

Outline of the Kim Jong Un's Ruling Coalition advanced in this April

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Through the fourth Party Delegates' Conference on April 11th and the 5th session of the 12th Supreme People's Assembly on April 13th, new North Korean leader Kim Jong Un laid out a framework for the political power structure of his successor regime. The basic elements of this framework can be condensed into two key points. First, the ruling structure that was secretly embedded via the political reorganization implemented in September 2010 at the 3rd KWP Conference has been further expanded. In other words, the structure of political power and authority in the Kim Jong Un's ruling coalition appears to be modeled on concepts put forth by Kim Jong Il. Second, the coalition of civilian political officials centered around Jang Sung Taek has set up a strategic position enabling tighter political control over the military. Considering the background of the first point, we can assess that this second aspect also originated from Kim Jong Il's attempt to construct a power base for his son. In connection with these two points, this essay will analyze the interactions among and actual functions of the three core components of power - namely the Politburo, the National Defense Commission (NDC), and the Party Central Military Commission (PCMC) - that have coalesced through the latest Party Delegates' Conference

and Supreme People's Assembly session.

Political Reorganization according to Kim Jong Il's Plan

The first thing that stands out from this power reorganization, said to have originated from plans laid by Kim Jong Il, is the appearance of Choe Ryong Hae in the spotlight. Through this most recent reshuffling he attained the positions of vice marshal of the Korean People's Army (KPA), director of the KPA General Political Bureau (GPB), standing member of the Politburo, and member of the NDC. As director of the KPA GPB, he ranks higher than Director of the KPA General Staff Ri Yong Ho. The only officials other than Choe Ryong Hae who serve concurrently on the PCMC, the Politburo (including candidate members), and the NDC are Kim Jong Un, Jang Sung Taek, and Joo Kyu Chang (the director of the Machine-Building Industry Department of the Party Central Committee and a candidate member of the Politburo). In terms of his official public duties alone, Choe Ryong Hae can be seen as Kim Jong Un's second-in-command in all three core aspects of the North's political system - party, government, and military.

Above all, this promotion of Choe Ryong Hae, with his non-military origins, to director of the GPB, a position which is traditionally reserved for military generals, is unusual. This move was most likely planned by Kim Jong Il. Let us analyze the reasons for this. First, in September of 2010 at the third Worker's Party Conference, Choe Ryong Hae was successively promoted to KPA four-star general and party secretary. At that time, the prevailing theory was that he would play the role of a secretary for organizations of workers, youths, and women. In view of his advancement in this April, however, it seems Choe Ryong Hae was destined from the beginning to become the director of the GPB. As the previous GPB director, Jo Myung Rok, began to decline in health from 2006 on, First Deputy Director Kim Jong Gak informally took over his duties in 2007. The director's position remained vacant in this manner for four years. Clearly Kim Jong Il agonized for some time over the decision of who should succeed to the position. The choice was ultimately made in favor of the civilian Choe Ryong Hae. Needless to say, this unorthodox maneuver probably did not sit well with the military; in fact, if Choe Yong-hae's appointment had not been one of Kim Jong Il's parting wishes, as emphasized by the North Korean media, his ascension to power would have been no easy task.

GPB Reorganization and Tightening Political Control over Field Generals

During the period when the GPB director post was vacant, there were two

individuals who seemed favored to take over the position: Kim Jong Gak, the first deputy director of the bureau, who was recently promoted to Minister of the People's Armed Force, and Kim Won Hong, the deputy director for Organization Department of the bureau, who was recently appointed director of the State Security Agency. What do these appointments signify? We can deduce three important implications.

The first is the dismantling of the GPB structure of power and vested interests. With the appointment of Choe Ryong Hae, an outsider with a non-military background, as director of the GPB, there arose a need to remove Kim Jong Gak and Kim Won Hong from their seats. This can be seen as part of a general trend of political reorganizations as the Kim Jong Un succession kicked off. Let us consider two of the most blatant examples of this pattern. First, in February of 2009, the KWP's Operations Department, directed since 1987 by O Guk Ryol, was absorbed by the Reconnaissance General Bureau, a consolidated organization under the Ministry of People's Armed Forces, and control of the organization was handed to Kim Yong Chol. Then, around January of 2011, State Security Agency Deputy Director Ryu Kyeong was executed and many other key figures were purged. Furthermore, Kim Won Hong's appointment as director of the State Security Agency signifies the retreat of Woo Dong Cheuk, former deputy director of State Security (since September 2003?), who was promoted to first deputy director in September of 2009.

