

**II. THE NORTH KOREAN LEADERSHIP:
SYSTEM DYNAMICS AND FAULT LINES**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study offers findings of on-going research and analysis of the North Korean leadership. It provides the reader with a theory on the how the North Korean system operates. It discusses the potential for factions among the senior leadership, their interaction with Kim Chong-il, and strategies for maintaining regime stability. The paper also examines the sources of information available to the elite, both in terms of internal and external communications, and efforts to monitor and control access to such information. An effort is also made to describe the lens through which the leadership receives, assimilates, and interprets information. The paper is based in large measure on extensive interviews, conducted by the author over the past decade with a number of North Korean defectors and “Pyongyang watchers,” including former Russian and Chinese diplomats who have served in North Korea, former South Korean officials, journalists, and academics.¹

A. KEY FINDINGS

The Technology of Power

Since its inception, the North Korean regime has contained strains of indirection and informal channels of authority, which at the same time support and weaken formal regime structures. Like most totalitarian regimes, North Korea has both a formal political structure and an informal one. Traditionally, the formal structure of power has been composed of the party and state apparatuses. The institutions of both the party and state are essentially creations of Kim Chong-il (and his father) and are designed not to limit the Suryong’s (Leader’s) power, but to limit that of his subordinates and potential rivals and to facilitate the consolidation of his own authority. Conflicting lines of authority between party and state provide an ad hoc system of crosschecks and balances.

The informal leadership, which includes Kim Chong-il’s apparatus, controls real power by virtue of its proximity to Kim and its controls over the flow of information. This Praetorian Guard is linked to the Great Leader either by blood ties or bonds developed over decades of service to the Kim family. It is this group of loyal servants that Kim relies on to enforce order throughout the system and provide key advice in the decision-making process.

¹ The author would like to thank Jee Sun Lee, his research assistant, who assisted him with Korean language sources. Her contribution to this study was invaluable.

The factional struggles in North Korean history have come in two varieties: struggles for power and struggles for influence. When the leader is in full control, factionalism is restricted to the second echelon, but this can be transformed into warlordism when the system comes under duress at the top. At present, factional politics in North Korea appear to take place at the second echelon, where officials compete with each other to secure influence with Kim Chong-il.

Flow of Information

Kim Chong-il has taken great steps to ensure that he is the most informed member of the leadership and, at the same time, to restrict access for others. He is the only individual within the regime who has unrestricted access to foreign media. His sources of information include:

- An information management system whereby all documents are routed through his personal secretariat
- An extensive surveillance apparatus
- Alliances with key figures within the regime, such as his sister, Kim Kyong-hui
- Foreign intelligence gathering apparatus (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, KWP's International and External Liaison departments)
- "Third Floor" operatives

As for the rest of the leadership, information necessary to run the day-to-day affairs of the North Korean regime is highly compartmentalized and frequently monitored. This leads to a system of half knowledge and an illusion of being informed. Those at the top of the leadership have access to more sensitive information about the regime. But, even the most senior leaders are restricted in the amount of access they can have on issues related to the security of the regime. Sources of internal information available to leaders include:

- Staff-prepared reports
- Unofficial elite network
- Information technology (telephones, Internet, and Intranet)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chosun Central News Agency-routed reports
- Limited access to the North Korean diplomatic community

Implications for the Future

The long-term survival of the Kim Chong-il regime will be determined by Kim's ability to control the North Korean elite. Relying on a strategy of divide-and-rule and internally restricting the flow of information, he has been able to maintain his grip on the regime. But, this strategy has the tendency to create cleavages, which will increasingly make it difficult to manage all the power groups/elites. As pressure on the regime grows, three factors will be critical: legitimacy, system vulnerabilities, and warlordism.

Legitimacy

Kim Chong-il has already eroded much of this legitimacy by not following the pursuit of power through legally established channels when he assumed the portfolio of General Secretary in 1997. Up until now, this violation of party procedures has not led to direct challenges to Kim's authority. However, if pressure on the system continues to erode the foundation of privileges that support the elite, opposition to the dynastic succession, which exists beneath the surface, could erupt into a struggle for power. In such a struggle, the opposition could seize the initiative by highlighting Kim's lack of institutional legitimacy.

System Vulnerabilities

Many of the vulnerabilities of the North Korean system reside with the elite. It is a class that for decades has been insulated from the horrors that are experienced throughout the country. As the North Korean economy has deteriorated, many elites have opened trading companies to earn foreign currency. This in turn has led to increasing corruption and weakening of the cohesion of the privileged class. Since the North Korean system is based on "feudal service nobility," where loyalty is ensured through privilege, if the regime loses its ability to placate the elite through goods and services, factions opposed to the regime could emerge.

Warlordism

While the evidence of existing warlords within the North Korean system is speculative at best, the possibility for their creation is real. Most likely, they will emerge within Kim Chong-il's inner core of supporters. As Kim Chong-il continues to isolate his power by narrowing the channels of communication and transferring lines of authority between bureaucracies, he is not only causing deep fractures within the leadership, but also bringing the security forces into conflict with each other. These two outcomes have direct consequences for the elite, who see their access to the Suryong, and the perks associated with that access, threatened.

A. INTRODUCTION

By definition, a totalitarian regime is characterized by the isolation of power and a highly personalized leadership. Authority is not found in formalized institutions adhering to laws. On the contrary, it is found in an opaque set of rules that dictate the relationship between members of the elite and among the governing bureaucracies, all wrapped in a mythology, which enforces a hierarchy within the system and the bond between the leader and the privileged class. Maintaining this order is critical. The operational code of such regimes is dedicated to the preservation of order, with all other considerations of policy being subordinate to this aim.

North Korea is one of the last surviving totalitarian regimes. While it shares many of the characteristics of other such regimes, with its indisputable ruler (*Suryong*) and brand of mythology and hero worship (*chuche* ideology), in many ways, it is unique. Kim Il-sung's death in July 1994 paved the way for the only hereditary succession in a communist system. In addition, the model (based on the Soviet experience) through which outsiders understood the leadership dynamics of totalitarian systems was violated. Because of the need to lay the foundation for the dynastic transfer of power, the North Korean ruling structure by the 1970s gave way to the creation of a system within a system with Kim Chong-il at the center. Informal levers replaced formal channels of authority and control. In 1998, this informal leadership was sanctioned by a new constitution, which blurred the authority of the ruling apparatus and its connection to the *Suryong*.

Today, there is much speculation surrounding the viability of the Kim Chong-il regime. As the Dear Leader sought to ensure the hereditary succession, did he also create fault lines and structural instability within the system? In order to answer this question, this paper will address the issues of factionalism and sources and channels of information within the North Korean elite. These two factors can in many respects be used as diagnostic tools to understand system dynamics and the vulnerability of the regime to outside stimuli, such as initiatives from the United States.

After a discussion of the unique characteristics of the North Korean system, this paper will focus on the system dynamics under Kim Chong-il. Special attention will be paid to the fault lines and potential vulnerabilities. The existence of factions within the leadership will be studied. Are these factions tied to policy lines, patronage systems, or are they loosely based on common

interests? Do factions, to the extent that they exist, have a corrosive effect on the leadership? Are these factions struggling for power or influence? What sources of information are available to the elite that could have an impact on their political leanings? Finally, what factors affect the lens through which the leadership receives, assimilates, and interprets information, both internal and external?

B. SYSTEM DYNAMICS

The generally held view of North Korea as a totalitarian state, characterized by an all-powerful leader, a unitary ideology, and a subservient ruling apparatus, fails to capture the idiosyncrasy of the system. Since its inception, the North Korean regime has contained strains of indirection and informal channels of authority, which at the same time support and weaken the formal rule of law.

The idiosyncratic nature of the system is best understood in terms of channels of power and authority. From its inception in 1945, the North Korean regime has undergone numerous reconfigurations of power. It has been subject to hidden outside influence, intense factionalism, one-man dictatorship, two-man dictatorship, and quasi-wartime machinations which blur the lines between authority and dependence. Each period in North Korean history has left its residue on the system. It has created a body of precedents that the leadership can use either to consolidate power or guard against resurfacing again. With the exception of a limited time around the period of the 1972 constitution, this power has lacked a true formal structure governed by rules that outline the relationship between bureaucracies and define the nature of the leadership.

In order to understand the Kim Chong-il regime, it is critical to realize that it is a product of North Korean political history. It is critical to also understand that it is very different from the Kim Il-sung regime. Whereas Kim Il-sung ruled through charisma and by virtue of his credentials as a revolutionary leader, Kim Chong-il has no such legitimacy and relies on fear and secrecy. He is an insider who has been groomed from a very young age to operate within the Byzantine architecture of the North Korean regime, with all its intrigues and political challenges. As a result, he prefers informality and compartmentalization when dealing with the leadership. Formal channels are often ignored — a practice in sharp contrast to the way Kim Il-sung ran the regime.

C. THE TECHNOLOGY OF POWER

A Party Within a Party

Kim Chong-il's ambiguous leadership style has its roots in North Korean history. With the defeat of the Japanese and the creation of the North Korean state in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Soviet Union sought to create a satellite government responsive to the interests of the USSR. Soviet authorities focused their efforts on the creation of a strong indigenous regime, fashioned after their own political system, and susceptible to selective and covert forms of control.

The result of Soviet manipulation of the North Korean leadership was a complex structure of authority in which positions of prominence, held by men of national appeal, were largely differentiated from positions of power, held by men thoroughly loyal to the Soviet Union. Even though Kim Il-sung and his ex-partisan allies existed in both of these groups, many of the key positions of power were entrusted to Soviet-Koreans who were selected from the Korean communities in the Soviet Union and brought into North Korea after the close of the war with Japan for this special role.¹ Coincident with Kim's rise, the Communist Party organization at the central and provincial levels was infiltrated with Soviet-Koreans and Kim's Soviet-trained fellow partisans.

As the system began to take shape in the late 1940s, Kim Il-sung began to place most of his emphasis on the state apparatus in his post as prime minister. Ho Ka-i, a former Soviet Communist Party official, as the first secretary, took over the day-to-day operations of the Korean Worker's Party (KWP).² Evidence seems to indicate that by 1949, a shadow apparatus was being created within the regime, one that did not necessarily report to Kim Il-sung, but was used by the Soviet Union to exert influence within the system through Ho Ka-i and the Soviet-Koreans.

Within the KWP, the secret channel of information was run through the General Affairs Department/Secret Documents Department apparatus, which existed at the provincial and city levels.³ Essentially housekeeping entities, these two departments have traditionally played key functions in Stalinist systems. They served as a secretariat to the leading party decision-making

¹ In the period from 1945-50, the power and influence of the Korean leaders who had been trained in Yanan by the Chinese communists declined rapidly.

² At this point, there was no formal Secretariat. Three secretaries (Ho Ka-i, Yi Song-yop, Kim Sam-yong), acting through nine executive departments, oversaw party operations.

³ According to some interpretations of how this system worked, there was a division of labor where the Secret Documents departments assumed responsibility for classified files while the General Affairs departments concentrated on unclassified material. Discussion with Russian Korean watchers.

bodies by organizing meeting agendas, and contained a deciphering office and a chancellery whose function it was to control all incoming and outgoing secret documents. They were also responsible for the issuance and safekeeping of party cards, which made them vital to any power-building venture by the senior leadership. Finally, they kept the records and archives for the party. There is no doubt that the Soviet authorities responsible for monitoring Korean developments would have wanted to use this apparatus to their own ends. The 1949 merger of the two Korean communist parties led to a reorganization of the Central Committee apparatus. The General Affairs and Secret Departments, which had existed at the central level since 1945, were now incorporated into the executive staff under Ho Ka-i.⁴ Therefore, the information flow through the party apparatus, both in terms of guidance and control over the system, was run not out of the General Secretary's office, but the Executive staff.

This duality of control even extended into the state apparatus, where Kim Il-sung focused most of his authority. The Cabinet, as the "supreme executive organ," was the nucleus of the administrative operations and controls of the state. But, as in all communist systems, it was not without restraints and controls placed on it by the party. The Political Committee (Politburo) was the ultimate policy decision-making body. The Cabinet had some authority to participate in the broad policy objectives of the regime (especially in the area of the economy), but its main function was to carry out the party's decisions and supervise the government hierarchy. Kim Il-sung's position as prime minister was underwritten by his role as chairman of the KWP. Two of Kim's closest associates, Kim Chaek (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry) and Pak Ilu (Minister of Internal Affairs) were both members of the party's Political and Organizational committees.

The shadow apparatus, populated by the Soviet Koreans, had direct contact with the cabinet. In each ministry, the vice ministers were Soviet Koreans. According to one assessment done by the United States in the early 1950s, the vice ministers' "authority was considered greater than that of the minister."⁵ At the central level, this network exerted influence, if not control, through the Cabinet's housekeeping organs: the Bureau of General Affairs, Secretariat, and Bureau of Leaders, apparently a personnel agency for high-level appointments. These organs in turn had direct lines to the individual ministries via the personnel, general affairs, and

⁴ In 1945, the General Affairs Department was established. Its director was Pak Chong-ho, a close associate of Kim Il-sung and a member of his anti-Japanese partisan movement. Pak is the father of Pak Myong-chol, the current Chairman of the Physical Culture and Sports Guidance Commission.

⁵ *North Korea: A Case Study in the Techniques of Takeover* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1951). This report represented the findings of a State Department Research Mission sent to Korea on October 28, 1950, to conduct a survey of the North Korean regime as it operated before the outbreak of the Korean War. Its findings were declassified in 1961.

document control bureaus in each ministry. This organizational structure suggests that even though Kim Il-sung was prime minister, his ability to exert control over the system was limited.

Even the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which was under the leadership of Pak Ilu, was not immune from control of the shadow apparatus. In contrast to the tight reins maintained by the cabinet over most ministries, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was unique in its freedom from close cabinet supervision. The Soviet Union—through Soviet advisers, a relatively large number of Soviet Koreans, and probably representatives of the Soviet political police (MGB) establishment in North Korea—was, on the other hand, closely involved in this phase of government.

Nowhere was the influence of the Soviet Union more evident than in the ministry's political police, which had the maximum degree of freedom from external controls of the formal apparatus and the broadest authority to intervene throughout the apparatus. It even had a completely separate party organization independent of local party organs and responsible to the party only at Central Headquarters. The political police were contained within the ministry's Political Defense Bureau, which was responsible for enforcement of loyalty to the North Korean state. Pang Hak-se, a Soviet Korean, commanded the bureau. Soviet Koreans also held the deputy chief post (Nam Chang-yong), as well as the chiefs of four of the five offices (counterintelligence, investigation of political parties, surveillance of ministry personnel, and interrogation). By 1950, the bureau had attained the position of an elite corps in North Korea. Its power was evident in the awe with which both members of the bureaucracy and the general public held it.

