

## **The Power Hierarchy: North Korean Foreign Policy-Making Process**

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### **PREFACE**

**W**ith the demise of the Soviet Union, its most generous patron, the North was compelled to modify its diplomatic goals in the 1990s. It had to adjust to a number of other global changes: the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, China's economic opening up and reform, as well as Pyongyang's economic crisis and security threat. For its new goals, it expanded diplomatic dialogues not only with South Korea, but also with other Western countries. This diplomatic development indicated that the center of its foreign policy had shifted from ideology to security and economy.

In addition, the North announced "independence, peace and friendship" as its basic ideology and as the underlying principle for its diplomatic activities.<sup>1)</sup> Pyongyang is exerting multi-dimensional diplomatic efforts to achieve its policy goals. Such change is, therefore, an indication that North Korea has overcome the acute national crisis created by Kim Il-sung's sudden death, and has

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1) The Socialist Constitution (Amended on September 5, 1998), Article 17.

normalized internal politics with the inauguration of the Kim Jong-il regime.

Pyongyang has placed the highest priority on the economy as one of its foreign policy objectives. With respect to diplomacy, optimists say that Pyongyang is involved in far-reaching transformation to change its basic strategy and to pursue economic reform. Furthermore, they predict that negotiations on North Korea's missile and nuclear programs could be resolved through dialogue. Pessimists, on the other hand, predict that Kim Jong-il does not really want reform or opening. Rather, he wishes to strengthen the country's military capabilities, including weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles, at the same time tightening his grip on internal matters to sustain the regime.<sup>2)</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to review the process of North Korea's foreign policy-making in the era of Kim Jong-il. Is North Korean policy solely determined by the new leader? Or is it decided by multi-faceted discussions among foreign policy-makers? In particular, is there friction or is there cooperation between hawks and doves? Likewise, what is the relationship between those who stick to principles and those who emphasize practicality? This paper will deal with these questions by analyzing organizations and individuals who participate in the foreign policy-making process.

## THE PROCESS OF FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING

### *Foreign Policy-Making Bodies and Their Characteristics*

In order to analyze the North Korean foreign policy-making structure, it is necessary to compare and analyze official and

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2) Huh Moon-young, "Changes in the Foreign Policy of North Korea and North Korea-U.S. Relations," (in Korean), *Oekyo* (Diplomacy), Vol. 54 (July 2000), pp. 31-32.

unofficial structures and bodies that are part of the foreign policy-making process; official and unofficial procedures; and finally, the authority and influence of those who participate in the foreign policy-making process.

North Korea is run by a one-party dictatorship dominated by *Suryong* (the Great Leader) Kim Jong-il. The Workers' Party of Korea (KWP) decides on each and every policy, and supervises and directs the enforcement of that policy. Officially, however, North Korea's foreign policy-making bodies are divided into party and state organizations. The foreign policy-making bodies that appear in the North Korea Constitution and the Workers' Party Constitution are state organizations—including the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA), Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, the Cabinet and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Party organizations include the Party Congress, Central Committee of the Party (CCWP), the Politburo, and the International Department of the Secretariat of the Party.

As a first step in North Korea's foreign policy-making process, under the Constitution, the Supreme People's Assembly establishes the basic principles of the nation's foreign policy.<sup>3)</sup> Secondly, the Presidium of the SPA decides whether or not to ratify treaties and agreements, appoints and recalls North Korean representatives in foreign countries, and makes announcements in this regard.<sup>4)</sup> Thirdly, the Cabinet sets up procedures to implement national policies, signs treaties with other countries and conducts overseas business.<sup>5)</sup> In essence, however, all policies are decided by the Party while the SAP merely deliberates and renders decisions as a formality. The Politburo of the Party's Central Committee sets the basic policy direction and the International Department of the Secretariat of the Party work on the basic policy to come up with a

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3) The Socialist Constitution, Article 91.

4) The Socialist Constitution, Article 110.

5) The Socialist Constitution, Article 119.

more detailed course of action. The SPA ratifies the policies set by the International Department. Policies adopted through this process are implemented by responsible departments under the supervision and direction of the Party, the Presidium of the SPA and the Cabinet.

