

## Kim Jong Eun's Activities in 2010 and Their Political Implications

**Park Hyeong Jung**

*Senior Research Fellow, Center for South-North Korean Cooperation Studies*

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To consolidate Kim Jong Eun as the successor has been the one of core agendas of the North Korean regime in 2010. This must have not been without some frictions and problems.

In this paper I have collected the reports of various North Korea-related media sources<sup>1)</sup> and assembled them into a single storyline. Of course this is a hypothetical storyline built from many different sources, none of which are definitive. Therefore this must be read critically. Nonetheless it should be helpful in getting a sense for the overall flow of developments. This covers the major news reports related to Kim Jong Eun's activities, excluding the various propaganda and educational efforts to elevate his status and boost loyalty toward him.

Most significant were the reports that Kim Jong Eun was in charge of the November 2009 currency exchange measures. The economic chaos and suffering that resulted from them are now well-known. After the measures, Kim Jong Eun forced local governments and trading companies to forward all of their

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1) The sources used here include Yonhap News, Daily NK, Radio Free Asia, Open Radio for North Korea, North Korea Intellectuals Solidarity, and the quarterly journal Imjingang. For convenience's sake I have not footnoted each source separately.

earnings to the state (previously this had been 60%). To direct attention away from the economic confusion caused by the money exchange measures, Kim Jong Eun initiated military exercises of artillery fire in the West Sea and raised tensions with the South in January 2010. It appears that he was also involved in the sinking of the Cheonan corvet in March of the same year. In May Kim Jong Il visited China to seek their help in quelling the internal disorder brought on by the money exchange measures, but the trip was largely unsuccessful.

Without economic improvement they would have a hard time formally establishing the succession; thus, they needed to increase tension internally. Shortly after the money exchange measures, in December 2009, Kim Jong Eun is said to have taken charge of the Ministry of State Security. Its authority has increased so that it now has control over the military as well as all of North Korean society. To maintain internal control, the “7.4 Inspection Group” was formed with Kim Jong Eun at the helm. Kim Jong Eun issued a directive that “the Ministry of State Security must take charge and thoroughly stamp out the phenomena of drugs, prostitution, gambling and illegal recorded materials (particularly pornographic videos).” However the methods of this group were so ruthless that they generated a fierce backlash from the common people and local party-state officials and on July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010 the group was dissolved. Subsequently control of the Ministry of State Security reverted back to Kim Jong Il. Until the Party Delegates’ Conference on September 28<sup>th</sup> 2010 a difference of opinion existed among the high-level officials, between veteran military leaders who said that Kim Jong Eun needed more training and the younger faction who argued that power must be transferred quickly. As a compromise, Kim Jong Eun rose no higher than vice chairman of the Party’s Central Military Committee. However, once he had been internally recognized as the successor, Kim Jong Eun began to focus all his energy on strengthening his authority.

On October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Kim Jong Eun joined his father on an inspection of the Ministry of State Security and chastised them for their lax discipline. He directed them to submit a proposal for increasing the number of foreign-currency earning commercial agencies under the aegis of the Ministry. This seems to suggest that Kim Jong Eun has gained Kim Jong Il’s permission to once again take charge of the Ministry of State Security. Subsequently, there was a dramatic increase in various crackdowns and control measures from November 2010. Furthermore, these actions were reported in association with Kim Jong Eun’s name. What is interesting is that these reports of Kim Jong Eun’s activities coincided with the failure to restart regular public distribution as promised on November 1<sup>st</sup>, the artillery attack on the Yeonpyeong island on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, and the sudden rise in inflation and the worsening of economic conditions throughout November.

Kim Jong Eun's major activities from November 2010 to the mid February 2011 can be summarized as follows. In November, he dispatched inspection teams to aid in preventing defections and tracking down defectors; in connection with this the existing five-household monitoring system was changed to a three-household system. Starting in November, Kim Jong Eun mobilized the Military Police Command to implement a focused crackdown on drugs in Hamhung. Also in November, there were inspections in Musan and Hyesan targeting corrupt officials involved in bribery, illicit smuggling, and assisting defectors. Since the emergence of Kim Jong Eun last November, the Military Police Command and the Ministry of State Security have been carrying out intensive inspections of various customs agencies and trading companies. Though they have been carried out in the name of re-asserting control over society, their main and real purpose must have been to reorganize foreign currency earning businesses on behalf of Kim Jong Eun. There was also a crackdown on the use of "service-cars" (vehicles affiliated with public agencies, but in reality owned by private persons and used commercially to transport goods and people). This severely handicapped the commercial transactions in the markets. On November 15<sup>th</sup> Kim Jong Eun ordered the Ministry of State Security to harshly crack down on the circulation of CDs and DVDs of South Korean songs and movies in the areas bordering China. On December 30<sup>th</sup> the paramilitary forces for preventing defections and suppressing popular dissent under the Ministry of People's Security were reorganized and expanded.

Throughout November and December a major personnel reorganization was undertaken, and many party bureaucrats over 60 serving in agencies at the district, city, and regional level or on the party committees of state firms were replaced with younger cadres in their 30s and 40s. From December 2010, Kim Jong Eun also directed the Military Police Command to launch inspections of various military units including the KPA General Political Bureau. It is said that about 70% of North Korea's 'donju' (wealthy people) are involved in the military. They are reportedly composed of the top officers of the General Staff and the General Political Bureau, and the commanders and political officers of military units in rear. As his first directive to the Ministry of State Security in 2011, Kim Jong Eun ordered to "strengthen counter-espionage against Chinese travelers in North Korea" and to "capture all North Korean defectors in China." He also formed an "Task Force for Anti-Drug Enforcement" made up of officials from the Ministry of State Security and the Military Police Command, which began operating on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011. On January 8<sup>th</sup>, on the occasion of Kim Jong Eun's birthday, foreign currency earning trading companies were busy with forwarding special presents to him.

It appears that Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Eun divided their roles in 2010. Looking at the reports that have emerged, Kim Jong Il appears to have been very actively engaged in on-site guidance in the economic sectors; i.e., he has been associated exclusively with

good deeds. On the other hand, Kim Jong Eun has been portrayed as being responsible for most of the major events of 2010. Thus it seems that Kim Jong Eun's role is not simply to build up goodwill among the people and the elite, but to show that he can manage the unpleasant but necessary work involved in maintaining the regime. Viewed in this light, it seems possible that Kim Jong Eun has actually been at the center of most of the major decisions recently. Yet Kim Jong Eun's status is not necessarily firmly established among the elite class. It is interesting to observe the complex interaction of the many factors at work in the background of Kim Jong Eun's actions, such as the relationship between the father and current leader and the son and designated successor, conflicting opinions about the speed of power transfer among the elites, frictions between the central and regional authorities, and discord between the people and the regime. These internal factors have impacted and will also impact the policies the regime adopts toward the South in 2010 and 2011.