Second, the responsibilities of the director of the State Security Agency(SSA) have been apportioned away from Kim Jong Un. Kim Jong Il had been in charge of this agency since 1987, but it was revealed in early 2009 that Kim Jong Un had been entrusted with the office. Yet now it seems that Kim Won Hong has been appointed to head the SSA. Kim Won Hong had been chief of the Military Security Command (since 2003?) and had taken the post of GPB's vice director for Organization Department in February of 2010.

A third aspect is the advancement to powerful positions of officials from the GPB, an organization which specializes in surveillance and control over the military. This includes Kim Jong Gak's appointment to People's Armed Forces Minister and Kim Won Hong's appointment to director of the State Security Agency. In addition, Hyeon Cheol Hae, also a GPB official, was recently promoted to the military rank of *chasu* (vice-marshal), while also becoming first vice minister of the Armed Forces Ministry and director of the Rear Guard General Bureau in charge of mobilizing supplies to the military. After serving as director of the GPB's

Organization Department in 1968 he held a variety of posts, serving again as Organization Department director since October 1995, as GPB deputy director since September 2003, and later as standing deputy director of the GPB. Considering that Hyun is now 78, and he had already headed the Rear Guard General Bureau once before as a lieutenant general in 1986, this appointment seems to have honorary significance as well. In addition to the advancement of political officers from the GPB, Internal Armed Forces (in charge of guarding border, coast, and major facilities) Political Director Ri Byeong Sam and Organization Department First Deputy Director Cho Yeon Jun were both appointed as candidate members in the Politburo.

Overall, we can see a trend of internal security related personnel gaining power through this April's Party Delegates' Conference. Civilian official Choe Ryong Hae took over the GPB, and it was the bureau's political officers rather than field officers who took important positions in the Ministry of People's Armed Forces. Predictably, Kim Won Hong, former chief of the Military Security Command, an organization charged with surveillance of the military, became director of State Security. In sum, we can assess that the coalition made of Kim Jong Un and Jang Sung Taek has strengthened its control over field military officers.

The Relationships between the Politburo, the NDC and the Party Central Military Commission, and Their Actual Functions

Through the 3rd Party Delegates' Conference in September 2010 and the recent 4th Party Delegates' Conference, the Politburo and the Party Central Military Commission (PCMC) have arrayed their forces for battle, and together with the NDC these groups have come to form the three core organs of North Korean regime. How do these three organizations relate to each other? And do they effectively carry out their formally assigned functions in regime's decision-making and its execution? Or is there some hidden, unofficial power structure operating behind the scenes apart from the formal agencies of the regime?

First let us look at the relationships among these three bodies. A majority of the PCMC is made up of field military officers, and its official functions are characteristic of an established military policy organ. In light of this it probably functions to control the business and interests of field military officers.

The NDC is made up of personnel from two key sectors: the military industry and public security. Its major functions are 1) execute policy priorities for 'defense industry first' through state's administrative coercive power; 2) survey the nation's

public security situation and manage the interests of public security officials. In regard to the NDC, there are three individuals we must not overlook: Secretary in Charge of Munitions Pak Do Chun,¹⁾ Machine Industry Department Director Ju Kyu Chang,²⁾ and Chairman of the Second Economy Paek Se Bong.³⁾ One of the core practical functions of the NDC is the task of these three individuals, namely wielding state power to guarantee implementation of the priorities promoting the 'defense industry first' policy. As a core economic sector in the North Korean economy, the military industry gets the highest priority in allocation of resources. Furthermore the work of these three people creates the basis for North Korea's diplomacy regarding possession of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Compared to rise and fall of major personnel in other fields, particularly those involved in the civilian economy, these three have kept stable positions for the longest period of time. After the launch of the Kim Jong Un regime these three individuals were also promoted. On February 15th, 23 generals were given military promotions on the orders of the PCMC and the NDC; among these, Pak Do Chun received the rank of 4-star general while Ju Kyu Chang and Paek Se Bong were promoted to colonel general. Also among the ranks of promotions, General Reconnaissance Bureau Director Kim Young Chul was made a four-star general and GPB 1st Deputy Director Kim Jung Gak was made a *chasu* (vice marshal).

