters and the 10,000 Home Construction Project, △ full-blown efforts on solving the food problem, and △ enforcing frugality and austerity. Also, ideology education, quarantine operations, national defense capacity building, and the strengthening of legal control will continue.

The intent behind and directions on North Korea's South Korean and foreign policies can be inferred as the following: North Korea needs △ stability in the Peninsula while it focuses on internal achievements, △ to evaluate South Korea's military capacity, as well as its forthcoming Presidential election, △ to project the political prospects of the U.S. and analyze international relations and increase response capacities, and △ approaches for strengthening its bonds with China and increasing its negotiating power against the U.S. Finally, the recent administrative speech from Chairman Kim Jong-un will hardly function as a fundamental turning point for transforming inter-Korean relations. However, the chances for military escalation on the Korean Peninsula in the final months of 2021 will likely go down.

## Legal System Maintenance for the 5-Year Plan

Let's review the six agendas set forth during the Assembly. First was the adoption of the "Province and Township Development Bill." This bill was proposed to help with the maintenance of national land and administration to foster self-reliant economies at the local level. Second was the adoption of the "Youth Education Bill." This bill was adopted to systematize the ideological education of youths, who will compose the main labor force for the 5-Year Plan. Third was the adoption of the amended "People's Planned Economy Bill." The bill provided additions and revisions to the law that would strengthen the government's plan and control over the 5-Year plan. Fourth was the discussion over the standards regarding the "Execution, Censorship, and Management of the Recycling Bill." This bill specifies the policies on the localization of materials and equipment. Fifth was the changing of the name of the Aviation Administration of the DPRK to the National Aviation Administration. The change is predicted to be a preparatory step for organizing government institutions and developing the aviation industry. Sixth was the "organization issue." The Assembly sought to reflect the changes made before and after the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress regarding certain party members, and their tasks, policies, and influence to state institutions, such as the State Affairs Commission.

The DPRK announced its adoption of the first three agendas "to materialize a nationally unified and strategically managed instruction of economic projects."<sup>1)</sup> The tone of the announcement implies that the adoption would legally prepare North Korea for "strengthening the self-reliance, the planning, and civic-orientation of its national economy." Underneath the preparation is North Korea's hopes of  $\Delta$  building a self-reliant economy based on the "self-rehabilitating strategy (*Charkyok Kaengsaeng*)" discussed during the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress,  $\Delta$  strengthening the government control and management for the strategy, and  $\Delta$  bolstering the political ideology and collectivism of the youth. The fourth agenda - reorganizing recycling

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1) "Day 1 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK," Korean Central News Agency, Sept 29, 2021.

laws – is closely tied to its ‘import substitution industrialization’ efforts that gained traction since the pandemic-driven border closures. The plan seems to be to integrate the recycling law that has been adopted at the Third Meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> Supreme People’s Assembly (Apr 12, 2020) with the ‘localization of raw materials and resources’ decided during the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress to boost its executive capacity.

### Policy Direction after Organization Restructuring

On the second day of the Assembly, agendas 5 and 6 were adopted in addition to Chairman Kim Jong-un’s administrative speech.<sup>2)</sup> Agenda 5 – changing the name of the Aviation Administration of the DPRK to the National Aviation Administration – is tied to the Kim Jong-un government’s decision to change the names of the state institution to be in line with international trends. Agenda 6 deals with personnel affairs in important government institutions like the State Affairs Commission which was ‘delegated by’ Kim Jong-un. The post-Party Congress personnel changes in the Party made up until late September seem to have been implemented alongside major national and party policy directives. The recent personnel changes provide inferences on the policies important to the North Korean government. Specifically, let’s take a look at the new personnel appointments at the State Affairs Commission which executes party decisions and functions as the highest decision-making body in North Korea.

First, the central leadership positions include Chairman Kim Jong-un and First Vice-Chairman Choe Ryong-hae who remained at their position and Premier Kim Tok-hun who became a new Vice-Chairman. The change was intended to strengthen the government’s execution ability over party decisions, guarantee the continuation of tasks, strengthen cabinet powers, and implement the retirement of Park Bong-ju.

Second, there were changes in position for Kim Yo-jong (Party Deputy Director),

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2) “Day 2 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> Supreme People’s Assembly of the DPRK,” Korean Central News Agency, Sept 29, 2021.

Kim Jong-un's 'mouthpiece' in U.S. and South Korea policy areas, Deputy Chief and Secretary Jo Yong-won (Organization), and Pak Jong-chon (military, state-of-the-art strategic weapons management). U.S. Affairs expert Choi Son-hui stepped down, and Kim Yo-jong, who mainly manages U.S. and South Korea policies, took her place. Such shifts imply that North Korea is dealing with U.S. affairs and South Korea affairs at its center and that it is likely to put heavy emphasis on managing the situations at the end of the year. The appointments of Jo Yong-won and Pak Jong-chon reaffirms North Korea's emphasis on national-level political ideology projects and the development of state-of-the-art strategic weapons.

