



INSTITUTE FOR DEFENSE ANALYSES

North Korean Policy Elites

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PREFACE

This study was conducted by the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) for the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Policy). The task order, entitled “North Korean Policy Elites,” requested an analysis of the North Korean elite to support Defense Department planning. The study goals were to examine any differences that might exist among the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) elite, and to consider how different individuals, groups, or factions might respond to U.S. initiatives. The study identifies top members of the elite, discusses their personal and ideological priorities, examines their main information sources, and considers how they interpret information.

For this study, five specialists in North Korean and international security affairs were invited to contribute papers. The project director coordinated the work and hosted initial and concluding project discussions. The five papers are published here as the authors wrote them, without major editorial revisions, the better to reflect each researcher’s distinctive approach. The introduction and conclusions were written by the project leader, in collaboration with Ralph Hassig. The authors and the project leader are accountable for their respective papers, although all participants had the opportunity to review all the papers. Dr. Bruce Berkowitz, the DoD study coordinator, provided inputs throughout the study and reviewed the papers, and his prompt response to many questions and demands from the project director are much appreciated.

The project leader, who has prepared a brief field trip report on Asian views of North Korea, is indebted to her many Asian interlocutors for their ideas and suggestions. Because many of them asked that their remarks be kept off the record, in lieu of thanking them individually a collective thanks goes out to them all.

At IDA, special appreciation goes to Admiral Dennis Blair, who introduced the project to IDA and without whose support the project would not have been possible. Mr. Mike Leonard and Dr. Victor Utgoff also strongly supported the project with their administrative guidance. Dr. Brad Roberts and Dr. Caroline Ziemke acted as official reviewers and provided valuable inputs to improve the report. Ms. Eileen Doherty, SFRD editor, labored under time pressure to edit the papers, and Ms. Rebecca Kay processed the final corrections. Ms. Barbara Varvaglione, SFRD publication coordinator, saw to it that the report met its deadline.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT

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To write accurately about North Korea is a daunting challenge, given the secretive nature of the country. Often even a single question, such as the key question of how North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-il, makes decisions, cannot be answered satisfactorily. Fortunately, our knowledge of North Korea has improved markedly in recent years, thanks in part to the attention devoted in the United States to dealing with North Korea's nuclear program, and thanks as well to expanded inter-Korean dialogue since former president Kim Dae-jung introduced his "sunshine" engagement policy in 1998.

Understanding North Korea is difficult not only because of its secretive nature, but also because it is so very different in culture and politics from Western capitalist societies. How best to characterize North Korea remains a matter of debate, but it is fair to say that North Korean society exhibits characteristics of a traditional dynastic Confucian society, with an overlay of Stalinism. North Korea's distinctive characteristic is that the Kim family, father and son (as well as assorted family members), have ruled in this Confucian-Stalinist tradition for over half a century, running the country somewhat like the autocratic founder of a private corporation that operates without transparency or accountability.

The North Korean Elites project was sponsored by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy for the purpose of developing a better understanding of North Korea's policy elites and how they might respond to communications, media, and other signals from abroad. Such an understanding is critical for both routine relations and for crisis management, where there is a high potential for overtures and actions to be misinterpreted or confused. Under the direction of project leader Kongdan Oh Hassig, USD(P) commissioned five American researchers to write on the topics set forth in the Terms of Reference provided in Appendix A. Brief biographies of the authors may be found in Appendix B. *Asian Views of North Korea: A Field Trip Report*, is found in Appendix C.

Three core questions guided the research: "What are the factions and potential factions that exist within the North Korean leadership?" "What information sources and channels do each of these individuals and factions depend on?" "What are the contextual factors that could affect how North Korean elites receive, assimilate, and interpret information from outside sources?"

Joe Bermudez, the preeminent open-source authority on North Korea's military, begins his paper, entitled *Information and the DPRK's Military and Power-holding Elite*, by conceptualizing the military and power-holding elite as a convergence of top individuals from the Ministry of People's Armed Forces, the cabinet, intelligence and security services, the Korean Workers' Party, and Kim family members and close associates. He then describes the organization of the civilian and military bureaucracy in which the power-holding elite operate. Information access in official and unofficial channels is discussed, with special attention devoted to channels provided by security and intelligence organizations. Bermudez's paper concludes with a thoughtful discussion of some of the flaws in information reception and processing that arise from the organizational and belief structure of the Kim Jong-il regime.

The second paper, *The North Korean Leadership: System Dynamics and Fault Lines*, is by Ken Gause, a policy analyst specializing in the study of authoritarian leadership structures. Gause is particularly interested in the dynamics of North Korea's authoritarian system. He begins by looking at the organizational structure in which power is exercised, and Kim Jong-il's rise to power within that structure. He offers estimates of the relative power of members of the elite in the government, party, and military, and he also discusses the informal power structure of Kim Jong-il's patronage system. Factions in the "benign" form of institutional and generational affiliations are viewed as competing to influence Kim Jong-il, rather than contending against him. Information access is discussed in terms of internal and external information channels. Gause also includes a brief discussion of the legitimacy of the Kim regime and its system vulnerabilities.

Ralph Hassig is a social psychologist whose primary interest is in the attitudes and beliefs of the North Korean masses and elite. He largely dismisses the issue of factionalism as conjectural in nature. The title of his paper, *The Well-Informed Cadre*, presents the thesis that the North Korean elite have access to a considerable amount of information about the international community from readily available domestic news sources, supplemented by information from foreign sources. Hassig focuses specifically on how information about U.S. military initiatives is received and, with reference to research in social psychology, discusses how this information might be interpreted by the North Korean elite.

Alexandre Mansourov, a scholar and prolific writer on North Korean issues, brings the interesting viewpoint of a former Russian government official who worked and studied in North Korea. His paper, *Inside North Korea's Black Box: Reversing the Optics*, opens with a discussion of recent economic changes in North Korea. Mansourov then discusses the history of North Korean policy making, the political characteristics of the Kim Jong-il regime, and the dynamics of the ruling Kim family. The core of Mansourov's paper is a detailed description of five domestic "power transmission belts:" the security organizations, the Kim Il-sung generation,

technocrats, provincial and county political bosses, and foreign affairs handlers. In the final pages of his paper, he returns to the topic of change in North Korea, this time discussing forces for political change in the Kim Jong-il regime.

The final paper is by David Smith, a policy analyst on global security issues, whose paper is entitled *Reaching into North Korea*. Smith introduces North Korea's society, communication channels, and elite, with special reference to the society's "fault lines." Following a brief discussion of North Korea's recent foray into the IT sector, he discusses the legal and illegal activities of North Korea's diplomatic corps, who provide the relatively isolated Kim regime with a window to the outside world and a much-needed foreign currency pipeline to support Kim's personal rule. Smith's paper concludes with discussions of how to better reach the North Korean elite with communications, and how U.S. policy might influence the Kim regime.

In Appendix C Kongdan Oh Hassig has contributed a brief report on a field trip she made to assess the views of scholars, media representatives, and government officials in China, Japan, and South Korea on the project questions in the context of U.S. policy toward North Korea.

The papers are presented here in the style and structure of their respective authors, the better to highlight the distinctive approaches taken to address the subject matter. The papers served as the basis for a day-long discussion session among the authors and invited guests at IDA in March 2004. The project summary that concludes this report is based on the papers, the discussions, and the project leader's experience and interpretation of relevant evidence.

**I. INFORMATION AND THE DPRK'S
MILITARY AND POWER-HOLDING ELITE**

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PREFACE

This paper will examine in broad terms the means by which information is accessed by and flows among the military and power-holding elite in the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK, more commonly called North Korea).

An examination of the available "open sources" dating from 1990 quickly reveals that very little has been written on the subject of information usage among the military and power-holding elite within the DPRK. When the subject is mentioned, it is done so tangentially and with modest detail. The observations and information in this paper have been pieced together from open source information collected by the author during his twenty-five years of research on the Korean People's Army and the DPRK's intelligence services.

For the author, this difficult topic presents disadvantages and advantages. On the negative side, accuracy in any work dealing with the DPRK is a matter of relatives. Inevitably some of the observations in this paper will be incorrect. Other material may be misinformation, disseminated by parties interested in serving their own purposes rather than serving the truth. This is especially true when dealing with DPRK defectors—a major source of information on the DPRK. The catchwords *probably*, *estimated*, *are believed to*, and *apparently* must appear frequently in any work of this type. On the positive side, this topic presents the author with a blank slate and allows room for expression of thoughts and ideas that do not easily fit in elsewhere. It is conceivable that a more complete understanding of the subject matter could be achieved by conducting extensive in-depth interviews with DPRK defectors who have held the rank of colonel or above in the Korean People's Army or with officials above the deputy director level in the Korean Workers' Party.

The projected audience for this paper are those Department of Defense (DoD) personnel who are tasked with understanding the DPRK or who would be called upon to conduct activities involving the DPRK during a future crisis. Considering this audience, the author will try to emphasize readability and easy access to information rather than adhere to a formal academic style of writing. The ultimate hope is that this paper will serve to stimulate discussion and provide a framework upon which DoD personnel can layer additional information—both open source and classified—thereby achieving a better understanding of the DPRK.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AGI	Auxillary, general, intelligence (i.e., an intelligence gather vessel)
CCSKA	Central Committee Secretary in Charge of South Korean Affairs
COMSEC	Communications security
DoD	Department of Defense (i.e., of the United States)
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EIW	Electronic Information Warfare
EW	Electronic Warfare
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service
KCBS	Korean Central Broadcasting Station
KCNA	Korean Central News Agency
KCTV	Korean Central Television
KPA	Korean People's Army
KPAF	Korean People's Air Force
KPN	Korean People's Navy
KWP	Korean Workers' Party
MPAF	Ministry of People's Armed Forces
MPS	Ministry of Public Security
NDC	National Defense Commission
OPSEC	Operations Security
PBS	P'yongyang Broadcasting Station
PRC	People's Republic of China
SIGINT	Signal Intelligence
SSD	State Security Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As with any nation, access to information within the DPRK proceeds along two very broad paths - official and unofficial. And, as with any other nation, the paths are affected by a host of social and political factors. Within the DPRK, these factors are expressed in extremes not typically witnessed in other nations.

The most significant of these is the importance and closeness of an individual or organization to Kim Chong-il and the power-holding elite. The average infantry soldier or citizen has no access whatsoever; however, as one progresses up the military chain of command or within the Korean Workers' Party (KWP), access increases so that at the very top three-tenths of one percent of the population - the military and power-holding elite and their immediate subordinates - access to information is the best it can be.

The military elite within the DPRK should be understood to comprise not only those individuals within the National Defense Commission holding military rank, but also those military personnel situated within the broader power-holding elite. From an organizational standpoint, this includes the Ministry of People's Armed Forces (MPAF) leadership and extends down to the commanders of the Guard Command, Security Command, General Rear Services Bureau, General Staff Department, Korean People's Navy Command, Korean People's Air and Air Defense Command, Corps, and a small number of the General Staff Department's major bureaus (e.g., Reconnaissance Bureau). It also includes those individuals within the KWP, the State Security Department (SSD), and the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) who are serving military officers.

When looking at access to information among the military elite, it is essential that the reader set aside many preconceived ideas concerning the nation and the subject. The most common of these - and thus the most important to set aside - is that the DPRK is a "closed" nation. While true for the vast majority of its population, it is patently false when considering the military elite. Their potential to access information,¹ should they desire to do so, is quite good, but certainly less than that of their counterparts in the Republic of Korea (ROK, more commonly known as South Korea).

The flow of information within the DPRK can best be described as "Kim-centric" - vertical and convoluted. That is, it is towards Kim Chong-il that all important

¹ The term "potential" is used here because it is unclear whether the majority of the military and power-holding elite actually desire to access information on their own from outside the nation.

information streams, and from him that all significant orders and directions issue forth. For the nation in general, and the military specifically, this flow is vertical. In most militaries in the world, information flows both up and down the chain of command and horizontally at each level, while orders flow down. Within the Korean People's Army (KPA), information flows up the chain of command and only orders flow down. There is extremely little horizontal flow of information or communications except at the highest levels. Major KPA units (e.g., corps, divisions, and brigades) can communicate with headquarters above them and units subordinate to them, but very little communication is permitted with units adjacent to them. This vertical flow of information is a means of maintaining strict control over the KPA. The belief is that if major units were allowed to communicate horizontally, they could unite and possibly stage a coup.

As information flows upwards into the military and power-holding elites, it is processed by overlapping and competing organizations - many of which are in competition with each other through what might best be described as a lens of self deception composed of four layers: historical world view, political indoctrination, hatred for the U.S., and authoritarian cultural rules. This lens is so darkly colored that instead of focusing and illuminating, it distorts and misrepresents the reality of the information. Ominously, it is upon this information and analysis that Kim Chong-il and the military and power-holding elite base their decision making.

The Internet (and to a lesser degree the national intranet) is playing an increasingly important role within the DPRK. The basic reason for this is simple: "information is power." Kim Chong-il and the military and power-holding elite unmistakably understand this, which is why they have so vigorously endeavored to restrict access to it. Yet, at the same time they understand the decisive importance of the information concerning world affairs available on the Internet in bolstering their national survival.

Because of the extremes inherent in the access and flow of information among the military and power-holding elite, the entire process is vulnerable to self-deception, overload, manipulation (domestic or foreign), and collapse.

A. THE MILITARY AND THE POWER-HOLDING ELITE

Simply stated, all power within the DPRK originates with Kim Chong-il, who is simultaneously Chairman of the National Defense Commission, General Secretary of the KWP, and Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army (a unified armed force comprising ground, navy, and air forces). Therefore what really matters within the DPRK is not so much an individual's schooling, personal achievements, job, position within society, rank within the military, etc., but how close - physically and emotionally - that individual is connected to Kim Chong-il. The closer the individual is, the more power that person wields, and the greater access to uncensored and foreign information he or she has.

This can best be illustrated by viewing Kim Chong-il as the center - physically, politically, and socially - of the DPRK (see Figure 1). Immediately surrounding him are a group of individuals, primarily men, and their subordinates, who come from five broad societal groupings: Kim Chong-il's extended family and close confidants¹; MPAF; KWP; Cabinet; and intelligence and internal security services. The convergence of these groupings represents the power-holding elite within the DPRK. The pinnacle of the power-holding elite is the National Defense Commission, which consists of ten individuals, eight of whom hold military rank (see below). Thus, the military elite within the National Defense Commission are among the highest power-holders within the DPRK.

A noteworthy characteristic of the National Defense Commission specifically and the power-holding elite in general is that its members occupy multiple leadership positions within the MPAF, KWP, and intelligence and internal security services. For example, Chon Pyong-ho is simultaneously KWP Central Committee Secretary in charge of the Defense Industry Policy and Inspection Department and a member of the National Defense Commission; Vice Marshal Kim Yong-ch'un is simultaneously KWP Chief of Staff and a member of the National Defense Commission. In fact, all the military members of the National Defense Commission are also members of the Central Military Committee. This cross-pollination and concentration of power

¹ Information on the Kim family may be found in Buckley, Sarah. "North Korea's Secretive 'First Family'," BBC News, October 29, 2003, accessed October 30, 2003, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3203523.stm>; and Carlson, Peter. "Sins of the Son; Kim Jong Il's North Korea Is in Ruins, But Why Should That Spoil His Fun?," *Washington Post*, May 11, 2003, p. D1.

within the hands of a few individuals enables Kim Chong-il, through the National Defense Commission, to easily maintain extremely firm control over all aspects of DPRK society and the flow of information. It also means that the decision-making process and poles of political power apparent in western nations are not present within the DPRK.

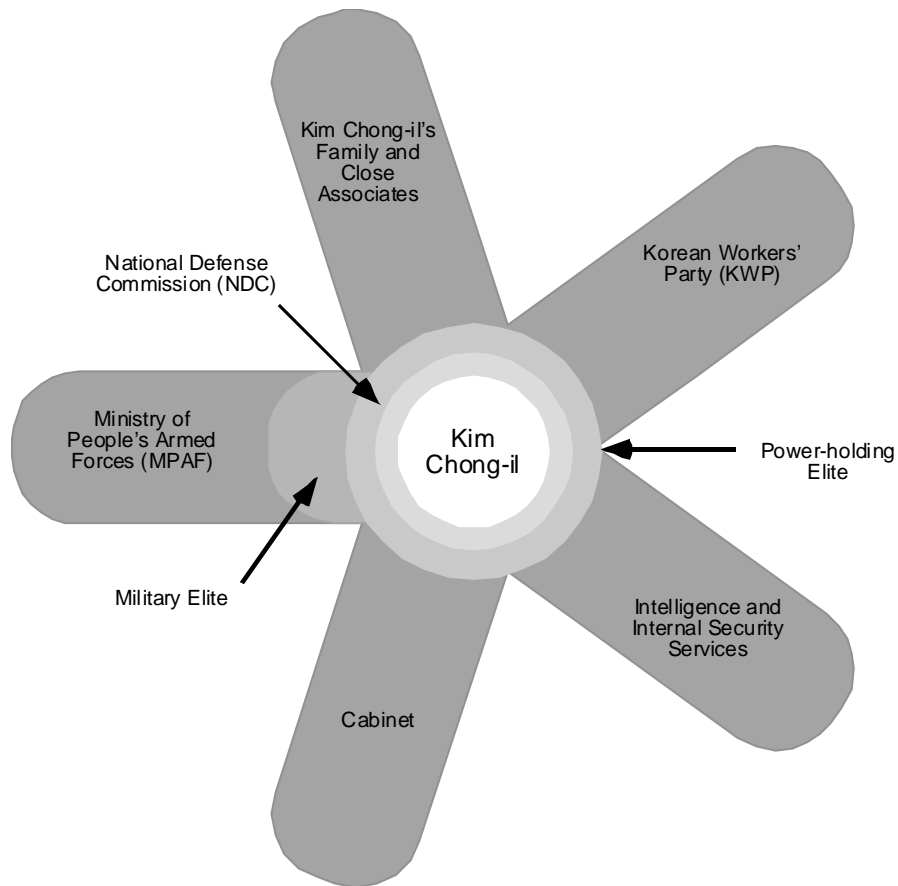


Figure I-1. Military and Power-holding Elite

There is a common misconception that during his forty-plus years as leader of the DPRK, Kim Il-sung was virtually impervious to the desires and concerns of the military, government, or people. Kim, while unquestionably “running the show,” always exercised control through, and shared power with, a very small tight-knit circle of power-holding elites, most of whom shared a common history reaching back to the days of the “anti-Japanese partisan struggle” of the 1930s and 1940s. And there always has existed a consensus-building and filtering mechanism within the DPRK leadership based principally upon this small power-holding group. The composition, effectiveness, and functioning of this mechanism have varied over time, especially during the 1990s with the passing of the old “partisan” leadership.

Contrary to popular belief, it is highly unlikely that Kim Chong-il (or Kim Il-sung, were he alive today) would unilaterally employ nuclear weapons, initiate a war, or pursue a policy which directly threatened national survival without first gaining the consensus of this power-holding group. This did not preclude Kim Il-sung's attempting to restructure or influence the power-holding group. He did so on numerous occasions throughout his career by purging his opposition. These purges, however, required a significant level of consensus-building among those engaged in the purging. Additionally, such shifts within the power-holding group have been long drawn-out affairs that have not been conducive to conducting national survival decision-making. Since the death of Kim Il-sung, Kim Chong-il has undertaken numerous significant changes in the power-holding group. With his elevation of the National Defense Commission as the ultimate power-holding group and the expansion of the "Military First" policy, the power of the military has assumed an historic high - even higher than that of the "Partisan Generals" of the late 1960s.² The process by which he has achieved this, however, has been selective and less disruptive than that frequently utilized by his father.

The military elite within the DPRK should be understood to contain not only those individuals within the National Defense Commission holding military rank but also those military personnel situated within the broader power-holding elite. From an organizational standpoint this would include the MPAF leadership and extend down to the commanders of the Guard Command, Security Command, General Rear Services Bureau, General Staff Department, Korean People's Navy Command, Korean People's Air and Air Defense Command, Corps, and a small number of the General Staff Department's major bureaus (e.g., Reconnaissance Bureau). As with military organizations throughout the world, the immediate staffs of the military elite can be viewed as having access to information considerably higher than their rank would typically suggest.

The concepts of military elite and proximity to power can be viewed as being institutionalized within the KPA. As best as can be determined, promotions of all officers from battalion level and higher within the KPA require the personal approval of Kim Chong-il. Candidates' names only reach Kim Chong-il after extensive background reviews by the KWP and Security Command, and with the personal recommendations of the individual's battalion, brigade, division, and corps commanders. The two primary factors used to determine a candidate's suitability by each level of command is whether that individual is politically reliable

² For information on the period of the "Partisan Generals," see: Bermudez Jr., Joseph S. *North Korean Special Forces: Second Edition*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 1998, pp. 64-68 and 90-93; Suh, Dae-sook. *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, pp. 211-231; Sung-joo, "North Korea's Security Policy and Military Strategy," in *North Korea Today: Strategic and Domestic Issues*, ed. Robert A Scalapino and Kim Jun-yop, University of California, Berkeley, 1983, pp. 144-163.

and whether or not he will embarrass those recommending the candidate. The net result of this is twofold. First, an officer is indebted throughout his career to Kim Chong-il and to specific individuals for his promotions and quality of life. Second, an officer's rank is dependent upon political loyalty and reliability rather than professional competence and experience. This allows Kim Chong-il to depend upon the absolute loyalty of the military. It also allows him, should he desire, to easily bypass the organizational chain of command and issue an order directly to a mid- or low-level officer.

By all accounts, Kim Chong-il is a workaholic, micromanager, and "information junkie." He is technologically savvy, impatient, quick-tempered, intelligent, and ruthless. By his own admission, he surfs the Internet daily, regularly watches NHK (Japan), CCTV (China) and CNN, and has foreign books and articles (especially anything written about himself) translated and summarized for him. He prefers to manage almost everything directly, down to the most minor of details. Without his personal approval, nothing of significance can be initiated or accomplished. He insists on numerous detailed reports from all organizations and then spends long hours at his office reading them. He doesn't necessarily trust any single source for information but rather compares the information he receives from several different organizations and sources (apparently including the Internet). It is not unusual for him to instruct specialists and technocrats throughout the government to appear before him so that he might directly question them concerning a particular matter. Finally, he believes that the decisions and choices he makes are better than those of the people around him. It is towards Kim Chong-il that all important information streams, and from him that all significant orders and directions issue forth.³ Ominously, much of the information and analysis he bases his decision making upon is fundamentally distorted by the system his father established and he perpetuates.

One final aspect of the military and power-holding elite that needs to be mentioned is what in the West would be termed corruption. In fact, this corruption may be viewed as being institutionalized and the means by which many of the military and power-holding elite have attained their positions. It is manifested in the access elites have to information, foreign manufactured goods, opportunity to have their children travel abroad for schooling, their own

³ Maas, Peter. "The Last Emperor," *New York Times Magazine*, October 19, 2003; "Interview with defector Hwang Jong Yop [Hwang Jang Yop]: A Rare Portrait Of North Korea," *Time [Asia]*, September 7, 1999, Vol. 152, No. 9, <http://www.time.com/time/asia/>; "DPRK's Kim Chong-il's Position on Retaliation," *Choson Ilbo*, October 17, 1996, pp. 8-11, as cited in FBIS-EAS-96-231; "Defector to ROK on Kim Chong-il's Control of DPRK Military," *Win*, June 1996, pp. 161-167, as cited in FBIS-EAS-96-197; "Articles by Defector Kang Myong-to Reported," *Chungang Ilbo*, April 21, 1995, p. 5, as cited in FBIS-EAS-95-097; "North Korean Defectors 27 July News Conference," *Choson Ilbo*, July 28, 1994, pp. 3-4, as cited in FBIS-EAS-94-145; and "Newspaper Profiles Kim Chong-il's Supporters," *Sindong-a*, February 1994, pp. 421-439, as cited in FBIS-EAS-94-050.

greater opportunities to travel, nepotism, etc. Thus, favoritism and cronyism are endemic among the elite. Given this vortex of institutionalized corruption, fear of displeasing Kim Chong-il, and a convoluted flow of information, it is certainly within the realm of possibility that Kim Chong-il is being deceived or misled at some level by subordinates. Exactly how it occurs is unclear, but it may manifest itself in a manner similar to the Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein.⁴ It may be something to the effect that managers or leaders of programs exaggerate achievements or the potential capabilities of programs or systems. Some of this may account for the stories related by defectors concerning Kim Chong-il's surprise at times concerning the conditions in military units or factories and the excessive remedies that he initiates to address these conditions.

Within such an environment of corruption it would serve an individual's interest (and by extension those who ally themselves with that individual) to have higher quality and greater diversity of information than a political rival. The corollary to this is that limiting a rival's access to information is of significant benefit to a member of the military or the power-holding elite.

B. ORGANIZATION⁵

As stated, all political, governmental, and military control within the DPRK originates with Kim Chong-il; it then proceeds down through three distinct paths – the National Defense Commission, the KWP, and the Cabinet (see Figure 2).

The principal path for command and control of the military extends through the National Defense Commission to the Ministry of People's Armed Forces and its General Staff Department. From here, command and control flows to the Korean People's Navy Command, the Korean People's Air and Air Defense Command, and various bureaus and operational units.

Two secondary paths exist to ensure political control of the KPA. The first extends through the KWP Central Committee to the Central Military Committee and onto the General Political Bureau subordinate to the National Defense Commission. From the General Political Bureau, it extends down via a separate chain of command to the lowest levels of the KPA. The second path extends from the National Defense Commission to the State Security Department. This department controls the MPAF's Security Command, which also maintains representatives

⁴ Risen, James. "Ex-Inspector Says C.I.A. Missed Disarray in Iraqi Arms Program," *New York Times*, January 26, 2004.

⁵ Author interview data; *Vantage Point*, "Military Rule in Full Swing," April 1999, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 2-8; *Defense White Paper 1998*, pp. 57-58 and 67-69; *A Handbook on North Korea: 1st Revision*, Naewoe Press, Seoul, 1996, pp. 64-88; *Vantage Point*, "An Analysis of the Constitutional Amendment and the Reorganization of Power Structure in North Korea," November 1998, Vol. XXI, No. 11, pp. 30-39; "Journal Views DPRK's Military Organization," *Sisa Journal*, 6 June 1996, pp. 30-31, as cited in FBIS-EAS-96-116; *NSP Issues Press Release on Hwang's Comments*; and *North Korea: The Foundations for Military Strength—Update 1995*, pp. 1-3.

to the lowest-levels of the KPA. As a unified armed force, the Chief of the General Staff not only directly commands the ground forces but also the naval and air forces. These two secondary paths are critical conduits through which information flows up to the military elite and National Defense Commission. Command and control of the DPRK's various intelligence and internal security forces also proceed down through the National Defense Commission, the KWP, and the Cabinet.

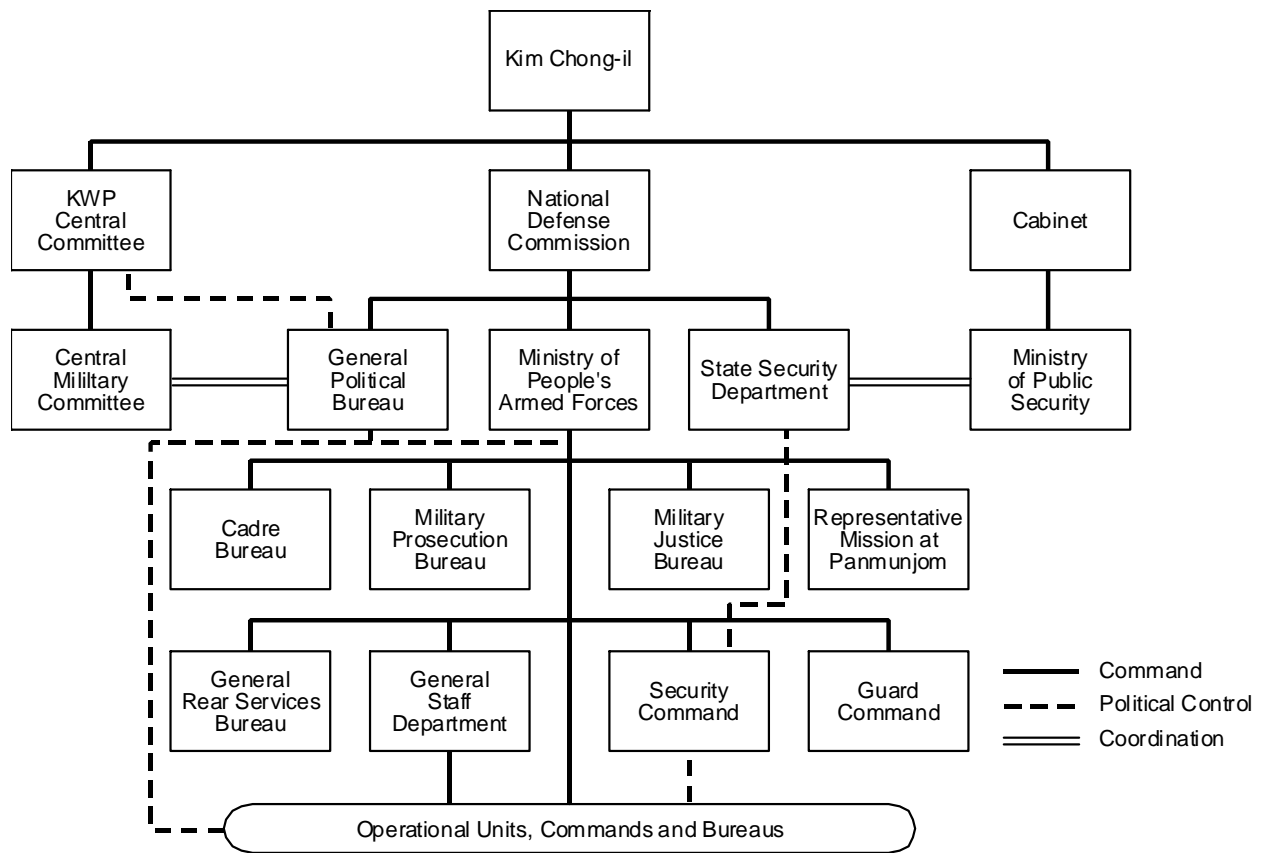


Figure I-2. Command and Control (Simplified)

National Defense Commission⁶

As of September 1998, "...the National Defense Commission Chairman controls all of the political, military, and economic capabilities of the Republic." It comprises ten individuals: Marshal Kim Chong-il (Chairman), Vice Marshal Cho Myong-rok (First Vice Chairman), Vice Marshal Kim Il-ch'ol (Vice Chairman), Vice Marshal Li Yong-mu (Vice Chairman), Vice Marshal Kim Yong-ch'un, Yon Hyong-muk, Marshal Li Ul-sol, Vice Marshal Paek Hak-rim, Chon Pyong-ho, and General Kim Ch'ol-man. The National Defense Commission represents the pinnacle of the power-holding elite, its military members are the elite of the military elite.

The exact organization of the National Defense Commission and the individual responsibilities of its members are unclear. Directly subordinate to the National Defense Commission are the MPAF, the State Security Department, and the General Political Bureau.

Korean Workers' Party⁷

The KWP pervades every aspect of life within the DPRK, including the KPA. Its two principal components are the Central Committee and the Central Military Committee. The Central Committee is composed of the Political Bureau, the Secretariat, the Central Control Committee, and the Central Auditing Committee. The Secretariat is the executive body of the KWP. It includes General Secretary Kim Chong-il, eight secretaries, and 22 departments. These secretaries and departments are responsible for organizing and implementing the policies and decisions of the KWP. The Central Military Committee and the Organization and Guidance Department are the most powerful entities within the KWP.

The KWP's Central Military Committee was established in December 1962 and is the highest level KWP organization directly involved with military policy. The KWP Charter states that the "Central Military Committee of the Party debates and decides on methods of implementing Party's military policies, organizes and guides all the projects related to the

⁶ Author interview data; "Military Rule in Full Swing," pp. 2-8; *A Handbook on North Korea: 1st Revision*, pp. 64-88; "An Analysis of the Constitutional Amendment and the Reorganization of Power Structure in North Korea," pp. 30-39; *Vantage Point*, "Is People's Army Becoming More Powerful than Workers' Party?" June 1998, Vol. XXI, No. 6, pp. 32-39; and "Journal Views DPRK's Military Organization," pp. 30-31.

⁷ "Defector Hwang Chang-yop [Hwang Jang Yop] Interviewed," *Sindong-a*, July 1998, pp. 328-345, as cited in FBIS-EAS-98-191; "Role of Political Organs in Military Examined," *Naewoe Tongsin*, 15 January 1998, pp. B1-B6, as cited in FBIS-EAS-98-079; "DPRK's Kim Chong-il's Position on Retaliation," pp. 8-11; "Defector to ROK on Kim Chong-il's Control of DPRK Military," pp. 161-167; "Defector Says KPA Under 'Complete Control' of Kim Chong-il," *Seoul Sinmun*, 26 February 1996, p. 20, as cited in FBIS-EAS-96-039; and "Channels and Means of Control of the Workers' Party to Control the People's Army," *Vantage Point*, March 1995, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, pp. 32-41; and "Newspaper Profiles Kim Chong-il's Supporters," pp. 421-439.

strengthening of all armed forces, including the People's Army, as well as the programs of developing the war industry, and commands the army.”

The Central Military Committee leadership is centered on the members of the National Defense Commission. It is headed by Marshal Kim Chong-il in his position as Supreme Commander of the KPA. Other members include: Marshal Li Ul-sol (Director of the Guard Command); Vice Marshal Cho Myong-rok (Chief of the General Political Bureau); Vice Marshal Kim Yong-ch'un (Chief of the General Staff); Paek Hak-rim (Minister of Public Security); Vice Marshal Kim Ik-hyon (Chief of People's Defense); Vice Marshal Kim Il-ch'ol (Minister of People's Armed Forces); Vice Marshal Li Ha-il; Vice Marshal Pak Ki-so (Commander of the P'yongyang Defense Command); Vice Marshal Li Du-ik; General Oh Ryong-bang (Vice Minister of People's Armed Forces); Colonel General Yo Ch'un-sok (Vice Minister of People's Armed Forces); General Kim Myong-guk; General Kim Du-nam; and Li Yong-chol. The officers of the Central Military Committee who are not members of the National Defense Commission form a second tier within the military elite.⁸

The Organization and Guidance Department, under the directorship of Chang Song-taek, Kim Chong-il's brother-in-law, is one of 22 departments comprising the KWP's Secretariat. In reality, it is the most powerful organization within the KWP and provides guidance to all KWP, Cabinet, and National Defense Commission organizations through personnel management, supervising the activities of subordinate political departments, and conducting political surveillance and investigations. In pursuing its mission, the Organization and Guidance Department generally concerns itself with individuals at the provincial secretary level or higher within the KWP, vice director and above within the Cabinet, and general grade officers and above within the National Defense Commission and MPAF.⁹

While directly subordinate to the National Defense Commission since September 2000, the General Political Bureau is actually controlled by the KWP's powerful Organization and Guidance Department. The General Political Bureau is responsible for ensuring the political reliability and for exercising political control of the KPA. It does so through the organization of party committees and front organizations throughout the KPA hierarchy, the placement of KWP members in key positions, the planning of political indoctrination, and the supervision of affairs by assistant political commanders and political departments.

⁸ Precise details as to how recent changes within the DPRK have affected membership in the Central Military Committee and Organization and Guidance Department are presently lacking.

⁹ “Newspaper Profiles Kim Chong-il's Supporters,” pp. 421-439.

Ministry of People's Armed Forces¹⁰

The Minister of the People's Armed Forces is the National Defense Commission's officer directly responsible for the KPA. Operational and administrative control of the KPA is exercised through the Chief of the General Staff. Directly subordinate to the MPAF are the Cadre Bureau, General Rear Services Bureau, General Staff Department, Guard Command, Representative Mission at Panmunjom, Military Justice Bureau, Military Prosecution Bureau, and Security Command.

The General Staff Department exercises administrative and operational control over the KPA ground forces, Korean People's Air Force (KPAF), Korean People's Navy (KPN), Workers'-Peasants' Red Guard, and Paramilitary Training Units. It is roughly equivalent to the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff. The General Staff Department is staffed by officers and enlisted personnel from all the branches and is responsible for organizing, training, and equipping, as well as planning and executing all operations within the KPA.

Subordinate to the General Staff Department are 24 known bureaus, and a number of military academies, universities, and research institutes. A number of these bureaus are directly involved in the processing of information and intelligence for the military elite. The most important of these bureaus are the Classified Information Bureau, Communications Bureau, Electronic Warfare Bureau, Military Training Bureau, and Reconnaissance Bureau. The level of computerization, and thus potential to access the Internet, within these bureaus is believed to be generally higher than that found in other bureaus of the General Staff Department.

The Classified Information Bureau is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the production, transmission, and storage of classified information within the KPA, including planning and inspection, encryption, and decryption. The Communications Bureau is responsible for the administration and operation of all communications within the KPA and presumably provides support to the National Defense Commission in cooperation with the State Security Department. The Electronic Warfare Bureau is responsible for the administration and training of all Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) and electronic warfare (EW)/electronic information warfare (EIW) assets within the KPA. The Military Training Bureau is responsible for education and training within the KPA, including that at military schools and academies. In fulfilling its mission, it conducts research and evaluates foreign combat operations through a small number of

¹⁰ Author interview data; "Role of Political Organs in Military Examined," pp. B1-B6; "Journal Views DPRK's Military Organization," pp. 30-31; "Defector Says KPA Under 'Complete Control' of Kim Chong-il," p. 20; "Channels and Means of Control of the Workers' Party to Control the People's Army," pp. 32-41; "Organization, Officers of Korean People's Army," *Pukhanui Kigwan Mit Tanchaebiyol Inmyongjip*, April 1988, pp. 93-99, as cited in JPRS-KAR-88-018; and Kin Motoyoshi, "DPRK Military Structure," *Gunji Kenkyu*, March 1986, pp. 196-205, as cited in JPRS-KAR-85-045.

research institutes and “think tanks.” The Reconnaissance Bureau (see below) is responsible for the collection of tactical and strategic intelligence within the military sphere, and strategic special operations throughout the ROK and overseas.

Intelligence and Internal Security Services

The primary mission of the DPRK’s intelligence organizations is to actively collect and disseminate timely and accurate information concerning any possible political, military, or economic threat to the security of the nation or to its political and military leadership, and to conduct subversion activities against the ROK. The primary missions of the DPRK’s internal security organizations are to protect the government and KWP from domestic threats and to prevent or neutralize any foreign intelligence collection or subversion activities against the DPRK. The DPRK’s intelligence and internal security organizations are the primary means by which foreign information enters the DPRK and reaches the military elite as processed intelligence.

The DPRK’s intelligence organizations have proven that they are capable of fulfilling their missions, especially within Asia. Intelligence collection outside of Asia is problematic as a result of the DPRK’s expanding economic crisis and political isolation in the international community. The DPRK’s internal security organizations have proven to be extremely effective.

While the missions presented above suggest a distinct separation of external and internal security responsibilities, the reality of the situation is somewhat more ambiguous, with various agencies often having overlapping areas of responsibility; in some cases, the agencies are in competition with each other (see below). For example, all agencies have an internal security responsibility to some degree, and internal security agencies have conducted positive intelligence operations within the ROK and overseas.

The organization of the intelligence and internal security community originates with Kim Chong-il and proceeds down through three distinct paths (see Figure 3): National Defense Commission, KWP, and Cabinet. Subordinate to the National Defense Commission are the MPAF and State Security Department. Subordinate to the MPAF are the Reconnaissance Bureau, Security Command, and Guard Command. The paths through the KWP and Cabinet are relatively short. Subordinate to the KWP is the office of the Central Committee Secretary in Charge of South Korean Affairs (CCSKA), which controls four intelligence-related departments. Subordinate to the Cabinet is the Ministry of Public Security.¹¹

¹¹ Author interview data, *North Korean Special Forces—Second Edition*,; *A Handbook on North Korea*, p. 20; and Bermudez Jr., Joseph S., *Terrorism: The North Korean Connection*, Taylor & Francis, New York, October 1990.

The office of CCSKA is responsible for implementing anti-ROK operations. It also exercises control over subordinate agencies and coordinates with the Reconnaissance Bureau, Ministry of Public Security, and State Security Department. It apparently collects information from its subordinate intelligence agencies and other organizations, and disseminates finished intelligence products to all DPRK government agencies including the National Defense Commission. The CCSKA controls four subordinate departments: Foreign Liaison Department (a.k.a., Social-Cultural Department or Liaison Department); Unification Front Department (a.k.a., South-North Dialogue Department); Office 35 (a.k.a., Research Department for External Intelligence, or Investigative Department); and Operations Department. The Foreign Liaison Department is tasked with establishing cells within the ROK and training agents; the Unification Front Department is responsible for “unified front” operations and anti-ROK psychological warfare operations; Office 35 is tasked with internal and external intelligence collection and infiltration into the ROK; and the Operations Department is responsible for basic training of anti-ROK agents and infiltration (a.k.a., escort) operations.¹²

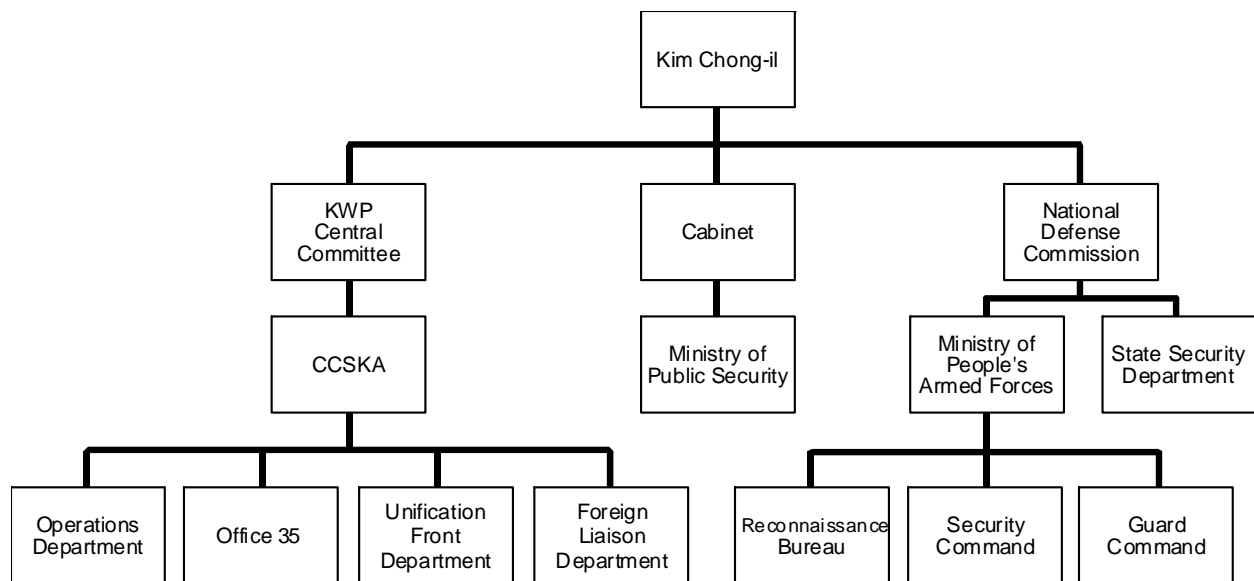


Figure I-3. Intelligence Services

¹² There is some question as to whether the position of CCSKA has been eliminated and its responsibilities assumed by Kim Chong-il. Author interview data; “National Security Planning on DPRK’s Anti-ROK Departments,” *Choson Ilbo*, July 30, 1998, as cited in FBIS-EAS-98-220; *Defense White Paper*, various editions 1990-1998; “The Aims and Characteristics of North Korea’s United Front Strategy,” *Vantage Point*, March 1996, Vol. XIX, No. 3, pp., 27-29; and “Former North Korean Agent Discloses DPRK’s Spy Activities,” *Mainichi Shimbun*, 9 May 1996, p. 6, as cited in FBIS-EAS-96-093.

The primary missions of the Reconnaissance Bureau are the collection of tactical and strategic intelligence within the military sphere, and strategic special operations throughout the ROK and overseas. It is organized into a headquarters, Political Department, Intelligence Department, Special Department, Technical/Radio Department, Training/Plans Department, Maritime Department, and five Reconnaissance Battalions. Additionally, the Reconnaissance Bureau is believed to operate a small number of Trading Companies as “covers” and to generate financing for operations.¹³

Subordinate to the MPAF is the Guard Command, which is responsible for the personal security of Kim Chong-il and high-ranking officials. Although it is roughly comparable to the U.S. Secret Service or the ROK Office of Presidential Security, it also possesses a small number of combat units. In the performance of its mission, it works closely with the State Security Department and, to a lesser degree, the P’yongyang Defense Command.¹⁴

Although institutionally subordinate to the MPAF, the Security Command is controlled by the State Security Department. This organization is responsible for internal security within the KPA.¹⁵ The State Security Department functions both as an intelligence agency engaged in active operations overseas and as a domestic political security force (i.e., secret police). It is most comparable in function to the former Soviet KGB or, to a lesser degree, the ROK National Intelligence Service (formerly National Security Planning Agency). It is responsible for security (physical and political) within the DPRK’s embassies, missions, and legations located throughout the world. The State Security Department and the Guard Command are the agencies most directly responsible for the security of Kim Chong-il and reportedly only he is exempt from their scrutiny. Following the Constitutional amendments of September 1998, the State Security Department was subordinated to the National Defense Commission.¹⁶

¹³ Author Interview data and “DPRK Spy Organizations Targeting Japan,” *Gunji Kenkyu*, June 1999, pp. 68-73, as cited in FBIS.

¹⁴ Author interview data; “Monthly Discusses Secret Works in DPRK,” *Pukhan*, 12 January 1999, pp. 72-83, as cited in FBIS-EAS-99-012; “Kim Chong-il’s Security Force Strengthened,” *Naewoe Tongsin*, No. 961, 13 July 1995, pp. E1-E4, as cited in FBIS-EAS-95-182; and “Journal Views DPRK’s Military Organization,” pp. 30-31.

¹⁵ Author interview data; “DPRK’s Kim Chong-il’s Position on Retaliation,” pp. 8-11; “Generational Shift in DPRK Leadership Gaining Momentum,” *Hanguk Ilbo*, 29 July 1996, p. 13, as cited in FBIS-EAS-96-146; “Defector to ROK on Kim Chong-il’s Control of DPRK Military,” pp. 161-167; “Defector Hwang Chang-yop [Hwang Jang Yop] Interviewed,” pp. 328-345; “Defector Says KPA Under ‘Complete Control’ of Kim Chong-il,” *Seoul Sinmun*, February 26, 1996, p. 2, as cited in FBIS-EAS-96-039; “Articles by Defector Kang Myong-to Reported,” p. 3; and “Journal Views DPRK’s Military Organization,” pp. 30-31.

¹⁶ Author interview data; “NK Reshuffles Political Structure,” *A Handbook on North Korea*, p. 20; “Attempted 1995 Military Coup d’Etat in DPRK Alleged,” *Chugan Choson*, March 21, 1996, pp. 34-35, as cited in FBIS-EAS-96-053; “Article on Past Military Coup Attempts in North,” *Iryo Sinmun*, 21 May 1995, p. 9, as cited in FBIS-EAS-95-097; “DPRK ‘Intensifying’ Internal Control,” *Seoul Sinmun*, 6 May 1996 p. 2, as cited in FBIS-EAS-96-088; and “Journal Views DPRK’s Military Organization,” pp. 30-31.

The Ministry of Public Security functions primarily as the national police and civil defense force for the DPRK. Like the State Security Department, it also is responsible for conducting political surveillance; however, political suspects are remanded to the State Security Department.¹⁷

Cabinet

Under the Constitutional changes initiated by the 10th Supreme People's Assembly in September 1998, the Central People's Committee and State Administration Council were abolished and replaced by a Cabinet and a Presidium. The Cabinet "...represents the government of the DPRK" and assumed the responsibilities of the Administration Council, while the Presidium "...represents the state and receives credentials and letters of recall from diplomatic representatives accredited by a foreign state."

The Cabinet is charged with responsibility for all economic programs and the administration of the nation. It exercises these responsibilities through at least 27 ministries, the most powerful of which is the Ministry of Public Security, which functions as a combination national police force, civil defense force, and national construction force. The Cabinet is the primary means by which the nation presents itself to the international community.

C. INFORMATION ACCESS AND FLOW

Information within the DPRK can be broadly divided into two categories - official and unofficial. Official links are those means of communication that are institutionally or governmentally created and maintained by the DPRK, to include all print and electronic media (see Appendix A) originating within the DPRK; official lines of communications between the National Defense Commission and components of the MPAF, SSD, KWP, and other military and intelligence components; daily/weekly/special intelligence reports produced by the intelligence and internal security services; translations of foreign broadcasts, media and publications; information collected by DPRK embassies and legations which is forwarded to P'yongyang; reports produced by government ministries; etc. Access to the Internet, which is growing considerably among the military and power-holding elite, can be viewed as falling within the official category since it is provided by the government and is closely monitored by the intelligence and internal security organizations. Unofficial links are those means of

¹⁷ Author interview data; "Kim Chong-il Thanks KPA, Security Officers," *KCNA*, 11 January 1996, as cited in FBIS-EAS-96-008; *A Handbook on North Korea*, p. 20; "Attempted 1995 Military Coup d'Etat in DPRK Alleged," pp. 34-35; "Article on Past Military Coup Attempts in North," p. 9; "DPRK 'Intensifying' Internal Control," p. 2; "DPRK Military Structure, Make-up Discussed," pp. 196-205; and "Kim Chong-il's Army," pp. 200-209.

communication that generally fall outside official channels. These would include listening to foreign media broadcasts or reading foreign newspapers and magazines; viewing films and videos brought into the country by personnel traveling abroad; obtaining information gathered from interaction with foreign individuals through official and unofficial contacts and from study abroad;¹⁸ communicating among family members, coworkers, and former classmates; gathering information during an individual's travels, both domestic and foreign; etc.

Internet, Intranet, and Cell Phones

The increasing use of the Internet, national intranet, and cell phones within the DPRK are new dynamics in the process by which information is accessed and flows within the DPRK.

DPRK computer security technology is reported to be relatively sophisticated. Although it probably possessed others before it, the DPRK's first known permanent link to the Internet began in October 1996 through the P'yongyang office of the United Nations Development Program. Since that time, links to the Internet have continued to expand. Access is restricted and is monitored by the State Security Department. Beginning in 1996, a small group of computer technicians began building the Kwangmyong (Bright) Network - a national level intranet. It currently has nodes in P'yongyang, each provincial capital, and several major cities. Although isolated from the world, it allows for email messaging and the sharing of web pages on the domestic level. The reason for this isolation is twofold. First is the fear that the DPRK's enemies (i.e., the ROK and the U.S.) would use the information sharing against the nation. The second reason for isolation is to prevent the people from being "contaminated" by outside influences. This isolation has resulted in all Internet web sites promoting the DPRK actually being located in Japan, the PRC, or other nations. For the general public, there is extremely limited access to the Internet available in P'yongyang (and possibly a few other selected cities) at major universities and selected institutes.¹⁹

The Internet (and to a lesser degree the national intranet) are playing an increasingly important role within the DPRK. The basic reason for this is simple—"information is power."

¹⁸ Students studying and Foreign Ministry personnel living abroad are viewed with some suspicion upon their return to the DPRK since they are often assumed to have been corrupted while abroad. While they may have not been "corrupted," all evidence points to the fact that they certainly understand the staggering differences between the DPRK and the nations in which they have lived. Even Foreign Ministry officials, when pressed in private conversations, admit to the wide disparity between the DPRK and most other nations. They, however, quickly assert the ideological and spiritual superiority of the DPRK. "North Korean Defectors 27 July News Conference," pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ Author interview data; Cho, Un-hui. "Do They Use Cellular Phones in North Korea?" *Chungang Ilbo*, 12 July 12, 2001; "China Report Highlights N. Korea's Homegrown Web," *Reuters*, March 23, 2001; "Cyber Commerce with North Korea Proposed," *Korea Herald*, June 8, 1999; and "DPRK Linked to Internet Through UNDP Office," *Hanguk Ilbo*, December 1, 1995, p. 8, as cited in FBIS-EAS-95-23.

Kim Chong-il and the military and power-holding elite unmistakably understand this, which is why they have so vigorously endeavored to restrict access. Yet, at the same time they understand the decisive importance of the information concerning world affairs available on the Internet in bolstering their national survival. This need to access information on the Internet appears to be insatiable and has resulted in the creation of an subclass of Internet-, technology-, and information-savvy soldiers and citizens who are younger than the leadership they support and who know more about the world they live in. Working in the computer and information technology field has become a goal of the elite and a symbol of privilege.²⁰ Like millions of such young people around the world, they undoubtedly find the technology and information liberating, seductive, and addictive. And in pursuing this technology and information, they are ever increasingly exposed to the reality of the world. They almost certainly understand that the world has more to offer than what they presently have; they likely see the conditions under which they live and compare them to what exists in the ROK, Japan, China, and the rest of world - and they undeniably want a better life for themselves. Just as fax machines and computer bulletin boards in China during the late 1980s proved to be essential tools for young Chinese democracy seekers, the Internet has the potential to be an equally powerful tool for change within the DPRK over the next 10 to 15 years. This potential is something that should be attentively observed and nurtured as best as is possible.

Beginning in 2002, cellular phone service was initiated in the P'yongyang region.²¹ The DPRK plans to expand this coverage to include additional cities in the future. Cellular service is also available at some locations along the PRC border and along the DMZ. As best as can be presently determined, access to the cellular network is limited to foreigners and the military and power-holding elite.

The introduction of cellular service, while undoubtedly allowing Kim Chong-il to “reach out and touch” his subordinates, presents several new situations with regards to information flow and access. As the military and power-holding elite use the new system, it will provide for an increased flow of information among individuals; however, it also is likely that the new technology will be abused by the users, thus presenting both domestic and foreign vulnerabilities. It is natural for individuals to assume - even if they've been told otherwise - that their conversations are private and that the only person listening is the one they are talking to. The reality is different. Any agency within the DPRK with the capability to intercept communications - and there are a number - can now utilize that capability to monitor the communications of potential political rivals. Presenting Kim Chong-il, or a high ranking member

²⁰ “N Korea-Computer Craze,” *Associated Press*, December 24, 2003.