Kim Chong-il's Rise to Power and Leadership Style

This system was destroyed in the 1950s with Kim Il-sung's purge of the Soviet faction. But, it laid the blueprint for Kim Chong-il's power-building strategy twenty years later.

Kim Il-sung used the revision of the constitution in 1972 to establish a formal ruling structure in North Korea. In addition to the creation of an office of the president, the new central government, unlike the old one under the 1948 constitution, separated policy-making functions performed by the newly created Central People's Committee (CPC) from the policy-execution functions to be carried out by the Administration Council.⁶ While ultimate decision-making authority remained in the KWP's Politburo, the state was made much more active and Kim Il-sung began to shift his ruling apparatus to the presidential administration.

⁶ The CPC was created specifically to control and supervise the state bureaucracy, whose performance and efficiency were of concern to Kim Il-sung in the 1960s.

This vision came into conflict with Kim Chong-il's own vision, which preferred to maintain ultimate control within the party apparatus. In the period from 1972 to 1974, Kim Chong-il's leadership position within the party was defined. At the 7th plenum, 5th session of the Central Committee in September 1973, he was elected to the Secretariat, holding the portfolios for both the Organization Guidance Department and the Propaganda and Agitation Department. In 1974, he was elected to the Politburo. As Kim Chong-il began to assume more control over the party, the power that Kim Il-sung had delegated to the state began to revert to the party. At the same time, the roles and functions of the president and the CPC began to be curtailed.

Kim Chong-il used the Organizational Guidance Department and a rigorous inspection guidance system to identify and co-opt critical nodes within the party, state, military, and security apparatuses. His network resembled that of the old Soviet network, relying on second echelon apparatchiks to perform surveillance and control functions. Particular focus was placed on the organizational elements within ministries and departments. These parts of the bureaucracy reported directly to Kim Chong-il via the Organizational Guidance Department. Once this foothold had been established within a bureaucracy, tentacles were spread out to other offices through guidance and discipline measures. In addition to this informal apparatus of control, Kim Chong-il took increasingly bold measures to undermine, compromise, and otherwise bend the senior leadership to his will. This included a system of phone tapping and other measures of surveillance, which stretched all the way up and included Kim Il-sung's personal office.⁷

By the 1980s, a dualistic power arrangement — a duopoly of sorts — existed within the North Korean regime.⁸ There were two semi-independent hierarchies of authority and two self-sustaining chains of command—one leading to Kim Il-sung and another leading to Kim Chong-il, with little interaction and communication between them. While, officially, all party and state bodies were subordinated to the President of the Republic, the General Secretary of the WPK, and the Supreme Commander-in-Chief Kim Il-sung, Kim Chong-il's informal surveillance network existed beneath the surface; and by the early 1990s, it was this apparatus that was running the country.

Since taking power in 1994, Kim Chong-il's leadership style of relying on informal channels has been strengthened. A quasi-wartime crisis management system has been created.

⁷ Hwang Chang-yop's memoirs (*I Saw the Truth of History*. Seoul: Hanul, 1999). Published in FBIS in 1999 at the following reference sources: KPP20030526000025, KPP20030526000027, KPP20030526000028, KPP20030610000113, KPP20030610000114, KPP20030610000115, KPP20030610000116, KPP20030610000117, KPP20030610000118.

⁸ Alexandre Mansourov was the first to espouse this concept of a "duopoly" in his article *DPRK After Kim Il-sung: Is a Second Republic Possible?* This paper was prepared for an international conference on "North Korea After Kim Il-sung" held in Melbourne Australia on September 26-27, 1994.

Originally implemented in 1994 and formalized in 1998 to ostensibly manage a deteriorating economy and a growing confrontation with the United States over North Korea's nuclear program, this system provides a framework for Kim Chong-il to build and isolate his power. It remains in effect probably to prevent a coup and to cope with the country's serious internal problems, thus guarding against internal instability. Operating under a crisis management mode allows Kim Chong-il, as either the Supreme Commander or chairman of a staunch group of loyalists who staff the NDC, to easily and legitimately direct the military forces, affect military personnel changes, mobilize the country to a war footing, and command sectors of the economy.

The informal nature of this system is apparent. Institutions and bureaucracies exist; elaborate legal procedures and regulations provide the outlines of formal rule. But the formal legal framework is often violated by a body of secret and unpublished circulars, regulations, decrees, orders, resolutions, and so on, which supercede published norms. Although various party and state institutions are invested with certain well-defined formal functions and powers, identifiable lines of legal responsibility, and specified procedures, the actual process is different.

The North Korean political superstructure is a complicated mosaic of shifting and interlocking, but relatively simple institutions, resting upon the entrenched foundation of one-man dictatorship, in which all powers are delegated from Kim Chong-il. The institutions of both the party and state, in terms of both their relationships with one another and the relationships of various organs within the party and state structures to each other, are essentially creations of Kim Chong-il (and his father) and are designed not to limit the *Suryong's* power, but to limit that of his subordinates and potential rivals and to facilitate the consolidation of his own authority. Conflicting lines of authority between party and state provide an ad hoc system of crosschecks and balances.

Kim Chong-il, by most accounts, does not subscribe to a deliberative policy-making process. Inputs from other senior leaders is circumscribed and tailored to fit what they think he wants to hear. This prevents the regime from devising long-term policies and reacting quickly to outside stimuli. In addition, the decision-making process is highly personalized. As such, challenges to the regime, either internal or external, are easily wrapped up in power politics.

The Role of Family and Key Relationships

Power and leadership in the North Korean political system has its own unique characteristics. It derives from a staunchly traditional Confucian culture, in which the family is the central socializing element and the father functions as an authoritarian figure in the family. This culture is reflected in the political system through a curious blend of nepotism, a dominant

leader, and an individualized conglomerate of military and civilian leadership.⁹ In many respects, it is this Confucian culture that lends legitimacy to the leader and his regime.

From its earliest days, the North Korean regime practiced nepotism, placing Kim Il-sung's relatives and close associates into key posts in the ruling troika (party, state, and military) as part of the father-to-son dynastic succession plan. Under Kim Il-sung, relatives held about 24 key positions in the North Korean apparatus.

Table II-1. Key Family Members in the Kim Il-sung Regime

Name	Relation	Position	Ranking
Kim Il-sung		General Secretary, President	1
Kim Chong-il	Eldest son of Kim Il-sung	Politburo, Secretariat, Chairman of NDC	2
Kang Song-san	Younger maternal cousin of Kim Il-sung	Politburo, Premier	4
Pak Song-chol	Son-in-law of Kim Hyong-nok, uncle of Kim Il-sung	Politburo Vice President	5
Kim Tal-hyon	Husband of Kim Il-sung's second niece	Alternate Politburo, Deputy Premier, Chairman, External Economic Commission, Trade Minister	14
Kim Yong-sun	Younger brother of Kim Chong-suk, ex-wife of Kim Il-sung	Alternate Politburo Secretariat Chief, KWP International Dept.	19
Hwang Chang-yop	Husband of Kim Il-sung's niece	Secretariat Vice Chairman, Committee for Peaceful Unification	27
Kim Chung-nin	Wife of Kim Yong-chu, younger brother of Kim Il-sung	Secretariat, Chairman, Qualifications Committee (Central People's Assembly)	28
Kim Chang-chu	Son of Kim Hyong-nok, uncle of Kim Il-sung	Deputy Premier	32
Kang Sok-sung	Relative of Kim Il-sung on his mother's side	Head, Institute of KWP History	38
Yang Hyong-sop	Husband of Kim Sin-suk, daughter of Kim Il-sung's father's sister	Chairman, SPA	42

⁹ Kim Byung-ki and Soh Chang-rok, "The Dilemma of North Korean Reform: Where is it Going?" *East Asian Review*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Winter 2000), pp. 105-19.

Table II-1. Key Family Members in the Kim Il-sung Regime (continued)

Name	Relation	Position	Ranking
Kim Bong-ju	Son of Kim Hyong-nok, uncle of Kim Il-sung, younger brother of Kim Chang-ju	Chairman, Democratic Front for the Unification of the Fatherland	51
Kang Hyon-su	Son of Kang Yong-sok, Kim Il-sung's mother's brother	Member CPC	101
Chang Song-u	Elder brother of Chang Song-taek	Director Political Bureau, Public Security Ministry	104
Kim Song-ae	Wife of Kim Il-sung	Chairman, Democratic Women's League	116
Kim Kyong-hi	Eldest daughter of Kim Il-sung, wife of Chang Song-taek	Director, KWP Light Industry Dept.	173
Yi Yong-mu	Nephew of Yi Bo-ik, Kim Il-sung's grandmother	Chairman, Transportation Commission	174
Kim Chong-suk	Second daughter of Kim Hyong-won, Kim Il-sung's uncle	Editor-in-Chief, Minju Choson	291
Chang Song-taek	Son-in-law of Kim Il-sung, husband of Kim Kyong-hui	1st Vice Director, OGD	302
Kim Pyong-il	Second son of Kim Il-sung and Kim Song-ae, half brother of Kim Chong-il	Ambassador to Bulgaria	
Kim Chong-u	Kim Il-sung's cousin	Chairman, External Economics Committee	
Kang Dok-su Vice	Son of Kang Bo-sok, Kim Il-sung's uncle on his mother's side	Chairman, Choson Broadcasting Corp.	
Kang In-su	Son of Kang Bo-sok, Kim Il-sung's uncle on his mother's side	Vice Minister, Chemical Industry	
Kang Yong-sop	Cousin of Kim Il-sung's mother (son of Kang Yang-uk)	Chairman, Choson Christian League	
Kim Chon-gu	Son of Kim Il-sung's father's sister	Vice Minister, External Economic Ministry	

Under Kim Chong-il, the family-based patronage system has declined, with fewer direct family members occupying senior leadership portfolios. By 1996, close relatives of the Kim family within the leadership numbered six. Besides Kim Chong-il, they included Kim Kyong-hui, Chang Song-taek, Kim Yong-chu (Kim Il-sung's brother, who returned to the leadership in 1992,

both in the Politburo and as a vice president), Yang Hyong-sop, and Kang Chu-il (a maternal nephew of Kim Il-sung, who was the first deputy director of the KWP CC United Front Department). Within the Central Committee, the number of Kim relatives has climbed slightly since the 1980s, but is down from the 1970s (Table 2).

Table II-2. Kim Family Members in the Central Committee*¹⁰

	1970s		1980s		1990s	
	Numbers	Percentage	Numbers	Percentage	Numbers	Percentage
Family	9	7.8	9	6.2	12	6.7

*Missing value: 1970s-107, 1980s-136, 1990s-166

As for those within the top 30 of the leadership, the percentage dropped dramatically by the outset of the Kim Chong-il regime (Table 3).

Table II-3. Kim Family Members in the Central Committee Leadership*¹¹

	1970s		1980s		1990s	
	Numbers	Percentage	Numbers	Percentage	Numbers	Percentage
Family	5/9	55.6	5/9	55.6	5/12	41.7

*Family within the top 30 ranking Central Committee members.

One area where blood relationships have increased is among relatives of key Kim Chong-il supporters, thus creating a fabric of familial relationships in support of the regime. For example, Chang Song-taek's two brothers began to rise in prominence under Kim Chong-il. Chang Song-u, who had begun his rise under Kim Il-sung, was appointed the commander of the 3rd Corps, while Chang Song-kil, was made deputy commander of the 4th Corps. This has allowed Kim Chong-il to create a web of connections spread across several families.¹²

Under Kim Chong-il, the family-based patronage system, therefore, appears to have been replaced by a relationship-based system. The succession struggle of the 1970s between Kim Yang-chu and Kim Chong-il, as well as the internal struggles within the Kim family following Kim Il-sung's death, convinced Kim Chong-il to place increasing emphasis on a selected group

¹⁰ Based on statistics provided by Yi U-young, "Character Change of North Korean Elites," Korean Institute for National Unification (2002) (in Korean).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² This is a power-building strategy popular to regimes in the Middle East. The belief is that by investing many key families in the fate of the regime, risk is dispersed and the fabric of protection is strengthened. See author's article "Can Saddam's Security Apparatus Save Him?" *Jane's Intelligence Review* (November 2002).

of associates who trace their relationship to him from different angles. This not only necessitated a very cautious power building strategy based on letting first generation leaders die off and elevating second generation leaders to key posts, it also made it vital that Kim Chong-il not tie his ability to lead strictly to the formal leadership.¹³ As such, Kim retains some of Kim Il-song's close associates to serve as a bridge to the country's revolutionary past. Most of the key positions within the regime, however, are occupied by people of Kim's generation who hail from the Three Revolution Movement squads, the classmates of the Mangyongdae Revolutionary Institute, and the graduates of the Nassan School and the Kim Il-sung University, all key institutions in Kim Chong-il's background. The table below illustrates some of the most prominent leaders within the Kim Chong-il regime and their critical relationships.

Table II-4. Illustrative Relationships in the Kim Chong-il Regime

Name	Position	Relationship(s)	Kim Chong-il Relationship
Kim Kyong-hui	Director, KWP Light Industry Department		Kim Chong-il's sister. Wife of Chang Song-taek.
Kim Yong-nam	President, SPA	Brother of Kim Tu-nam, former military aide –de-camp to Kim Il-sung and Kim Ki-nam. May be related to Kim Chong-il through marriage.	In 1960s, helped purge KWP International Department of Pak Kum-chol/Pak Yong-kuk faction.
Kim Yong-sun	Former KWP Secretary for ROK/Japan Affairs (deceased)	Close friend of Kim Kyong-hui	
Yon Hyong-muk	Member NDC	Related to a partisan compatriot of Kim Il-sung. Yon also reportedly had a close relationship with the late Kim.	Economic adviser to Kim Chong-il. Worked in the OGD and Three Revolution Teams.
Kim Chol-Man	Former Member NDC		Worked with Kim Chong-il in establishing Kim Il-sung's system of unitary leadership.

¹³ The most insightful work being done on Kim Chong-il's power building strategy is by Jei Guk Jeon, a freelance scholar in Seoul. Jei argues that Kim has employed a balancing act between political forces. This strategy, which is characterized by inclusive politics, honor-power sharing arrangements, and divide-and-rule tactics, has turned out to be an effective way of clearing away potential cleavages built into the ruling circle. See "The Politics of Mourning Ritual in North Korea (1994-1997)," *World Affairs* (Winter 2000); "North Korean Leadership: Kim Jong-il's Intergenerational Balancing Act," *The Strategic Forum*, No. 152 (December 1998).