Let us now examine the past role of the Party in the process of the foreign policy-making. Under the Constitution, the Party Congress, the supreme organization of the Party, set the basic principles and direction of foreign policy, while the CCWP deliberated on them and made the final decision. And the International Department of the Secretariat assumed the role of control management and mediation in a philosophical and ideological sense. On the working level, the Department hammered out measures and implemented them. In reality, however, the Party Congress is just a forum for discussion, and has no real influence. Moreover, the Central Committee of the Party no longer functions as a policy-making body. Finally, the Politburo is practically useless in the foreign policy-making process. In contrast, the Secretariat of Kim Jong-il has emerged as a powerful force.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs holds exclusive responsibility over foreign affairs. Officially, it is part of the Cabinet, but in practice it reports directly to Kim Jong-il. Increasingly, under Kim Jong-il's direction, the ministry independently develops and implements foreign policies. Another change since the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, diplomacy between the socialist parties of such nations has significantly declined, while relations with Western countries have expanded. Against this backdrop, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, entrusted to carry out normal diplomatic affairs, has taken a greater role. It appears that the Ministry has successfully undertaken the multi-directional diplomacy that the North is vigorously pursuing.

#### *Participants in the Foreign Policy-Making Process*

By analyzing the roles and personalities of major figures in the power hierarchy of North Korea, this paper will highlight the main

features of the foreign policy-making process in North Korea.

(1) Top Decision-maker: Kim Jong-il

There are conflicting descriptions about Kim Jong-il. Some say he is a capricious film buff, a womanizer, and even a violent imbecile and psychotic.<sup>6)</sup> After the death of Kim Il-sung, some thought North Korean collapse was imminent, based on Kim Jong-il's predicted inability to lead, but more recent evaluations call him energetic, witty and insightful with sound judgment and a deep understanding of international politics.

In fact, Kim Jong-il's ascendancy was long in the making. He was named as his father's successor in the 5th plenary session of the 8th CCWP held on February 1974, and officially appointed as the successor to Kim Il-sung in the 6th Congress of the Workers' Party on October 10, 1980. Since the early 1980s, in an effort to solidify his power base, Kim Jong-il installed in major party, government and military positions his trusted and reliable followers. Kim Jong-il took office as General Secretary of the Party on October 8, 1997. On September 5, 1998 at the first plenary session of the 10th Supreme People's Assembly, he was selected as Chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC), formally completing his succession to power.

Even though there are agencies and organizations at each level and various responsible for foreign relations, Kim Jong-il has the last word in foreign policy-making. Essentially, he decides policy unilaterally, and punishes those who disagree with him. To his credit, he has shown a keen interest in changes in the international political environment, an important factor in the process of foreign policy-making, and he seems to have considerable insight regarding

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6) Hwang Jang-yup commented on the personality of Kim Jong-il that "He is ruthless and sadistic in the sense that he enjoys the suffering of his people rather than their happiness." Hwang Jan-yup, *I Saw the Truth of History* (in Korean) (Seoul: Hanwul, 1999), p. 308.

**Table 1. Power Hierarchy in North Korea**

Rank	Name	Current Position	Others
1	Kim Jong-il	Chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC)	General Secretary of the Workers' Party Central Committee (CCWP), Supreme Commander of the People's Army
2	Kim Yong-nam	Chairman of Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA)	Former Deputy Premier, Foreign Minister
3	Cho Myong-rok	First Vice Chairman of the NDC	Vice Marshal, Chief of the General Political Bureau of the People's Army
4	Hong Song-nam	Premier	Former Deputy Premier
5	Kim Yong-ju	Honorary Vice Chairman of the Presidium of the SPA	Former Vice President, Younger brother of Kim Il-sung
6	Pak Song-chol	Honorary Vice Chairman of the Presidium of the SPA	Former Vice President, Member of a Chinese Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Unit
7	Kim Yong-chun	Member of the NDC	Vice Marshal, Chief of the General Staff of the People's Army
8	Kim Il-chol	Vice Chairman of the NDC Minister of the People's Armed Forces	Vice Marshal, Member of the Party Central Military Committee
9	Li Ul-sol	Member of the NDC	Marshal, Member of a Chinese Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Unit
10	Chon Byong-ho	Member of the NDC	Secretary of the CCWP Member of the Politburo
11	Paek Hak-rim	Member of the NDC, Minister of Public Security	Chairman of the Legislation Committee, Member of a Chinese Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Unit