²¹ “N. Korea's Kim Orders Start of Mobile Phone Service,” *Kyodo*, January 20, 2002.

of the State Security Department or the Organization and Guidance Department, with a recording or transcript of a political opponent's conversations would be an ideal means of neutralizing or disadvantaging him.

Access to Information

The average citizen within the DPRK has very little opportunity to access foreign or uncensored information. The great majority of radios and televisions within the DPRK do not come with tuners or, if they do, these are limited to selecting only the state-approved radio and TV stations. Most people cannot access foreign broadcasts. In fact, the Ministry of Public Security and to a lesser degree the State Security Department ensure that average citizens do not modify their radios and televisions to receive foreign broadcasts. To do so, and to be found out, can result in extreme prison (i.e., detention camp) sentences. However, as an individual moves up through society, his potential to access uncensored information increases. As a civilian, it is when an individual attains a mid-level position within the KWP or government administration (especially one involved in external affairs) that such access can become a reality.

Despite draconian efforts, it appears that gradually increasing numbers of average citizens are risking their livelihoods to listen to ROK radio broadcasts. During the mid 1990s, the ROK Korean Broadcasting System surveyed defectors and arrived at an estimate of 2 to 6 million people within the DPRK who listen to their programming using inexpensive battery operated transistor radios manufactured in China and obtained on the black market. Since the time of this report, the border with China has become considerably more porous to black market trade and it appears that the number of illegal transistor radios within the DPRK has grown considerably.²²

An individual's ability to access information appears also to be dependent upon his physical location. Individuals living in P'yongyang, other large cities, or in the provinces along the DMZ appear to have a greater opportunity to view or listen to foreign broadcasts, while those living near the Chinese border appear to have a greater opportunity to obtain unrestricted televisions and radios.

High-ranking officials within the KWP and Cabinet frequently have access to foreign-made televisions or radios that do not have their tuners restricted. These are frequently presented to them as gifts from Kim Chong-il, obtained through individuals engaged in foreign trade, or

²² Author interview data; "2 to 6 Million in North Reportedly Hear KBS," *Yonhap*, February 13, 1995, as cited in FBIS-EAS-95-031; and "Many North Koreans Eager to Listen to South Korean Radio Program," *North Korea News*, May 23, 1994, No. 736, p. 4.

purchased on the black market. More significantly, they have access to regularly published translations of foreign broadcasts (see below).²³

Within the military, the potential to access uncensored or foreign information becomes significant at the level of a general grade officer or mid-level officer within a major bureau of the General Staff Department or MPAF. The members of the National Defense Commission have the potential to directly access whatever foreign or uncensored information they wish. They also have access to regularly published translations of foreign broadcasts, the opportunity to travel abroad, access to the Internet, and the opportunity to purchase foreign made radios and televisions that can access ROK, Japanese and Chinese stations.

The members of the military and power-holding elite typically have support staffs. In most military organizations and corporations throughout the world, it is not just the leaders who possess a certain level of power and access, but their support staffs do also. So it is with the staffs of the military and power-holding elites in the DPRK, who can be viewed as also having almost as much access to uncensored and foreign information as the people they work for. This access is even more pronounced with the DPRK's military elite since many are elderly, not computer savvy, and depend heavily upon their support staffs for information, research, and computer skills. Thus, the number of individuals within the military who actually have access to uncensored and foreign information is significantly greater than normally would be assumed.

Flow of Information

The flow of information within the DPRK can best be described as “Kim-centric,” - vertical and convoluted; that is, it is towards Kim Chong-il that all important information streams, and from him that all significant orders and directions issue forth. For the nation in general, and the military specifically, this flow is vertical. In most militaries in the world, information flows both up and down the chain of command and horizontally at each level, while orders flow down. Within the KPA, information flows up the chain of command and only orders flow down. There is extremely little horizontal flow of information or communications except at the highest levels. Major KPA units (e.g., corps, divisions, and brigades) can communicate with headquarters above them and units subordinate to them, but very little communication is permitted with units adjacent to them. These communications, according to defectors, rely heavily upon computers down to the battalion level and are conducted over what is presumed to be a secure military intranet.²⁴ The vertical flow of information is a means of

²³ “High-Level Defector Comments on DPRK Military,” *Choson Ilbo*, February 5-9, 1996, as cited in FBIS-EAS-96-072; and “Articles by Defector Kang Myong-to Reported,” p. 3.

²⁴ “N. Korea-Computer Craze,” *Associated Press*, December 24, 2003.

maintaining strict control over the KPA. The belief is that if major units were allowed to communicate horizontally, they could unite and possibly stage a coup.

The flow of information moves through a convoluted, almost Byzantine at times, series of paths controlled by different organizations with diverse agendas and priorities, in a manner that is quite frequently redundant and inefficient. As information flows upward toward the military and power-holding elites, it is processed through organizational, political, and cultural dynamics that distort and misrepresent its nature and reality.

The internal dynamics of the various intelligence and internal security agencies are such that the agencies are in competition with one another and do not readily share information. Therefore, each only possesses a “piece of the puzzle” from which to produce reports or briefings that are presented to the senior leadership. This has often resulted in the duplication of effort and a waste of precious resources, with operations frequently displaying overlapping and sometimes conflicting areas of responsibilities. Additionally, there appears to be a political competition among these agencies to accomplish “feats” in their anti-ROK operations in order to celebrate important domestic events (e.g., the anniversary of the KWP) or to ingratiate themselves with Kim Il-song or Kim Chong-il.²⁵ This situation has arisen because of the manner in which the intelligence and internal security organizations have evolved over the past fifty years and the fact that Kim Il-song and Kim Chong-il employ the various organizations as a means of preventing any person or faction from becoming too powerful and threatening their control.

Viewed in its most simplified form, information flows towards Kim Chong-il through three principal channels: KWP, the National Defense Commission, and the Cabinet. Each provides a distinctively tailored, often redundant and competitive conduit of processed information. At the uppermost levels, members of the military and power-holding elite unevenly overlay these channels.

Within the KWP, internal raw information is gathered from party members and organizations placed throughout the nation and the government and within the military. It is forwarded upwards through a dizzying array of departments and bureaus, where it is processed and refined within stringent guidelines established by the Central Committee. The Central Military Committee and Organization and Guidance Department are the most powerful entities within the KWP. Along with the National Defense Commission’s General Political Bureau, these organizations form a triumvirate within the KWP. As the semi-processed information enters

²⁵ Author interview data; and Chon, Shi-yong, “Security Agency Suspects North Korea Plotting Terrorism to Strain Ties,” *Korea Herald*, July 10, 1998.

these entities, it is used to prepare reports and briefings that are presented to the Central Committee, the National Defense Commission, and Kim Chong-il. Typical of these would be routine reports concerning the activities of provincial KWP committees, or the status of prisons and political prisoners. Alternately, depending on their subject matter, these reports and briefings may be solely for Kim Chong-il, or for Kim and a selected few confidants. Typical would be those reports dealing with counterintelligence and counterespionage, domestic security, and the like. The most feared of these are the surveillance and investigative reports produced by the Organization and the Guidance Department and the General Political Bureau.

The Organization and Guidance Department under the directorship of Chang Song-taek, Kim Chong-il's brother-in-law, focuses primarily upon the military (e.g., general level and above) and power-holding elite (e.g., department director and above). It produces what is believed to be a daily report highlighting the activities, attitudes, and political reliability of selected individuals that is submitted to Kim Chong-il. These internal security reports serve as a check to those produced by other agencies (e.g., State Security Department). The General Political Bureau compiles similar reports, but for selected KPA officers and soldiers below the military elite.²⁶

External information enters the KWP channel primarily through the intelligence agencies subordinate to the CCSKA, personnel stationed abroad, and unofficial (e.g., foreign media, Internet, etc.) sources. Raw information is sent back to P'yongyang from overseas intelligence stations and operatives as well as from Foreign Ministry personnel abroad. It is combined with intelligence acquired through official channels as a result of agreements with foreign governments, and information developed within the various agencies themselves. Numerous reports and briefings are presented to various members of the Central Committee, National Defense Commission, and Kim Chong-il; typical of these reports would be threat assessments, status reports of ongoing intelligence operations, etc. The KWP reports and briefings on political developments within the ROK, Japan, China, and Russia serve as a check to those produced by the State Security Department and Foreign Ministry.

The levels of computerization within the CCSKA are believed to vary considerably, with the highest being within the South-North Dialogue Department and the lowest within the Operations Department. Beginning in the 1990s, the growing availability of Internet access contributed significantly to the ability of agencies of the CCSKA to obtain previously unavailable intelligence on an almost endless range of subjects. During the 1990s, intelligence

²⁶ While a strict delineation of responsibilities is suggested here, the reality is probably significantly more ambiguous.

agencies in the ROK and Japan began to notice the use of commercial encryption software and Internet email services by CCSKA agents operating in their countries. The websites of the U.S. Department of Defense are heavily visited by users from the DPRK. The Internet also has provided a means to quickly and easily disseminate propaganda and engage in disinformation campaigns. The internet, along with foreign broadcasts, appears to be a major source of information for the CCSKA.

Central Committee members who hold the rank of department director or above and a limited number of other KWP officials receive the regularly published classified bulletin "Reference Information." It contains translations of foreign news items with an emphasis on news from the ROK, Japan, and the U.S. The information is presented in much the same manner as Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) reports - uncensored and without commentary. It is unclear if distribution extends outside the KWP; however, members of the National Defense Commission undoubtedly have access to it and similar products from other agencies.²⁷

The information channel subordinate to the National Defense Commission consists of three sub-channels: the General Political Bureau, the State Security Department, and the Ministry of People's Armed Forces.

As noted above, the General Political Bureau is primarily concerned with internal security within the KPA. While institutionally subordinate to the National Defense Commission, it is controlled by the KWP. Although the majority of its reports apparently proceed up through the KWP channel, some may bypass this and go directly to members of the National Defense Commission or Kim Chong-il.

The State Security Department functions both as an intelligence agency engaged in active operations overseas and a domestic political security force (i.e., secret police). It is most comparable in function to the former Soviet KGB. It controls both the MPAF's Guard Command and Security Command. The information it collects and the reports and briefings it produces cover the entire spectrum. For internal missions, the State Security Department and the Guard Command are the agencies most directly responsible for the security of Kim Chong-il. In this role, the State Security Department collects information on possible threats to Kim Chong-il and the political reliability of members of the military and power-holding elite. Its counterespionage and counterintelligence missions allow it collect additional information on anyone within the DPRK, including foreign residents. Depending upon its nature, the information and intelligence

²⁷ It is unclear whether the "Reference Information" publication noted here still exists as such. It is, however, probable that there are a series of products similar to FBIS available to the military and power-holding elite today. "North Korean Defectors 27 July News Conference," pp. 3-4.

produced by the MPAF's Guard and Security Commands may flow upward through both the State Security Department and MPAF. The reports and briefings that are produced by the State Security Department serve as a check of those produced by the KWP. These reports may be directly passed to the National Defense Commission or Kim Chong-il. At the external level, the State Security Department's role in providing for the physical and political security of embassies and legations throughout the world allows it to collect information on the political reliability of members of the Foreign Ministry, foreign political developments, status of DPRK defectors, and foreign military and intelligence operations. This information is forwarded back to P'yongyang where it is processed and incorporated into briefings and reports for the National Defense Commission or Kim Chong-il. The State Security Department reports on foreign political developments serve as a check for those produced by the Foreign Ministry and CCSKA.

With regard to information access and dissemination, the State Security Department's Communications Interception Bureau (a.k.a., Signals Interception Bureau) is believed to be the DPRK's primary SIGINT agency. It is responsible for the creation of encryption systems and equipment, as well as the decryption of foreign code systems. It maintains a system of collection sites throughout the country that monitor both illegal internal and foreign civilian and military transmissions. This system appears to be separate from that of the Reconnaissance Bureau's Technical/Radio Department. In addition to its SIGINT capabilities, this bureau is believed to possess EW and EIW assets. The relationships among the Communications Interception Bureau, the Technical/Radio Department, and the Electronic Warfare Bureau are unclear; however, the Communications Interception Bureau appears to be the senior service. The State Security Department, possibly through its Communications Interception Bureau, is believed to play a crucial role in monitoring access to the Internet. The general level of computerization within the State Security Department is believed to be high, with numerous modern high-end computers of Asian, European and U.S. manufacture.

The State Security Department and the Reconnaissance Bureau are believed to be the primary agencies involved in the production of translations of foreign broadcasts that apparently are regularly disseminated to the military and power-holding elite. It is probable that the KWP's "Reference Bulletin" is prepared from information collected by these agencies.

The sub-channel that proceeds through the MPAF comprises at least seven significant components: Guard Command, Security Command, Reconnaissance Bureau, Classified Information Bureau, Communications Bureau, Electronic Warfare Bureau, and Military Training Bureau. With the exception of the Guard and Security Commands, these components produce reports and briefings from raw information and pass them up through the MPAF to the National Defense Commission and Kim Chong-il.

The Guard and Security Commands, while institutionally subordinate to the MPAF, are controlled by the State Security Department. Information and intelligence produced by these Commands serve as a check to that produced by the KWP's General Political Bureau and are believed to flow upward through both the MPAF and the State Security Department. Both the Guard and Security Commands possess small SIGINT components, which are apparently focused upon internal targets. The level of computerization within these Commands is believed to be high.

The Reconnaissance Bureau is the primary military intelligence agency within the DPRK. As such, it utilizes a wide array of methods to collect relevant information and process it into intelligence, which is then disseminated to varying degrees among the components of the MPAF and General Staff Department, as well as the National Defense Commission. The Internet and foreign media apparently serve as important sources of information for the Reconnaissance Bureau.

With regard to information access and dissemination, the Reconnaissance Bureau's Technical/Radio Department plays a crucial role. This Department, in cooperation with the Electronic Warfare Bureau, is believed to be the organization exercising overall responsibility for SIGINT, communications security (COMSEC), EW, and EIW operations within the MPAF. The number and organization of SIGINT assets within the MPAF is unclear. Ground based assets are believed to consist of a small number of independent SIGINT collection sites located throughout the DPRK in areas of high interest (e.g., along the DMZ and the Russian and PRC borders); the EW/SIGINT battalions within KPA corps; and the EW/SIGINT battalions that exist within some KPA divisions. In addition to these assets, the Technical/Radio Department exercises some degree of control over KPAF SIGINT collection aircraft and KPN intelligence-gathering vessels (AGIs). Assets subordinate to the Technical/Radio Department are responsible for EIW operations. The Department also coordinates with the MPAF Communications Bureau and its subordinate units. The relationship and level of coordination and cooperation between the Reconnaissance Bureau's Technical/Radio Department and the State Security Department's Communications Interception Bureau is unknown. The Communications Interception Bureau is apparently the senior service. The Reconnaissance Bureau and the State Security Department are believed to be the principal agencies involved in the production of regular translations of foreign broadcasts. These apparently are disseminated with varying levels of access to the military and power-holding elite.

As with the State Security Department, the level of computerization within the Reconnaissance Bureau is believed to be high, with numerous modern desktop and mid-range computers, the vast majority of which are of Asian manufacture. The availability of Internet

access over the past ten years has undoubtedly provided several orders-of-magnitude improvement in the Reconnaissance Bureau's ability to collect quality information and produce timely intelligence on a wide range of subjects. As noted above in reference to the CCSKA, DPRK users frequently visit U.S. Department of Defense web sites.

The General Staff Department's Classified Information Bureau, Communications Bureau, Electronic Warfare Bureau, and Military Training Bureau play unique supporting roles to the Reconnaissance Bureau in the collection and processing of military-related information.

The Classified Information Bureau is believed to have an operations security (OPSEC) responsibility and works in cooperation with the Communications Bureau. It is unclear what roles this department may play in the creation of code systems for the KPA, or in the decryption of foreign communications.

The Communications Bureau conducts monitoring of both domestic and foreign telecommunications traffic and is believed to work closely with the Reconnaissance Bureau and State Security Department in conducting SIGINT operations. This bureau also plays an important role within the area of COMSEC for the KPA and works in cooperation with the Classified Information Bureau. Within its role of COMSEC, the Communications Bureau probably exercises some control over the KPA's growing computer networks and their ability to access the Internet. Subordinate to the Communications Bureau is the 9th Signals Brigade (a.k.a., 9th Communications Brigade) and a communications school.²⁸ Aside from overseeing all communications within the KPA, this unit apparently operates a nationwide SIGINT collection system and plays a role - along with the Reconnaissance Bureau and State Security Department - in the preparation of translations of foreign broadcasts.

The Electronic Warfare Bureau, in coordination with the Communications Bureau and Reconnaissance Bureau's Technical/Radio Department, probably oversees both offensive and defensive EW/EIW operations. The Electronic Warfare Bureau is believed to consist of a staff, the Electronic Warfare Institute, and a small number of SIGINT, EW, and EIW assets.²⁹

The Military Training Bureau conducts research and evaluates foreign combat operations through a small number of research institutes and "think tanks." Because of this mission, it has wide-ranging access to uncensored and foreign information. While the primary focus of its mission is to prepare and train the KPA, its "think tanks" undoubtedly produce studies and

²⁸ It is unclear whether the 9th Signals Brigade is still designated as such.

²⁹ Author interview data; "Ex-KPA Major Writes on DPRK Military Situation," *Pukhan*, January 2000, pp. 86-93, as cited in FBIS; and "Future Electronic Warfare Discussed," *Nodong Sinmun*, December 5, 1999, p. 6, as cited in FBIS.

reports that are funneled up through the MPAF to the National Defense Commission and Kim Chong-il. The bureau's best-known "think tanks" are the Research Institute for Military Sciences and the Strategy Research Institute. These institutes are known to have conducted extensive historical research not only on World War II and the Fatherland Liberation War (i.e., Korean War), but also more significantly on the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iran-Iraq War, Operation DESERT STORM, Operation ALLIED FORCE; Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (see below), etc. Additionally, they have conducted an intensive study of the process by which the Nationale Volksarmee (armed forces of the former German Democratic Republic) was dissolved and merged into the Bundeswehr (armed forces of the German Federal Republic). These institutes also conduct research into the development of new weapons (especially ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and precision-guided munitions) by other nations.³⁰ Information developed within the Military Training Bureau is then used to instruct the KPA and is the foundation for developing new tactics and doctrines.

The information channel subordinate to the Cabinet consists of two sub-channels: the Ministry of Public Security and the Foreign Ministry.

The Ministry of Public Security functions primarily as the national police and civil defense force for the DPRK. This Ministry plays an important role in preventing the general public from accessing foreign broadcasts and printed media. Like the State Security Department, it also is responsible for conducting political surveillance; however, political suspects are remanded to the State Security Department. In this role, the MPS prepares reports and briefings concerning internal security, civil preparedness, etc. These reports and briefings flow up to the Cabinet and possibly on to Kim Chong-il. The Ministry's Public Security Bureau is believed to possess a small SIGINT capability. The level of computerization within the Public Security and Prison Bureaus is believed to be moderate.

The Foreign Ministry is the DPRK's principal means by which it presents itself to the world. It also serves as an important asset by which it collects information on foreign nations. Diplomatic personnel stationed around the world are required to submit regular reports concerning their activities and political, cultural, and military developments within their host nations. These reports serve as a check against those produced by the KWP and the State Security Department. Reports from important nations (e.g., Russia, China, U.S.) are routed through the Foreign Ministry to both the National Defense Commission and Kim Chong-il.

³⁰ Author interview data; "Lessons for DPRK From NATO Bombing of Yugoslavia," *Nodong Sinmun*, 20 April 1999, p. 1; "DPRK's Keen Interest in New Weapons Used in Yugoslavia," *Yonhap*, 13 May 1999; "DPRK Military Studies Merging of East, West German Armies," *Choson Ilbo*, 25 April 1997, p. 2, as cited in FBIS-EAS-97-115; and "Journal Views DPRK's Military Organization," pp. 30-31.

A distinct aspect of diplomatic communications through the Foreign Ministry is that they are excruciatingly slow in all countries with the possible exceptions of China and Russia. This results from two factors. First, DPRK diplomats are briefed only on a limited number of subjects and are not allowed to negotiate or communicate freely within their host nations. So, if a DPRK delegation to a conference encounters a situation on which it has not been briefed, it must refer back to P'yongyang for guidance. Second, due to a variety of reasons - including paranoia and lack of technological capabilities - DPRK embassies, missions, and legations have a very limited means to securely and rapidly communicate back to P'yongyang. Therefore, important negotiations require that couriers hand-deliver messages between delegations and P'yongyang. Since events proceed so quickly in the world today, a message sent through official diplomatic channels based upon specific circumstances might be completely superceded by new events by the time it arrives and is processed in P'yongyang. During diplomatic exchanges of a critical nature to the DPRK, it is not unusual for Kim Chong-il to order the diplomat most closely associated with the exchange back to P'yongyang to brief him personally.

Probably one of the most disconcerting aspects of DPRK diplomatic communications for foreigners is the distortion or misinterpretation of these communications caused by the manner in which it is processed within the DPRK (see below). It is not unusual for the DPRK to issue a communication to a foreign government believing - quite often incorrectly - that it will be received and interpreted in a certain manner. It is received by the foreign government, but interpreted and responded to in a manner entirely at variance with the DPRK's intention. The message from the foreign government is then received back in P'yongyang where it is processed and interpreted based on their originally flawed expectations and entirely at variance with the foreign nation's intention. This cycle then repeats itself, often spiraling out of control.

While the entire information flow process described in this section is essentially a "push" system, during periods of crisis Kim Chong-il or the National Defense Commission frequently issues critical requests for information from all branches of the KWP, MPAF, and intelligence services - a "pull" system. Defectors report that during the 1994 nuclear crisis, which was eventually resolved by the signing of the Agreed Framework, all branches of the government were placed on emergency alert and directed to collect information regarding the possibility of a U.S. attack, the likelihood and degree of Chinese assistance should the U.S. attack, and China's stance concerning the nuclear crisis. Similar emergency requests for the collection of information have been reported during subsequent periods of perceived threat.³¹

³¹ "DPRK Defectors' News Conference Reviewed," *Sisa Journal*, August 11, 1994, pp 6-10, as cited in FBIS; and "Articles by Defector Kang Myong-to Reported," p. 3.

Complicating the entire “Kim-centric” flow of information are three factors: limited strategic reach, competition among organizations, and the “lens of self deception.” The ministries, bureaus, and departments involved in the collection of information and production of intelligence, reports, and briefings are very active and assumed to acquire reasonably accurate raw information in the nations immediately surrounding the Korean Peninsula: ROK, China, Japan, and Russia. As the distance from the Korean peninsula increases, however, the quantity and quality of information apparently decreases dramatically. Therefore, information for strategic intelligence and indications and warnings comes not from a widespread network of human and technical assets passing on information to an impartial, professionally trained and developed staff working with multiple sources, but rather from the Internet, CNN, NHK, and CCTV, etc. proceeding through a fundamentally flawed analysis and interpretation process.

Lens of Self Deception

It is important to note that the information and intelligence that reaches Kim Chong-il and the National Defense Commission are processed through what might be described as a lens of self deception comprising four layers: historical world view, political indoctrination, hatred for the U.S., and authoritarian cultural rules. This lens is so darkly colored that instead of focusing and illuminating, it most often distorts and misrepresents the reality of the information.

As noted above, the real power within the DPRK rests within the hands of a small group of men, the majority of whom either fought with Kim Il-sung during the “Fatherland Liberation War” or who have been raised entirely within a cultural and educational environment that worships Kim Il-sung and Kim Chong-il. These individuals possess a narrow and distorted worldview that is based not upon the free flow of ideas, questioning of facts, and exposure to different cultures and philosophies, but rather almost entirely on the propaganda of the KWP. This worldview places world events and the actions of other nations within a distorted historical context. For example, Japan is not only a neighbor and important trading partner, it also is the nation that occupied Korea and brutally oppressed the Korean people for many years. Because of this, any actions undertaken by Japan, benign as they might be, are viewed with suspicion. Likewise, the United States is both a superpower and the hated enemy who interfered in the internal affairs of the Korean people and prevented the reunification of Korea. All actions undertaken by the U.S. are viewed with distrust and as attempts to both prolong the division of the Korean people and directly threaten the existence of the Kim regime.

The DPRK has never attempted to conceal the fact that it believes the United States is its principal enemy and the ROK a “puppet” of the U.S. In the DPRK’s view, it was the United States that interfered in a purely internal dispute (i.e., the “Fatherland Liberation War”) and

threatened to employ nuclear weapons. Since that time, it has been the U.S. that has continued to both prevent the unification of Korea and threaten the existence of the DPRK with the use of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, it is the U.S. that “controls” the U.N. and directs world attention against the DPRK and other countries that it doesn’t approve of. The DPRK leadership views U.S. actions in countries such as Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, Somalia, and Iraq as demonstrative of threats to their own nation, with the U.S. acting as a bully, “kicking the door in...” and interfering in purely internal affairs. These beliefs have only been strengthened by U.S. “unilateral” actions in Iraq during 2003.

Korean society within both the ROK and DPRK has a strong underpinning of Confucian philosophy. One notable aspect of this is the influence of stringent authoritarian hierarchal rules. Within military and intelligence organizations, this is expressed by the fact that subordinates will rarely, if ever, disagree with their superiors. In fact, they are encouraged not to. Therefore, if a superior is known to possess a particular view on a subject, his subordinates - whether they believe the view correct or not - will tend to work new information into that view. These authoritarian rules also are manifested in deep institutional loyalty that results in a frequent refusal to share information and are detrimental to inter-agency competition. While such submission to superiors and institutional loyalty are witnessed throughout the business, military, and intelligence communities around the world, within the DPRK they are taken to extremes. The distinct possibility exists that this dynamic may manifest itself in a desire by the subordinates and support staffs of Kim Chong-il and the National Defense Commission to not present information that displeases or is at variance to stated opinions.

The net effect of this is that, whether consciously or subconsciously, information internally processed or transformed into intelligence passes through a lens of self-deception and exits in a fundamentally flawed state. It is upon this flawed process, however, that decisions within the DPRK are made. When combined with Kim Chong-il’s apparent belief that he “knows better” and can arrive at better decisions than those around him, this process often leads to ill-advised courses of action and unanticipated outcomes. A prime example of this was evidenced by Kim Chong-il’s 2003 public admission that DPRK intelligence agencies had kidnapped Japanese civilians over the past thirty years. Kim’s apparent analysis of the situation was that the Japanese would appreciate his magnanimous admission of guilt, view it as a sign of a new level of openness, and open themselves to the DPRK. It apparently never occurred to him that it would ignite deep emotions from a broad spectrum of the Japanese population and harden their feelings towards him and the DPRK. It should be anticipated that such a dynamic will be present during any future dealings with the DPRK, especially during times of crisis.

Within the military, this dynamic can be illustrated by how the Military Training Bureau evaluated U.S. operations against Iraq during Operations DESERT STORM and IRAQI FREEDOM. According to defectors,³² international news broadcasts concerning Operation DESERT STORM were taped and

“Videos of the Gulf War were watched everyday in the Operations Office, and assessments of the military power of the United States and the multinational forces, and studies of their strategy and tactics, were re-assessed from new angles.”

In one of those paradoxes that are so common when dealing with the DPRK, the same defector indicated that what they witnessed in the videos was shocking, yet they concluded

“...the Gulf War was, in short... “child’s play.” Should [the DPRK] face such circumstances, they concluded, it could easily deal with the United States and the multinational forces. The reasons for this were that: unlike in the past, a US-led military block, even if it is formed, would be unable to act without the consent of its allies; in the event of another Korean war, neighboring powers would not go along with the US position as they did in the Gulf War; [the DPRK’s] symmetry in conventional and high-tech weapons; and [the DPRK’s] new confidence in electronic warfare.”

Other defectors recount that following Operation DESERT STORM, officers above the level of regimental commander were required to watch videotapes of the war to familiarize themselves with U.S. tactics. The videotapes, however, had a negative effect upon the commanders, who realized that modern war depends on modern weapons and that the weapons possessed by the KPA were obsolete.

More recently, during the buildup to and early combat phases of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Kim Chong-il is reported to have gone into seclusion for 50 days beginning in mid-February and extending to the end of March. He even missed the traditional opening ceremonies of the Supreme People’s Assembly in P’yongyang. The general assessment of this behavior was that Kim and probably the DPRK intelligence community interpreted media reports concerning U.S. intentions and subsequent attempts to decapitate the Iraqi leadership and the U.S. deployment of additional bombers and combat aircraft to East Asia as indications that Kim might also be the target of a similar decapitation attack. Yet, no such attack was contemplated by the United States.³³

³² “Ex-DPRK Major Unveils KPA Military Plan,” *Pukhan*, February 1, 2000, pp. 92-99; and “Anti-Kim Front: DPRK Military May Revolt,” *Chugan Choson*, December 2, 1993, pp. 32-34, as cited in FBIS-EAS-94-028.

³³ “Kim Jong II Reportedly Feared Being Next Target,” *Houston Chronicle*, May 12, 2003, p. 12.

D. SUMMARY

Simply stated, all power within the DPRK originates with Kim Chong-il, who is simultaneously Chairman of the National Defense Commission, General Secretary of the KWP, and Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army. Therefore, what really matters within the DPRK is not so much an individual's schooling, personal achievements, job, position within society, rank within the military, etc. but how close - physically and emotionally - that individual is connected to Kim Chong-il. The closer an individual is, the more power that person wields, and the greater access to uncensored and foreign information he has.

The military elite within the DPRK should be understood to contain not only those individuals within the National Defense Commission holding military rank but also those military personnel situated within the broader power-holding elite. From an organizational standpoint, this would include the MPAF leadership and extend down to the commanders of the Guard Command, Security Command, General Rear Services Bureau, General Staff Department, Korean People's Navy Command, Korean People's Air and Air Defense Command, Corps, and a small number of the General Staff Department's major bureaus (e.g., Reconnaissance Bureau). It also includes some of those high-ranking military personnel located with various government, intelligence, and internal security organizations. In fact, a significant number of the military, and to a lesser extent power-holding, elite occupy multiple leadership positions within the MPAF, KWP, and the intelligence and internal security organizations.

The ever increasing use of the Internet, national intranet, and cell phones by the military and power-holding elite presents new dynamics in the process by which information is accessed and flows within the DPRK. While attempting to restrict access to the Internet, the DPRK leadership unmistakably understands the decisive importance of the information available concerning world affairs and its contribution to bolstering national survival. This need to access information on the Internet appears to be insatiable and has resulted in the creation of a subclass of Internet-, technology-, and information-savvy soldiers and citizens who are younger than the leadership they support and who know more about the world they live in. They almost certainly understand that the world has more to offer than what they presently have. Just as fax machines and computer bulletin boards in China during the late 1980s proved to be essential tools among young democracy seekers, the Internet has the potential to be an equally powerful tool for change within the DPRK during the next 10 to 15 years. This potential is something that should be attentively observed and nurtured as best as is possible.

Information flow within the DPRK can best be described as "Kim-centric" - vertical and convoluted. That is, it is towards Kim Chong-il that all important information streams, and from

him that all significant orders and directions issue forth. For the nation in general, and the military specifically, this flow is vertical. In most militaries in the world, information flows both up and down the chain of command and horizontally at each level, while orders flow down. Within the KPA, information flows up the chain of command and only orders flow down. There is extremely little horizontal flow of information or communications except at the highest levels. This vertical flow of information is a means of maintaining strict control over the KPA. The belief is that if major units were allowed to communicate horizontally, they could unite and possibly stage a coup.

This flow of information is convoluted - almost Byzantine at times - as it moves through a series of paths controlled by different and competing organizations with diverse agendas and priorities in a manner that is quite frequently redundant and inefficient. Most notably, the information and intelligence flowing upward toward Kim Chong-il and the military and power-holding elites are processed through what might be described as a lens of self deception composed of four layers: historical world view, political indoctrination, hatred for the U.S., and authoritarian cultural rules. The net effect of this is that, whether consciously or subconsciously, information internally processed or transformed into intelligence passes through a lens of self-deception and arrives in a fundamentally flawed state. It is through this flawed process, however, that decisions within the DPRK are made. When combined with Kim Chong-il's apparent belief that he "knows better" and can arrive at better decisions than those around him, this process often leads to ill-advised courses of action and unanticipated outcomes. It should be anticipated that such a dynamic will be present during any future dealings with the DPRK, especially during times of crisis.

APPENDIX I-A: DPRK PRINT AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA¹

The news media within the DPRK do not exist to serve the people's right to know, but rather to serve the interests of the state (or more accurately, Kim Chong-il). Private individuals or organizations own none of the news agencies, television, or radio stations or any of the 30 or more newspapers and magazines currently published in the DPRK. All are ultimately subordinate to the National Defense Commission, the KWP, or the Cabinet.

The printed media are heavily weighted towards newspapers. The largest number of newspapers, and those with the largest circulation, are published in P'yongyang. The largest include *Nodong Sinmun*, *Minju Choson*, *P'yongyang Sinmun*, and *Nodong Chongnyon*. Also published in P'yongyang is the weekly English language *P'yongyang Times*.

Because of the media's official function, major articles are generally identical or complementary in content to each other, except for some minor differences. Content is targeted towards internal consumption and centers around praising the Kim Chong-il regime and reinforcing the ideology of the KWP. The small number of news-related articles confine themselves to positive reporting of social and political activities throughout the country. Papers almost never report on crime or accidents within the DPRK, or irregularities involving KWP or MPAF officials. They do, however, devote considerable space to negative aspects of ROK and U.S. society, and condemn foreign (especially U.S., ROK, and Japan) bullying of the DPRK. These articles almost always grossly distort or exaggerate facts so as to present the DPRK in the most favorable light.

All articles written by the various departments within the papers and magazines are first submitted to intense scrutiny by local staffs and editors. Articles passing this level of approval are then passed to the Newspaper Section of the Press Guidance Bureau. If approved, they must then be cleared by the KWP's Propaganda and Agitation Department. All of this is done to ensure that the content is consistent with the approved Party line and that there are no conflicts with previously published articles.

¹ "Defectors Comment on DPRK Broadcast Media, Research Organs," *Yonhap*, June 7, 1996, as cited in FBIS-EAS-96-111; "Journalism in North Korea," *Vantage Point*, June 1995, Vol. XVIII, No. 6, pp. 25-32; "North Korea is Essentially a Slave Society, Theocratic System, and Military State," pp. 404-425; and "Article Describes DPRK News Media," *Naewoe Tongsin*, 11 March 1993, pp. B1-B6, as cited in FBIS-EAS-93-092.

Until the 1990s, the electronic media were divided into two systems, television and radio. During the late 1990s, KCNA established an Internet website and began releasing stories and announcements on a daily basis.

The three principal television stations within the DPRK are Korean Central Television (KCTV), Mansudae TV, and Kaesong TV. The KCTV network is by far the largest and covers almost the entire nation. Its programming includes news, educational, and entertainment shows; however, it mimics the print media in praising Kim Chong-il, publicizing KWP policies and denouncing the ROK and the United States. Mansudae TV can be considered the cultural channel of the DPRK's electronic media, as its primary programming is art and movie programs. It only broadcasts on weekends and special occasions in the P'yongyang area. Kaesong TV is used almost exclusively for propaganda broadcasts to the ROK.

The leading radio station in the DPRK is the Korean Central Broadcasting Station (KCBS). Its broadcasts consist of domestic and foreign programs and can be heard in eight languages besides Korean. Programming is similar to the print media, although there are a larger percentage of press reports from the Korean Central News Agency and there are a number of programs for children and youth. Radio Pyongyang broadcasts to the ROK with programs extolling the virtues of *Chuch'e*, the superiority of the DPRK, criticisms of ROK society, etc. This station is under the direct control of the KWP's Unification Front Department.

In addition to these radio stations, there is the "Voice of National Salvation" (VNS) allegedly the clandestine radio station of the underground National Democratic Front (Hanminjon) broadcasting from somewhere within the ROK. In reality, its transmitter is in Haeju, and the "Chilbosan Liaison Office" - a component of the KWP's intelligence system - manages the station. It broadcasts propaganda that is directed specifically towards ROK children and youth. The staff of the Chilbosan Liaison Station includes a high percentage of defectors from the ROK, a number of whom have permission to listen to ROK radio broadcasts and watch ROK television in order to become familiar with the words, customs, and popular feeling within the ROK, thereby making the VNS broadcasts more authentic.

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) is the DPRK's only press agency. On the surface, it generally functions like other press agencies, receiving foreign wire dispatches and conveying them to newspapers and radio stations, maintaining contracts with foreign news agencies, employing overseas correspondents, etc. In reality it focuses on publicizing the DPRK's positions to the world and is under the same stringent censorship as all the other DPRK media outlets.

Many people who live in cities and large towns are privileged to have apartments; these apartments have hard-wired public address speakers mounted in the central living space. A public address system broadcasts propaganda, political education programming, and public service announcements directly into people's homes 18 hours a day. These speakers cannot be turned off or modified; to do so would result in extreme prison (i.e., detention camp) sentences and loss of a person's apartment and privileges.

**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

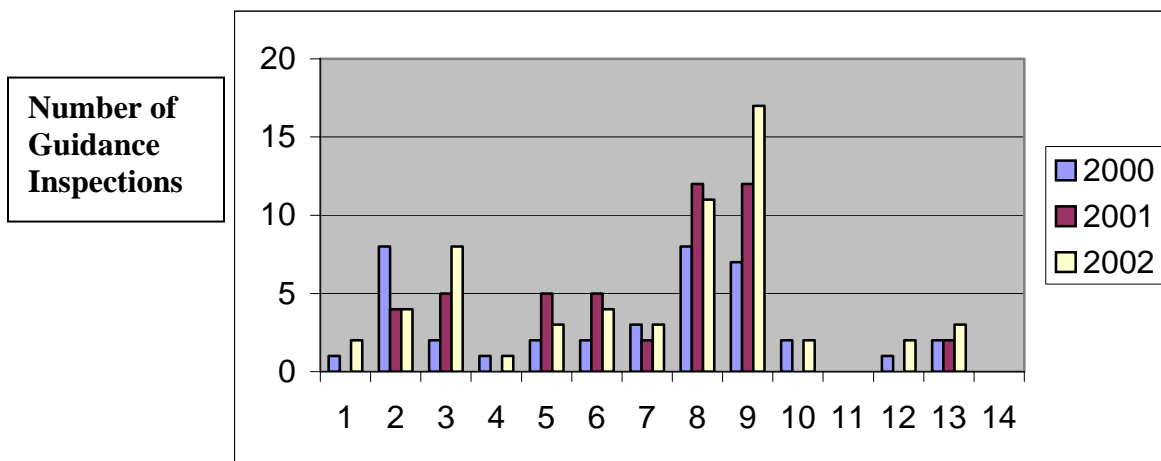
Guidance Inspections

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

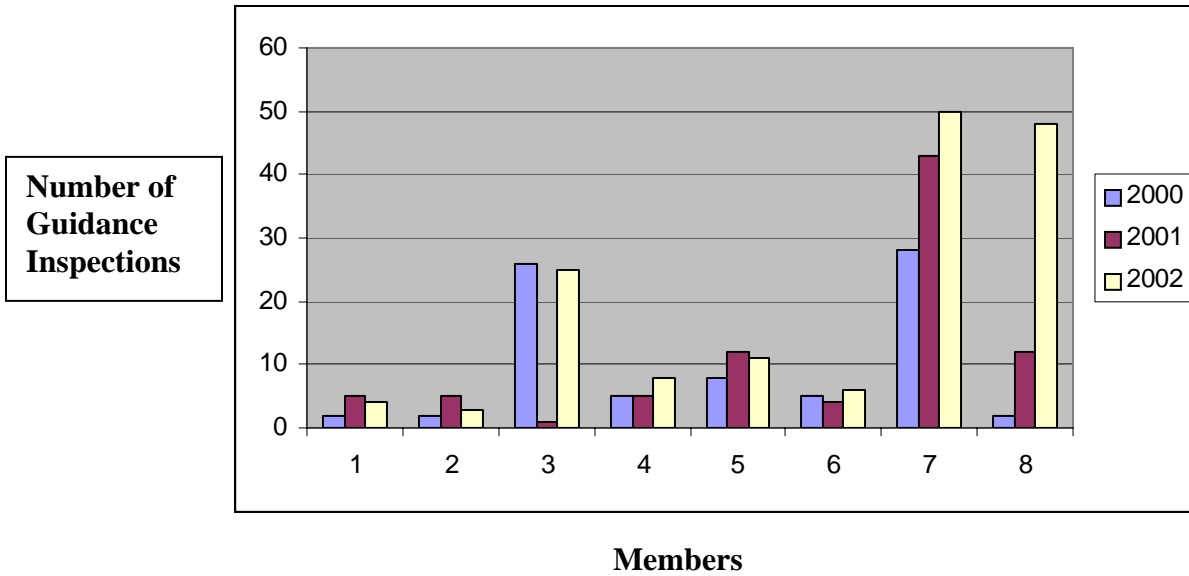


- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Pak Sung-chol | 8. Choi Tae-bok |
| 2. Kim Yong-nam | 9. Yun Hyong-muk |
| 3. Jon Byong-ho | 10. Kim Chol-man |
| 4. Kim Young-ju | 11. Hong Suk-hyung |

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).

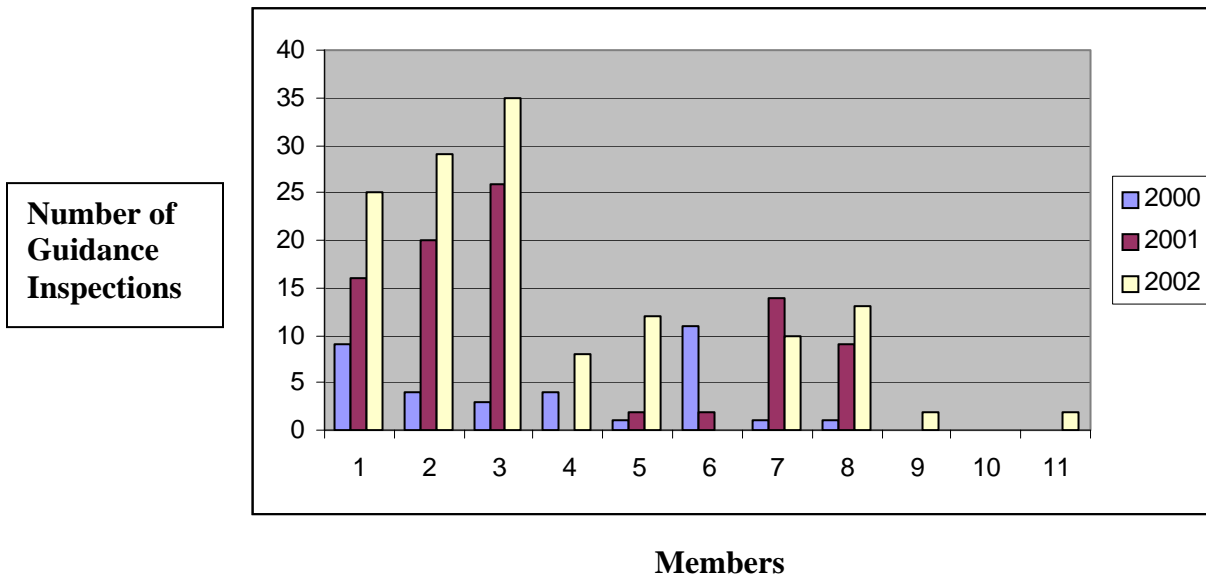
- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 5. Kye Ung-tae | 12. Choi Yong-nim |
| 6. Han Sung-nyong | 13. Hong Sung-nam |
| 7. Yang Hyong-sup | 14. Yi Son-sil |

Chart II-2: Secretariat



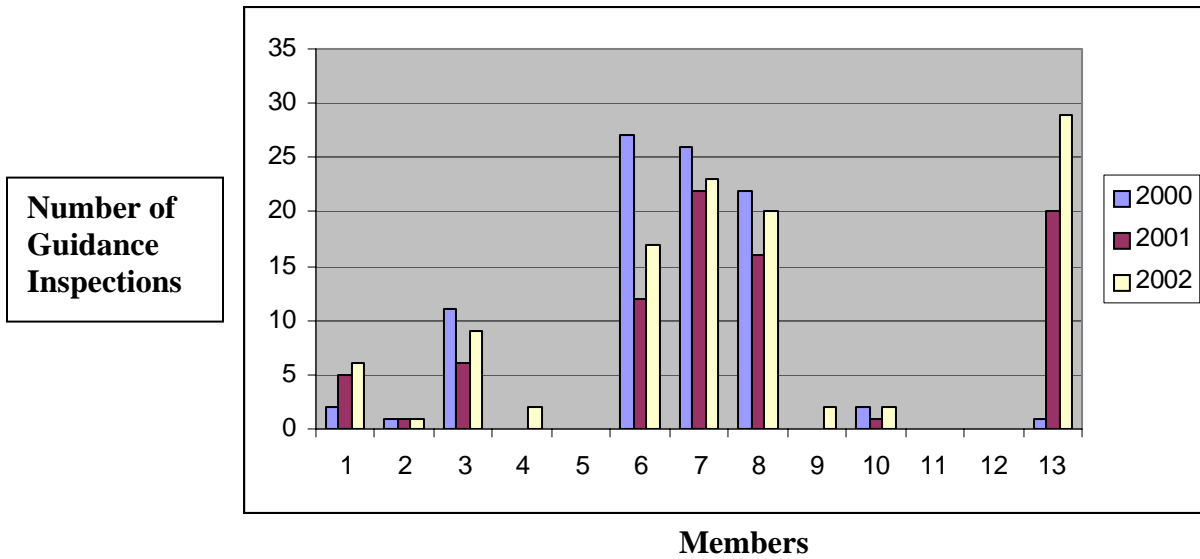
- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Han Sung-yong | 5. Choi Tae-bok |
| 2. Kye Ung-tae | 6. Kim Chung-nim |
| 3. Kim Yong-sun | 7. Kim Kuk-tae |
| 4. Chon Pyung-ho | 8. Kim Ki-nam |

Chart II-3: Central Committee Apparatus



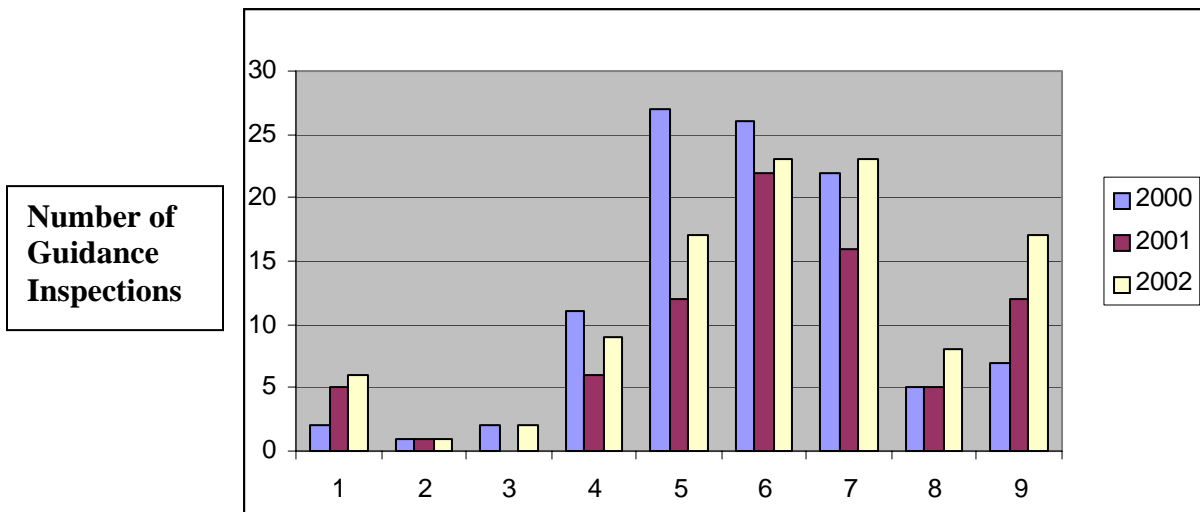
- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Chang Song-taek | 5. Chi Chae-ryong | 9. Yi Ha-il |
| 2. Yi Yong-chol | 6. Pak Song-bong | 10. O Kuk-ryul |
| 3. Chung Ha-chol | 7. Ju Kyu-chang | 11. Kim Ik-Hyun |
| 4. Choi Chun-hwang | 8. Kang Suk-ju | |

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 | |

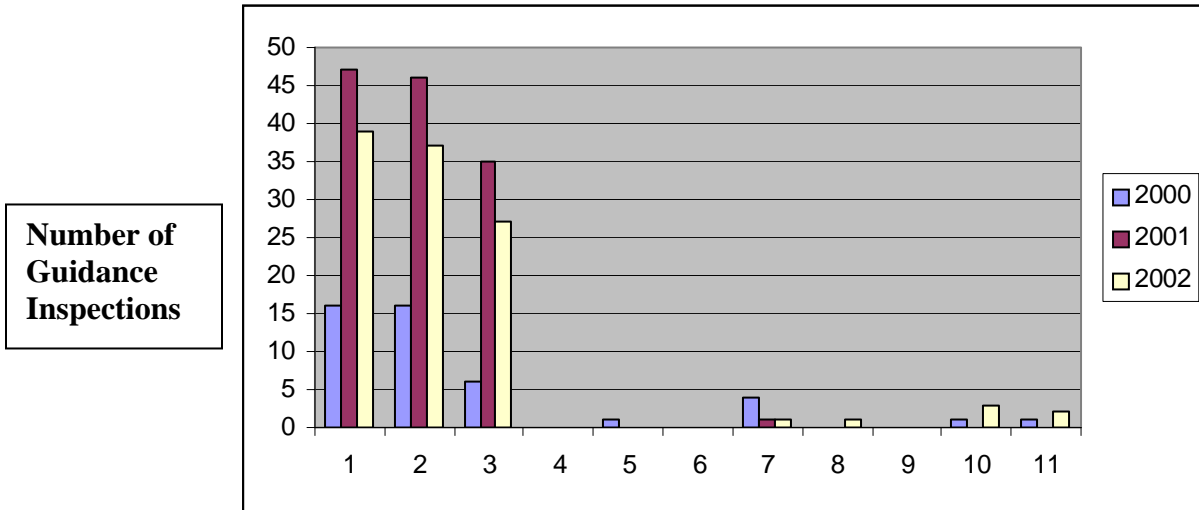
Chart II-5: National Defense Commission



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.

III. THE WELL-INFORMED CADRE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DEFINITIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

What factions or potential factions exist among the North Korean elite, and what power do they exercise? What information sources and channels do these different groups depend upon? What contextual factors influence how they receive and interpret information from outside sources? Based on the initial guidelines provided for this study, the following definitions frame the search for answers to these three questions. “Factions” are any divisions among the elite that respond in their own way to information from outside sources. “Elites” are those who have political power and who are in a channel of communication leading toward the top of the North Korean leadership hierarchy. “Information from outside sources” refers to open-source information about initiatives related to U.S. military planning.

For lack of better information on the DPRK’s internal situation, the following assumptions are made. Kim Jong-il is the only person with “real power,” although others may exercise power on his behalf. A useful rule of thumb is that the closer to Kim one is, the more power one has. It is also assumed that those with more power have greater knowledge about the domestic and international situations.

DIVISIONS IN NORTH KOREAN SOCIETY

The basic division in North Korean society is between those who are deemed to be loyal to the Kim regime and those whose loyalty is questioned. Since the North Korean economy collapsed in the 1990s, a second division has emerged between those who have access to foreign currency and those who do not. Foreign analysts have often speculated about the existence of divisions among the elite on a variety of other dimensions, including hardliners versus soft-liners, military versus party personnel, members of Kim Il-sung’s different families, members of Kim Jong-il’s different families, older- versus younger-generation elites, technocrats versus ideologues, economy-first versus military-first policy makers, and nationalists versus internationalists. No evidence exists that any of these dimensions are the basis for cohesive groups or factions. In terms of power, the military and security organizations have more power than do other organizations in North Korean society, but no credible information indicates that people within the military or security services operate as political groups outside of the party structure.

What is known about decision making and information flow in North Korea suggests that on important matters, Kim turns to his subordinates for policy suggestions, encouraging them to

discuss and argue among themselves. But once Kim makes a decision, it is official policy until he chooses to review it. In this decision-making process, Kim wants everyone to report up to him, not to each other. Because everyone's personal security is dependent on pleasing - or at least not displeasing - Kim, self-censorship is presumably an important characteristic of policy discussions and recommendations.

DOMESTIC NEWS SOURCES

The major North Korean media consist of four national newspapers, one AM radio station, three television stations, and local cable systems connected to loudspeakers in homes and public places. For many North Koreans, television sets and radios are still a luxury, and hardly anyone has access to a computer. Kim Jong-il is known to be an avid web surfer, and a select number of scientists and officials also may have access to the Internet. The Kwangmyong Intranet was set up in 2000 to link major cities and organizations.

“Newsworthy” items are scarce in all the media. The DPRK's premier news outlet is *Nodong Sinmun* (Daily Worker), which publishes six pages every day of the year. Page 6 is devoted to international news. News in the DPRK press focuses on two themes. First, that the domestic and foreign policies of the Kim regime are correct and successful. Second, that Japan, the United States, and some elements in the ROK pose a threat to all Koreans. An informal survey of news stories in the North Korean press relating to U.S. military initiatives indicates that a considerable amount such news is available, although it is presented in a very negative fashion. News stories in 2003 reported on the transformation of the USFK, the deployment of fighters and bombers to Guam, the southward relocation of American soldiers in the ROK, the Proliferation Security Initiative, and the war in Iraq - especially the U.S. military's psychological operations in the early stages of the war.

