

Significance of the 9.28 KWP Reorganization and Future Policy Direction

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On September 28th, the Korean Workers Party convened a Delegates' Conference at which Kim Jong Eun was formally anointed as successor and the party leadership structure was reorganized. The outcome of this conference shows the following noteworthy features. First, Kim Jong Eun's image and status as successor was definitively unveiled. Kim Jong Eun was appointed to the newly-created position of vice chairman of the KWP Central Military Commission, making him second-in-command under Chairman Kim Jong Il and reflecting a desire not to put him in the shadow of anyone other than Kim Jong Il.

Second, while the conference bestowed upon Kim Jong Eun the status of successor, it did not in fact give him the actual responsibilities of one. This may have reflected an effort to prevent leaks in Kim Jong Il's power structure, but we cannot discard the possibility that more complicated political calculations by other forces with vested interests also may have played a role. Further, the hasty transference of official successor status to Kim Jong Eun despite his lack of proper preparation may indicate that Kim Jong Il's health condition has grown that much worse.

Third, Kim Jong Il's relatives and closest associates solidified their hold on the top leadership. As long as Kim Jong Il remains healthy and firmly in control, a close association with him may take precedence over one's actual status; however this may change if his health takes a turn for the

worse. Director of Light Industry Kim Kyung Hee was promoted to the rank of general and appointed a member of the Politburo; North Hwanghae Party Secretary Choi Ryong Hae was also promoted to general and given positions as candidate member of the Politburo, KWP General Secretary, and member of the Central Military Commission. Kang Sok Ju, who just prior to the conference was promoted from 1st vice foreign minister to vice premier of the cabinet, also became a Politburo member. The rapid promotion of these close associates is the North Korean leadership's way of preparing for life after Kim Jong Il. One interesting thing is that KWP Administrative Director and NDC Vice Chairman Jang Song Taek, who is considered effectively second-in-command and who was expected to be appointed to the Standing Committee of the Politburo, was merely appointed a candidate member of the Politburo and a member of the Central Military Commission. It is unclear whether this reflects an effort to hold Jang's rapidly expanding power in check, or a decision by Jang himself to lie low.

Fourth, a dramatic generational transition has taken place in the military organization. Of the three leading figures on the NDC - General Political Bureau Director Jo Myong Rok, Armed Forces Minister Kim Young Chun, and NDC Vice Chairman Oh Kuk Ryol - only Jo was named as a Politburo Standing Committee member. However, as Jo is now very ill, he is unlikely to play much of a role, and he was removed from his position on the Central Military Commission. Oh Kuk Ryol was not given any post in this latest party personnel reshuffling Kim Young Chun was appointed a member of the Politburo and the Central Military Commission, but his position relative to Chief of General Staff Lee Young Ho was reversed, with the former underling becoming the superior. Meanwhile, Lee Young Ho, who was only promoted from Pyongyang Defense Commander to Chief of General Staff a year ago, advanced in rank to vice-marshal and became a member of the Politburo Standing Committee and a vice-chair of the Central Military Commission, becoming the military representative with the highest rank in the party. In addition, Vice Chief of Staff Choi Bu Il and 8th Army Commander Hyun Young Chul were promoted to general just prior to the conference; Vice Director of the National Security Agency Woo Dong Cheuk and 1st Vice Director of the General Political Bureau Kim Jeong Gak were elected to the Politburo and Operations Bureau Director Kim Myeong Guk, General Bureau of Reconnaissance Director Kim Young Cheol, and Navy Commander Jeong Myeong Do were elected to the Central Military Commission. These people have advanced to form the core of the military organization.

Fifth, the central focus of the *songun* system has been transferred from the NDC to the party. Of the 17 permanent members of the Politburo, only 5 are also on the NDC, and of the 15 candidate members, only 4 are NDC members. The fact that Kim Jong Eun has risen through

the party structure and his close associates have gained positions in the party leadership even while largely being excluded from the NDC has contributed to the party's increased functionality. The conferring of the military title of general to civilians Kim Jong Eun, Kim Kyung Hee, Choi Ryong Hae, and Kim Kyung Ok prior to appointing them to party leadership positions seems to reflect an emphasis on the continuity of the *songun* policy, by showing that all party leaders have high military titles.

In preparation for the post-Kim Jong Il era, the North Korean leadership has hastily constructed a succession system and reshuffled the power structure, but still their future is hard to see. Kim Jong Eun is very young and has no experience or power base, which makes the succession system very precarious. The photo of him which was made public just one day after his official emergence as successor was a pitiful effort to cover for his lack of qualifications.

Due to Jong Eun's congenital tendency toward corpulence, they were able to play on people's memories of his grandfather, putting him in the Mao suit and retro hairstyle of Kim Il Sung's younger days, and greatly easing the minds of the North Korean leadership. For Kim Jong Eun's power to take root he will need the help of influential people, but nobody can say for certain if this group will continue to give their absolute support to Kim Jong Eun after Kim Jong Il passes away.

If Kim Jong Il has to abruptly relinquish power before the succession system is firmly in place, we cannot rule out the possibility of conflict within the top power structure. The most important feature of the *songun* structure is its control of the people. Thus, the regular system was ignored and Kim Jong Il, as absolute leader, took direct control of all major organs of the party, state, and military, including the Organization and Guidance Department, the Administrative Department, the Unification Front Department, the General Staff, the General Political Department, the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces, the National Security Agency, the Ministry of People's Security, and the Foreign Ministry. However, without Kim Jong Il in the "control tower," the focal point binding these different organizations together will disappear, and rivalries among them may become overt.

Actually, one of the intentions of this party reorganization was to distribute power from Kim Jong Il's one-man control structure to a collective guidance system under the party, but if the group of Kim Jong Eun supporters which has taken over the party leadership tries to expand the party's control over the military, they could induce a party-military rivalry. If this group's functions can be normalized through a reorganization of the Politburo and the Secretariat, then

the party's voice will naturally become more influential and its control over the population will increase.

North Korea's future policy direction will give the appearance of thoroughly carry out the final directives of the Kim Jong Il era, while concentrating on boosting internal solidarity for the sake of a stable succession. In this same context we can interpret the declaration, made immediately after Kim Jong Eun's formal promotion, stating that North Korea could never abandon its nuclear missiles and would continue to build up its nuclear capability. They may also continue to follow the familiar strategy of raising tensions with the outside world in order to suppress internal dissent and maintain stability. On the other hand, the need to compensate for the leadership's lack of legitimacy and cover up any popular resistance will be even greater than it was in the Kim Jong Il era. They will sound out a variety of options: they could rely on China, or seek economic aid from South Korea, or attempt a breakthrough in relations with the US. But as the new leaders execute their foreign policy agenda, it is uncertain whether they will be able to deploy sufficient political leadership to suppress resistance from the military establishment. We should pay close attention to future trends in the North Korean leadership's actions and work closely with the other regional countries to prepare strategies for various contingencies.