12	Yon Hyong-muk	Member of the NDC	Former Premier, Associate Member of the Politburo
13	Li Yong-mu	Vice Chairman of the NDC	Vice Marshal, Former Chairman of the State Inspection Commission
14	Yang Hyong-sop	Vice Chairman of the Presidium of the SPA	Former Chairman of the SPA, Associate Member of the Politburo
15	Kye Ung-tae	Member of the Politburo	Former Chairman of the Bills Committee
16	Han Song-ryong	Chairman of the Budget Committee	Secretary of the CCWP, Member of the Politburo
17	Choe Tae-bok	Chairman of the SPA	Secretary of the CCWP, Associate Member of the Politburo
18	Kim Chol-man	Member of the NDC	Member of the Party Central Military Committee, Member of a Chinese Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Unit
19	Choe Yong-rim	Prosecutor General	Associate Member of the Politburo, Former Deputy Premier
20	Kim Yun-hyok	Secretary General of the Presidium of the SPA	Former Deputy Premier

Sources: List of platform of the 3rd plenary session of the 10th Supreme People's Assembly (April 4, 2000); List of platform of the first plenary session of the 10th Supreme People's Assembly (September 5, 1998); Seo Dae-suk, *Modern North Korean Leaders: Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il* (Seoul: Eulyoo Moonwhasa, 2000), p. 235.

this issue. He is briefed directly on international politics by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and also receives analyses and reports from North Korea's Central News Agency and other national agencies. Based on these various sources of information, he forms a

judgment on the political environment and sets the direction for North Korean foreign policy.

(2) Participants in the Policy-making Process: The Power Elite

The Kim Jong-il regime includes fellow alumni and loyal members of his father's government. They form the dominant power hierarchy in North Korea, participate in major decisions and are relatively influential in the foreign policy-making process.

First, elites who graduated from the Mankgyongdae Revolutionary School include: Cho Myong-rok, Kim Yong-chun, Kim Il-chol, Chon Byong-ho, Yon Hyong-muk, Han Song-ryong, Choe Tae-bok, Kim Guk-tae, and Oh Guk-ryol, all of whom are strong supporters of the Kim Jong-il regime.

Secondly, relatives of Kim Jong-il include: Kim Yong-ju, Pak Song-chol, Yang Hyong-sup, Kim Gyong-hi, Kim Yong-sun, Kim Chang-ju, Chang Song-wu, Chang Song-taek. They too have an influence on policy-making of Kim Jong-il, either in a formal or informal way.

Thirdly, first and second-generation descendants of partisans, including: Pak Song-chol, Li Ul-sol, Paek Hak-rim, Kim Chol-man, Li Jong-ok, and Chon Mun-sop. They have been Kim Jong-il's strongest supporters, even before the establishment of the country. They include those who once fought against Japanese imperialism, and who then entered North Korea with Kim Il-sung after liberation of Korea. They have also supported Kim Jong-il's succession from its initial stages.

Lastly, those who graduated from Kimilsung University include: Kim Yong-nam, Hong Song-nam, Chon Byong-ho, Yon Hyong-muk, Yang Hyong-sop, Han Song-ryong, Choe Tae-bok, Kim Kuk-tae, Kim Ki-nam, and Kim Yong-sun. They have expertise in various areas and play a major role in running the Kim Jong-il regime.

Among the ruling elite in North Korea, a number are deeply engaged in the official and unofficial foreign policy-making process at the moment, or are prominent participants in foreign affairs in



North Korea.<sup>7)</sup>

*Kim Yong-nam* was born in North Hamgyong Province in 1925. He graduated from Kimilsung University in the 1940s and studied at Moscow University in 1953. From 1983 to 1998, he was directly engaged in North Korean diplomacy with Kim Jong-il's full trust. He was deeply involved in the process of selecting Kim Jong-il as Kim Il-sung's successor and in the actual launch of the new regime. In particular, he contributed greatly to the process of solidifying Kim Jong-il's power base by disposing of opponents and challengers in the regime. This earned him the solid trust of Kim Jong-il, and he remains one of Kim Jong-il's most loyal supporters.