Third, Kim Song-nam (Director for International Affairs), who manages China policies, became a new member of the State Affairs Commission. He was also appointed as the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly. This implies North Korea's intention to put greater emphasis on China.

Fourth, the appointment of Oh Su-yong (Chairman of the Second Economic Committee, Party Secretary for Economic Affairs), Ri Yong-gil (Minister of Defense), and Jang Jong-nam (Minister of Social Security) implies that North Korea will maintain its strategies from the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress focused on weapons, military, and social control.

In addition, the following people were appointed to the permanent seats at the Supreme People's Assembly's Standing Committee, which operates as the highest sovereign body during the adjournment of the Supreme People's Assembly: Deputy Director (Jang Yun-sok), Chief Justice of the Central Court (Cha Myong-nam), Chairman of the Judiciary Committee (Jang Jong-nam), Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee (Kim Song-nam), and Chairman of the Budget Committee (Oh Su-yong). This was by far the largest personnel changes since the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. In fact, the changes are a reflection of reshuffle projects on reorganizing the party before and after the Party Congress to the appointments of the state organizations. They are also related to North Korea's efforts to aggregate all government capacities to achieving the first portion of the 5-Year Plan. In line with these goals, Chairman Kim Jong-un gave his administrative speech, offering

directives on issues and policy agendas to be focused during the final months of 2021.

### North Korea's Year-End Domestic Approaches and Prospects

Kim Jong-un's administrative speech during the meeting was reminiscent of Kim Il-sung's administrative speeches. The speech entailed lengthy sentences across all policy fields, and included details in various aspects. According to Kim Jong-un, the speech was intended as an administrative proposal to "strongly drive the new development of a socialist society in line with the turbulent international landscape." In other words, the speech intended to "increase the independent force and internal drive to overcome the disadvantageous environment and troubles" that North Korea is currently facing.<sup>3)</sup> The speech also provides important inferences for North Korea's year-end approaches in 2021.

First is to encourage government institutions' policy initiatives. The most important mission for the government institutions is to derive meaningful results for the first-year achievements of the 5-Year Plan. The most important task is to strengthen ideological force and collectivism. Specifically, institutions are predicted to receive 'encouragements for their devoted vitality' toward the first-year achievements of the 5-Year Plan.

Second is to strengthen the leadership in the government institutions to achieve self-reliant economic development. Institutions are predicted to receive control from the center government regarding the 'goal-plan-execute' procedure and will be required of stronger leadership. Also, they will receive demands for self-reliant supplies of raw materials, resources, power, and equipment for year-end production.

Third is about the 10,000 Home Construction Project. The administration has

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3) "Our honorable Chairman Kim Jong-un has given a historic administrative speech *On Our Struggle Toward a New Development of a Socialist Society*," Korean Central News Agency, Sept 31, 2021.

claimed the 10,000 Home Construction Project as a major project in the public economy sector, but the construction seems to be facing difficulties. Hence, Kim Jong-un has ordered the completion of constructions in Pyongyang's Sonsin and Songhwa districts and the continued construction of homes next year. He also emphasized the completion of the constructions in Komdok District of South Hamgyong Province, which has been carried out by the People's Army. Hence, the military will likely be sent to land management projects to prepare for year-end natural disasters as well as to home construction projects.

Fourth is about the full-blown efforts on alleviating the food problem. Kim Jong-un has suggested preparing for seed improvements against abnormal climates, applying two-fold sowing of wheat and barley, preparing against flooding, developing weather forecasting capacities, growing rabbits across the country, increasing dairy production to support childcare policies, growing crops in a greenhouse, and developing the fishing industry. Above all, to deliver agricultural outcomes, the government will actively promote the 'creation of model units,' the 'movement of copying the leading and learning,' the 'movement of exchanging experience,' the 'struggle to eradicate bluffs in the agriculture sector,' and improvements in procuring agricultural and fishing products and grain processing.

Fifth is about the local industry-based movement to produce daily necessities and the emphasis on reduced spending and austerity. In the light industry sector, which Kim Jong-un continues to emphasize, the 'localization, re-resourcing of raw materials,' and the production of daily necessities will take place by making the localities and local factories find their own raw materials and remain frugal in their spending. The central government knows the limits of such approach and has been increasing its import volumes, especially those from China. However, the quarantine-related border closures are highly unlikely to go out of effect by the end of the year. Finally, it will continue fostering collectivism, enforcing quarantine measures, strengthening military power, and consolidating legal control.