FOREIGN NEWS SOURCES

In principle, North Koreans should not be able to gain direct access to foreign news sources. Possession of a radio with an unfixed dial, listening to foreign radio or television broadcasts, possessing foreign video or audiotapes, and reading foreign newspapers or magazines all are grounds for detention. Although the government tries to jam foreign broadcasts, including Radio Free Asia, these broadcasts do sometimes get through, and some risk listening to them with foreign or altered radios.

There is little reason to believe that one group of the North Korean elite is more likely than another to be exposed to information from foreign broadcasts. Those cadres who have the opportunity to meet tourists and those with the opportunity to travel overseas obviously have

greater access to first-hand information from outside the country. But those few North Koreans who travel abroad are watched carefully by North Korean security personnel. Because of security restrictions and infrastructure problems, most personal communication inside the DPRK takes place on a face-to-face basis. Mail, telephone, and intranet communications are subject to monitoring by the security services.

RECEIVING AND INTERPRETING INFORMATION

How North Koreans respond to news about U.S. initiatives depends to a large extent on how they process this information. Like people everywhere, North Koreans are probably skeptical of information that contradicts their beliefs, although this skepticism may be overcome if the communication source is highly credible. Whereas the North Korean press depicts Kim Jong-il as the most credible person in North Korea or anywhere else, the United States is portrayed as a country of schemers plotting to enslave North Koreans and other “progressive” peoples.

Communications coming from the United States urge the North Korean elite to change their policies - the same policies that put them at the top of their society. Change may not be in their best interest. To overcome strong resistance to change, a highly credible source must present an extremely attractive - or extremely threatening - message. The greatest challenge is not how to get international news into North Korea, but how to get the desired response to that news.

A. BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS

As a foreign visitor to North Korea marveled, “There are no shopping malls or advertising boards, no lights or neon or color of any sort except for propaganda banners.”¹ Only one major daily newspaper (with six pages) serves the country of 23 million people. The dials of authorized radio receivers are pre-set to the government station. Two television stations broadcast part-time, although few North Koreans have a television set in their home. Many homes and most workplaces are equipped with a speaker system to broadcast local party news, although these speakers are not always working. It is forbidden to read foreign publications, listen to foreign broadcasts, or watch foreign television or videotapes. Personal communication *between* people is restricted as well, thanks to a compartmentalized social structure and fear of domestic surveillance. How then do the people get information about the outside world; and in such an environment, what does that information mean to them?

Of course, no society can be perfectly regulated or sealed. The fact that the government regularly publishes articles calling for vigilance against “the imperialists’ cunning maneuver of ideological and cultural infiltration” attests to the imperfections of censorship and social control.² North Korea has its share of malingerers, black marketers, and rumor mongers. In a society regulated by money and power, not by law, some who break the rules or speak ill of the Kim regime are punished and perish, others are punished and later pardoned, and those with money often avoid punishment altogether.

Kim’s socialist paradise-in-the-making is a typical communist class society, with party cadres as the new ruling class. As the elite become disillusioned with socialism and use their power to gain access to increasingly limited resources, the gap between the ruling and ruled classes widens. Part of the advantage enjoyed by the ruling class is that its members have better contact with the outside world. The increasing number of options for economic prosperity, especially among the elite, is a threat to the homogeneity of North Korean society and to the cohesiveness of the political elite.

¹ Oliver August, “A Journey into the Land That Time Forgot,” *The Times*, September 17, 2003, Internet version. FBIS EUP20030917000097.

² To pick one of hundreds of examples. Article by Paek-hyon Yun so titled, *Nodong Sinmun*, May 24, 1997, pd 6. FBIS FTS19970626000069.

The first question addressed by this study is what factions or potential factions exist among the North Korean elite, and what power they exercise. The second question is what information sources and channels these different factions depend upon. The third question is what contextual factors influence how the elite receive and interpret information from outside sources. Based on the initial guidelines provided for this study, the following definitions are understood. “Factions” are any divisions among the elite that respond in their own way to information from outside sources. “Information from outside sources” refers most specifically to open-source information about initiatives related to U.S. military planning. “Elites” are those who have political power and are located in a channel of communication leading toward the top of the North Korean leadership. Needless to say, most of North Korea’s 23 million people have little direct influence on policy formulation. Participation in elections is usually reported to be 99.9 percent, with 100 percent casting their votes for the party candidates listed on the ballot.³ But the people do exercise a measure of political and economic power, even if their votes do not count. James C. Scott has chronicled (for rural Indonesia) the “weapons of the weak” in such forms as “foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, and sabotage,” to name a few.⁴ With the possible exception of arson and sabotage, these behaviors are easily found in North Korea as well.⁵

B. THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL POWER

In the absence of better information about the DPRK, it is often necessary to operate on assumptions. A central assumption in this study is that Kim Jong-il holds most of the political power. Former South Korean president Kim Dae-jung once remarked that Kim Jong-il was “perhaps the only person who matters in his country.”⁶ Hwang Jang-yop has said that Kim is the

³ As was the case in the 2003 SPA election. KCBS, August 4, 2003. FBIS KPP20030804000057. An ITAR-TASS article by Denis Dubrovin informs readers that “North Korean citizens who came to polling stations on Sunday do not even permit an idea of voting against candidates to the Supreme People’s Assembly. A teacher of an elementary school . . . told TASS that ‘by voting for candidates, we express our full and unanimous support for the great leader Kim Jong-il.’” ITAR-TASS, August 3, 2003. FBIS CEP20030803000027.

⁴ James C. Scott. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. Scott notes that peasant rebellions and revolutions are rare compared to the everyday forms of resistance. He admits that such resistance has only a small effect on the measure of exploitation suffered by the oppressed; nevertheless, the “powerless” do inhibit and interfere with the elites’ exercise of power. An application to North Korea may be found on pp. 211-214 in Jae Jean Suh, “Class Conflict and Regime Crisis in North Korea,” pp. 195-218 in Chung-in Moon (ed.), *Understanding Regime Dynamics in North Korea*. Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1998.

⁵ One is inclined to consider the reported “terrorist” bombing at an SSD office in June 2003 as an anomaly. See Kang Chol-hwan, “Explosion Erupted in Front of Musan County State Security Building,” *Choson Ilbo*, July 22, 2003, Internet version. FBIS KPP20040128000122.

⁶ As reported by Steven Mufson, “Seoul’s Kim Presses for U.S. Role,” *Washington Post*, March 9, 2001, p. A22.

only person with “real power,” although others may exercise power on his behalf.⁷ A useful rule of thumb might be that those with the closest working relationship to Kim have the most power.

Consider the evidence for Kim’s power. To the extent that the North Korean people believe the party propaganda, they may have come to accept that the first duty of any loyal citizen is to lay down his life for General Kim.⁸ On the other hand, the extravagance and frequency of this kind of propaganda probably indicate that the people have yet to be convinced. More compelling evidence for Kim’s power is provided by those who have been in close contact with him. The stories told by Kim’s former Japanese chef, Kenji Fujimoto, reveal that Kim could get just about anything he wanted in his personal life, from foreign delicacies for his table to Japanese jet skis and Sony home electronics.⁹ Likewise, the account of Yi Nam-ok (Li Nam-ok), who grew up as a companion to Kim’s first son, Kim Chong-nam, reveals no limits to Kim’s desires or power. Ms. Yi and the rest of the family lived as virtual prisoners in one of Kim’s villas, but lacked nothing in terms of luxuries. On one occasion when Kim became angry with the family, he cut off food supplies to the house, and the family was forced to sneak out and buy their own food.¹⁰ If Kim could treat his own family in such a way, how must others fare when they displease him?

It is difficult to find evidence of a case in which Kim has proposed or backed a policy, such as building small power plants or rezoning land, only to see that policy blocked by others. This is not to say that his policies work; however, once a policy has been decided upon, it is not directly opposed. Two potential contending power centers are the bureaucrats, who through their inertia hinder the implementation of Kim’s policies, and the military, who could go up against him with their guns. The bureaucrats (in North Korean terminology, “functionaries”) are notorious for failing to carry out socialist policy with any degree of enthusiasm. Not a month goes by without the press publishing complaints on this point, often coming from Kim Jong-il.¹¹

⁷ “No one has real power. You should know that clearly. . . Only Kim Jong-il has real power. . . A person who gains some trust today may be gone tomorrow. Therefore, it is better not to pay attention to individuals but policy.” Interview on KBS Television, July 10, 1997. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, July 15, 1997. It should be noted that some analysts entertain doubts about the credibility and judgment of former secretary Hwang.

⁸ For example, “The vitality of collectivism is that people entirely depend on their leader for their destiny and future, and they uphold the leader’s ideology and leadership with loyalty. . . We must think of the respected and beloved general at any time and place, and we must devotedly defend the general by using our bodies as citadels and as shields.” Pak Yong-mi, “Loftiest Expression of Collectivism,” *Minju Choson*, October 9, 2003, p. 2. FBIS KPP20031107000020.

⁹ Fujimoto’s story has been published in Japanese under the title *Kin Seinichi no Ryoryinin* [Kim Jong-il’s Chef], Tokyo: Fusosha, 2003. The title of the Korean edition is *Kim Jong-il ui yorisa*. FBIS translated sections of the book over a period of months in 2003, and offers a CD compilation for U.S. government employees (but not contractors). One of the series on the FBIS web site is KPP20031003000076.

¹⁰ Interview of Yi Nam-ok by *Bungei Shunju*, February 1998, pp. 274-292. FBIS FTS19980119000029.

¹¹ Some of the strongest complaints were made at the time Kim launched his “new economic thinking” campaign in early 2001. For example, “Throwing oneself into one’s work and [versus] the cult of self-preservation can be said

But this lack of enthusiasm is probably not a result of any objection to the policies *per se*, but rather an indication that the functionaries do not believe their best interests lie in energetically implementing the policies.

Some evidence exists that Kim might face policy constraints. He himself has claimed that on some issues, the military has its own opinion. In a meeting with visiting South Korean media executives, Kim explained that opening a direct flight route between Pyongyang and Seoul was “no problem at the government level, but it is a problem at the military level. I need to speak with the military in order for direct flight routes to be opened.”¹² This sounds a bit like a good-Kim/bad-military routine played out for the benefit of foreigners, but in any case, such flights have only occasionally been realized. When the media executives raised the issue of the harsh anti-South Korean tone of the KWP’s charter, Kim said that he would “find it difficult to revise the platform” because some of the top party officials who had worked with his father would have to resign, and that would make it look like Kim was purging them! Regarding the armed clash between North and South Korean patrol boats in 1999, Kim told South Korean delegates at the 2000 June summit that the sailors initiated the attack “without instructions from authorities.”¹³ And he informed visiting Prime Minister Koizumi that a recent armed spy boat intrusion into Japanese waters, and the abductions in the 1970s of Japanese citizens, were conducted without his knowledge by “radical elements” of North Korea’s spy organizations.¹⁴ If these denials are true, they suggest that Kim is not always completely in control of the military, but these examples do not indicate any serious opposition to his authority.

The most convincing evidence that Kim has almost complete power is that the rule of the Kim dynasty has not been seriously contested since the 1950s. In good times and in bad, Kim Jong-il’s position appears secure. The people suffer, the economy atrophies, and the military makes do with less, but Kim sticks to failed policies. If anyone else has power, why haven’t they tried to use it?

If power in North Korea is largely in the hands of Kim and a few associates, what can be assumed about how knowledge about the outside world is distributed? We know that Kim, with his multiple satellite television channels and 24/7 Internet access, is highly knowledgeable about

to be a line that separates functionaries’ devotion from cowardice. Such a way of doing things as putting on an air of importance and doing nothing but sitting in the office has nothing to do with today’s realities.” Kim Chin-kuk, “Initiative, Creativity, and Dedication,” *Nodong Sinmun*, February 23, 2001, p. 2. FBIS KPP20010315000007.

¹² Yonhap News Agency of August 13, 2000. FBIS KPP20000813000044.

¹³ Yonhap, July 4, 2000. FBIS KPP20000704000022.

¹⁴ For example, NHK Television, September 17, 2002. FBIS JPP20020917000132. Also, Koichi Kosuge, “Japanese Abducted So They Could Teach Language to Spies,” *Asahi Shimbun*, September 19, 2002. FBIS JPP20020919000045.

world events. It might also be assumed that the more power his followers have, the more knowledge they have as well. The top-most cadres may know more about world events than the average American.

Another assumption underlying this study is that the loyalty to Kim shown by top cadres is both genuine and feigned. The elite are proud to have been chosen to serve Kim, and they enjoy the power and privileges that come with the job. At the same time, they realize that their positions depend entirely on pleasing Kim, and this puts a lot of pressure on them because the alternative to working for Kim may be working in a labor camp. All in all, however, they probably find the benefits of their positions to exceed the costs. Recall that most of Stalin's followers remained with him, even though their position was more tenuous than the position of Kim's followers.

C. DIVISIONS IN NORTH KOREAN SOCIETY

Depending upon how one defines them, the North Korean elite number anywhere from a thousand to two million. Whatever their number, as a class they share the characteristics of the typical communist nomenklatura.¹⁵ The basic division of people in the DPRK - whether the elite or the masses - is between those who are deemed to be loyal to the Kim regime and those whose loyalty has been questioned. A secondary division, corresponding somewhat to the first, is between laborers who depend on state rations for survival, and bureaucrats and officials who can market their services to petitioners for bribes, thereby supplementing their government rations. Needless to say, it is difficult to become a bureaucrat or official unless one is a member of the "loyal" class. The political class division can be viewed in terms of the tripartite classification system outlined by Kim Il-sung at the 1970 party congress, but operating in some form as early

¹⁵ By all accounts, Victor Kuznetsov's harsh characterization of the typical member of the Soviet nomenklatura applies to the North Korean cadres as well: "As a rule, it was a man superficially and one-sidedly educated, cynical, hypocritical, and selfish. A confirmed member of the nomenklatura had no respect for the law; he knew that Soviet laws were formal and not meant to be enforced or were to be observed only by ordinary citizens. As long as he followed the unwritten rules common to all members of the 'ruling upper class,' his status in the hierarchy was assured. Breaking a formal law was dangerous for him only because it could be used by other members of the nomenklatura in their own interests in the course of the unrelenting inner struggle to obtaining a more prominent post. The real strength of the nomenklatura member consisted not in his professional knowledge, but in his ability to please his chiefs and, circumstances permitting, to intrigue against them hoping to take their place." In the North Korean case, it might be added that the first unwritten rule is not to criticize or disparage Kim Jong-il. It also seems likely that the North Korean nomenklatura, as well as many commoners, are more motivated by nationalism than their Soviet counterparts. Passage from Victor Kuznetsov, "The Economic Factors of the USSR's Disintegration." Pages 264-279 in Anne de Tinguy, *The Fall of the Soviet Empire*. Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 1997. Quotation from p. 270. For an excellent discussion of class conflict and regime security in the DPRK, see Jae Jean Suh.

as the 1950s.¹⁶ The security organizations classify people according to their presumed loyalty to the regime, with classification based primarily on family history going back several generations. These classifications may be reviewed whenever an individual is considered for occupational promotion.

The trusted “core” of society, comprising about 30 percent of the population, comes from families who historically were members of the working class. The elite are a select few from this core class. A few of the historical subgroups in this class are laborers, poor farmers, office clerks, and soldiers - not by any means members of the intellectual class. The 50 percent of North Korea’s society belonging to the “wavering” class are considered to have the potential to become members of the loyal class, given sufficient time and indoctrination. They include those whose families, in pre-communist times, were middle-class merchants, prosperous farmers, or workers who immigrated from South Korea. At the bottom of society is the “hostile” class, constituting at least 20 percent of the population. These are “untrustworthy” people whose ancestors were wealthy landlords or merchants, committed members of religious organizations, officials or collaborators of the Japanese occupation government, or anyone who has a family member guilty of criticizing the Kim regime. Except in highly unusual circumstances, these people never become party members, let alone join the Pyongyang elite. The dregs of this group are tens of thousands of political prisoners serving life-time sentences in an animal-like existence.

Beginning in the 1990s, hard times fell on most North Koreans, and party membership no longer guaranteed a privileged life. Instead, access to foreign currency (primarily dollars or yen) became the ticket to success, and sometimes, even to survival. Consequently, a major division in society has emerged between those who have foreign currency (regardless of their political classification) and those who do not.¹⁷ Foreign currency can be acquired through black market activities, border trade with China, and travel abroad (in unusual cases). An inferior alternative to having foreign currency is to have direct access to food, because in the 1990s food became the basic goal of life for many North Koreans. Country life had always been tougher than city life, but when the North Korean economy was knocked back to the stone age, farmers survived better than city dwellers,¹⁸ excepting the higher classes in Pyongyang who could use their political power to extract food from the countryside or help themselves to foreign aid supplies.

¹⁶ See for example, *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea, 2003*. Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2003, pp. 111-114. On the web, see the National Intelligence Service’s summary of “Social Elements” in the Society/Controlling People section at <http://www.nis.go.kr/eng/north> (refresh).

¹⁷ Two excellent articles have been published on foreign currency earning in the DPRK. Yi Kyo-Kwan, “North Korea’s Up-and-Coming Influential People,” *Chugan Choson*, June 19, 2003, pp. 36-37. FBIS KPP20030623000066. And “North Korean Regime’s Mobilization of Residents for Garnering Foreign Currency,” *Keys*, Vol. 13 (summer 2003), pp. 8-27.

¹⁸ Yonhap, December 19, 2003. FBIS KPP20031219000034.

No known political divisions among the elite could fairly be called “factions”: that is, organized or semi-organized groups working against other groups or against the regime. By the time the identity of any such group came to the attention of foreign analysts, the group would already have been exterminated.¹⁹ Kim may appreciate the value of setting one person against another in order to keep people from joining up against him, but he does not seem to relish the idea of independent group formation, perhaps because he realizes they could form a coalition and turn against him. Hence the monolithic nature of North Korean politics. In terms of the ideological themes of Juche and the socio-political organism (a single Confucian-style family), only the “main branch” of the North Korean tree can be tolerated, with all competing branches harshly pruned. This explains why the families of political criminals are punished: their “bad seed” must be completely eliminated from the garden of North Korean socialism.

Warnings in the North Korean press that “impure, hostile elements are wriggling inside our country”²⁰ hint that there may well be aggregations of the elite, not organized as formal or even informal groups, that share ideas and interests at variance with official ideology. Foreign analysts and the press have often speculated about the existence of divisions arrayed on a variety of dimensions, including hardliners versus soft-liners, military versus party personnel, members of Kim Il-sung’s different families (Kim Jong-suk versus Kim Song-ae families), members of Kim Jong-il’s different families (Song Hye-rim, Ko Yong-hi and their three sons as possible successors to Kim Jong-il), older versus younger generation elites, technocrats versus ideologues, economy-first versus military-first policy makers, and nationalists versus internationalists, to name a few. Any of these dimensions could spawn factions, but that is a matter for the future to decide.

Other factors may create divisions among the North Korean elite without having the potential to galvanize them into factions. Those who fear impending arrest (for example, because they have engaged in illegal economic activities) may fear the current regime. Some who have been punished or reprimanded by Kim may never forgive him. And those who believe that the Kim regime is an impediment to reunification may be motivated by a higher, nationalistic goal. People with affiliations to foreign countries might also form the basis for political divisions; in the 1950s, the domestic (South Korean), Yen-an (Chinese), Soviet, and partisan (Kim Il-sung) groups might be considered factions, but of course their leading members were purged by Kim Il-sung many years ago.

¹⁹ Yi Nam-ok had this to say about possible factions: “[Kim] has organizational capabilities, and is always in the know about what is happening. If a bud of a ‘faction’ sprouted, he would not leave it to grow bigger.” Interview of Yi Nam-ok by *Bungei Shunju*.

²⁰ According to an internal DPRK document published by *Tokyo Shimbun* (Morning Edition), August 15, 2003, p. 4. FBIS JPP20030817000050.

Another way to look at divisions within North Korean society is to define them in terms of how segments of the population distinctively respond to communications. Contemporary marketers in capitalist economies have embraced the idea of identifying population segments that respond differently to marketing communications and to the rest of the “marketing mix” (product, price, place of sale, as well as promotional communications).²¹ If different segments of the North Korean elite have access to different channels of communication, or if they interpret communications in different ways (e.g., naively versus skeptically), it might be useful to segment the elite along these communication dimensions, regardless of what other characteristics they possess. For example, if some soldiers, diplomats, and technocrats have access to certain foreign information sources and others do not, all of the foreign-information people could be considered a single communication segment. However, in the absence of reliable indications that different segments of the elite have access to substantially different sources of foreign news or are inclined to interpret news in different ways, it may be too soon to segment the North Korean elite news market.

D. DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL POWER

Which of these potential groups - under conditions not yet realized - might possess sufficient power to impose their will on other groups or on Kim Jong-il? The military and security elites (two or more possible groups) have such power, but no reliable information indicates that people within the military or security services operate as political groups outside of the party structure.²² Other groups could have the power that derives from the cohesiveness provided by shared interests, or power based on access to information (e.g., technocrats), but it is hard to see how such groups could go up against the vast political and military power controlled by Chairman Kim. One hears rumors of the occasional coup attempt against the Kim regime, but it does not appear that any coup has come close to succeeding.²³

²¹ Segmenting a market is justified when different people make different responses to a marketing communication, when those different responses occur within separate, identifiable, and homogeneous segments, and when the marketing benefits of segmentation (usually increased profitability) outweigh the costs of tailoring the marketing mix to one or more segments. For example, the advertising market is usually segmented by age group; products are often segmented by benefits sought (e.g., cavity prevention, brighter teeth, or cleaner breath for the toothpaste market).

²² Notwithstanding unsubstantiated reports such as that by Yi Tong-chun, “Does an Anti-Kim Jong-il Group Exist in the North Korean Military,” *Hanguk Ilbo*, February 6, 2003, Internet version. FBIS KPP2003020600046. The report claims that a document “opposing the Kim Jong-il system” and signed by several “high-level cadres of the KPA, including three generals” was delivered to “U.S. intelligence authorities in Seoul.”

²³ Rumors of military coup attempts have surfaced from time to time. In the 1950s and 1960s, when Kim Il Sung was still consolidating his power, show trials were held to convict allegedly traitorous generals and politicians, most notably during the Korean War, in 1956-1958 (when Kim Il Sung completed his major purges of political rivals), and in 1969-1970 (when officers opposed to the 1960’s “people’s military strategy” were purged). One of the most frequently cited coup rumors relates to an incident in 1992 in which a group of officers who had received

Whatever political power Kim fails to exercise resides with his personal representatives, although they must be careful how they use this power. Among foreign analysts, a popular way of estimating relative power is by the platform seating order of top officials who gather on important occasions. These rankings are regularly reported by the ROK press.²⁴ Another way to gauge power position is to note who appears with Kim on his on-the-spot inspections.²⁵ Leadership rankings show considerable stability from year to year, as one would expect for a government that does not subject itself to free elections. This stability may also be accounted for by the fact that power comes from showing loyalty to Kim, and in turn from Kim's trust in others; loyalty is relatively enduring in a Confucian culture, and trust develops slowly. Two frequently noted shifts have occurred in the power line-up. First, most of the first-generation cadres - Kim Il-sung's old partisan comrades - have died and been replaced by Kim Jong-il with people of his own generation, who are better educated and more loyal to him. Second, since Kim Il-sung's death in 1994, military figures have risen in the official hierarchy. Members of Kim Jong-il's National Defense Commission have even appeared ahead of politburo and secretariat members. The rise of military officials, and the emphasis given by the press to Kim's military-first policy, indicate either Kim's greater reliance on the military for support or his accommodation to the increased power of the military.

training in the Soviet Union allegedly plotted to kill an assemblage of North Korean officials by turning their tank cannon on them. It is said that the plot was discovered, the coup participants arrested and punished (presumably executed), and that virtually all officers who had received training in the Soviet Union in the 1980s (approximately 600) were purged. See Kwang-chu Son, "Kim Chong-il and the Military," *Sindong-a*, October 1997, pp. 210-237; FBIS FTS19971104001278. The defector Kang Myong-to is apparently describing the same incident in his book *Pyeongyangun Mangmyongul Kkumggunda*, June 1, 1995, pp. 255-272. FBIS KPP20030528000014. An account of the purges following this coup attempt is by Yun Sok-chin, *Chungang Ilbo*, March 21, 1996, p. 10. FBIS-EAS-96-056, p. 42. SK2103071196. On this and other coup attempts, see Han Ki-hung, "The 'Anti-Kim Chong-il Tendency' in the Military Is Serious," *Tong-a Ilbo*, August 20, 1995, p. 14. FBIS-EAS-95-161, pp. 40-41. SK2008060095. A former SSD officer, Yun Tae-il, speaks of other coup plots, including a military plot in 1995. *Kukka Anjon Powibuui Naemak*, July 20, 2002, pp. 138-166. FBIS KPP20030423000070.

²⁴ Until the late 1990s, the monthly *Vantage Point*, published by Naewoe Press (later by Yonhap News Agency), produced excellent leadership charts in its December issues. The South Korean and foreign press continue to monitor the rankings. See, for example, the rankings from 1998-2002 reported by Kim Tu-hwan of Yonhap on March 28, 2002. FBIS KPP20020328000022. An excellent discussion of North Korean leadership, along with rankings, is Kenneth E. Gause, *The North Korean Leadership: Evolving Regime Dynamics in the Kim Chong-il Era*. Center for Naval Analysis, 2003. For a broad view of power relations in the Kim regime, see Jinwook Choi, *Changing Relations between Party, Military, and Government in North Korea and Their Impact on Policy Direction*. Institute for International Studies, Stanford University, 1999. A longitudinal analysis of the composition of the KWP Central Committee, noting the consolidation rather than the diversification of that committee since the death of Kim Il-sung, is reported by Kwon Soyoung, "Changes in the Composition and Structures of the North Korean Political Elite," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2003), pp. 87-122. A book-length view of regime dynamics, with contributions from a multinational roster of scholars, is *Understanding Regime Dynamics in North Korea*, edited by Chung-in Moon. Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1998.

²⁵ See, for example, the FBIS Media Analysis of this issue, corrected version of February 11, 2004, entitled "FMA 6 Feb: Roundup of Kim Chong-il's Appearances in 2003," KPP20040206000129.

Because the Kim regime governs according to personal rather than organizational position, it is difficult to determine how much power people have without knowing their personal connections. Kim prefers to live and work outside of the limelight, and some of his closest aides keep out of the public eye as well. The analyst who studies North Korea must beware of a “window-dressing effect” whereby high ranking people (e.g., top generals) accompany Kim not because they have any real power, but because Kim believes that their presence confers legitimacy on his regime. Why else would these busy people follow Kim around and scribble notes of his passing thoughts?

Kim seems to rely on a “kitchen cabinet” of trusted advisers, which presumably never convenes as a group but instead consists of individuals with whom Kim frequently consults and socializes. Most of the people believed to reside in this inner circle are of Kim’s generation; all are considered loyal to him and, under normal circumstances, would share his fate. Most hold positions of power in the military, party, and/or government. Some inner circle members are from Kim’s own family. Some are drinking buddies. A veritable cottage industry has grown up around speculation about the identity of these chosen few, and no two lists are the same. A recent report by the ROK’s National Intelligence Service (NIS) warns of the difficulty of identifying members of this group:

Due to the closed nature of the society, information on the extent and make-up of Kim’s military inner circle is hard to obtain. Moreover, Kim’s self-righteous and impulsive leadership style makes it virtually impossible to make educated guesses about who might be among his favorites. The only thing one might conjecture with a degree of certainty is that the make-up of the inner circle can change at any time based on perceived loyalty to Kim.

The report then goes on to list ten candidates for inclusion in Kim’s military inner circle. Other recent listings may be consulted as well.²⁶

²⁶ “Kim Chong-il’s Inner Military Circle,” National Intelligence Service, August 17, 2003. FBIS KPP20030817000027. Kang Myong-to [a defector], “North Korea’s Power Men,” Chapter 5 in his *Pyongyangun Mangmyongul Kkumggunda* [Pyongyang Dreams of Exile/Defection], June 1, 1995, pp. 129-171. FBIS KPP20030831000019, and KPP20030528000012. Kwon Kyong-pok, “Who Are the People That Run North Korea with Real Power in Their Hands?” *Chugan Choson*, June 20, 2000, Internet version. FBIS KPP20000620000047. Chon Yong-u, “Kim Chong-il’s Men - Close ‘Power Elites’ Placed Everywhere,” *Taehan Maeil*, April 11, 2002, Internet version. FBIS KPP20020411000099. “National Defense Commission, Secretariat Have Kim Jong-il’s Ear in North Korea,” *Yonhap*, July 7, 2003, citing the ROK defense ministry’s biannual magazine. FBIS KPP20030707000066. An Yong-chol [a North Korean defector], “The Mystery of the Son’s Rivalry to Become Heir and Who is This No. 2 Man Kang Sang-chun - Kim Chong-il’s Group of Closest Confidants Wrapped in Veil of Secrecy,” *Gendai*, August 1, 2003, pp. 110-119. FBIS JPP20030710000005. Kim Kwang-il, “New Year’s Special: Ten Years of Kim Jong-il - Change of Close Aides,” *Chosun ilbo*, December 31, 2003, Internet version. FBIS KPP20031231000069. Bae Sung-in, “Recruitment Characteristics of Kim Jong-il’s Ruling Elite,” *Vantage Point*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (January 2001), pp. 44-53. Kenneth E. Gause, pp. 12-20. Kongdan Oh also compiled her own list in May 2003 (personal communication).

How is power used to make policy decisions?²⁷ What is known about decision making in North Korea suggests that Kim does not go around dictating - at least not all of the time - although he is known to intervene in even the smallest of affairs if they come to his attention (for example, he may decide on where a particular high-level cadre should live or what kind of car he should drive). On important matters, Kim turns to his subordinates for policy suggestions, encouraging them to discuss and argue among themselves. These subordinates, presumably working within a single organization rather than communicating between organizations, then send their recommendations up to him to be evaluated in terms of what is good both for national and regime security. Once Kim makes a decision, it is official policy until he reviews it, and presumably no one can contest it.

Two points are worth noting. First, Kim wants everyone to report up to him, not to each other. This is a prudent means to prevent the formation of factions. Early in his career, Kim began sending Three Revolution Team squads throughout the country to teach and to monitor what was going on. Over the years, Kim has developed an extensive reporting system that enables him to receive information from all sectors of society, without people in those sectors learning about what is happening in other sectors, but the exact nature of these channels is as difficult to discern as the nature of communication existing in, say, the U.S. government. Clearly, the North Korean intelligence services play an important role in this monitoring function. People are expected to report relevant information to Kim, and if he gets that information instead from another source, he becomes angry. The security services - MPS, SSD, and Security Command - have separate channels of upward communication, and in a sense are competitors who often spy on each other.²⁸ The people with the most power also may be the most carefully watched and the most completely isolated - the better to prevent them from plotting against Kim.

A second important point is that because everyone's personal security is dependent on pleasing - or at least not displeasing - Kim, self-censorship is a well-developed art. Psychological researchers in the United States have studied self-censorship and related "groupthink" phenomena in U.S. government and corporate policy making.²⁹ The groupthink effect is most powerful when the group knows - or believes it knows - the leader's policy preferences. A good

²⁷ Information on decision-making is fragmentary, because none of Kim's close associates has defected. See Kenneth E. Gause, pp. 20-23. Also, Jinwook Choi. And Huh Moon-young, "The Foreign Policy Decision-Making Structure of the Kim Jong-il Regime," *Vantage Point*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (February 1999), pp. 36-46. A few very enlightening paragraphs about Kim's method of operation may be found in Choe Son-yong, "Why the Discrepancy between ROK, DPRK Joint Communiqué Regarding Military Authorities Talks," *Yonhap*, April 8, 2002. FBIS KPP20020408000065.

²⁸ Memoir by the defector Im Kyong-su, "The Inside of DPRK Ministry of Public Security: A Prison Empire of Corruption, Conspiracy, and Torture," *Wolgan Choson*, June 1999, pp. 340-370. FBIS FTS19990614001666.

²⁹ The original source is Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972.

guess is that anyone who rises in the North Korean hierarchy is adept at reading the mind of his superiors, although the mercurial Kim can be a tough person to predict. Even when people are careful to consider Kim's likely preferences, they still face the danger that a recommendation seemingly consistent with Kim's current thinking may be branded "counter-revolutionary" if Kim changes his mind at a later date. Consider the cases of Kim Dal-hyon and Kim Chong-u.³⁰ This dilemma of creativity vs. orthodoxy critically undermines Kim Jong-il's call for "new thinking."³¹

E. DOMESTIC NEWS SOURCES

What roles do different kinds of communications play in North Korean society? What role would Kim like them to play in order to achieve his goal of making society into a homogenous "socio-political organism," with the leader as the "nerve center"? How can communications contribute to social stability and at the same time promote adaptations to a changing world? Models and theories of communication raise many interesting and important questions about North Korean communication patterns, suggesting future lines of research.

For example, systems theorists are fond of pointing out that closed systems, which do not communicate with the environment, inevitably die.³² Open systems live, but at the risk of becoming destabilized by their environment. How will the Kim regime resolve this dilemma?

Organizations tend to employ an information search process matching the perceived degree of ambiguity of the environment.³³ An unambiguous environment can be scanned with a simple search mechanism (e.g., a few clerks assigned to the environmental monitoring function), whereas a complex, ambiguous environment requires that the organization employ more

³⁰ Kim Dal-hyon, who appeared to be the champion of North Korea's economic modernization in the early 1990s, rose to the posts of State External Economic Affairs chairman and deputy prime minister. He led a delegation to South Korea in 1992, but later was abruptly demoted to a local economic position from which he never made a comeback. He is believed to have died in 2000. Yonhap News Agency, *North Korea Handbook*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003, p. 830. Later in the 1990s, Kim Chong-u, the top North Korean official in charge of external economic affairs, failed to appear at a November 1997 economic conference. It is rumored he was banished to the countryside. A number of other top external economic officials disappeared at about the same time. *Chosun Ilbo*, December 28, 2001. FBIS KPP20011228000015.

³¹ Expanding on the New Year's editorial, one of the major statements of Kim Jong-il's "new economic thinking" campaign in early 2001 instructs that "With innovative insight, functionaries should meditate on and examine their overall tasks anew . . ." At the same time, they should do everything "in line with the great Comrade Kim Jong-il's intent." That is to say, be creative in the way that you think Kim wants you to be creative. *Nodong Sinmun* editorial, January 4, 2001. Broadcast on KCBS on the same date. FBIS KPP20010104000042.

³² A readable overview of communications theory, including the systems approach, is Dominic A. Infante, Andrew S. Rancer, and Deanna F. Womack. *Building Communication Theory*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2003. Another good source is Stephen W. Littlejohn. *Theories of Human Communication*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2002.

³³ This is the "principle of requisite variety," a part of "organizational information theory." The original source is Karl Weick's *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (2nd ed.). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979.

complex tools and a larger staff to open a wider channel of communication to the environment. In the relatively complex post-Cold War environment, have North Korea's communication channels been broadened, as the theory suggests they should have been? Is North Korea suffering from a widening information gap? If so, are some of the elite motivated to narrow that gap?

Communication is the means by which groups organize, and by the same token, communication is used to influence and control group members. The North Korean people are subjected to a constant stream of communications telling them what to do and what to think. Are these communications effective, or are they largely ignored? Information also travels in the opposite direction, as people's reactions and feedback flow upward, influencing the leaders in terms of making their job easier or more difficult. One of the managerial problems that the North Korean elite encounter is that misinformation and disinformation hamper their decision making. Within a group or society, control is also exercised horizontally, as individuals and groups at the same level provide or withhold information, and sometimes compete against each other (as illustrated by the rivalry between different security organizations). A brief summary of communication flows within North Korea might look like this: communications from outside are usually blocked; communications among the people are restricted; communications from the people to their leaders are not to be trusted; and communications from the leaders to the people are ignored as much as possible.

The simplest way for North Koreans to get information about the outside world is to read, listen, and watch their domestic media, which provide both news and a context for interpreting the news. The philosophy of news reporting adhered to by the government-controlled press is the same as the philosophy found in other communist and former communist states. According to this view, the purpose of news is not to satisfy the idle curiosity of the audience, but rather to shape them into the hardworking and loyal citizens their leaders wish them to be. As Lenin said, "Newspapers are free not for the sake of the circulation of news but for the purpose of educating and organizing the working masses toward the attainment of goals clearly defined by the thoroughgoing leadership of the party."³⁴

Article 67 of North Korea's constitution provides for "freedom of press, publication, assembly, demonstration, and association," but "freedom" is defined as what is best for the masses.³⁵ Of course, what is best for the masses is determined entirely by those who are in power.

³⁴ Quoted in Yu Chae-chon, *Pukhanui Ollon* [Media in North Korea], December 30, 1990, pp. 45-84. One of a series of FBIS translated articles on this topic. FBIS KPP20031009000071.

³⁵ According to Kim Pyong-ho, vice director general of KCNA, in an interview with No Kil-nam, editor of *Minjok Tongsin* (of Los Angeles), September 8, 2003. FBIS KPP20030930000082.

But even though the media serve as a political tool of the Kim regime, they are not without news value, because the propagandist needs the raw material of news content in order to tell his story. The intelligent news consumer can often separate content from spin to get to the real news.

To take an example, when *Nodong Sinmun* tells its readers that in the months after invading Iraq, the U.S. forces fell into a “trap” set by resistance forces, the article provides background with the news that “it took only some 40 days for the U.S.-led coalition forces to occupy Iraq.”³⁶ Trap or no trap, the astute reader can infer that U.S. military power must be formidable if it vanquished the Iraqi army in a matter of weeks. Likewise, the domestic press waited almost a month before informing its audience (in a Korean Central Broadcast Station news item) that Saddam Hussein had been captured. The news was placed in the background of a piece about the continuing attacks against U.S. forces by Iraqis.³⁷

An interesting question is why the press chose to publish either piece of hard news, given that neither the quick U.S. victory nor Saddam’s capture was necessary for, or even relevant to, the main themes of these respective news articles. At other times, so many facts are left out of a news story that the audience probably can make neither head nor tail of it. For example, Korean Central Television (KCTV), presumably referring to speculation that the new nuclear transparency of Iran and Libya might have some effect on North Korea, cryptically says: “Recently, the United States has been extensively advertising on the incidents [left unspecified in the news item] they orchestrated in some Middle East countries and is having a hallucination that the effects from these incidents will be reproduced on the Korean peninsula. . . . To expect a change in our position is the same as expecting a shower from clear sky.”³⁸

Saying that the North Korean news is censored would falsely imply that much of the news gets through, although with some distortion. In fact, only a few foreign and domestic news items find their way into the North Korean press, and even those items are usually published days or even weeks after the event, giving the North Korean propagandists time to evaluate the outcome of events and decide how best to report them. Items for broadcast or publication are selected with great care. Like all organizations in North Korea, the print and electronic media operate under the dual authority of the party and the government. If a published item reflects badly on the leader or the party, those responsible for its publication may lose their jobs and possibly even be banished to the countryside.

³⁶ Paek Mun-kyu, “Fate of an Occupier Who Has Fallen into a Trap from Which There Is No Escape,” *Nodong Sinmun*, November 28, 2003, p. 6. FBIS KPP20031217000136.

³⁷ KCBS, January 8, 2004. FBIS KPP2004011000030.

³⁸ Korean Central Television, January 9, 2004. FBIS KPP20040109000087.

According to a KCBS scriptwriter who defected in 1996, reporters and writers receive monthly topic guidelines from the KWP's Propaganda and Agitation Department. Approved topics are similar from one month to the next: the greatness of the Kims, the value of "our style of socialism," and the corrupt nature of the United States, Japan, and "reactionary" elements in South Korean society. After news items are composed, they are submitted to the writing staff for review, and then sent up to the director of the news department.³⁹ As stories work their way through layers of inspection, they reach the General Bureau of Publications Guidance, and finally the appropriate news department of the KWP's Propaganda and Agitation Department. Important items (e.g., editorials and commentaries) are undoubtedly submitted to Kim Jong-il for approval. According to one source, most of the copy for newspapers is submitted a month ahead of time, and over half of the typesetting is completed several days before publication.⁴⁰

For the domestic audience, North Korea has four national newspapers, one AM radio station, and three television stations. Also, each province publishes a daily newspaper comparable to the *Pyongyang Daily*. The only news agency is KCNA, the Korean Central News Agency, which reportedly employs between 500 and 1,000 people who gather international and domestic news, process that news, publish some of it internationally in English and other languages (for example, through the KCNA web site at <http://www.kcna.co.jp>), and make some of it available to the domestic news media.⁴¹ Until the mid-1990s, reports out of North Korea indicated that about a thousand top cadres received *Chamgo Tongsin* (Reference News), a kind of *Early Bird* publication that provides not so much news, but challenging current issues to think about.⁴² Reference News may now be distributed on the intranet.

Recent articles in the North Korean press mention problems in getting newspapers to readers: "The roles of the functionaries in the post and telecommunications sector are greatly related with the smooth operation of distribution publications, including the official party paper, cable broadcasting, and television broadcasting, which carry our party's voice. . . . Above all, the post and telecommunications sector must make sure that the publications, including the official party newspaper, should be immediately distributed without delay."⁴³

³⁹ News conference by former North Korean broadcast scriptwriter Chang Hae-song, KBS-1 Television in Seoul, June 7, 1996. FBIS-EAS-96-112, June 10, 1996, pp. 37-45 (FTS19960607000179). Also see Yonhap's *North Korea Handbook*, p. 410.

⁴⁰ Yonhap's *North Korea Handbook*, p. 410.

⁴¹ Yonhap's *North Korea Handbook*, p. 410. Also, Yonhap, September 18, 2003. FBIS KPP20030918000039.

⁴² Paeng Won-sun, "North Korea's News Agency," *Pukhanui Ollon*, December 30, 1999, pp. 227-244. FBIS KPP20031009000077.

⁴³ "Relay Party's Ideology and Intention to the Masses in a More Timely, Faster Way," October 6, 2003, p. 3. FBIS KPP20031106000049.

Newspapers

The DPRK's premier news outlet is the KWP's *Nodong Sinmun* (Daily Worker), which publishes six pages every day of the year. Its articles - especially the editorials and commentaries - signal the direction of the Kim regime's thinking. As one would expect, any newspaper in which the editorials are the main attraction must be very boring indeed, and most North Koreans avoid reading *Nodong Sinmun*, although they are required to study selected articles as part of weekly political study sessions. Circulation is nominally rated at a million copies, but newsprint shortages almost certainly prevent the paper from reaching this announced circulation. In 2003, the newspaper became available on an intranet home page where cadres are urged to read it first thing in the morning in order to "learn about the party's intention and demands in a timely manner."⁴⁴

The newspaper has 12 departments, with names like Propaganda for Juche Theory, Party History Cultivation, Revolution Cultivation, Party Life, Industry, Agriculture, International, South Korea, and of course, Editorials. A sample of the content (for the randomly chosen date of February 4, 2002 (Juche 91)) is illustrative:⁴⁵

- Page 1 is the editorial page. To the left and right of the title are displayed wise words or slogans of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. A commentary is spread across the top of the page ("Let's Be Fighters with an Iron Will"). Most of the articles on this page refer explicitly to the teachings or activities of one of the Kims: Kim Jong-il sends letters of New Year's greetings to a list of foreign political officials, beginning with the Chinese, then Russians, then Cubans, and ending with an official from the Communist party of Brazil; the late Kim Il-sung receives a doctoral degree from and honorary membership in the Belarus Academy of International Information and Technology (so does Kim Jong-il); Kim sends telegraphic New Year's congratulations to a list of "second-tier" world leaders; February is the month to show loyalty to Kim (his birthday is the 16th); a nationwide farmer's loyalty march has begun [they will converge on Pyongyang carrying letters of loyalty].
- Page 2 is similar to page 1, with articles and photographs about the two Kims. On this particular date, the entire page is given over to photographs of the two Kims under the heading "Heaven-Created Military Generals Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il."
- Page 3 is devoted to domestic stories: organizations that have reportedly reached or exceeded their production goals, examples of heroic workers, and descriptions of how the party's correct policies are being realized throughout the country. On this date, the theme

⁴⁴ "Relay Party's Ideology and Intention to the Masses in a More Timely, Faster Way." According to the article, one model functionary, "after he read, first thing in the morning, the editorial that urged a great upsurge in building a powerful state with the pride of having splendidly celebrated the 55th anniversary of the Republic's founding . . . carried out political work by going out to many cooperative farms bustling with corn harvests and letting them know the tasks suggested in the official party newspaper's editorial."

⁴⁵ *Nodong Sinmun* may be read, when it finally arrives, in the Library of Congress's East Asian Collection.

is the environment: “Let’s Build a Socialist Paradise with a Clean Environment According to the Instructions of General Kim Jong-il”; “Let’s Plant More Trees”; along with an article about how a model county manages its water resources and plants trees, articles about farm mechanization, and at the bottom of the page brief paragraphs of news from a dozen government ministries.

- Page 4 is devoted to arts and culture. The unifying theme on this date is the military: a reader’s contribution on “how our military is the best, and how we should support the military”; a poem praising the motherland; a description of how the military is like a big, happy family; an article on military-first youth patriotism.
- Page 5 is the pan-Korean or Korean unification page. “February is the designated month of South Korean people’s joy and longing for Kim Jong-il”; “South Koreans Praise Kim Jong-il”; “Let’s Defeat South Korean Divisionists”; “The United States Should Stay Out of the Korean Unification Issue”; “Japanese-Korean Youth Unite!”; “President Bush Is a Warmonger (divisionist).”
- Page 6, the international page, features articles praising North Korea and denigrating other countries, including “Banzai to Kim Jong-il, Sun of the 21st Century” and “US Underhanded Approach to the Nuclear Issue.” In other articles on the page, readers are informed about support for North Korea coming from Egypt, Russia, and ASEAN; countries that hate the United States; U.S. armed hegemony; U.S.-Russia policy conflict; and the failure of IT globalization (viewed as a form of Western hegemony).

Minju Choson (Democratic Korea) is the paper of the government administration. It publishes four pages daily, with a maximum circulation of 600,000. It informs readers about government policies and urges their implementation. Many *Minju Choson* articles are indistinguishable from those published in *Nodong Sinmun*. *Pyongyang Sinmun* (Pyongyang Daily) is the Pyongyang city paper, publishing four pages daily with a circulation of 50,000 or less. It carries more entertainment and cultural articles than *Nodong Sinmun*. The daily paper of the KPA is *Choson Inmingun Sinmun* (Korean People’s Army Daily), with information tailored to the needs of military personnel. The daily paper of the Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League is *Chongnyon Chonwi* (Youth Vanguard). Inasmuch as the party, the government, the military, and the youth organizations are the primary organizations in North Korea, these daily papers cover just about all of the population.

Three other publications may be of interest to the North Korean elite. *Kulloja* (Worker), the theoretical monthly journal of the party, publishes explanations and justifications for party policies, *Kyongje Yongu* (Economic Studies) is a quarterly journal explaining and rationalizing North Korean economic policies; *Kyongje Yongu* also tries to teach its readers the rudiments of market economics and international trade, on the theory that North Korea must be prepared to deal with non-socialist economies - until capitalism destroys itself and the world embraces socialism. *Chollima*, the DPRK’s only general-interest magazine, is dedicated to instilling

motivation in its readers through moderately interesting essays, travel articles, poems, and the like.

Electronic Communication Channels

For many North Koreans, television sets and radios are luxury items. There may be only about four million radios and one or two million television sets in the country. In Pyongyang, one household in three may have a television; in the countryside, only one in 30 or 40 homes.⁴⁶ North Korean radios are fixed to receive only the broadcast frequency of KCBS, with transmitters throughout the country.⁴⁷ Computers are scarcer still. In Pyongyang, an Internet cafe opened in August 2002, but the prices for a connection to the outside world by way of China (optical cable to Shanghai via Sinuiju) are too expensive for most North Koreans; in any case, computer use is closely monitored by the authorities.⁴⁸ Kim Jong-il is known to be an avid web surfer, and a select number of scientists and officials may also have access to the Internet. The Kwangmyong [brightness] intranet was set up in 2000 to link major cities and organizations.⁴⁹ It is presumably on this network that the *Nodong Sinmun* home page is located. A few other, more localized intranets are also said to operate. An ROK source reports that, beginning in May 2003, international email service has been provided on a highly restricted basis by the “International Communications Department” in Pyongyang.⁵⁰ Before that, the “Silibank” web site (<http://www.silibank.com>) is said to have provided email service to foreign addresses by way of a server in Shenyang, China.⁵¹

KCBS carries more domestic news and less international news than KCNA provides to the international audience. The three television stations are Korean Central Television (KCTV), offering news and other programming on weekday evenings and during the weekend, Mansudae Television, providing entertainment programs on weekends and holidays, and Korean Educational and Cultural Television, broadcasting educational programs three hours a day during the week, and longer on weekends. The so-called “third broadcasting” network consists of local cable hook-ups to homes, public buildings, and loudspeakers in public spaces, over which local instructions and news are delivered (for example, instructions on how to behave before a scheduled VIP visit to the town).

⁴⁶ Yonhap News Agency, *North Korea Handbook*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003, p. 409.

⁴⁷ Radio and TV information in this section is summarized from Yonhap’s *North Korea Handbook*, pp. 422-423.

⁴⁸ FBIS compiled report, November 24, 2003. FBIS KPP20031124000116.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Also, Yonhap’s *North Korea Handbook*, pp. 244-245.

⁵⁰ Kim In, “North Korea Sets up International E-Mail Server,” *Chosun Ilbo*, November 28, 2003, Internet version. FBIS KPP20031128000177.

⁵¹ Ibid. Also, FBIS compiled report, November 7, 2003. FBIS KPP20031107000090.

For comparison purposes, here are the major news stories carried by the KCNA web site, *Nodong Sinmun*, KCBS, and KCTV on December 18, 2003.⁵²

KCNA

- The president of Bangladesh sends greetings to Kim Jong-il on the 30th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations.
- South Koreans rally against sending troops to fight in Iraq.
- The ROK's GNP opposition party members are characterized as thieves for allegedly engaging in corruption.
- Regulations are issued for doing business in the proposed Kaesong free-trade zone.
- Regulations for entry, stay, and residence are issued for the Kaesong zone.
- Customs regulations are issued for the Kaesong zone.
- China's ambassador to Pyongyang hosts a reception and predicts a brilliant future for China-DPRK relations.
- Kim Jong-il sends a reply to the president of Bangladesh.
- Japan is criticized for planning to send troops to Iraq.
- People of the world are urged to frustrate the imperialists' globalization initiatives.
- SPA president Kim Yong-nam sends greetings to the king of Bahrain on the country's founding day.
- Recent successes of DPRK sports teams in international competitions are applauded.
- Greetings are sent to the president of Nigeria on the 45th anniversary of the republic.
- In Pyongyang, a film about Kim Jong-il is shown to foreign diplomats on the occasion of the 12th anniversary of Kim's appointment as KPA supreme commander and the 86th anniversary of the birth of his mother, Kim Jong-suk.
- U.S. legislation sanctioning Syria is said to be part of a campaign to intimidate independent states.
- A friendly gathering of North Korean and Chinese youth league representatives is held.

Nodong Sinmun

Page 1:

- Kim thanks managers and workers for supporting the army.
- People in various countries deeply study the classic works of Kim Jong-il.
- The DPRK's achievements in various fields are celebrated.

⁵² KCNA from <http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm> (Past News); *Nodong Sinmun* from FBIS KPP20031219000043; KCBS from FBIS KPP20031218000122; KCTV from FBIS KPP20031218000094.

Page 2:

- Kim Jong-suk's development of national handicrafts is celebrated ("Embroidering Brilliant Future of National Handicraft").
- Representatives from various countries lay wreaths at the statue of Kim Jong-suk on the occasion of her 86th birthday.
- SPA president Kim Yong-nam sends greetings to the president of Niger on its founding anniversary day, and to the king of Bahrain on its founding day.

Page 3:

- Achievements of various organizations are presented under the heading of "Let Us Endlessly Create Production Upsurges with the High Spirit of Victors."

Page 4:

- Articles and photographs highlight the achievements of Samjiyon County under the heading "People's Paradise That Sings of the Creation of a New World."
- In Pyongyang, a film about Kim is shown to foreign diplomats on the occasion of the 12th anniversary of Kim's appointment as KPA supreme commander and the 86th anniversary of the birth of his mother, Kim Jong-suk.
- The Russian ambassador hosts a new year's friendship party.
- A friendly gathering of North Korean and Chinese youth league representatives is held.
- The DPRK's ambassador to Iran pays the president a farewell visit.

Page 5:

- A special article celebrates the theme of Uri Minjokkiri ("our race only").
- ROK news is reviewed, including ROK criticism of President Bush's diplomatic policy.
- Japan's Chongnyon is praised for its efforts in reinforcing nationalist education.

Page 6:

- A special article warns against the dangers of war presented by the relocation of U.S. forces in the ROK.
- A commentary explains why a DPRK nuclear deterrent is the only way to prevent war.
- A spokesperson for the foreign ministry sees evil designs behind the passage of the U.S. sanctions law against Syria.
- The Cuban army minister vows to crush U.S. provocations.
- Developing countries are developing science and technology.
- An article warns that "We Should Be Cautious of Japan Emerging as a Country of Aggression."

Korean Central Broadcasting Station (18 minute news cast)

- Kim thanks managers for planting trees and carefully protecting historical relics.
- The 24th anniversary of Kim's work on "living in our own style" is celebrated.
- The works of Kim and his father are displayed at the Juche exhibition hall.
- New Kimilsungia and Kimjongilia greenhouses are built.
- People visit the Kim Jong-suk relic room at a museum on the occasion of her birthday.
- ROK authorities are denounced for their anti-reunification act of suppressing ROK students.
- Japan's budget for a missile defense program is denounced.

