



## **Kim Jong Un’s Policy Plans in the Revision of the KWP Rules: Continued Goal of Communizing South Korea, Enhancing Political Power, and Internal Solidarity**

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In January 2021, North Korea revised the “Rules of the Korean Workers’ Party (KWP Rules)” during the 8<sup>th</sup> KWP Congress. The revision, dated January 9, was reported by North Korean media at the time, but the full contents of the amendment were not disclosed until early June.

### **‘Revolution of South Korea’ still maintained as the major goal**

Some analysts in South Korea claim that North Korea scrapped the “Policy line of the Revolution of South Korea” through this revision of the KWP Rules. It is true that North Korea deleted the phrase “carry out Korean national liberation and people’s revolution and ultimately achieve the Korean people’s independence and sovereignty through Kim Il Sung/Kim Jong Il-ism,” which was defined as the “immediate goal of the Korean Workers’ Party” in its preface to the KWP rules. However, it is hard to see this as the abolition of the revolutionary theory towards South Korea itself. The fact that a state actor aims to instigate “revolution” against another state is its will to eventually change the characteristics of the rival’s system in a radical way. The “Revolution of South Korea” is a policy line that has been pursued since the establishment of the North Korean regime and was the cause of the Korean War in 1950. Even after the Korean War, North Korea adopted a plan to strengthen its “three-dimension revolutionary capabilities” at the 8th Plenary Session of the Workers’ Party in February 1964 to (1) strengthen its revolutionary base in North Korea, (2) expand its revolutionary foundation in South Korea, and (3) create international conditions favorable to the revolution. To declare that North Korea has “abandoned” the revolutionary theory, it must withdraw its policy line to transform South Korean society into a communist system, which should remain the essence of the revolutionary theory if Pyongyang is oriented toward this goal by military aggression, threats, and political maneuver.

### **Military supremacy over South Korea and the will for ultimate communization**

In addition to North Korea’s military power, the KWP Rules is aimed to achieve unification by inciting revolutionary sentiments within South Korean society. However, the newly revised KWP

Rules makes a tactical change that shifts to communization of the whole Korean Peninsula by enhancing North Korea's military power and strengthening its capabilities to induce international support, instead of internal division in South Korea. Although the policy line of the "Revolution of South Korea" is maintained, the tactic to realize this has been changed from a mix of "Revolution of people's democracy in South Korea" and enhanced North Korea's revolutionary capabilities to military supremacy over South Korea.

Through the 8<sup>th</sup> KWP Congress, Pyongyang declared the resumption of its "Parallel Development (*Byungjin*) Policy," which is not confined to nuclear development. In fact, Kim Jong Un vowed in a general report to the KWP Congress to "push ahead with the construction of nuclear power that has already begun without interruption," while vowing to diversify and upgrade nuclear power and simultaneously acquire various advanced conventional weapons in the future.

In this regard, the revised KWP Rules also states North Korea's goal of achieving unification (communization) based on military dominance over South Korea. Rather, it emphasizes the importance of a "unified front" that consists of various factions against imperialism, declaring that "Strengthening the unified front with the patriotic democratic power of the whole Korea and ensuring democratic rights and interests of overseas Koreans ... We should actively take the path to unification and prosperity of our fatherland." This is why the assertion that Pyongyang abandoned the "Revolution of South Korea" is incorrect.

### **Amplifying power concentration to Kim Jong Un**

On the contrary, what should be noted in the revision of the KWP Rules at the 8<sup>th</sup> KWP Congress is the possibility of power concentration to Kim Jong Un. Through the KWP Rules revision, Kim Jong Un once again demonstrated his legitimacy as a son of the "Mount Baekdu Bloodline (*Baekdoo Hyultong*)" and heir to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il by clarifying that the KWP is a "Kim Il Sung-Kim/Jong Il-ist" party. At the same time, he reaffirmed that he was completely out of the shadow of the "Military-first Policy (*Songun*)" pursued during the Kim Jong Il era by removing the word "Military-first Policy" that was still maintained in the 2016 revised KWP Rules.

Kim Jong Un also showed his willingness to establish himself as an unrivalled supreme leader within the North Korean elite by trying to strengthen North Korea's image as a "normal (socialist) system." He has been aiming to create the impression that North Korea is a normal state by appearing on the international stage since the 2018 U.S.-North Korea summit. At the 2016 KWP Congress, North Korea introduced an organizational system called "Political Affairs Bureau (*Jongmukook*, former secretariat)" and "Chairman of the KWP" that is not well adopted by ordinary socialist systems. However, the revision in 2021 returned to the "Secretariat (*Bisokook*)" as a party executive as before 2016 and the "General Secretary" system, the head of the party. At the same time, the party changed its plan to "elect" the general secretary at the Party Congress (Article 23, Clause 5), unlike the past method where the general secretary was "crowned" at the Party Congress. All of these measures are

believed to be intended to show that North Korea is following the power structure of an orthodox socialist state and that Kim Jong Un is ruling according to laws and systems.

