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# Major Characteristics and Patterns of Nuclear and Missile Activities of the Kim Jong-un Regime

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North Korea launched the Hwasong-12 and the Pukguksong-2, the new intermediate-range ballistic missiles, with the presence of Kim Jong-un at 5:27 a.m. on May 14<sup>th</sup> – four days after the new administration took office in the Republic of Korea (ROK). The prospects of North Korea staying on a path of missile provocations, such as a series of missile launches occurred this time, could undermine the initiative of the new ROK government on its North Korean policy and leave a little room for strategic maneuvering. North Korea's series of actions have presented a worrying sign that the success or failure of South Korea's policy on North Korea and the level of inter-Korean relations might strongly hinge on North Korea's repeated patterns of nuclear and missile provocations. In that regard, a clear understanding on major characteristics and patterns of the Kim regime's nuclear and missile activities is required to set the direction for the government's North Korean policy and obtain the capability of predicting its behaviors. This paper sets out to utilize North Korea's Major Statements and Activities on Nuclear and Missile Development - a database stored at KINU and analyze the major features and patterns of

its nuclear and missile activities that have been witnessed after Kim Jong-un came to power.

The first characteristic is that North Korea's nuclear and missile activities have sharply increased after Kim Jong-un came into power. Our research showed that there have been 107 nuclear and missile activities in the North from 1984 to 14<sup>th</sup> May 2017. There had only been 8 times of nuclear and missile activities under the Kim Il-sung era, for Kim Jong-il 28 and for Kim Jong-un 71. The number recorded under the Kim Jong-un ruling for the past five years and four months was twice as much as that of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il combined, totaling at 36 during their 25 years of leadership. What those figures imply is that the Kim Jong-un era distinctively differs from the previous regimes in terms of frequency, diversity and timing of the activities with the more diversified and highly activated weapons.

Second, when judging by the number of activities per month, every March has recorded the highest number of activities at 21 from 1984 to 2017, with May and April falling behind at 20 and 15 respectively. In details, 56 activities (roughly 52%) took place between March and May and 78 activities (70%) occurred between March and July. The repetition of such patterns illustrates that a significant portion of their nuclear and missile activities are very much structuralized in terms of cycle and rhythm. Ever since Kim seized the power, 18 of the total 71 activities occurred in March making up the largest share. May recorded the highest number of activities both under Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, but under the Kim Jong-un regime, March and April have shown the highest number of activities. That period happens to coincide with the annual ROK-US joint military exercise, which provides a rationale for the Kim regime to react more sensitively to the joint military drill.

Third characteristic is an increase of short and medium-range missile launches. For the last 33 years, North Korea fired short-range missiles 64 times, for medium-range 23, for long-range 7, including satellite projectiles, and for SLBM

7. The North has fired the short and medium-range missiles the most, which have central metropolitan cities and the entire Korean Peninsula within their shooting range. What merits our attention is that the number of short-range missiles fired has doubled and that the intermediate-range missiles have increased six times under the Kim Jong-un era. The research showed that the North under Kim Il-sung had fired 15 missiles of all types, including short, medium, intermediate, and long-range missiles, for Kim Jong-il 58, and for Kim Jong-un as much as 211. An exponential surge in the number of missile launches has largely been attributed to an increased in short-range missiles (projectiles) and in particular, the medium-range missiles.

Fourth characteristic was found in the types of missiles. Scud-type missiles were launched 15 times with the KN-03 (the Hwasong-5, SRBM) and the KN-04 (the Hwasong-6, SRBM) most-frequently launched. Kim Jong-un launched more Scud-type or Scud-level missiles than before considering that there was no record of Scud-missile launches under Kim Jong-il. Short-range missiles, such as the KN-01, KN-02, and the KN-03, were fired 40 times, making up roughly 42% of the entire missile activities. What should be noted is that under the Kim Jong-un ruling, surface-to-air missiles were either released out in the public or test-launched, including the KN-06, KN-07 (the Hwasong-10), KN-09, KN-11 (the Pukguksong), KN-14 (the Hwasong-14, ICBM), KN-15 (the Pukguksong-2, MRBM), KN-16, and the KN-17 (the Hwasong-12, IRBM). The missile types have also become significantly diversified under the Kim Jong-un ruling, in stark comparison with the Kim Jong-il's simple missile line-up of the KN-01, KN-02, Rodong-1, and the Taepodong-1.