Korean Central Television Network (29 minute news cast)

- One of Kim Jong-il's books is published in Angola.
- Various countries, including Egypt, celebrate the 86th birthday of Kim Jong-suk and the 12th anniversary of Kim Jong-il's appointment as KPA supreme commander.
- Kim thanks a boat crew for their accident-free work at Kumgang.
- People are shown listening to a lecture at the Historic Place of Revolution on the occasion of Kim Jong-suk's 86th birthday and Kim Jong-il's appointment as supreme commander.
- Archive footage shows on-the-spot guidance at a food institute given by Kim and his father.
- The winner of the Kim Il-sung poet prize and his family are shown enjoying a "birthday table" of food sent by Kim Jong-il.
- A video shows progress in land rezoning work in North Hamyong province.
- A video shows progress in the construction of the Orangchon Power Plant.
- A video celebrates the year-end acceleration of production at the Nanam Coal Mine Machinery Complex.
- The operation of the Tokchon Chicken Plant is shown.
- Medical researchers at the Academy of Koryo Medicine talk about their recent achievements.
- A "meritorious" technician is shown working in a laboratory at the 5 October Automation Apparatus Plant.
- A visiting delegation of Vietnamese is shown paying their respects to Kim Il-sung and reviewing exhibits on display at the Kumsusan Memorial Palace.
- Representatives from various countries are shown laying wreaths at the statue of Kim Jong-suk on the occasion of her 86th birthday.
- The announcer notes that in 2003, the world's progressive people supported the DPRK's anti-U.S. policy, with photographs of approving foreign publications.
- A DPRK foreign ministry spokesperson reports on the interest of various countries, including the Czech Republic, Russia, and China, in the resumption of six-party talks.

This selection of news items presents few surprises. More attention is devoted to Kim Jong-il (and his mother) in the domestic press than in KCNA; Kim Il-sung is infrequently mentioned. More international news is presented in KCNA and *Nodong Sinmun* than on domestic radio and television. “Newsworthy” items are scarce in all the media. On this date, news relating to the United States appeared in all the media except KCBS, and all the news about the United States was negative. None of the news items on North Korea’s domestic situation was the least bit negative; in fact, the only negative domestic items ever to appear are veiled references to the need for better social order and criticism of bureaucrats for failing to work more energetically.

The news presented in these four channels is consistent with two themes. First, that the domestic and foreign policies of the Kim regime are correct and successful. Second, that Japan, the United States, and some elements in the ROK threaten the freedom of peace-loving people. These themes are two aspects of one grand theme of legitimacy: the DPRK under the leadership of Kim Jong-il is the best country in the world to live in.

Foreign sources wishing to communicate with the DPRK audience through the domestic media are faced with an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity is that a scarcity of international stories in the North Korean domestic press makes any international news item stand out. The challenge is that the North Korean audience has been conditioned to expect that anything related to the United States is negative, and so U.S. initiatives are likely to be interpreted in a negative manner.

F. FOREIGN NEWS SOURCES

In principle, North Koreans should be unable to gain access to any foreign news sources. Possession of a radio with an unfixed dial, listening to foreign radio or television broadcasts, possessing foreign video or audiotapes, and reading foreign papers or magazines are all grounds for detention. Inspectors make surprise visits to households to check on radios, and defectors say that many North Koreans returning from overseas discard their imported radios rather than come under a cloud of suspicion.⁵³ Speaking with visiting foreigners invites a subsequent interview with the police. But the Kim regime has not achieved complete control over its citizens, because complete technical control cannot be achieved and the controllers can easily be bribed.

Although the government tries to jam foreign broadcasts, they do sometimes get through, and some people risk listening to them with foreign or altered radios. The ROK government

⁵³ Kang Chol-hwan, “North Koreans Watch South Korean Videos in Pyongyang, Wonsan,” *Chosun ilbo*, August 21, 2003, Internet version. FBIS KPP20030822000038.

operates several “gray” radio stations broadcasting to the North.⁵⁴ The Social Education Broadcasting (*Saehoe Kyoyuk Pangsong*) station, operated by the ROK government’s KBS network, beams signals into North Korea and China 24 hours a day. Echo of Hope Broadcasting (*Huimangui Meari Pangsong*) transmits for about 12 hours a day, with its opening and closing music the beloved “Arirang” (played by Paul Mauriat and his orchestra, according to the web site “Clandestine Stations in East Asia”).⁵⁵ The station claims to be sponsored by Koreans living abroad, but is reportedly run by the NIS. Voice of the People Broadcasting (*Inminui Sori Pangsong*), transmitting 12 hours a day as well, advertises itself as a service of the Korean Workers’ Union, but is reportedly operated by the Ministry of National Defense.⁵⁶ Since the beginning of the Kim Dae-jung administration, broadcasts that slander the North Korean regime reportedly have been banned on all the ROK government-sponsored stations. Far East Broadcasting (*Kukdong Pangsong*) is operated by a Korean Christian organization (although it is not clear who provides the finances), and may be more outspoken in its opinions.

In a February 2003 survey of 103 defectors conducted by the KBS Broadcasting Institute, 67 percent of respondents said they had listened to KBS’s Social Education Broadcasting; six percent said they listened to Far East Broadcasting, and three percent said they listened to Radio Free Asia. Some 40 percent said they listened to the KBS station once or twice a week, and the same proportion said they listened every day. Asked how they learned about KBS broadcasts, 50 percent said they discovered the station by accident, whereas 15 percent said the station was recommended by others. What the North Korean listeners liked most about the station was “information about the ROK.”⁵⁷ In July 2003, the DPRK government admitted that its “black” propaganda station, Voice of National Salvation (VNS), which had been broadcasting programs in South Korean dialect since 1970, was not in fact a dissident South Korean station, but was, as everyone knew, broadcasting from the DPRK. The station signed off on August 31, and the DPRK asked the ROK government to make a corresponding gesture by ending broadcasts aimed at the North. The admission and request were widely seen as a sign that the Kim government was increasingly concerned about outside information reaching the North Korean people, especially

⁵⁴ FBIS Report, August 1, 2003. FBIS KPP20030801000115. The privately run web site “Clandestine Stations” is at <http://www.clandestineradio.com>. The brief section on ROK broadcasts to the DPRK is under Country Intel/North Korea. According to this web site, a one-hour Internet-based radio broadcast sponsored by Radio One, an organization of North Korean defectors, began test broadcasts on February 16, 2004 (Kim Jong-il’s birthday) in advance of an official launch on April 15 (Kim Il-sung’s birthday). The origin of “gray” propaganda is disguised, but it does not claim to come from the target country, whereas “black” propaganda attempts to disguise its true origin by purporting to originate in the country toward which it is targeted.

⁵⁵ The privately run web site “Clandestine Stations in East Asia” is at <http://www.246.ne.jp/~abi/clangest.htm>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Paek Sung-ku, “Kim Jong-il Orders to Confiscate Radios; A Conspiracy Is Underway to Abolish the KBS Social Educational Broadcasting to Keep Step with North Korea’s Suspension of Anti-North [sic] Propaganda Broadcasts,” *Wolgan Choson*, September 1, 2003, pp. 249-255. FBIS KPP20030830000035.

in the wake of the U.S. propaganda attack on Iraq and calls in the United States to increase Radio Free Asia broadcasts to North Korea.⁵⁸

In 2003, Radio Free Asia (RFA) began broadcasting in Korean four hours a day (0700-0800 and 2300-0200 local time). Before that, Korean broadcasts were limited to two hours a day - the same as broadcasts in Burmese, Laotian, and Khmer, and less than the six hours broadcast in Tibetan!⁵⁹ On July 16, 2003, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill authorizing 24-hour broadcasts and urging that transistor radios be dropped over North Korea, but these measures have yet to be implemented. Voice of America (VOA) beams Korean-language broadcasts to North Korea for three hours a day, from 0600-0700 and 2100-2300 local time.⁶⁰

Loudspeakers operated along the DMZ by the ROK government formerly carried slanderous comments, but since the coming of the sunshine policy, the slander has apparently ceased. The ROK's NIS also has apparently ended its flights of balloons that dropped propaganda flyers into North Korea.

Apart from listening to foreign radio broadcasts, North Koreans can get news of the outside world from the thousands of Korean and Chinese-Korean traders who regularly cross the northern border. Occasional information also comes from conversations with tourists, whose numbers have increased in recent years. By the end of 2003, almost 600,000 South Koreans had traveled to the Kumgang Mountain tourist area, where they could view the stunning scenery but were kept isolated from North Korean citizens. In fact, most tourist personnel in the area are ethnic Koreans brought in from China. At Kumgang, speech with North Korean tour guides must be conducted with great care to avoid causing offense and inviting detainment. The Tongil conglomerate of South Korea, financed by the Unification Church, began offering tourist trips to Pyongyang in September 2003, but the Tongil tourists also are isolated for the most part from the North Korean population.⁶¹ The only other large group of tourists to visit North Korea are

⁵⁸ Yonhap, July 30, 2003. FBIS KPP20030730000057. FBIS Report, August 1, 2003. Paek Sung-ku. VNS went out defiantly: "Our nation is now welcoming the 15 June [2000] era of reunification in which the fellow countrymen will become one under Great General Kim Jong-il's military-first politics based on love for the country and people. . . . The North side, on the occasion of the 15 August Independence Day, proposed to stop all broadcasts that slander the other party The Editorial Bureau of the Voice of National Salvation, while extending full support to, as well as fully sympathizing with, the North's proposal, in response to such a proposal, inform all of you that we will actively and totally end our broadcast starting 1 August. From the bottom of our hearts, we extend our thanks to all of you who gave unsparing support to our broadcast and earnestly enjoyed listening to it and wish that greater results are seen in the future struggle. Good-bye, everyone." VNS, July 31, 2003. FBIS KPP20030801000001.

⁵⁹ RFA's home page is <http://www.rfa.org>.

⁶⁰ VOA's home page is <http://www.voa.gov>.

⁶¹ "Tongil Group Starts 'Pyongyang Tourism Business,'" *Chugan Choson*, September 25, 2003, pp. 38, 40. FBIS KPP20031107000119.

Chinese who come to gamble in Chinese-owned casinos in Pyongyang and in the Najin-Sonbong foreign trade zone.⁶² Westerners, especially Americans, are usually denied visas. Employees for the various NGOs that provide aid to North Korea are mostly non-Americans, and in any case few Korean-speaking NGO representatives are granted visas.

There is little reason to believe that one segment of the North Korean elite is more likely than another to be exposed to information from foreign broadcasts. Those cadres who have the opportunity to meet tourists, and those with the opportunity to travel overseas, obviously have greater access to outside information. More importantly, their information comes in the form of first-hand experience rather than brief news reports. But even the North Koreans who travel abroad have to be careful about whom they converse with and what they read, watch, or listen to, because they are accompanied by North Korean security personnel.

G. DIFFUSION OF NEWS WITHIN NORTH KOREA

It is difficult to get a sense of the nature and amount of personal communication that occurs in North Korea's "closed" society. Because of security restrictions and infrastructure problems, most communication takes place on a face-to-face basis. Mail is easily examined, and ownership of private telephones is limited to upper-level cadres or relatively wealthy traders.⁶³ Cellular telephone service was initiated in 2002 and has spread rapidly: in late 2003, a pro-North Korean newspaper in Japan reported that 20,000 mobile phones were in use in North Korea, although there is no independent verification of this statistic.⁶⁴ Near the border, Chinese cell phones have become so popular that the SSD is reportedly cracking down on them.⁶⁵

Research on public opinion in the United States has demonstrated that most Americans do not pay close attention to the news, especially to the political news. The communication psychologist Paul Lazarsfeld and others discovered years ago that many media messages reach

⁶² Cortland Bennett, "Beauty Waiting for a Beholder: Astonishing Sights Await Visitors to North Korea - If They Can Get in," *Chungang Ilbo*, August 2, 2003, Internet version. FBIS KPP20030802000035.

⁶³ For access to land-line telephones, see the "How do North Koreans make phone calls?" under Society/Living Conditions on the National Intelligence Service's web site at <http://www.nis.go.kr/eng/north>.

⁶⁴ FBIS sources include KPP20031020000039, KPP20031112000084, and KPP20011204000101.

⁶⁵ Yi Hae-yong, "Mobile Phone Regulations along DPRK-PRC Border," Yonhap, September 21, 2003. FBIS KPP20030922000071. Also, Kang Chol-hwan, "Mobile Phone Calls Possible from Musan, North Korea, to Seoul," *Chosun Ilbo*, September 25, 2003, Internet version. FBIS KPP20030924000118. And "Asia: Cellphones New Threat for North Korean Regime," *Asahi Shimbun*, February 12, 2004, Internet version. FBIS JPP20040212000041. Also, Kang I-ruk, "Modernization of Telecommunications Network Being Rapidly Accelerated in the DPRK - Foundation for the Development of Information Industry," *Choson Sinbo* (pro-North Korean paper in Tokyo), December 3, 2003, Internet version. FBIS KPP20031204000101.

the general audience in a two-step process, with messages first being received by a small, educated segment of “opinion leaders,” who in turn pass the information on to their friends.⁶⁶

Some sort of news diffusion obviously occurs in North Korea, where scarce information about the outside world is cautiously passed from one person to another.⁶⁷ Hwang Jang-yop believes that until greater freedom of speech is available within North Korea, broadcasting to or dropping information leaflets on North Korea may be premature.⁶⁸ Between two North Koreans, some freedom of communication is possible, because if one reports to authorities that his interlocutor said something that could be construed as “counter-revolutionary,” the other can always deny it. But among three or more people, a form of the prisoners’ dilemma provides the motivation for listeners to report disloyalty to the authorities before they in turn are reported upon. Children are sometimes even induced by their teachers to report on their parents. Nevertheless, defectors report that news, rumors, and even criticism of the Kim regime make the rounds, with a few people paying the price for their loose lips but most avoiding negative consequences.

H. NEWS OF U.S. MILITARY INITIATIVES

As an example of what North Koreans could learn about the U.S. military policy toward their country - without needing direct access to foreign media or contact with foreigners - consider the following news items and accompanying interpretations carried in *Nodong Sinmun* and/or broadcast on KCBS or KCTV during the year 2003.

On U.S. military forces: On May 13, KCBS reported that Secretary Rumsfeld had asked Congress to appropriate funds to develop a nuclear bomb to destroy underground bunkers.⁶⁹ On June 26, *Minju Choson* carried an article on the Defense Department’s “combat capability enlargement plan.”⁷⁰ The article said the United States would spend \$11 billion in the ROK over the next three years to introduce a mobile armed brigade, precision-guided bombs, and updated Apache helicopters, and that “there is no way to view the U.S. military buildup maneuvers other than as the augmentation of armed forces for war against the North.” Similar items have

⁶⁶ Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet. *The People’s Choice*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1948. The two-step information flow is but one form of information diffusion, initially studied by the sociologist E. M. Rogers, and a long-standing concern of the marketing industry. See E. M. Rogers. *Diffusion of Innovations*. New York: The Free Press, 1962.

⁶⁷ For example, a brief discussion of how North Koreans discuss political topics is provided by the defector Kim Jin Ho in an interview for *Keys*, vol. 15 (Winter 2003), p. 36.

⁶⁸ Hwang was speaking to a meeting of police officers in Seoul. Yonhap, October 13, 2003. FBIS KPP20031013000079.

⁶⁹ KCBS, May 13, 2003. FBIS KPP20030519000036.

⁷⁰ O Pyong-chi, “The U.S. Imperialists Must Withdraw the Adventurous ‘Combat Capability Enlargement Plan.’” *Minju Choson*, June 26, 2003, p4. FBIS KPP20030709000084.

appeared regularly in the latter half of 2003, directed both at the North and South Korean audiences. In the stories targeted at the North, it is frequently reported that South Koreans were protesting this military buildup. Similar stories targeted at the South (e.g., on the Pyongyang Broadcasting Station) urge the South Korean people to join their brothers in the North in resisting the further militarization of the Korean peninsula by the Americans.

On September 24, KCBS reported that five days earlier the United States had conducted its 20th subcritical nuclear test, which was “stirring strong protests and denunciations from the world.”⁷¹ On October 7, *Nodong Sinmun* published a commentary entitled “A Very Dangerous Military Measure,” in which it denounced the introduction along the MDL of the Shadow 200 UAV, said to be able to detect automobiles and other vehicles at a range of 3.5 kilometers in the dark. The article also reported on the recent introduction into the ROK of new helicopters and Patriot 3 missiles, arguing that this introduction constituted a “preparation for a military attack on our Republic” and was inconsistent with Washington’s professed desire to peacefully resolve the “DPRK-U.S. nuclear issue.”⁷²

The December 10 issue of *Nodong Sinmun* carried a commentary which said that on November 13 the U.S. Air Force chief of staff had announced that F/A-22s would be deployed to Guam.⁷³ The article reported that 24 B-1B and B-52 bombers and two nuclear attack submarines had already been sent to Guam, and that three more submarines were scheduled to be deployed there. According to the commentary, the United States also wanted to dispatch another aircraft carrier to Hawaii or Guam. The Bush administration’s 2004 fiscal year defense budget was reported to be \$401.2 billion - “the largest of its kind.” *Nodong Sinmun* concluded that “Although it champions the six-party talks, the United States is not revoking its previous brigandish demand of [the DPRK] first giving up the nuclear [program] and is stepping up military threats to and preemptive attack maneuvers against the DPRK.”

A KCBS broadcast on December 27, 2003, mentioned the U.S. deployment of U-2 reconnaissance aircraft, the stationing of six F-117 stealth bombers in South Korea, and reminded its audience that the United States and South Korea had jointly staged the Foal Eagle and RSOI military exercises during the year.⁷⁴ In regard to these forces, the broadcast cited a DPRK foreign ministry spokesman who said that the United States wanted to transform its forces stationed in South Korea “into a Northeast Asian force which targets not only our Republic but

⁷¹ KCBS, September 24, 2003. FBIS KPP20030924000064.

⁷² “A Very Dangerous Military Measure.” *Nodong Sinmun* commentary reported by KCBS and KCNA. FBIS KPP20031007000094.

⁷³ “Main Culprit in the Destruction of Regional Peace and Stability.” *Nodong Sinmun* commentary of December 10, 2003, carried by KCBS and PBS. FBIS KPP20031210000049.

⁷⁴ KCBS, December 27, 2003. FBIS KPP20031227000047.

also countries surrounding the Korean peninsula,” thereby making the region “more unstable and tense.” Two days later, KCBS informed its listeners that the U.S. Pacific Fleet had announced plans to move anti-submarine aircraft from Hawaii to Misawa (in northern Japan), and use an environmentally controversial “low-frequency detector” at sea.⁷⁵

U.S. negotiations with the ROK to redeploy American soldiers from the DMZ and Seoul to south of the Han River did not go unnoticed by the DPRK media. On June 27, *Nodong Sinmun* termed the planned redeployment “a very dangerous military move which should not be overlooked.”⁷⁶ The article explained that “It is the view of the U.S. military strategists that when a war starts in Korea, Seoul and areas north of it will turn into a sea of fire in a matter of days due to North Korea’s strong artillery fire power, and none of the U.S. troops within its firing range will be able to survive.” Thus the redeployment plan was viewed in the context of a “strategy for a preemptive attack on the DPRK.” On July 27, *Nodong Sinmun* cautioned the United States not to forget its “past defeat” in the Korean War, and warned that “it is utter folly for the U.S. to think that its troops will go scot-free when they are relocated in areas south of Seoul.”⁷⁷ At the end of the year, *Nodong Sinmun* published an article citing a November 25 message by President George W. Bush in which he reportedly announced global redeployment plans for U.S. forces.⁷⁸ According to the article, a “considerably large” number of U.S. troops currently stationed in Germany were to be redeployed to eastern Europe as part of a larger strategy aimed at “modernizing and lightening U.S. military units and deploying them closer to ‘danger spots’ (citing a *Wall Street Journal* article).” The article claimed that “in this redeployment program, the Bush administration puts the focus on the Asia-Pacific region,” and warned that “maneuvers for redeploying U.S. forces are an extremely dangerous scheme for war aimed at realizing an ugly design for world hegemony by force at all costs.”

Another Bush administration strategy that received some attention was the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), although the North Korean domestic press appears not to have labeled it as such. An item carried by KCTV and KCBS on June 8 said that at the recent G-8 summit, the United States had made a proposal “to inspect and check ships and planes carrying nuclear substances, missile parts, and equipment and materials necessary to manufacture them. This, in essence, is aimed to justify blockades against sovereign countries like our country.”⁷⁹ Relating this initiative to what the Kim regime sees as the reluctance of the United States to engage in

⁷⁵ KCBS, December 29, 2003. FBIS KPP20031229000049.

⁷⁶ KCNA, June 27, 2003; citing a *Nodong Sinmun* article of the same date. FBIS KPP20030627000085.

⁷⁷ KCNA, July 27, 2003; citing a *Nodong Sinmun* article of the same date. FBIS KPP20030727000021.

⁷⁸ *Nodong Sinmun*, December 15, 2003, carried on the Uriminzokkiri web site (<http://www.uriminzokkiri.com>). FBIS KPP20031216000050.

⁷⁹ KCTV, June 8, 2003. FBIS KPP20030608000037.

bilateral discussions on the DPRK's nuclear program, the item concluded that the delay in talks was an excuse to "buy time for stepping up international pressure on and blockade against us." In a related development, a July 2 *Nodong Sinmun* article cited U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher as warning that countries should refrain from engaging in military cooperation with the DPRK.⁸⁰ In this regard, the article denied that the DPRK's export of missiles was illegal, charged that the United States was the world's largest weapons exporter (earning "nearly 50 billion dollars from 1997 to 2001"), and characterized the U.S. policy as a "collective siege" against the DPRK. Two days later, KCBS cited a member of the "U.S. Defense Department Policy Advisory Committee" as having advocated the creation of a "maritime network on our east and west coasts to stop all suspicious North Korean boats and investigate all their shipped goods."⁸¹ The news item warned that insofar as a maritime blockade of North Korea would violate Article 2, Paragraph 15 of the Armistice Agreement, in the event of a blockade the KPA would "immediately and decisively take strong and merciless retaliatory measures by mobilizing all its potentials, completely free from the binding force of the Armistice Agreement."

The two U.S. military issues that received the most news coverage in the domestic press were the war in Iraq and the U.S. military's psychological operations. North Korea saw the two issues as closely related. As presented in the North Korean press, the story line on Iraq was simple. The intrusive inspections that Iraq was forced to accept fatally weakened its defense capabilities. In the words of a March 29 *Nodong Sinmun* article, "The Iraqi situation generates a serious lesson that imperialists' weapons inspections on a sovereign state lead to disarmament; the disarmament turns into war"⁸² The North Korean press said that in the face of a U.S. attack, the Iraqi army quickly folded because it had been weakened by U.S. psychological operations. The press further said that the U.S. attack came despite the wishes of the international community; that in fact, the United States had intended to attack regardless of the outcome of the inspections: "Since the United States pursued its goal to disarm and take over Iraq from the first, it moved on to use armed forces, regardless of the inspection process or results."⁸³ After the war, according to this story line, it became clear that the original justification for going to war was false, because no weapons of mass destruction could be found.⁸⁴ The North Korean press warned

⁸⁰ KCNA, July 2, 2003, citing a *Nodong Sinmun* article of the same date. FBIS KPP20030702000067.

⁸¹ KCBS, July 4, 2003. FBIS KPP20030704000081.

⁸² As the North Koreans present it, the link between inspections and war is not altogether clear, because according to their assessment, war was inevitable. KCBS, March 29, 2003; FBIS KPP20030329000036.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ "There is growing opinion that the 'information about the suspected production of weapons of mass destruction' in Iraq might be faked up to invade it" and "the misinformation about Iraq's 'plan for purchasing uranium' is being brought to light." KCNA, July 31, 2003; citing *Nodong Sinmun* on the same date. FBIS KPP20030731000017.

that the war in Iraq was “a test war for the second Korean War,” and therefore warranted high vigilance on the part of the North Korean people.⁸⁵ Reports picked up from the U.S. press about a new Operation Plan 5030 to supplement Oplan 5027 for conducting military operations against North Korea further reinforced North Korean concerns.⁸⁶

The North Koreans have been particularly interested in the psychological operations (psyops) dimension of the war in Iraq. Here is *Nodong Sinmun*'s take on the operation and its relevance to the North Korea case:⁸⁷ The Iraq war, which had been anticipated to drag on, came to an end some time ago. . . . Were the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi regular army troops then wiped out by U.S. high-tech weapons? . . . Public opinion gathering strength today has it that the U.S. ‘victory’ in the Iraq war is attributable more to psychological warfare experts than to ultra-precision weapons. . . . The fact that the United States is ballyhooing ‘victory’ and crediting it to its high-tech weapons is, in itself, psychological warfare.”

As to the psyops method: “The No. 1 target in the U.S. psychological campaign was the Iraqi leadership. . . . The U.S. CIA and military intelligence agencies focused on establishing contact with general officers of the Iraqi army and high-ranking figures of the Ba’ath Party through modern communication networks such as e-mail and cell phones. . . . The United States carried out false propaganda prior to the beginning of the war. It was to the effect that Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Aziz ‘has the intention of defecting.’ . . . It pressed on a large-scale false propaganda campaign vilifying Saddam Husayn, his sons, vice presidents, and other members of the Iraqi leadership.”⁸⁸

Bribery allegedly plays an important role in U.S. psyops: “The U.S. imperialists are attempting to easily realize their aggressive goal by seizing control of the pertinent country’s leading classes through a reinforced bribe campaign against them. . . . According to data, at a decisive moment right before a fierce battle in the capital, Baghdad, it is said that hundreds of Iraqi military commanders were taken in by the United States’ bribe campaign; either they ran away to foreign countries or surrendered themselves. . . . Of late, the United States is reportedly planning a large-scale bribe campaign against our functionaries. They [the Americans] are running amok, with bloodshot eyes, to find out about our functionaries’ ideological leanings and

⁸⁵ KCNA, March 30, 2003, citing a *Nodong Sinmun* commentary on the same date. FBIS KPP20030330000010.

⁸⁶ “Extremely dangerous New War Plan for Northward Aggression,” KCBS, July 21, 2003. FBIS KPP20030721000029.

⁸⁷ Yi Kyong-su, “Psychological Warfare - the U.S. Imperialists’ Cunning Way of Aggression and Domination.” *Nodong Sinmun*, May 15, 2003, p. 6. FBIS KPP20030530000013.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

the details of their material life through various channels, and they are craftily maneuvering to realize [the bribe campaign] in various conspiratorial ways.”⁸⁹

In these and similar news items, the North Korean audience was reminded of the wisdom and foresightedness of Kim Jong-il in establishing his “no compromise” military-first policy to aggressively resist U.S. psychological and physical military operations. “We never regret that we walked on the military-first path without properly feeding or dressing ourselves in such a difficult time of the arduous march and the forced march, but we consider it the greatest pride.”⁹⁰ “If one should give ear to the U.S. imperialists’ deceitful and hypocritical propaganda, he will end up with a shaken faith and walking a path of betrayal against his people.”⁹¹ “[We] must never accept their coercive demands for weapons inspections or disarmament, and instead, must strongly act in response to them. . . . One step of concession to the imperialists will result in tens, hundreds, and thousands of steps of concessions.”⁹²

The Kim regime’s concern over foreign news sources entering North Korea is nothing new. The Iraq (and Afghanistan and Kosovo) cases only sharpened fears that the United States would come after the North Koreans, first with propaganda and then with weapons. According to the North Korean press, psyops information can reach the people by flyers dropped from airplanes (mentioning F-16s and B-52s), shells shot from cannons (155mm howitzers), radio broadcasts from terrestrial stations and from airplanes (EC-130E), booklets “using the same paper and fonts as produced locally in target countries,”⁹³ photographs, newspapers, magazines, novels, movies, music, and so forth.

Perhaps the most feared psyops source, to judge by the critical attention it receives in the North Korean press, is Radio Free Asia. North Koreans who pay attention to the domestic media know about RFA, even if they have never listened to it. They have been informed that RFA began Korean broadcasts in March 1997, that Radio “Free” broadcasts are made in Europe and Africa and the Middle East, and that thanks to Radio Free Europe (RFE) “large numbers of people, such as the youth . . . were imbued with illusions about capitalism” in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, thereby resulting in the collapse of communism and a worse life for everyone. In the North Korean case, the United States is accused of “attempting to disintegrate

⁸⁹ Cho Taek-pom, “Vicious Bribe Campaign.” *Nodong Sinmun*, September 19, 2003, p. 6. FBIS KPP20031002000080.

⁹⁰ KCBS, March 29, 2003. FBIS KPP20030329000036. Similar to KCBS on April 7, 2003. FBIS KPP20030407000045.

⁹¹ Yi Kyong-su, “Psychological Warfare”

⁹² KCBS, April 7, 2003. FBIS KPP20030407000045.

⁹³ Cho Song-chol, “Let Us Raise Awareness Against U.S. Imperialists’ Psychological Scheming Warfare.” *Nodong Sinmun*, July 17, 2003, p. 6. FBIS KPP20030801000061.

and transform us internally through shoving in numerous pocket size radios on the one hand and on the other hand, through airing Radio 'Free Asia' programs in the Korean language day and night," thereby "falsely trumpeting the temporary difficulty we are experiencing due to natural disasters as if our system itself has 'huge shortcomings' or 'problems.'"⁹⁴

To summarize, the DPRK domestic media report foreign news by mixing fact with propaganda, thereby providing their own interpretation of events. By paying close attention to news broadcasts, and by drawing logical inferences, the audience can gain a considerable amount of information about U.S. military policy and operations targeted at the DPRK. The media's intention is obviously to prepare (inoculate) the people to resist this kind of information, but it is difficult to tell how the people respond to this mixture of news and propaganda. Are people impressed and frightened by news of U.S. initiatives, or are they hardened to resist them? Their response must depend to a large degree on how they process this information in the context of other information (mostly propaganda) that is available to them.

I. RECEIVING AND INTERPRETING INFORMATION

Gaining access to outside information is one thing; interpreting it is something else. People everywhere hate to change their minds. New information is not viewed objectively, but instead is interpreted in light of the old information that already forms the basis for an individual's understanding of the world. The communications analyst should not focus so closely on the message that he ignores other factors in the traditional communication model: source, medium, and audience response. Several research psychologists who worked for the Information and Educational Division of the War Department during World War II and later collaborated at Yale University published landmark studies in the fifties on how information reaches and influences people.⁹⁵ In addition to looking at how variations in the factors of the communication model affect communication responses, they looked at the stages through which an audience may progress after being exposed to information: attention, comprehension, and acceptance.⁹⁶ Consistent with early work in the field that demonstrated strong resistance to persuasion, social psychologists over the years have noted the operation of several "cognitive filters" that prevent

⁹⁴ Cho song-chol, "U.S. Imperialists' Vicious Psychological Warfare Via Radio 'Free Asia.'" *Nodong Sinmun*, June 13, 2003, p. 6. FBIS KPP20030702000054. Many other articles offer similar criticism of RFA. See, for example, KPP20030527000059, KPP20030801000061, KPP20031110000056, KPP20030823000049, KPP20030805000098.

⁹⁵ The most comprehensive statement of research from this group is Carl I. Hovland, Irving L. Janis, and Harold H. Kelley, *Communication and Persuasion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953. Their research may be found in any book on social psychology or communication theory.

⁹⁶ The Yale group did some work on this process, but it was researched more extensively two decades later by William McGuire (also at Yale). An original source is his "Personality and Attitude Change," pages 171-196 in A. G. Greenwald et al. (Eds.), *Psychological Foundations of Attitudes*. New York: Academic Press, 1968.

people from fully processing new information. In order of appearance, these filters are selective exposure, selective attention, selective understanding, and selective remembering.⁹⁷ The more committed an individual is to current beliefs, the “thicker” these filters will be. Consider how they might work for a typical North Korean.

The Kim regime is highly selective about what information it allows its people to receive. For the information that does make it through that first filter, selective attention is not likely to be a significant second-stage filter in North Korea’s under-communicated society, because outside information is so scarce that people will pay attention to it. This is in contrast to Western societies, where most media information is ignored. Selective interpretation, on the other hand, may prevent information from being understood in the way the information source intends. North Korean propaganda consistently - over time and across media – has taken the line that the United States’ aim in all its endeavors is to subjugate the North Korean people. Even American foreign aid is depicted as a kind of psychological operation.⁹⁸ North Koreans who believe this propaganda will be inclined to interpret any information coming from the United States as “imperialistic” propaganda.

Those North Koreans who have access to outside information - even if they have a healthy skepticism of their own government’s propaganda - cannot help but notice that people all over the world are voicing concern about growing U.S. military power and influence. These knowledgeable cadres may well share the concerns and fears of less-enlightened North Koreans that the United States is out to dominate the world, country by country, and that North Korea is near the top of Washington’s target list. Such skepticism about U.S. intentions brings into focus two important and related issues in communication and persuasion: latitude of acceptance and communicator credibility.

Latitude of acceptance is another way of looking at how people resist changing their attitudes. Beginning with the work of Hovland and his colleagues, it has generally been found that communications are most persuasive when they are neither too different from nor too similar to the audience’s current attitudes and experience.⁹⁹ Too similar, and the new information is

⁹⁷ A good discussion is in David O. Sears, Jonathan L. Freedman, and L. Anne Peplau, *Social Psychology*, Fifth Edition, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985. pp. 417-421.

⁹⁸ About once a month, the North Korean press publishes a warning about the evil intentions behind U.S. foreign aid; in 2003, this aid was often characterized as a type of psyops. For example, “The purpose of the United States’ ‘aid operation’ lies in the paralysis of anti-U.S. independent consciousness by creating fantasy about the United States in people and encouraging pro-U.S. flunkeyism that depends on the United States.” Cho Song-chol, “Let Us Heighten Vigilance Against U.S. Imperialists’ Psychological Smear Campaign: Cunning Stratagem Abusing Humanitarianism,” *Nodong Sinmun*, August 14, 2003, p. 6. FBIS KPP20030829000063.

⁹⁹ For example C. Hovland, O. J. Harvey, and M. Sherif, “Assimilation and Contrast Effects in Reaction to Communication and Attitude Change,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 55 (1957), pp. 244-252.

received with little thought and has little impact, falling well within the latitude of acceptance. Too different, and the new information is rejected as implausible or incomprehensible, falling in the latitude of rejection. The width of these latitudes varies for each audience segment and even for each individual. A plausible hypothesis is that the North Korean people having been for so long isolated and subjected to anti-American propaganda, have developed a wide latitude of rejection for foreign (especially American) communications.¹⁰⁰

Resistance to communications outside the latitude of acceptance may be overcome when the source of the communications is highly credible.¹⁰¹ One might like to believe that validity would be judged on the merits of the message, but this is not the case when validation requires more knowledge, education, and/or cognitive effort than is available to the audience. Consider the problems juries have in deciding a case based on the evidence - and how they become susceptible to the persuasive communications of the prosecuting and defense attorneys. North Koreans may interpret outside communications primarily on the basis of the perceived credibility and intentions of the communication source. If the source is not credible, whatever it says may be rejected or misinterpreted.

The Yale group found that credibility is the product of trustworthiness and expertness: a trustworthy source will speak truthfully; a knowledgeable source will speak accurately. A trustworthy and knowledgeable source can speak the truth, whereas a trustworthy but unknowledgeable source may be unintentionally biased, and a knowledgeable but untrustworthy source may intentionally mislead. Indicators of trustworthiness include personal character, reputation for trust, confidence and consistency in speech and behavior, and demonstrated lack of self-interest in the persuasive endeavor. Indicators of expertness include experience, credentials and titles, public recognition, sometimes age, and volubility (people who say more are perceived to know more).

Whom do North Koreans consider to be a credible source? In the North Korean press, Kim Jong-il is depicted as a benevolent genius who sacrifices himself for the welfare of his people. This portrait may not be believed in its entirety, but to the extent that Kim is seen to be carrying on the work of his father, who *was* widely perceived as a benevolent genius, Kim's credibility is high. The United States, on the other hand, is depicted as a country of schemers,

¹⁰⁰ An interesting case is the North Korean who escaped to China, where he came across an article in a Russian journal telling about how the Korean War had actually been started by Kim Il-sung. "If the journal had not been from Russia, I still would have believed the article was fabricated by South Korea. . . . I had not believed in Juche, but I did believe in Kim Il-sung." Interview of a North Korean defector, footnote 46 on page 101 of Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass*, Washington, DC: Brookings, 2000.

¹⁰¹ Again, the Hovland group. A few methods to enhance the credibility of U.S. communications directed at the DPRK are discussed in Kongdan Oh Hassig. *Bringing the News to North Korea*. IDA Document D-2519, October 2000, p. 25, pp. 49-51.

with a fool for a president;¹⁰² any information coming from the United States may be viewed as coming from a source of low credibility.

The true beliefs of the North Korean masses and elite are difficult to judge from their behavior. No opposition voices are heard (although some anti-regime graffiti have been reported), nor is there any public criticism of Kim Jong-il or his father. This absence of criticism may indicate public apathy or support, but it may also mask private dissension. The abrupt fall of communism in the former Soviet bloc demonstrated that underneath the surface of society, people - and not just the dissident intellectuals - held their governments in contempt. No intellectual dissent has been detected in North Korea, but it may exist, buried more deeply than it was in Eastern Europe.

The Kim regime has taken measures to prevent its people from receiving and believing foreign communications, especially those coming from the United States. As the country opens itself slightly to foreigners, a “mosquito net” of censorship has been erected to let some information in while preventing unwanted influences from endangering the mental health of the people.¹⁰³ Another measure to combat outside communications is the use of “inoculation,”¹⁰⁴ whereby North Korean propagandists contrast an idealized picture of American life with the harsher reality in order to prevent the audience from believing everything they hear and see about the United States. For example, America’s ideal of freedom of ideas is criticized on the grounds that because the “ruling class” controls the media, “unlimited freedom [is ensured only] for the ideological activities to champion and propagate the bourgeois ideas which represent its class interests.”¹⁰⁵

In the last quarter century, work on communication and persuasion has gone beyond the classical studies that manipulated source, message, medium, and audience factors to probe *how* people process information. One of the newer cognitive theories is the theory of cognitive dissonance, which is especially relevant to the case of people living in a country with no freedom of expression. The North Korean elite, who generally know more about their country and the

¹⁰² According to Yonhap, on March 12, 2002 a DPRK literary journal published a crude poem beginning, “Dear notorious U.S. President Bush/You are such a fool,/ but a real stylish fool.” FBIS KPP20020313000018. President Bush has been called much worse in the North Korean press.

¹⁰³ A German visitor quotes Kim Il-sung as using the term “mosquito net” in regard to the opening of the Najin-Sonbong foreign trade zone. The term occasionally appears in the North Korean press. For Kim’s original quote, see Hy-Sang Lee, *North Korea: A Strange Socialist Fortress*. Westport, CN: Praeger, 2001, p. 178.

¹⁰⁴ The idea of attitude inoculation was introduced by William McGuire, who began thinking about the concept after reports of brainwashing during the Korean War. The original source is William McGuire and D. Papageorgis, “The Relative Efficacy of Various Types of Prior Belief Defense in Producing Immunity against Persuasion,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 62 (1961), pp. 327-337.

¹⁰⁵ “Deceptive Nature of Freedom of Ideology Chanted by Imperialists,” KCNA report on a *Nodong Sinmun* article of June 29, 1995; transcribed by FBIS-EAS-95-125 on June 29, 1995, p. 33 (FTS19950629000451).

outside world than the ordinary workers, are faced with a serious contradiction. On the one hand, their leader and his media say that North Korea is the best country in the world to live in; on the other hand, they know that domestic conditions are bad because of their corrupt system, and that conditions outside North Korea are much better. Do the elite live with this contradiction in their minds, or do they somehow resolve it?

The theory of cognitive dissonance makes predictions about how people resolve discrepancies between conflicting information.¹⁰⁶ The theory's first principle is that when people recognize discrepancies or dissonances between two or more of their beliefs, they experience a cognitive discomfort that motivates them to reduce the dissonance. For example, the belief that socialism is the most superior economic model is inconsistent with the perception of North Korea's abject poverty. Dissonance can be reduced in a variety of ways. One way is to avoid thinking about the inconsistency. Many North Koreans are perhaps so accustomed to socialist propaganda on the one hand and poverty on the other, that they do not notice the inconsistency. Another dissonance reduction method is to seek out information that bolsters one of the beliefs, or seek a higher principle that explains the inconsistency. The belief in the correctness of socialism could be bolstered by the government's claim that socialism can succeed only if everyone wholeheartedly supports it, which they obviously do not. The conflict may also be resolved by the belief that socialism in its early stages is bound to encounter many obstacles, but will eventually prevail. The question is, have the elite reconciled themselves to their situation, coming to believe in the superiority of socialism and the legitimacy of the Kim regime, or are they living a lie? Dissonance theory predicts that people do all that they can to avoid living a lie. The people of the former communist regimes in Eastern Europe faced a similar dilemma. As one of his aides recounted, "Gorbachev, me, all of us, we were double-thinkers, we had to balance truth and propaganda in our minds all the time."¹⁰⁷ Others said the same. But dissonance theory would predict that most people either found a way to resolve the inconsistencies, or ignored them, as often seems to have been the case in Eastern Europe. Any communication directed at the North Korean elite should take into account the possibility that they have either ignored this kind of inconsistency, or they are searching for a way to resolve it.

A final issue worth examining is how people deal with the wealth of information coming at them: in the case of North Koreans, a wealth of propaganda. Much of the early research on communication and persuasion assumed that when people are presented with information, they

¹⁰⁶ Thousands of dissonance studies have been conducted since Leon Festinger's formal presentation of the theory in *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson, 1957.

¹⁰⁷ Georgi Shalchnazarov, an aide to Gorbachev, quoted by David Remnick in *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire*. New York: Random House, 1993, p. 168. This issue is further discussed in Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, pp. 37-40.

rationaly process it and draw reasonably appropriate conclusions. This is the model of the “thinking person.” In recent years, research has supported another, more common-sense view; namely, that most of the time people do not think very carefully about what they read, hear, and see. They are exposed to it, they may attend to some of it, but somehow their interpretative powers fall short of the ideal. Many a marketer has lamented the public’s weak response to his creative offerings. Do most communications in fact fail to have any impact?

One of the newer cognitive models, the elaboration likelihood model, assumes that people process information on two levels.¹⁰⁸ Information relating to important issues (such as buying a house or a car) is carefully attended to and “elaborated” upon. Other information goes in one ear and out the other. The effect of this “unelaborated” information is not nearly as strong as the effect of elaborated information, but *cumulatively*, even this lightly processed information has an effect. For example, not one of the thousands of automobile advertisements one sees in a lifetime may motivate a person to go out and buy the advertised car; but when car-buying time comes around, some automobile makes or models may be more favored than others because of the cumulative effect of these “ignored” advertisements. It is quite possible that the same thing happens with North Korean propaganda. Any given propaganda item may be easily dismissed as blatantly false, especially by the elite, but the cumulative effect may shape a North Korean’s attitude toward his own country and other countries, and thereby provide a cognitive context for interpreting information.¹⁰⁹

How to summarize the main points about information reception and interpretation? Getting information to people involves choosing appropriate messages and channels, and then getting the information through the physical and cognitive filters that protect people from being overwhelmed by their information environment. The difficult task is to present information in such a way that it will be accepted by people who already have firm ideas that serve them reasonably well. When information is presented that challenges basic beliefs, thereby triggering

¹⁰⁸ The original source is Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo, “The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion,” pages 123-305 in Leonard Berkowitz, (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 19. New York: Academic Press, 1986.

¹⁰⁹ *Symbolic convergence theory* sounds depressingly dry, but its associated research methodology, “fantasy theme analysis,” could be of interest to analysts of North Korea. The key observation here is that members of a group or society use stories or fantasies to create and reinforce an identity, to provide guidelines on how to view outsiders, to promote norms of behavior, and to motivate members to work toward group goals. An analysis of these stories, often about the group’s founder or heroes, can provide a better understanding of how the group sees itself and what it views as important. No society has a more elaborate repertory of (regime-manufactured) stories than North Korea. Although these stories are usually viewed by outsiders as the regime’s rather crude attempt to gain legitimacy, the stories can be examined as a lens through which the North Korean people view communications coming from the outside world. See E. G. Bormann, “Symbolic Convergence Theory and Group Decision Making,” pages 219-236 in R. Y. Hirokawa and M. S. Poole (Eds.), *Communication and Group Decision Making*. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1986.

cognitive dissonance, particular care must be taken to provide people with a “face-saving” way to accept the new information. To achieve this acceptance, skillfully crafted messages from highly credible sources are needed. But it is not necessary to make every message a “knock-out blow.” Oftentimes, people gradually change their thinking under the onslaught of many messages, each of which may be hardly noticed.

J. CONCLUSIONS

The first question addressed in this study is what factions or potential factions might exist among the North Korean elite, and what power each faction might exercise. The second question is what information sources and channels these different factions could depend upon, especially to learn about publicly communicated initiatives related to U.S. military planning. The third question is what contextual factors influence how North Korean elites receive and interpret this kind of information. Given the constraints imposed by the ambiguity of type of communications to be examined (“relating to U.S. military planning”) and uncertainty surrounding how to define the “North Korean elite,” what conclusions can be drawn about communication among the North Korean elite?

No reliable evidence exists of factions within the North Korean elite. Members of the elite certainly have different attitudes on many issues. The Kim regime classifies society, including the elite, in terms of perceived loyalty to the regime. It is important for the elite not to fall from the regime’s favor; it is also important for them to physically survive in North Korea’s harsh environment. Consequently, those who have access to foreign currency or any other resource that can be exchanged for life’s essentials and luxuries are better off than those whose only asset is loyalty. It seems likely that, in the future, the most important divisions among the elite will have something to do with this economic factor.

Except for those who fear being cast out of the group, the elite share a common interest and destiny. With Kim, they are something; without him, they risk being nothing. Their loyalty in the service of their perceived best interest enables Kim to exercise power over them. Kim’s power also comes from his ability to watch over and punish individuals and their entire families. Yet another important source of Kim’s power is Korean nationalism: the proud desire that the DPRK be recognized as a political equal of the United States.

Communications from the United States to the North Korean elite urge them to change their policies - the same policies that put them at the top of their society and keep North Korea independent from other countries. Change may not be in their best interest. When they look at how U.S. military power has transformed other countries - most recently Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yugoslavia - they see societies in which many in the ruling class have been displaced. Changes

in the former Soviet bloc were likewise not kind to many of the nomenklatura. Only China, which is big enough to resist military and political pressure from the United States, has managed a controlled change that has kept the ruling party in power. This is what the North Korean elite see when they look out on a changing world. In short, communications that favor change in North Korea are likely to be welcomed more warmly by the masses, who have little, than by the elite, who have relatively more. But thanks to a half-century of communist propaganda, even the masses, living their miserable lives, may fear any change that is advocated by Americans. To overcome strong resistance to change, a highly credible source must present an extremely attractive - or extremely threatening - message. What that message might be, or what it might seek to achieve, is beyond the scope of this study. But it is probably safe to say that the United States is not a credible source of information in the eyes of most North Koreans.

In what channels can messages from the United States be placed in order to reach the North Korean elites? To reach Kim Jong-il, any public channel will do. He monitors CNN, NHK, and South Korean and Chinese broadcasts. He has people who gather news for him from other major international sources as well. A handful of Kim's closest associates probably have privileged access to international news as well. For the rest of the elite, articles that KCNA picks up from the *New York Times* and similar news outlets find their way into *Nodong Sinmun*, and to a lesser extent, into KCBS and KCTV, thereby providing satisfactory coverage of possible U.S. military threats against North Korea.

From a policy perspective, the important issue is not so much how to get international news into North Korea, but how to get the desired response to that news. Strong anti-Americanism on the part of the North Korean elite may hinder the achievement of American goals on the Korean peninsula. It is naive for Americans, who live in a society structured very differently from North Korean society, with a national history very different from North Korea's history, to assume that information sent to the North Koreans will be interpreted in the same way it might be interpreted in Washington, DC.

**IV. INSIDE NORTH KOREA'S BLACK BOX:
REVERSING THE OPTICS**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North Korean government is neither a monolith nor a “black box.” It is a semi-privatized amorphous collection of rivaling immobile organizations and stove-piped bureaucracies that often act at cross purposes and are pressed hard and corrupted by the individual and group interests of competing clans, and social and political forces vying for power, prestige, and wealth invested by the Dear Leader. North Korean policy-makers are rational and very predictable, whether one likes or dislikes their actions.

Kim Jong Il is the absolute monarch presiding over the Byzantine Court on the Taedong River. This court encompasses at least six immediately related families (1+2+3), all competing for the emperor’s attention, devotion, and favors, and jockeying for position in the event of post-Kim Jong Il succession.

Five major political forces, affecting all spheres of the North Korean life - namely the national security establishment, the old guard, the technocrats, the local vassals, and the compatriots - approach the “extended family clan” with their own visions for national development and policy recommendations for the burning issues of the day, and attempt, with different degrees of success, to penetrate and influence the Kim “family court” in order to ensure the representation of their corporate interests at the heart of national decision-making at the time of political succession.

These five “transmission belts” connect the “hub” of the North Korean policy-making - the Dear Leader and Supreme Commander-in-Chief Kim Jong Il - with the “outer circle” of the North Korean elites - the brain-feeding tubes at the center and in provinces, who also constitute the “protective belt,” absorbing external shocks and safe-guarding the regime from mass discontent.

Party membership serves as an entry ticket into the elite club, but increasingly it is taken for granted and is no longer sufficient for the new nomenclature. Access to state assets, prestige, and power, accumulation of private wealth, or government licensing authority is a must to qualify for the new elite status. Among the members of the same interest-based establishment, there may exist significant value gaps on the ideological continuums from conservative to liberal and from moderate to radical. But, different “transmission belts” tend to articulate and aggregate divergent strategic priorities and policy preferences among the North Korean elites.

The four pillars of the traditional political regime – fear, isolation, elite unity, and the *Juch'e* ideology – have begun to show noticeable cracks and signs of erosion. Today, North Korea is a different country than it was when the Great Leader passed away a decade ago. It is in the midst of a “stealthy” structural transition affecting all areas of the national economy, politics, and society, as well as people from all walks of life – strengthening neo-authoritarian military rule and accelerating catch-up modernization reforms aimed against the communist party rule and socialist economic stagnation. The regime is evolving and slowly cracking. It is high time for foreign influence to start shaping the direction of future developments inside the hermit kingdom.

A. BETTER, MERRIER, MORE HOPEFUL LIFE

Since the initiation of the political and socio-economic reforms in the fall of 1998, life has been getting better in the DPRK. It has been an uphill battle, with all the twists and turns accompanying a national transition from a highly centralized and overly militarized command-and-control economy to an increasingly decentralized market-oriented economy, from a totalitarian to a neo-authoritarian political regime, from a totally closed Juch'e-based society preaching communist ideals to a gradually opening society rediscovering its traditional neo-Confucian roots and reviving post-colonial nationalism as its mass-mobilizing ideology.

Structural transition does pay off, slowly but inevitably. There are more visible signs of improvement in people's daily lives than ever before. More electric lights in many more public places, along the roads, and at residential homes are turned on for longer hours, both in large cities and in small villages. More urban and rural buildings are repaired and given a facelift with fresh paint, new tile, and modern glass window packages. A construction boom is visible everywhere.¹ Significantly more vehicular traffic is observable in the streets, causing traffic jams and a surge in pedestrian and car accidents. As of December 2003, the number of large-scale district markets (over 500 registered private vendors) stood at 38, and is projected to grow to 42 in the near future. Street vendors, both mobile and stationary, are everywhere, trading all kinds of daily necessities, snacks, baked chestnuts, sweet potatoes, soft drinks, household appliances, kitchenware, clothes, and what have you (see Appendices A and B). The number of people engaged in small businesses has soared recently. Foreign exchange in the Juch'e corner of the "Eurozone" (Euros, U.S. dollars, Japanese yen, Chinese yuan, and other hard currencies) can be bought and sold at will, without punishment, in the streets and at the state-licensed exchange offices that begin to crowd out the black market currency traders. The Kim Il Sung University faculty is in a rush to revise economics textbooks before the beginning of the new school year in April 2004, in order to better reflect maximum profit-driven new economic realities.

¹ In 2003, a number of new construction material businesses with local and foreign private stakes were established in the vicinity of Pyongyang, including the Seungho Cement Factory on the Nam River, the Sangwon Cement Union Company opened on June 14, 2003, a Slate Factory based on a joint DPRK-PRC venture opened on November 25, 2003, a Chinese-financed \$50M JV glass factory, and others.

Life is getting merrier, too (see Appendix C). Restaurants, eateries, beer bars, and small cafes work day and night and are filled with the increasingly well-to-do customers.² Bowling centers, public saunas, billiard parlors, and a handful of newly opened Internet cafes are crowded with enthusiastic patrons from all walks of life – from relaxing soldiers and workers, to respectable functionaries, to cigar-smoking new entrepreneurs. Amusement parks, mountain ski resorts, cinemas, and theatres are again open for general public use and normal business. Shopping and gawking at glitzy store windows has become a favorite pastime for many urbanites,³ and it is quite rewarding for those folks who actually have money to spend. Gambling, prostitution, and drug dealing are facts of new life, too.

Finally, life is getting more hopeful in the North. Transition towards a market economy creates new income opportunities, opens new career possibilities, allows for changes in lifestyle previously unthinkable but now quite within the reach of many entrepreneurial people, and begins to raise expectations about a better life in the future. There are plenty of losers, to be sure, but there are a few winners, too. Everyone has to adjust to new market realities, for better or worse. New life conditions may cause despair and frustration among some, but they also can restore faith, form new desires, and generate optimism among others. Despite the widely spread political apathy and lack of general public interest in politics and ideological campaigns, hope of a better individual future is back in North Korea. The country is finally awakening from a decade-long coma and the pain inflicted by a dramatic cutoff of the umbilical cord connecting it with the communist womb of its procreators in the early 1990s.

Why is there progress, seeming or real, in North Korea today? The cynics assert that it is just a Potyemkin village set up for the outsiders to marvel at, where the real situation in the country is as bad as it has ever been. The economic determinists say that it is a recurrent phenomenon. Following a decade of steep macro-economic decline, it is almost inevitable that there would be a cyclical up-tick in the economy after it hit a transient bottom; that the trend of protracted steep declines followed by short-lived upswings is likely to continue until the long wave of economic collapse is reversed by fundamental changes in the DPRK's economic system. They argue that more time is needed to ascertain whether an even harder landing in the future will not follow the current crawling take-off after the past hard landing.

