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## **Analysis of the 9th Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK): Emphasis on "Remarkable Achievements" and Hostile Policy Toward South Korea**

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From December 26 to 30, North Korea held an expanded 9th Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea to evaluate the achievements of 2023 and set policy directions for 2024.

### **Results of the 9th Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the WPK**

At the Plenary Meeting, Kim Jong Un placed a significant emphasis on introducing the achievements of 2023. Unlike in the past, he declared that through the struggle of 2023, the party had "greatly increased the overall national power" and "ushered in an era of comprehensive development of socialism." In this way, North Korea showcasing the achievements of the regime in 2023 both domestically and internationally was intended to encourage North Korean citizens, who have been forced to endure hardships due to prolonged international sanctions, while also giving the impression to the outside world that North Korea remains resilient. This was evidenced by the lack of specifics related to actual improvements in the lives of the residents.

### ***Presentation of Positive Outlook for the Second Five-Year Economic Development Plan***

North Korea unusually disclosed the overall economic development indicators in detail. It was announced that all 12 major targets have been achieved, including a 109% growth in grain production, with the economic growth scale in 2023 significantly increasing key indicators such as iron oxide and machine tools production, resulting in a 1.4 times increase in GDP compared to 2020. However, there is room for questioning the credibility of these claims. In the case of GDP growth, North Korea claimed a 1.4 times growth compared to 2020 for the 2023 GDP, but the 2020 economic scale had already been significantly reduced

due to years of sanctions. Even if South Korea accepts North Korea's announcement that it has achieved 12 major goals, the logic that the three years of stagnation in the overall five-year plan could be offset by one year of growth, especially under conditions of stringent national quarantine measures and severe sanctions from hostile forces, is flawed.

### ***Emphasis on Achievements in the Military Sector***

Through Kim Jong Un's state address and business report, North Korea highlighted the holding of grand political-military celebrations, including parades commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Korean People's Army, and the 70th anniversary of the Victory in the Fatherland Liberation War. In addition, he mentioned, during the Plenary Meeting, the successful launch of the 'Hwasong-17' and 'Hwasong-18,' and specifically, North Korea highlighted the fact that its intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) have reached the stage of "launch training" and "test launches," implying their deployment readiness.

At the 8th and 9th Plenary Meetings, North Korea criticized the Washington Declaration and the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) meetings, the visit of U.S. nuclear submarines and nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, and the landing of B-52 strategic bombers in South Korea. This indicates that the psychological deterrence function against North Korea is starting to work, albeit limitedly, and suggests the need for more concrete measures to strengthen extended deterrence.

### ***Declaration of Hostile Policy Toward South Korea and Foreign Countries***

Kim Jong Un claims that North Korea focuses on strengthening relations with socialist ruling parties and solidarity with China, Russia, and the anti-American struggle with third-world countries. In particular, Kim asserted that inter-Korean relations would be redefined as between two hostile countries and belligerents at war. Through this, North Korea had made it clear that South Korea is not a dialogue or coexistence partner but a target for overthrow.

### ***Organizational and Personnel Changes***

Overall, the organizational restructuring and personnel changes at the 9th Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee can be seen as a version of North Korean "revolving-door appointments" rather than placing fresh faces in appropriate positions.

## **North Korea's 2024 Policy Outlook: Encouraging Economic Performance and Increasing Tensions on the Korean Peninsula**

The 8th Central Committee's 9th Plenary Meeting allocated more than twice the amount of attention to economic and social sectors while highlighting the severity of the external environment and the need for strengthening national defense. It seems inevitable that inter-Korean relations will deteriorate further in 2024. In the future, North Korea is likely to raise tensions on the Korean Peninsula through 1) mid-to-low intensity provocations within its control; 2) stimulating South Korean society and inducing national division; and 3) shifting the responsibility for conflicts to South Korea. By doing so, North Korea aims to increase the priority of North Korean policy for the next U.S. administration during the 2024 U.S. presidential election, seeking advantageous conditions in U.S.-North Korea negotiations, reminiscent of the 2017 scenario.

### **Direction of South Korea's Response**

South Korea must continue promoting "values-based diplomacy" and normalizing inter-Korean relations while maintaining security cooperation among South Korea, the U.S., and Japan based on the ROK-U.S alliance. In response to North Korea's growing nuclear threat, there is a need to seek groundbreaking enhancements in extended deterrence measures that go beyond the Washington Declaration. Also, South Korea needs to stimulate the dissatisfaction of North Korean residents who are forced into hardship. Although this may not lead to severe instability, it could impose significant pressure on Kim Jong Un, eventually serving as a major driving force to modify his current uncompromising policies. Moreover, South Korea needs to prepare in advance for measures to strengthen psychological warfare against North Korea.

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