## North Korea's Year-end Policy on South Korea and External Affairs: Intent, Direction, and Prospect

The content that received the most attention in this administrative speech was North Korea's policy toward South Korea. Let's estimate North Korea's intentions and the direction of year-end policies toward South Korea and foreign countries and predict global prospects.

First, North Korea needs a stable Korean Peninsula in the process of producing its year-end domestic political performance. As discussed earlier, North Korea is expected to aggregate its capacities on producing the first-year achievements of the national 5-Year Plan. Hence, it can be predicted that North Korea would not want military escalations in the Korean Peninsula at the end of this year. In this regard, as the administration speech also indicated, North Korea responded positively to the reoperation of the inter-Korean communications hotline on October 4.

Second, North Korea seeks to evaluate Seoul's military capacity, as well as its forthcoming Presidential election. Prior to announcing the current policy on South Korea, Kim Jong-un expressed that he is stimulated by "the various military drills and expansion measures from South Korea intended to contain the North." North Korea has already resisted against South Korea's test-launch of its new, independently developed submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) and other new weapons. Furthermore, South Korea has already entered a presidential race, an event extremely pertinent to inter-Korean relations. Similar to how South Korea's North Korea policies are affected by North Korea's power structure or Sino-North Korea relations, North Korea's policies on South Korea and external affairs in general, are affected by the results of the South Korean presidential race. Hence, attaining information and influencing the election, as well as examining the South Korean political landscape and preparing for various potential scenarios are all important tasks of the North Korean government.

Third, North Korea seeks to predict the political prospects of the U.S., analyze international relations, and enhance the responsive capacity. At his administrative

speech, Kim Jong-un ordered to research and analyze the U.S.'s stances of external projects on the Korean Peninsula, prospects on international affairs, and interconnected relations among changes in international relations.' Also, he requested that North Korea put their full efforts in devising the tactics to implement their strategies toward the U.S. and other foreign countries based on their research. These orders seem to have been triggered especially by the establishment of AUKUS - the U.S. and U.K.'s joint transfer of nuclear-powered submarine technologies to Australia - and the U.S. Navy's recent test on its advanced SLBM. The orders will likely result in year-end tasks to revise North Korea's 2022 foreign policy and national strategy in developing state-of-the-art weapons. Hence, North Korea's Reconnaissance General Bureau and other anti-South Korea and anti-U.S. departments will strengthen their hacking and cyber-information projects.

Fourth, North Korea seeks to strengthen its bonds with China and increase its negotiating power against the U.S. In his administrative speech, Kim Jong-un suggested that a key characteristic of today's shifting international situation is its 'increasing complexity and multidimensionality caused by the transition toward the new cold war structure.' Specifically, he seems to be interested in the East Asian realignment vis-à-vis the conflict between the U.S. and China. Also, he emphasized that he will invest a majority of his power in projects that will 'help actively respond to international politics and surrounding environments and protect sovereignty, independent development, and national interest.' Traditionally, North Korean diplomacy revolved around maximizing self-interest by taking advantage of shifting world orders and of conflicts between superpowers. As such, North Korea will concretize its approach toward raising its value amid the tension between U.S. and China. Since June 2021, the trade volume between North Korea and China has increased, implying a lift of pandemic-driven border closure. North Korea also should prepare for its own '2022 WITH CORONA' policy. In such a situation, North Korea will likely stand close to China while preparing for a negotiation with the U.S.

Finally, during the administrative speech, Kim Jong-un demanded as a prerequisite for alleviating inter-Korean relations that South Korea withdraw its 'two-faced



behavior' and 'hostile perspectives and policies.' Given the recent tone of the North Korean government, the demand can be interpreted as asking for the following: △ acknowledge all parties as 'equal and normal states,' △ stop all weapons testing and military practices including the U.S.-South Korean Joint Military Drills, and △ remove the sanctions against North Korea. As Chairman Kim said, the administrative speech discussed 'fundamental matters.' Such demands are not a prerequisite for alleviating inter-Korean relations but are rather the results that can only be earned through years of negotiations and cooperation along with the progress in North Korea's denuclearization.

Overall, Kim Jong-un's recent administrative speech does not seem to offer a fundamental or groundbreaking turning point for inter-Korean relations. North Korea has been behaving capriciously ever since Kim Jong-un came to power. Hence, North Korea might test new weapons according to its carrot-and-sticks strategy toward South Korea. Still, based on Kim Jong-un's speech and the reoperation of the inter-Korean communication hotline, the chances for military escalation on the Korean Peninsula in the final months of 2021 will likely decrease. ©KINU 2021

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