² In 2003, several new modern food-processing companies with private local and foreign stakes were established in the vicinity of Pyongyang, including the Kangseo Mineral Water Processing Factory opened on October 21, 2003, the Cheongdan Basic Food Factory producing soy sauce and soybean paste, opened on May 31, 2003, the Taedonggang Beer Brewery opened on November 29, 2002, in the Sadong district of Pyongyang, and others.

³ Among the new semi-private businesses opened in 2003, one should note the Sinuiju Cosmetics Factory, the Pyongyang Cosmetics Factory, and the Seongyo Knitting Factory: all three are joint ventures with Chinese and Korean-Japanese stakes, selling to the local market.

In contrast, the optimists believe that the recent upturn in the economy is the long-awaited result of the socio-economic reforms initiated by Kim Jong Il in the late 1990s. It proves that the current regime can change for the better and has the political will and the organizational capacity to steer the country out of its prolonged economic depression and social malaise into a brighter, more civilized future.

But, some pessimistic critics credit most of the recent surge in the economic activity to the burgeoning inter-Korean trade. They argue that North Korean nuclear blackmail finally began to pay off after Pyongyang was able to drive a deep wedge in the U.S.-ROK alliance and compel Seoul to expand its one-way transfer of resources from the South to the North amidst the escalating nuclear crisis, despite the U.S.-sponsored international campaign to isolate the communist regime.

Whatever the origins of domestic social and economic changes unfolding in North Korea – superficial cosmetics, developmental cycles, government policy adjustments, or stimulus from the external environment – everyone is affected positively or negatively by its predictable and unintended consequences, including the elite, the bureaucracy, and the masses. Individuals are forced to make new personal choices, affecting the group dynamics and generating a new public context for combined social action. Emerging social chaos undermines the traditional value system, the rigid ruling ideology, divine personality cults, and previously rock-solid power hierarchies: they lose legitimacy, credibility, and mass appeal, and become fluid, porous, malleable, and transient. Incumbent gods and demi-gods enter the twilight zone as the rising leaders of the future prepare to challenge their rule.

How do various groups inside the “black box” of the Juch’e elite cope with the ongoing structural transformation of North Korean society? What are their long-term individual and group interests and corporate objectives, as well as short-term preferences, fears, and expectations, and how can one shape them? How do they communicate their specific policy preferences to the top and include them in the government policy planning process? How do they resolve emerging conflicts of interests and priorities? Is there an “iron curtain” between the supreme leader and those who attempt to communicate policy matters to him? Who gets ahead in the inter-bureaucratic rivalries, and why, and how can one benefit from the emerging clashes of divergent bureaucratic interests and differences of organizational outputs? What forces shape the transition by determining the pace, directions, and specific advances, and who controls what in that process, including the veto power over what? What are the productive pressure points, where one can exploit various sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the North Korean elites? These questions constitute the subject matter of this study.

B. PATH DEPENDENCE, CRITICAL JUNCTURES, AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Institutions, both formal and informal, are the rules of the game that structure incentives in human exchange in a society and reduce uncertainty by providing a stable structure to everyday life. Institutions define and limit the set of choices of individuals. Institutional change shapes the way societies evolve through time. Institutions connect the past with the present and the future so that history is a largely incremental story of institutional evolution, a study of the evolution of collective incentives and constraints against human individualism and the problem of achieving cooperative solutions to collective problems. Lack of public information and external transparency in a closed society should not be mistaken for the lack of rules, procedures, formal organizations, informal influence networks, and hierarchies of authority that are always present and very clear to the internal actors themselves.

The current form of political organization and policy decision-making process in North Korea is derived from the opportunity set provided by the traditional values, inherent administrative culture, and domestic institutional structures that evolved sometimes incrementally, showing a great degree of stability, and at other times experiencing rapid, discontinuous change. They reflect a mixture of traditional neo-Confucian influences, the imprint of the Japanese colonial rule and post-liberation Soviet military occupation, the impact of the Korean War-time experiences, the “self-reliant” post-war socialist reconstruction and decay.

Traditional Korean political culture is characterized by the heavy influence of neo-Confucianism accentuated by the teachings of Chu-Hsi, especially his emphasis on the so-called “Three Basic Relationships” between the father and the son, the state and the subject, and the heaven and the ruler. That gave rise to such traditional aspects of Korean politics as paternalism and filial piety, state-centered consensual politics and autocratic political agenda-setting, “government of men rather than government of laws,” and the exercise of the Mandate of Heaven and authoritarian despotism. Nepotism, corruption, and factionalism were the inevitable by-products of rigid hierarchical social-political structures that evolved in the Hermit Kingdom.

The policymaking process in traditional Korea was exclusively personalistic in nature. At the policy initiation stage, either concerned individuals submitted memorials to the throne, or the king solicited the opinions of eminent Confucian scholars and former ministers and counselors, primarily at times of crises. Six administrative departments – the Civil Office, the War Office, the Revenues Office, the Punishment Office, the Public Works Office, and the Ceremony Office – were in charge of policy deliberation. It was the Defense Council in the 16th century and the State Council later on that was responsible for policy formulation and policy recommendations

to the throne. The State Council usually consisted of fewer than fifty noblemen, including three supreme counselors, two royal personal assistants, six ministers, chief inspectors, military leaders, and some provincial governors.

Any policy recommendation made by the State Council was always based on unanimous consent. But, often arm-twisting and political intrigue were used to arrive at that unanimity. Then, policy recommendations were submitted to the king for his approval. As a rule, the essence of all major foreign policy and national security decisions was to hand the issue to the Chinese Imperial Court for its own deliberation and final approval, which was only natural because Korea was, after all, a tributary state of the Middle Kingdom. That was the decision-making process followed by Korean rulers when they had to make up their mind as to how to handle shipwrecked Western sailors who washed on Korean shores or whether or not and how to normalize relations with Japan and the Western powers in the mid-19th century.

The Japanese colonial rule that lasted for thirty-five years contributed heavily to the dislocation of the traditional Korean political system, its values, institutions, informal influence networks, and policy-making mechanisms. Although the Japanese-installed Government-General of Chosen was not empowered to deal with foreign policy matters, its impact on subsequent institutional development in Korea was enormous, for it was the Japanese who for the first time set up a modern, efficient bureaucracy in Korea, inculcated many of the post-war Korean administrative beliefs, and left behind thousands of Japanese-trained Korean administrators, managers, and officials after their forced and abrupt departure in August 1945.

The amalgamated communist party-state formed under Soviet tutelage after the liberation, and cemented in the trials and tribulations under Kim Il Sung's leadership during and after the Korean War, was a localized replica of the Soviet communist party-state system, exhibiting many features of the typical Stalinist political system and bureaucratic regime, emphasizing the one-man-centered communist party monopoly rule, mass mobilization politics, repressive security apparatus, unanimity, and centralism in policy decision-making.

Kim Il Sung founded a dynastic monarchy in the late 1940s, although officially he proclaimed the establishment of the Cabinet-based parliamentary republic in September 1948, which was later recast as a presidential republic in the course of the constitutional revision in 1972. For a long time, the President cum Great Leader relied on his personal Secretariat to set national security priorities and formulate foreign policy goals. As the issues grew in complexity, he began to turn for advice and support to the other senior leaders of the North Korean government, most of whom were his former revolutionary comrades-in-arms. That collective consultative process was officially legitimized when the 1972 constitutional reform set up the

Central People's Committee (CPC), consisting of the CPC Foreign Policy Commission and the National Defense Commission, as the supreme national collective body responsible for the deliberation of foreign policy and national security issues. The Supreme People's Assembly and its Foreign Affairs Commission rubber-stamped the CPC decisions, whereas the International Department of the WPK (Workers' Party of Korea) Central Committee coordinated, supervised, and controlled their implementation by various ministries and organizations under the Administrative Council, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense and its subordinate organizations, Ministry of External Economic Affairs and External Economic Commission, Ministry of Foreign Trade, and many others.

From the late 1950s until the early 1990s, the essence of political life in the DPRK was defined by the WPK uniform party rule, Kim Il Sung's ruthless consolidation of personal power, and its gradual and unconditional transfer to his heir and eldest son, Kim Jong Il. Intra-party factional struggles served as a functional alternative to larger political and social conflicts and policy disputes. Factional purges and political re-education in provincial exile was Kim Il Sung's weapon of choice in his quest for absolute power. The WPK imposed on the North Korean people the twin cults of personality of the Great Leader and the Dear Leader, rooted in neo-Confucian familism and indigenous Korean shamanism, sprinkled with elements of the Japanese emperor's colonial worship, shadowed by the overtones of evangelical Christianity, backed by the cults of benefactor Mao Zedong and Stalin, and buttressed by the Manchurian-born siege mentality of the North Korean elites. All decision-making processes were subject to Kim Il Sung-led WPK Central Committee Politburo and Secretariat control through the unified Juch'e party doctrine and ubiquitous party committee system, reinforced by the ever vigilant and merciless state security apparatus.

Public opinion was negligible. But, informed elite opinion was somewhat important, especially when a major change of course (like the North-South détente in the early 1970s or the break-up of relations with the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s) was contemplated. Rigid ideological tenets, the over-bearing burden of past propaganda, and bureaucratic inertia constricted the ability of the national leadership to initiate major strategic shifts in foreign and domestic policies in total disregard for the dominant elite opinions. New policy initiatives always had to masquerade as creative reinterpretations of existing Juch'e policies and introduced into the public consciousness slowly and surreptitiously.

Kim Jong Il was designated as the Great Leader's heir apparent at the age of 41 in 1973, despite vociferous opposition from his step-family relatives and some of Great Leader's older revolutionary comrades-in-arms, who were later purged thrice in 1973-1974 (see below), in

1976-1977,⁴ and in 1986-1987 (see below). On the one hand, Kim Jong Il was promoted to top positions in the Workers' Party of Korea: the WPK Central Committee Secretary (September 1973), Politburo member (February 1974), and member of the Politburo Standing Committee (October 1980). In 1980, at the Sixth WPK Party Congress, Kim Jong Il appeared in public for the first time next to his father, Kim Il Sung. By showing up together with his son, Kim Il Sung officially presented Kim Jong Il to the world as his heir.



In order to guarantee smooth political succession, Kim Il Sung also gradually transferred to his eldest son control over the military by appointing Kim Jong Il as the First Deputy Chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC) in May 1990, and six months later as the Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army (KPA). In April 1992, Kim Jong Il was awarded the rank of "Marshal of the Republic" (*konghwaguk wonsu*), which made him the second highest-ranking person in the KPA, next to his father who held the rank of "Grand Marshal" (*tae wonsu*). In April 1993, Kim Jong Il was promoted to the chairmanship of the

⁴ The now deceased DPRK Vice-President and WPK CC Secretary Kim Tong-gyu, who was the No. 3 man in the North Korean power hierarchy after Kim Il Sung and Kim Il in the mid-1970s, launched an open critique of Kim Jong Il and his personnel management policy at the WPK CC Political Bureau meeting in June 1976. Kim Tong-gyu opposed rush dismissals of former guerrilla fighters from top government positions in favor of Kim Jong Il-appointed younger generation cadres in violation of the party discipline and party rules. Kim Tong-gyu also criticized the intra-party discrimination against the people who come from the South and who had "complicated backgrounds." He proposed not to rush to designate Kim Jong Il as the Great Leader's heir apparent, but to take time and prepare the popular masses for the succession slowly. Kim Tong-gyu was supported by Ryu Chang-shik, the WPK CC Secretary in charge of South Korean affairs, but opposed by the other Politburo members - O Chin-U, Kim Il, and Choe Hyun. In the end, Kim Il Sung intervened in the discussion and cooled down the debate for the time being. However, several months later, when Kim Tong-gyu raised his opposition to Kim Jong Il's succession again, he was accused of violating the "Ten Principles of Party Unity" and factionalism. Consequently, Kim Tong-gyu and Ryu Chang-shik were purged and sent to a political re-education camp in South Hamgyong Province in late 1977; Chang Chon Hwan, Deputy Minister of People's Defense, was exiled to Chagang Province; and thousands of lower-ranking party officials accused of factionalism were purged from the WPK and exiled to the countryside and ore mines in the special districts in North Hamgyong and Ryangrang Provinces.

National Defense Commission, following a constitutional revision transferring control over the KPA from the DPRK President (*chusok*) to the NDC Chairman. Once the Dear Leader began his ascent through the party leadership labyrinths and military command structures to the power pinnacle in Pyongyang, political authority began to bifurcate, resulting in the formation of a duopoly of power of sorts, namely, two informal power hierarchies leading to the father and his son, respectively.



As an anointed successor and early disciple of traditional Korean neo-Confucian thought, Kim Jong Il feared and revered his father, and left all principal policy and strategy decisions for his final approval. When the Great Leader was still alive, the Dear Leader allegedly often felt frustrated at his inability to step into his father's shoes and was seen as an under-performer by many outsiders. Consequently, pent-up frustrations allegedly led to a decadent lifestyle, bouts of alcoholism, and chain-smoking in the 1980s and early 1990s.

This notwithstanding, Kim Jong Il shied away from a unique opportunity to take the reigns over his absolute monarchy on one humid day in the summer of 1986, when the Great Leader Kim Il Sung suffered a severe heart attack during his meeting with a delegation of

Bulgarian Trade Unions, after which he went into coma.⁵ Two days later, on a rainy Saturday morning, Kim Jong Il hurriedly invited the Soviet Ambassador Nikolay M. Shubnikov to his marbled and gilded office on the party street in downtown Pyongyang. Visibly traumatized, the Dear Leader came out in person to greet the Ambassador, firmly shook his hand and, without beating about the bush, informed the Soviet envoy via a Korean interpreter that “the Great Leader was passing away from us,” and that the “Politburo decided to revive him for us.” He said that “the catastrophe occurred two days before, and we badly need urgent medical assistance from Soviet cardiologists.” Then, he described in detail what had actually happened to Kim Il Sung and how Korean doctors attempted to revive him. What was surprising was the level of detail and Kim Jong Il’s almost professional knowledge of all related medical terms and processes. Kim Jong Il went on to say that the DPRK government would not spare any resources and expenditures in order to save the Great Leader. At the end of the conversation, he shook the Ambassador’s hand, warned him that, besides the two of them, only five other people from the inner circle of the supreme North Korean party and military leadership and Kim Il Sung’s three personal doctors were privy to that information, and admonished him to safeguard the state secret in earnest.

Upon his return to the Soviet Embassy, Ambassador Shubnikov composed a ciphered telegram addressed only to Mikhail Gorbachev, burnt the hand-written minutes of the conversation, and personally dispatched it to Moscow. Just twelve hours later, an emergency aircraft carrying fifteen leading Soviet cardiologists arrived at Pyongyang. The Soviet heart specialists were immediately transported by helicopter from the Sunan International Airport to Myohyangsan, where Kim Il Sung’s comatose body was lying at one of his magnificent secluded residences. It took a total of forty-eight hours for these extraordinary medical miracle workers to bring Kim Il Sung back to life. They continued to monitor Kim Il Sung’s health progress until his full recovery in the following month. In other words, Kim Jong Il’s decisive action saved his father’s life and cemented the dictator’s trust in his son’s judgment and confidence in his filial piety.

But, on July 8, 1994, Kim Jong Il chose to move on. He launched a new era in Korean history when the court doctors were ordered to cease their efforts to maintain the 82-year old Great Leader’s life. During the ensuing neo-traditional three-year mourning period, key decision-making processes allegedly became more “informalized” and “privatized” by Kim Jong Il and his 13 to 15 closest family members and staff aides. Organizationally, the party grip on the formulation of domestic economic policy, national security and defense strategy, and foreign

⁵ The following account is based on the author’s conversation with one of the Russian participants of the described events who asked not to be identified.

policy began to loosen up. Party and state functions appeared to be increasingly delimited, and other domestic actors, especially the national security establishment, began to move to the forefront in the domestic policy-making process. But, some institutions suffered relative decline. For instance, the elections for the Supreme People's Assembly, whose 9th term expired in the fall of 1995, were not held until July 1998, and the Assembly failed to convene for four years following Kim Il Sung's death. The WPK Central Committee and Politburo held no plenary meetings, party conferences, or congresses. The DPRK Administrative Council was all but invisible. The State Presidency and the Central People's Committee, which had functioned as a "super-cabinet" of sorts since 1972, were not functioning. Natural attrition of the older "guerrilla fighter" generation rapidly progressed. Substantively, interpretation and implementation of the Great Leader's last will (*yuhun chongch'i*) amidst aggravating domestic economic crisis and deteriorating international environment has been the *raison d'être* of Kim Jong Il's rule ever since.

C. KIM JONG IL'S REVOLUTION FROM ABOVE

In the tumultuous decade following Kim Il Sung's death on July 8, 1994, after initial shock and a three-year policy-making hiatus, Kim Jong Il finally took the plunge and introduced a major constitutional revision and government administration restructuring in September 1998, followed by a civil-military readjustment and advent of the army-first policy in 2000. He launched a still-born diplomatic "normalization" offensive and actively pursued summit diplomacy in 2000-2002, and he successfully pushed through controversial economic liberalization reforms in July 2002. The First Session of the 10th Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) passed a new "Kim Jong Il-era" Constitution, which:

- abolished the institution of the President and Vice-President;
- diminished the powers and status of the Central People's Committee;
- made the National Defense Commission the supreme state organ defining national security and defense strategy, and economic and political development strategies;
- appointed Kim Jong Il as the de-facto supreme leader;
- made the President of the Presidium of the SPA as a formal "head of state" (plus three vice-presidents and four "honorary vice-presidents");
- abolished the Administrative Council and instituted the Cabinet of Ministers composed mainly of the economic ministries, while all "power-related ministries" were subordinated directly to the National Defense Commission;
- legalized private ownership; and
- curtailed the WPK party rule and expanded the scope of religious freedoms in the DPRK.

Second, the principal objective of the government administration reform was to cut down government expenditures in order to save money and increase government efficiency through greater centralization of functionally related government bureaucracies at the center and through the delegation of responsibilities to local actors. The solution was to create so-called “super-ministries” and “super-commissions” under the newly established Cabinet of Ministers, and to reduce the central government workforce by almost thirty percent in five years. The number of party functionaries at the workplace was reduced drastically (see Figure 1). The result turned out to be a significant decrease in central government and party control over local governments and economic actors and a noticeable reduction in government budget deficits.

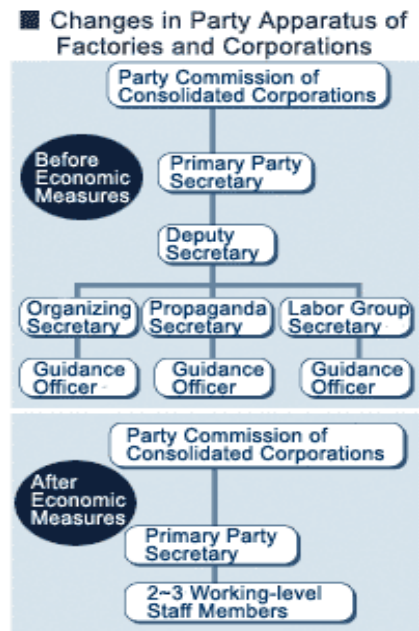


Figure 1. Party Functionaries in the Workplace

Third, the army-first policy (*songun chongch'i* or AFP) expanded dramatically the military’s role in North Korean society, economy, and politics. The “military sprawl” under the army-first politics, army-first policy, army-first leadership, and army-first ideology made the Korean People’s Army not only the military defender of the nation and the principal guarantor of regime survival, but also an important economic actor in agriculture, infrastructure construction, R&D, professional education, arms sales and hard currency earning, and the major ideological educator, socializer of the youth, and general backbone of the society, as well as the principal veto power in all policy deliberations.

Fourth, in just three years, Kim Jong Il had three summits with Russian President Putin, two summits with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, a summit with ROK President Kim Dae-Jung, a summit with Japanese Prime-Minister Koizumi, and hosted visiting U.S. Secretary of State Albright in Pyongyang.

Fifth, to name just a few of the most important economic reforms, the so-called “July 2002 economic improvement measures” included (1) partial liberalization of prices and wages in all sectors of the national economy, (2) elimination of rice subsidies and transformation of farmers’ markets into district markets, as well as the legalization of market sales of agricultural, industrial, and consumer goods, (3) government blessing for the complete monetarization of the economy, including the Public Distribution System, various social entitlements, and residential and industrial utilities services, (4) quasi-privatization of residential housing and farming lots, (5) official licensing of small private enterprises, (6) growing de-facto privatization of medium-size

state-owned enterprises (SOEs), (7) advancement of plans for the securitization of assets (“chaebolization”) of large state-owned combines, (8) termination of the bulk of state subsidies to the SOEs, introduction of a self-accounting and profit-based system at SOEs, and movement from mandatory to indicative central planning at SOEs, (9) contracting an overseas investment bank to draw up plans for national banking reform, and (10) innovative government debt financing through T-bond issuance, and others.

Overall, Kim Jong Il attempted to re-build the North Korean state and implement a relatively ambitious domestic modernization agenda, using the military as the primary driving force in restructuring and modernizing the North Korean economy on the basis of the market-based approach, re-energizing the North Korean society, and consolidating the ruling elites under the slogans of the army-first policy with the goal of building a “prosperous powerful great nation” (*kangsong taeguk*). He clearly was driven by the self-preservation instinct, not Marxist-Leninist or Juch’e ideology. His “new thinking” (*saesago pangsik*) developed within the normative, organizational, and personnel constraints imposed by his father’s legacy against the background of the worsening domestic legitimacy and performance crises during the trial years of the “arduous march” (*konanui haenggun*). It is very important that the strategic decision to initiate the modernization reforms was a military-backed decision. Without the support of the top military leaders, Kim Jong Il alone could not have made a strategic decision to launch economic reforms. He needed the military support for his catch-up modernization drive, and he got it.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that in 2003, the socio-economic reforms and political decompression were not reversed but further advanced, despite an increasingly hostile international environment and the nuclear stalemate with the United States. Such policy continuity can be construed either as a sign that the reforms are generating positive feedback and may be approaching the point of no return, or that the national leadership may not necessarily have complete control over and cannot help but swim along with the new social and macro-economic processes and micro-economic behaviors originated in the late 1990s and formally legalized in July 2002.

In the past five years, the overwhelming process of late modernization began to change the substance of North Korean politics, create new social and political divisions in North Korean society, expand the policy issue areas, and propel new social forces, corporate concerns, and interest groups into the policy-making arena at the expense of the previously ubiquitous faceless class struggle for the construction of socialism with Juch’e characteristics under the WPK party leadership centered on the “party headquarters.” The issues that are the most important for the increasingly pragmatic and nationalistic leadership in Pyongyang today are regime security and power succession, economic reforms and defense modernization, national reconciliation and

southward expansion, and, last but not least, the anti-U.S. struggle and the peaceful resolution of the nuclear crisis.

D. WHO GOVERNS: THE HUB-AND-SPOKES MODEL OF DECISION-MAKING IN THE DPRK

The North Korean government is neither a monolith nor a “black box.” It is a semi-privatized amorphous collection of rivaling immobile organizations and stove-piped bureaucracies that often act at cross purposes and are pressed hard and corrupted by the individual and group interests of competing clans, social and political forces vying for power, prestige, and wealth invested by the Dear Leader. North Korean policy-makers are rational and very predictable, whether one likes or dislikes their actions.

The North Korean Byzantium upon the Taedong River

Kim Jong Il is the absolute monarch presiding over the Byzantine Court on the Taedong River. His family clan resides in a modern-day Juch’e Constantinople, the Kim family-built DPRK capital of Pyongyang. The court encompasses at least six immediately related families (1+2+3), all competing for the emperor’s attention, devotion, and favors, and jockeying for position in the event of post-Kim Jong Il succession.

Although it may be hard to believe, the race for the successor mantle and the inheritance of the “party center” has already begun among the third-generation “top echelon” of the revolution in North Korea. The year of 2004 has a threefold symbolic meaning in the North Korean political history because it marks the 40th anniversary of Kim Jong Il’s beginning to work at the WPK Central Committee (at the Organizational Guidance Department and Propaganda and Agitation Department), the 30th anniversary of his designation as the heir apparent to his father Kim Il Sung, and the 10th anniversary of his assumption of power after the Great Leader’s death. As potential heirs to Kim Jong Il grow up and mature, they begin to develop their own bureaucratic attachments and personal loyalties. As their distinctive power bases consolidate and expand, their leadership ambitions tend to grow and legitimacy claims solidify. The battle orders of the future “estate fights” between the first-tier, second-tier, and third-tier families within the Kim clan are already shaping up, despite the urgent party calls for the elites to unite behind the “top echelon” of the revolution.

As the power succession struggle intensifies, the political regime tends to crack along the lines of personal loyalties and “estate inheritance.” Some power-wielding organizations and interested outside parties may take a risk and choose to take sides up-front, expecting higher returns in the future; others may prefer to explore various alternatives as to who may come out

on top in the power struggle within the Kim's extended family clan, without locking themselves into any particular candidate in the absence of a clear vision of the future government setup in Pyongyang.

The truth of the matter is that Kim Jong Il considers his three sons as “idle blockheads.”⁶ His eldest son, Kim Jong Nam, born on May 10, 1973, is the bastard 31-year old offspring of Kim's mentally unstable concubine, former famous actress Sung Hye Rim.⁷ Kim Jong Nam grew up at Kim Jong Il's residence on Mount Changgwang San on a hill in the center of Pyongyang. He was an estranged, albeit spoiled, child with little parental guidance, love, and care. Kim Jong Il is said to have paid special attention to him only when he was from 12 to 16 years old, namely, in 1985-1989. He received his secondary and high school education in Moscow and Geneva. Kim Jong Il is said to have required that his eldest son be a “prince without flaws” – no alcohol, cigarettes, women, or luxury, only reading and sports. But Kim Jong Nam could not and did not wish to live up to his father's high expectations and eventually disappointed him badly. When he turned 20, his father all but abandoned him, never displaying any affection towards him, placing only demands and restrictions on his son and looking at him as a burden. In the 1990s, Kim Jong Nam became miserable, easily distracted, short-tempered, and vindictive. He has always been jealous and resentful of “the other woman's family” and all his step-relatives. He never met his grandfather, and his current relationship with his father is said to be tense and full of mutual disdain. He was sidetracked in the succession plotting, and, therefore, feels embittered and frustrated.

Kim Jong Nam is married and has a son born in 1997.⁸ He spends most of his time in China under the shadow of the Chinese State security apparatus that is rumored to consider him as a potential Manchurian candidate. Despite being regarded as one of the potential “traitors” from the “defector family,”⁹ he is rumored to work for the DPRK State Security Agency,

⁶ This is what he reportedly told General Pulikovskiy in one of their long daily conversations during his 24-day train journey across the Russian Federation in 2001. By the way, all Kim Jong Il's children from his three women are said to look similar. The father's side has come out very strongly in all of his three sons and three daughters.

⁷ Song Hye Rim was born in 1937 in the family of old Korean intelligentsia who came from the South during the Korean War. She left the film world for Kim Jong Il in 1968. After bearing his child, she spent most of her life in Russia under the watchful eye of the KGB, being treated for chronic depression and kidney stones. She passed away at a secretive government clinic in Moscow in 2002. Throughout their unofficial life together, Kim Jong Il could not present Song Hye Rim in public or to his father, because she was officially married to another man. Although concubines were acceptable in the old society, in the new society it was impossible. It was absolutely forbidden to break up a marriage. Only when Song Hye Rim gave birth to Kim Jong Nam, she became “legitimate” in the eyes of Kim Jong Il, but not before the law or in the eyes of Kim Il Sung.

⁸ When Kim Jong Nam was arrested at Tokyo's Narita Airport for attempting to enter Japan on a false Dominican passport in 2001, he was escorted by two women and a four-year old boy. He identified one of the women as his wife, the four-year old boy as his son, and the other woman as the “nanny” for his son.

⁹ It must have been very hard for Kim Jong Il to accept the fact that there had been a traitor in his own family, after Kim Jong Nam's younger cousin, Li Il Nam, disappeared in Geneva in 1982, where he was vacationing during a

controlling some of North Korea's overseas cash flows and financial operations going through the Chinese banking system, including in Hong Kong and Macao. He is said to have developed some personal loyalties within the North Korean national security establishment. One wonders whether some forces within the North Korean State Security Agency might be willing to consider Kim Jong Nam as a potential alternative to the Dear Leader. Kim Jong Nam may appeal to them as one of the young and ambitious Kim family members who was rejected by Kim Jong Il and is very unhappy about his fate and his life because he can never win back his father on his own, and, at the same time, as a relatively safe choice because of the low likelihood that Kim Jong Il will murder his own eldest son as Ivan the Terrible or Josef Stalin did, should he find out about Kim Jong Nam's potential betrayal.

Kim Jong Il's two younger sons, Kim Jong Chul and Kim Jong Un, born respectively in 1981 and 1983, are the bastard children of another concubine, a former dancer of Japanese-Korean decent. Ko Young-Hui,¹⁰ who commands most of Kim Jong Il's personal time and shares plenty of pillow talk with her common-law husband. She is said to be a very good cook, has a creative personality, and is always trying to find ways of stimulating her husband and of interesting him in new things. She is rumored to be very manipulative, has a lot of influence over Kim Jong Il, and a lot of power. One Pyongyang insider believes that "Kim Jong Il does what she wants him to do. He does not know how to say no to a woman he is in love with." In particular, she is credited with the ascension of the Korean-Japanese in the 1980s in North Korean society and the diplomatic opening towards Japan since the 1990s.

Ko Young-Hui's and Kim Jong Il's two boys and their younger sister lived and grew up under Kim Jong Il's personal care, seeing him almost daily at his second private residence on Mount Taesong San. They spent some time in private boarding schools in Switzerland, but were mostly educated domestically where they were exposed to the North Korean educational system. The elder son, Kim Jong Chul, currently attends the Kim Il Sung University. All three children are said to be very close to their father, the Dear Leader, emotionally and ideationally, although

break from his studies at a military university outside Pyongyang. The KGB could not find him, and Kim Jong Il suspected that the ROK intelligence service had kidnapped the youth. Li Il Nam resurfaced in South Korea in 1991, but was murdered under suspicious circumstances in Seoul in 1992, which some people believe may have been a "birthday gift" to Kim Jong Il from the DPRK's security services.

¹⁰ Mdme. Ko Young-Hui was born in Osaka to the family of a professional wrestler in 1952 and returned to Korea from Japan with her Korean-Japanese parents in 1960 when she was eight years old. She received most of her education in Korea. She met Kim Jong Il when she turned 20 in 1972 at one of her traditional dance performances, which he observed as the head of the cultural department at the WPK Central Committee. She is quite small – 154 cm in height. Her parents were never party members. As half-Japanese, they belonged to the social outcasts. For a long time, Kim Jong Il could not make public his relationship with Ko Young-Hui because of her background - half-Japanese, no party membership, social pariah and politically suspect. The first time that she was exposed to international observation was in the mid-1990s when she is rumored to have visited Switzerland for breast cancer surgery.

he appears to favor the younger son, Kim Jong Un. Despite their tender age, Kim Jong Il encourages them to learn more about the Korean People's Army and develop personal friendships with the children of senior Korean generals. As a result, they are seen as the darlings of the KPA's generals' corps. Because of their quarter-Japanese roots and fascination with the Japanese culture and tastes inherited from their half-Japanese mother, they are seen as potential conduits for Japanese influence at the Kim's court.

Kim Jong Il's sole official wife, the now-deceased Kim Yong Suk, born in 1947, failed to deliver any male heirs and gave birth to his only legitimate children recognized by Kim Il Sung – two daughters, including his beloved eldest daughter Kim Seol Song. She was born in 1974, educated inside North Korea, and knows very well traditional values and the North Korean system. She is very sophisticated and can speak fluently several foreign languages, including Russian, English, French, and Spanish. Kim Jong Il asked her to work at the WPK Secretariat, Office 99. She follows him everywhere. She takes part in many of his meetings with foreigners as his personal assistant. Kim Jong Il is said to be very proud of her accomplishments. She seems to follow Russian developments with particular interest. The father and daughter are said to have a genuine psychological connection. Some observers wonder what role Kim Jong Il may have in mind for his daughter during the power transition period, speculating that in case of emergency, Kim Seol Song may become North Korea's future powerful Queen Min (Minbi), serving as a regent to Kim Jong Il's younger sons from Ko Young-Hui, should that become necessary one day. Kim Jong Il also was very close to Kim Yong Suk's younger brother Kim Yong Sun, who became the WPK CC Secretary in charge of International Affairs, but was killed in a car accident on June 16, 2003.



In addition, in the late 1960s, Kim Jong Il was rumored to have had a love affair with the current female President of Kim Hyong-jik University of Education, Hong Il-chon, who allegedly delivered a daughter named Kim Hye-kyong to him in 1968.

Kim Jong Il's children, legitimate and bastard, and their respective relatives compete for his attention, favors, benevolence, and a succession preference not only among themselves, but

also against the second-tier family of his dearest sister and Kim Il Sung's only daughter, Kim Kyong-Hui.¹¹ Kim Kyong-hui was born in 1946; she is a graduate of the Kim Il Sung University and is rumored to be very close to the heart and mind of the Dear Leader. As one Pyongyang insider notes, "For Kim Jong Il, only his sister Kim Kyong-Hui counts. He always protected her from their step-mother." Kim Kyong-Hui's family can ground her hereditary succession claim on the simple fact that she and her husband, Chang Sung-thaek, have delivered the only legitimate grandson to the Great Leader Kim Il Sung, which makes him the only legitimate third-generation male heir to Kim Il Sung's throne. His name is Chang Kim-song and he is known to have studied in Sweden in the late 1990s. They also have a smart and beautiful daughter, Kim Gum Sung, born in 1978, whom Kim Jong Il asked to work at the party central committee, where her mother heads the WPK CC Economic Policy Inspection Department. Without doubt, Kim Jong Il adores and loves his sister very much, and she is said to be his close confidant.

The Dear Leader also likes his brother-in-law Chang Sung-thaek a lot and allegedly delegated the oversight of the state security apparatus to him. Since the early 1980s, Chang Sung-thaek has worked at the WPK CC, first spearheading the Youth and Three Revolutions Team Department and later as the first deputy director of the Organization and Guidance Department, a position held by Kim Jong Il before his ascendance to power in the 1970s. That fact gave rise to speculation that one day "Comrade Director Chang" or his son may inherit Kim Jong Il's mantle. Chang Sung-thaek is believed to have substantial influence over Kim Jong Il directly and through his wife Kim Kyong-Hui. He is the only close relative of Kim Jong Il, who visited the Republic of Korea in November 2002. He left a very good impression in Seoul as a modernizer and supporter of economic reforms and is regarded as a potential conduit for South Korean influence inside Pyongyang's Versailles.

Kim Jong Il seems to use the Chang family and three Chang brothers as his eyes and ears inside the state security apparatus. He placed Chang's older brother, Vice-Marshal Chang Sung-U (born in 1935), who had previously served at the Ministry of People's Security and the General Guards Bureau, in charge of the Political Bureau of the MPAF's Guard Command and the Third Army Corps deployed in Pyongyang and critical for the regime security. He also appointed Chang Song-kil, Chang Sung-thaek's younger brother, as the deputy commander of the 4th Corps. This notwithstanding, one has to remember that in the mid-1970s, Kim Jong Il and Chang Sung-thaek had a rather tense relationship because of Kim Il Sung's purge of Chang Sung-thaek's uncle, Chang Chon Hwan, the then-Deputy Minister of the People's Armed Forces.

¹¹ Kim Jong Il is said to have had a younger brother Kim Tong-il (who was named Shura in Russian), who was born in Khabarovsk in the former Soviet Union in 1944 and drowned in Pyongyang at the age of four in 1947. Kim Jong Il's second brother was said to have been still-born in September 1949.

Chang Chon Hwan was accused of sympathizing with the heretic position on the succession issue of the then-DPRK Vice-President Kim Tong-gyu. The elder Chang was summarily dismissed and exiled to the Jagang Province in late 1977.

As a rule, observers tend to rule out several third-tier Kim families as viable alternatives to Kim Jong Il's more direct successors from the first-tier and second-tier families. Kim Il Sung's parents, father Kim Hyong Jik¹² (1894-1926) and mother Kang Pan Sok (1892-1932) had three sons – Kim Song Ju (a.k.a. Kim Il Sung, 1912-1994), Kim Yong-ju (born in 1920), and Kim Ch'ol-chu (who was killed by the Japanese in 1935), as well as a daughter Kim Hyong-sil.

Kim Il Sung's younger brother, the 84-year old Kim Yong-ju,¹³ who is the middle son, is not known to have any legitimate children. Although on July 26, 1993, during the nation-wide celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the "DPRK's Victory in the Great Fatherland Liberation War," Kim Jong Il returned his uncle to public life from his two decades of political exile in the countryside, restored his full membership in the WPK Politburo in December 1993, and even asked him to serve as one of the honorary Vice-Chairmen of the Presidium of the SPA in September 1998, Kim Yong-ju is not believed to wield any real power or harbor any succession-related ambitions.

Kim Il Sung's younger sister, Kim Hyong-sil, had three daughters: Kim Jong Il's aunts – Kim Chong-suk (the same name as Kim Jong Il's mother), Kim Sin-suk, and a third daughter who allegedly died as an unnamed infant. Kim Chong-suk was married to the now-deceased Ho Dam, a very influential party official, who rose to become the DPRK Foreign Minister in 1970-1983. Kim Sin-suk married Yang Hyong-sop, who was born in 1925 and studied at the Moscow State University in the early 1940s together with Kim Yong-ju, Kim Il Sung's younger brother. Yang Hyong-sop rose in the party education circles: in 1961, he was appointed Director of the WPK Central Party School, and in 1967, minister of education. Kim Sin-suk passed away in 1986. Yang Hyong-sop rose to become Chairman of the 10th Supreme People's Assembly, and now he serves as one of the Vice-Presidents of the 11th SPA.

¹² Kim Hyong Jik had two younger brothers, i.e., Kim Il Sung's uncles – Kim Hyong-nok and Kim Hyong-gwon (died in 1936). Kim Se-hyong, the only known son of one of Kim Il Sung's uncles, reportedly served as Deputy Commander of the First Army of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army and died in 1938, without leaving any children behind.

¹³ Kim Yong-ju took part in the anti-Japanese guerrilla activities in Manchuria together with Kim Il Sung in the late 1930s. He went to study in the Soviet Union in 1941. In 1945, he graduated from the Moscow State University with a degree in political economy and returned to Korea after liberation. He helped his brother purge the WPK from the South Korean Communist faction. He was elected a member of the WPK Central Committee in 1961. The highlight of his political career was the fact that Kim Il Sung delegated him to sign the North-South Joint Declaration on July 4, 1972. But, in 1974, when Kim Il Sung decided to make his son Kim Jong Il his heir apparent, Kim Yong-ju, who was regarded as a potential contender for the throne, all of a sudden disappeared for almost two decades.

Kim Sung-ae, who is Kim Il Sung's second wife and Kim Jong Il's hated step-mother,¹⁴ is unlikely to resume her previously lost battle royale for the transfer of power to her eldest son and Kim Jong Il's younger half-brother Kim Pyong Il, born in 1953, let alone to her younger son and Kim Jong Il's second half-brother Kim Yong Il, born in 1955.¹⁵ Two daughters of Kim Song-Ae, who are Kim Jong Il's half-sisters, and their respective children, have never been considered in contention for the supreme power mantle in Pyongyang. In specifics, the eldest daughter, Kim Sung-il (or Kyong-il), born in 1951, is married to a MOFA official, Kim Kwang-sop, born in 1949, who served as the DPRK Ambassador in some African countries and Austria. The younger daughter, Kim Yong-ja, is married to a KPA general. Kim Jong Il's eldest step-brother, Kim Pyong Il, has been honorably exiled to serve as the DPRK Ambassador in various European countries, including Hungary, Finland, and Poland, since the early 1980s. Kim Pyong Il is not known to have legitimate male children. Besides, he has been overseas for so long that he has become so out of touch with the prevailing value system and power realities in Pyongyang that he can hardly mount any successful power transfer campaign of his own without mighty backing from some very influential force inside the DPRK power system. Everyone in the loop, however, knows that Kim Jong Il despises his half-brother and that "it is over between them for life." Kim Jong Il's youngest step-brother, Kim Yong-il, is rumored to have a serious drinking problem and has no official positions.

It goes without saying that all extended family members are protected and watched over by the ballooning Secret Service (sometimes referred to as the MPAF Guards Command) whose ranks expanded from a few hundred at the time of the Great Leader's death in 1994 to allegedly more than eight thousand a decade later. The Secret Service personnel – bodyguards, cleaning maids, cooks, technicians, chauffeurs, etc. - guard the Kims' private residences, take them to

¹⁴ Kim Sung-ae, born in 1924, Kim Jong Il's step-mother, had two sons and two daughters from Kim Il Sung. Kim Il Sung had lived with Kim Sung-Ae since 1952. They married in the summer of 1963. Kim Song-Ae's power had been considerable between 1960 and 1973, when she was made the Chairwoman of the DPRK Democratic Women's League. As a typical Korean step-mother, she treated her step-son rather badly, trying to do her best to disparage Kim Jong Il in the eyes of his father. She is rumored to have scolded him constantly, dressed him badly, and barely fed him. Kim Sung-Ae is rumored to have hated Kim Jong Il and had tried to position her own son, Kim Pyong Il, as Kim Il Sung's successor. She encouraged the development of her own personality cult, by publishing books, giving "on-the-spot guidance" at public places and factories without Kim Il Sung, appearing on television next to the Great Leader and alone, greeting dignitaries, and trying to diminish the stature of Kim Jong Il's deceased mother, Kim Jong Suk. In the early 1970s, Kim Jong Il vociferously protested to his father about the growing power of Kim Song-Ae and her brother, by arguing that there must not be different power centers and that all power must be centralized in the figure of his father Kim Il Sung. Kim Junior prevailed in 1973 when the Great Leader convened a conference of the WPK Secretaries and proposed the theory of unified *Juch'e* idea. Kim Song-Ae was finished and had to retreat back into the "women's side of the house." No wonder that at Kim Il Sung's funeral, Kim Jong Il and his sister stood at the center of the podium, whereas Kim Song-ae was already located far away from the other members of the WPK Central Committee.

¹⁵ There is a disagreement among Korea observers over whether Kim Jong Il's second step-brother's name is Kim Yong Il or Kim Kyong Il.

work, monitor their communications, and ensure that Kim Jong Il knows everything about each one of his relatives, whereas his own secrecy and privacy are well preserved and no one knows anything about him. Marshal Li Ul-Sol,¹⁶ Kim Il Sung's closest long-time aide and confidant, his former personal aide de camps, and one of Kim Jong Il's trusted elders, has been the Chief of the Secret Service since 1982. He is a very influential figure in the top leadership. But, because of Marshal Li Ul Sol's advanced age, the day-to-day operations are believed to be handled by one of Kim Jong Il's in-laws, Vice-Marshal Chang Sung-U, who is Li Ul-Sol's first deputy. The Secret Service is a real player, albeit cautious and surreptitious, in all the internal family power feuds.

“Power Transmission Belts”

Five major political forces affecting all spheres of the North Korean life, namely the national security establishment, the old guard, the technocrats, the local elites, and the “foreign wind,” approach the “extended family clan” with their own visions for national development and policy recommendations for the burning issues of the day, and attempt with different degrees of success to penetrate and influence the Kim “family court” in order to ensure the representation of their corporate interests at the heart of national decision-making at the time of political succession.

These five “transmission belts” connect the “hub” of the North Korean policy-making, the Dear Leader and Supreme Commander-in-Chief Kim Jong Il, with the “outer circle” of the North Korean elites, the brain-feeding tubes at the center and in provinces, who also constitute the “protective belt,” absorbing external shocks and safe-guarding the regime from mass discontent.

Party membership serves as an entry ticket into the elite club, but increasingly it is taken for granted and is no longer sufficient for the new nomenclature. Access to state assets, prestige, and power, accumulation of private wealth, or government licensing authority is a must to qualify for the new elite status. Among the members of the same interest-based establishment, there may exist significant value gaps on the ideological continuums from conservative to liberal and from moderate to radical. But, different “transmission belts” tend to articulate and aggregate divergent strategic priorities and policy preferences among the North Korean elites.

¹⁶ Li Ul-Sol was born in 1920 in South Hamgyong Province. He served in the Chinese Communist Eighth Route Armies together with Kim Il Sung in the 1930s and graduated from the Soviet Military Academy in the 1950s. He became a corps commander in 1962 and commander of the Fifth Army Group in 1968. He has been a member of the WPK Central Military Committee since 1980 and a member of the National Defense Commission since 1990. He was promoted to vice-marshal in 1992 and to full marshal in 1995.

“National Security Establishment”

The “national security establishment” represents the interests of the “power-wielding” bureaucracies, namely, the military (the KPA General Staff, the KPA General Political Department, the Ministry of People’s Armed Forces, Pyongyang Defense Command, the MPAF Security Command, etc.), the state security apparatus (the Ministry of People’s Security, the State Security Agency, the Secret Service), the prosecutorial and court system (the Central Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Central Court), the defense industry (Second Economic Committee), and the nuclear establishment (the General Bureau of Atomic Energy, the Yongbyon Atomic Complex, etc.). They use the National Defense Commission as the supreme national power organ to dominate the policy-making agenda in Pyongyang. Table 1 lists the principal Chiefs within the national security establishment who play significant roles in the formulation of the DPRK’s national security strategy, defense policy, and foreign policies.

Table IV-1. Composition of the National Security Establishment (Chiefs only)

Organization	Name	Title
National Defense Commission	Kim Jong Il Cho Myong-rok Yon Hyong-muk Ri Yong-mu Kim Yong-ch’un Kim Il-ch’ol Chon Pyong-ho Ch’oe Ryong-su Paek Se-bong	Chairman First Vice-Chairman Vice-Chairman Vice-Chairman Member Member Member Member Member
KPA General Political Department	Cho Myong-rok	Director, First Vice-Marshal, Air Force
KPA General Staff	Kim Yong-ch’un Ri Thae-il	Chief, Vice-Marshal, Army Deputy Chief, Col.-General (promoted on 4/13/02)
Ministry of People’s Armed Forces	Kim Il-ch’ol Chang Sung-U Jong Chang Ryol Ryo Chun Sok	Minister, Vice-Marshal, Navy Deputy Minister, Vice-Marshal, Army Deputy Minister, Army General Deputy Minister
MPAF Guards Command	Won Ung-hui	Commander Four-star General
Pyongyang Defense Command	Pak Ki-so	Vice-Marshal (promoted on 4/13/97)
State Security Agency	Kim Ch’ol-su	Director, Four-star General

Table IV-1. Composition of the National Security Establishment (continued)

Organization	Name	Title
Ministry of People's Security ¹⁷	Ch'oe Ryong-su Ri Yong-il So Chun-bong Kang Yong-ho Choe Mun-dok	Minister, Four-star General Deputy Minister, LTG Deputy Minister, LTG Deputy Minister, Col.-Gen. (promoted on 4/13/02) Chief of the Political Bureau of MPS
Central Public Prosecutor's Office	Ri Kil Song	Public Prosecutor General, Four-star General
Central Court	Kim Pyong Ryul	President, Four-star General
Kim Il Sung Military University ¹⁸	Choe In-duk	Vice-Marshal, President (since 1982)
Defense Industry Policy and Inspection Department under the Central Military Committee of the WPKCC	Chon Pyong-ho	Chairman
Second Economic Committee under NDC	Kim Ch'ol Man (retired)	Chairman, Army General
Atomic Energy Committee under the WPK CC	n.a.	
General Bureau of Atomic Energy (under the Cabinet of Ministers)	Ch'oe Hak-kun Li Je-seon	Former Director-General Current Director-General
Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center ¹⁹	Dr. Ri Hong Sop	Director

The core members of the national security establishment still come from the so-called “1980 group,” a small group of the second generation of party and military leaders who were rapidly promoted upon Kim Il Sung’s instructions following the Sixth WPK Party Congress in

¹⁷ Vice-Marshal Paek Hak-nim, a longtime loyal supporter of the Kim family, had served as the Minister of People’s Security from 1982 to July 1, 2003. Curiously, although Paek Hak-nim had been absent from work since March 2003 due to his failing health, he was officially removed from his post on July 1, 2003, just two weeks after the ill-fated “car crash accident” on June 16, 2003, that lethally wounded Kim Jong Il’s right-hand aide, close personal friend, and one of the masterminds of the DPRK’s strategy of accelerated reconciliation with the South and normalization with Japan, the WPK CC Secretary in charge of international affairs, Kim Yong Sun.

¹⁸ The military education and training establishment is part and parcel of the national security establishment. It includes the faculty, staff, students, and alumni of the Kim Il Sung Military University, Kim Il Sung Political University, Kim Hyuk Security Academy, Kanggun Military (Army) Academy, Kim Jung-sook Naval Academy, Kim Ch’ul-chu Artillery Academy, Kim Chaek Air Force College, and the Mirim College (otherwise known as the Automated Warfare Academy).

¹⁹ Also, one should mention Choi Kil Man, Assistant Director of the Center; Li Yong-ho, Chief of Safeguards Section; Kim Haik Soon, Senior Center Researcher; and Pak Chang Su, Center Researcher; as well as Li Song Hwan, Chief Engineer of the 5 Mwe reactor; and Li Yong Song, Chief Engineer of the Radiochemical Laboratory. These are the people who provide critical input to the DPRK’s leadership regarding the technical aspects of the North Korean nuclear program. See Siegfried S. Hecker, testimony at the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Hearing on the “*Visit to the Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center in North Korea*,” January 21, 2004.

October 1980. Many of them (Yon Hyong Muk, Chon Byong-ho,²⁰ Kim Yong Nam, Ch'oe Thae-bok,²¹ and Yun Gi Bok) were born in the North Hamgyong Province, attended the Mangyongdae Revolutionary School, graduated from the Kim Il Sung University, and studied at one of the Soviet universities early in life. They constituted Kim Jong Il's key support group during the process of dynastic succession and power consolidation in the ensuing two decades. At the Sixth Party Congress, the WPK Central Committee Secretariat was reshuffled and stacked with Kim Jong Il's loyalists, with many new faces added, including five new party secretaries – Yon Hyong Muk, Chon Byong-ho, Kim Yong Nam, Ch'oe Thae-bok, and Kim Jung-rin, who occupy the key positions in the North Korean government today.²² The “1980 group” also included the following rising generals, who acted as Kim Jong Il's trusted eyes and ears within the DPRK's armed forces and security apparatus: Cho Myong Rok, Kim Il Ch'ol,²³ O Guk Ryol (later purged but rehabilitated), Kim Kang Hwan (passed away), Kim Du Nam,²⁴ Ri Bong Won (later purged and executed), and Ch'oe Sang Uk. No wonder that Kim Jong Il feels comfortable

²⁰ Chon Byong-ho, born in 1926, is a WPK CC Secretary in charge of the Defense Industries. For a long time, he had served as Yon Hyong Muk's deputy in various establishments. For instance, when Yon Hyong Muk was the Director of the Machine-Building Department in the WPK CC in the late 1970s, Chon Byong-ho was his Deputy Director. When Yon Hyong Muk moved to head the First Economic Department of the WPK Central Committee in the early 1980s, Chon Byong-ho followed him as his deputy Director again. When Yon Hyong Muk was elected a member of the WPK CC Political Bureau, he “pulled” Chon Byong-ho together with him, by recommending that Chon be elected an Alternate Member of the Political Bureau at the Sixth Plenum of the Sixth WPK CC in 1986. When Yon Hyong Muk was appointed the Premier of the Administrative Council, Chon Byong-ho was made one of his Deputy Premiers. Clearly, Yon Hyong Muk and Chon Byong-ho are close friends and their careers in the party and government are closely linked and interdependent.

²¹ Ch'oe Thae-bok, born in 1929, is Chairman of the SPA Presidium and Alternate Member of the WPK Political Bureau. Choe Thae-bok has long been regarded as a rising progressive star on the North Korean political horizon. He received his higher education in East Germany and the former USSR and can speak fluent German, good Russian, and a little bit of English. Choe Thae-bok is said to be a protégé of Kim Il Sung's relative Yang Hyong-sop, who had long been in charge of education in the DPRK. He emerged as one of the leading representatives of the “1980 group” at the Sixth WPK Party Congress. From 1980 to 1986, he served as the Chairman of the Education Committee. In December 1986, he followed his friends, Yon Hyong Muk and Chon Byong-ho, from the Administrative Council to the WPK Central Committee. As early as the 1980s, Ch'oe is said to come to recognize the DPRK's economic problems and the ROK's economic accomplishments. He is said to be very popular among the student youth and those North Koreans who studied abroad. Several thousands of the North Koreans who attended Eastern European universities in the 1980s (over 1000 in the USSR, 600 in the Czechoslovakia, 800 in the GDR, 400 in Poland, 600 in the PRC) believe that they were able to study abroad and learn about the outside world only because of his policy of expanding student exchanges under the auspices of his Committee on Education under the Administrative Council, despite the opposition from the then WPK CC hardliners. Choe Thae-bok is rumored to have been one of the driving forces behind the resumption of the student exchanges between the DPRK and the rest of the world in the early 2000s. Ch'oe Thae-bok is known as a very intelligent person who is able to admit his own mistakes and is open to self-criticism.

²² Among the four remaining party secretaries from the “1980 group,” three men passed away – Yun Gi-bok in 2003, Kim Hwan, and Hong Si Hak, whereas Hwang Jang Yop defected to the ROK in 1997. Hong Song Nam, WPK CC Secretary in charge of Economic Policy, is also considered to be a member of the 1980 group.

²³ Kim Il Ch'ol, born in 1928, is the Minister of the People's Armed Forces now.

²⁴ Kim Du Nam, born in 1927, is an Army General and Member of the WPK CC Central Military Commission. Kim Du Nam is the brother of Kim Yong Nam, Chairman of the SPA Presidium.

channeling all his decisions through the National Defense Commission, which is packed with such long-time loyalists as Yon Hyong Muk, Cho Myong Rok, Kim Il Ch'ol, and Chon Byong Ho.