Table II-4. Illustrative Relationships in the Kim Chong-il Regime (continued)

Name	Position	Relationship(s)	Kim Chong-il Relationship
VM Cho Myong-nok	First Vice Chairman NDC, Director GPB	Rumored to be rival of O Kuk-yol.	Studied at Mangyongdae Revolutionary Institute.
VM Kim Il-chol	Minister of People's Armed Forces	Counterweight to Cho Myong-nok	Rumored to be a relative of Kim Chong-il.
VM Paek Hak-nim	Former Minister of Public Security		Former bodyguard of Kim Il-sung. Faithful servant to Kim family.
VM Pak Ki-so	Commander, Pyongyang Defense Command		Kim Chong-il's cousin.
VM Kim Yong-chun	Member NDC, Chief, KPA General Staff		Uncovered coup attempt in 1994-95.
VM Chang Song-u	Commander, 3 rd Corps	Older brother of Chang Song-taek	Rumored to be close to Kim Chong-il
Gen. Yi Myong-su	Director, General Staff Operations Bureau		Former Chief of Staff to Chang Song-u, Commander of 3 rd Corps and brother of Chang Song-taek.
Kang Sok-chu	First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs	Close career relationship with Kim Yong-nam	Enjoys Kim Chong-il's trust.
Kim Gye-gwan	Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs	Protégé of Kim Yong-nam	Wife was translator to Kim Song-ae, which hurt his standing with Kim Chong-il.
Yi Yong-ho	Ambassador at Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Adviser to Kang Sok-chu on issues relating to U.S.	Rumored to be the son of Yi Myong-chaе, member of Kim Chong-il's personal secretariat.
Ho Chong	Ambassador at Large	Close to Kang Sok-chu and Kim Yong-nam.	
Pak Kil-yon	Ambassador to UN	Close to Kang Sok-chu and Ko Yong-hui (Kim Chong-il's mistress).	

Measuring Influence

There are numerous ways of dividing the North Korean leadership in an effort to measure influence. The most recognizable way is through leadership ranking, which is obtained through official postings (such as obituaries) and observations made at official functions. The leadership ranking at the commemorative troop review and mass demonstration marking the 55th anniversary of the founding of the North Korean state, which opened at Kim Il-song Square on

September 9, 2003, showed a change in which Pak Pong-chu, the newly appointed Cabinet premier, ascended to number six, while Guard Commander Yi Ul-sol (KPA marshal), who until last year had been in the top-10 ranking, was pushed out of the top 20. In addition to this, Chang Song-u, has entered the top 20 for the first time, which reveals a significant increase in his standing within the North Korean military.

Table II-5. Leadership Rankings 2000-2003

Order	25 Apr 00 KPA Founding	9 Sep 01 State Founding	25 Apr 02 KPA Founding	3 Sep 03 1st Session of 11th SPA	9 Sep 03 State Founding
1	-	-	Kim Chong-il	Kim Chong-il	Kim Chong-il
2	Kim Yong-nam	Kim Yong-nam	Kim Yong-nam	Kim Yong-nam	Kim Yong-nam
3	Cho Myong-nok	Hong Song-nam	Chong Myong-nok	Cho Myong-nok	Cho Myong-nok
4	Kim Yong-ch'un	Kim Il-ch'ol	Pak Song-ch'ol	Pak Song-ch'ol	Pak Song-ch'ol
5	Kim Il-ch'ol	Yi Ul-sol	Kim Yong-chu	Kim Yong-chu	Kim Yong-chu
6	Yi Ul-sol	Paek Hak-nim	Hong Song-nam	Hong Song-nam	Pak Pong-chu
7	Hong Song-nam	Chon Pyong-ho	Kim Yong-ch'un	Kim Yong-ch'un	Kim Yong-ch'un
8	Kye Ung-t'ae	Kim Ch'ol-man	Kim Il-ch'ol	Kim Il-ch'ol	Kim Il-ch'ol
9	Paek Hak-nim	Kye Ung-t'ae	Yi Ul-sol	Chon Pyong-ho	Yon Hyong-muk
10	Yi Yong-mu	Han Song-yong	Paek Hak-nim	Yon Hyong-muk	Yi Yong-mu
11	Kim Ch'ol-man	Ch'oe T'ae-pok	Chon Pyong-ho	Han Song-yong	Chon Pyong-ho
12	Ch'oe T'ae-pok	Yang Hyong-sop	Yon Hyong-muk	Kye Ung-t'ae	Han Song-yong
13	Yang Hyong-sop	Kim Chung-nin	Han Song-yong	Yi Yong-mu	Kye Ung-t'ae
14	Ch'oe Yong-nim	Kim Yong-sun	Kye Ung-t'ae	Yi Ul-sol	Kim Ch'ol-man
15	Kim Kuk-t'ae	Chong Ha-ch'ol	Kim Ch'ol-man	Paek Hak-nim	Ch'oe T'ae-pok
16	Kim Ki-nam	Yi Yong-mu	Ch'oe T'ae-pok	Kim Ch'ol-man	Yang Hyong-sop
17	Kim Chung-nin	Kim Ik-hyon	Yang Hyong-sop	Yang Hyong-sop	Kim Kuk-t'ae
18	Kim Ik-hyon	Kim Yong-yon	Ch'oe Yong-nim	Ch'oe T'ae-pok	Chong Ha-ch'ol
19	Yi Ha-il	Kwak Pom-ki	Kim Kuk-t'ae	-	Kim Chung-nin
20	Kim Yun-hyok	Kim Yun-hyok	Chong Ha-ch'ol	-	Chang Song-u

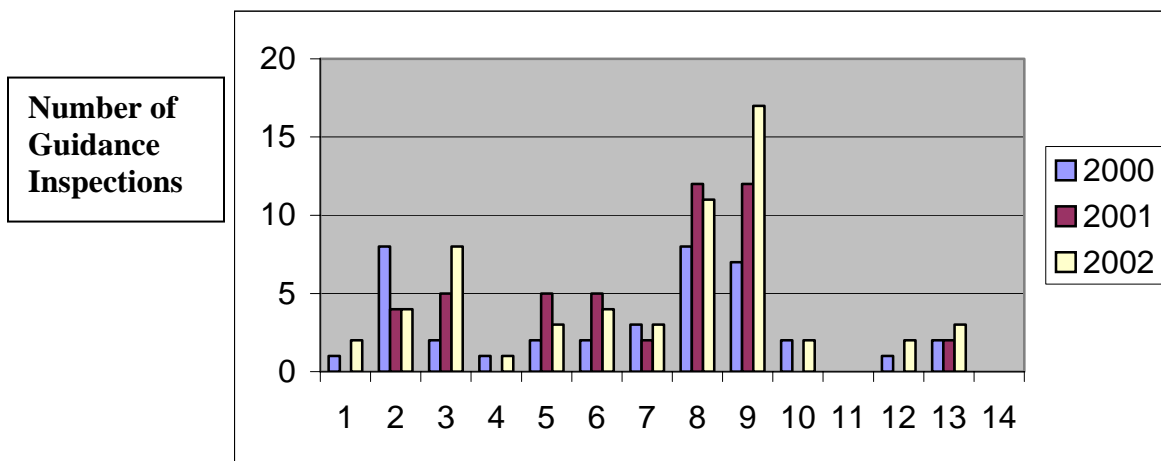
Guidance Inspections

Official positions and functions may provide some clues as to which leaders have access to Kim Chong-il, but the question of who has the North Korean leader's confidence is difficult to

answer. One method of identifying key leaders within the North Korean system is observing the amount of times a person accompanies Kim Chong-il on one of his inspection tours. Because of Kim Chong-il's reluctance to preside over meetings and due to his preference for behind-the-scenes national administration, the role of the Politburo and other traditional centers of power have deteriorated, whereas the positions of those who accompany Kim on his on-the-spot guidance tours (such as members of the Secretariat and military) have been enhanced.

The charts below are based on figures gathered by the South Korean Ministry of National Unification. They are divided by institution and portray the number times each member of that institution accompanied Kim Chong-il on one of his guidance tours. They cover the years 2000-2002.¹⁴ As the charts reveal, members of the National Defense Commission, the KWP Secretariat, and the Central Committee apparatus participated in the most visits. It should be noted, however, that while this methodology is useful in highlighting certain trends within the upper echelons of the leadership, it does not entirely reveal which leaders have real influence.

Chart II-1: Politburo

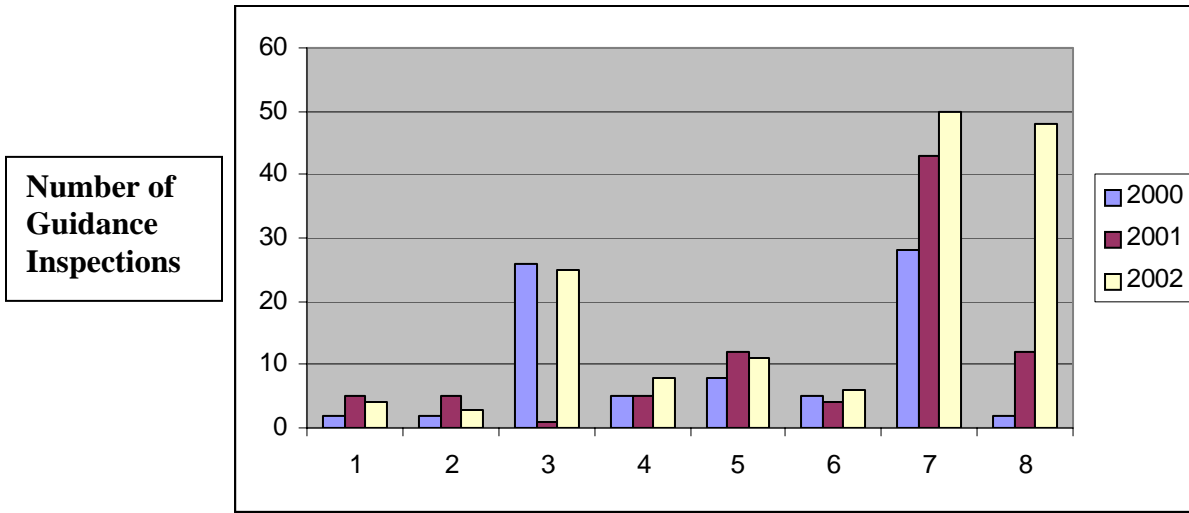


- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Pak Sung-chol | 8. Choi Tae-bok |
| 2. Kim Yong-nam | 9. Yun Hyong-muk |
| 3. Jon Byong-ho | 10. Kim Chol-man |
| 4. Kim Young-ju | 11. Hong Suk-hyung |

¹⁴ A thorough breakdown of Kim Chong-il's appearances for 2003 had not been completed by the time of this paper's publication, although some conclusions could be made. According to Radio Press, Kim Chong-il made 86 appearances in 2003, falling from 117 in 2002. Those related to military affairs represented 65 percent, as opposed to 27 percent in 2002. Most frequently, he was accompanied by military officials, in contrast to 2002, when party officials mostly accompanied him. Those most frequently reported in his company were as follows: Hyon Chol-hae (38), Pak Chae-kyong (35), Yi Mung-su (32), Kim Yong-chun (25), Yi Yong-chul (19), Kim Ki-nam (19), Kim Kuk-tae (17), Kim Yong-sun (16), Choe Chun-hwang (14), Kim Il-chol (13), Chong Song-taek (12).

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 5. Kye Ung-tae | 12. Choi Yong-nim |
| 6. Han Sung-nyong | 13. Hong Sung-nam |
| 7. Yang Hyong-sup | 14. Yi Son-sil |

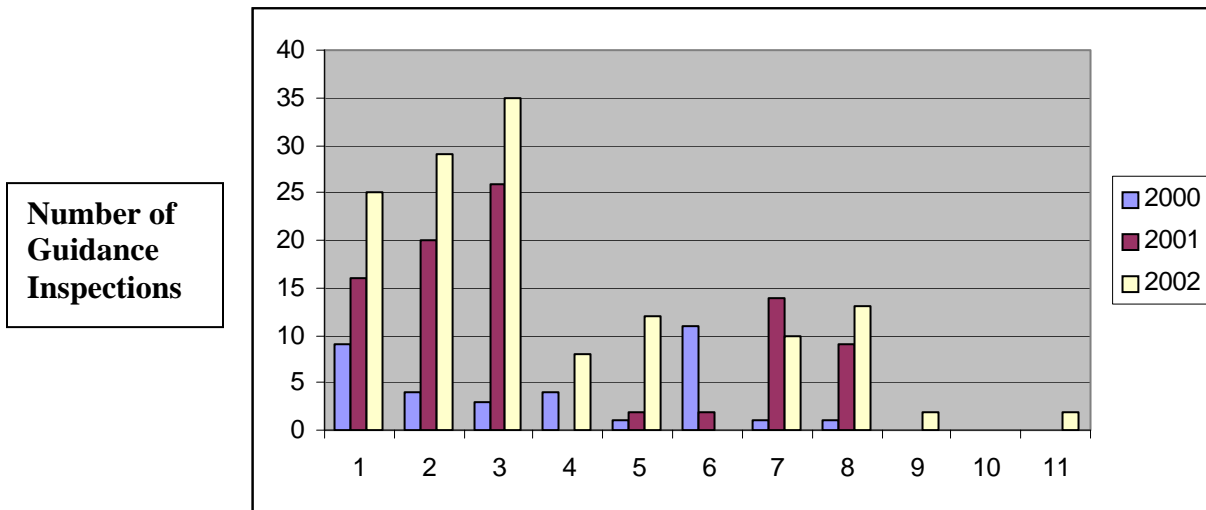
Chart II-2: Secretariat



Members

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Han Sung-yong | 5. Choi Tae-bok |
| 2. Kye Ung-tae | 6. Kim Chung-nim |
| 3. Kim Yong-sun | 7. Kim Kuk-tae |
| 4. Chon Pyung-ho | 8. Kim Ki-nam |

