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Day 1 Session 1 - Elite Cohesion: Probability of a Power Struggle among the Elite

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1. The Causes behind of North Korea Elite Cohesion

The greatest common interest in the NK Workers' Party is regime survival. There are two layers of meaning, namely, outside influence and growing pressure will shake the regime rule's foundation; the whole nation lack sufficient foods and the national economy is in the precarious status.

Ways of solution: passive or hard-line approach: Resist outside political and military threat and prevent liberal thoughts from flowing in and disseminating in the society. Active approach: abandoning nuclear weapons; establishing normal relations with the US, Japan and South Korea; opening door and waging a reform.

The main stream of the solution is passive or hard-line approach, which is representative of the military and Kim's family. However, the military is not monolithic since the military is facing starvation and having dissatisfaction with Kim's rule as well. Particularly the third generation of the generals may not afraid of Kim Jong-un and they will have fewer burdens to support some changes. But so far we don't know much about those middle level military people's thinking.

Except for the worries about the regime survival, there are various reasons accounting for the regime cohesion: the personality cult lasting for 55 years for Kim's family and their charismatic rule; top leader regularly promoting those officials, who are very loyal to Kim and his family, and cruelly punishing those who have showed a bit of disloyal attitude, and rotating and removing officials who gain accumulative power; maintaining an effective monitoring system; Chinese minimum economic assistance keeping their country's subsistence.

Without Kim Jong-il rule, the personality cult will be phased out and some long-restrained opinion and behavior will gradually burst out, so the 3-4 year after Kim Jong-il will be a very dangerous period. But Kim Jong-un and his family will regain power and order after during that period. He will try to re-establish the personality cult again, however, less and less people will continue to believe a mystified Kim Jong-un. Many people, including the military people, doubt the legitimacy of the hereditary succession for three generations and particularly the qualification of Kim Jong-un.

2. The KWP New Power Configuration

After the KWP Representatives Conference in September of 2011, the transitional

power structure roughly formed: Kim Kyong-hui, sister of Kim Jong Il; Jang Song-taek, the brother-in-law of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, and vice chairman of the National Defense Commission; And Kim Jong-en and General Ri Yong-ho. Among them, in terms of party hierarchy, Ri Yong-ho sits the highest position since he is a member in the Politburo Presidium. And Kim Kyong-hui and Jang Song-taek are respectively member of Politburo and alternate member of Politburo. If North Korea real power will be diverted from National Defense Commission to the party, these three persons plus Kim Jong-en will have the legal authority to control the country.

In terms of military hierarchy, the KWP Representatives Conference elected Kim Jong-en and Ri Yong-ho as vice Chairmen of the Military Affairs Committee (MAC). Interestingly noticed, the vice Chairman of the National Defense Commission Jang Song Thaek and Kim Yong-chun are just the MAC's committee members. By this token, North Korea substantial military power will gradually shifted into the party apparatus; Ri Yong-ho's power will be bigger than Kim Yong-chun.

From recent activities of Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un, they seem to have a division of work: the father had more field guidance in the economic sectors; while the son had more military activities. In other words, as the vice Chairman of the Military Affairs Committee, Kim Jong-en is now in charge of all the military affairs. For Ri Yong-ho, he will likely assist Kim Jong-en to command the whole military while managing the specific affairs.

With regard to the originally powerful National Defense Commission, it looks as if it has been hollowed out. There are five deputy Chairmen: Cho Myong-rok, Jang Song-taek, Lee Yong-mu, Kim Il-chul, and O Kuk Ryo. Now Cho Myong-rok died in 2010; Kim Il-chul has stepped down from the Minister of People's Armed Forces, so he probably no longer holds the deputy Chairman of NDC; as for O Kuk Ryo, he even hasn't been elected into the Politburo, so he might have lost favor of both Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un.

Now NDC mission is more on the administrative work, particularly coordinating for the economic construction and attracting foreign investment, which falls into the power of Jang Song-taek. In general, the Party's Military Affairs Committee has taken up the management of the military, which is controlled by Kim Jong-un.