At the same time, Kim Jong Un's status as the supreme leader has become strengthened. The revised KWP Rules established the title of "First Secretary" within the secretariat and define the first secretary as an "agent of the General Secretary of the KWP." The secretaries and first secretaries are both elected from the party's Central Committee, not from the KWP Congress. His status is now of a significantly different character from other secretaries by establishing an "agent" position that did not appear in the Congress of 2010 when he adopted the secretariat system or the Congress of 2016. In other words, Kim Jong Un's status in the KWP has become unrivaled as the two-stage hierarchy between the general secretary and the secretaries is transformed into a three-stage relationship among the general secretary, first secretary, and other secretaries.

### **Emphasis on building a socialist utopia**

Another noticeable part of the amendment to the KWP Rules is the re-appearance of the term "communism." North Korea removed the word "communism" from the preface to its constitution in April 2009, defining the chairman of the National Defense Commission as the supreme leader in name and substance, and also deleted the term "communism" in 2010 when it also revised the KWP Rules. Since then, the term "powerful socialist state" has been commonly used in major North Korean media and official documents. After the revision of the KWP Rules, "communism" began to reappear in the North Korean media.

The re-appearance of the term "communism" in the KWP Rules is irrelevant to the economic reality that North Korea now encounters. In a speech celebrating the 75th anniversary of the founding of the KWP on October 10, 2020, Kim Jong Un cited three severe economic obstacles of international sanctions, natural disasters, and quarantine, and admitted that the "five-year strategy for national economic development" was a failure. The problem is that there is still no sign of improvement so far. The long-term economic downturn or the heavy burden of people's lives can also lead to a weakening of Kim Jong Un's power, which can never be neglected.

In this regard, the re-appearance of the term "communism" can be interpreted in terms of a "revival of nostalgia for the Kim Il Sung era." Kim Jong Un has consistently assumed the Kim Il Sung era as a model for consistently desirable governance since he took power, which can be seen as a step toward strengthening legitimacy by stimulating nostalgia for his grandfather's era, when relative economic and social stabilization existed in North Korea. Second, the attempt to strengthen legitimacy itself proves that people's complaints due to international sanctions and COVID-19 are severe. By emphasizing the "utopia" of the construction of a "communist society," it can also be evaluated as an intention to alleviate complaints about "reality" and emphasize the "ideological armament" of the people. It can be seen as a logical basis to emphasize that the current hardship is an inevitable rite of passage for the construction of a "communist utopia" and that people should endure it a little longer.

Third, North Korea is also trying to highlight that it is not an unusual system compared to other socialist countries and shares its “communist” orientation.

### **How should we look at and deal with North Korea?**

By revising the KWP Rules, Kim Jong Un strongly hinted at his willingness to strengthen the dictatorship of the “Great Leader” for the time being, enhancing Pyongyang’s ability to threaten the South—including nuclear development—and focus on solidarity within North Korea. From this perspective, there is little possibility at present that the talks between the two Koreas and the U.S.-North Korea denuclearization dialogues will be smoothly advanced by North Korea’s early response to inter-Korean dialogue or promising sincere denuclearization measures. Kim Jong Un’s remarked at the 8th Plenary meeting of the Workers’ Party Central Committee on June 18th, “We must be prepared for both dialogue and confrontation, especially for confrontation.”

Considering this, the core of the North Korea policy direction that we should take at this point can be divided into three main ways. The first is to take a moment to recalibrate our North Korea policies. South Korea and the U.S. have already declared in a joint statement that there is room for humanitarian assistance to North Korea and that they will respect the existing agreement between the two Koreas and the United States. Now is the time for North Korea to respond, not preemptive concessions or unilateral preparations for dialogue.

Second, in order to bring North Korea to the negotiating table, North Korea must be made aware that its current approach to South Korean and U.S. policy is not working at all. At this point, it is necessary to return to running South Korea-U.S. combined military exercises at their previous level and strengthen the international monitoring network to effectively implement sanctions on North Korea until the North changes its stance.

Third, given the currently stalled nature of inter-Korean relations, it is necessary to create space for domestic discussion and deliberation related to North Korea policy rather than focusing only on drawing North Korea’s attention.

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<http://www.asaninst.org/?p=80505>)