It is interesting that the economic wing of the “1980 group” attempted to initiate some cosmetic economic reforms in 1986-1989, responding to the growing domestic economic crisis and echoing the general trends within the then-world socialist camp. At the 12th Plenum of the 6th WPK Central Committee, devoted to the consideration of the control targets for the 3rd Seven-Year Plan (1987-1993), held on December 27, 1986, Hong Song Nam,²⁵ the then-Alternate Member of the WPK CC Political Bureau and Vice Premier of the Administrative Council, reported that “the 2nd Seven-Year Plan (1978-1984) was a failure, that the national economy was in stagnation, that the people were hungry and miserable.” No one expected such an honest report. Before leaving home that day, Hong Song Nam allegedly told his wife: “If I do not return home tonight, pack up our stuff and get ready to move to the countryside.” Hong was arrested during the break, immediately following his provocative speech. However, after the break, Kim Il Sung allegedly asked the chief of state security where Comrade Hong Song Nam was, “without any suspicion,” and when told about the arrest, the Great Leader ordered Hong released and, to the surprise of all, promoted him to be the First Deputy Premier in the Ri Gun Mo-run Administrative Council, in order to “correct the economic situation.”²⁶

In 1988-1989, the then-Premier Yon Hyong Muk, who is known to be very intelligent and well-versed in economic theory, and his first deputy, Hong Song Nam, a sophisticated economist in his own right, attempted to boost labor motivation and productivity and improve government finances through the introduction of the self-accounting system at the workplace, concentration and centralization of ministerial functions under the newly established enlarged state committees, and creation of a self-reliant infrastructure for foreign economic exchanges, including specialized foreign trade banks, i.e., Taesong Bank and Kumgang Bank, foreign trade houses, specialized supply and distribution networks for the export-oriented enterprises, and special incentives for barter and intermediary transactions. However, their half-hearted efforts largely failed to correct deepening structural imbalances in the economy exacerbated by the

²⁵ Some insiders in the North still consider Hong Song Nam as a hero of sorts for his speech at the Plenum. Hong Song Nam, born in Kangwon Province in 1929, began his party career in economic policy-making in the South Pyongyan Provincial Economic Management Committee under the guidance of the then South Pyongyan Provincial Administrative Committee Chairmen, first Ri Gun Mo and then Cho Se Ung. When Ri Gun Mo became Alternate Member of the WPK CC Political Bureau in 1981, he supported Hong Song Nam's transfer to Pyongyang to become a Vice-Premier for Kang Song San, the then head of the Administrative Council. When Ri Gun Mo was appointed the Premier, Hong Song Nam became his First Vice-Premier in early 1987. After the fall of Ri Gun Mo in late 1987, Hong Song Nam was appointed as the Deputy Premier and Chairman of the State Planning Commission for Yon Hyong Muk, the then Premier.

²⁶ Materials of the Soviet Trade Mission in the DPRK, 1987.

severe draught in 1988 and the dramatic rise in energy and consumer demand caused by the 13th World Youth Festival in July 1989. The economic situation continued to deteriorate against the background of falling communist dominoes in Eastern and Central Europe. Consequently, these modest plans of economic quasi-liberalization were shelved in favor of orthodox command-and-control remedies, and their leading proponents, such as Yon Hyong Muk and others, were sacked temporarily.

At the same time, the military wing of the “1980 group,” headed by the then Chief of the KPA General Staff and Member of the WPK CC Political Bureau, Colonel-General O Guk Ryol,²⁷ began to push for a large-scale military reform aimed at “professionalization of the people’s armed forces” and “separation of the military from politics and economics.” They used to say that, “the military must prepare for the defense of the Fatherland, not carry the burden of economic construction or industrial management.”²⁸ Allegedly, O Guk Ryol advocated the need to amend the nation’s military doctrine and the KPA’s strategy and tactics in the event of a potential conflict with the South in such a way that would allow for a reduction in the conventional forces by 150,000 and would translate into substantial savings in the nation’s military expenditures. He is rumored to have expressed considerable doubts about the expediency of the proposed use of the KPA units in the construction of the key infrastructure facilities envisioned by the 3rd Seven-Year Plan (1987-1993). In the end, his conservative opponents succeeded in casting the military reform plans as counter-revolutionary measures designed to undermine the WPK rule, Kim Il Sung’s government, and Kim Jong Il’s succession bid. Consequently, these modest plans of gradual military restructuring were shelved, and O Guk Ryol, the Number Two man in the KPA’s power hierarchy, who was expected to succeed the ailing and aging Minister of People’s Defense O Jin-U, was suddenly replaced by a hard-line KPA veteran and guerrilla fighter, Army General Ch’oe Gwan.²⁹ Thus, in the late 1980s, the

²⁷ O Guk Ryol was born in Manchuria in 1933. His father, O Chung-hup, saved Kim Il Sung’s life at the expense of his own during one of the guerrilla battles in Manchuria in 1939. Subsequently, O Guk Ryol grew up in Kim Il Sung’s family in the 1940s. He was one of Kim Jong Il’s early childhood playmates. O Guk Ryol graduated from the Mangyongdae Revolutionary School and studied at the Frunze Academy of the Soviet General Staff in Moscow. He can speak Russian and is highly regarded as a modern military leader with global outlook. He was the Chief of the KPA General Staff from 1979 to February 12, 1988.

²⁸ Materials of the USSR Embassy in the DPRK, 1989.

²⁹ It is noteworthy that Ch’oe Gwan was the only previous Chief of the KPA General Staff (1966-1969) who was removed for policy disagreements with the top political leadership. At that time, Ch’oe Gwan was one of the proponents of the “hard-line vis-à-vis South Korea and American imperialism,” which resulted in the Pueblo incident, North Korean commando raid against the Blue House, and the North Korean capture of the U.S. surveillance plane ES-121. Ch’oe Gwan was purged in 1969 and exiled to head the Provincial People’s Committee in South Hwanghae Province throughout the 1970s. He was rehabilitated at the Sixth WPK Party Congress in October 1980, and was appointed as one of the Vice-Premiers and Chairman of the Fisheries Committee in the Administrative Council, where he served until his re-appointment as the Chief of the KPA General Staff in February 1988.

North Korean regime decided to weather the storm of perestroika and the ensuing collapse of the communist regimes in the former socialist world and to meet the challenge of consolidating Kim Jong Il's power by hunkering down, "tightening the screws," and returning to the *Juch'e* orthodoxy. The ensuing policy paralysis lasted for almost a decade, until the late 1990s.

However, in 1998, the "1980 group" re-emerged as the driving force of North Korean policy-making, after facing down the ideological challenges and winning over the power struggles against the revolutionary "old guard," ideological hardliners, and conservative, paranoid state security forces. Kim Jong Il appointed Hong Song Nam to serve as the Premier of the Cabinet of Ministers from September 1998 to September 2003. Kim Yong Nam was elected the Chairman of the SPA Presidium, i.e., formal head of the DPRK state. General Cho Myong Rok, O Gug-ryol's protégé from the Korean Air Force, became the de-facto Number Two man in the North Korean power hierarchy after the Dear Leader. As a result, the key survivors of the "1980 group" – Yon Hyong Muk, Chon Byong-ho, Hong Song Nam, Kim Yong Nam, Ch'oe Thae-bok, Cho Myong Rok, Kim Il Ch'ol, and O Guk Ryol – were able to re-ignite the late modernization drive and became the chief architects of the North Korean reforms in the late 1990s – early 2000s.

In the past decade, in order to ensure the personal loyalty of the third-generation military and state security leaders, the Dear Leader in his capacity of Supreme Commander of the KPA completely revamped the national security establishment through twelve rounds of general officers' promotions (several dozens at a time), which usually took place on such occasions as the Great Leader's birthday on April 15, or the KPA founding anniversary on April 25, or the anniversary of the Armistice Agreement on July 26, or the WPK founding anniversary on October 10. For instance, on April 13, 1997, Supreme Commander of the KPA Kim Jong Il issued an order to promote 123 general officers.³⁰ On April 13, 1998, Kim Jong Il issued order No. 00102 to promote 22 general officers.³¹ On April 13, 1999, Kim Jong Il issued order No. 00114 to promote 79 general officers.³² On October 4, 2000, Kim Jong Il issued order no. 00133 to promote 44 general officers.³³ On April 13, 2001, Kim Jong Il issued an order to promote 19

³⁰ According to the order dated April 13, 1997, Kim Il Chol, Jon Jae Son, Pak Ki So and Ri Jong San were promoted to the KPA vice marshals, Jong Chang Ryol to Army General, eight others to colonel generals, 37 to lieutenant generals, and 73 to Major Generals. See *KCNA*, Pyongyang, April 14, 1997.

³¹ According to the order dated April 13, Choe Song Su was promoted to colonel general, Jong Hong Gyong to lieutenant general, and Ri Hui Song and 19 others to major generals. See *KCNA*, Pyongyang, April 14, 1998.

³² According to the order, Ri Pyong Sam was promoted to a colonel general, Kwon Ok Phil and Kim Son Ju to lieutenant generals, and Kim Tong In and 75 others to major generals. See *KCNA*, Pyongyang, April 13, 1999.

³³ According to the order, Ri Myong Su received the military title of Army General, Kim Kum Son and Ri Chan Bok were promoted to Colonel General, six other commanding officers were promoted to Lieutenant Generals, and 35 others were made major generals. See *KCNA*, Pyongyang, October 8, 2000.

general officers.³⁴ On April 13, 2002, the WPK Central Military Commission and the DPRK NDC issued a joint decision to confer the military rank of Vice-Marshal of the KPA on Kim Jong Il's brother-in-law's elder brother, Chang Sung-U, whereas Kim Jong Il issued an order of the Supreme Commander of the KPA No. 00152 to promote 53 general officers.³⁵ Finally, on July 26, 2003, Kim Jong Il issued order No. 00160 to promote 24 general officers.³⁶

The fact of the matter is that the national security establishment in the DPRK is neither monolithic nor uniform in their assessments of the challenges and opportunities facing the North Korean state in their preferred crisis management strategies and policy prescriptions for dealing with the problems at hand. The basic goals that they seem to share are consolidation of their own power in new socio-economic conditions, perpetuation of the ruling regime in one form or another, enhancement of the DPRK's external security and preservation of the national sovereignty and statehood, and, perhaps, to a much lesser extent, improved public welfare, especially their own wealth.

It is noteworthy that the military and the state security apparatus do not always see eye to eye on the fundamental problems of state survival, regime adaptation, and Kim Jong Il's late modernization drive. Since the late 1990s, Kim Jong Il decided to elevate the role of the military in the DPRK's decision-making, by launching the "Songun Era" of the "military-first politics." That was a clear-cut victory for the reform-inclined KPA that has become the primary actor in all policy-making processes, whereas the more conservative state security apparatus was relegated to secondary status in restructuring the North Korean state and building a "great powerful and prosperous nation."

³⁴ According to the order, one leading officer was promoted to colonel-general, three - to lieutenant general, and 15 - to major general. See *KCNA*, Pyongyang, April 13, 2001.

³⁵ According to the order dated April 13, Kim Yun Sim, Kim Jong Gak and Ryo Cyun Sok were promoted to army generals. The military rank of colonel general was conferred on Paek Sang Ho, Kang Yong Ho, Ri Thae Il, Kim Yang Jom and Pak Sung Won, and the military rank of lieutenant general was conferred on Ri Yong Ho, Ri Yong Gil, Hwang Hong Sik, Pak Su Chol and Pang Kuk Hwan. Ri Yong Rae; and 39 others were promoted to major general. All these general officers were referred to as the "hardcore members of the Korean revolutionary armed forces who are true to the army-based leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea." See *KCNA*, Pyongyang, April 14, 2002.

³⁶ Six lieutenant-generals were promoted to colonel-generals, ten major generals were promoted to lieutenant-generals (including Jon Ryong-gu, Ri Chang-shik, Kim Yang-geum, Kim Kyong-shik, Oh Chol-san, Jong Tae-geun, Kim Seung-yon, Ri Mun-Gwang, Jon Ki-chang, and Kang Hui-ryol), and eight colonels to major-generals (including Rim Yong-hwa, Jo Yong-dae, Jang Chun-san, Kim Chol-jong, Kim Kyong-hun, Jo Sa-hyong, Kim Bong-shik, and Kim Tae-hak). Three of the six newly promoted colonel-generals – Pyon In-son, Kim Hyong-ryong, and Choe Hyong-gwan – are key staff members of the General Political Bureau of the KPA, which is responsible for monitoring ideological views and political behavior of army servicemen, in particular the officers' corps. Also, two new Colonel-Generals, Gen. Ri Tae-won and Sim Sang-dae, are in charge of political affairs in the Air Force Second Division and Navy Command, respectively. The newly made Colonel-General Ji Yong-chun is a deputy chief of the political bureau in the army. See *KCNA*, Pyongyang, July 26, 2003.

The advent of the “*Songun Era*” and “*Kangsong taeguk*” strategy, both of which debuted in official propaganda in January 1999, is unlikely to have been a response to the so-called “hostile foreign environment,” because it was the time of emerging détente between the DPRK and the West and in inter-Korean relations. Nor is it likely to have been caused by the protracted economic crisis, because the country was already entering the period of economic stabilization in the late 1990s.

The most likely reason for the introduction of the military rule under the *Songun* slogans and initiation of the military-backed modernization drive in the land of *Juch’e* was the defeat of the power challenge brought by the state security apparatus against Kim Jong Il’s leadership in 1998. There is always some tension between the military and the state security establishment, as previous purges in the national security establishment in 1976-1977 and in 1987-1988 indicate. That tension was exposed again at the end of 1998, following the purge of the top leadership at the State Security Agency and other organizations within the intelligence and counter-intelligence community, which ultimately gave impetus to the ensuing rise of the *Songun* policy in the DPRK.

Reportedly, a number of key security officials began to pass negative judgments on Kim Jong Il’s leadership in early 1998. Especially harsh in his criticisms was Full General Kim Yong Ryong, First Deputy Minister of the State Security Agency, who essentially acted as the Minister of State Security in the absence of the aging and ailing Minister Chon Mun Sop.³⁷ Kim Yong Ryong is rumored to have stated in private conversations that “our political system is sick,” and that “we also can live well if we open and reform our country.” Even Kwon Hui-Gyong, Director of Office 35 at the WPK Central Committee in charge of the South (which used to be called the Foreign Intelligence Analysis Department), who was personally close to Kim Jong Il, is alleged to have shared these critical views. Moreover, they are alleged to have asserted that they could “restore discipline,” “create a new order,” and “rectify the mistakes committed by the current leadership” through “internal reforms and external opening,” like the former Soviet KGB Chief and the CPSU Secretary-General Andropov hoped to do in the stagnant Soviet Union back in 1983.

Obviously, it was a direct challenge to Kim Jong Il’s leadership from the state security establishment. The Dear Leader chose to rely on the KPA to suppress the dissent within the ranks of the intelligence and counter-intelligence community and throughout the society. Kim Yong Ryong and his close associates were accused of treason and bribery from the export-oriented enterprises under the control of the State Security Agency and promptly executed.

³⁷ Chon Mun Sop passed away in late 1998.

Kwon Hui Gyong, the DPRK Hero, was accused of failing to “repatriate” Hwang Jang Yop and of embezzling state funds during his ambassadorship in Moscow and was exiled. In addition, Kim Jong-U, former Chairman of the Committee on Promotion of Cooperation with Foreign Countries, and some other officials responsible for economic exchanges with the South, were accused of illicit wealth accumulation and disappeared. Seo Kwan-Hui, the then WPK CC Secretary for Agriculture, was accused of undermining the party agricultural policy and starving the people and was executed. Even General Lee Bong-won, the Army Commander with close ties to the State Security Agency, was accused of espionage and disappeared in late 1998. Through these purges, Kim Jong Il successfully re-imposed “discipline and personal loyalty” among the senior leadership by “teaching them a painful lesson in obedience.” No heresies would be tolerated, especially within the inner sanctum responsible for the North Korean regime’s security. More importantly, the Dear Leader dramatically curbed the unbridled ambitions of the state security apparatus to change the course of the country in accordance with their own vision. Instead, the ever-loyal KPA was given the green light to start the modernization of the nation on its *Songun* terms.

Following the purges in the state security apparatus in 1998, in his day-to-day country management, Kim Jong Il has surrounded himself with his trusted military aides, who accompany him on all his military inspections and civilian on-the-spot guidance tours around the country. The so-called Operation Command Group of the KPA Supreme Command consists of Army General Ri Myong Su (Chief of Operations Bureau at the General Staff, promoted on 10/08/2000), Col.-Gen. Hyong Ch’ol Hae (Logistics Commander of the General Staff and Deputy Chief of the General Political Department), and Col.-Gen. Pak Jae Gyong (Chief of the Propaganda Bureau of the General Political Department). In essence, these three senior generals, all in their late sixties, who have the executive authority over all the KPA operations, logistics, and information assets, control most of the daily access to Kim Jong Il. They decide what paperwork he reads, what documents he signs, what telephone calls he takes, where he goes on his trips, and what he sees. In a way, they constitute a “military screen” around the Dear Leader. Although they may have their own differences of opinion and represent slightly divergent corporate interests, they share a common interest in “shielding” the Supreme Commander-in-Chief from unvetted information, in “guiding” his thought process, in promoting their respective corporate interests, and in “striking” their enemies in his name. Occasionally, Vice-Marshal Kim Yong Chun (Chief of the KPA General Staff), Army General Kim Yun Sim (promoted on April 13, 2002), and Col.-Gen. Kim Ki Son also join the Operation Command Group in accompanying the Supreme CINC on his functions.





The Operation Command Group of the KPA Supreme Command has to work very closely with Kim Jong Il's personal Secretariat, which consists of Kim Chong-Sun (Chief), Kim Chung-kil, Kil Chae-Gyong, Ri Chae-Kang (WPK CC First Deputy Department Director for cadres), Kang Song-Chun (bodyguard/protocol), and Ri Yong-Ch'ol (finances), as well as with a number of the WPK Central Committee members who are his close friends and often escort him on his trips, especially now-deceased Kim Yong Sun (WPK CC Secretary for International Affairs), Kim Ki Nam (WPK CC Secretary for Propaganda and Agitation), Ri Yong Ch'ol (Member of the Central Military Commission and First Deputy Department Director for Military Affairs), Chang Sung-thaek (brother-in-law and First Deputy Department Director), Ch'oe Chun Hwang (First Deputy Department Director), Kim Hui Thaek (First Deputy Department Director), and Mun Myong On (First Deputy Department Director).

Arguably, the military and party leaders in Kim Jong Il's daily entourage may have different agendas and divergent perspectives on national developments, and may strive to pull and push the Dear Leader in different directions.

The fact that North Korea is run predominantly by the military under the military-first policy does not mean that the country is in hopeless shape: however, as the experience of the ROK led by General Park Chung-hee, who orchestrated the South Korean economic miracle, powerfully testifies, revolution from above is one of the possible pathways for North Korean modernization. If economic reforms continue to bear positive results (following the July 2002 liberalization of prices and wages), Kim Jong Il is expected to initiate a gradual privatization of state property. At that time, the Korean People's Army may become one of the leading actors in the North Korean privatization process, because the KPA generals control so many of the country's key economic assets.



Bearing in mind Kim Jong Il's recent fascination with General Park Chung-hee's military rule,³⁸ in the future, North Korea may well develop a corporate state capitalist economy under the authoritarian military leadership, when the KPA generals decide to trade their military uniforms

³⁸ On May 13, 2002, in Pyongyang, Kim Jong Il "warmly welcomed and had a cordial tete-a-tete conversation with Mrs. Park Keun-hye, General Park Chung-hee's daughter, for an hour, after which he gave a dinner in her honor." See KCNA, Pyongyang, May 14, 2002.

for key civilian management positions in major industrial combines and trading houses in the same way as their South Korean rivals did back in the 1960s.

In the meantime, due to the over-expansion of military roles, the over-politicization of the KPA, and the “military sprawl” in the North Korean society, the KPA’s primary role, i.e., the military defense of North Korea, tends to be downgraded and downplayed. Despite the KPA’s continuous claim on almost half of the DPRK’s government budget, its resources are still limited and unduly stretched out. The KPA’s military readiness appears to be on the decline and actual military capabilities continue to deteriorate, despite the military-first policy, which is the reason why the KPA rule is subject to frequent attacks emanating from the state security apparatus. Allegations of military corruption, theft of state assets at military units, and outright disloyalty of some local commanders are designed to undermine the military influence on Kim Jong Il and to restore the previously overwhelming influence of the state security apparatus over the state and the party.

“Old Guard”

The “old guard” represents the views of Kim Il Sung’s generation in their 80s and early 90s, the dying breed of the anti-Japanese guerrilla fighters. Some of them still possess real power and influence, especially within the national security establishment, despite their delegation of responsibilities over the day-to-day management of their respective ministries and agencies to their younger deputies, whereas others are relegated to nominal honorary positions, primarily at the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly and the WPK Politburo and Central Committee.



Table 2 lists the leading representatives of the “old guard” scattered throughout the DPRK’s power hierarchy.

Table IV-2. Composition of the North Korean “Old Guard”

Name	Year of Birth	Position
Kim Yong Nam ³⁹	1925	President of the SPA Presidium
Cho Myong-rok	1924	Director of the KPA General Political Department
Pak Song Chol	1913	Honorary Vice-President of the SPA Presidium
Kim Yong-ju	1920	Honorary Vice-President of the SPA Presidium, Kim Il Sung's younger brother
Kim Yong-ch'un	1922	Chief of the KPA General Staff
Han Song Ryong	1923	WPK Politburo Member
Kye Ung Thae	1925	WPK Politburo Member
Ri Yong-mu	1924	Vice-Chairman of the National Defense Commission
Ri Ul-Sol (retired in 2003)	1920	Marshal, former Minister of State Security Agency
Paek Hak Rim (retired in March 2003)	1918	Vice-Marshal, former Minister of the People's Security
Kim Ch'ol-man (retired in 2003)	1918	Full General, Former Chairman of the Second Economic Committee
Yang Hyong-sop	1925	Vice-President of the SPA Presidium, Kim Il Sung's relative
Hong Sok-hyung	1924	SPA Presidium
Kim Guk-tae	1924	WPK CC Secretary, Chief of the Cadres Department
Kim Jung-rin ⁴⁰	1924	WPK CC Secretary (Mass Organizations)
Kim Yun-hyok	1926	Secretary-General of the SPA Presidium

Although some representatives of the “old guard” still occupy important positions at the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly, the 11th SPA in general is a relatively middle-aged, university-educated, civilian technocrat-dominated, and professionally oriented expert-driven institution comprising the North Korean intellectual elite, with little military representation, despite the era of *Songun* politics. As a matter of fact, on August 3, 2003, out of 687 deputies, 340 deputies were elected for the first time, which means that 51% of the 10th SPA deputies were replaced with new people at the 11th SPA. Moreover, 52% of them are younger than the age of 50, including fourteen SPA deputies, probably some of the off-spring of the current DPRK leaders, who are younger than the age of 35. Such a drastic revamping and rejuvenation of the SPA deputy corps and top ranks of the Cabinet of Ministers led some observers to brand the newly elected and appointed third-generation leaders of the DPRK as the “2003 group.”

³⁹ Kim Yong Nam is said to be a rather cunning and cautious politician, who always hesitates to make principled decisions on his own. He is known to prefer to sit on the fence and wait until the dust settles before he makes his own moves.

⁴⁰ Kim Jung-rin is known to be a sullen and uncommunicative individual who chain smokes cigarettes and only listens to his counterpart, but rarely speaks.

“Technocrats”

The “technocrats,” who tend to have technical backgrounds and who have been exposed to overseas policy innovations, are traditionally located within the central economic apparatus, including the Cabinet of Ministers and various central economic ministries, agencies, and commissions loaded with younger economists. Some of the “chiefs” among technocrats may be conservative, but most of the “indians” tend to be rather pragmatic and progressive in their policy views. The “technocrats” also aggregate the views of the new entrepreneurs and corporate elites, especially the former “red directorate” from about a hundred of the most important industrial combines and commercial enterprises that constitute the backbone of the DPRK’s industry, agriculture, and service sector, including banking, construction, and commerce. Table 3 lists the key representatives of the “technocrat” establishment in North Korea.

Table IV-3. North Korea’s “Technocrats” within the Cabinet of Ministers

Cabinet Posts	10th SPA	11th SPA
Premier	Hong Song-nam	Pak Pong-ju
Vice Premier	Cho Ch’ang-dok	Kwak Pom-gi
Vice Premier	Kwak Pom-gi	No Tu-ch’ol
Vice Premier	Sin Il-nam	Chon Sung-hun
State Planning ⁴¹	Pak Nam-gi ⁴²	Kim Kwang-Rin
Electric & Coal Industry ⁴³	O Kwang-hung	Chu Tong-il
Mining Industries	Son Chong-ho	Yi Kwang-nam
Metal Machine Industry	Chon Sung-hun ⁴⁴	Kim Sung-hyon
Electronic Industries		O Su-yong
Construction Materials Industry	Cho Yun-hui	Cho Yun-hui

⁴¹ For instance, in an interview with the “People’s Korea” on April 1, 2003, Choi Hong-kyu, a reformist bureau chief under the State Planning Commission, discussed the efforts of his bureau to develop an indicative “three-year plan to solve fuel and energy problems.” If that plan were to succeed in its desired goals, it would open a way for the resumption of longer-term economic planning of broader economic and social developments in the country.

⁴² Prior to that, Pak Nam-gi served as the Chairman of the Administrative Committee of Pyongyang City.

⁴³ In 2003, the General Bureau of Coal Industry (referred to as GBCI) under the Ministry of Electric and Coal Industry implemented a major industry-wide restructuring, including a massive raise in miners’ wages on average up to 15,000 Won per month, expansion of an individual progressive contract work system, and development of 230 quasi-privatized small and mid-sized mines. It also supervised the restructuring and normalization of mine output at the large-scale Bukchang and Deokcheon Coal Mining Enterprises and Ranam Coal Mining Union Enterprise. In sum, due to the GBCI-led restructuring in the mining sector, coal output was reportedly increased by 257,000 tons in 2003 as compared to 2002, which partially alleviated the shortage of energy resources exacerbated by the KEDO cutoff of the HFO deliveries to the DPRK in December 2002.

⁴⁴ Minister Chon Sung-hun led an expert-level ministerial delegation to Russia and China to study the experience of industry-wide restructuring in the Russian and Chinese machine-building sectors during the market transition and explore ways to resume inter-industry cooperation between the DPRK’s leading machine-building enterprises, especially the Ryongsong Machine-building Complex and Huichon Machine-building Combine, and their traditional Russian and Chinese counterparts in July 2003.

Cabinet Posts	10 th SPA	11 th SPA
Railway	Kim Yong-sam	Kim Yong-sam
Land-Sea Transportation	Kim Yong-il	Kim Yong-il
Agriculture	Yi Ha-sop	Yi Kyong-sik
Chemical Industries	Pak Pong-ju	Yi Mu-yong
Light Industries	Yi Yon-su	Yi Chu-o
Foreign Affairs	Paek Nam-sun ⁴⁵ Kang Seok-Ju, 1VM	Paek Nam-sun Kang Seok-Ju, ⁴⁶ 1VM
Trade ⁴⁷	Yi Kwang-gun	Yi Kwang-gun
Forestry	Yi Sang-mu	Yi Sang-mu
Fisheries	Yi Song-ung	Yi Song-ung
City Management	Chang Il-son	Ch'oe Chong-gon
Environmental Protection	Ch'oe Chong-gon	Chang Il-son
State Construction Supervision	Pae Tal-chun	Pae Tal-chun
Commerce ⁴⁸	Yi Yong-son	Yi Yong-son ⁴⁹
Grain Purchasing	Paek Ch'ang-yong	Ch'oe Nam-gyun
Posts and Telecom	Yi Kum-bom	Yi Kum-bom
Finance	Mun Il-bong	Mun Il-bong
State Accounting	Kim Ui-sun	Kim Ui-sun
Central Bank	Kim Wan-su	Kim Wan-su
Central Statistics Bureau	Kim Ch'ang-su	Kim Ch'ang-su
Labour	Ri Won Il	Ri Won Il ⁵⁰
Committee for the Promotion of International Trade under the Cabinet of Ministers	Kim Jong-U	Kim Jong Gi (Chairman)
Flood Damage Rehabilitation Committee		Ri Yong Sok (Vice-Chairman)

⁴⁵ Prior to that appointment, Paek Nam-sun had served as one of the Vice Foreign Ministers in charge of inter-Korean exchanges. He used the alias of Paek Nam-Joon when he served as the DPRK representative at the North-South high-level talks in 1991-1992 and acted as the Chief of the Secretariat at the Committee for Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland. He has also served as the Chairman of the SPA Unification Committee since 1992. In the past couple of years Paek Nam-sun has been seriously ill, and rarely attended to his ministerial duties.

⁴⁶ First Vice-Foreign Minister Kang Seok-ju, who is one of Kim Jong Il's close confidants on foreign affairs, is said to run the daily operations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs these days. He is in line to be appointed the next Foreign Minister of the DPRK, probably as early as by the end of 2004.

⁴⁷ Ku Bon-tae, a vice minister of trade, led an economic delegation to Vietnam on November 15, 2003, to study the experience of Vietnam in market reforms and to promote bilateral trade, investment, and mutual learning.

⁴⁸ On August 16, 2003, the Institute of Commerce under the Ministry of Commerce published a new "Business Dictionary," a product of one year's work, which introduced hundreds of new macro-economic and micro-economic terms widely used in market economies around the world.

⁴⁹ As part of the July 1, 2002, Measures for Economic Management and Improvement, the Ministry of Commerce began to develop a "market-based pricing system" for rewarding "individual scientific and technological achievements in an attempt to better motivate scientists and technicians." Subsequently, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a new system under which new scientific and technological achievements, such as intangible intellectual properties like inventions and computer software, can be distributed on market-based principles and be compensated for as "intellectual goods." See *Chosun Sinbo*, Pyongyang, January 21, 2004.

⁵⁰ Ri Won Il serves concurrently as Chairman of the DPRK-Iran Friendship Association.



It is noteworthy that in the past three decades, four out of five North Korean premiers have come from the eastern littoral provinces (Kang Sung San and Yoon Hyong Muk from North Hamgyong; deceased Ri Jong-ok from South Hamgyong; Hong Song Nam from Kangwon); only deceased Ri Gun Mo came from South Pyongan. All attended Kim Il Sung University and studied abroad. Three former prime-ministers – Kang Sung San, Hong Sung Nam, and Yon Hyong Muk – studied at the Prague University in the 1950s. During their tenures at the helm of North Korean economic decision-making, they (arguably) advanced the ideas of the so-called “Prague school” in the North Korean economic policymaking.

The current Prime Minister Pak Pong-Ju⁵¹ also visited Czechoslovakia in May 1987, when the then prime-minister Yon Hyun Muk asked him to lead a party exchange group on a visit to Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest, in order to study new economic ideas spreading across

⁵¹ Pak Pong-Ju was selected as an alternate member of the WPK Central Committee (rank #79) at the Sixth WPK Congress in October 1980. But, at the time of Kim Il Sung’s funeral in 1994, he ranked only 188th. At the First Session of the 10th SPA in September 1998, he was appointed Minister of Chemical Industries. Prior to that, he was in charge of the WPK CC Department that oversaw chemical industries. He is an expert in chemical industries and believed to have received his education in North Korea.

Eastern Europe. That was reportedly the only foreign trip that he made. But, Pak Pong-Ju’s connection to the “Prague group” and specifically to Yon Hyun Muk, who occupies the third place after Kim Jong Il and Cho Myong-Rok at the National Defense Commission, apparently survived over time and seems to have propelled him to the prime-minister’s seat in Pyongyang today. Pak Pong-Ju represents the 3rd generation of technocrats. He probably wields little real power inside Kim Jong Il’s court, in contrast to his very influential predecessors and mentors.



In general, educational background seems to be a traditionally important factor in determining the individual inclinations, group loyalties, and policy predispositions of the North Korean elites. Table 4 shows where some of the main players received their education.

Table IV-4. Educational Background of the DPRK Elites

Mangyondae School	Kim Il Sung University	Soviet Moscow State University	PRC Yunan Military Academy
Ch’oe T’ae-bok	Chae Hee-jong	Chae Hee-jong	Ch’oe Yong-gon (deceased)
Cho Myong-rok	Hong Song Nam	Hwang Jang-yop (graduate of 1953)	Chon Mun-sop (deceased)
Ch’oe Yong-rim	Ch’oe Yong-rim	Ch’oe Yong-rim	Kim Ch’ol-man
Chon Byong-ho	Chon Byong-ho	Chon Byong-ho	Kim Gwang-hyop (deceased)
Hyon Jun-guk	Kang Hyon-Su	Hyun Jun-guk	Kye Ung-tae
Kang Sung-san	Kim Gi-nam	Kim Ch’aek (deceased)	Ri Jong-ok (deceased)
Kim Du-nam	Kim Gyong-hee	Kim Du-nam (Soviet Military Academy, graduate of 1963)	Paek Hak-rim

Table IV-4. Educational Background of the DPRK Elites (continued)

Mangyondae School	Kim Il Sung University	Soviet Moscow State University	PRC Yunan Military Academy
Kim Guk-tae	Kim Hwan	Kim Guk-tae (Soviet Military Academy, graduate of 1963)	Park Song-ch'ol
Kim Il Chol	Kim Jong Il	Kim Yong-ju	Yun Gi-bok (deceased)
Kim Jong Il	Kim Yong Nam	Kim Yong Nam (1954)	
Oh Guk-ryol	Soh Yun-sok	Oh Guk-ryol (Soviet Air Force Academy)	
Soh Yun-sok	Kim Yong-sun	Kim Yong-sun (deceased)	
Yong Hyon Muk	Yong Hyon Muk	Kim Yun Hyok (Leningrad Politechnical University)	
		Kye Ung Tae	
		Li Ul Sol (Soviet Military Academy)	
		Pak Nam-gi (Leningrad Politechnical University)	
	Yang Hyong Sop	Yang Hyong Sop	
		Yun Gi-bok (deceased)	

In contrast to technocrats, who tend to be rather pragmatic and progressive in their thinking, the leading ideologues of the current North Korean regime differ widely in their views: from conservative to moderate-conservative to moderate-progressive to progressive. Some of them actually stand behind Kim Jong Il's call for "new thinking" and demonstrate some proclivity for innovative approaches and ideas, whereas others are still aligned with the "old guard" and generally are regarded as the guardians of the revolutionary traditions, proponents of conservative thinking, and defenders of the unified Juch'e party line (see Table 5).

"Local Elites"

The "local elites" represent the voices of the provincial and county administrative and party bosses, as well as local military commanders. These local officials have their own parochial interests and try to shield themselves from political winds in Pyongyang. Table 6 lists some of the most influential local leaders whose opinions are taken seriously in Pyongyang.

Table IV-5. Leading Ideologues Inside the DPRK's Power Elite

Name	Position	Organization	Views
Ch'oe Thae Bok	Secretary for Ideology	WPK Central Committee	Moderate-progressive
Jong Ha Chol	Secretary for Propaganda and Agitation	WPK Central Committee	Moderate-Conservative
Thae Hyong Chol	President Full professor, Doctor of Philosophy, alternate academician	Academy of Social Sciences	Conservative
Seong Ja-rip O Kil Bang Paek Chol	President First Vice-President (Ideology) Vice-President (Science & Technology)	Kim Il Sung University	Moderate-conservative Moderate Progressive
Jang In Su	Secretary for Ideology	WPK Party Committee of Pyongyang City	Conservative
Ryang KyongBok	Director and Editor-in-Chief	WPK Publishing House	Conservative
Cha Kyong Il	President Doctor of Philosophy	Kim Il Sung Political University	Conservative
Choe Chil Nam	Editor-in-Chief	Rodong Sinmun	Moderate-progressive
	Director and Editor-in-Chief	KPA Publishing House (classified materials)	Moderate-conservative
Han Song Bok Ro Chang Dok Kim Pyong-ho	Deputy Directors General	Korean Central News Agency	Moderate-progressive

Table IV-6. List of the Most Influential Provincial Administrative and Party Bosses

Name	Province	Position
Yon Hyong-muk	Jagang	Head of Provincial Party Committee
Kye Ung-Tae	South Pyongan	Head of Provincial Party Committee
Hong Song Nam	South Hamgyong	Head of Provincial Party Committee
Ryang Man Gil	Pyongyang	Head, City People's Committee, General
Pak Su Gil	North Hamgyong	Head of Provincial People's Committee
Yun Sun Byong	North Hamgyong	Head of Provincial Party Committee
Kim P'yong-hae	North Pyongan	Head of Provincial Party Committee
Pak Kyong Sam	North Pyongan	Head of Provincial People's Committee
Kim Il Gun	Kaesong	Head, City People's Committee, General
Ri Ho-yon	Nampo	Head, City People's Committee
Kye Seung-hae	Sinuiju	Governor, Special Administrative Region, General
Kim Un Gi	South Hwanghae	Head of Provincial Party Committee
Ko Jong-deok	Kangwon	Head of Provincial People's Committee

These leaders are very sensitive to regional differences and local problems, which gives rise to provincial regionalism (*chibangjuui*), fueling the revival of traditional region-based factionalism at the center.

It is noteworthy that Kim Jong Il tries to maintain an even balance at the center between the party and military leaders who come from the Hamgyong and Pyongan provinces, i.e., the North Korea's own northerners and southerners. For instance, out of the 54 most influential leaders in North Korea (some of whom are already deceased, to be sure), 24 were born in the Hamgyong provinces, 23 were born in the Pyongan provinces, including the capital area of Pyongyang, and 7 were born overseas (4 in Manchuria, 2 in South Korea, and one in Russia) (see Table 7 for details).

Table IV-7. Regional Origins of Top 54 North Korean Leaders (in alphabetical order)

<u>Hamgyong:</u> North Hamgyong – NH South Hamgyong – SH Ryanggang – RY Jagang - JA	<u>P'yongan:</u> North P'yongan – NP South P'yongan – SP Pyongyang – PY Kangwon - KA	Manchuria	South Korea	Russia
Chae Hi-Jong (SH)	Ch'oe Yong-Kon (NP) (deceased)	ChoMyongRok	Pak Nam-gi	Kim Jong Il
Ch'oe Thae-bok (NH)	Hong Sung-Nam (KA)	Chon Mun Sop (deceased)	Hong Sok-hyung	
Chang Ch'ol (NH) (deceased)	Hwang Jang-Yop (PY) (defected to ROK)	Oh Guk-ryul		
Ch'oe Gwang (NH) (deceased)	Kang Hyun-Su (SP)	Paek Hak-rim		
Ch'oe Yong-rim (RY)	Kang Seok-Ju (PY)			
Chon Byong-ho (NH)	Kim Bok-Shin (SP)			
Han Song-Ryong (NH)	Kim Byong-Ryul (NP)			
Hyon Jun-Guk (SH)	Kim Ch'ol-Man (SP)			
Kang Sung-San (NH)	Kim Du-Nam (NP)			
Kim Ch'aek (SH) (deceased)	Kim Gi-Nam (KA)			
Kim Guk-Tae (NH)	Kim Gwang-Jin (SP)			
Kim Yong-Nam (NH)	Kim Kyong-Hui (PY)			
Kwon He-Gyong (JA)	Kim Hwan (NP)			
Kye Ung-Tae (HN)	Kim Il-Ch'ol (PY)			
Li Jong-Ok (SH) (deceased)	Kim Il Sung (PY) (deceased)			
Li Ui-Sol (SH)	Kim Jung-Rin (PY)			
Paek Nam-Sun (HN)	Kim Yong Ch'un (PY)			
Pak Jae-Gyong (NH)	Kim Yong-Ju (SP)			

Table IV-7. Regional Origins of Top 54 North Korean Leaders (continued)

<u>Hamgyong:</u> North Hamgyong – NH South Hamgyong – SH Ryanggang – RY Jagang - JA	<u>P'yongan:</u> North P'yongan – NP South P'yongan – SP Pyongyang – PY Kangwon - KA	Manchuria	South Korea	Russia
Pak Song-Ch'ol (NH)	Kim Yong-Sun (SP) (deceased)			
Yang Hyong-Sop (SH)	Kim Yun-Hyok (SP)			
Yon Hyong-Muk (NH)	So Yun Sok (SP)			
Yun Gi-Bok (SH) (deceased)	Kang Hui-Won (PY)			
Cho Se-Ung (NH)	Li Gun-Mo (SP) (deceased)			
Hyun Moo-Kwan (NH)				

In general, there always has been latent animosity and competition for central power between the Hamgyong people and the Pyongan people. The Hamgyong people (often referred to as “brambles” or “king brambles” in the DPRK) tend to be clever, competitive, and eager to get ahead. They are tough, realistic, and aggressive in seeking their interests. The Pyongan people (often called “stinges” and “leftover straws”), especially those who come from the capital of Pyongyang, are regarded as being void of substance, selfish, crafty, double-faced, and averse to hard work. They have a reputation for shiftiness and scheming because of their proximity to the halls of power. The role of regionalism, especially the north-south differences, can no longer be ignored in the analysis of the North Korean policymaking.

Local influences also can be felt at the major national public organizations listed in Table 8, and their respective local chapters. Heads of the most influential national social organizations and federations are elected as members of the SPA Presidium, where they represent the interests of their corporate constituencies at the national level.

Table IV-8. Major National Public Organizations

Name	Organization	Position
Pak Sun Hui ⁵²	Korean Democratic Women's Union	Chairwoman of the Central Committee Member
Ri Yong Hui	SPA Presidium	Vice-chairwoman of the Central Committee
Kim Kyong Ho	Kim Il Sung Socialist Youth League SPA Presidium	First Secretary of the Central Committee Member
Kim Sung Chol	Pyongyang City Committee of the Kim Il Sung Socialist Youth League	First Secretary
Ryom Sun Gil	General Federation of Trade Unions of Korea SPA Presidium	Chairman of the Central Committee Member
Song Sok Hwan	General Federation of the Unions of Literature and the Arts of Korea	Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee
Sung Sang Sop	Korean Agricultural Workers' Union SPA Presidium	Chairman of the Central Committee Member
Kim Yong Do	Korean Educational and Cultural Workers' Union	Vice-chairman of the Central Committee (ROK)
Kim Song Guk	Korean Journalists' Union	Chairman of the Central Committee
	Korean Lawyers Committee	
Cho Sang Han Oh-chul	DPRK Olympic Committee DPRK Olympic Committee	Vice-president Secretary
	Korean General Federation of Science and Technology	
	Korean Children's Union	
Pyon Yong Rip	DPRK Academy of Sciences SPA Presidium	President Member
Thae Hyong Chol	DPRK Academy of Social Sciences SPA Presidium	President Member
Kang Yong Sop	Korean Christian Federation SPA Presidium	Chairman Member
Mun Chae Chol Jon Hyon Chan Jon Yong Jin ⁵³	Korean Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries	Acting Chairman Vice-Chairman Vice-Chairman for S&T

⁵² Pak Sun Hui is a daughter of Pak Chong-Ae (1907-1967), a member of the Soviet-Korean faction who was the first Chairwoman of the Korean Democratic Women's League in the 1940s-early 1960s. Pak Chong-Ae was the common-law wife of Kim Yong Bum, Chairman of the North Korean Branch Bureau of the Korean Communist Party in the 1940s. From the early 1950s to 1963, she had accompanied Kim Il Sung at many official functions as the only representative of all Korean women and was one of the most powerful women in the DPRK. In 1965, Pak Chong-Ae was replaced by Mrs. Kim Ok-sun, a guerrilla wife of Ch'oe Gwan, a partisan general and Director of the Political Bureau of the KPA. Following Ch'oe Gwan's purge in 1969, Mrs. Kim Ok-sun was replaced by Kim Il Sung's second wife, Kim Song-Ae, as the Chairwoman of the KDWU. In other words, the top position in the Korean Democratic Women's Union customarily used to go to one of the most powerful women in the country. Now, despite earlier speculations that Kim Jong Il may give this job to his common-law wife, Ko Young Hui, he chose to hand this highly prestigious and coveted post over to the daughter of the founder of the women movement in Korea.

“Foreign Wind”

The “foreign wind” reflects the interests of various compatriot groups, including the Koreans of Chinese, Japanese, Russian, American, and Southern origins. Also, it may be reflected in the parochial interests of the government officials who are responsible for specific neighboring countries in their official duties or who are known to have expressed noticeable interest in certain countries and cultures. Origin, educational background, known policy preferences, and observable interactions with foreign counterparts (job description, participation in international talks, visits to foreign countries, visits to foreign embassies, reception of foreign delegations, etc.) are used as criteria for listing certain individuals in the “foreign wind” group. These people are scattered throughout the entire government and operate in the penumbras of larger and more powerful political forces. They may or may not lobby for certain domestic and foreign policies beneficial or detrimental with respect to the DPRK’s relations with its neighboring countries. Tables 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 list the most influential representatives of the “foreign wind” constituency inside the DPRK’s political elites.

Table IV-9. The Korean-Japanese “Hands”

Name	Position
Ko Young-Hui	Kim Jong Il’s wife, 11 th SPA Deputy
Kang Sok-ju	First Vice Foreign Minister, 11 th SPA Deputy
So Man Sul	11 th SPA Deputy Chairman of the Central Standing Committee of Chongryun
Ho Jong Man	11 th SPA Deputy Chief Vice-Chairman of Chongryun
Ryang Su Jong	11 th SPA Deputy Vice-Chairman of Chongryun Chairman of Korean Federation of Workers of Commerce in Japan
Kim So Ja	11 th SPA Deputy Vice-Chairwoman of Chongryun Chairwoman of Korean Democratic Women’s Union in Japan
Jang Byong Tae	11 th SPA Deputy President of Korea University in Japan
Pak Hui Dok	11 th SPA Deputy Chairman of Economic Committee of Chongryun
Thae Hyong Ch’ol	11 th SPA Deputy President of the Academy of Social Sciences
Kim Gwang-Rin	Chairman of the State Planning Commission
Ko Jung Ho	KPA General and Ko Young-Hui’s relative
Hong Myong-Ryol	Vice-Minister of Agriculture

⁵³ Jon Yong Jin is also a Vice-chairman of the DPRK Committee for Friendship with the British People.

Table IV-9. The Korean-Japanese “Hands”

Name	Position
Jo Ryong Hyon	Vice-Chairman of the Central Standing Committee of the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan
Nam Sung U	Vice-Chairman of the Central Standing Committee of the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan
Kim Yu Ho	Director of the Bureau for the Reception of Overseas Compatriots
Kim Jung Rin ⁵⁴	WPK CC Secretary
Sung Il-ho	Deputy Director, Japan Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Hong Son Ok	Vice-Chairwoman, Korean Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries; Chairwoman, the DPRK Measure Committee for Demanding Compensation to Comfort Women for the Japanese Army and Victims of Forcible Drafting; Chairwoman, the Korean Committee of the International Consultative Council for Solidarity Demanding Japan’s Redress for Its Past Crimes
Kang Ju Il ⁵⁵	WPK CC Deputy Department Director (?) DPRK-Japan Friendship Association
Jong Chang Gyu	Director, History Institute under the Academy of Social Sciences
Ri Jong Hwal	Chairman, Association of Koreans in Japan for Peaceful Reunification
Kenichi Ogami	Secretary-General, International Institute of the <i>Juch’e</i> Idea
Masaharu Ueki	Secretary-General, Japanese Society for the Study of Kimilsungism

⁵⁴ Party Secretary Kim Jung-rin, born in North Hamgyong Province, began his political career in his native provincial party organization where he had worked for a long time before being elected as a candidate member of the WPK CC at the Fourth WPK Party Congress in 1961. His party fortunes rose in the wake of the partisan purge in the late 1960s and fell together with the purge and disappearance of his mentor former Vice-President Kim Tong-gyu, following the latter’s fatal challenge of Kim Il Sung’s succession plans in 1977. Kim Jung Rin was able to recover from his political exile and re-emerged as one of the core members of the “1980 group” supporting Kim Jong Il’s succession process. One of the highlights of his diplomatic career was his service at the North Korean Red Cross, representing the DPRK at the Geneva Red Cross meetings that facilitated the repatriation of Koreans in Japan to the DPRK in the early 1960s. Since that time, Kim Jung Rin is rumored to have always had special interest in Korean-Japanese relations.

⁵⁵ Kang Ju Il is generally considered the WPK CC official in charge of providing leadership for Chongryun. According to Japanese police sources, Kang entered Japan about a dozen times between 1972 and 1996, often as an adviser for a visiting arts group. He is said to have passed on instructions to Chongryun officials aboard the passenger-cargo vessel Man Gyong Bong-92 when it anchored in Niigata. See *Asahi Simbun*, Tokyo, March 11, 2004.



Table IV-10. Some of the Most Influential Figures Among the Korean-Chinese “Hands”

Name	Position
Pak Sung-Ch'ol	Honorary Vice-Chairman of the SPA Presidium
Yang Hyong-Sop	Vice-Chairman of the SPA Presidium
Jong Ha-Ch'ol	WPK CC Secretary (Ideology, Culture, and Arts)
Kang Yong-Ho	Deputy Minister of People's Security
Kim Sang-Ik	Vice-Minister of the People's Armed Forces
Kang Chon-mo	Deputy Chairman of the Foreign Economic Committee, former head of the DPRK Interests Section at the PRC Embassy in Germany
Ryo Chun Sok	Vice-minister of the People's Armed Forces
Ri Pyong Sam	Colonel General of the KPA
Kim Jong-Gi	KPA General
Kim Jin Bom	KPA General
Kim Jong Sik	KPA General
Kim Pyong Ryul	Chief Justice of the DPRK Central Court
Ri Kwang-Gun	Minister of Foreign Trade
Kim Su Hak	Minister of Public Health Chairman of the Central Committee of the DPRK-PRC Friendship Association
Mun Chang Nam	Vice-Minister of Electricity and Coal Industries Director of the Board of the DPRK-PRC Hydro-electrical Power Company
Ko Il Hun	Director of Hydro-meteorological Service
Kim Sang Ho	Vice-Chairman of Korean Journalists' Union
Hong Hwang-Gi	Deputy Editor-in-Chief, Rodong Sinmun
Yang Yong Dong	Chairman, PRC side, General Association of Koreans in China
Ri Chol Jae	Chairman, DPRK side, General Association of Koreans in China
Cha Sang Bo	Vice-Chairman, General Association of Koreans in China
Sim Tong Gol	Vice-minister of Culture
Kim Pong Hyon	Vice-director of the General Civil Aviation Administration
Mun Jae Chol	Acting chairman of the Korean Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries

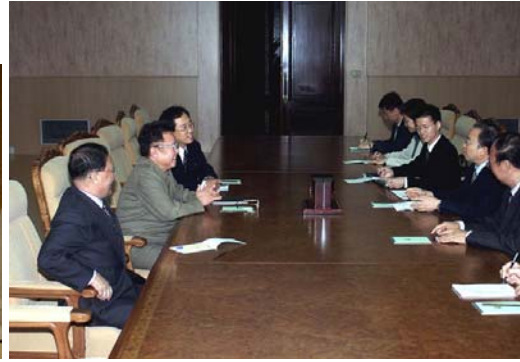


Table IV-11. The North-South “Hands”

Name	Organization	Position
Chang Sung-thaek	WPC CC Organization and Guidance Department	First Deputy Department Director Kim Jong Il's brother-in-law
Rim Dong Ok ⁵⁶	WPK Central Committee Central Bureau for South Korea	First Deputy Department Director (Reunification Front Department)
Kwak Pom Gi	Cabinet of Ministers	Vice-Premier
Jong Mun San	Cabinet of Ministers	Chief Secretary
Kim Ryong Song	Cabinet of Ministers North side delegation to inter-ministerial talks	Chief Councilor Chief Delegate

⁵⁶ Rim Dong-Ok used the alias of Rim Choon-Kil when he participated in the North-South Red Cross talks and working-level interactions with the South in the 1970s-1990s.

Table IV-11. The North-South “Hands” (continued)

Name	Organization	Position
An Kyong Ho ⁵⁷	Committee for Peaceful Reunification of Fatherland WPK CC Central Bureau for South Korea North Headquarters of the National Alliance for the Country's Reunification (Pomminryon)	Director of Secretariat Vice-Chairman for Political Propaganda and Subversion Deputy Department Director (Reunification Front Department) Chairman of the Presidium
Jeong Deog-gi	Committee for Peaceful Reunification of Fatherland	Director-General of the Secretariat
Choe Song Ik	Committee for Peaceful Reunification of Fatherland North side delegation to inter-ministerial talks	Deputy Director of the Secretariat Delegate
Jo Chung Han	National Reconciliation Council	Vice-Chairman
Ho Hyok Phil	National Reconciliation Council	Vice-Chairman
Jong Un Op	National Economic Cooperation Federation	Chairman
Kim Chun Gun	National Economic Cooperation Federation	Secretary-General
Kim Yong Sun (deceased)	Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee	Chairman WPK CC Secretary
Ri Jong Hyok	Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee National Reunification Institute ⁵⁸	Vice-Chairman President
Song Ho Kyong	Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee	Vice-Chairman
Jo Kyu Il	Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland (DFRF)	Director of the Secretariat at the Central Committee
Kang Ryon Hak	Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland (DFRF)	Presidium Member of CC
Kim Wan Su	WPK Central Committee Central Bank	Member Chairman
Pang Jong Sam	Kumgangsan International Tourist General Company	President
Hong Sok-Hyong	WPK Politburo	Alternate member
Pak Kwan Oh	Kim Il Sung University	Former President (born in 1932)
Hong Il Chon	Kim Hyong Jik University of Education	President
Kim Yong Do	Korean Educational and Cultural Workers' Union	Vice-chairman of CC

⁵⁷ An Kyung-ho used the alias of An Byung-soo when he served as the spokesman at the North-South high-level talks in 1991-1992.

⁵⁸ The National Reunification Institute is sometimes referred to as the Research Institute for the Unification of the Fatherland.