Vice Marshal *Cho Myong-rok* is First Vice Chairman of the all-powerful National Defense Commission and chief of the General Political Bureau of the People's Army. Born in Manchuria in 1924, he graduated from Mangyongdae Revolutionary School after returning from the Soviet Union in 1959. He worked tirelessly to build the foundation for the succession of Kim Jong-il by handling military politics and ideological projects. In May 1993, during the crisis over a suspected nuclear facility in Yongbyon, in North Korea, he displayed a hawkish attitude by organizing a special suicide force. One of Kim's closest confidantes, he can speak for the North Korean leader's thoughts in military circles. He is also known to have a

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7) For the analysis of personalities: Kang Myong-do, *Pyongyang Dreams of Defection* (in Korean) (Seoul: Chungang Ilbosa, 1995); Ko Young-hwan, *Pyongyang 25 Hours* (Seoul: Koryowon, 1993); Institute of North Korea Studies, *The Latest Who's Who in North Korea* (in Korean) (Seoul: INKS, 1996); Seoul Sinmunsa, *Who's Who in North Korea* (in Korean) (Seoul: Seoul Sinmunsa, 1995); Seo Dae-suk, *Modern North Korean leaders: Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il* (in Korean), (Seoul: Eulyoo Moonwhasa, 2000); Yonhap News Agency, *North Korean Almanac: Who's Who in North Korea* (in Korean) (Seoul: Yonhap News Agency, 2000); Lee Hang-gu, *Kim Jong-il and His Staff* (in Korean) (Seoul: Shintaeyangsa, 1995); Chun Hyun-jun, *A Study on the Ruling Elite of the Kim Jong-il Regime* (in Korean) (Seoul: The Research Institute of National Unification, 1995); and Chung Chang-hyun, *Kim Jong-il with a Close Look* (in Korean) (Seoul: Kimyoungsa, 2000).

powerful influence on foreign relations, including behind-the-scenes relations between Pyongyang and Washington.

Premier *Hong Song-nam*, a typical economic technocrat, had played a role in the field of heavy industry. Born in Kangwon Province in 1924, he graduated from Kimilsung University and studied in Czechoslovakia. He was reportedly appointed as Premier of the Cabinet in 1998, not because of his political base or ability, but because of his administrative capability. As a technocrat, he is good at administration yet he lacks a solid political base. The biggest task facing him is to revive the North Korean economy. Although he is a premier, ranking fourth in the power hierarchy, he has barely engaged in the diplomatic policy-making process and other aspects of foreign affairs.

Vice Marshal *Kim Il-chol*,<sup>8)</sup> Minister of the People's Armed Forces, born in Pyongyang in 1928, graduated from Mangyongdae Revolutionary School. He is the symbol of change, representing the second revolutionary generation. Although the North Korean army mainly depends on ground troops, Admiral Kim was installed in the highest military position of the head of the People's Army, indicating that he is fully trusted by Kim Jong-il. Kim Il-chol participated as a senior delegate in the inter-Korean Defense Minister's meeting held for the first time since the division of the Korean peninsula in September 2000.

*Yon Hyong-Muk*, a member of the National Defense Commission and Responsible Secretary of the Party Chapter in Jagang Province, served as a Premier of State Administration Council from 1988 to

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8) In order to strengthen the role of the military in the diplomatic arena, North Korea restructured the military ranks and positions. The Minister of the People's Armed Forces was renamed the Department of the People's Armed Forces and the General Politburo, under the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces, was elevated to a status comparable to the Department of the People's Armed Forces. This demonstrates Kim Jong-il's determination to give special treatment to the military and symbolizes his adoption of the "military-first policy," *Munwha Ilbo*, October 7, 2000.

1992. Born in North Hamgyong Province in 1931, he graduated from Kimilsung University and studied at an engineering college in Prague. In December 1992, a year after the end of the third seven-year economic plan, he was discharged from Premier of State Administration Council, demoted to associate member of the Politburo, and appointed responsible secretary of the Party Chapter in Jagang Province. After his ouster, however, he performed well in Jagang Province, and regained Kim Jong-il's confidence. In 1998, he was named to the National Defense Commission. He has visited Seoul for high-level inter-Korean negotiations, and engaged in a variety of activities regarding South Korea. Assessed as a reasonable man, he is deeply involved in South Korean affairs and is believed to have had a great influence on foreign policy-making process, particularly with regard to inter-Korean relations.

