

# **In the Name of the Father, Son, and Grandson: Succession Patterns and the Kim Dynasty**

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## **In the Name of the Father, Son, and Grandson: Succession Patterns and the Kim Dynasty**

This paper seeks to understand North Korea's Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un's hereditary transition by proposing a comparative analysis of several dictatorship families. The paper utilizes totalitarian successions in Nicaragua with García and Debayle, in Haiti with the Duvalier family, in Syria with the al-Assads, in Azerbaijan with the Aliyevs, in Congo with the Kabilas in order to draw parallels and difference with the North Korea. Eventually, North Korea's control over information and its management of myths are highlighted as factors that have enabled the country's hereditary transition, though new patterns of domestic governance might lead to a different political environment over the Korean peninsula.

**Keywords:** hereditary successions, political families, dictatorship, North Korea, Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un

# **In the Name of the Father, Son, and Grandson: Succession Patterns and the Kim Dynasty**

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## **Introduction**

In the summer of 2008, several media outlets started to worry about the growing lack of new footage of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il, who had come to power in 1994 upon his father's death. Kim Jong Il had suffered from a stroke which led him to more visible efforts to organize his political succession, allegedly promoting his third son Kim Jong Un to four-star general status and reshuffling his personal entourage to consolidate his son's position within the elite. This grooming period was cut rather short by Kim Jong Il's surprisingly peaceful passing in December 2011. The Dear Leader's death now leaves twenty-something Kim Jong Un as the new commander of the impoverished country, thus

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continuing the Kim's family reign yet again.

The concept of hereditary dictatorship is far from being an isolated phenomenon in politics, and throughout history, the world has witnessed several families holding onto power through undemocratic means. Hereditary dictatorships are therefore different from monarchies which codify successions and regulate them by law, as well as from political families which focus on politicians' power and influence through elections rather than utilizing family members' past or present hold on power to impose one family member as a successor. But while most hereditary dictatorships have managed to transfer power from one generation onto the next, a transfer to a third generation was yet to be seen until North Korea achieved such a transfer following Kim Jong Il's death. Does this make North Korea unique, thus supporting the idea that the country's peculiar history and specific government structure make it an exception, and therefore a force to be reckoned with in the world?

This paper reframes the North Korean case within the larger context of dictatorial families and their succession patterns by arguing that this new North Korea succession has been organized in a fairly identical manner to the first to second generation succession between Kim Il Sung and his son Kim Jong Il. But unlike hereditary successions in other countries, North Korea's extensive control of information and propaganda have so far succeeded in avoiding the point of "diminishing return" at which totalitarian actors are unable to sustain their hold on power, thus suggesting that North Korean leaders have managed to subtly manipulate institutions to ensure a dynastic construction. Thus, this paper defines a hereditary succession as a leader's offspring assuming power for at least three years following their father's death, according to the criteria used in Brownlee's analysis of hereditary transitions in autocratic regimes (2007, p. 597). The paper thus presents the idea that long before Kim Jong Il's death, the Kim family utilized a three-prong approach to legitimize its future leader by focusing on (1) their individual qualities and expositing them to the North Korean

population in a myth-creating effort, (2) check-mating any potential rivals for power at the state level by creating a system based on families ties, purge, and tested loyalty, and (3) legitimizing Kim Jong Un as the new heir through public engagements and international outings aimed at presenting him to the international arena in a bid to limit foreign interference at the time of Kim Jong Il's death.

## **Politics and Families**

Politics have always been part of family life. Discussing domestic or international affairs has brought brothers and sisters together while dividing husbands and wives or sons and fathers. Concurrently, families have always been part of politics, either as patient of political decisions made by higher authorities, or as agent of power. As such, political families have reigned over government systems of vastly different natures such as monarchies, republics, or dictatorships. Austria's Habsburgs shine of the imperial and glorious past that spanned across Germany and, Hungary. The Aung Saus bring about Burma's independence struggle against British colonial rule while resonating with today's harsh junta rule. The Nehru-Gandhis' influence on Indian politics for the past century or the Kennedys and Bushes' control of the American vote remind us that large democracies are no exception to the power of blood lines. However, the Husseins' control of Iraq and designs for the Middle East shows how quickly downfall can come to those who are feared and believed to be infallible. North Korea's Kims represent one of the last bastions of totalitarianism as well as perhaps "the first Communist Dynasty" (Yung-hwan Jo, 1986) with Kim Il Sung's founding of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1948 and his son Kim Jong Il transitioning into power in 1994. Family "transition" here will equate to "political succession" as opposed to "political transition." Indeed, as Cantori et al. suggest, political succession is "the replacement of one ruler by another" while political transition suggests a

“movement from one status to another, e.g. from authoritarianism to democratization, from state capitalism to market economics or from underdevelopment to development” (2002). This definition could be supplemented by Govea and Holm who summarize the terms as being “the appearance of a new person filling the position of principal leader, and exercising primary control of the personnel and policy apparatus” (1998, p. 133).