Name	Organization	Position
Ro Tu Chol	State Planning Commission	Vice-Chairman
Kim Ryong Gang	Ministry of Railways	Vice-Minister
Pak Jong Song	Ministry of Railways; North-South Panel for Reconnecting Rail and Road Links	Department Director; Chairman of the North Side
Choe Yong Gon	Ministry of Construction and Building Materials Industry North-South Committee for the Promotion of Economic Cooperation	Vice-Minister Vice-Chairman
Jang Il Son	Ministry of Land and Environmental Preservation	Minister
Kim Pyong Chil	Ministry of Land and Environmental Preservation North-South Committee for the Promotion of Economic Cooperation	Department Director Member
Kim Yong Dae	Korean Social Democratic Party National Reconciliation Council	Chairman of CC (since '98) Vice-President of 11 th SPA Chairman
Ryu Mi Yong ⁵⁹	Korean Chondoist Chongu Party Korean Chondoist Church	Chairwoman of CC Member of 11 th SPA Chairwoman of the Central Guidance Committee
Ri Mun Hwan	Korean Chondoist Chongu Party	Vice-Chairman of CC
Jang Jae On ⁶⁰	Korean Council of Religionists and the Roman Catholic Association	Chairman
Pak Tae-ho ⁶¹	Korean Buddhist Federation	Chairman
Hwang Shi Chon	Korean Christian Federation	Deputy Director of International Department
Kim Nam Hyok	Korean Christian Federation	Deputy Director of Organizational Department
n.a.	Pyongyang Mission of the National Democratic Front of South Korea	Hardliners
Ra Chang Sun Ri Kyong Won	South Headquarters of the National Alliance for the Country's Reunification (Pomminryon)	Chairman Secretary General
Ri Kyong Gu Pak Wan Gyu	"Former unconverted long-term prisoners who are pro-unification patriotic fighters"	Hardliners
Jo Chan Gu	Ministry of Culture	Vice-Minister

⁵⁹ Ryu Mi Yong is the wife of the ROK defector to the DPRK Ch'oe Duk Shin. She has served as the Chairwoman of the KCCP Central Committee since 1993.

⁶⁰ Jang Jae On used the alias of Jang Jae-chul when he served as the Chairman of the DPRK Red Cross Society.

⁶¹ Pak Tae-ho used the alias of Pak Tae-hwa in the past.

Song Sok Hwan		Vice-Minister
Cha Sung Su Yang Si Un	DPRK Radio and TV Broadcasting Committee	Chairman Vice-Chairman
Jo Ui Suk	Korean Physical Culture and Sports Guidance Commission	Vice-Chairwoman
Ri Sung Chol	Korean Student Committee	Vice-Chairman
Ho Jong Ho	History Society of the DPRK	Chairman
Mun Yong Ho	Linguistic Institute of the DPRK Academy of Sciences	Director
n.a.	North-South Arrangement-making Panel for Economic Cooperation	





Table IV-12. Some of the Most Important Proponents of Russian Ties

Name	Position
Yon Hyong Muk	Vice-Chairman of National Defense Commission
Kim Yong Chun	Chief of the General Staff and member of NDC
Kim Ki Nam	WPK CC Secretary
Ji Jae Ryong	WPK CC vice department director (international affairs)
O Kuk-ryol	Former KPA Chief of General Staff, WPK CC Secretariat (operations)
Jong Chang Ryol	Vice-Minister of the People's Armed Forces
Pak Jae Gyong	Colonel-General, KPA; Chief of the Propaganda Bureau of the General Political Department
Pak Sung Won	Colonel-General, KPA
Ryo Chun Sok	KPA General
Han Tong Gun	Lt.-Gen., KPA
Pak Kyong Son	WPK CC Vice-Department Director
Hong Son Ok	Vice-Chairwoman, Korean Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries Chairwoman of the DPRK-Russia Friendship Association
Ho Il Jin	Chairman, Korean Orthodox Church Committee Curator, Jeongbaek (Russian Orthodox) Temple
Pak Hyon Jae	Deputy Director, DPRK Institute for Disarmament and Peace





Table IV-13. Korean-American “Interface Elements”

Name	Organization	Position
Kim Kye Gwan	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Vice-Minister
Li Gun	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Deputy Director-General, Bureau of US Affairs, Deputy Director, DPRK Arms Reduction and Peace Institute
Han Song-ryol	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Current DPRK Ambassador to UN in NYC
Pak Gil Yon	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Former DPRK Ambassador to UN in NYC
Li Chang Bok	Korean People’s Army	Col.-Gen., Chief of Panmunjom mission ⁶² (promoted on 10/08/2000)

⁶² The DPRK established the Panmunjom KPA Representative Mission in May 1994 in an attempt to replace the former Military Armistice Commission. Its main duties include management and execution of contacts and talks between the KPA and the UN Command; delivery of the remains of the US servicemen found in the DPRK to the U.N. side; support of the events related to the North-South exchanges; and guarding of the North side of the Joint

Jong Yun-hyong	Flood Damage Reconstruction Committee	Director
Ri Hak Gwan	Committee for Promotion of Investment and Trade	Vice-President
Ri Mun Ho	DPRK Academy of Sciences	Head of Counselors for Science
Jong Hun Il	DPRK Academy of Sciences	Senior Officer, Bureau of International Science and Technology Cooperation
Ri Jun Mu	Federation of Koreans in the U.S.	Chairman of Culture and Arts Committee
Mun Chang Su	Federation of Koreans in Australia	Director of Secretariat
Ju Yong Il	International Confederation of Koreans	Vice-Chairman
Ri Yong Il	North Headquarters of the Nationwide Special Committee for Probing the Truth behind the GIs' Massacres	Vice-Chairman
Jo Hyon Gi	National Bereaved Families Society of Civilian Victims before, after, and during the Korean War	Member of the Executive Committee

The DPRK's neighboring powers, including the Republic of Korea, China, Russia, and Japan, try to use the carriers of "foreign wind" (sometimes regarded as a potential "fifth column" by the regime hard-liners) to penetrate the North Korean political system. They strive to advance their respective national interests through whatever channels and transmission belts they can master, in order to get inside the Kim's family court and exercise direct or indirect influence on Kim Jong Il's thinking about power, policy, and the future direction of the nation.

E. THE BIG PICTURE: FORWARD WITH OR WITHOUT THE KIM REGIME?

Today, North Korea is a different country than it was when the Great Leader passed away a decade ago. It is in the midst of steady, albeit stealthy, structural changes affecting all areas of the national economy, politics, and society, as well as people from all walks of life – the strengthening neo-authoritarian military rule and accelerating catch-up modernization reforms aimed against the communist party rule and socialist economic stagnation.

The four pillars of the traditional political regime – fear, isolation, elite unity, and the Juch'e ideology – began to show noticeable cracks and signs of erosion. First, there is less fear in the country where money is the king and people can buy their way out of any trouble, even exiles to the mines and labor re-education camps. Second, there is less isolation in the country where hundreds of thousands of citizens can go back and forth across its national borders as they do on the Korean-Chinese frontier, where tens of thousands of people use mobile phone services, can watch international television channels, and have access to the Internet, regardless of its censored

Security Area. The KPA Panmunjum Mission also includes Major-General Pak In-soo and Major-General Jo Dong-hyun.

content and government monitoring. Third, there is less elite unity when economic stimulus supplants party loyalty in motivating human behavior, when factionalism and interest group politics re-emerge, and power rivalries, often fuelled by external sources of revenue, intensify with a vengeance. Fourth, there is much less ideology left when the unified Juch'e idea becomes simply what Kim Jong Il says it is, when faith in the infallibility of the semi-divine Dear Leader is broken and cults of personality are disparaged, when traditional religions are revived, and a hope of a new beginning beyond the old Gods begins to glimmer on the horizon.

Kim Jong Il took his country on a path of catch-up modernization and national reconciliation with the South, which can be either complimentary or potentially fraught with many contradictions, difficulties, and dangers. The biggest challenge for him is to preserve his personal power and safeguard the throne for his successors, while reforming his country and engaging the South.

All signs indicate that Kim Jong Il welcomes creeping privatization of public property by the principal state authorities, including the leaders of the armed forces and security services, senior party functionaries, and the "red directorate." If such socio-economic transition in a partially de-industrialized, re-ruralized, extremely atomized, and semi-feudal North Korean society were to proceed without civil strife, one may expect the formation of privatized chaebol-like economic conglomerates on the ruins of the North Korean socialist economic edifice with substantial government stakes in flagship industries. With time, the latter may well be able to attract South Korean investment in the cheap labor-based export-oriented sectors, which could form the growth poles for the long-term recovery of the North Korean economy. Such gradual economic reforms are unlikely to bring prosperity to the DPRK's working classes, but they may bring about a more decent life, at least by removing the daily threat of starvation. If in the process of change the absolute power of the Kim monarchy is to be eroded or curtailed, Kim Jong Il is unlikely to halt the process as long as his dynastic rule is assured of continuing survival.

In 15 to 20 years from now, Kim Jong Il's heir (who is being considered for nomination now) is likely to inherit a very different country, possibly embarked on the military government-sponsored capitalist development road and engulfed in close economic ties with the Republic of Korea. Far from being a bona fide democracy, a post-Kim Jong Il North Korea may well develop into a constitutional monarchy more acceptable to the international community.

If dynastic survival is the paramount strategic goal of the Kim family, then nothing can offer the Dear Leader a better model of dynastic perseverance in the face of tremendous adversity than the Chrysanthemum dynasty in Japan, which survived the U.S. nuclear

bombardment and military occupation in the 1940s and remains one of the symbols of Japanese national power and unity today.

It is no wonder that despite traditional Korean-Japanese animosity, Kim Il Sung is said to have advised Kim Jong Il repeatedly to step back from the domestic political arena and economic policy-making and leave both to the party and government officials, while concentrating his energy on cultivating national military power, advancing the international interests of the DPRK, and acting as a symbol of national unity, sovereignty, and dignity before the North Korean people and the world. If Kim Jong Il succeeds in redefining and re-legitimizing the constitutional space for his absolute monarchy through bold constitutional compromises, and insulates it from political and economic processes pressuring the North Korean society from inside and outside through radical administrative reforms without undermining its charismatic legitimacy, then he may be able to extend its life for generations to come.

The wild card is the set of pressures and incentives presented by the international community in the years to come and the possible reaction of the North Korean national security establishment to these changing external circumstances. If the continuous survival of the Kim Jong Il clan eventually becomes an obstacle and a serious threat to the preservation of the DPRK's national sovereignty and independence for whatever reason (for instance, the threat of the use of force against the regime is substantiated and becomes a "clear and present danger," or the increased possibility of Kim Jong Il's "sell-out" with a "golden parachute" by striking a behind-the-scenes deal on reunification with the ROK leaders, or the uncontrolled escalation of internal civil and political strife fuelled by foreign penetration), then one cannot exclude the possibility that the national security establishment, the primary guarantors and main beneficiaries of the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the DPRK, may orchestrate a swift palace coup against or another car crash accident involving Kim Jong Il and his clan.

They witnessed what the Gorbachev reforms did to the old Soviet Union, which is no more. They observed the chaos and destruction that took place under the liberal democratic Yeltsin regime in the new Russia. Neither alternative is acceptable to them. But, the rise of previously unknown foreign intelligence operative Putin from the bowels of the former Russian KGB monster to unexpectedly take over the helm of the sinking Russian Titanic as a result of the "Grey Colonels coup" inside the Kremlin, and his imposition on Russian chaos of a nationalistic militaristic bureaucratic regime, spear-heading the state-capitalist development and restoring Russia's great power status may well appeal to their imagination.

In order to preserve the national sovereignty against the looming threat of the South-led absorption and abolition of the North Korean state, fraught with the likely decapitation of the

Northern security, military, and party elites, they may decide to move forward without the Kim clan altogether. In the view of some, state survival and Kim regime survival may become incompatible, if the nation were to move from the Gorbachev-like current liberalization reforms to the Putin-style regime with restored order and stability, pursuing the state-led catch-up modernization and defending its independent national identity from the South. In order to skip or leap-frog the “lost decade” of the Yeltsin era, with its destruction of state institutions and tremendous losses of state assets, the outright removal of the Kim regime may become a necessary evil for the die-hard defenders of the North Korean state.

Kim Jong Il is aware of the undercurrent threats to his regime and the many difficulties that lie ahead. He got the message when his closest confidant Kim Yong Sun was killed and his wife Ko Young-Hee was severely hurt in unprecedented car accidents on the almost traffic-less roads in June and October 2003, respectively. His state security chiefs, his bodyguards, his generals, his party entourage, his relatives, and their respective foreign connections – all are suspect. This is a time of rising uncertainty in Pyongyang. The regime is evolving and slowly cracking. It is high time for foreign influence to start shaping the direction of future developments inside the hermit kingdom.

APPENDIX A
FREE MARKET IN RAJIN (16,000 SQ. METERS), OCTOBER 2003



APPENDIX B
TONGIL STREET FREE MARKET IN EAST PYONGYANG, JANUARY 2004



APPENDIX C
COMPUTER LAB AT THE PEOPLE'S STUDY PALACE, INTERNET CAFÉ AT THE TAESONG SHOPPING MALL, AND RESTAURANT IN DOWNTOWN PYONGYANG, DECEMBER 2003



V. REACHING INTO NORTH KOREA

DAVID J. SMITH
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER,
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North Korea is not known as the hermit kingdom without reason. It is difficult to identify target audiences and effective messages and tactics to overcome the considerable barriers to communication. Kim Jong-il has achieved a level of social control and personal adulation that would make Stalin weep.

The power and status of what might be called the North Korean elite are entirely derived from Kim. Some may not like him, but forming even the loosest of associations would require articulating discontent, a crime one commits only once in North Korea. Therefore, there are no independent groups in North Korean society, certainly none based on dissension among the elite. As a consequence, it is more accurate to speak of divisions rather than groups, fault lines rather than fissures. Behind each fault line are a number of North Korean elites, and certain messages - if received - may appeal to them.

North Korea is benighted and desperately poor. That means that among the most important determinants of power are information and money, both commodities that are, to a significant extent, derived outside North Korea. The elites that derive these benefits have some window on the outside world, making them more accessible to us.

In general, the third generation, young people who do not remember what westerners refer to as World War II, probably has a different outlook than its grandparents' generation that fought the Japanese and then the Americans with Kim Il-sung. Younger people are increasingly susceptible to the lure of practical ideas and money, particularly in Pyongyang.

Pyongyang is the center of information. Some residents may have access to the North Korean *Kwangmyong* intranet service. Those who dare may listen to South Korean, American, or British radio broadcasts. Fewer have access to South Korean television. North Korea has a large agency devoted to translating foreign press and broadcast programs. Depending on their position, officials may have access to a translated digest of the foreign media.

Perhaps more interesting is that Kim Jong-il and at least some of the leadership have determined that North Korea must develop information technology to survive. This has given rise to a small elite of mostly young IT professionals. It appears that a very select few may have Internet access for circumscribed purposes. Their computers no doubt are carefully monitored, and they know that security agents are peppered among co-workers and friends. There are also a number of software development joint ventures with China, South Korea, and Japan. Other

interesting developments include a North Korean cellular telephone network and E Mail provided by the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications for certain businesses.

The new high-tech generation will not transform the Kim Jong-il regime, but some of the few selected for this kind of experience may begin to question the tenets of the regime drilled into them since infancy. And these people are all the more susceptible because they are more exposed to information than are other members of the elite. The window may be open just a crack, but it could be made to open wider.

The paper proceeds to examine a number of other divisions with uncommon access to information or money:

- Diplomats speak languages, analyze world situations, entertain foreign visitors, see information from abroad, and serve at foreign posts.
- North Korean diplomats are also an important part of Kim Jong-il's worldwide mafia, charged with bringing in cash to support their own diplomatic missions as well as the regime.
- Closely related is a wider illegal money-making operation known as Bureau 39.
- Back home in North Korea, there have been signs of budding market enterprises, including farmers' markets, restaurants, and city kiosks.

To reach people inside North Korea, radio is probably the single most potent medium. At a time when South Korea is reportedly watering down the content of KBS *Social Education Broadcasting*, broadcast objectives should be reviewed. With accurate news about North Korea as a base, broadcasts should target particular divisions in North Korean society and overcome cognitive dissonance by offering a sense of belonging, and alternative frameworks. Some content should be designed to appeal to small entrepreneurs and exporters, IT professionals, and younger members of the elite, generally.

Other media should not be ignored. We should consider Internet site content that might be attractive to North Korean elites. And experts should study the technical aspects of using the E Mail system, the *Kwangmyong* intranet, and cellular phones. South Korean opponents of Kim Jong-il are very active in the print media, but Americans can become more active.

There also are a number of relevant diplomatic initiatives that should be considered. In particular, Roh Moo-hyun should be encouraged to articulate a South Korean vision of an independent, democratic, peaceful, and prosperous Korea. This would help North Koreans grasp an alternative framework for feelings about their government and their country.

Turning to the darker side, the only way to affect Kim Jong-il's dirty diplomats and Bureau 39 thugs is to squeeze them. A concerted effort to constrict the money flow will send a

message right to Kim Jong-il, and measures can be relaxed or tightened in accordance with the Dear Leader's behavior or with U.S. policy.

There is no easy formula for effectively reaching into North Korea. Physical barriers, fear of punishment, and cognitive dissonance stand in the way. Still, some, whether driven by desperation or uncommon courage, wonder what lies south of the DMZ. Though still a trickle, increasing numbers of North Koreans risk escape from the hermit kingdom. In this light, continuing to communicate with them, and to refine our effort, is a worthy endeavor.

The most reliable method of toppling North Korea's dictatorship is to instill a democratic ideology of valuing human rights into the North Korean people so that they can exert grass roots pressure on North Korean rulers.

Hwang Jang-yop, 2000¹

A. INTRODUCTION

North Korea is not known as the hermit kingdom without reason. Reaching into it is a challenge greater than reaching beyond the Iron Curtain, into Mainland China, or into Iran. It is hard to identify target audiences, effective messages, and tactics to overcome the considerable barriers to communication.

The demilitarized zone (DMZ), starkly dividing North from South Korea, is the epitome of physical barriers. Few North Koreans leave their country, and few of us will ever visit them. Fear of punishment is another barrier. Tinkering with the preset frequencies on North Korean radios is a one-way ticket to a labor camp. But perhaps the greatest barrier to communication with North Koreans is cognitive dissonance. Social control is so complete that skeptics have no other frame of reference. Their support for Dear Leader Kim Jong-il may be skin deep, but they have no context in which to consider alternatives.

Still, some human beings, whether driven by desperation or uncommon courage, wonder what lies south of the DMZ or north of the Tumen River. Defectors report listening to South Korean and American radio broadcasts, such as KBS Social Education Broadcasting, Far East Broadcasting and Radio Free Asia.² Though still a trickle, increasing numbers of North Koreans

¹ Hwang Jang-yop, "Treatise by ex-WPK Secretary Hwang Chang-yop on DPRK's Reunification Strategy," *Seoul Wolgan Choson*, December 1, 2000, FBIS translation KPP20001201000106, pp. 182-214. Hereafter cited as Hwang Jang-yop.

² Paek Sung-ku, "Kim Chong-il Orders to Confiscate Radios, A Conspiracy is Underway to Abolish the KBS Social Education Broadcasting to Keep Step With North Korea's Suspension of Anti-North (sic) Propaganda Broadcasts," *Seoul Wolgan Choson*, September 1, 2003, FBIS translation KPP20030830000035, pp. 249-255. Hereafter cited as Paek Sung-ku.

risk escape from the hermit kingdom.³ And at least one true hero, Ahn Chol, has gone back and forth to bring pictures of tragic North Korea to the outside world.⁴

In this light, continuing to communicate with North Koreans, and to find ways of refining our effort, is a worthy endeavor. This paper contributes to the consideration of potential North Korean audiences, effective messages, and tactics to overcome the barriers to communication.

B. REMOTE, PECULIAR, AND MISERABLE

Reference to the works of Lewis Carroll is the best way to begin any analysis of North Korea, as Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig do in the title of their excellent 2000 book: *North Korea: Through the Looking Glass*.⁵ Everyone knows the story. Stepping through the looking glass, Alice soon finds that she needs a mirror to read the title of an epic poem, *YKCOWREBBAJ*. Then she encounters living chessmen, talking flowers, and the Red Queen, to whom she explains that she has lost her way. “All the ways about here belong to me” retorts the queen!⁶

So it is with North Korea. Oh and Hassig call it “remote and peculiar” and it is, one should add, miserable.⁷ And all the ways about there belong to Kim Jong-il! As one ponders just how to reach the isolated people of North Korea, it is important to bear in mind just how bizarre and perfectly totalitarian the place is.

“Never before has there been such a country,” argues Sin Sang-ok, a South Korean movie director abducted and held by Kim Jong-il.⁸ Although North Korea is sometimes dubbed “Stalinist” or “communist,” no “ist” really applies because it is truly unique. Indeed, Kim Il-sung and his son, Kim Jong-il, have achieved a level of social control and personal adulation that would make Stalin weep. Moreover, North Korea’s ideology is *Juche*, not communism - Marxism has been removed from the constitution and the charter of the Korean Workers’ Party. *Juche* is commonly translated as self-reliance, but it is a singular Korean blend of nationalism, socialism, Confucianism, and just plain authoritarianism, all twisted around to legitimize the absolute rule of the Kim dynasty.

³ “Some 15,000 N., Korean Soldiers Go AWOL in 2001-2002,” *Seoul Yonhap*, September 26, 2003, FBIS translation KPP20030926000088; “249 N. Koreans Enter S. Korea via South’s Diplomatic Missions,” *Seoul, Yonhap*, October 9, 2003, FBIS translation KPP20031009000012.

⁴ Gripping video taken by Ahn Chol is featured in *Children of the Secret State*, broadcast on the Discovery Times Channel, August 19, 2003.

⁵ Oh, Kongdan & Ralph C. Hassig, *North Korea: Through the Looking Glass*, Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000, hereafter cited as Oh & Hassig.

⁶ Carroll, Lewis, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*, New York, Bantam Books, 1998, pp. 113-125.

⁷ Oh & Hassig p. xiv.

⁸ Sin Sang-ok, “ROK Movie Director Sends ‘Open Letter’ to President Kim Tae-chung,” *Seoul, Wolgan Choson*, October 1, 2001, FBIS translation KPP20010924000017, pp. 138-156. Hereafter cited as Sin Sang-ok.

The Kims rule with a heavy dose of mysticism. The late Kim Il-sung remains president for eternity - Kim Jong-il rules as Chairman of the National Defense Committee. Born in a Soviet refugee camp, Kim Jong-il claims to have been born at the foot of Mount Paektu, the traditional birthplace of the Korean people. Deer from that mountain wander his Pyongyang palace grounds, and only wood gathered from Mount Paektu can cook his food. Speculation is rife about which son Kim Jong-il will name as successor, and when,⁹ but there is no doubt he will try to install a third generation Kim at the helm.

Kim is revered as the *dear leader*, *great general*, and even *matchless hero who rules the world with great virtue*. But a *Nodong Sinmun* editorial shows that all bounds have been broken with regard to glorification of Kim Jong-il:

We shall believe in and follow General Kim Chong-il, the peoples' leader who has taken over the magnificent achievements of *Juche* ideology as a god...We shall live our life, trusting the great general as god. That is the banner of our eternal victory.¹⁰

Newspapers and books are replete with passages such as:

The great leader, Comrade Kim Chong-il, has pointed out the following: **“Today, the heavy and honorable duty of further developing the country’s communications is presented before us.”**¹¹

The Dear Leader is credited with authoring thousands of articles on *Juche*, and he dispenses advice on weighty matters of state, as well as on everything else from the design of uniforms for Pyongyang’s (female) traffic police to the proper feeding of the rhinoceros at the capital’s zoo. North Korea is a leader-dominant state like no other.

C. NORTH KOREAN SOCIETY

All this matters for the consideration of potential North Korean audiences. With such absolute and total power, the Kim’s have literally redrawn social structures in North Korea.

⁹ Speculation has recently been revived by yet another report that Kim Jong-il is ill, coinciding with Kim Jong-nam returning from abroad. “Kim Chong-il Enters Hospital To Receive Emergency Treatment for Serious Liver Disease: Will the Kim Dynasty Collapse Finally?”, *Tokyo Shukan Bunshun*, January 22, 2004, p. 28-31, FBIS translation JPP20040116000057; Ko Sung-il, “Shukan Bunshun - Rumors of Chairman Kim Chong-il Having a Liver Trouble,” *Seoul Yonhap*, January 15, 2004, as translated and re-titled by FBIS KPP2004011600007.

¹⁰ Kentaro Isomura, “Interpretation of the ‘New Order’ in North Korean Leadership; Mr. Kim Chong-il Is Now a ‘God’,” *Tokyo AERA*, March 10, 1997, FBIS document FTS19970521000883.

¹¹ Yi Pyong-ch’un, “DPRK Ministry Reports Progress in Mobile Telecommunications Network Construction Nationwide,” *Pyongyang Nodong Sinmun*, September 14, 2003, FBIS translation KPP20030924000114, p.3. The bolding represents how such a passage would appear in a North Korean newspaper. Hereafter cited as Telecommunications Progress.

Society is divided into three broad groups delineated by Kim Il-sung: core, wavering, and hostile. Each of these is, in turn, divided into a total of 51 sub-groups, based on pre-liberation (from Japanese occupation) family status. Social mobility is rare.

Members of the core group carry out Kim Jong-il's orders, run the state apparatus, and perform other functions deemed necessary to the state. These people comprise an elite in the sense that they occupy the most important positions and have power over certain situations and people. They are rewarded with housing, medical care, education, and goods unavailable to ordinary citizens. However, just as North Korea is a leader-dominant society like no other, its elite is like no other because its status and power are entirely derived from the Kims.

Revolutions in other countries have, to be sure, jumbled societies, purging traditional elites and catapulting lower or marginalized groups to the fore. But no matter how a society is recast, one would expect to find at least some elites come to the table with power derived from a variety of power bases - military, labor, religious, regional, ethnic, linguistic, business, academic, etc. In North Korea, Kim Jong-il bestows power, status, and perquisites. The organizational chart of the upper strata of North Korean society would resemble spokes on a bicycle wheel with no rim and no tire. Those closer to Kim Jong-il - the hub - rank higher than those farther out, with no connection among the spokes, except at the hub.

These people did not achieve their positions without making personal calculations. They must have likes and dislikes, and some of them may not like Kim Jong-il. As Oh and Hassig explain, "the greatest threat to the security of the Kim regime would come from a palace coup by top cadres or by the security people."¹² Kim Jong-il knows this and guards against it. A former bodyguard recounts that when the Dear Leader visits Peoples' Army units, soldiers must unload their weapons, air activity in the vicinity is prohibited, and his personal bodyguards keep even security agents 1,000 meters away.¹³ Sin Sang-ok suggests that when the Dear Leader traveled to Moscow, he "took about 150 people with him on the train because they were the people likely to revolt during his absence."¹⁴

However, knowing that there must be discontent, and finding it, are different things. Forming even the loosest of associations would require articulating discontent, a crime one commits only once in North Korea. Therefore, there are no independent groups in North Korean society, certainly none based on dissension among the elite. Consequently, it is more accurate to

¹² Oh & Hassig, p. 38. For a good analysis of the North Korean social structure and political control, see Chapter Six, pp. 127-147.

¹³ "DPRK Leader's Former Bodyguard Describes Security Procedures on Inspection Tours," *Seoul Nanun Kim Chong-il Kyonghowoniotta*, p. 5, November 20, 2002, FBIS translation KPP20030124000045.

¹⁴ Sin Sang-ok.

speak of divisions instead of groups, fault lines instead of fissures. Research can suggest where the fault lines lie, but it is far more difficult to know who belongs to which division, what they know and how they know it, what they think though dare not say, and how they might react to a particular emergent situation. Nonetheless, behind each fault line are a number of North Korean elites, and certain messages, if received, are bound to appeal to them.

There are a number of fault lines to analyze: the so-called “lesser” versus “greater” branches of the Kim family, Kim Il-sung confidants versus Kim Jong-il confidants, the Korean Workers’ Party versus the Korean Peoples’ Army, soldiers versus generals, army versus local people, the First Security Department versus the Second, and no doubt more. Recently gaining some attention in the press is a potential fault line within the Kim family that may underlie the succession to Kim Jong-il. Will Kim appoint his eldest son, Kim Jong-nam, born of Sung Hae-rim? Or will he name the younger Kim Jong-chul, or the younger yet Kim Jong-woon, both born of Ko Yong-hee?¹⁵ This is an important matter and we should analyze all available information. However, it is hard to glean more than anecdotes and harder still to know how to affect the outcome.

However, there may be some fault lines and divisions more susceptible to analysis and outside influence. North Korea is benighted and desperately poor. That means that among the most important determinants of power are information and money, both commodities that are to a significant extent derived outside North Korea. The elites that derive these benefits have some window on the outside world, making them more accessible to us. We should examine North Korean elites and some of their avenues to outside information and money.

D. THE ELITE IN GENERAL

Bearing in mind the qualifications just outlined, it is reasonable to say that North Korea has an elite, centered in Pyongyang. Among this elite, architects of South Korea’s “sunshine policy” such as former president Kim Dae-jung and his reunification aide Lim Dong-wan purport to see traditionalists and reformers, hawks and doves. Some western observers agree.¹⁶ Frankly, their case is overstated.

Oh and Hassig point out that, “most likely the elite population, as well as the masses, rarely engages in political thought, thereby avoiding the discomfort of cognitive

¹⁵ Fairclough, Gordon, “Pyongyang Place: The Family Saga of Kim Jong Il,” *The Wall Street Journal*, p. A1, October 10, 2003; “Japanese Weekly Examines Reports that ‘Big Change to Occur Soon in North Korea’,” *Tokyo AERA in Japanese*, p. 76-77, October 6, 2003, FBIS translation JPP20030930000154.

¹⁶ Harrison, Selig, “North Korean ‘Good Guys’ require U.S. Assistance,” *USA Today*, p. 13A, January 7, 2004.

contradictions.”¹⁷ This makes sense for two reasons. First, members of the elite are creatures of Kim Jong-il, and he and his father are the only authority figures they have ever known. Second, Kim Jong-il keeps things as they are by meting out severe punishment for even inadvertent slights, not to mention opposition: possibly death, and certainly a labor camp for the offender and his family, extending as far as seventh cousins.¹⁸

In such a stark and brutal regime, it is likely that among some elites support for the Dear Leader and *Juche* is rather shallow. Given the chance, they might grasp at alternatives, but, a prominent defector notes, “they couldn’t find any alternative...they just live on a day-to-day basis.”¹⁹ That said, there no doubt are divisions among the elite and the most likely fault line is generational.

The third generation, young people who do not remember what westerners refer to as World War II, probably has a different outlook than its grandparents’ generation that fought the Japanese and then the Americans with Kim Il-sung. Oh contrasts the outlooks of the two generations as “old glory” and “new opportunities.”²⁰ An aid worker who visits North Korea frequently elaborates. The younger elite, he says, is more numerate and less ideological. “Corruption and the power of money appear to be gaining power over party rule.”²¹ It is unnecessary to determine whether the former has truly overtaken the latter to accept this expert’s point that younger people are increasingly susceptible to the lure of practical ideas and money.

One would be most likely to observe this phenomenon in Pyongyang. Kim Jong-il’s regime carefully controls residency in the capital, so just to live in Pyongyang denotes something of elite status. But of course, that elite extends from Kim Jong-il’s inner circle - probably no more than a dozen to a score of people - through senior military, party, and government officials, the middle ranks, out to, say, schoolteachers who instruct the children of the elite.

E. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

“The center of information,” writes the *Seoul Choson Ilbo*, “is naturally Pyongyang.” Pyongyang residents have more access to the official information sources, although these carry nearly pure propaganda. “In the absence of information,” *Choson Ilbo* continues, “the public is sensitive to rumors, most of which turn out to be true.” If something happens in the capital, residents of other cities will start hearing of it when the next train arrives from Pyongyang. The

¹⁷ Oh & Hassig p. 39.

¹⁸ Kongdan Oh, presentation to the National Institute for Public Policy, “Who is the DPRK? Decisionmaking and the Regime,” September 12, 2002. Hereafter cited as Oh presentation.

¹⁹ Yun Seong-su, speech to the Defense Forum Foundation, May 17, 2002.

²⁰ Oh presentation.

²¹ Aid worker presentation to the National Institute for Public Policy, September 6, 2002.

Seoul newspaper goes on to describe how children of the elite, though carefully watched, swap stories at institutions such as Pyongyang University of Foreign Studies and Kim Il-sung University.²² Some Pyongyang residents may have access to the North Korean *Kwangmyong* intranet service.²³ Those who dare may listen to South Korean, American, or British radio broadcasts.²⁴

Fewer would have access to South Korean television. Kim Jong-il lets his few visitors know that he watches South Korean television. His residences have cable access to these, plus to broadcasts from Japan and Russia.²⁵ It is possible that his inner circle enjoys some of these privileges some of the time, but unlikely that many more do.

North Korea has a large agency devoted to translating foreign press and broadcast programs.²⁶ The people involved in this process obviously have access to these. Depending on their position, other officials may have access to a translated digest of the foreign media.²⁷ We know the North Korean government pays attention to the South Korean and western press because Pyongyang often directly responds to particular articles.²⁸ Though these feisty rejoinders frequently reveal bizarre misconceptions,²⁹ the people involved in this process - from translation to response - have some knowledge of media content outside of North Korea.

Much has been made of Kim Jong-il's Internet prowess - he even had his personal armored train wired for Internet access.³⁰ Very few other North Koreans would have access to the Internet; however, there may be some exceptions. A 2001 article in *Minju Choson* lionized Hwang Tok-man, a young biologist. After pointing out that Hwang was inspired by Kim Jong-il's declaration of the 21st. Century as the era of information technology, the government newspaper goes on to detail that Hwang's research involved retrieving data from the U.S. Department of Energy's Brookhaven National Laboratory's Protein Database.³¹ While the

²² "Article Views Public's Access to, Spread of Information, News in DPRK," from *Seoul Choson Ilbo* (Internet edition), April 1, 2001, FBIS translation KPP20010429000034. Hereafter cited as Choson Ilbo.

²³ Oh presentation.

²⁴ See Choson Ilbo and Paek Sung-ku.

²⁵ "Kimraderie, At Last," *The Economist*, June 17, 2000, p. 41; "Full Dialog Between DPRK Leader, ROK Media Delegation," *Yonhap*, August 13, 2000, FBIS translation 20000814000035; Interview with ROK Unification Ministry official Park Kwang-ho, August 2, 2002. Hereafter cited as Park interview.

²⁶ Park interview.

²⁷ Oh presentation.

²⁸ Park interview.

²⁹ The book, *Stupid White Men*, lampooning the George W. Bush administration was taken as serious American commentary in, "Stinging Satire of Current U.S. Administration," *Nodong Sinmun*, July 24, 2002, FBIS translation KPP20020806000025.

³⁰ Seo Soo-min, "Kim Jong-il's Railroad Trip to Moscow," *The Korea Times*, July 28, 2001.

³¹ "DPRK Rising Biologist Hwang Tok-man Featured," *Minju Choson*, July 21, 2001, FBIS translation KPP20010904000142.

Internet is not specifically mentioned, it appears that a very select few may have access for no doubt clearly circumscribed purposes. Such people are surely among the most trusted and the most monitored in the country, but they may also be among the most curious.

F. NORTH KOREA'S IT ERA

Whether her own words or supplied by the helpful writers at *Minju Choson*, Hwang Tok-man's invocation of a Kim Jong-il-inspired information technology era may indicate a chink in the Dear Leader's armor. Kim has also dubbed this, "the age of science, technology and computers."³² His eldest son, Kim Jong-nam, was appointed by his father as head of the North Korean Computer Committee.³³ All this adds up to indicate that Kim Jong-il and at least some of the leadership have determined that North Korea must develop certain advanced technologies in order to survive, if not compete with the outside world.

The reality is, of course, that the information revolution is distancing Seoul from Pyongyang by orders of magnitude at an ever-increasing rate. That some North Korean leaders have grasped this indicates that they have some idea of developments - and their implications - in the outside world. How they deal with this may prove the downfall of the Kim regime, just as President Ronald Reagan predicted communication would topple the already teetering Soviet Union.³⁴

The Korean Workers' Party newspaper *Nodong Sinmun* reports three areas in which "primary efforts should be directed:" information technology, nanotechnology, and bioengineering.³⁵ (Hwang's research involves two of these!) This drive has resulted in a number of developments that affect how various members of the North Korean elite may receive some information from outside the country.

Though the numbers are yet small, Dr. Hwang cannot be the only researcher with limited access to the outside world, probably via the Internet. Even if she never manages a peek at AskJeeves.com, she must be awed by the quantity and quality of data openly available from the Brookhaven National Laboratory site. Colleagues will find similar offerings on sites pertaining to their respective fields. Their computers are no doubt carefully monitored and they know that

³² Song Sun-sop, "Developments in North Korea's IT Sector, and North-South Exchanges and Cooperation Following the Joint Declaration of 15 June 2000," *Seoul Pukhan*, December 1, 2001, FBIS translation KPP2001121000045. Hereafter cited as Song Sun-sop.

³³ Lee Kyo-kwan, "Kim Jong-il's Eldest Son Heads the IT Industry in NK," *NKchosun.com*, posted April 23, 2001. (nk.chosun.com)

³⁴ President Ronald Reagan, Speech at Moscow State University, USSR, May 31, 1988. Text of the speech is available Online at http://www.forerunner.com/forerunner/X0692_Reagans_Speech_in_Mo.html.

³⁵ FBIS Report, "DPRK Channeling Foreign Information Technology, Information to Regime Goals," November 24, 2003, KPP20031124000116. Hereafter cited as FBIS Report (IT).

security agents are peppered among co-workers and friends. Still, the eyes of intelligent, educated people see what they see, and this cannot help but have some effect.

Although we must be cautious about reports originating in Pyongyang, it is worth noting here that KCNA has reported that since March 2003 E-Mail has been available to North Korean businesses through the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications.³⁶ It may not be as much of a “growing trend,” as KCNA says, and access is surely circumscribed and monitored. Nonetheless, even communications of a strictly business nature open a window, if only a crack, and even if only to a few. Meanwhile, an Internet cafe has opened in Pyongyang. Reportedly, high prices restrict the clientele to foreign officials based in Pyongyang³⁷

Another interesting development has been a North Korean cellular telephone network. Naturally, “the great general personally selected the mobile communications network format.”³⁸ According to North Korean reports, there are now 20,000 subscribers. Ten base sites have been erected in Pyongyang and 40 nationwide, toward a planned total of 59. Apparently, cost keeps most North Koreans from cell phone service - the initial cost can be as much as \$1,200. Again, we should be suspicious, particularly of the numbers reported, but a cellular telephone network of any kind and size in North Korea is big news.³⁹

Some other indications of Pyongyang’s budding interest in information technology include holding the Pyongyang International Science and Technical Book Exhibition since 2001, and reportedly even buying books on Amazon.com. Also, a number of North Korean technical delegations have attended events such as the China International Software and Information Service Fair in Dalian and the World PC Expo in Tokyo. A North Korean “Go” computer game team has traveled to a number of international competitions.⁴⁰

There also are a number of software development joint ventures with China, South Korea, and Koreans in Japan.⁴¹ Reportedly, North Korean interest in IT industry development has even

³⁶ Kim Chi-yong, “Fatherland News: KCNA Transmits Photo Regarding Service Provided by International Telecommunications Bureau,” *Tokyo Choson Silbo* (Internet version), November 29, 2003, FBIS translation KPP20031129000026. Note that *Choson Silbo* is a pro-Pyongyang newspaper in Japan, citing KCNA, North Korea’s official broadcast service.

³⁷ FBIS Report (IT).

³⁸ Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM).

³⁹ Telecommunications Progress; “Choson Sinbo Notes Number of DPRK Mobile Phone Subscribers Surpasses 20,000,” *Seoul Yonhap*, December 4, 2003, FBIS translation KPP20031204000063, hereafter cited as DPRK Mobile Phone; “DPRK Minister Discusses Telecom Development for International Communications,” *Pyongyang KCNA*, October 1, 2003, 1042 GMT, FBIS translation KPP20031002000047.

⁴⁰ FBIS Report (IT).

⁴¹ *Ibid.* See also Song Sun-sop, however, beware that this is written by a South Korean Unification Ministry official whose purpose is to advance “Sunshine Policy.” The quality and extent of North-South IT ventures may not be all he describes.

led to a training program for young North Korean programmers at the Hanna Program Center in Dandong, China.⁴² (Dandong is just across the Yalu River from North Korea's Sinuiju Special Economic Zone.) Interestingly, another report indicates that Pyongyang has sent a number of officials to Ho Chi Minh City and to Hanoi for training on market economies with professors from the Stockholm School of Economics.⁴³

Of course, neither Dandong nor Hanoi is anything close to cosmopolitan, but these are still major steps for North Korea. To put it in perspective, defector Yun Seong-su says he fled in 1998 because he was accused of having too much overseas experience as a State Security Department agent in northern North Korea. Yun's job was to return North Korean refugees who had fled into China. His overseas experience was traveling across the Tumen River into parts of northeast China far less sophisticated than Dandong.⁴⁴

It would be nice to think that a new high-tech day is dawning over North Korea, but that would be a mistake. A number of qualifications must be considered. First, while there is surely at least a kernel of truth to everything presented above, it may be exaggerated by North Korean propagandists or South Korean sunshiners. Second, exaggerated or not, North Korea's high-tech ventures will fail to save its economy without a systemic overhaul, of which the regime is incapable.

The third point to consider is that Kim Jong-il's regime will remain what it is, so long as Kim is there. The most expansive aspects of North Korea's IT efforts involve only a few people who no doubt are highly trusted - and highly monitored. They will be asked to turn their new talents toward strengthening the Kim regime, including using information technology for more effective propaganda and social control. We should recall the words of Hwang Jang-yop:

Only a select few people are allowed to go overseas, and when they return, they are permitted only to stress the negative aspects of foreign countries. They also have actively to propagandize how the North Korean leader is respected even in foreign countries.⁴⁵

So, the point here is not that a new high-tech generation will transform the Kim Jong-il regime; rather, it is simply that some of the few selected for this kind of experience will begin to question the tenets of the regime drilled into them since infancy. And these people are all the

⁴² FBIS Report, "DPRK-ROK IT Venture in China Developing DPRK Software Expertise," January 4, 2004, KPP20040107000119.

⁴³ "DPRK Officials Receive Training on Market Economy in Vietnam," *Seoul Yonhap*, January 5, 2004, 0902 GMT, FBIS translation KPP20040105000091.

⁴⁴ Interview with Yun Seong-Su, North Korean Defector, May 16, 2002.

⁴⁵ Hwang Jang-yop.

more susceptible because they are more exposed to information than other members of the elite. The window may be open just a crack, but it could be made to open wider.

G. DIPLOMATS: LICIT

Another subset of the elite with uncommon access to information is the diplomatic corps. Diplomats always have a perspective different from other officials because their experience is different from their colleagues'. They speak languages, analyze world situations, entertain foreign visitors, see information from abroad, and serve at foreign posts. In this sense, North Korean diplomats share some traits with South Korean, Japanese, or western counterparts. This may be unremarkable in our societies, but in North Korea it places at least some of them, particularly the younger ones, in what Oh describes as the new opportunities group. They may be at varying stages of disillusionment with the Kim Jong-il regime, looking for fresh ideas consistent with the interests of their country.

But as in all things North Korean, commonalities with the outside world are limited. The North Korean diplomatic corps is a service like no other. Its members are carefully watched by the various security agencies of their own country and, when abroad, kept under careful surveillance by the host country. Their movements are limited and their contacts are confined to countries with which they have diplomatic relations. Compared to South Korean, Japanese, or western diplomats, their experience is very limited, but it is expansive compared to other North Koreans, including members of the domestic elite.

A North Korean diplomat in New York, for instance, would not get more than a formal "good morning" from an American diplomat. He would have to receive permission from the U.S. State Department to travel outside a prescribed radius around the city - but there is plenty to see in New York City. It would not take more than the ride in from JFK Airport to observe that New York, not Pyongyang, is the center of the universe. Though they remain first-class rhetoricians on behalf of Kim Jong-il's regime, many North Korean diplomats must be silently seeking alternative explanations.

H. DIPLOMATS: ILLICIT

Sadly, North Korean diplomats also bear another distinction: they are part of Kim Jong-il's worldwide mafia, charged with bringing in cash to support their own diplomatic missions as well as the Dear Leader's regime.

North Korea's economy is a shambles and getting worse. Recent Congressional testimony of the Heritage Foundation's Larry M. Wortzel sums up the situation nicely.

North Korea's exports from legitimate businesses in 2001 totaled just \$650 million, according to Wall Street Journal reports of April 23, 2003, citing South Korea's central bank. Income to Pyongyang from illegal drugs in the same year ran between \$500 million and \$1 billion, while missile sales earned Pyongyang \$560 million in 2001. North Korea is producing some 40 tons of opium a year, according to U.S. Forces Korea officials cited in *The Guardian* on January 20, 2003, and earns some \$100 million a year from counterfeiting currency.⁴⁶

Economist Nicholas Eberstadt calculates that Kim Jong-il uses income of about \$1.2 billion per year just to keep his regime on life support. But it cannot do what would be necessary to overhaul the economy without dismantling its crippling "military first" policy.⁴⁷ That would undermine Kim's quest for Korean unification, which is the sole source of his regime's legitimacy. Sin Sang-ok sums it up pithily: "the nature of North Korean society dictates that Kim Chong-il cannot change and that his changing will mean his death."⁴⁸

To survive, the regime has turned to crime. Food crops, for example, have been abandoned in favor of opium. South Korean intelligence believes that opium production expanded from 4.3 million square meters in 1992 to 72 million square meters in 1994. Kim Ah-young of Pacific Forum CSIS writes, "government factories reportedly process the cultivated opium into heroin, and then companies and diplomatic economic departments distribute it."⁴⁹ Like the farmers, diplomats have been suborned to crime.

"Few North Korean embassies," writes Joshua Kurlantzick in *The New Republic*, "receive any money at all from Pyongyang, forcing them to fend for themselves. Nonetheless, if they can obtain enough money on their own, these diplomats can enjoy a capitalist lifestyle."⁵⁰ In other words, North Korean diplomats have become a subset of the elite that is well informed, exposed to the outside world, and all too capitalist! They can be reached, not with lofty ideals, but with the language of a New York City cop. The tale of Kim Jong-il's dirty diplomats is so bizarre that a few examples are required to gain credibility.

⁴⁶ Wortzel, Larry M., *North Korea's Connection to International Trade in Drugs, Counterfeiting and Arms*, May 20, 2003, testimony before the Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Financial Management, Budget, and International Security, published by The Heritage Foundation at <www.heritage.org>. Hereafter cited as Wortzel.

⁴⁷ Interview with Dr. Nicholas Eberstadt, January 12, 2004.

⁴⁸ Sin Sang-ok.

⁴⁹ Kim Ah-young, "Targeting Pyongyang's Drug Trade Addiction," June 18, 2003, <www.atimes.com>, with permission of Pacific Forum CSIS.

⁵⁰ Kurlantzick, Joshua, "Traffic Pattern," *The New Republic*, March 24, 2003, p. 12.

About 40 percent of the heroin, methamphetamine, and opium consumed in South Korea and Japan originates in North Korea; some has reached the streets of New York.⁵¹ And North Korea's diplomatic corps has been serving as suppliers and mules, including using the diplomatic pouch for drug trafficking.⁵² Incidents have been reported since 1976 in Egypt, China, Russia, Germany, the Czech Republic, Venezuela, India, Nepal, Sweden, Zambia, Ethiopia, and Laos. Drugs included heroin, hashish, cocaine, rohypnol, and opium.⁵³

With regard to weapons, we usually focus on North Korea's lucrative missile trade, but an estimated 40 percent of their arms income is derived from sales of conventional weapons.⁵⁴ For example, Han Chong-li, accredited as a North Korean diplomat in Hungary, reportedly dealt in F-16s and torpedoes before his 2000 expulsion for activities inconsistent with his position.⁵⁵ Moreover, North Korean diplomats have been caught gathering military technology for North Korea's missile and nuclear programs. In 1993, when former Soviet scientists were looking for any kind of work, military attaché Nam Gae-wok was expelled from Russia for recruiting missile and space experts.⁵⁶

And many such deals have no doubt been paid for with Pyongyang's own counterfeit dollars and yen. One estimate says that North Korea prints \$10 to \$15 million per year.⁵⁷ Entire cases of fake money have been confiscated in Southeast Asia.⁵⁸ Moreover, counterfeiting arrests reveal that North Korea supplies diplomatic passports to some of its operatives who do not even pretend to be diplomats.

Finally, though the extent of the North Korean diplomatic corps' involvement in trafficking endangered species is uncertain, a few examples underscore the extent of its criminality. The Environmental Investigation Agency reports that North Korean diplomats have

⁵¹ Solomon, Jay, and Jason Dean, "Heroin bust point to source of funds for North Korea," *Wall Street Journal*, April 23, 2003; Ch'oe Yong-chae, "Reporter Ch'oe Yong-chae, Disguised as a Drug Dealer, Witnessed the Secret Dealing of North Korea-manufactured Drugs – 'Life? We Cannot Guarantee You Life. Merchandise? We Can Guarantee You That'," *Seoul Singdong-a*, 1 September 2002, FBIS document KPP20020827000033.

⁵² Perl, Raphael F., "Drug Trafficking and North Korea: Issues for U.S. Policy," *CRS Report for Congress*, page 6-7, December 5, 2003.

⁵³ Ibid; Hwang, Balbina, "Curtailling North Korea's Illicit Activities," *Heritage Foundation Backgrounders*, August 26, 2003.

⁵⁴ Lintner, Bertil, "North Korea's Missile Trade Helps Fund its Nuclear Program," *Yale Global Online*, May 5, 2003, available Online at <<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=1546>>.

⁵⁵ Ronay, Gabriel, "North Korean Diplomat on Trial for Arms Smuggling," *Sunday Herald*, July 7, 2002.

⁵⁶ McElvoy, Anne, and Wolfgang Munchau, "Russia Foils North Korea Plot to Hire Nuclear Team," *The Times*, November 17, 1993.

⁵⁷ Kaplan, David E., "The Far East Sopranos," *US News and World Report*, January 27, 2003, page 34; Rathbone, Owen, "North Korea: A Gangster State," *American Daily*, April 27, 2003.

⁵⁸ Lilley, James R., "North Korea – A Continuing Threat," *Testimony at the House Committee on International Relations*, Washington DC, March 24, 1999, available Online at <http://www.aei.org/news/newsID.17032/news_detail.asp>.

been the biggest buyers of ivory over the last decade.⁵⁹ They are involved in rhinoceros horns too. But the prize surely goes to Kim Yong-chal who was detained in 1998 at a Paris airport with 600 kilograms of elephant tusks in twenty suitcases. Just a year later, Kenyan authorities detained Kim with 188 elephant tusks weighing 700 kilograms!⁶⁰

Other incidents have been reported involving gold, pirated CDs, and bootleg alcohol and tobacco. All this would be humorous if it were not so tragic and dangerous.

The point is that, although some North Korean diplomats may have new opportunities and outlooks, many others are interested in plain criminal opportunities. These people form a sort of elite in North Korean society because they have information and money - and they are vital to Kim Jong-il's regime. They are too valuable and too dangerous to bring home, so they probably have little impact on day-to-day thinking in the capital. But if their sources of income were to be squeezed, the cries would no doubt be heard in the highest places in Pyongyang.

I. BUREAU 39

North Korea's illicit diplomats are plugged into a much wider money-making operation that provides them with banks and trading companies to facilitate their drugs, arms, and counterfeiting capers. Bureau 39 - within the Finance and Accounting Department of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party - is the nerve center of Pyongyang's legal and illegal ventures. Over the years, it is said to have accumulated reserves of \$5 billion in offshore accounts, while funneling money to Kim Jong-il's slush fund and to North Korea's military programs.⁶¹

Bureau 39 has some legitimate product lines, such as exotic mushrooms and ginseng, but its big cash comes from drugs and arms. The Bureau operates through at least ten trading companies and its own Golden Star Bank with branches in Beijing, Macau, Singapore, and Vienna.⁶² Austrian intelligence reports that Golden Star in Vienna provides cover for North Korea's operatives in Europe and facilitates the trade in missiles and technology.⁶³

⁵⁹ "Intl Organization Denounces DPRK for Ivory Smuggling," *Yonhap* 2 April 2000, FBIS document KPP20000402000008.

⁶⁰ "Lethal Experiment: Ivory Seizures Soar," Report by *Environmental Investigation Agency* available Online at <<http://www.salvonet.com/eia/old-reports/Elephants/Reports/lethExp/>>; "Arrested N. Korean diplomat flees Kenya," Japan Economic Newswire, October 8, 1999.

⁶¹ "In NK, Secret Cash Hoard Props up regime," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 2003. Bureau 39 is believed to have \$5 billion in cash assets in secret bank accounts in Macau and Switzerland; Hwang, Balbina, "Curtailing North Korea's Illicit Activities," *Heritage Foundation Background*, August 26, 2003.

⁶² Spaeth, Anthony, "Kim's Rackets," *Time Asia*, June 2, 2003; Lintner, Bertil, "North Korea: Pyongyang's Banking Beachhead in Europe," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 13, 2003; Polak, Matthew, "Kim's Drug Intervention," unpublished article, January 14, 2004.

⁶³ Burgermeister, Jane, "North Korean Bank is 'front for arms trade'," *The Observer*, July 27, 2003.

Like the illicit diplomats, Bureau 39 personnel are part of an elite with information, money, and a pivotal role in the Kim Jong-il regime. Defector and former Bureau 39 operative Kim Dong-hun says, “if it goes to Bureau 39, it is the same as sending it to Kim Jong-il.” Another defector, Kim Dok-hong, says that destruction of Bureau 39 would be “tantamount to a death blow for Kin Jong-il.”⁶⁴

Bureau 39’s overseas operatives are probably too valuable and too dangerous to bring home. But, like their diplomatic colleagues, if their sources of income were to be squeezed, the cries would no doubt be heard in the highest places in Pyongyang.