Minister of Foreign Affairs *Paek Nam-sun* (born in 1929) participated in the 6th Inter-Korean Red Cross Talks held in May 1973 in Seoul and in the preliminary meeting at the vice prime minister-level for the inter-Korean summit talks between former South Korean President Kim Young-sam and former North Korean leader Kim Il-sung in June 1994. He is considered a specialist in South Korean affairs. He has limited foreign experience, however, having served only as ambassador to Poland (1972-1979). His appointment as foreign minister (1998) was, therefore, unexpected. Compared with the powerful influence of his five predecessors for the last five decades (Pak Hon-yong, Nam Il, Pak Song-chol, Huh Dam, Kim Yong-nam), he is a notch lower in the hierarchy, considering his limited foreign experience and lack of a political support base. This could mean that Kim Jong-il needed someone with administrative skills in the diplomatic area rather than a foreign policy planner.

*Kim Yong-sun*, Secretary in charge of South Korean Affairs of the Workers' Party Central Committee and the Chairman of the Korean Asia-Pacific Peace Committee, was born in South Pyongan Province in 1934. He graduated from Kimilsung University and studied in

Moscow University. Although he once dismissed as an associate member of the Politburo in 1993, he soon regained Kim Jongil's trust. In fact, he is charged with communicating the Great Leader's thoughts and opinions on South Korean affairs and political and diplomatic matters. He is a specialist on nonaligned countries and on North Korean diplomacy toward the West. In the 1990s, with the full confidence of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, he played a major role in improving relations with Washington, Tokyo and Seoul. He established the framework of negotiations for establishing official relations with Japan in 1990, and laid the groundwork for improved relations with the United States in January 1992 in a high-level meeting in New York. In addition, he acted as chief delegate in the preliminary meeting for the inter-Korean summit talks held in 1994, and was instrumental in drawing up the timetable for the historic inter-Korean summit talks. He also plays an important role in Pyongyang's relations with the Seoul and other Western countries.

Other Party members who have participated in the process of foreign policy-making include: Chon Byong-ho (born in 1926), full member of the Politburo, a secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea and a member of the National Defense Commission; Kim Guk-tae (born in 1924), Party Secretary and chief of the CCWP Cadre Department; Choe Tae-bok (born in 1929), Chairman of the Supreme People's Assembly and Education Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party; and Chang Song-taek (born in 1946), first deputy chief for Organization and Guidance Department of the Party. Several other officials are actively engaged in diplomatic relations, not only with the South but with other countries. They include: Song Ho-gyong (born in 1940), Deputy Chairman of the Korean Asia-Pacific Peace Committee and Deputy Minister of the International Department of the Party; and Chon Keum-chol (born in 1932), Deputy Chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland.

In the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, Vice Chairman Yang Hyong-sop (born in 1925) contributed significantly to

establishing the one-man dictatorship of Kim Il-sung by systemizing the *Juche* (self-reliance) ideology. Honorary Vice Chairman of the Presidium Pak Song-chol (born in 1913), who was once partisan fighter, has been mainly engaged in diplomatic matters since the end of the Korean War. He contributed to North Korea's participation in the Non-Aligned Movement in 1975 after devoting his time and energy to diplomatic activities targeting the Third World.

Members of the National Defense Commission with real influence include Kim Yong-chun, Li Ul-sol, Chon Byong-ho, Paek Hak-rim, and Li Yong-mu. Vice Marshal Kim Yong-chun (born in 1922) is Chief of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army and a confidant of Kim Jong-il. Marshal Li Ul-sol (born in 1920) has long served as the head of the People's Security that protected Kim Il-sung and now his son, Kim Jong-il. Li and Kim Il-sung once served together as partisans. Chon Byong-ho (born in 1926) is Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party and once served as Chairman of the Light Industry Committee of the Party. Paek Hak-rim (born in 1918) also once a partisan, is Minister of the People's Security. He has long served as the Minister of Public Security responsible for internal security and social order. Vice Chairman of the NDC Li Yong-mu, whose age and hometown are unknown, is married to Kim Il-sung's cousin and is known to be totally devoted to Kim Jong-il.

