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United States Department of State

Washington, D. C. 20520



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I. 18

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

S/S

TO: P - Mr. Kimmitt

RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.4(B), 1.4(D)

FROM: INR - Douglas P. Mulholland

SUBJECT: North Korea--Kim Jong Il Takes Charge

There is increasing evidence the Kim Jong Il is now calling most of the policy shots in North Korea--both domestic and foreign. The attached paper examines this evidence; its principal findings are:

--The younger Kim seems to be behind North Korea's recent foreign policy moves, especially toward Japan and South Korea.

--The more forward, bolder approach to inter-Korean dialogue in recent months may reflect Kim Jong Il's leadership and could be a harbinger of both the style and content he will bring to decisionmaking in Pyongyang.

--There are signs that those elements in the leadership associated with the younger Kim and advocating cautious economic reform managed to survive a conservative backlash earlier this year and are again pushing their policy agenda.

--Along with changes in foreign and unification policy, we have seen a major Kim Jong Il boom in domestic politics, including the first-ever party-wide loyalty campaign for him

--Kim Jong Il continues to polish his credentials as a revolutionary theorist. He has now virtually supplanted his father as the source of new theoretical guidance.

--Given the exigencies of Pyongyang's situation, we believe the current buildup of Kim Jong Il may signal the final push to formalize his succession. Events in Eastern Europe and the North's deteriorating relationship with the Soviet Union may have prompted the North to try to put all the remaining elements of the succession in place.

--Pyongyang appears to be trying to use its present difficulties to rally support behind Kim Jong Il. The current situation provides the North with a chance to fill in one of the remaining gaps in his revolutionary hagiology--proving his mettle in a time of trouble, as his father did during the anti-Japanese struggle and the Korean War.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: DONALD A JOHNSTON
DATE/CASE ID: 28 JUL 2005 200404808

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DECL: ~~TOP SECRET~~

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Kim Jong Il "Boom." Along with changes in foreign and unification policy, there has been a major upsurge in attention to Kim Jong Il. Similar periods of unusual attention to the younger Kim have occurred in the past, but these have all receded--for example, when he was left in charge during his father's trip to Eastern Europe in 1984.

A prime example of the current boom is a loyalty campaign that began in October with an exchange of letters between Kim Jong Il and a party cell in the official North Korean news agency. This is the first-ever party-wide loyalty campaign for the younger Kim and appears intended to firm up his support by eliminating "impure elements" from grassroots party organizations.

Kim Jong Il continues to polish his credentials as a revolutionary theorist. The North Korean media are currently trumpeting his new treatise on the role of the party, published to mark the 45th anniversary of the Korean Worker's Party. The younger Kim has gradually slid into the role of the revolution's chief theoretician, and has now virtually supplanted his father as the source of new theoretical guidance.

Highlighting Kim Jong Il's ascendancy, Pyongyang carved slogans praising the younger Kim--but not Kim Il Sung--atop the highest peaks on the Diamond Mountains to mark the party's 45th anniversary. The Diamond Mountains, on the eastern border with South Korea, hold a special emotional place in the hearts of all Koreans and are likely to be one of the first areas opened to tourists from the South.

Succession end game? Given the exigencies of Pyongyang's situation, we believe the current buildup of Kim Jong Il signals the final push to formalize his succession. Events in Eastern Europe and the North's deteriorating relationship with the Soviet Union may have prompted the North to try to put in place all remaining elements of the succession. It is possible that the current Kim Jong Il boom may be partially designed to counter internal opposition to him, possibly encouraged by sniping at his revolutionary credentials from South Korea and the Soviet Union.

Whatever the case, Pyongyang appears to be trying to use its present difficulties--which it openly acknowledges--to rally support for Kim Jong Il. The current situation provides the North with a chance to fill in one of the remaining gaps in the younger Kim's revolutionary hagiology--proving his mettle in a time of trouble, as his father did during the anti-Japanese struggle and the Korean War.

Pyongyang knows it makes little sense to rally round the elder Kim (who is 78 and not in the best of health) only to see him pass away. Nonetheless, Kim Il Sung is a weighty historical figure who remains useful as a symbol in inter-Korean dialogue and international diplomacy.

NORTH KOREA: KIM JONG IL TAKES CHARGE

Evidence that Kim Jong Il is now calling most of the policy shots, domestic as well as foreign, is mounting. The son has played a large role in several recent diplomatic moves by Pyongyang, including the opening to Japan and the prime ministerial talks.

DPRK media have devoted increased attention to the younger Kim in recent months, and an unusual campaign is underway to secure pledges of loyalty to the son from individuals and organizations. In all but name, the succession has already been accomplished; Kim Jong Il's formal installation is likely to occur at a party congress soon--if not next year then certainly by 1992. By gradually expanding the younger Kim's role, the DPRK has reduced the likelihood of sharp dislocation when his father passes away. Moreover, the signs of agility and cautious economic reform we are already seeing are probably connected with Kim Jong Il's emergence and a harbinger of both the style and the content he will bring to decisionmaking in Pyongyang.

Foreign policy moves. The younger Kim seems to be behind North Korea's recent foreign policy moves, especially toward Japan and South Korea. North Korean officials have publicly credited him with facilitating Japanese leader Shin Kanemaru's visit to Pyongyang. This judgment is buttressed by the fact that Hwang Chang Yop, long regarded as a close advisor to Kim Jong Il, is known to have played a key role in the breakthrough with Japan. As party secretary for ideology, Hwang has also provided the theoretical arguments justifying economic reform.

The more forward, bolder approach to inter-Korean dialogue in recent months may also reflect Kim Jong Il's style. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] over the past several months, Pyongyang has moved quickly and adeptly in its dealings with Seoul, undercutting ROK objections to DPRK proposals and at least appearing to accommodate Seoul's concerns. The North has agreed to sports and cultural exchanges with a minimum of bickering. And it has stuck with dialogue in the face of developments--such as the Roh-Gorbachev meetings in San Francisco and Moscow--that would have derailed it in the past.

Domestic policies. This ability to roll with the punches has also shown up in the domestic sphere. There are signs that those elements in the leadership associated with the younger Kim and advocating cautious economic reform managed to survive a conservative backlash earlier this year and are again pushing their policy agenda. Premier Yon Hyong Mok's recent visit to China may, in part, have been an effort by more reform minded elements to get their program back on track.

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