(NOTE: It is unclear whether the Japan-based pro-Pyongyang *Chosen Soren* organization should be considered part of North Korean society. However, it is important to recognize here that it plays an important role in North Korea’s illicit overseas operations.)

J. ENTREPRENEURS BACK HOME

Meanwhile, back in North Korea there have been some signs of budding market enterprises. Private gardens, farmers’ markets, restaurants, and city street kiosks have been reported by a number of travelers. The kiosks carry drinks, cigarettes, and some food. The farmers’ markets sell produce, but also bits of everything else, such as videos. Reportedly, Kim Jong-il directed the Pyongyang city government to issue small business permits.⁶⁵ Predictably, South Korean Unification Minister Jeong Se-hyun was quick to shed some sunshine on these developments. “The North,” he said, “recognizes the inevitability of taking the course of reform and openness.”⁶⁶ Equally predictably, a number of unnamed western diplomats and aid workers have joined the chorus.

Unfortunately for North Korea, the prospects are not so bright. The much-touted July 2002 economic reforms have made people even more desperate. Economist Nicholas Eberstadt explains that prices and wages increased without a rise in production. The result was, of course, rampant inflation.⁶⁷ It is unlikely any of this will lead to real economic change. More likely, Kongdan Oh told *The Economist*, Pyongyang is just “creatively muddling through.”⁶⁸ An aid

⁶⁴Spaeth, Anthony, “Kim’s Rackets,” *Time Asia*, June 2, 2003; Solomon, J., Hae Won Choi, B. Baas and C. Hardt, “The Dictator’s Long Shadow: Secret Network of Funds and Firms Supports North Korean Regime,” *Handelsblatt*, August 6, 2003, FBIS document EUP20030806000138.

⁶⁵AERA North Korea Reporting Team, “Surprising Information Flows Out of North Korea,” *Tokyo Aera*, October 6, 2003, FBIS translation JPP20030930000154, pp. 76-77. Hereafter cited as AERA Reporting Team.

⁶⁶“N.K. Embarks on Initial Phase of Market Economy,” *Yonhap*, September 19, 2003, 0313 GMT, FBIS translation KPP20030919000030.

⁶⁷“Progress at a Snail’s Pace,” *The Economist*, October 11, 2003, pp. 43-44.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

worker who travels throughout North Korea observes that when food supplies decrease, social mobility increases.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, for the purpose of this paper, a division of people is being created - those who tend private gardens, and those who run restaurants, kiosks, or farmers' market stalls. Even someone who only sells locally grown produce is becoming acquainted with the basics of a market economy and, by contrast, with the inefficiencies of North Korea's command economy. Those who sell western cigarettes and videos also are in contact with suppliers and may well deal in foreign currency. Although there is no group identity among these people, and many of them even regard themselves as loyal to Kim Jong-il, they are forming common interests that would be affected by a government pullback from its current foray into the market. Moreover, a seed of regime criticism will have been planted in all of them.

North Korea's flirtation with a market economy has also resulted in instances of state capitalism. The (Tokyo) AERA North Korea Reporting Team writes:

Offices of the party, government and military services are now competing to expand their clout by putting farmland, like rice paddies and vegetable fields, and hotels and restaurants doing business in foreign currency under their umbrellas. Part of what these offices and departments earn is donated to General Secretary Kim as "loyalty funds." The general secretary himself also has some foreign currency earning organizations running right under his control. Kim has secured for himself a system by which he can earn money sitting doing nothing.⁷⁰

If true, this phenomenon reflects the aforementioned comment by an aid worker that corruption and the power of money are surpassing party rule. But even if only half true, it indicates that there is a segment of officialdom, including the Dear Leader, with some stake in preserving the *status quo*. Neither moving backward nor forward would suit their economic interests. A rejuvenated socialist regime would purge them as corrupt. But a move toward more efficient capitalism would sweep them away too.

Yet a third type of North Korean entrepreneur may be engendered by what Larry Wortzel describes as "perhaps the only successful feature of 'sunshine policy.'" Wortzel cites South Korean officials who say that over 450 South Korean small- to medium-size businesses are manufacturing textiles, shoes, clothing, and light industrial goods for export. Of course, this group probably overlaps with the aforementioned instances of state capitalism. North Korean bosses are no doubt military, party, or government officials, but exporting confronts them with certain business imperatives that may not be present in, say, cornering the private rice market in

⁶⁹ Aid Worker.

⁷⁰ AERA Reporting Team.

a province of North Korea. “Think of the implications of this commerce,” says Wortzel, “hundreds of South Korean small businessmen are looking communist Korean Workers’ Party officials in the eye on a regular basis and explaining profit and loss.”⁷¹

So long as the South Korean government or a large South Korean company does not subsidize these enterprises, they may prove truly infectious to Kim Jong-il’s regime.

K. REACHING INTO NORTH KOREA

This paper has identified a number of divisions in North Korean society, first by suggesting a generational fault line, and second by considering a number of economic factors now observable in North Korea. The people in these divisions have something in common, but the nature of North Korean society prevents the formation of a group consciousness, or even much substantive communication among division members. For example, there is no doubt some cohesion among a circle of friends at Kim Il-sung University. They may even swap gossip based on stories heard at home, but any deeper feelings of alienation from the Kim Jong-il regime are likely kept strictly personal.

A KBS survey of escapees offers some insight into this phenomenon. Asked how they learned of foreign radio broadcasts, only 15 percent indicated someone else had told them about them. Most said they “listened secretly by themselves.”⁷² Each has his or her own yearning for information, but not much identity with others in a similar situation or who hold similar views. North Koreans don’t know whom they can trust and they instinctively understand the principle of compartmentalization. They are members of analytical divisions, not groups.

The divisions presented here are illustrative, not exhaustive. Others will examine different phenomena that indicate fault lines different from those discussed here. Some of these may be congruent to those discussed in this paper; others may be crosscutting, resulting in new qualifications to the divisions identified here, in other words, sub-divisions.

This analysis sought to identify divisions in North Korean society susceptible to what mainstream westerners might call positive and negative information and other stimuli. They run the range from idealistic university students or young foreign service officers to Bureau 39’s thugs and mules. The former may accept carefully crafted messages about better opportunities in democratic, free market countries like South Korea. The latter are streetwise (in the pejorative sense), and may react only to the giving or taking of money or the tough talk of the back streets.

⁷¹ Wortzel.

⁷² Paek Sung-ku.

If we want to reach into North Korea, different messages must be crafted for different divisions in the society.

This paper has discussed, roughly: a general elite - particularly the younger members; IT professionals; small entrepreneurs; small exporters; diplomats - above-board and not; state capitalists; and Bureau 39 thugs. Each division's sources of information may be different, and sources may be general or specific. (Bear in mind, of course, that even general sources of information in North Korea are very restricted.)

L. MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

Rumors may be the most general source of information in North Korea. However, for us who are considering how to reach into that society, rumors are a secondary medium. The root information would have to come from radio or a foreign press article, although an occasional traveler or business person might offer grist for the rumor mill.

North Koreans have very limited access to foreign television - the country is too totalitarian yet to imagine banned but ubiquitous satellite dishes as one reportedly now sees in Iran. Consequently, radio remains the single best general source of outside information.

The foreign, particularly South Korean, press may also have some impact, although the government applies a double filter to it. The government controls what will be translated and circulated, and it severely restricts the number of officials with access to this once-filtered information. Still, it is reasonable to assume that a combination of foreign press and rumor mill affords the Pyongyang elite some second or third hand exposure to the foreign media.

The *Kwangmyong* intranet also is a source of general information, but it is a closed system run by the North Korean government and any communication through it would be carefully monitored. As a closed system, outsiders have no access to it. However, plans have been discussed to link it with the Internet.⁷³ In that case, Internet experts might want to study whether it is accessible from outside North Korea. Some North Koreans also have limited access to the Internet and reportedly the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications is making some kind of E Mail available to businesses. With some creative thought, the Internet, E Mail, and maybe the intranet also can become media for active communication with specific individuals or for passive content designed to appeal to certain individuals or small groups.

⁷³ Song Sung-sop, "Developments in North Korea's IT Sector, and North-South Exchanges and Cooperation Following Joint Declaration of June 15, 2000," *Seoul Pukhan*, p. 8, December 1, 2001, FBIS translation KPP2001121000045.

Other specific sources of information for North Koreans include the scientific book fair, computer shows and games, joint ventures, and diplomatic contact.

Turning to the dark side, North Korea's diplomatic *mafiosi* and Bureau 39 mules have considerable access to information because they operate outside the country. Although they work the back streets, they do get around, they see what there is to see, and they can be contacted easily, at least by certain elements of our societies.

M. IMPEDIMENTS TO COMMUNICATION

Using any of these sources of information, that is, reaching into North Korea, is difficult. As mentioned at the very beginning of this paper, North Korea is not known as the hermit kingdom without reason. Impediments to communication with North Koreans are physical, fear of punishment, and cognitive.

Physical impediments are the easiest to understand because, for the most part, we can touch and feel them. The DMZ, the carefully guarded Yalu and Tumen Rivers, and two seas seal off the country. Very few outsiders visit, fewer have real contact with the people, and fewer still North Koreans can go and come. Internally, movement and residency are controlled. Permission is required to live in Pyongyang, "the center of information" (such as it is).

Legal radios are preset to government stations, and inspections are conducted to detect tampering. Internet access is severely limited, and we should assume that computer terminals and passwords are carefully guarded.

The future of cellular telephones in North Korea is yet unclear, although it is difficult to imagine replicating in Pyongyang the scene of Seoul teenagers jabbering away on their mobiles (at dad's expense)! Interestingly, the Great General himself chose the GSM operating format for the North Korean cellular telephone network - different from South Korea's Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) format.⁷⁴

Another impediment to communication with North Koreans that is both physical and cognitive is the use of amplifier broadcasting, an Orwellian showering of workplaces, towns, and even many homes with propaganda. This steady stream of gibberish makes it hard for people to talk or even think, and they are bound to retain bits and pieces of it.

That may be useful because the Kim Jong-il regime diabolically combines physical impediments to communication with fear of punishment. Anyone sufficiently savvy to become one of the lucky cell phone users also knows that the instrument must be used only for anodyne

⁷⁴ DPRK Mobile Phone.

conversations with the correct mix of obsequiousness and sycophancy. The same would apply to anyone fortunate enough to surf the web and to businesses that may gain access to E Mail. A labor camp is in store for anyone caught tampering with an official radio or concealing an illegal one.

In such a regimented society, the cognitive impediments to communication, though harder to see, may outweigh physical barriers and fear of punishment. Doubting is a lonely occupation in a society like North Korea. This can plunge most humans into feelings of isolation and anomie. The only way out is to let go and rejoin the group.

Still, some North Koreans surely harbor doubts about their system, but they have no intellectual framework in which to consider alternatives. Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il are the only authority figures they have ever known. And they have been taught since infancy that the systems in South Korea and the U.S. are embodiments of evil. To confuse them further, they may hear attacks on America and the U.S.-ROK alliance on South Korean radio. North Korean skeptics may wonder if South Korea and the U.S. are as demonic as depicted in the North, but they still have no coherent construct for an alternative to the Dear Leader.

Perhaps most important, Oh and Hassig point out that, despite doubts, the North Korean “elite believe(s) in socialism as a utopian idea... and probably also firmly believes in the importance of national pride, independence and economic self-reliance.”⁷⁵ Hwang Jang-yop’s recent Capitol Hill appearance is instructive in this regard. Repeatedly badgered by Korean expatriates about whether he should move to the U.S. to wage a more effective opposition to Kim Jong-il, a bristling Hwang retorted, “I am not a defector; I am a Korean living in Korea.”⁷⁶ Any messages we aim at North Koreans must be carefully and tactfully crafted.

N. SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT LENGTHENING OUR REACH

Echoing Hwang-Jang-yop’s thought used as the preface to this paper, Oh and Hassig write that “if more North Koreans had the courage to take exit or voice action in the face of the totalitarian regime, Korean reunification would come sooner rather than later.”⁷⁷ They are right, but North Koreans will need more information from the outside to do this, and that can only come from South Korea and the United States. Radio is probably the single most potent means to reach into North Korea.

⁷⁵ Oh & Hassig, p. 38.

⁷⁶ Hwang Jang-yop, “What America Needs To Know About North Korea,” speech to the Defense Forum Foundation, October 31, 2003.

⁷⁷ Oh & Hassig, p. xiv.

At a time when South Korea is reportedly watering down the content of KBS *Social Education Broadcasting*, broadcast objectives should be reviewed. Escapees report listening to foreign broadcasts, particularly for accurate news about North Korea.⁷⁸ With accurate news about North Korea as a base, the analysis in this paper suggests that broadcasts should target particular divisions in North Korean society and overcome cognitive dissonance by offering a sense of belonging and alternative frameworks.

Some content should be designed to appeal to small entrepreneurs and exporters, IT professionals, and younger members of the elite, generally. Moreover, it should be carefully considered to overcome cognitive dissonance.

Oh and Hassig point out that members of the North Korean elite are probably proud to be Korean and they believe in socialism as an ideal, bringing independence and economic self-reliance. Therefore, broadcasts should not attack these values. For example, exposing the corruption of Kim Jong-il, state capitalists, and Bureau 39 may be more effective than a stark capitalism versus socialism theme. Naturally, broadcasts should be by Koreans for Koreans, and Korean expatriates need to ensure that the message is about Koreans in the North, not Koreans in Los Angeles.

As individuals become disassociated with the all-encompassing Kim Jong-il regime, broadcasts should help fill in a sense of belonging and alternative frameworks. Stories about how escapees felt before they left the North, or about people in, say, the IT professions in South Korea might appeal. Far more difficult is to offer an alternative framework to a person who has been taught from infancy that Kim Jong-il is everything.⁷⁹

“We helped them realize North Korean society’s problems by informing them what Christianity is and what kind of figure Jesus is,” said Han Ki-pung of the private Far East Broadcasting.⁸⁰ It is unnecessary to judge the message to see that this station is providing an alternative framework for North Korean listeners. In addition to messages like this, what is sorely needed to counter Kim Jong-il’s vision of a united Korea is a South Korean vision of an independent, democratic, peaceful, and prosperous Korea.

Although radio can be very powerful, there are a number of other measures we should consider to strengthen our reach into North Korea.

⁷⁸ Paek Sung-ku.

⁷⁹ The captain of the North Korean women’s soccer team provided a sad example of the complete lack of alternative frameworks before a recent World Cup match in Philadelphia. “I am determined to bring joy and happiness to Kim Jong-il,” was her only comment to an American sports writer. Gildea, William, “More Great Feats for Hamm, U.S. Women,” p. D1, *Washington Post*, September 26, 2003.

⁸⁰ Paek Sung-ku.

Although the future of cellular telephones and the Internet in North Korea is yet uncertain, it would be useful to consider how these media might be used to lengthen our reach to the kind of North Korean elites discussed in this paper. We should consider Internet site content that might be attractive to North Korean elites - IT professionals and researchers like Hwang Tok-man. Computer experts should study the technical aspects of using the Internet, the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications' E Mail system, and the *Kwangmyong* intranet system.

We should not ignore the print media. We know that the North Korean government pays attention, particularly to the South Korean press. This information is circulated on a limited basis and probably passed along the rumor chain. South Korean opponents of Kim Jong-il are very active in this regard, but Americans can become more active.

Korea is a security, economic, and social priority for the U.S. and we should not shy away from writing about it. Articles in English may have some impact, but National Institute for Public Policy analysts Matthew Polak and Cristen Duncan have demonstrated that it is possible to have articles republished in Korean.⁸¹ Depending on the subject, this kind of activity also enhances the dialog between the United States and its ally, South Korea.

More contact and dialog would surely help strained U.S.-ROK relations, but that matter is beyond the scope of this paper. There are, however, a number of relevant diplomatic initiatives that should be considered. Roh Moo-hyun is the elected president of South Korea and he is continuing the sunshine policy toward the North. Despite Washington's misgivings, we could encourage him in two directions that would lengthen our (U.S. and South Korean) reach into North Korea. First, President Roh should be encouraged to articulate a South Korean vision of an independent, democratic, peaceful, and prosperous Korea. This would help North Koreans grasp an alternative framework for feelings about their government and their country.

Second, following Larry Wortzel's point, South Korea should be encouraged to promote independent small businesses that actively engage North Koreans in free enterprise, consistent with alliance security requirements. In pursuing this, however, we should be mindful that there is a fine line between encouraging North Korean entrepreneurship and providing cash to the Kim Jong-il regime. The latter would be harmful.

There also is a diplomatic initiative we could pursue with some of our other allies that have diplomatic relations with North Korea. Their diplomats could begin identifying particularly younger North Korean diplomats who may be quietly part of the new opportunities group

⁸¹ Duncan, Cristen, "North Korea's Nuke Freezing Proposal is a trap – Defense News," *Yonhap News*, January 21, 2004, available in Korean at <www.yonhapnews.co.kr>; Polak, Matthew, "Does Aid Really Reach North Koreans?", available at <www.vietvet.co.kr>.

described by Kongdan Oh. Allied diplomats might then engage these people more purposefully. This would, of course, have to be done within each foreign ministry's guidelines for diplomatic contact with North Korea. But concerns over guidelines may be eased because the North Korean diplomats of interest are young and generally of a lower rank. The United Nations and other international organizations in which North Korea participates would be the best venues for this sort of effort.

Of course, as we have pointed out, not all North Korean diplomats are what they claim to be. There is no point in crafting sophisticated messages for Kim Jong-il's dirty diplomats or Bureau 39 thugs. The way to affect this division of the North Korean elite is to squeeze them. A concerted effort to constrict the money flow will send a message right to Kim Jong-il, and measures can be relaxed or tightened in accordance with the Dear Leader's behavior or with U.S. policy. Apart from this, stemming the flow of missiles and drugs would be in the interest of the United States, its allies, and its friends.⁸²

Stemming the flow of Pyongyang's missile sales is challenging because to a significant degree the sales are legal. Nonetheless, the Bush Administration has demonstrated that the international community can band together for a common purpose under the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). It should be noted, however, that sporadic harassment is unlikely to be effective;⁸³ a comprehensive effort is required. The U.S. and its PSI allies need to consider the international legal implications of their strategy and agree upon a common policy. China needs to be pressed to not provide alternate overland routes. And potential recipient countries must understand that there will be consequences for buying North Korean missiles.

The PSI can double as a drug interdiction effort, as the recent Australian seizure of the Pong Su shows.⁸⁴ And a wider effort to stem the tide of North Korean drugs is liable to garner considerable support among affected countries, if presented as apolitical law enforcement. We could first enlist the support of Australia, Japan, South Korea, and even China; then Southeast Asian countries could be approached with offers of assistance. For example, their police, customs, and coast guard officials have valuable information about North Korean drugs, but often do not have the means to intercept them. With relatively small expenditures, we could assist them with intelligence, organization, and interdiction capabilities.

⁸² For a discussion of constricting money flows to North Korea, see Stevens, Terry C. with David J. Smith et al., "Deterring North Korea: U.S. Options," *Comparative Strategy* 22(5), December 2003, pp. 503-508.

⁸³ Gertz, Bill, "Ship gets arms in and out," *The Washington Times*, February 18, 2003. The December 9, 2002 Spanish detention of the North Korean vessel *Sosan* and its subsequent release demonstrate the need for careful legal consideration and policy development. It is likely that Kim Jong-il saw this incident as an example of American weakness.

⁸⁴ "Macao-based organized crime said behind N. Korea heroin trade," *Kyodo News Service*, November 19, 2003.

There are a host of other things one could do to constrict Kim Jong-il's income and assets. A comprehensive campaign can be designed, but it need not be leak-proof. Just \$1.2 billion keeps the North Korean regime afloat in its current miserable state, so constriction of just a few hundred million dollars would have enormous effect. The lowest people in Pyongyang's criminal food chain would be the first to lose their perquisites; then the effect would ripple up the elite pyramid to Kim Jong-il himself.

O. CONCLUSION

This analysis is by no means complete; it must be complemented by the research of others. When this is done, some revision will no doubt be required to produce a full and accurate picture of North Korean elites. Some of the thoughts for action offered here may need to be revised and joined with other recommendations before a draft plan can be presented. It should also be noted that this analysis was conducted without knowledge of any particular policy direction; only with the general sense that the United States would like to refine its approach to reaching the people of North Korea.

With all this said, we should be mindful that social science jargon and analysis sometimes dull us to the fact that we are discussing real people in an infernal situation. *Wolgan Choson* reporter Paek Sung-ku's interview with Kim Un-ch'ol, a 33-year-old teacher who escaped from North Korea, is sobering.

PAEK: It is said that the North has recently issued a radio seizure order. Does something like this happen from time to time?

KIM: In North Korea, radio frequencies are fixed at Korean Central Broadcasting Station and Pyongyang Broadcasting Station. The residents who have a certain degree of know-how, however, can restore them to the original state. Of course, they are punished when they are found out. The North creates special control teams and frequently inspects radios. If a radio seizure order has been issued recently, it is proof that the internal community is chaotic to that extent and illegal activities are in vogue.

PAEK: What kinds of punishment are doled out when people are found out?

KIM: They are taken to labor discipline camps. They receive mentality-transforming education.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Paek Sung-ku.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

KONGDAN (KATY) OH HASSIG

Each of the five papers in this collection takes its own approach to addressing the questions of what factions or potential factions exist among the North Korean elite, what information sources the elite use to learn about U.S. military initiatives, and what factors influence how outside information is perceived. It would be an exaggeration to say that the five viewpoints are as varied as the proverbial blind men's descriptions of the elephant, but readers have surely noted differences as well as consistencies among the perspectives. For example, no two of the tables of North Korean elite purport to list exactly the same thing, and consequently no two can be directly compared. The differences in emphasis and approach to understanding North Korea point to the importance for U.S. policy makers of analyzing the behaviors of foreign leaders from multiple perspectives.

A. WHO ARE THE NORTH KOREAN ELITE?

North Korea's elite can be defined in any number of ways, and as the country undergoes inevitable changes in its political and economic systems, the attributes that qualify one for elite membership may be changing as well. Bermudez conceptualizes the elite as the convergence of "five broad societal groupings: Kim Jong-il's extended family and close confidants; the MPAF [Ministry of People's Armed Forces]; the KWP [Korean Workers' Party]; the cabinet; and the intelligence and internal security services," with the "pinnacle of the power-holding elite" being the members of the National Defense Commission. Gause refers to the elite as a "class," which paradoxically seems quite accurate in North Korea's supposedly "classless" society. Hassig adopts a definition that emerged from the initial discussions of the research group, defining the elite broadly as "anyone who is in a channel of communication that leads upwards [to Kim Jong-il]." Mansourov notes that party membership used to be the "entry ticket into the elite club," but that under what he terms the "new nomenclature," "access to state assets, prestige, and power, accumulation of private wealth, or government licensing authority is a must to qualify for the new elite status." Mansourov argues that the people who are closest to Kim in the information chain are three generals in the KPA Supreme Command's Operation Command Group. Smith endorses the idea that the elite consist of members of the topmost of the three political classes in North Korea - sometimes referred to in internal North Korean documents as the "core" class, but he also adds a concentric view of power: the "elite extends from Kim Jong-il's inner circle - probably no more than a half dozen to ten people - through senior military, party and government officials, the middle ranks, out to, say, schoolteachers who instruct the children of the elite."

Depending upon how the elite are defined, their paths to “elite-hood” can take somewhat different routes. Broadly speaking, political status is inherited in North Korea, much as caste is inherited in some traditional societies. The children of the elite are automatically in the elite class. In contrast, people who are born into the “wavering” political class (North Korea’s broad working class) rarely have the opportunity to attend the best schools or receive important political appointments, although by taking advantage of anomalies and changes in the quasi-socialist economic system, they may gain sufficient wealth to become members of an emerging economic elite. Economic advancement is even possible for members of the lowest, “hostile” class, although they can hardly expect to translate their wealth into political position.

The surest thing that can be said of the political elite, however they are defined, is that they have gained their positions because the Kim regime assumes they are politically trustworthy. In the case of the elite at the highest level, loyalty to Kim Jong-il is the absolute requirement. Nobody can reach the highest echelons of power without demonstrating such loyalty, nor can one remain at that level without being able to anticipate Kim’s preferences and moods and adapting to them as circumstances require.

B. ARE THERE FACTIONS AMONG THE ELITE?

The consensus among the five authors is that factions - in the traditional sense of organized groups - do not exist in North Korea. There are no political groups apart from the Korean Workers’ Party. Whereas there surely are differences of opinion on policy matters, formal policy decisions are unanimous. Kim Jong-il and his fellow “elected” officials always win with 100% of the vote. Of course, North Korea is not truly monolithic in the political sense, or in any other sense. The closer one examines North Korean society, the more potential political cracks become visible. Individuals and groups - including offices, departments, and organizations throughout the North Korean bureaucracy - use what power they can muster to pursue their own interests. Nor is Kim Jong-il impervious to influence - either the broad influence of North Korean society or the more direct and powerful influence of the inner-circle elite.

Factions exist to exert political power. All the authors gave some thought to the locus and range of political power in North Korea, and all agreed that political power ultimately derives from Kim Jong-il. He giveth and he taketh away power. The Kim family has held on to power for almost 60 years by manipulating the institutions, the elite, and the masses. Kim often has been described as a mastermind at understanding people and manipulating them. He is always on his toes. He worries constantly about coup attempts, of which there appear to have been several targeted at him and his father. Through a combination of rewards (e.g., praise, lavish gifts, and

promotions) and punishments (e.g., angry criticism, demotions, and purges), Kim keeps everyone else on their toes as well. Anxiety is the price of elite membership.

Political rank as indicated by “platform ranking” on important state occasions is only a rough estimate of a person’s political power. To know more accurately how powerful someone is, it is necessary to know how closely that person works with Kim Jong-il. Bermudez makes the important point that in North Korea (as in other societies), people in staff positions supporting the high-profile elite themselves have power that derives from their affiliation with their superiors and from the information they have access to. Gause studies the informal leadership structure of the Kim Jong-il patronage system as a guide to where power lies, emphasizing in particular the importance of the first vice director level in organizations.

What is the closest thing to elite factions, if they do not exist in the strictest sense? Bermudez speaks of the five “societal groupings” mentioned above. Gause quotes defectors as painting “a rather benign picture of factionalism in North Korea”: a factionalism that is “firmly ensconced at the second echelon of the leadership and is tied to various policy initiatives.” Gause sees these factional divisions as related to different generations and different institutions, as well as to different policy initiatives. “Factionalism as it exists today is focused on garnering influence with the *Suryong*, not trying to depose him.” Gause believes that in the future “if the Kim regime loses its ability to placate the elite through goods and services, there is a real chance of the creation of factions,” citing rumored “cracks” that exist “within Kim Jong-il’s core constituency.” “This can be transformed into warlordism when the system comes under duress at the top.”

Hassig explains the consensus conclusion that “No known political divisions among the elite could fairly be called ‘factions’; that is, organized or semi-organized groups working against other groups or against the regime” by suggesting that “by the time the identity of any such group came to the attention of foreign analysts, the group would already have been exterminated.” He believes it is more accurate to speak of “divisions” or “segments” or “aggregations of the elite, not organized as formal or even informal groups, which share ideas and interests at variance with official ideology.” He characterizes as only speculative the assertions of some North Korea observers that the elite are divided on such dimensions as “hardliners versus soft-liners, military versus party personnel, members of Kim Il-sung’s different families . . . members of Kim Jong-il’s different families . . . older versus younger generation elites, technocrats versus ideologues, economy-first versus military-first policy makers, and nationalists versus internationalists, to name a few.”

Mansourov refers to the existence of factions in the days of Kim Il-sung. In contrast, the contemporary North Korean government is characterized as “a semi-privatized amorphous collection of rivaling immobile organizations and stove-piped bureaucracies that often act at cross purposes and are pressed hard and corrupted by the individual and group interests of competing clans, social and political forces vying for power, prestige, and wealth invested by the Dear Leader.” Mansourov suggests that “as the power succession struggle intensifies, the political regime tends to crack along the lines of personal loyalties and ‘estate inheritance.’” Mansourov’s principal method of describing the North Korean elite is in terms of five “power transmission belts”: “the national security establishment, the old guard, the technocrats, the local elites, and the ‘foreign wind’ [foreign affairs handlers]. Each of these groups is seen as attempting to “penetrate and influence the Kim ‘family court’ in order to ensure the representation of their corporate interests.”

Smith addresses the issue of factions by noting that “there are no independent groups in North Korean society, certainly none based on dissension among the elite. Consequently, it is more accurate to speak of divisions instead of groups, fault lines instead of fissures.” The major divisions he identifies are defined by generational differences and disparities in economic situations, “but the nature of North Korean society prevents the formation of a group consciousness, or even much substantive communication among division members.”

C. WHERE DO THE ELITE GET THEIR INFORMATION?

The Terms of Reference ask about the North Korean elite’s “potential response to various initiatives related to U.S. military planning, and how they may learn about these initiatives.” In an initial meeting of the project participants, these initiatives were further described as public rather than private ones. However, most of the authors preferred to analyze information and communication channels in a broader sense.

The papers generally agreed on several points. First, Kim Jong-il and perhaps a few members of his personal secretariat have access to information from a wide range of domestic and foreign media, although what this information means to them is not always clear. Other top members of the elite probably have access to some sort of daily *Reference News*, either in print or on the intranet. Foreign radio targeted at North Korea can be received by the elite without much difficulty, although even for them, listening to foreign stations is technically illegal. Satellite television reception is restricted to only a few hotels and government offices. Foreign video and audio tapes are available on the black market, but foreign newspapers are not readily available, although the major stories they carry sometimes appear (in edited form) in the North Korean press. International telephone connections can be made through some office telephones,

although presumably all calls are monitored. Cell phones are becoming popular with the elite, although these phones are presumably also monitored. Along the Chinese border, cellular connections to Chinese transmitters are becoming popular among the elite, and are presumably not so easily monitored by North Korean authorities.

In the wrap-up workshop, the researchers engaged in lively debate over the availability in North Korea of Internet connections. Kim Jong-il is pushing an IT program for North Koreans, and many aspects of computer use are expanding. The South Koreans are providing funding, technology, and training for this purpose, and a few Internet connections (via China) permit communication directly between the two Koreas. Like long-distance telephone connections, what Internet connections exist are in the possession of organizations, not individuals, and Internet communication is likely to be closely monitored by the security organizations. Communication on the domestic intranet is expanding as rapidly as North Korea's poor computer and communication infrastructure allow, but like telephone communication, is accessible only through the workplace.

Bermudez observes that those who live in the bigger cities, especially the privileged elite who live in Pyongyang, have access to more information than those living in the countryside. He believes that within the military, only those "at the level of a general grade officer or officer within a major bureau of the General Staff Department or MPAF" have "significant" access to uncensored or foreign information, and that their support staffs presumably also have good access. Given the vertical "Kim-centric" nature of North Korea's communication channels, Bermudez says that "there is extremely little horizontal flow of information or communications except at the highest levels." He identifies three organizational channels of communication leading up to Kim Jong-il: the Korean Workers' Party, the National Defense Commission, and the cabinet. Along with a few of the other authors, Bermudez cites the restricted-distribution *Reference Information* (and *Reference News*) as sources of information available to KWP central committee members who hold the rank of department director or above, and a limited number of other KWP officials. There is some doubt about whether this publication is still being distributed, and none of the authors cites a contemporary source that says it is, although the existence of such a publication, on the intranet if not on paper, seems likely. Bermudez's paper also considers in detail military and security organizations that provide classified information to the leadership.

Gause notes that "information necessary to run the day-to-day affairs of the North Korean regime is highly compartmentalized and frequently monitored, leading 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." According to

Gause, Kim Jong-il, through his personal secretary Kim Kang-chol, 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.” “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.” Gause identifies the primary sources of external information as MOFA intelligence from the embassies, and overseas “correspondents.”

Hassig surveys the content of North Korea’s domestic print and electronic media, which are available to all the elite. He also lists the various foreign radio sources that broadcast into the country, such as Radio Free Asia. Although the dials of North Korean radios are supposed to be fixed to the government station frequency, many North Koreans unfix these dials, putting themselves at risk of arrest; higher-level cadres apparently listen to such radios without much danger of being caught or punished. Other than official communication channels, the only secure way news can be disseminated within the country is by face-to-face contact, and according to defectors, such communication must be conducted with some discretion.

Hassig’s major emphasis is on how the elite could acquire news of U.S. military initiatives. He conducts an informal survey that demonstrates the impressive breadth of knowledge on this subject that is carried by North Korea’s two major domestic news outlets: *Nodong Sinmun* and the Korean Central Broadcasting Station. He concludes that if the North Korean elite pay attention to these channels, they are better informed about U.S. military initiatives in Asia than are most well-educated Americans.

D. HOW IS FOREIGN INFORMATION PERCEIVED?

Whatever their access to foreign information, the North Korean elite will surely perceive such information in their own unique way, and draw their own conclusions. For example, all North Koreans heard about the October 2000 visit to Pyongyang of Secretary of State Albright, but what did it mean to them? Was it seen as a gesture of peace or as a visit by a representative of a declining power to pay homage to the memory of Great Leader Kim Il-sung (whose tomb she visited)?

The interpretation of information is likely to be shaped in several ways. Bermudez speaks of a four-layered “darkly colored lens” filtering information flowing to Kim Jong-il and the top elites: “historical world view, political indoctrination, hatred for the U.S., and authoritarian

cultural rules.” Given the “strong underpinning of Confucian philosophy” in North Korean society, subordinates are loath to present any information that is at variance with what they think their superiors believe. This attitude helps explain distortions that appear to creep into communications. Bermudez describes the flow of information as “convoluted - almost Byzantine at times - as it moves through a series of paths control[led] by different and competing organizations with diverse agendas and priorities in a manner that is quite frequently redundant and inefficient.” Gause suggests two more causes of information distortion: “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.” News to Kim Jong-il is said to be “sanitized,” with “unpleasing news glossed over.”

Hassig begins his discussion of information interpretation by introducing several communication concepts that describe how people interpret information in light of their existing knowledge, and he notes that only a highly credible source of information can change a person’s core beliefs. Years of anti-American propaganda have presumably made North Koreans highly skeptical of U.S. initiatives. The growing global anti-American sentiment, a favorite topic of the North Korean press, simply reinforces this hostility and skepticism. Hassig’s survey of news stories illustrates the negative spin that the North Korean press inevitably gives to U.S. initiatives.

The elite, who are in possession of more information than are ordinary North Korean citizens, may well experience cognitive dissonance as they try to reconcile official dogma with received news or observed fact. But the dual forces of loyalty to the Kim regime and Korean nationalism are likely to resolve many cognitive discrepancies in favor of the official North Korean line. In particular, news of U.S. initiatives that seek to overturn the North Korean status quo is likely to be viewed with disfavor by those elite who have a stake in the Kim regime. Given these problems with interpretation, Hassig believes that the issue of how to craft messages targeted at the North Korean elite is more important than the issue of what channels to put the messages in.

In his discussion of communication channels, Smith identifies three “impediments to communication”: fear of punishment, physical impediments, and cognitive impediments. The fear comes from the danger of accessing forbidden foreign news. The physical impediments derive from North Korea’s physical isolation and restricted communication infrastructure. One cognitive impediment is doubt: “some North Koreans surely harbor doubts about their system, but they have no intellectual framework in which to consider alternatives.”

E. INSIGHTS FOR U.S. POLICY MAKERS

In these papers, and in the wrap-up workshop convened at IDA, a good first step has been made toward understanding the elite, factionalism, and communication channels in North Korea. The two major conclusions on which consensus was reached were that Kim Jong-il is the source of political power in North Korea, and that there is no evidence for the existence of factions that actively contest his leadership, although the potential for faction formation exists. Numerous lists of elite members were compiled, and some progress was made in enumerating and explaining the important channels of communication into the country and within the elite. It goes without saying that the validity of evidence about secretive North Korea should be judged on the basis of the reliability of the sources of that evidence.

The identification of factions, divisions, or segments of the elite who might respond in their own ways to news of U.S. military initiatives was the more specific focus for this project. It would be a mistake to assume that any divisions among the North Korean elite that might exist are clearly defined or stable entities, such that one party or group automatically responds to a given U.S. initiative in one way while another responds in a different way. This is no more likely to be true than to say that all Republicans respond to a given issue in one way and all Democrats respond in another. How the North Korean elite might divide depends upon the dividing issue. For example, several authors noted that potential factions might form around the issue of who succeeds Kim Jong-il. Other factions may find supporters among those who favor faster rather than slower economic reform. In other words, “All politics is local.”

Several other issues raised in these papers deserve further research. One is the question of the current level of North Korea’s technical capability, especially in the IT sector. Does the Kim regime have a national plan for technical education and development that balances the advantages of greater IT expertise with the dangers of losing informational control over the population?

In regard to the reception of information originating from the United States, do we have an adequate understanding of North Korean perceptions? For example, do we understand the meaning of their propaganda? When a North Korean government newspaper says that the people are ready to die to defend their land and their leader in the event of a U.S. invasion, should we interpret this as declaration of the strong will of the people, as a bluff, as an expression of fear or xenophobia, or as a regime ploy to rally the people or distract their attention from domestic conditions?

Speaking of Kim, whom does he consult when making key decisions? There exist many lists of reputed top North Korean elites, but these lists are of limited usefulness without fuller elaboration and analysis. What do we know about the political decision-making culture that exists in North Korea? ROK intelligence and analysis communities have produced perhaps two dozen books on this culture-specific topic, but the subject is not well understood in the U.S. policy community.

On a broader level, if the United States desires to understand how its communications affect the North Korean elite., a better understanding of how these communications are perceived is needed. When communicating to North Korea, it is also necessary to take into account how those communications sit with North Korea's neighbors. It may prove challenging to maintain the U.S.-ROK alliance and other regional relationships while at the same time trying to send clear messages to North Korean elite.

APPENDIX A

TERMS OF REFERENCE

**Terms of Reference:
North Korean Policy Elites**

We require an analysis focused on issues that will support the assessment of alternative courses of action in Defense Department planning. We are particularly interested in any differences that might exist among various North Korean (NK) elites and how each may respond to U.S. initiatives.

Our study focuses on North Korean elites, their personal and ideological priorities; their potential response to various initiatives related to U.S. military planning; and how they may learn about these initiatives. We request an assessment that will, at a minimum, address the following questions:

1. *What are the factions and potential factions that exist within the NK leadership?* It is understood that the NK regime is extraordinarily centralized. Even so, potential divisions among NK elites could result, for example, from:

- Familial links and personal relationships developed through one's career;
- The fact that different individuals, groups, and organizations with the NK elite would be affected differently by U.S. actions; and
- The fact that the welfare of different individuals, groups, and organizations are dependent on different sources of income.

2. *What information sources and channels do each of these individuals and factions depend on?* Because of their roles and responsibilities, different members of the NK elite have access to different sources of information. Most NK elites have access to the controlled domestic media. In some cases, though, individuals may also have access to external media, broadcasting, and Internet. Some individuals may also acquire information one-on-one (e.g., from interlocutors in foreign commercial, diplomatic, and military dealings). With this in mind, we wish to know:

- The paths through which this information passes, and the degree to which they are monitored;
- The sources of the information; and
- Organizational or technical filters that block or shape information at each step.

3. *What are the contextual factors that could affect how NK elites receive, assimilate, and interpret information from outside sources?* These could include, for example:

- Interrelationships among NK elites—the organizational or social network—that facilitate sharing of information; barriers that restrict specific information in specific conditions; or factors that ensure information passed through certain channels has a particular “spin;”
- Channels outside the direct control of the NK regime (e.g., communications and information sources available to NK officials working abroad) that permit elites to bypass barriers;
- Cultural and ideological factors that impose constraints.

APPENDIX B

BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES

Joseph S. Bermudez Jr. is an internationally recognized analyst, author and lecturer on North Korean defense and intelligence affairs and ballistic missile development in the Third World. He is currently a senior analyst for *Jane's Information Group*. He has authored five books and more than 100 articles, reports and monographs on these subjects. His two most recent books: *Shield of the Great Leader: The Armed Forces of North Korea* and *North Korean Special Forces- 2nd Edition* are considered by many to be the definitive "open source" works on their subjects and have been translated into Korean and Japanese. His forthcoming book, *Scud: Weapon of Terror*, promises to follow this tradition. Mr. Bermudez has lectured extensively in the academic and government environments and worked as a consultant, both in the U.S. (e.g., Columbia University, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Army Intelligence, U.S. Naval Intelligence, etc.) and the Republic of Korea (e.g., National Defense College and National Intelligence Service). He has also testified before Congress as a subject matter expert concerning North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear, chemical and biological warfare programs and ballistic missile development in the Third World.

Ken Gause is a senior research analyst at the Center for Strategic Studies of the CNA Corporation in Alexandria, VA. He has spent the last 20 years focusing on issues related to leadership structures around the world. He has done extensive research on the Stalinist regime and its influence on the leadership architectures of similar regimes, such as North Korea and Iraq. Mr. Gause has written over 200 articles, which have appeared in *Jane's Intelligence Review*, RUSI's *China Military Update*, *SP Military Yearbook* (India's premier defense journal), and *The Worldwide Government Report*. He is the author of the recent study *The North Korean Leadership: Evolving Regime Dynamics in the Kim Chong-il Era*.

Ralph C. Hassig is the principal of Oh & Hassig, where he specializes in North Korean studies. He is also an adjunct associate professor of psychology at the University of Maryland University College. He received a Ph.D. in social psychology from UCLA and an MBA in marketing from the University of San Francisco. He is the co-author of *North Korea through the Looking Glass* (Brookings, 2000) and co-editor of the *Korea Briefing* (Asia Society, 2002). His most recent articles are "The Great Switchover Debate" (*The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Fall/Winter 2003), and "The North Korean Military as a Security Threat" (*East Asia: An International Quarterly*, Summer 2003).

Dr. Alexandre Y. Mansourov is an Associate Professor at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu, HI. He is a specialist in Northeast Asian security, politics, and economics, focusing primarily on the Korean peninsula. Dr. Mansourov received his Ph.D. in Political Science from Columbia University. He has co-edited "*The North Korean Nuclear Program: Security, Strategy, and New Perspectives from Russia*" and published numerous book chapters and academic articles on Korean and Northeast Asian affairs.

Ambassador David J. Smith is Chief Operating Officer of the National Institute for Public Policy, a nonprofit research center located in Fairfax, VA. There he directs projects on South Caucasus security, arms control and North Korea, and also serves as the Editor of Comparative Strategy. He is also the U.S. representative to the International Security Advisory Board (ISAB). ISAB assists newly independent states of the former Soviet Union to build democratic national security establishments. From 1993 to 2002, Ambassador Smith was President of Global Horizons, Inc., consulting on defense, international affairs and overseas business development. His earlier career included work in the Intelligence community, Pentagon, State Department and both houses of Congress. He has served on three diplomatic delegations, one of which he headed as Chief Negotiator for the U.S.-Soviet Defense and Space Talks. He was a major in the U.S. Air Force, serving on active duty and in the reserve.

Kongdan (Katy) Oh Hassig is a Research Staff Member at the Institute for Defense Analyses and a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. She is a member of the Korea Task Force of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Korea Working Group of the United States Institute of Peace, the Council on US-Korea Security Studies, and the Co-Founder and Co-Director of The Korea Club in Washington, D.C. She received her B.A. at Sogang University and her M.A. at Seoul National University. She subsequently earned an M.A. and Ph.D. in Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Her recent publications include *Confronting North Korea's Nuclear Ambitions: US Policy Options and Regional Implications* (IDA, 2003), *Korea Briefing 2000-2001: First Steps Toward Reconciliation and Reunification* (Asia Society, 2002), and *North Korea through the Looking Glass* (Brooking, 2002).

APPENDIX C

**ASIAN VIEWS OF NORTH KOREA: A FIELD TRIP REPORT
KONGDAN OH HASSIG**

The author made a trip to Tokyo, Beijing, and Seoul from December 8 to December 23, 2003, to get an update on current information and attitudes regarding North Korea from regional researchers, members of the news media, and business persons. Thirteen interviews or meetings were held in Tokyo, seven in Beijing, and 29 in Seoul. The discussions addressed three topics: the nature of the Kim Jong-il regime, North Korea's economic reforms since July 2002, and the problem of North Korea's nuclear activities.

View from Tokyo

Tokyo is the only city in Asia seriously worried about North Korea's nuclear and missile development. In the view of a prominent Japanese security expert, the South Koreans, the Chinese, and the Russians believe that whatever nuclear weapons North Korea may have are for negotiating purposes and will be bargained away for the right price. On the other hand, most Japanese and American experts on North Korea believe that the Kim regime wants to develop nuclear weapons as a deterrent, and will not give them up under any circumstances. (Interestingly, both of these views have been expressed by North Koreans.)

Some people interpret North Korea's July 2002 market economy measures as a sign that the Kim regime is more concerned with improving its economy and doing business with the international economic community than it is in building a stronger military deterrent and thereby further alienating the international community. Others believe the economic initiatives are merely a temporary measure to stem economic decline. Many Japanese economists who study North Korea initially believed the reforms were only a minor correction factor designed to make North Korea's socialist system run better, but more economists are coming to believe that the reforms signal a serious and irreversible attempt to adopt market mechanisms. These market measures primarily involve giving individuals and organizations production incentives by paying them according to their output. A need for money has been created by virtually eliminating the public distribution system that supplied daily necessities, thereby forcing the people to make their purchases on the semi-open economy. The major stumbling block encountered by these measures so far is that production plans and resources remain under the control of the state. The consensus among the Japanese (and most other foreign economists) is that the reforms have lowered the standard of living for many North Korean people because goods are so scarce that they are priced out of their reach. Many Japanese believe that the Kim regime's motivation for making these economic changes is not a desire to give people freedom from state control, but rather to force them to provide for their own welfare now that the state industries can no longer do so.

In any case, the reforms provide a measure of freedom for people to move around and look for side jobs (after “buying out” their state-assigned jobs) and to establish small businesses. Visitors to Pyongyang report the appearance of small stores and kiosks (many owned by state companies) and busy marketplaces where purchase and barter take place under the surveillance of the authorities. People in Pyongyang (all of whom are members of the elite) seem to be better fed now than before the reforms. The government also seems to be relaxing its control over information. For example, Pyongyangites are now aware that they are eating rice imported from South Korea.

But the picture of conditions in North Korea remains fuzzy. Most Japanese experts admit that they do not have reliable information channels into North Korea. The best information comes from defectors or from visitors to North Korea (e.g., Korean-Chinese traders), and from material smuggled out of the country by them. In a number of cases, official North Korean documents marked “only for party cadres” (*tang’ane hnaham*) or “only for internal distribution” (*taeane hanham*) have been sold to Japanese on the black market. These materials provide a window into the Kim regime’s thinking and intentions. For example, these documents show how the government is trying to indoctrinate people to remain loyal to the regime in the face of greater exposure to outside influences. It is interesting to note that the paper on which these documents are printed is of extremely poor quality; for example, paper made from corn husks, which is difficult to read but surprisingly durable.

North Korea is developing an intranet system to disseminate news and instructions from the government and to coordinate activities. People are urged to read the party newspaper *Nodong Sinmun* on their office computers “first thing in the morning.” Although the intranet is supposed to reach down to the village (*li*) level, it is not clear if village cadres actually have access to working computers, given North Korea’s severe electricity shortage. The military has its own intranet network, but the Japanese do not have much information about it. Paper documents still serve as the main channel of communication.

View from Beijing

China’s official position on North Korea’s nuclear weapons program is conservative: “We have not yet seen actual bombs.” Some Chinese researchers accept that North Korea has become a virtual nuclear weapons state, but they do not seem to have any concrete information. The Chinese are frank in expressing their national goals: peace and wealth. Some scholars express a very negative attitude toward Kim Jong-il and his bizarre rule, noting for example that he eats well while his people starve. Nonetheless, the Chinese advocate either a peaceful

resolution to the North Korean nuclear issue or even living with the status quo of nuclear uncertainty, rather than pushing North Korea to the brink of war.

In regard to North Korea's economic reforms, the Chinese interlocutors say they believe the reforms are having a positive impact and are moving faster than they expected. Given this assessment, they believe other countries should be patient with the North Koreans, giving them time to make the reforms work. "It took us 20 years after Deng Xiaoping decided to pursue a socialist market economy in 1978 until we had built a solid base for our economy."

The bottom line offered by most Chinese is that, although Kim Jong-il is not respected in China, and although his country remains in bad shape economically, allowing the Kim regime to pursue its own changes will be the best way for the United States and other countries to improve relations with North Korea and avoid making the situation worse. The Chinese note that China was once very much like North Korea in the sense that it had many starving people and its government was unpopular in the international community, but now China has redeemed itself. Some day, North Korea will be like we are today, say these Chinese. In any case, the Kim regime has a right to protect its sovereignty. Economic engagement with the regime is the best way to change it, because the regime cannot be destroyed without starting a war on the peninsula, and such a war could easily turn into a regional conflict.

Chinese researchers get much of their information about North Korea from contacts along the border area, for example in the cities of Jilin, Yanbian, and Dandong. Yanbian University is a good place to converse with Korean-Chinese minority students who are in close touch with relatives living in North Korea and are eager to do anything that will improve relations with North Korea and make their relatives' lives better. Through official government contacts, the Chinese can learn much about North Korea, but foreigners must settle for information from semi-official contacts made in the economic sector, for example with North Korea traders.

Another avenue of information about North Korea is Chinese-North Korean exchange programs. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) has numerous centers where North Koreans can come to study. For example, in 2001 and 2002 North Korea sent 10-member study teams to CASS to take one-week courses on topics such as energy cooperation and banking. But as is usually the case when dealing with North Koreans, this program has been occasionally interrupted by the North Korean side, which cancels and delays delegations.

View from Seoul

The single most important and vexing strategic policy challenge for South Koreans is how to deal with North Korea, which is at once part of a homogeneous Korean race and a sworn enemy of South Korea's major ally, the United States. It is safe to say that almost no Koreans are willing to accept the fate of becoming involved in a Korean conflict provoked by a third party, even if the alternative is to accept North Korea as a virtual nuclear state. The overwhelmingly favored policy to deal with North Korea is dialogue and persuasion designed to alleviate the Kim regime's perennial concerns about the hostile intentions of other powers in the region.

Many younger generation Koreans, who are taking control of the political destiny of their country, oppose the U.S. policy of toughness toward North Korea and feel bitter about the U.S.-forced decision to suspend KEDO. They doubt that the United States is committed to the peace and welfare of the entire Korean people. The U.S.-ROK security alliance is becoming increasingly unpopular, and many young Koreans believe that China will become South Korea's primary economic and political partner in the future, replacing the United States.

Among a group of South Korean researchers in the intelligence community, the consensus about how South Korea could prevent another Korean war includes the following points: (1) speed up inter-Korean cooperation and reconciliation, for example, in trade and investment; (2) introduce information about the outside world into North Korea; (3) prevent other states from adopting aggressive policies toward North Korea; and (4) encourage the international community to engage and teach North Koreans market mechanisms and the norms of international cooperation. In the face of resistance from Kim Jong-il, who is recognized as the only important decision maker in North Korea, South Koreans advocate trying to convince him that opening and adopting reforms are the only way to save his regime and keep North Korea an independent state. One member of the South Korean intelligence community advised that negotiations with Kim Jong-il should be designed to allow him to "save face." The high-level defector Hwang Jang-yop has said that South Korea should employ policies to make Kim "feel proud" and feel like he is acting in a bold and broad-minded manner, because this is the picture of himself that has been promulgated by the North Korean propaganda machine. Kim seems to be very proud of his success at the June 2000 inter-Korean summit and the August 2000 meeting he had in Pyongyang with South Korean media heads, and more such successes might improve his disposition toward the outside world.

Although the South Koreans are trying to be optimistic about North Korea's recent economic reforms, they are not sure that the reforms will succeed under the Kim regime. Most economists believe that successful reform will require Kim to dramatically change his attitudes

and behaviors. A case in point is the construction of a Chinese-built power plant in North Korea. Chinese engineers and North Korean cadres looked for the optimal site, but as a “man of all knowledge,” Kim had to choose the site himself. He chose to build the plant literally on sand, and construction required ten times more money and effort than it should have. When asked if Kim has any firm ideas about what direction to take his country economically, a South Korean economist said he believes that Kim does indeed know what he would like to do, but keeping control of his people and dealing with the nuclear issue are big stumbling blocks in the way of making important changes in the economy. Yet the changes that have begun are likely to ultimately bring political and system changes in North Korea.

South Koreans are very interested in the leadership dynamics and decision making process of the Kim regime. They agree that it would be exaggerating to say that there are factions among the North Korean elite. When asked about decision making, they admit they do not have “complete” knowledge of how internal meetings with Kim proceed, but the intelligence community believes it has better information than anyone else. Their view is that at a first meeting on an issue, Kim welcomes different opinions. As debate progresses, once Kim speaks and offers his viewpoint, everybody else falls into line and individual views disappear. In short, anyone who cannot read Kim’s mind or intentions is not likely to have gotten into a meeting with him in the first place.

On the issue of information channels into North Korea, the consensus among South Koreans is that whereas some top cadres trusted by Kim have access to considerable information, nobody can match Kim’s comprehensive knowledge because he ultimately controls the information channels. Although not all the top cadres have the same information, they are all quite knowledgeable about domestic and foreign affairs. In the past, the top elite read *Chamgo tongsin* or *Chamgo sosik* [Reference News] to learn about important issues, but it appears that these publications may now be available only on the intranet.

There was some discussion with the South Koreans about how the war in Iraq is viewed in North Korea. The party line among the North Korean elite is that Iraq’s defeat was attributable to a failure of Iraqi morale. South Koreans have learned that immediately after news of the defeat became known, North Korean government officials contacted owners of short wave radios and asked each owner to sign a statement promising never to lie to the authorities about listening to enemy news of information. At about the same time, the North Korean government officially asked the South Korean government to halt propaganda broadcasts targeted at North Korea, with the understanding that North Korea would stop its own broadcasts, presumably reflecting the Kim regime’s opinion that the North Korean people would be more susceptible to South Korean broadcasts than vice versa.

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