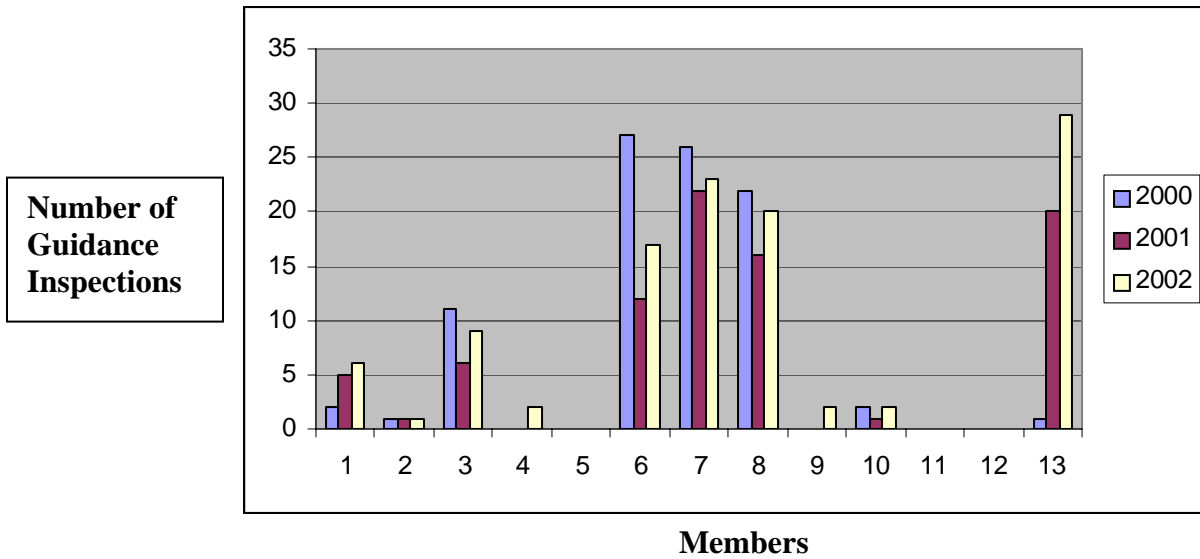
Chart II-3: Central Committee Apparatus



Members

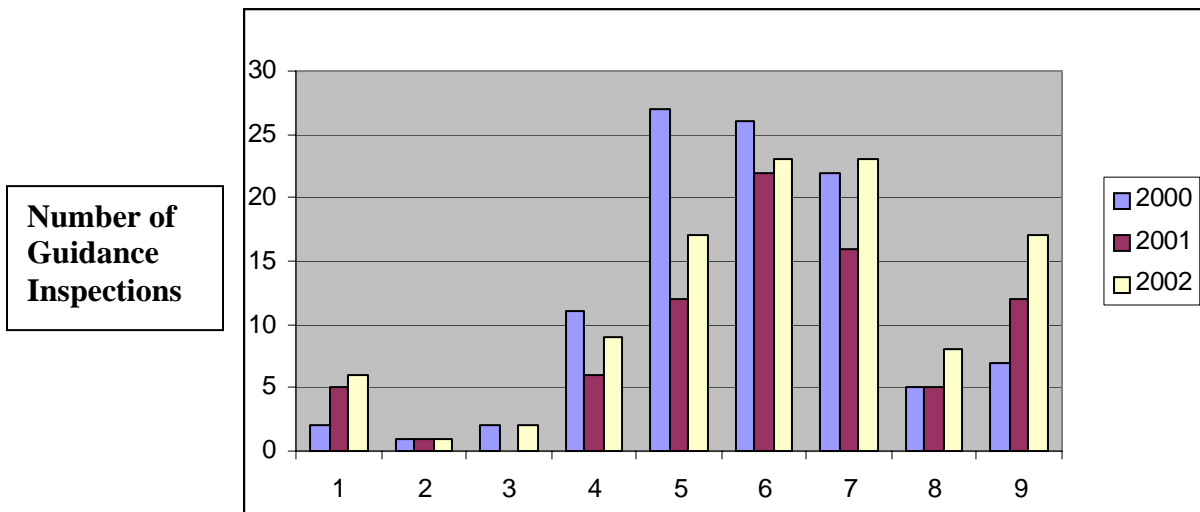
- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Chang Song-taek | 5. Chi Chae-ryong | 9. Yi Ha-il |
| 2. Yi Yong-chol | 6. Pak Song-bong | 10. O Kuk-ryul |
| 3. Chung Ha-chol | 7. Ju Kyu-chang | 11. Kim Ik-Hyun |
| 4. Choi Chun-hwang | 8. Kang Suk-ju | |

Chart II-4: Central Military Commission



- | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Yi Ul-sol | 6. Cho Myung-nok | 11. O Yong-bang |
| 2. Paek Hak-nim | 7. Kim Yong-chun | 12. Kim Myung-kuk |
| 3. Yi Yong-mu | 8. Kim Il-chol | 13. Yi Yong-chul |
| 4. Kim Ik-hyun | 9. Yi Ha-il | |
| 5. Yi Du-ik | 10. Pak ki-so | |

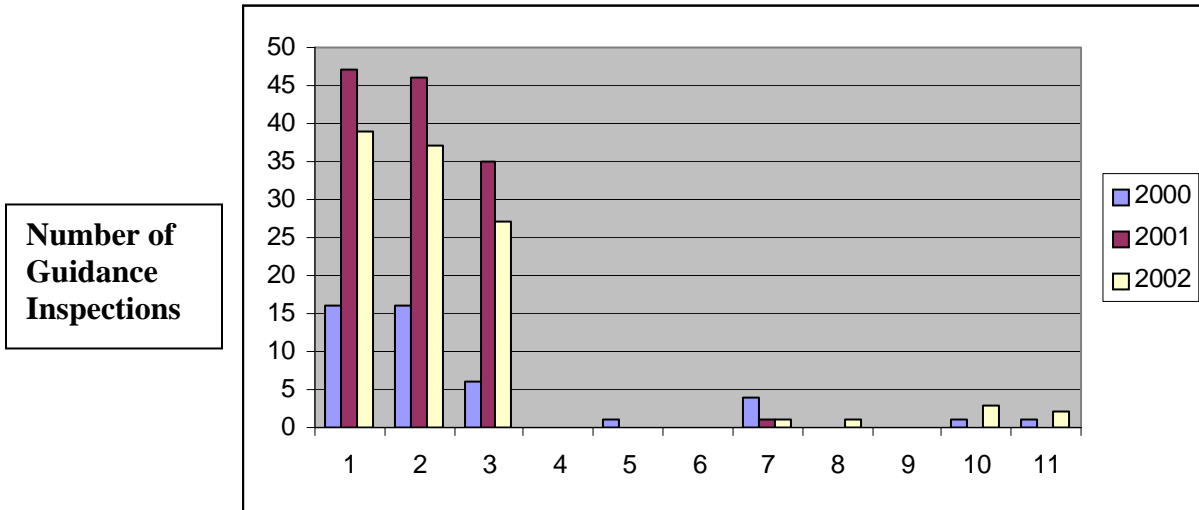
Chart II-5: National Defense Commission



Members

- | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Yi Ul-sul | 4. Yi Yong-mu | 7. Kim Il-chul |
| 2. Paek Hak-nim | 5. Cho Myong-nok | 8. Chon Pyong-ho |
| 3. Kim Chul-man | 6. Kim Yong-chun | 9. Yon Hyong-muk |

Chart II-6: Military Institutions



Members

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. Hyun Chul-hae | 7. Chon Chae-sun |
| 2. Pak Chae-kyung | 8. Chang Song-u |
| 3. Yi Mung-su | 9. Kim Myung-kuk |
| 4. Won Ung-hui | 10. O Kum-chul |
| 5. Kim Ki-sun | 11. Kim Yun-sim |
| 6. Kim Ha-kyu | |

Access

Influence is now measured not so much by blood ties or position, but by other factors. In the early part of the Kim Chong-il regime, access was a measure of influence. Access was concentrated in the KWP Secretariat and CC apparatus. Most, if not all, party secretaries were able to directly report to Kim Chong-il regarding policy-making.¹⁵ They included Kye Ung-tae, Chon Pyong-ho, Han Song-yong, Cho Tae-pok, Kim Ki-nam, Kim Kuk-tae, Hwang Chang-yop (defected), and Kim Yong-sun (died). By 1998, under the institution of the quasi-wartime management system, the nature of influence was transformed. Access to the supreme leader has

¹⁵ This is the general consensus of the Pyongyang watchers I interviewed.

been severely curtailed.¹⁶ Kim Chong-il relies on carefully placed lieutenants within the second echelon as his key sources of information and power management. Therefore, influence is measured not so much by access (few have it), but by being a source who receives direct instructions from Kim Chong-il. As the Kim Chong-il regime has reformulated the lines of power, those receiving instructions have tended to be pushed further down into the apparatus, mainly at the deputy director/commander level.

In order to understand where true power lies in the system, one should look not at the formal institutions, but at the patronage system within the institutions. By virtue of Kim Chong-il's patronage system, the role of the first vice director is critical.¹⁷ According to numerous defector accounts, the four most powerful men in North Korea are the first vice directors of the Organization Guidance Department: Yom Ki-sun (in charge of Party Central Committee), Yi Yong-ch'ol (military), Chang Song-t'aek (administration), and Yi Che-kang (personnel management). Other Central Committee first vice directors, include Choi Chun-hwang (Department of Propaganda and Agitation), Yim Tong-ok (Reunification Propaganda Department) and Chu Kyu-ch'ang (Munitions Manufacturing Department). Within the military, the same type of patronage system exists, as can be seen in the examples of Gen. Pak Chae-kyong and Gen. Yi Myong-su. Both reside within the second echelon of the military leadership and appear to have been tapped by Kim as sources of information and intelligence. Pak Chae-kyong is a vice director of the General Political Bureau and oversees propaganda ideological training for the KPA. Yi Myong-su (63) is the director of the General Staff's Operations Bureau,¹⁸ which is responsible for all operational aspects of the KPA, including the general operational planning for the Air Force, Navy, Workers'-Peasants' Red Guard, and Paramilitary Training units.¹⁹ A close associate of Chang Song-u, Yi has a direct channel to Kim Chong-il.²⁰ In cases of emergency, Kim can by-pass the chain of command and communicate directly with the Operations Bureau.

¹⁶ Party secretaries now mainly report directly to Kim Chong-il's personal secretariat. Chung Ha-chul (Secretary, Propaganda) is believed to still carry influence within the Secretariat. Kim's key supporters in the early part of his reign, including Kye Ung-tae (Secretary, Public Security), Choi Tae-bok (Secretary, Science Education), are believed to be declining in influence.

¹⁷ Kim Kwang-in, "Change of Kim's Associates," <http://nkchosun.com>, December 31, 2003.

¹⁸ Yi Myong-su took over from Kim Myung-kuk, who moved over to become commander of the 108th Mechanized Army. He was an influential figure in the early years of Kim Chong-il's reign.

¹⁹ Joseph Bermudez, *The Armed Forces of North Korea*. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 2001), p. 40. It is also rumored that the Operations Bureau may serve as an information facilitating body for NDC directives to the KPA, a relationship similar to the one that existed between the Soviet General Staff's Operation Directorate and the Defense Council.

²⁰ Yi's relationship with Chang dates back to at least the early 1990s when Yi was commander of the 5th Corps.

Table II-6. Kim Chong-il's Principal Supporters

Name	Position
<i>First Echelon Supporters</i> ²¹	
Kim Yong-nam	Politburo Member
Kye Ung-tae	Politburo Member
Chon Pyong-ho	Politburo Member
Han Song-yong	Politburo Member
Kim Kyong-hui	Director, KWP Light Industry Department
Kim Yong-woo	Chairman, Economic Cooperation Committee
VM Kim Yong-chun	Chief of General Staff
V. Mar. Cho Myong-nok	Director, General Political Bureau
Gen. Won Ung-hui	Commander, Security Command
Mar. Yi Ul-sol	Commander, Guard Command
<i>Second Echelon Supporters</i>	
Chang Song-taek	1st Vice Director, OGD
Yi Yong-chol	1st Vice Director, OGD (Military Affairs), Member, KWP CMC
Yom Ki-sum	1st Vice Director, OGD
Yi Chi-kang	1st Vice Director, OGD
Mun Myong-on	1st Vice Director, OGD
Yim Tong-ok	1st Vice Director, Reunification Department
Chu Kyu-chang	1st Vice Director, Munitions Department
Kang Sok-chu	1 st Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs
Gen. Yi Myong-su	Director, General Staff Operations Bureau
Gen. Pak Chae-kyong	Deputy Director, GPB Propaganda Bureau
Gen. Hyon Chol-hae	Deputy Director, GPB Organization Bureau (oversees military personnel affairs)
VM Chang Song-u	Commander, Third Corps
Yi Nun-sil	Vice Commander, Guard Bureau
Lt. Gen. Chang Song-kil	Political Committee Member, 820 th Tank Corps. Reported links to KPA intelligence.

As in all totalitarian regimes, power can be understood as a series of concentric circles surrounding the pre-eminent leader.²² The above discussion referenced the outer circles of power. The innermost circle includes those in closest proximity to Kim Chong-il: members of his

²¹ In this chart, “echelon” refers to the formal position of the person in the apparatus. Those in the first echelon are either in decision-making positions or control specific bureaucracies. Those in the second echelon are key players within specific institutions.

²² The concept of concentric circles as a way of understanding totalitarian regimes is not new, but was developed in the 1930s as a way of explaining the Nazi and Stalinist regimes. The concentric circles refer to the tiers within the leadership based on access to the pre-eminent leader. Those within the inner circle enjoy the greatest access, trust, and access to information. Those in the second tier are normally associated with security functions and portfolios. Those in the third tier are also associated with security functions, but not necessarily part of the Praetorian Guard. Family relationships and patronage systems cut across all the circles.

personal apparatus. The source of much speculation by North Korean watchers, Kim Chong-il's personal secretariat wields influence by virtue of its "gatekeeping" function.²³ Often compared to the royal order system that operated during the Chosun Dynasty (1392-1910), Kim Chong-il's personal secretariat has no official sanction and rarely is mentioned in the North Korean press. It receives, classifies, and facilitates documents addressed to the chairman (Kim Chong-il) and then issues instructions. It also administers Kim's schedule, itineraries, protocol and logistics supply, and liaisons with the Guards Command to ensure his security.

Closely associated with Kim Chong-il's personal secretariat (and even overlapping at times) is an entity known as the "Third Floor."²⁴ This element of Kim Chong-il's personal staff assists him in conducting numerous "special" operations, both inside and outside the country. The members of the "Third Floor" cadre normally have long political lives. Paek In-su (former head of Office No. 39) worked for the apparatus for 28 years, while Kwon Yong-nok and Yi Ch'ol worked for more than 20 years. While it would be difficult to replace them, as they are in charge of secret affairs, their long hold on their positions is also not unrelated to Kim Chong-il's personality. These behind-the-scene members of the leadership are critical to the maintenance of the regime.

These "special" operations mark a significant departure from the role of the personal secretariat as it existed under Kim Il-sung. For example, the concept of a slush fund, which is managed by Kim Chong-il's staff, did not exist. Instead, Kim Il-sung's needs were paid for by "presidential bonds," which were created by laying in three percent of the budget. They were akin to the resources reserved in preparation for war.²⁵ These secret funds are Kim Chong-il's personal money for him to buy whatever he thinks is necessary, including daily necessities from foreign countries or presents for his subordinates. In terms of system dynamics, the operation of this nefarious activity by a key component of the regime undermines Kim's legitimacy.

²³ According to some sources, the secretariat was created in the mid-1980s, when Kim Chong-il carved out its responsibilities from the KWP CC, most likely from several departments, including the General Affairs Department, which oversees a variety of housekeeping functions for the party leadership.

²⁴ The name comes from the location of this office, which is on the third floor of Office Complex Number 1, where Kim Chong-il's offices are located.

²⁵ U Chong-ch'ang, "ROK Monthly on DPRK Kim Chong-il's Slush Fund Deposits in Swiss Banks," Seoul, *Wolgan Choson* (November 1, 2000), FBIS translation KPP20001019000046.