Studies of successions usually fall within three categories: monarchies, political families, and hereditary dictatorships, the latter being the focus of this article. Monarchies are based on a legal tradition that stipulates precise rules of succession, with hereditary power transfer that is decided in advance and usually but not always, from fathers to sons (Jason Brownlee, 2007). The legal contraptions regulating monarchical transitions mean that transfer is expected to be smooth since no contingency plan is needed upon a monarch’s death, hence providing a seemingly stable succession process. Political families, on the other hand do not enjoy the same legal status as monarchies, but benefit from an inner legitimacy that is built upon previous experiences and successes. As such, political families are often associated with elite status and economic achievements exemplified by Vilas in his work on Nicaraguan “notable” families (1992).

Hereditary dictatorships retain elements of both monarchies and political families, with a focus on organizing a succession that retains power and blood line while ensuring that no political opposition can grasp supreme authority. Non-democratic systems such as dictatorships are often definite in terms of their level of authoritarianism, but they also have been divided according to the relationship between the ruler (and its personal characteristics) and a state’s institutions (Joshua Stacher, 2011). Several types therefore appear. First, patrimonial regimes have been defined according to Weber’s understanding of authority as being sanctioned and validated by tradition, but with the leader showing “discretion in the use of his power” (Alisher Ilkhamov, 2007, p. 66): the leader’s

authority is similar to that of a family head or patriarch, but with the difference that a patrimonial regime is also based on the presence of a specific administration and staff group that will help the leader direct the state. Patrimonialism tends to develop into two separate trends, however: neopatrimonialism and personalistic/personal rulership. Neopatrimonialism relies on a “rational-legal government provision system” (Alisher Ilkhamov, 2007, p. 67), thus establishing a collection of rules and organizational behaviors that are not completely divorced from democratic principles, in some cases, with a network of extended relationships that Snyder labels as “characterized by the chief executive’s maintenance of state authority through an extensive network of personal patronage rather than through ideology or impersonal law” (1992, p. 379).

Personalistic rulership is considered to be more autocratic than other patrimonial variants as the leader usually control all aspects of a political system (from military forces to cadres), and power is directly linked to how close one can be to the autocrat, hence removing a great deal of decision-making and agency from the cadres. Eventually, allegiance to the ruler depends much less on ideological affinities than on “a mixture of fear and rewards to his collaborators” (Juan J. Linz & H. E. Chehabi, 1998, pp. 7-8). Finally, patrimonial regimes can also develop into a more extreme form of domination which some call sultanism (Farid Guliyev, 2005, 2011; Jessica L. Weeks, 2012), in which the leader’s power extends to blend the government within the leader’s private realm as “no distinction is made between a state career and personal service to the strongman who rules using ‘rewards and fear’ to enact compliance and loyalty” (Farid Guliyev, 2011, p. 579).

Studies focusing on non-monarchical hereditary successions have been conducted by Herz as early as the 1950s, and focused on the “crown-prince” problem of dictators selecting a potential heir (1952). Others such as Tullock have concentrated on autocracies by arguing that hereditary successions lead to less instability since grooming a son for succession dispels both the ruler and the surrounding elite’s anxiety

about a potential power vacuum since a son might be less tempted to assassinate his father in order to access power than any non-relatives (1987). Subsequent analyses include Brownlee's dataset of 258 autocrat regimes and his explanations of the determinants of succession in post-World War II autocracies, especially when considering the role of parties pre-dating leaders (2007).

According to Brownlee, "Beginning with Kim Jong Il's installation in 1994, the sons of autocratic executives have come to power at an average rate of one every three years" (2007, p. 595). Dictatorial successions are thus neither an oddity in the political landscape, nor a phenomenon unseen since Kim Jong Il's accession to power. Indeed, Bashar al-Assad returned to Syria from his ophthalmologic residency in the United Kingdom to take the reins of power from his father Hafez in 2000 following his poised-to-power brother Bassel's accidental death (Michael Wahid Hanna, 2009). Dictatorial succession is therefore a pervasive phenomenon that defies waves of globalization and democratization. But while hereditary transition studies have often focused on power transfer mechanisms and on providing explanations on processes, only a few have really focused on the concept of charisma and political ideologies, and whether those can be transferred beyond more than two generations.