Fifth, a correlation was found between North Korea's nuclear and missile activities and ROK-US joint military exercise. In fact, 41 out of 71 activities occurred coinciding with the ROK-US joint military drill. Roughly 58% of the entire activities took place during or prior to this joint military exercise. Especially, the activities were mostly witnessed during joint theater level exercises, during which additional

American forces were dispatched. North Korea has meticulously adjusted their missile launches during the joint military exercise depending on the characteristics of such military drill. The North appears to have used the joint military drill as an excuse to systemize their war preparation exercise and launch various missiles. In short, Kim Jong-un, ever since he took power, has made the external tensions intensified with a series of missile provocations and threatening statements, which intentionally made April Crisis look imminent, and he has very actively utilized such tools for ruling and military purpose.

Sixth, nuclear and missile activities were detected prior to political events such as the presidential and parliamentary elections. After Kim Jong-un came to power, two presidential elections were held both in 2012 and in 2017 and two parliamentary elections took place in 2012 and 2016 in South Korea. And Pyongyang never forgot to launch missiles prior to all these four elections. It tends to launch intermediate-range missiles especially around the presidential election and inauguration of the new administration. However, those periods stand in comparison to Kim Jong-il's era in 2008 when only three ship-to-ship missiles were launched 12 days before the general election without additional provocations.

Next, there was a close link between the presidential election and inauguration cycle of the US and North Korea's nuclear and missile activities. In general, North Korea launches long-range missiles and conducts nuclear tests right after the US presidential election or inauguration. While it could be a mere coincidence, the North's nuclear tests tend to go along with the U.S. presidential election and inauguration period, especially accompanying intermediate range missile launches as a package. Pyongyang normally tends to consecutively carry out series of nuclear tests and launch intermediate-range missiles within one to six months after the presidential election and inauguration. This is indicative of North Korea's strong determination to influence formulating the US policy on North Korea at the early stage of the administration.

Seventh, North Korea repeatedly went ahead with provocations on a regular basis before and after a bilateral or multilateral summit meeting among South Korea, the US, and China. After Kim Jong-un came into power, 17 out of the total 71 nuclear and missile activities occurred at a time of bilateral-multilateral summit meetings between ROK, U.S., and China, a nuclear security summit, and G20 summit meeting with most of such provocations happening around the nuclear security summit. Most recently, an unidentified ballistic missile (assumed to be the KN-17) was launched a day before the first summit meeting between US President Trump and its Chinese counterpart Xi Jin-ping. Such provocation can be construed as a purpose to call the attention to the North Korean issue at the summit. Experts analyzed that with the launch of intermediate-range ballistic missile Hwasong-12, North Korea made their intention clear to go their own way. In other words, at a time when it should wait and see or seek a dialogue as opposed to going for provocation, it decided to launch a missile at their will according to their own schedule.

In conclusion, from the perspective of nuclear and missile activity patterns, the Kim Jong-un regime has chosen a highly-calculated political timing that enables it to use the created conditions, technical necessity, and the political message to their advantage. This is proven by its provocation patterns shown after the presidential elections and inauguration of both the US and ROK. Behind such highly-orchestrated political timing lies in the structural tension that exists between the sophisticatedly aligned system of Korea-US joint military drill and North Korea's military exercise. Therefore, it would be fair to say that North Korea leverages such tensions, logic grounded on the circumstantial evidence, technical necessity, and the political message in choosing the timing for nuclear and missile provocation. To that end, we should view the timing of the Kim regime's nuclear and missile activities as a meticulously calculated campaigning tactic in terms of structural inertia and highly political aspects. ©KINU 2017

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