Finally, Kang Sok-ju (born in 1939), First Vice Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a diplomatic bureaucrat in charge of the practical issues of North Korea's diplomacy. He played an instrumental role in securing assurances on U.S. provision of light water reactors and heavy fuel oil during the Geneva negotiations in 1994. In May 1999, he also met with William Perry, North Korea Policy Coordinator, and discussed about details of a comprehensive package deal, earning him the reputation as the No. 1 man in North Korea's diplomacy with the United States. Kim Gye-kwan (born in 1943), Deputy Minister of the Foreign Affairs participated in the Pyongyang-Washington negotiations and the Geneva talks as a working-level representative of North Korea, serving as a channel of

**Table 2. Personal Traits and Political Orientation of Policy-Makers**

Rank	Name	Personal Trait	Political Orientation
1	Kim Jong-il	Show-off "performer" big ideas, impresario likes to impress	Moderate
2	Kim Yong-nam	Earnest, clever, rigid and incorruptible	Conservative
3	Cho Myong-rok	Out-spoken, quick-tempered, driven in his work	Conservative
4	Hong Song-nam	Generalist, good administrator	Moderate
5	Kim Yong-ju	Deceitful, cruel	Conservative
6	Pak Song-chol	Straightforward, out-spoken, dissolute	Moderate
7	Kim Yong-chun	—	Conservative
8	Kim Il-chol	Easy-going, active	Conservative
9	Li Ul-sol	Indolent, inept, egotistical	Conservative
10	Chon Byong-ho	Impatient, active	Conservative
11	Paek Hak-rim	Nervous, lacking in judgement	Conservative
12	Yon Hyong-muk	Vigorous, flexible, rational	Reformer
13	Li Yong-mu	Carefree, open-minded	—
14	Yang Hyong-sop	Intelligent, well-informed brilliant conversationalist	—
15	Kye Ung-tae	Meticulous, rigid, incorruptible	Conservative
16	Han Song-ryong	Skilled in statistics	Moderate
17	Choe Tae-bok	Academic, good command of foreign languages	—
18	Kim Guk-tae	Brilliant, moderate	Conservative
19	Paek Nam-sun	—	Reformer
20	Kim Yong-sun	Honest, gentle, flexible perfectionist	Reformer
21	Chang Song-taek	Driven in his work	Reformer
22	Kang Sok-ju	—	Moderate

communication with the United States. Kang Sok-ju and Kim Gye-kwan are deeply trusted by Kim Jong-il and are working to improve relations with the U.S.

In terms of their political inclinations, participants in the foreign policy-making process vary greatly. Generally, those who work for the International Department of the Party and the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs are more open to outsiders and more progressive than those who work for the Organization and Guidance Department, and the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Party, and the Ministry of People's Armed Forces, or the State Security Agency. Military leaders, on the other hand, are allegedly opposed to reform and opening up and with the conservatives and technocrats of the Party and the Cabinet.

To summarize, moderates include Kim Jong-il, Hong Song-nam, Pak Song-shol, Han Song-ryong, and Kang Sok-ju. Secondly, economic and diplomatic specialists in the Cabinet who argue for reforms and opening-up include Yon Hyong-muk, Paek Nam-sun, Kim Yong-sun, Chang Song-taek. Finally, conservatives include Kim Yong-nam, Chon Byong-ho, Kye Ung-tae, Kim Guk-tae, Kim Gi-nam, all of whom are members of the Party. Conservatives from the military include Cho Myong-rok, Kim Yong-chun, Li Ul-sol and Paek Hak-rim. They contend that development and maintenance of "their own style of socialism" is required to safeguard the North Korea regime. In particular, Chon Byong-ho and Kim Guk-tae are forging a network of conservatives to oppose a radical opening that they believe might threaten the regime, calling instead for a gradual and limited opening.

However, putting into perspective the development of North Korea's diplomatic relations with South Korea and the United States, individuals do not seem to have much influence on the foreign policy-making process. It is the internal and external environment coupled with Kim Jong-il's assessment of the political environment that create a greater impact on the foreign policy-making process, not individual personalities.