Herz pondered on how "the power and authority which rested upon the charisma of a unique and irrepeatable personality be inherited or even made to appear inheritable" (1952, p. 28) and proposes the notion of "mystique" surrounding a leader's persona, which is reminiscent of the theme of "charisma" that has often been studied in reference to African politics. Govea et al. for example, looked at 102 African successions and argued that political volatility was noticeably higher in cases of leaders who was no longer popular, and in cases where succession were not regulated prior to a leader's death (1998). The concept of charismatic leaders is also especially looked at by Sylla et al. who refer to the "Gordian knot" of Africa political successions by stating that coups have



traditionally been the vehicle by which power was transferred from one charismatic man to another, whereas “in Western Europe, for example, the emergence of a charismatic leader seems purely circumstantial” (1982, p. 16). The concept of African charismatic leaders exposed by Sylla et al. and the vocabulary used by leaders to give themselves statuses such as “president for life” or “emperor” (Lanciné Sylla & Arthur Goldhammer, 1982) is not without reminding us of Kim Il Sung being appointed “Eternal State President” at the 10th Supreme People’s Assembly in 1998 (Charles K. Armstrong, 2005), hence providing an immortality that would allow room for his son to lead the country while benefitting from his charisma.

But charisma must also be coupled with politics, and sustaining ideologies beyond their founders is a delicate affair: indeed, both Capitalist and Marxist scholarships have frowned upon hereditary successions (Yung-hwan Jo, 1986, p. 1092). In North Korea, caution appeared to have been exercised in order to address potential worries in both domestic and international spheres when Kim Jong Il was groomed to take over his father’s position (Morgan E. Clippinger, 1981). However, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s leaders have managed to achieve a sort of “revolutionary immortality” that others such as Mao or Stalin wanted, but failed to secure (Robert L. Lifton, 1968). If a country has neither embraced globalization nor democratization, and has already witnessed a stable transition from one authoritarian leader to his son, how likely is it for yet another hereditary succession to be sustainable? If, as Bialer contends, the “most dangerous point of transition” in any dictatorship must be “the death of the dictator and the succession” (1980, pp. 184-5), could we consider that Kim Jong Un has succeeded in assuming power, and that he can most likely consolidate his power to ultimately perpetuate the Kim’s family through another succession? Essentially, are the Kim’s family and its mystique immune to the law of diminishing returns?

## Families and Successions

North Korea as a socialist state is an anomaly: while succession in other parts of the communist world have been of a negotiated nature, that is to say a political leader deciding on a suitable successor prior to his own death or retirement, North Korea has privileged heredity. Some in the literature recognize this choice as being rather rational, with Ji suggesting that the very nature of the Kim family's rule over North Korea, a hybrid combination oscillating between neopatrimonial, sultanistic, and personalistic tendencies would prevent any election from ever taking place, as those would be too threatening to the system in place (2011). Kim Jong Il's "military-first" policy should also be noted as having played a large role in allowing the Dear Leader to consolidate his own power, but in a different way than his father Kim Il Sung had done. Indeed, Kim Jong Il's use of a reporting system propelled him toward a sultanistic system (Samuel P. Huntington, 1991)

Has North Korea managed to avoid pitfalls that other neopatrimonial families fail to consider? Indeed, transitions from a leader onto his son, therefore from a first generation to a second one have occurred repeatedly over the course of history but the possibility of a transfer of power from a second generation to to a third generation has always been more questionable, especially because neopatrimonial or personalistic regimes are highly dependent on personal patronage, and any crisis such as economic difficulties could "inhibit the distribution of benefits to supporters and allies of the dictator," thus weakening support for the ruler, therefore creating a potential threat to the country's political order (Barbara Geddes, 1999, p. 139). Out of Brownlee's original dataset of 258 post-1945 autocracies, there are only five cases apart from the North Korea example in which an "undemocratic regime"<sup>1</sup> was headed by a

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<sup>1</sup> Brownlee's original dataset of 258 post-1945 autocracies was used to select cases according to

**Table 1.** Transition Cases

	Country	First Generation	Second Generation	Reason for Succession	Succession Preparation	Post-Second Generation Situation
1 <sup>st</sup> to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation Succession	Nicaragua	Anastasio S. Garcia (1896-1956) Ruled 1937-1947 and 1950-1956	Luis Debayle (1922-1967) Ruled 1956-1963	Death (assassination)	Family Ties	Resignation
			Anastasio Debayle (1925-1980) Ruled 1967-1979	Elected Just before brother's death	Family Ties	Sandinista National Liberation Front
No 3 <sup>rd</sup> Generation Succession	Haiti	Francois Duvalier (1907~1971) Ruled 1957-1971	Jean-C. Duvalier (1951-) Ruled 1971-1986	Death (failing health)	Family Ties	Overthrow and exile
1 <sup>st</sup> to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation Succession	Azerbaijan	Heydar Aliyev (1923-2003) Ruled 1993-2003	Ilham Aliyev (1961-) Ruled 2003-	Appointment prompted by failing health	Groomed	No apparent sign
	Congo	Laurent-D. Kabila (1939-2001) Ruled 1997-2001	Joseph Kabila (1971-) Ruled 2001	Death (assassination)	Groomed	No apparent sign
2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation still in Power	Syria	Hafez al-Assad (1930-2000) Ruled 1971-2000	Bashar al-Assad (1965-) Ruled 2000-	Death (heart attack)	Family Ties	Contestation due to Arab Spring
1 <sup>st</sup> to 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> to 3 <sup>rd</sup> Generation Succession	North Korea	Kim Il Sung (1912-1994) Ruled 1947-1994	Kim Jong Il (1941-2011) Ruled 1994-2011	Death (failing health)	Groomed	Kim Jong Un (1983-) Ruled 2011-Groomed

ruler who prepared their own succession in the presence of a viable adult heir (2007, p. 597). Two groups of countries emerge: those that failed to