Next let us consider the Politburo. In terms of ideology this is the most important and the most comprehensive of the three main organs. Originally the Politburo and its Standing Committee are bodies in which the highest authorities of major policy sectors gather to settle disputes over conflicting interests and establish a unified policy direction. But in North Korea it seems that the Politburo and Standing Committee are not organs which actually make practical decisions; they are more likely to simply lend their political power to external announcements of decisions that have been made elsewhere. Most members are in their 80s; the exceptions are Kim Jong Un (late 20s), Choe Ryong Hae (62), Kim Kyung Hui (66), Lee Young Ho (69), and Kang Seok Ju (72). Thus, it seems that the Politburo's

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- 1) Pak Do Chun was appointed after his predecessor, Chun Byung Ho, stepped down due to health problems in September 2010. Chun Byung Ho had managed the munitions sector for 28 years.
 - 2) Ju Kyu Chang became vice minister of the Machine Industry Department 38 years ago, in August 1983.
 - 3) It was leaked in South Korea that Paek Se Bong became an NDC member in September 2003. Subsequently he was appointed chairman of the Second Economy Committee (date unknown, since 2004?) where he has served up to the present.

most important functions are providing honorary positions for elderly officials and ideological decoration to help legitimize the regime, rather than performing any practical functions. The 15 candidate members and 10 secretaries are mainly in their 50s or 60s. It seems probable that these people perform a more important role in practical business operations. The Politburo is used for irregular announcements to provide ideological legitimization, but the actual work of political processes and settling of rivalries over benefits is most likely handled by the Secretariat, the PCMC, and the NDC, where the more functional officials are concentrated. Furthermore, it is clear that behind-the-scenes consultations and settlements performed by working level organs are more important than the Politburo Standing Committee, which is supposed to be the highest political organ of the party and the state. In regard to these behind-the-scenes dealings, the names Jang Sung Taek and Kim Kyeong Hui are constantly mentioned.

Other Changes

In addition, Kim Kyeong Hui joined the Secretariat, and some believe that she may be the secretary for the Organization Department at the Central Committee. Also, the economic officials have been reinforced. Vice Premier (1998.9–2010.6) and Party Secretary of South Hamgyong Province Kwak Beom Gi became a Politburo candidate member, a Secretariat member, and director of the Planning and Finance Department at the Central Committee, while Vice Premier (2003.9~) and State Planning Director Roh Du Cheol became a Politburo candidate member, and former Premier (2003.9–2007.4) and Central Committee Deputy Director (2010.8~) Pak Bong Ju was promoted to director of the Central Committee.

Summary and Conclusion

The power restructuring carried out at the 4th Party Delegates' Conference on April 11th, 2012 can be understood as a further extension of the power formation laid out at the 3rd Party Delegates' Conference in September 2010. In other words the basic structure of the ruling coalition for the Kim Jong Un era was prepared by Kim Jong Il. A core element is greater political control of field military units by civilian officials. This has manifested through the appointment of Choe Ryong Hae, a civilian, as director of the GPB, a position traditionally held by military officials. This appointment would have been impossible without Kim Jong Il's authority. To create a place for Choe Ryong Hae in the GPB, 1st Deputy Director Kim Jong Gak was made People's Armed Forces Minister, and Organization Department Deputy Director Kim Won Hong became head of the State Security Agency. As a result Kim Jong Un and Jang Sung Taek have prepared a position of expanded political

control over the field military units as a whole. How effective this position will prove to be remains to be seen.

Also, through the Party Delegates' Conference and the SPA session, the Politburo, the NDC and the PCMC were fully appointed. Examining the character of each organization, we see that the NDC's main functions deal with the military industry and public security, particularly using state power as a basis to support military industry. The core of the PCMC is made up of field military officers, who settle business issues among themselves and represent various vested interests. The Politburo is the most comprehensive organization, but its members perform more ideological and ceremonial functions rather than practical functions. It seems that the Secretariat and behind-the-scenes actors play a more important role than the Politburo in negotiating and working out compromises.

Overall, the Kim Jong Un ruling coalition is made up of three groups. First, the civilian party officials coalition (public security + civilian economy managers + other sector specialist); second, the field military generals; and third, defense industry officials. One feature of the power reshuffling that occurred last April was that the party civilians grew stronger. Particularly this group's political control over the field military was reinforced. The military industry coalition continues to prosper. Competition among the three groups for power and prestige has strongly influenced North Korea's internal evolution and policy towards the outside world. Kim Jong Un's fortunes and North Korea's policies will continue to be influenced by the interplay of frictions, cooperation and compromises among the three groups.