### **CONCLUSION: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KIM JONG-IL REGIME'S FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING**

While a number of North Koreans favor reform and opening-up in line with rapid improvements in foreign relations, others, especially some military personnel and hard-liners prefer moderate-paced reform and opening-up. At present, North Korea is pursuing reforms with a view to maintaining its regime while improving diplomatic relations to resolve security and economic issues, thus ensuring continuity of the regime. In a nutshell, the characteristics of North Korea foreign policy-making process are as follows.

First, compared to Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il's exclusive influence is relatively weaker in the area of foreign policy-making. Kim Il-sung dominated Pyongyang's foreign policy-making, primarily focusing on Eastern Bloc diplomacy—China and the Soviet Union—and the non-aligned countries. Kim Jong-il, on the other hand, feels the need to utilize diplomatic experts and policy makers only for advice. He holds absolute power over both internal and external affairs. Nevertheless, when North Korea launched multi-directional diplomacy, he was faced with a number of complex diplomatic decisions requiring the counsel of specialists. This means that participants in the foreign policy-making process are now enjoying greater opportunities to contribute their ideas.

Secondly, it is clear that the Workers' Party will continue to hold a superior position in the hierarchy in North Korea. Even though its role has weakened considerably in terms of foreign policy-making, the party is still the most powerful organ in North Korea. The Workers' Party is a vanguard organization that follows whatever orders Kim Jong-il issues. And despite the "military-first" policy, the supremacy of the party continues. Thus, it would be difficult to expect that the military, the Presidium of the SPA, or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would decide and implement diplomatic policy independently of the party.



Third, the role and responsibilities of the military have expanded. In order to achieve its diplomatic goals, North Korea is utilizing its military sector as a bargaining chip in negotiations with other countries and as a means to maintain its regime's grip on power as well. The North Korean military is hawkish and thus opposed to opening-up and reform. They do not see eye-to-eye with the moderates, reformists or others who favor reform and opening-up.

Nevertheless, Cho Myong-rok, First Deputy Chairman, and Kim Il-chol, Minister of People's Armed Forces and other high-ranking military officials are playing an important role in the process of improving North Korea's ties with South Korea and the United States. This proves that the role and responsibility of the military has increased in North Korea's foreign policy-making. There has been no change in the loyalty of the military to Kim Jong-il and it will continue to support his policy to open up until North Korea achieves its immediate goals of securing the maintenance of the regime and economic recovery. Therefore, even though it would be impossible for the military to decide on and implement diplomatic policy independently, it will continue to exert influence to some extent, and with the full support of Kim Jong-il.

Fourth, the role of the National Defense Commission has expanded. The Commission is, in practice, the most powerful organ in North Korea, is chaired by Kim Jong-il. Kim's chairmanship indicates that the Commission has a sizable impact on foreign policy-making.

Fifth, the elite who are pursuing the opening-up are expected to have more clout in the foreign policy-making process in the future as Pyongyang is embracing change—at least in part—in order to expand economic cooperation with Western countries, secure food aid, assure the survival of the regime and extricate itself from diplomatic isolation.

With respect to the changes in North Korea's foreign policy, its foreign relations are rapidly changing even though there are no

substantial changes in its national objectives, i.e., national liberation, the fulfillment of the revolutionary tasks of the people's democracy, and building a communist society. In the face of security and economic crises, North Korea has begun stressing "survival and maintenance of the regime" rather than its ultimate goal to "unify the Korean peninsula by communizing it." Due to changes in the internal and external environment, North Korea has come to recognize that "the revolutionization of the South" is impossible to achieve, and that it has no other option but to set a new foreign policy objective.

Against this backdrop, North Korea is pursuing a separate policy for external and internal affairs and for economic and non-economic matters. In other words, externally, it is seeking extensive changes, while internally it is trying to block any unwanted foreign influences. In its foreign relations it is also focusing on economic issues.

In sum, diplomatic issues are not decided arbitrarily. Rather, they are managed according to Kim Jong-il's perceptions of internal and external policies; coordination of interests of powerful organizations; and discussion among moderates, conservatives and those in favor of opening-up. In addition, North Korea's foreign policy to open its doors toward Seoul and Washington does not necessarily represent changes in Pyongyang's objectives concerning those nations. Instead it represents shifts in its strategy and tactics in the diplomatic sense in order to address the immediate problems of security and the economy, and to maintain and develop the regime.