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two of his variables: “ruler’s survival in office to the point of preparing an orderly succession” and “presence of a viable adult heir” (2007, p. 597). Cases were then narrowed down to five - Azerbaijan, Congo, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Syria - based on the Polity IV dataset and according to Polity scores ranging from +10 for strongly democratic states to -10 for strongly autocratic, with those five countries exhibiting a -10 rating (Monty G. Marshall & Keith Jagers, 2009).

consolidate an existing father to son transition beyond the second generation due to upheavals, and those that succeeded in a father and son transition with the current son still in power.

*Nicaragua and Haiti - Resignation and Overthrow:*

Anastasio Somoza's accession to power as Nicaragua's leader owed a lot to his previous appointment in 1932 as head of the National Guard that had been created after the United States' military intervention (Jason Brownlee, 2007). The Nicaraguan system, however, was composed of a lot of notable families that led to a strong opposition to Somoza, and ultimately to his assassination in 1956. His succession by his son Luis, and eventually Anastasio Junior reflected the family "managing to manage" the system, hence managing a sultanistic approach to power yielding, especially by making sure that "one of them was always head of the National Guard" (Alfred G. Cuzan, 1989, p. 187). The Nicaraguan system was marked by what is often described as extremely rigid structures which led to difficulties in incorporating new elements. As such, power being maintained in the hand of a few known elites was often seen by the population as being more comfortable and stable (Carlos M. Vilas, 1992, p. 341).

Contrary to Nicaragua, Haiti's François "Papa Doc" Duvalier was elected president in 1957 by gaining support from the masses and with a large amount of votes coming from the middle class (David Nicholls, 1986, p. 1239). This popular support, however, would not be dutifully respected by Duvalier who created what was often called a "kleptocratic" state which was essentially a system that would control commodities as well as services (Anthony P. Maingot, 1986-1987, p. 85). Papa Doc's control over the entire country was mainly due to his use of the Tonton Macoute militia as well as voodoo priests who helped him manage most of the country. When his health started to fail, François Duvalier set his son up to be elected "successor for life" before he died in 1971 (Mats

Lundahl, 1989). The transfer was noted as apparently peaceful but the absence of real opposition to the transition was not read properly by the international community which failed to recognize that Papa Doc's stronghold over the entire system meant that the opposition had been muzzled. Jean-Claude Duvalier thus came to power at the tender age of nineteen, just a few months before his father's death, unchallenged by domestic powers who had been subdued by his father, and unrestrained by the international community which thought that, for commercial interests, an apparent peaceful regime transition was a better outcome than yet another potential political crisis that could have required outside intervention (David Nicholls, 1986).

Haiti and Nicaragua present interesting aspects of leaders encountering difficulties, both in terms of personal support and domestic economics, as well as international pressures. All those pressures, however, led in both cases to an abrupt end of regime that was followed by exile for Haiti's Duvalier, and resignation quickly followed by assassination for Nicaragua's Debayle. The Somoza dynasty fell through domestic political pressures from the Marxist-led Sandinista National Liberation Front's revolution which had been the major counterweight to the regime in place for the previous several decades. Most of the revolutionaries yearned for more liberties and democracies (Mitchell A. Seligson & John A. Booth, 1993, p. 790), and were supported by the working class battling against a privileged elite that had depleted the country's wealth. Duvalier's downfall was similar to that of Nicaragua, and was exacerbated by a porcine epidemic that forced the slaughter of all Haitian pigs in 1982 thus sparking severe food riots which were even aggravated by drought in 1985, leading to a reduction of about 20 percent grain production (Anthony P. Maingot, 1986-7). Popular protests ensued, especially in more provincial areas with the middle class becoming disappointed with "Baby Doc" Jean-Claude Duvalier's lack of clear understanding of the country.

### *Azerbaijan, Congo and Syria: Endurance and Modernization*

As a post-soviet satellite, Azerbaijan had to rebuild a political system following decades of communist rule. Heydar Aliyev created the New Azerbaijan Party in 1993 and thus was able to consolidate his power because of domestic support, as the population who was still seeking a strong patriarchal figure after the dismantlement of the Soviet Union (Farid Guliyev, 2005). Aliyev's health, however, was a major concern during the last years of his presidency, with news outlets often reporting on his surgeries and other ailments. The problem of succession therefore had to be addressed by the Aliyev clan: in this case, elites helped in installing Aliyev's son Ilham to the presidency with a large number of political and legal maneuvers to facilitate a dynastic succession (Jason Brownlee, 2007), including a referendum changing the constitution and assuring Ilham the post of prime minister.