Table II-7. Kim Chong-il's Personal Apparatus

Name	Position
Private Office	
Kim Kang-chol	Personal Secretary
Personal Secretariat	
Kang Sang-chun	Director
Kim Chung-il	Chief, Main Office of Secretaries (oversees foreign affairs issues)
Choe Pyong-yul	Chief, Office of Adjutants (bodyguard function)
Pak Yong-chin	Assistant for Intelligence
Kim Hyong-chol	Assistant for Intelligence
Yi Pyong-chun	Head, Documents Office
Ho Myong-ok	Chief, Consolidation Division (part of Documents Office)
Yi Chae-kang	Secretary to Kim Chong-il, Head, Cadres of 5 th Section (Female Entertainers)
Yi Myong-che	Secretary to Kim Chong-il. Provides policy recommendations and oversees Kim Chong-il's household
Chang Tong-wan	Chief, Office 38 (handles Kim Chong-il's funds)
Chang Song-u ²⁶	Assistant for Military Strategy
Kim Tu-nam	Director, Kumsusan Memorial Palace; Chief, Office of Military Officers
An Yong-chol	Military Liaison Officer
Nam Yong-chol	Military Liaison Officer
Yom Ki-sun	Long-time associate of Kim Chong-il and probable adviser
"Third Floor" Members not directly part of Personal Secretariat	
Kim Chang-son	Position not identified. Used to be chief of Kim Chong-il's personal secretariat.
Kil Chae-kyong	Former ambassador to Sweden, Deputy Director of KWP CC International Department. Controls East European net for Kim Chong-il.
Kim Mun-kyong	Granddaughter of Kim Chaek
Kwon Yong-nok	Chief Mangyong Trading Company. Based in Vienna, Austria. Assists in handling European funding/procurement for Kim Chong-il. Oversees Kim Chong-il overseas slush fund.
Kim Su-yong (aka Yi Chol)	Deputy Public Prosecutor; roving European ambassador; vice chairman, Korean Christian Federation. Handles Kim Chong-il's personal Swiss accounts.
Myong Kil-hyon	Director KWP CC. In charge of overseas purchases for Kim Chong-il.
Kil Chae-kyong	Myong's deputy in charge of purchasing daily necessities for Kim Chong-il.
Choe Yong-ho	Procurement of goods for Kim Chong-il.
Pak Song-pong	Procurement of military material.

²⁶ This posting has only recently been identified and has yet to be verified. As of mid-2003, Chang Song-u was still identified as commander of the Third Corps.

Factions

Providing in depth analysis of factions within North Korea poses difficulties because of the isolated nature of the regime and the government's policy of selective engagement with the outside world over the last 50 years. However, a brief examination of some of the history of factional politics in North Korea reveals much about how the system works. It reveals flaws in the system and countermeasures the leadership has taken to eradicate, or at least cover up, these fault lines.

The factional struggles in North Korean history have come in two varieties: struggles for power and struggles influence. Struggles for power refer to competition between elites for control of the regime, while struggles for influence take place within a regime where the pecking order is clear and subordinates vie for access and impact on the decision-making of the recognized leader. Kim Il-sung's moves to eradicate the pro-Soviet and pro-China factions within the leadership can be characterized as struggles for power. They were direct challenges to Kim Il-sung's rule. Contrarily, the challenges of the 1960s, characterized by the Kapsan Faction Incident, were struggles for influence. They did not directly challenge Kim Il-sung's rule, but his succession plans.²⁷

The first major factional struggle of the Kim Chong-il era occurred in 1992, two years before Kim Il-sung's death. This so-called rebellion of the Ministry of People's Armed Forces involved several generals in a plan directly aimed at overthrowing the North Korean leadership.²⁸ The motive behind the rebellion was allegedly the economic hardship facing the country. The faction believed that if it rebelled during an inspection of nuclear facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency, they would win international support, thus bolstering the chances that the coup would be successful. This coup attempt was uncovered and destroyed before it had a

²⁷ In 1968, a conservative faction within the military arose in opposition to Kim Il-sung's succession plans. This faction was led by Kim Chang-pong and Ho Pong-hak, along with the chief of the Special Reconnaissance Office, Kim Chong-tae (Kim Chaek's younger brother). They devised a plan to overthrow the South Korean government and unify the two Koreas by Kim Il-sung's 60th birthday. This plan had an ulterior motive of undermining Kim Yong-chu, by skirting around the regulations of reporting to the Organization Guidance Department. The plan was uncovered and a purge took place at an expanded meeting of the Politburo in 1969. Kim Chong-il was at the center of the rear guard action against this faction.

²⁸ Most of the conspirators were graduates of Soviet military academies, led by An Chong-ho, deputy chief of the General Staff. Other conspirators included Kang Un-yong, son of Kang Hyon-su (Pyongyang City Party senior secretary and cousin of Kim Il-sung) and Pak Chol-hun, the deputy director of the Reconnaissance Bureau, son of Pak Yong-kuk (minister of railways) and grandson of Kim Il (one of the revolution's first generation). They had established foreign contacts throughout the Warsaw Pact and had come into contact with a system that was much freer and more prosperous than North Korea. They consequently developed a pro-Soviet outlook, which developed into a domestic independent political element. The fall of the Soviet Union and the resulting tension between Moscow and Pyongyang caused a sense of crisis among this Soviet faction and spurred them into action. See Kang Myong-to, *Pyongyang Dreams of Exile*. (Seoul: Chungang Ilbo, 1995).

chance to unfold. In terms of system dynamics, this incident, unlike the 1968 rebellion, was directly aimed at the Kim family leadership. Thus, once again the factional politics in North Korea had shifted from second echelon moves to garner influence to outright power grabs. This seems to be a symptom of transitional leadership in North Korea. When the *Suryong* is in full control, factionalism is restricted to the second echelon, but this can be transformed into warlordism when the system comes under duress at the top.

Hawks vs Doves?

Many western commentators on North Korean politics theorize about elite power struggles, with conservative, hard-line forces headed by military diehards intent on maintaining the status quo pitted against reformist elements calling for the introduction of *chuche* capitalism. Recent defector accounts, however, paint a rather benign picture of factionalism in North Korea. It is firmly ensconced at the second echelon of the leadership and is tied to various policy initiatives. From all indications, contrary to the opposition to the Kim Chong-il regime in the early 1990s, factionalism as it exists today is focused on garnering influence with the *Suryong*, not trying to depose him.

This struggle for influence takes place in the policy-making process. Kim apparently encourages the system to analyze and vet issues and narrow options before passing policy initiatives up to him. An agency or ministry takes the lead on an initiative. It develops policy alternatives to particular (or changing) situations and methods for dealing with them. When cooperation with related agencies/ministries is required, consultation will take place with regard to strategies and tactics. Once an accord is reached, the initiative is forwarded to Kim Chong-il's personal secretariat where it is prepared for his consideration.²⁹

The territorial nature of the North Korean party and state bureaucracies can slow the leadership's ability to react to outside overtures and rapidly changing events. Infighting and turf battles at the second echelon within institutions and between institutions can delay the convergence of views. And with the military's influence growing, not just in the security arena, but in the foreign and domestic policy arenas, stumbling blocks in the decision-making process can arise in the NDC, where Kim presumably vets his decisions for leadership approval.³⁰

²⁹ Discussion with Kim Kwang-in, a reporter for *NKChosun*, who writes extensively on internal North Korean politics. It has been reported that Kim's office receives reports on current issues from each agency in the form of written documents, which are used to inform his decision-making. He then facilitates the process by rejecting them or approving them in the form of directives.

³⁰ Kim Chong-il and Ministry of Foreign Affairs personnel have complained to outsiders about the military's interference in foreign affairs. Occasionally, the institutional debates surface in public documents, such as the MFA's response to the U.S. revelation of its nuclear program in October 2002. The document, both conciliatory

There are several ways of looking at factionalism, as it exists in North Korea today. For example, it is possible to examine similarities and differences between generations. On the issue of North Korea's nuclear program, factions break along several different lines. Much of the intransigence in the North Korean position is found within the first generation leaders, whose views are more grounded in the *chuche* ideology. They feel threatened by superior U.S. military capabilities and by talk of regime change. On this issue, they are allied with hard line military leaders,³¹ who argue the need for nuclear weapons as a guarantee for regime survival. They are opposed by technocrats, many western educated, who see the benefit in negotiating away North Korea's nuclear and missile programs to pave the way for a new relationship with the United States and other regional players that will ensure the regime's survival and create a better environment for economic reforms.³²

Another way of looking at factionalism is in terms of institutions. While the opacity of the system does not allow clear insight into the decision-making process, defector accounts and analysis of the visible orientation of specific leaders suggest that different institutions represent different views and political leanings. Kim Chong-il promotes a system whereby he is the focal point for many separate chains of command. This, in turn, leads to a scramble for influence at the next echelon of power.³³ As a result, this hub-and-spoke approach to regime management has created a system of checks and balances with regard to the decision-making process.

In the area of foreign affairs, the KWP's International Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs appear to be more moderate and progressive, while the OGD, Propaganda and Agitation Department, military, and security forces appear to be more conservative.³⁴ Within the

and militant, appeared to have been drafted by committee. Aidan Foster-Carter, "Guns or Butter," *Pyongyang Watch* (November 5, 2002).

³¹ The military should not be assumed to be a monolith when it comes to policy debates; there are rumored to be several factions within the military, breaking down by generation and patronage system. Officers of the third generation, who make up a major portion of the field commanders, are believed to be a reservoir of hard-line sentiment within the armed forces. The high command is believed to be split on the issue of reform.

³² This assessment based on discussion with South Korean and Chinese Pyongyang watchers.

³³ Under the Kim Il-sung leadership, interdepartmental coordination was stressed, rather than competition. Influential figures often were appointed to top positions in two or more organizations to facilitate horizontal coordination among different agencies. Under Kim Chong-il, the strategy has shifted towards inter-agency competition and away from coordination. Ryoo Kihl-jae, "North Korean Regime Under Kim Chong-il's Leadership: Changes in Systems and Politics," *Vantage Point*, 20 (5), 1997. This strategy apparently has heightened Kim's political autonomy from within. With compartmentalization, power has been dispersed among various agencies and inter-departmental competition has been intensified. At the apex of national authority, Kim alone has final and absolute say on major policies.

³⁴ It should be noted, however, that within institutions there can be widely differing viewpoints on policy initiatives. For example, Chang Song-taek is rumored to be a reformer within the conservative OGD. Within the military, the senior leadership appears to be more willing to support economic and foreign policy reform efforts than commanders at lower echelons.

domestic policy arena, the split is clear-cut between moderate economists and diplomats, who argue for greater reform and an opening up to the outside world, and conservative military and security cadre, who may still support reform, but at a more controlled pace.³⁵ These debates, however, should be understood within the larger context of North Korean politics. Policy debates are not between hawks and doves, but between ideologues, bent on adhering to principles, and pragmatists, who emphasize practicality. On issues of reform, debates do not seem to focus on the need for reform as much as on the pace of reform.

Table 8 attempts to link various North Korean leaders to a particular policy line based on the author's discussions with numerous North Korean watchers and some senior-level defectors.

Kim Chong-il's Measures for Neutralizing Factionalism

Kim Chong-il has adopted several measures for blunting and neutralizing opposition within his regime. His basic power-building strategy is designed to maintain links with the various factions within the leadership. It is important to understand that factions are not stand-alone entities based on policy. The issue of power cuts across all the factions, thus neutralizing them in terms of their ability to coalesce as centers of opposition to Kim Chong-il.³⁶

Another strategy employed by Kim Chong-il is the constant shifting of lines of demarcation between the various bureaucracies. This is characterized by the granting and taking away of authority. In this way, Kim Chong-il can keep potential rivals off balance. He even uses this strategy to keep his key allies in check. For example, Gen. Won Ung-hui, commander of the Security Command, is seen as a counterweight to powerbrokers in the military high command, such as Cho Myong-nok and Kim Yong-chun. Gen. Won reports directly to Kim Chong-il. Since the 1995 coup attempt, the Security Command has grown in influence, having been elevated in status from a bureau.³⁷ In recent years, it has been given authority to conduct operations and surveillance outside of the military sphere. This enhanced portfolio has come at the expense of

³⁵ Moderates at the forefront of policy debates include Hong Song-nam (and presumably now his successor, Pak Pong-chu), Pak Song-chol, Han Song-ryong, Kang Sok-ju, Yon Hyong-muk, Paek Nam-sun, Kim Yong-sun, and Chang Song-taek. Conservative spokesmen include Yi Ul-sol, Paek Hak-nim, Chon Byong-ho, and Kim Guk-tae. Cho Myong-nok and Kim Yong-chun appear to take a middle road between the two groups. Discussions with Lim Chae-hyong.

³⁶ In many respects, power within the North Korean system is a "zero-sum" game. If one faction gains, by default, another must lose. By creating a system that thrives on competition for influence, with Kim at the center, he is able to blunt the creation of a legitimate opposition, for this would violate the rules by which the system operates.

³⁷ This was an alleged coup attempt involving the Sixth Corps. For a detailed account of the coup attempt, see Joseph Bermudez, "Failed 1995 Military Coup in North Korea Revealed." (self-published on the web, 1996). See also Joseph Bermudez, *Shield of the Great Leader: The Armed Forces of North Korea*. (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 2001).

the KWP's State Security Department, which has increasingly been tainted with rumors of corruption.³⁸

Table II-8. Factional Leanings within the North Korean Elite³⁹

Name	Personality	Policy Line
Moderates		
Kim Chong-il	Chairman, NDC, Politburo, Secretariat	Moderate
Pak Song-chol	Politburo	Moderate
Han Song-yong	Politburo	Moderate
Yon Hyung-muk	Politburo, NDC	Moderate (reform tendencies)
Yi Ha-il	Director, KWP Military Affairs Department	Moderate (reform tendencies)
Conservatives		
Kim Yong-chu	Politburo	Conservative
Kim Yong-nam	Politburo	Conservative
Kye Ung-tae	Politburo, Secretariat	Conservative
Chon Pyong-ho	Politburo	Conservative
Kim Ki-nam	Secretariat	Conservative
Kim Kuk-tae	Secretariat	Conservative
O Kuk-ryul	Director, KWP Operations Department	Conservative
Cho Myong-nok	Director, General Political Bureau	Conservative (but open to limited reform)
Kim Il-chol	Minister of People's Armed Forces	Conservative
Kim Yong-chun	Chief of General Staff	Conservative (but open to limited reform)
Yi Ul-sol	Commander, Guard Command	Conservative
Kim Song-ae	Central Committee (Kim Il-sung's second wife)	Conservative
Open		
Yang Hyong-sop	Politburo	Open
Kim Chung-nin	Secretariat	Open
Kim Pok-sin	Chancellor, Cabinet	Open
Kim Kyung-hui	Director, KWP Light Industry Department	Open
Kim Tu-nam	Member, Kim Chong-il Personal Secretariat	Open

³⁸ Kim Chong-il lacks sole control over the SSD, which has reporting channels elsewhere within the leadership, namely to Chang Song-taek (in the OGD) and the KWP Secretary for Security Affairs, Kye Ung-tae. It is likely that if Kim Chong-il wants to keep a watch on people within his own retinue, he will use the Security Command. See author's paper *The North Korean Leadership: Evolving Regime Dynamics in the Kim Chong-il Era*, op. cit.