In the past, former Minister of People's Armed Forces Kim Il-chol, former Chief of General Staff Kim Yong-chun and former General Directorate of the General Political Bureau Cho Myong-rok formed a triangular relationship of checks and balance. Now there is no equal institutionally balance among the heads of the military branches. Kim Il-chol was sacked, Cho Myong-rok died; though Kim Yong-chun takes up the post of the Minister of People's Armed Forces, his position is apparently curtailed since he has some health problem and doesn't get favor from Kim Jong-en.

In the core power group of Gang of Four, General Ri Yong-ho will be a critical player or balancer. The DPRK armed forces maintain a single command system: the Chief of the General Staff directly commands and controls ground corps, tanks, infantry and artillery command, navy command and air command.

Kim Jong-il suddenly put this former Pyongyang Garrison Commander, a general with less power and relatively lower position in the military hierarchy, to the Chief of the General Staff of Korean People's Army purposely to let him to guarantee his son peaceful succession. In comparison with other generals, Ri Yong-ho will have less ambition and power to challenge Kim Jong-en's leadership. More importantly, as a relatively inferior general, his any action or behavior beyond system rules and traditional arrangement will easily lead to his defeat in the power struggle.

His predecessor Kim Kyok-sik was removed the title, Chief of the General Staff, in 2009 by Kim Jong-il and dispatched into the west front to take the position of the commander of 4th Army Corps. This was really unexpected move since Kim Jong-il trusted Kyok-sik with a deep heart. One explanation is that: he is too powerful or capable to be entrusted with the task assisting Jong-un to take up the leadership; another possible observation: he is an ideal person to be entitled to help Jong-un to secure his position as an heir. Given the latter consideration, Kim Jong-il thought that Kim Kyok-sik stayed out of Pyongyang would be better than in the capital. In case of crisis against Jong-un, he could command his troops to return Pyongyang to suppress those rebels.

3. Future Leader Kim Jong-un's Policy Options and Survivability

Within 3-4 years after Kim Jong-un takes power, he will be very cautious of grip on the power, avoid risking to take any big policy change. Winning over more senior officials and promotion a batch of young officials and officers are his first policy so as to consolidating his power base. Keeping strong and hard-line policy towards outside will be his necessary tactics in the transitional period.

The above core power group will play a leadership role without Kim Jong-il personality cult. Whether this core group will have power struggle depends on their mentality, the skill of controlling power by Kim Jong-un; generally speaking, Jang is seemingly a reform-minded politician, and he will try to shape Kim Jong-un's mind to certain degree. They two will have more policy consensus in the first several years in the post Kim Jong-il era. But it will be not long before he is removed from the high position. Kim Jong-un will not allow this ambitious and powerful old man to look after him for long. What he relies in his bureaucratic system might be partly on the North Korea "Prince Party" (or in Korean term *Bonghwajo*).

Whether Kim Jong-un will take a limited reform policy and is resolved to forgo nuclear program may depend on several variables: the worsening degree of its economic situation; the US and South Korea policy---reconciliatory or coercive; the

influence of conservative group in the North Korea military---falling into disgrace or maintaining robust; the position and role of the young and relatively liberal elites; the effects of Chinese advice and policy influence on Kim Jong-un.

We could have some optimistic expectations on Kim Jong-un, but not too much. Though the personality cult will die out in the short time, but they will re-constitute it and enforce the people to embrace it. In addition, the system inertia, the embedded autocracy will automatically prevent this country from self-reforming. Without any normally political life in the party or encountering a life-and-death struggle among different political forces in the North Korea, a top-down reform change is less likely to happen.

If *Bonghwajo* comes into power and become the power base of Kim Jong-un, things will turn into much badly. This group is notorious for smuggling, forging dollars and other illegal activities, so we could not expect they can bring fortune to the North Korean people.

In terms of the reporting of Kim Jong-un's activities in the last year and his mandated task in charge of national security affairs, he must be very ruthless and decisive in dealing with social disorder and outside military confrontation. Through these challenges experiencing, he will be much more mature for reining on the people and the government. Though he received education in Switzerland in his juvenile years, he may not be genuinely imbued with Western thoughts. Just like Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Saif al-Islam Muammar al-Gaddafi, the second son of the toppled down Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, they got complete education in the west, but when they return their homeland, they had been greatly inundated with their own regime interests and one-ruler culture.