Just as Azerbaijan had looked for a new voice after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Laurent-Désiré Kabila was initially hailed as being himself the only voice willing and able to restore the Congolese identity after years of suffering through Mobutu's post-colonial rule (Christian Christensen, 2004). Kabila, however, was somewhat unknown when he came to power in the late 1990s (Jean-Claude Willame, 1998) but his failure to provide a clear agenda for peace, no democratic reforms within the country, and draconian measures such as banning political parties apart from his own led to the alienation of his base support, and to his eventual assassination. His son Joseph has now been ruling for twice as long as his father, and as such has managed to weather some of its political opponents, being re-elected a second time in December 2011. He did not appear to benefit much from his father's legacy since the rule was so short, and as such this might have been an advantage in helping him impose himself as a legitimate and unique politician and leader, despite allegations of vote manipulation. Beyond Congo's borders, Kabila's commitment to improving peace with neighbors has fortified his

standing within the international community (Ola Olsson and Heather Congdon Fors, 2004).

With a GDP increasing an average of 8 percent during the 1970s, Syria was in a very different economic situation than Congo, but was politically and historically unstable, as more than fifteen military coups had been fomented between the end of World War II and Hafez al-Assad's accession to power in 1970 (Jason Brownlee, 2007). Al-Assad's regime, while totalitarian, tried to portray its leader as the father of the nation and developed a personality cult partly built similar to that of Kim Il Sung. Controlled media as well as acute management of potential political opponents helped solidify the dictatorship (Daniel Pipes, 1992). Having encountered medical problems in the early 1980s, Hafez al-Assad set himself up to the task of preparing his succession by grooming his son Bassel to take over power within the Baath party. This plan came to a halt in 1994 with Bassel's accidental death in a car accident which prompted Hafez to recall his second son Bashar from his ophthalmology studies in England (Jason Brownlee, 2007). Much of this peaceful transition appears due to the fact that Hafez al-Assad had managed, through his personality, to subdue any potential opposition within the party as well as within the military, with generals choosing to retire instead of competing for the utmost power (Louis J. Cantori, et al., 2002). Syria therefore presents the image of an apparently uncontested hereditary succession with no real interference from either abroad or within apart from a brief power hold from Hafez's brother. Whether Hafez's brother contended for the power succession remains unclear, however but recent events sparked by the Arab Spring started to show cracks in Bashar al-Assad's apparently stable rule (Marius Deeb, 1988).

Political successions in Azerbaijan, Congo, and Syria have all taken place in the early 2000s, and each of the leaders who assumed power then were in their thirties or early forties. In Syria and Azerbaijan, there was a clear grooming process that took place because both Heidar Aliyev and Hafez al-Assad were suffering from ailments that they knew would

prevent them from actively ruling for a much longer period of time. In both cases, the elite either helped or facilitated the power transition (Jason Brownlee, 2007), and neither country was strongly influenced by other nations around the world, either economically or because of regional threats. As such, successions were watched by the international community, but were not blatantly opposed.

## North Korea: A New Succession Story?

### *Establishing North Korea's power transitions*

The literature focusing on hereditary succession concentrates on two themes: how leaders create a cult of personality and “manage to manage” it,<sup>2</sup> and how elites and political opposition support or challenge a potential appointment.<sup>3</sup> Those characteristics are central to understanding how North Korea managed, against many odds, to produce a hereditary succession in the 1990s as well as a second one in the early 2010s. Back in the early North Korean days, however, few would have bet on the reclusive regime sustaining itself long enough for Kim Il Sung to have to pick a successor. Likewise, many journalists, academics and politicians kept on predicting for that North Korea was teetering on the brink of collapse, and that Kim Jong Il would be unable to realize the communist transition that his father has started many years ago. When Kim Il Sung died in 1994, Kim Jong Il quietly assumed his succession and many thought that such a change meant the end of the North Korean Communist and isolationist regime, as it was assumed that the North Korean people would resist a monarchical succession. The potential for

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<sup>2</sup> See for example James Cotton (1988); John H. Herz (1952); Robert L. Lifton (1968); Lanciné Sylla & Arthur Goldhammer (1982).

<sup>3</sup> See for example Lijphart (1991); Karl W. Ryavec (1982); Donald E. Schulz (1993); Richard Snyder (1992).



an internal shake-up was real but the country showed no sign of obvious or apparent uproar and revolution, though North Korea's tight control and harsh treatment of unfaithful mourning of Kim Il Sung could have contributed to an apparently peaceful transition. At the same time, there was little evidence that the elite had tried to take power away from Kim Jong Il, since there appeared to be no opposition or long-standing political counterforce such as the National Liberation Front in Nicaragua, for example. Perhaps if North Korean party officials were not as loyal to Kim Jong Il as they had been to his father, they were at least willing to work alongside the Dear Leader to ensure the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's survival. Is the concept of one "North Korea" stronger in its people's mind than any wish for freedom?