³⁹ The policy lines described in this table represent a consensus view based on numerous discussions with Pyongyang watchers and North Korean defectors. It is important to point out that in the North Korean political system, terms such as "moderate" and "conservative" do not equate with similar terms in western political discourse. Moderates are those that take a more pragmatic approach to policies, while conservatives take a view that policies should rigidly adhere to ideological principles. Those who are "open" do not appear to fit easily in the other two categories and have expressed views that transcend these factional boundaries.

At the second echelon of power, Kim Chong-il has adopted divide-and-rule tactics. Through compartmentalization, power has been dispersed among various agencies and inter-departmental competition has been intensified. At the apex of national authority, Kim alone has final and absolute say on major policies.⁴⁰ This strategy has apparently heightened Kim's political autonomy from within. Cooperation, bargaining, and coordination among the various departments is possible only through Kim Chong-il. Therefore, if departments (or individuals) want to win favors and enjoy more power, they have to forge a close relationship with Kim, competing among themselves to demonstrate their loyalty to the leader.

As part of Kim Chong-il's hub-and-spoke decision-making style, he often circumnavigates direct chains of command in order to give him alternate reservoirs of information. This allows him to access information that may otherwise be denied through formal channels. It also allows him to keep tabs on the senior leadership. As was outlined above, he does this by forming alliances within critical second echelon institutions inside the military and party apparatuses. He also does this within the foreign policy apparatus. Kim by-passes the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paek Nam-sun, to seek advice and guidance from key protégés within the ministry,⁴¹ which keeps other senior leaders off balance and prevents them from using their bureaucracy as a breeding ground for anti-regime cabals and plots.

Finally, a system of privileges exists in North Korea to ensure loyalty to the regime. Kim Chong-il has instituted a program, run out of his personal secretariat, of systematically rewarding close allies with money and gifts. This has created a system whereby competition among the elites focuses more on personal favors than on society's need for economic and political reform. This in effect blunts the policymaking process since elites are reticent to support initiatives (e.g., reforms) that would jeopardize their careers. Therefore, the regime is left with a narrow range of policy alternatives to address both domestic and international problems.⁴²

⁴⁰ Under the Kim Il-sung leadership, interdepartmental coordination was stressed, rather than competition. Influential figures were often appointed to top positions in two or more organizations to facilitate horizontal coordination among different agencies. Ryoo Kihl-jae, "North Korean Regime Under Kim Chong-il's Leadership: Changes in Systems and Politics," *Vantage Point*, 20 (5), 1997.

⁴¹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' USA Bureau and Office of Counselors are especially influential. Key members of these organizations include Chang Chong-chon (director of the USA Bureau), Pak Myong-kuk, Kim Kye-kwan, and Ambassador Yi Yong-ho.

⁴² There are some indications that elements within the second and third generations may be more flexible in their view of reform, provided it does not severely impact their lives. Discussion with South Korean analysts and North Korean defectors.

Implications for North Korean Policy

As it exists today, the North Korean leadership is not well positioned to undertake radical reform or react in a timely manner to outside stimuli. Factionalism within institutions and between bureaucracies can delay the convergence of views that is necessary for the system to embark on new paths. Even though he is the preeminent leader, Kim Chong-il appears reticent to firmly back one faction over another on policy and, therefore, risk upsetting the balance of forces that exists within the leadership.

For policies such as the nuclear program, leadership dynamics restrict the range of decisions. Four scenarios are often touted with regard to this issue: 1) North Korean leaders have decided that nuclear weapons are essential for security and will not give them up; 2) North Korean leaders are willing to negotiate the program away for a guarantee of security and sovereignty; 3) North Korean leaders will hedge on giving up the nuclear program by pursuing both nuclear weapons and better relations with the United States, Japan, and South Korea; and 4) the North Korean leadership may agree to give up its nuclear program, but will cheat to maintain it covertly.⁴³ The first two scenarios present stark policy choices, which could leave Kim Chong-il exposed politically. Thus, he would likely settle for a hedging or a cheating strategy, which leaves room for ambiguity and, therefore, creates more room for him to maneuver among the factions.

North Korean policy-making could be further complicated by succession politics, which appears to have become more prominent in recent years. As various individuals and institutions line up in support of particular candidates for heir apparent, the result could be a galvanizing effect whereby factions are formed from leaders with similar vested interests. It is rumored that the military and security apparatus have thrown their support behind Kim Chong-nam, Kim Chong-il's oldest son, while Kim's personal apparatus - through Chang Song-taek - is trying to lay the foundation for anointing one of his two sons (Kim Chong-chol, Kim Chong-un) by his mistress, Ko Yong-hui.⁴⁴ If this is true, such a situation could potentially place the most powerful elements of the regime apparatus in opposition, thus diverting the leadership's attention from anything other than internal politics.

⁴³ These choices are discussed in detail by Phillip C. Saunders, *Assessing North Korea's Nuclear Intentions*, North Korea Special Collection (Monterey Institute of International Studies, January 14, 2003).

⁴⁴ Hwang Chang-yop believes Chang Song-taek is the most likely successor if Kim Chong-il were to become ill or step down in the near term. Chang could also serve as the power behind the throne if one of Ko Yong-hui's young sons (approximately 22 and 20) is chosen. A very recent rumor posits the possibility of a nephew, the son of Kim Kyong-hui and Chang Song-taek, succeeding Kim. An excellent examination of the various contenders is provided by Yoel Sano, "Happy Birthday, Dear Leader—Who's Next in Line?" *Asia Times* (February 14, 2004).

D. FLOW OF INFORMATION

George Kennan, the father of Sovietology, once remarked, “A totalitarian dictatorship can overnight turn into a most fragile society.” Because of the brittle nature of totalitarian regimes, the impact of information on them is unpredictable and, therefore, must be managed. Dictators rule by controlling the flow of information, factions garner power/influence by access to information, and the manipulation of public information in the form of ideology ultimately confers legitimacy on the regime. Therefore, more than any other society, totalitarian regimes adhere to the idiom “knowledge is power.”

Internal Information

Information necessary to run the day-to-day affairs of the North Korean regime is highly compartmentalized and frequently monitored.⁴⁵ This leads to a system of half knowledge and an illusion of being informed. Those in top leadership positions have access to more sensitive information about the regime, but even the most senior leaders are restricted in the amount of access they can have on issues related to regime security.

Kim Chong-il has taken great steps to ensure that he is the most informed member of the leadership and, at the same time, to restrict access to others. He began to institute an information management plan within the regime in the early 1970s when he assumed responsibility for running the party apparatus. At the heart of this architecture was the “10 principles to establish the party’s monolithic ideological system,” a set of rules that enforced obedience to the established Kim leadership. To guarantee the efficiency of this system, Kim Chong-il ordered that all documents be run through his office before being sent to other organizations, thus creating the informal network of communication and monitoring within the leadership. Because the channels for distributing internal information among the leadership bodies were contained within the KWP Central Committee apparatus, namely the General Affairs Department and the Organization Guidance Department, Kim was able to “sanitize” information to leaders above him and closely guard the amount of information let out to the wider elite. By the 1980s, Kim

⁴⁵ As the first generation leadership began to step down from leadership posts, there was an increase in the compartmentalization of the ruling elite into functional specialties. Before then, North Korea’s decision-makers rotated between party, government, and military positions. As key positions were monopolized by a core group of Kim loyalists, power was concentrated in a very small elite. After this cadre of elite were thinned out by purges and retirement, they were replaced by military professionals, technical experts, and party specialists. Under Kim Chong-il, these military professionals have begun to assume positions in growing numbers within the party and state apparatuses. For an examination of the restructuring of the North Korean elite, see Lee Chong-sik, “The 1972 Constitution and Top Communist Leaders,” in Suh and Lee (eds.) *Political Leadership in Korea*. (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1976).

was apparently tapping phones of other leaders, including Kim Il-sung.⁴⁶ Representatives of the Kim Chong-il network, who reported directly to Kim Chong-il's staff, countersigned all commands throughout the system, including military orders.

It is rumored that Kim Chong-il relies on his sister, Kim Kyong-hui, as a private source of information and reconnaissance on the system. She apparently has been dispatched to areas of the country to verify reports Kim Chong-il receives through dedicated and other channels. This is an especially useful tool when Kim Chong-il decides to conduct a surgical anti-corruption campaign and needs unvarnished information.⁴⁷

According to one North Korean source, most of the information senior leaders rely on to carry out their bureaucratic responsibilities is based on reports culled and sanitized by their staffs. These reports are often reduced to a two to five-page memo "with an introductory paragraph written as if the reader has no preliminary knowledge of the subject."⁴⁸ Information in the reports is checked for superfluties, and unpleasing news is glossed over. In addition to reports prepared by their staffs, some North Korean leaders have developed some dedicated channels for additional information. This is done through personal contacts and alliances formed with one or another bureaucracy. Leaders also seek to reach accommodations with various counterintelligence organizations for both reasons of political survival and to protect private ventures, which, if discovered, could lead to allegations of corruption.

Most reports and memoirs of senior North Korean defectors also make reference to an unofficial network of information that is shared among the elite.⁴⁹ Much of the information (and rumors) garnered from this network concerns power within the system and the private lives of the leaders. In his memoirs, Hwang Chang-yop relates various stories of intrigues and scheming between factions within the Kim Il-sung family tree. Information is used as a tool for infighting between clans. Disinformation campaigns are run within elite channels to undermine rivals and position people for key posts within the apparatus.⁵⁰ According to one defector, "the members of the elite class are selective in what they choose to be informed about; they are most curious

⁴⁶ According to one North Korean source, Kim Chong-il sought and received the cooperation of Chon Ha-chol, Kim Il-sung's chief secretary, as a conduit for information. While this claim cannot be verified, Chon, before he entered Kim Il-sung's personal secretariat, was the director of the KWP CC General Affairs Department in the early 1980s and worked closely with Kim Chong-il in establishing the routing procedures of information through the senior political leadership. See "Kim Il-sung's Former Chief Secretary Chon Ha-chol Profiled," Seoul National Intelligence Service website (www.nis.go.kr) (May 12, 2003).

⁴⁷ Discussion with a South Korean Pyongyang watcher, November 2003.

⁴⁸ This North Korean defector worked in the Central Committee apparatus in the 1980s and 1990s. E-mail correspondence in December 2003.

⁴⁹ Several references are made to this network in Hwang Chang-yop's memoirs (*I Saw the Truth of History*) published in 1999.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

about things that affect their careers.”⁵¹ It is most likely that information related to succession struggles would be shared among the elite through this informal venue.⁵²

Other sources of internal information involve “communication,” which includes telephones, media, and, recently, the Internet. Telephones are highly valued among the elite as a symbol of power and influence. According to a report by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), North Korea has approximately 1,100,000 telephones, which is fewer than five per 100 persons.⁵³ The country’s telephone directory, last published in 1995, is classified as secret.⁵⁴ According to defector accounts, the department head or above inside the state or party apparatuses has a number of phones at his disposal. One phone is for internal calls within the ministry or department and another is for outside communications. Unlike in the Soviet Union, where senior level bureaucrats were able to carve out fiefdoms within their bureaucracies, illustrated by their dedicated lines that bypassed their secretariat to ensure privacy, it is highly likely that all calls by such officials in North Korea are routed through their secretaries.⁵⁵ Cadres, who have regular contact with the armed forces, probably have a direct line to their opposite numbers in the military.

North Korea’s security services closely monitor leadership communications, especially those leaders close to Kim Chong-il. The Guard Command, and to a lesser extent the Ministry of Public Security, oversee communications security within the regime.⁵⁶ All telephone calls, regardless of ministry or department, are ultimately routed through switchboards. The Guard Command and Ministry of Public Security have responsibility for the operators, who facilitate calls throughout the country. According to numerous defector accounts, particular attention is paid to monitoring and following criticism of the regime and leading officials.⁵⁷ The Guard Command apparently also is in charge of guaranteeing the security of Kim Chong-il’s

⁵¹ Discussion with North Korean source, November 27, 2003.

⁵² Discussion with Yun Ho-u, a reporter for *Newsmaker*, a South Korean news outlet, December 10, 2003. In a recent article, Yun outlines a theory making the rounds in the North Korean expatriate community that concerns the struggle currently taking place in North Korea to choose Kim Chong-il’s successor. According to the theory, Kim Chong-nam, Kim Chong-il’s oldest son, is working to undermine his possible rivals from Kim Chong-il’s mistress, Koh Young-hui. Yun, ho-u, “Power Conflict: Kim Chong-nam vs Koh Young-hui,” *Newsmaker*, December 26, 2003.

⁵³ Kim, Young-su, “Socio-Political Meanings hidden in North Korea’s Network: Study on Telephone Directory.” *North Korean Studies* 5(1), North Korean Studies Research Institute (2001): 243-60.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ It has been speculated that Kim Chong-il used the pool of senior-level assistants as a monitoring tool in the 1970s, a practice that probably continues today. Discussion with Kim Young-su.

⁵⁶ Most likely the Guard Command’s Security Department oversees communications security.

⁵⁷ Ibid. It should be noted that access to Internet sites or web searches remains prohibited.

communications and ensuring his ability to link to critical parts of the regime through the “number one” communication lines.

Kim Chong-il has identified computer technology as a growth industry for the country. Recent articles tout the advancements in the information technology sector and the proliferation of e-mail, even down to the average citizen.⁵⁸ Despite the fanfare surrounding these innovations, information technology is a closely guarded industry in North Korea, available only to the elite.⁵⁹ The various bureaucracies are loosely tied together through an intranet, which can be accessed by senior government officials, but it is not linked to an outside server, thus preventing even members of the leadership from surfing the worldwide web.⁶⁰

Kim Chong-il’s eldest son, Kim Chong-nam, has been placed in charge of the IT industry. The fact that Kim Chong-nam has close ties to the State Security Department would suggest that sophisticated monitoring techniques are being designed in coordination with advances in the technology.⁶¹ In addition, North Korea has recently established its own server, run out of the International Communications Department of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications.⁶² This makes monitoring easier than in the past when e-mails between North Korea and third countries were relayed through the Internet site of Sili Bank in Shenyang, China.

External Information

Kim Chong-il is believed to be the only individual within the North Korean leadership to have unrestricted access to foreign media.⁶³ According to numerous defector accounts, he monitors foreign news broadcasts, including CNN, NHK (Japanese Broadcasting Corporation), BBC, and KBC (Korean Broadcasting Corporation). He also has access to computer network-based information, which, as discussed above, is extremely limited to the rest of North Korea.⁶⁴ It has been suggested that Kim Chong-il uses the Internet to supplement information available from other media outlets.

In addition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which provides intelligence gathered from embassies, Kim Chong-il’s major sources for foreign information are the KWP’s International

⁵⁸ Kim In, “North Korea Sets Up an International E-mail Server,” *Choson Ilbo* (November 28, 2003).

⁵⁹ According to one source, it costs \$60 to send a single e-mail from North Korea. Kim Young-su, op. cit.

⁶⁰ Discussion with various Russian and South Korean sources, November 2003.

⁶¹ Because of the Guard Command’s portfolio for communication security, as well as the high level of trust it enjoys from Kim Chong-il, it can be assumed that it most likely also plays a monitoring role.

⁶² Kim In, op. cit.

⁶³ Discussion with North Korean analysts at the Korean Institute for National Unification, November 2003.

⁶⁴ According to Chinese sources, who accompanied Kim Chong-il on his last trip to China, “He travels with a laptop computer and surfs the Internet 4-5 hours a day.” Discussion with American scholars who have had contact with these Chinese interlocutors, January 2004.

(ID) and External Liaison (ELD) departments. The ID is responsible for diplomatic affairs, while the ELD oversees South Korean and Japan affairs.⁶⁵ The ELD is closely associated with the KWP's Unification Front Department and answers (until recently) to the Party Secretary for South Korean/Japan Affairs. Both serve as important back channels for Kim Chong-il in his relations with the outside world. Kim Yang-kon, director of the ID, serves as a key adviser on matters related to China, while Kang Kwan-chu serves a similar function on issues related to the United States, Japan, and South Korea.

In addition to the traditional sources of information (i.e., diplomatic/intelligence channels), there is a much murkier source of information. Critical to Kim Chong-il's understanding of the world is his retinue of "correspondents." These correspondents enjoy Kim Chong-il's special confidence, and are dispatched overseas to handle Kim Chong-il's personal affairs. The correspondent's key duties consist of managing Kim Chong-il's slush funds, and buying the things Kim Chong-il and his family need. They possess expertise on various parts of the world, critical to their ability to move in and out of countries under false identities. Many eventually end up in his personal secretariat or as part of the "Third Floor" cadre, such as Kwon Yong-nok, who served as Kim Chong-il's correspondent in charge of Europe, including Germany, beginning in the late 1970s.⁶⁶

Kim Chong-il also has a dedicated personal apparatus to assist him in gathering information about the outside world. This apparatus is not consolidated, but spread throughout the regime, with tentacles that reach into a variety of party, state, and military institutions. It is through this apparatus that Kim Chong-il conducts various schemes to sell weapons, drugs, etc., abroad in return for hard currency, goods, and technology. Kim Chong-il and selected members of his inner circle also use this channel to access information that could be used to vet the intelligence coming through traditional channels, as well as open source information included in reports and papers distributed by the Chosun Central News Agency.

Kim Chong-il's conduit to this dedicated intelligence apparatus is his personal secretary, Kim Kang-chol. Kim Kang-chol maintains links to a number of departments that serve as direct channels of un-vetted information. The table that follows represents some of these departments.

⁶⁵ The ELD is not just an intelligence-gathering organization; it also is closely tied to Kim Chong-il's personal apparatus. It responds to requests for foreign technology and currency by working through contacts it has developed in pro-North Korean organizations (primarily in Asia), such as Chosen Soren. Kang Kwan-chu is rumored to be one of Kim Chong-il's cousins. Discussion with South Korean sources.

⁶⁶ According to some sources, Kwon is still active in the region, serving as the auditor of Golden Star Bank, a North Korean entity in Austria. It is a subsidiary of North Korea's Taesong Bank, which was founded as a corporation in Austria. U Chong-ch'ang, "ROK Monthly on DPRK Kim Chong-il's Slush Fund Deposits in Swiss Banks," Seoul, *Wolgan Choson* (November 1, 2000), FBIS translation KPP20001019000046.

Table II-9. Departments with Direct Ties to Kim Chong-il Apparatus

Department	Sponsoring Agency	Chief of Department	Role
Operations Department	KWP CC	O Kuk-yol	The Operations Department is responsible for waging espionage activities abroad, including infiltration into Japan and South Korea, SOF operations, and kidnappings.
Unification Front Department	KWP CC	Vacant since Kim Yong-sun's death	Oversees relations with ROK and Japan, including psychological/ propaganda campaigns.
External Liaison Department	KWP CC	Kang Kwan-chu	Intelligence collection and recruitment of agents. Works closely with Chosen Soren.
Number 35 Office (External Intelligence and Investigations)	KWP CC	Kim Kyong-hui	Weapons and narcotics trafficking.
Number 38 Office	KWP CC	Yim Song-chung	Runs front organizations for hard currency (hotels, restaurants, factories, stores). Responsible for buying daily necessities for Kim Chong-il and his family from foreign countries.
Number 39 Office (may have been merged into Office 38)	KWP CC	Kwon Yong-nok	Sells precious metals overseas for hard currency. Also involved in drug production and trafficking. Oversees apparatus for securing foreign currency for Kim Chong-il's use.
Number 99 Office	KWP CC	Kim Sol-song (Kim Chong-il's daughter)	Handles some slush funds. Also oversees some aspects of North Korea's computer technology infrastructure.
Number 312 Office (finance and supply?)	State Security Department	Kim Chol-su (director?)	Acquires funds and goods for Kim Chong-il's use, often funneled through front companies.
Accounting Department	Kumsusan Assembly Hall (Presidential Palace)		Runs Nungra 888 General Trading Company to secure foreign currency.
519 th Liaison Office	Reconnaissance Bureau, MPAF	Col. Gen. Kim Tae-sik	Collection of strategic and operational intelligence.
964 th Unit, KPA	Security Command	Gen. Won U-chi (commander)	Transport company for leadership. Used for various foreign currency ventures.
3 rd Bureau (operations)	Ministry of Public Security	Choe Yong-su (minister)	Collects foreign intelligence.
99 th General Bureau	Ministry of Foreign Trade	Yi Kwang-kun (minister)	Facilitated weapons sales abroad. Tied to Number 35 Office of KWP CC.
Third Floor Staff	Kim Chong-il's Personal Secretariat	Kim Chung-il Kil Chae-kyong Kwon Yong-nok Kim Su-yong	Vets Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports. Oversees Kim Chong-il's funds and "special" procurements in Europe.

For the rest of the North Korean leadership, there are some dedicated channels of information, but the amount of foreign news is limited compared to what is generated through Kim Chong-il's apparatus. The primary source of information for high-ranking North Korean officials (vice director and above) comes through access to specially produced newspapers and magazines covering domestic and world news. These publications are treated as classified material, but are used to inform officials responsible for developing policy initiatives.

The major source of information for the North Korean leadership on issues relating to world affairs comes from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Monitoring stations are set up in selected capitals (Washington, Tokyo, Beijing, and Moscow) to track foreign news broadcasts. This information is then relayed to the appropriate country desks within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for processing and analysis. Foreign newspapers are used to provide context to the analysis, but the lack of timeliness marginalizes their use.⁶⁷ The dissemination of this analysis is strictly limited. The Situation and Data Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which monitors foreign radio and television broadcasts, creates a daily report which is disseminated at the director level throughout the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and presumably to other critical party and government offices.

Members of the Politburo, Secretariat, and National Defense Commission have access to daily coded cables from North Korean embassies, usually compiled by the ambassador's office and vetted by the State Security Department.⁶⁸ These reports include information based on local newspapers and other publications, supplemented with some analysis by embassy officers. Because of the source of the information, these reports are treated as classified. However, unlike in the Soviet Union and China, the ability of the senior North Korean leaders to draw upon experts beyond their staffs to help them understand this material is limited. Formal ties between leadership institutions, such as the Politburo, and research organizations (something that became popular in the Soviet Union in the 1950s) do not exist.⁶⁹

Another source for world news is the Chosun Central News Agency. Its Department of Reference News collates and disseminates 18 kinds of materials, including *Reference News*, and *Reference Paper*, based on a constant monitoring of the international news through newspapers and broadcastings.⁷⁰ The *Reference News* contains daily reviews of the foreign press divided by

⁶⁷ In the past, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not been given access to the Internet out of fear that its use to provide depth to data collected on international issues might provide a venue for foreign ideas. Recently, however, North Korea has begun to experiment with limited Internet access within the ministry. Discussion with North Korean analysts at the Korean Institute for National Unification, November 2003.

⁶⁸ Discussion with Kim Kwang-in, December 2003.

⁶⁹ Discussion with a former staff officer in the KWP Central Committee, May 2001.

⁷⁰ Kim, Kwang-in, "Reference News: A Periscope to South Korea," *Chosun Ilbo* (May 1, 2001).

subject headings, including South Korean affairs, the world situation, and science/technology. These are composed of unclassified material, similar to China's "Red TASS" and the former Soviet Union's "White TASS." These materials are disseminated twice a day to vice directors / ministers and above.⁷¹ In departments / ministries with an international portfolio (i.e., the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Trade), this information may be pushed further down in the apparatus. The *Reference Paper* contains much of the information contained in *Reference News*, minus some of the more sensitive stories. It is distributed to the middle levels in KWP and Cabinet, directors in institutions and organizations, and presidents of companies.

Despite the restrictions placed on dissemination of foreign information within the North Korean elite, many members of this privileged class have some understanding of the outside world based on personal experience. As can be seen from Table 10, many members of the North Korean elite have ventured beyond the borders of North Korea, be it through education or career. Much of that experience at the senior echelons of the party was achieved in early life and for the most part in patron countries friendly to North Korea, such as the Soviet Union or China.

The Leadership's Access to Foreign Expertise within the Regime

Select senior officials are informed about the outside world. In addition to those in the diplomatic and intelligence communities, there are cadre attached to semi-official organizations, such as the Asia Pacific Peace Committee, who regularly engage the international community. These officials, however, are carefully watched and their ability to establish significant ties with both foreigners and other members of the North Korean leadership is restricted. In many cases, this isolation is self-imposed to guard against the possibility of being accused by political opponents of colluding with foreign interests.

Following the death of Kim Il-sung, Kim Yong-nam was removed as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1998 and gradually ceded his roles in diplomacy to the late Kim Yong-sun and the vice ministers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Over the last few years, this group of diplomats has become the center of expertise on the outside world. A rising star within this community is Kang Sok-chu, the First Vice Foreign Minister. He began his career in the KWP International Department and shifted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the mid-1980s when the center of foreign policy was shifted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He is rumored to have close contacts with Kim Chong-il.⁷² Since the death of his patron, Kim Yong-sun, Kang has become

⁷¹ According to some sources, many senior North Korean leaders allow their staffs to read the material and underline the critical parts for their attention. Discussion with Kim Kwang-in, December 2003.

⁷² Kang is rumored to be a former member of Kim Chong-il's "Three Revolutions Teams." A sign of Kang's growing influence was revealed in October 2003 when he attended talks between Kim Chong-il and China's Wu Bangguo. *Tokyo Kyodo Clue II* (Internet Version) in Japanese (November 4, 2003).

the focus for not only a significant portion of North Korea's diplomatic operations, especially regarding the United States, but also the primary patron within the diplomatic community.⁷³

Table II-10. North Korean Officials with International Experience or Contacts⁷⁴

Name	Position	Education	Remarks
Kim Chong-il	General Secretary and Chairman of NDC		Visits to Russia and China.
Kim Kyong-hui	Director, KWP Light Industry Department	Moscow University	
Kye Ung-tae	KWP Secretary for Public Security, Politburo	Soviet Party High School	
Chon Pyong-ho	KWP Secretary for Military Munitions, Politburo	Moscow University	
Choe Tae-pok	Chairman, SPA, KWP Secretary for Education, Alternate Member of Politburo	Technical University of Leipzig	Numerous meetings with foreign delegations. Led delegations abroad, such as Thailand. Former Chairman, SPA Foreign Affairs Committee.
Kim Yong-nam	President, SPA (titular head of state), Politburo	Moscow University	Began career in KWP International Department. Foreign Minister (1983-98). Accepts foreign diplomatic credentials, greets visiting foreign dignitaries. Rumored to be concerned about North Korea's isolation in the world. Allegedly speaks French, English, and Russian.
Han Song-yong	KWP Secretary for Heavy Industry, Politburo, Chairman, SPA Budget Committee	Prague Institute for Technology	
Pak Song-chol	Politburo	Jochi University (Japan)	
Kim Yong-chu	Politburo	Moscow University	
Choe Yong-nim	Alternate Member of Politburo,	Moscow University	
Hong Song-nam	Former Premier, Alternate Member of Politburo	Prague Institute of Technology	At one time, he traveled in Eastern Europe and had some contacts in China.
Yang Hyong-sop	Alternate Member of Politburo	Moscow University	He led a January 2004 North Korean delegation to Nigeria.

⁷³ Discussion with Noriyuki Suzuki, the director of Japan's Radio Press, a Foreign Ministry-affiliated organization which monitors DPRK media, December 2003.

⁷⁴ This chart is based on a wide variety of sources, including Yi Hang-ku's 1995 book *Kim Chong-il and His Staff* (in Korean). It is not meant to be exhaustive, but to provide some examples of the variety of international experience contained within the leadership.