Brownlee's study of hereditary succession cases leads to one specific finding that contributes to answering this question: he suggests that if a leader's power predates a party, a son will more likely succeed his father than any other potential contender or even a brother (Jason Brownlee, 2007, p. 628). In the case of North Korea, Kim Il Sung embodied not only the party, but he was for all purposes the regime's sole focal point and by extension, the whole country. But the North Korean case also represents an oddity in terms of Brownlee's study: installed most likely by Soviet leaders after the Korean peninsula was divided in half to ensure the removal of Japanese colonial structures, Kim Il Sung did not create the Worker's Party but he and the party were almost born together during the late 1940s (Jason Brownlee, 2007, p. 617). Upon its creation in 1948, North Korea embraced Marxist values, but slowly modified them in order to create its own communist system. Its leaders, Kim Il Sung and his son Kim Jong Il elevated the cult of personality to levels surpassing that of Fidel Castro, Stalin, or Mussolini, and created a system that neither Lenin nor Mao Zedong were able or perhaps willing to devise, as neither were seen or able to give power to successors they would have chosen (James Cotton, 1988, p. 81). It is therefore unsurprising that an important part of the literature on North

Korea has been devoted to analyzing its regime, and especially dissecting the flamboyant personalities of the Great Leader and the Dear Leader with Kim Il Sung being described as “a cross between Marlon Brando playing a big oil mogul in a film called *The Formula*, walking with feet splayed to handle a potbelly and hands midriff thus to pat the tummy, combined with the big head on narrow shoulders, and the blank, guttural delivery of Henry Kissinger” (Bruce Cumings, 2003).

### *From Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il*

Transition preparation under Kim Il Sung is believed to have started many years before the Great Leader’s death. Kim Jong Il, his son, was named head of several important North Korean agencies long before Kim Il Sung’s death in 1994 and though Kim Jong Il assumed his succession immediately, he was only elevated to the General Secretary after a period of three years, which is the usual mourning period for Korean kings (Charles K. Armstrong, 2005, p. 384). Many thought that such a change meant the end of the North Korean Communist and isolationist regime, as it was assumed that the North Korean people would resist a monarchical succession.

Did Kim Il Sung fear the potential backlash that fomenting a system that would slowly put his son into the spotlight could create, given that Communist principles loathed hereditary succession? Martin’s understanding of why Kim Il Sung decided to pursue hereditary succession points to Nikita Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization of the Soviet Union in the 1950s, as he argues that a hereditary succession would have been the only way for Kim to preserve his own historical legacy and to preserve North Korea’s independence as well (Bradley Martin, 2004). According to Martin, partisans of the ideas were elevated to higher ranks while those who were against such a succession were purged, and by the 1970s, a strong system had been put in place to elevate Kim Jong Il to replace his father in due time. There are, however, two schools of thought

on Kim's succession. The succession started to be planned in the 1970s, with the Three Revolution Team that became the tool for lobbying Kim Il Sung's entourage and make them accept the inevitability of Kim Jong Il's destiny (Yung-hwan Jo, 1986, p. 1095). Specific political maneuvers such as the replacement by the Central Committee Party in 1973 of all the party's membership were designed to provide for a younger generation of members that would tend to support Kim Jong Il in the future (Kokusai kankei & Kyōdō kenkyūjo, 1981). With the younger Kim being gradually given more responsibilities within the regime, an apparent succession was only communicated more openly in the 1980s. Great care appeared to have been exercised in order for Kim Jong Il not to blatantly replace his father and the Juche ideology, but for the elder Kim's life to be immortalized. As such, the Tenth Supreme People's Assembly decided in 1998 to appoint the younger Kim as head of the National Defense Committee, while Kim Il Sung was slated as being "Eternal State President" (Charles K. Armstrong, 2005, p. 384). The hereditary succession discourse was also masterfully orchestrated within North Korea, and tensions with the United States exploited to justify keeping power along dynastic lines and as the only way to fight against the aggressor: the succession is therefore at the very core of North Korea's survival strategy (Yung-hwan Jo, 1986, p. 1093). Kim Jong Il was close to being portrayed as the reincarnation of his father in his spirit to lead the revolution and the media has used the same expressions to qualify both father and son, hence perfecting their idolization (Yung-hwan Jo, 1986, p. 1100).