Name	Position	Education	Remarks
Kim Yong-sun	Former KWP Secretary for ROK/Japan Affairs (deceased)	Moscow State University	
Kim Ki-nam	KWP Secretary (?), Director Korea History Institute	Moscow International University	
Kim Kuk-tae	KWP Secretary for Cadre Affairs	Moscow University	
O Kuk-yol	Director, KWP Operations Department	Frunze Military Academy (USSR)	Oversees clandestine operations service with focus on Japan/ROK.
Kim Tu-nam	CC Director in Kim Chong-il's personal secretariat	Frunze Military Academy (USSR)	
Yon Hyong-muk	Member NDC	Prague Institute of Technology	Rumored to speak Russian.
Gen. Kim Chol-man	Former Member NDC	Frunze Military Academy (USSR)	
Chon Pyong-ho	Member of NDC	Moscow University	
VM Cho Myong-nok	First Vice Chairman NDC, Director GPB	Frunze Military Academy (USSR)	Traveled in Europe, Middle East, and China. Led official delegation to U.S. in 2000.
VM Kim Il-chol	Minister of People's Armed Forces	Soviet Naval Academy	Traveled in Asia, Russia, and to Cuba.
VM Paek Hak-nim	Former Minister of Public Security		Traveled with delegations to China, Africa, and South America.
Mar. Yi Ul-sol	Commander, Guard Command	Frunze Military Academy (USSR)	
Pak Kil-yon	Ambassador to UN		Diplomatic postings in Asia and Latin America. Served in Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Speaks English.
Kim Hun-yok	Secretary General SPA, Vice Minister of Railways	Leningrad Technology Institute	
Chang Chol	Vice Chairman SPA	Meiji University (Japan)	
Kim Wan-su	President, Central Bank		Plays crucial role in international trade. Maintains relationships within the South Korean business and government communities.
Yun Ki-bok	Chairman, Committee for Probing Truth Behind GIs' Mass Killings	Moscow University	
VM Pak Ki-so	Commander, Pyongyang Defense Command		Some travel abroad to North Korea allies.
Yi Chong-ok	Curator, Party Founding Museum, Functionary in Ministry of Post and Telecommunications	Harbin Technology Institute (China)	

At the 11th Supreme People's Assembly elections held in August 2003, nine Foreign Ministry officials were elected as SPA deputies: Foreign Minister Paek Nam-sun; First Vice Minister Kang Sok-chu; Vice Ministers Kim Kye-kwan, Ch'oe Su-hon, and Kim Kye-kwan; vice minister-level Ambassadors Ch'oe Chin-su (China), Pak Ui-ch'un (Russia), and Pak Kil-yon (United Nations); and Ch'oe Su-il, director of the General Diplomatic Corps Programs Department. Several officials involved in South Korean affairs also were elected. They include Chon Kum-chin and Kim Yong-song, both Cabinet councilors who served as the North's chief delegate to North-South ministerial talks; Song Ho-kyong, Chon Kyong-nam, and Ch'oe Sung-ch'ol, all vice chairmen of the Asia-Pacific Peace Committee [APPC] in charge of Mt. Kumgang tourism, the Kaesong Industrial Zone, and private exchanges; and Pak Ch'ang-yon, first vice chairman of the State Planning Commission, who was the North's chief delegate to the North-South Economic Cooperation Promotion Committee. APPC Vice Chairman Yi Chong-hyok was re-elected, as well. The election of so many officials with foreign policy experience suggests a decision by the regime to retain the existing expertise critical for continuity in foreign affairs, especially with regard to North-South relations.⁷⁵

North Korean leaders, even within the top leadership, are restricted, and in most cases prohibited, from traveling abroad.⁷⁶ Therefore, one channel of outside information available to some members of the North Korean elite is through relationships established with members of North Korea's diplomatic corps. As was mentioned earlier, this is not easy, because of the surveillance of the diplomatic community, but it does occur. One such example is the friendship between Pak Kil-yon, ambassador to the United Nations, and Kim Chong-il's mistress, Ko Yong-hui. For the Pyongyang-based leadership, this is a unique source of data, and for the diplomatic community, it is a way to currying favor with people close to Kim Chong-il.

In some cases, members of the leadership use their contacts with the diplomatic community to establish foreign business ventures. Bureaucracies are under pressure to secure foreign currency. This has led to a proliferation of schemes, some legal, many not. Often, these ventures become tied to the bureaucratic fiefdoms within the regime as a means of amassing personal wealth and influence for individual leaders. These businesses can also provide channels of information on the outside world.

⁷⁵ Chong Ch'ang-hyon and Chong Yong-su, "Many Core Military Cadres Dropped in SPA Elections," *Seoul Chungang Ilbo* (August 14, 2003).

⁷⁶ All travel abroad must be authorized the CC Dispatch Deliberation Committee. For senior officials, Kim Chong-il must give his personal authorization. This has sometimes led to complaints within the leadership. For example, Hwang Chang-yop, when he was KWP Secretary for International Affairs, argued for the need for more delegations to be sent abroad to absorb foreign economic and scientific expertise. Hwang Chang-yop's memoirs, op cit.

Below are some of the general trading corporations - so-called foreign currency-earning companies - and the bureaucracies they serve. These companies offer 30 percent of their annual budget to the KWP CC's Office 39 each year, in the name of foreign currency earned for "loyalty."⁷⁷

General Trading Corporation	Patron Organization
Maebong General Trading Corporation	Ministry of People's Armed Forces
Unha General Trading Corporation	Administration Council's Light Industry Committee
Samch'olli General Corporation	Administration Council's External Economic Committee
Unbyol Trading Company	WPK Central Committee's League of Socialist Working Youth of Korea
Kumnung Trading Corporation	Ministry of Machine Industry

These ventures, however, are very risky because they can attract allegations of corruption and foreign espionage and can be used by the regime as a convenient excuse to purge officials who have fallen out of favor. There is little doubt that Kim Chong-il's apparatus knows about these independent operations and can make use of them or destroy them if they become a threat.⁷⁸

Efforts to Close Down Independent Channels of Information

Kim Chong-il on occasion has taken steps to close down independent channels of information to the senior leadership. Unlike efforts to restrict internal information flow, such as the institution of a comprehensive information management plan, access to external information has been restricted through purges and demotions.

- The 1993 coup led to Kim Chong-il's strategy, which has been resurrected several times since, to curb the elite's access to the outside world. After putting down the coup attempt, Kim issued a special order to have all military officers, technicians, and scientists who had studied in the Soviet Union confined to hard labor for three years. In addition, he recalled all students studying in Russia and Eastern Europe. Finally, he retired all North Korean military officers below the age of 50 who had studied in the Soviet Union.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ U Chong-ch'ang, "ROK Monthly on DPRK Kim Chong-il's Slush Fund Deposits in Swiss Banks," Seoul, *Wolgan Choson* (November 1, 2000), FBIS translation KPP20001019000046.

⁷⁸ Such a purification campaign took place in the late 1990s when several North Korean economic officials were purged for espionage related to their dealings with South Korea. It is rumored that some officials form alliances with security agencies to thwart the monitoring system. Discussion with North Korean analysts at the Korean Institute for National Unification, December 2003.

⁷⁹ In addition to the retirements, over 300 high-ranking officers with contacts to the Soviet Union were allegedly executed between 1992 and 1994. According to one North Korean defector, the Soviet Union had actively sought

There is little doubt that one of the lessons Kim Chong-il learned from this incident was the danger of outside influence on elite politics.

- In 1997, following the execution of KWP Secretary So Kwan-hui, a number of Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League officials were executed as spies for accepting money from South Korean companies. Even Chang Song-taek was implicated in the scandal, but received light punishment because of his relationship to Kim Chong-il.
- In 1998, several cadres closely associated with North Korean foreign policy failed to win nominations as candidates for the SPA. While the reason for this purge is not clear, it did result in the demotion of numerous cadres who had special outside knowledge of peninsula affairs, as well as diplomatic affairs in general. Among those who were affected by this purge included Chon Kum-chol (Vice Chairman of the Committee for Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland), Im Chun-kil (member of the SPA's Unification Policy Committee), Kwon Hui-kyong (director, KWP CC's External Information Collection Department), Yi Chang-son (former director, KWP CC's Social and Cultural Department), Chong Tu-hwan (Chairman, Fatherland Front), Chon Sin-hyok (Deputy Chairman, Fatherland Front), Hyon Chun-kuk (director, KWP CC's International Department), Pak Kil-yon (Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs), and Son Song-pil (former Ambassador to Russia).⁸⁰
- While the circumstances surrounding Kim Yong-sun's death are still not clear, it closes down a significant independent pipeline of information into the senior leadership. Kim Yong-sun's patronage system and network of contacts within the elite were extensive. Many of these elites, such as Kim Chong-il's sister, Kim Kyong-hui, and mistress, Ko Yong-hui, relied on this relationship for information and foreign goods.⁸¹

E. CONCLUSION

The long-term survival of the Kim Chong-il regime will be determined by Kim's ability to control the North Korean elite. Kim Il-sung was able to control the ruling circle through a vertical division of labor - the Leader ruled the party, and the party controlled the state and the army. Kim Chong-il dismantled this practice and has been trying to directly control the ruling troika and the individual power elites. Relying on a strategy of divide-and-rule and internally restricting the flow of information, he has been able to maintain his grip on the regime. But, this strategy has the tendency to create cleavages, which will increasingly make it difficult to manage all the power groups/elites. As pressure on the regime grows, three factors will be critical: legitimacy, system vulnerabilities, and warlordism.

to create a pro-Soviet organization within the KPA in the 1980s. This plan was exposed after the fall of the Soviet Union.

⁸⁰ "Analysis of the Results of the 10th SPA Deputies Election," *Seoul Naewoe T'ongs* (July 31, 1998).

⁸¹ Kim's relationship with Kim Kyong-hui is discussed in Hwang Chang-yop's memoirs, op. cit.

Legitimacy

From a structural point of view, legitimacy is defined negatively as the lack of collectively organized alternatives.⁸² Only when collective alternatives are available does political choice become available to specific individuals. As long as no collective alternatives are available, individual attitudes toward the regime matter little for its stability.

Legitimacy to the regime originally came from the national liberation ideology and practice of the first Kim Il-sung government with its anti-colonial, nationalist, and revolutionary credentials.⁸³ By the early 1970s, the legitimacy of the political regime was bolstered by the formalization of the presidential system in 1972, codified by the new constitution.

Kim Chong-il has been the benefactor of a regime that is content to live under the rules laid down under his father. This has been achieved in large measure by graft and favors to critical elites. To date, the elite have not felt compelled to challenge the interpretation and rules that uphold the legitimacy of the Kim Chong-il regime.

Kim Chong-il has already eroded much of this legitimacy by not following the pursuit of power through legally established channels when he assumed the portfolio of General Secretary in 1997. By law, the KWP Congress should elect a new CC, which in turn, chooses the General Secretary. The process for Kim Chong-il, however, took the form of acclamation rather than election, contrary to normal procedures in NK and other communist states. The actual process began in September 1997, with a series of provincial and national party conferences, each culminating in a recommendation that Kim Chong-il be acclaimed General Secretary. A special communiqué followed on October 8, 1997, issued jointly by the existing CC and the Party's CMC, announcing Kim's election.

Up until now, this violation of party procedures has not led to direct challenges to Kim's authority. However, if pressure on the system continues to erode the foundation of privileges that support the elite, opposition to the dynastic succession, which exists beneath the surface, could erupt into a struggle for power. In such a struggle, the opposition could seize the initiative by highlighting Kim's lack of institutional legitimacy.

The legitimacy of the regime could be called into question as the built-in tendency of mutual exclusiveness among the ruling apparatus stifles policy coordination and thus weakens strategy effectiveness. Kim Chong-il's divide-and-rule tactics have choked inter-agency cooperation and coordination. Instead, mutual competition has become the new norm of the

⁸² This concept was put forth by Adam Przeworski in his discussion of political reforms in Eastern Europe; later cited by Alexandre Mansourov, *op. cit.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

decision-making process. Moreover, because Kim Chong-il's ruling style encourages rivalry among his officials, personal and professional jealousies sometimes develop into attritional recriminations between competing bureaucracies and key officials. Lack of close coordination among the concerned parties deprives public policies of coherence, continuity, and direction. Should such practices accumulate, the overall effectiveness of state policies will be substantially eroded, thus eventually undermining the legitimacy of the regime.⁸⁴

System Vulnerabilities

Many of the vulnerabilities of the North Korean system reside with the elite. It is a class that for decades has been insulated from the horrors that are experienced throughout the country. As the North Korean economy has deteriorated, many elites have opened trading companies to earn foreign currency. This in turn has led to increasing corruption and weakening of the cohesion of the privileged class. Since the North Korean system is based on "feudal service nobility," where loyalty is ensured through privilege, if the regime loses its ability to placate the elite through goods and services, there is a real chance of the creation of factions.⁸⁵ At first these factions will compete with each other for the ever-declining privileges; if the situation persists, this factionalism could transform itself into centers of opposition to the regime.

Another weakness results from the graft and corruption within the security apparatus. As ideological faith and their devotion to the revolution and its leader are weakened within the Praetorian Guard, Kim Chong-il will increasingly require the means to buy the loyalty that faith and devotion no longer inspire. If he lacks the resources to buy this loyalty, he must allow the cadre to engage in the irregular and corrupt to ensure their survival. Naturally, members of the security services have a special advantage because they are in charge of monitoring and checking such activities. Thus, when the agency responsible for enforcing loyalty itself becomes corrupt and, therefore, less controllable, fault lines are created in the system. And, thus looms the prospect of increasing corruption and systemic loss of balance, with concomitant consequences for both the viability of the regime and the "rationality" of its leader.

⁸⁴ Ken Gause, *The North Korean Leadership: Evolving Regime Dynamics in the Kim Chong-il Era*. Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, September 2003.

⁸⁵ At times, cracks have been rumored to exist within Kim Chong-il's core constituency. In the late 1990s, such stalwart supporters as Kim Kuk-tae, Kim Ki-nam, and Kim Yong-sun were rumored to be frustrated by lack of influence and access, when Kim Chong-il tended not to accept policy proposals they made. Nothing much seemed to materialize from this discontent; however, it did reveal that as the system came under increasing economic and political pressure, cracks could appear even within Kim Chong-il's inner sanctum.

Warlordism

While the evidence of existing warlords within the North Korean system is speculative at best, the possibility for their creation is real.⁸⁶ Most likely, they will emerge within Kim Chong-il's inner core of supporters. As Kim Chong-il continues to isolate his power by narrowing the channels of communication and transferring lines of authority between bureaucracies, he is not only causing deep fractures within the leadership, but he also is bringing the security forces into conflict with each other. These two outcomes have direct consequences for the elite, who see their access to the *Suryong*, and the perks associated with that access, threatened. While Kim Chong-il prefers bureaucratic rivalry as the chief operating principle of his regime, over the long term, the conflicts that it engenders could result in potentially destabilizing anti-regime outbursts by demoralized and disenfranchised organizations. This, in turn, could lead to the creation of warlords,⁸⁷ who are able to serve as rallying points for the frustrated elements within the elite.

⁸⁶ Kim Il-song carried out five purges of the North Korean military. While he was able to rid the system of warlords, he did not cut deep enough to rid the regime of their patronage systems. In fact, today, colleagues or descendants of these vanished warlords exist within the high command. Cho Myong-nok, Yi Tu-Ik, Choe In-tok, Kim Ik-hyon, Chon Chin-su, Yi Pyong-uk, Kim Yong-yon, and Chon Chae-son were protégés of one or another warlord; while Kim Il-chol, Kim Yong-chun, Yi Yong-mu, Pak Chae-kyong, Hyon Chol-hae, Won Ung-hui, Kim Myong-kuk, Yi Myong-su, O Kuk-yol, Kim Tae-sik, O Yong-pang, Kim Ha-kyu, Chang Pong-chun, Yi Chong-san, Pak Ki-so, Kim Kyok-sik, Yi Yong-hwan, and Chu Sang-song are their descendants. Kim Chong-min, "Kim Chong-il's New Ruling Structure and Its Real Power Holders," Seoul, *Pukhan* (October 1998) pp. 60-77.

⁸⁷ Warlords, in this context, refers to individual leaders who have sources of power, independent of Kim Chong-il's largess or manipulation, including alliances within the security and military apparatuses.