Kim Il Sung therefore slowly imposed his son as the future leader, by using popular propaganda and controlling the media, by reassuring the population, by political maneuvering laws and the elite, and by appeasing the international community while at the same time seeking approval from important partners and gradually making Kim Jong Il as the one in charge of international affairs. Kim Jong Il's ascension to power appeared to have been piloted by Kim Il Sung as well as some of

**Table 2.** From Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il

	<b>Individual Level: Popular Propaganda</b>	<b>State Level: Political Appointments</b>	<b>International Level: Recognition and Support</b>
1964		Kim Jong Il joins the Party Central Committee <sup>4</sup>	
1972	The definition of hereditary succession found in the official dictionary of political terminology: “a reactionary practice of the old exploitative system” is erased <sup>5</sup>	Kim Jong Il becomes Party Secretary in Charge of Propaganda and Organizational Control <sup>6</sup>	
1974		The Eighth Plenum of the Fifth WPK Central Committee formalizes Kim Jong Il as a national leader and his father's successor <sup>7</sup>	Kim Jong Il is given authority over North Korea's relations with the South and Japan <sup>8</sup>
1975	Kim Jong Il is awarded the title Hero of the Nation <sup>9</sup>		
1980		At the sixth Korean Worker's Party Congress, Kim Jong Il becomes a member of the Political Bureau of the KWP Central Committee and Secretary of the Party Central Committee <sup>10</sup>	
1983	North Korea media states that “Our masses and the international community today are praising the dear leader Comrade Kim Jong Il as a great man who is gloriously inheriting the revolutionary Chu'che cause of the great Comrade Kim Il Sung” <sup>11</sup>		Kim Jong Il takes a secret twelve-day visit to Beijing <sup>12</sup>

<sup>4</sup> “The Moment is Near” for Kim Chong-II’s Succession. (November 22, 1993). *Yonhap News*.

<sup>5</sup> A Dynasty of the Left. (July 2, 1983). *The Globe and Mail*.

<sup>6</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Marxist Monarchy; North Korea’s Kim Il Sung Grooms Son to Succeed. (October 15, 1978). *The Washington Post*.

<sup>7</sup> The Moment is Near’ for Kim Chong-II’s Succession. (November 22, 1993). *Yonhap News*.

<sup>8</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Marxist Monarchy; North Korea’s Kim Il Sung Grooms Son to Succeed. (October 15, 1978). *The Washington Post*.

<sup>9</sup> A Dynasty of the Left. (July 2, 1983). *The Globe and Mail*.

	<b>Individual Level: Popular Propaganda</b>	<b>State Level: Political Appointments</b>	<b>International Level: Recognition and Support</b>
1984	Kim Jong Il is officially identified as “Dear Leader” <sup>13</sup>		Kim Jong Il drafts laws that open up North Korea to foreign investment <sup>14</sup>
1991		Kim Jong Il is given the title of Marshal and becomes the Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army <sup>15</sup>	
1992		North Korea reforms its Constitution, removing the provision that the state president is to concurrently serve as the supreme commander of the army. The National Defense Committee is elevated to second in the power hierarchy after the president <sup>16</sup>	Pyongyang requests China to give Kim Jong Il the protocol associated with a visiting head of state <sup>17</sup>
1993		Kim Jong Il is elected Chairman of the National Defense Committee and replaces 664 military generals <sup>18</sup>	

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<sup>10</sup> “VRPR” Discusses Kim Chong-II’s Succession to Chucho Cause. (August 5, 1983). *Voice of the Revolutionary Party for Korean Unification*.

<sup>11</sup> “VRPR” Discusses Kim Chong-II’s Succession to Chucho Cause. (August 5, 1983). *Voice of the Revolutionary Party for Korean Unification*.

<sup>12</sup> A Dynasty of the Left. (July 2, 1983). *The Globe and Mail*.

<sup>13</sup> Kim Jong-II Consolidates Power. (June 30, 1994). *Defence & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*.

<sup>14</sup> Kim Jong-II Consolidates Power. (June 30, 1994). *Defence & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*.

<sup>15</sup> NKorean Leadership Revising History for Succession: Report. (November 28, 1993). *Agence France Presse*,

<sup>16</sup> Senior ROL Official Says Formal Process of Kim Chong-II’s Succession has Begun. (December 9, 1992). *Yonhap News*.

<sup>17</sup> China Visit May Mark Full Succession in North Korea. (February 22, 1983). *United Press International*.

<sup>18</sup> Kim Jong-II Consolidates Power. (June 30, 1994). *Defence & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*.

	<b>Individual Level: Popular Propaganda</b>	<b>State Level: Political Appointments</b>	<b>International Level: Recognition and Support</b>
1994	The Pyongyang Radio broadcasts that Kim Jong Il has now been raised to the “highest position of the party, the state and the revolutionary armed forces” <sup>19</sup>	Kim Jong Il refuses to take over the two top posts held by his father before the end of the mourning period <sup>20</sup>  Kim Jong Il receives the public support of 6,000 senior members of the North Korean army <sup>21</sup>	
1997	North Korea starts referring to Kim Il Sung as the “former” Great Leader North Korea ends its official three-year mourning period <sup>22</sup>	Kim Jong Il is elected general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea <sup>23</sup>	

his closest advisors (or at least not obstructed by his closest advisors), and was targeted toward three audiences: the North Korean population, the ruling elite and military and the outside world.

On the home front, propaganda slowly disseminated information about Kim Jong Il until his presence next to the Great Leader was just de facto accepted and lauded by the population, but information were also given to various news agencies to slowly bring about Kim Jong Il and impose him as the sole North Korean leader. Language refrained from referring to Kim Jong Il as Kim Il Sung’s son in an effort to concentrate on the necessity of the regime and the Dear Leader’s qualities to lead the Korean people rather than his attribute of being his father’s son. On the

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<sup>19</sup> Kim’s Son “Raised” to Power, Seoul in Dilemma over Broadcasts from North. (July 13, 1994). *Agence France Presse*.

<sup>20</sup> Kim Jong-Il Delaying his Own Succession: Radio Pyongyang. (September 25, 1994), 1994. *Agence France Presse*,

<sup>21</sup> Transfer of Power in NKorea Slow but Sure: Official. (January 31, 1995). *Agence France Presse*.

<sup>22</sup> Title Change Indicates Son’s Accession. (July 1, 1997). *The Korea Herald*.

<sup>23</sup> Biographical Profiles of North Korean Figures. (May 6, 1995). *Sinton-a*.

political front, legislative changes and careful appointments to key posts within the administration allowed Kim Jong Il to checkmate any potential opponent wanting to claim power, or intending to challenge the Dear Leader's hold on power.

A propaganda mission also took place at the international level, with North Korea ensuring that China and the Soviet Union were briefed on the importance of Kim Jong Il while he was being groomed, so that he also became the de facto recognized leader for North Korea's remaining political partners. While Kim Jong Il assumed his succession immediately, he was only elevated to the General Secretary after a period of three years due to official mourning but floods and droughts of the late 1990s might have also contributed to the delay. The dire economic circumstances that plagued the 1990s exposed a number of faults within the North Korean system: the sultanistic/patronage-focused system was collapsing and Kim Jong Il might have foreseen that relying only upon the Korean Worker's Party to ensure his power would become more difficult as party members failed to receive as many benefits as before. The creation of the National Defense Commission in 1998 therefore allowed Kim Jong Il to give more power to the military and militarized institutions instead of the Party (Scott Snyder, 2010). This system, sometimes referred to as a "divide and rule mechanism" has allowed Kim Jong Il to maintain direct control over the Korean People Army as opposed to Kim Il Sung using the Party to manage the KPA. Ji goes as far as suggesting that the KPA is now the Kim's dynasty's "family army" (2011).

### *From Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un*

Kim Jong Un was slated as North Korea's new leader following Kim Jong Il's death in late December 2011. Even though Kim Jong Il's decision to groom his third soon can be officially referenced to 2007, one could speculate that the Dear Leader might have started to make

preparations regarding his own succession much earlier and in a manner extremely similar to that of his own father. The Dear Leader was known to have three sons from two different wives, with the eldest Kim Jong Nam, and two younger ones, Kim Jong Chol and Kim Jong Un, born to Kim Jong Il's late third wife. Per Confucian customs, power is usually transmitted from fathers to first sons, and Kim Jong Nam was thought to be the apparent heir. However, his extravagant lifestyle and run-ins with international border agencies discredited him. The two younger sons, both Swiss-educated and who were thought to be too young to take over from Kim Jong Il, especially in the years following his stroke, were both tested through their holding various functions within the North Korean administration, as well as through travelling with his father. Ultimately, Kim Jong Il chose his youngest son Kim Jong Un, who bears a resemblance with his father, including his chunky appearance, stare, and medical problems such as diabetes, over his second son Kim Jong Chol who, despite being considered bright, also suffers from a hormonal imbalance leading to him being too effeminate in the eyes of his father to be a steely leader.

Like his father, Kim Jong Un started his ascension within the North Korean society and elite, and benefitted from the same rewriting of history that his father had. Just as North Korea propaganda had praised Kim Jong Il's achievements as a young man, such as the many books he had written as well as the technological inventions that came out of his celebrated brilliant mind, North Korea also started a few years ago to display Kim Jong Un's virtues by praising through songs and stories. Indeed, nursery rhymes focusing on the virtues of the third son started to be taught to infants. A similar propaganda machine has also targeted other population segments, institutions, and the international world by disseminating the young man's life and image, to make him the de facto leader.

Kim Jong Il's elite circles have also been tightened, and supporters of Kim Jong Un, such as Jang Song Taek, who is the brother-in-law of



**Table 3.** From Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un

	<b>Individual Level: Popular Propaganda</b>	<b>State Level: Political Appointments</b>	<b>International Level: Recognition and Support</b>
<b>1999</b>		Kim Jong Nam, Kim Jong Il's eldest son, stars his career as a manager for North Korea's Intelligence Agency <sup>24</sup>	
<b>2001</b>			Kim Jong Nam attempts to enter Japan illegally and is refused entry <sup>25</sup>
<b>2002</b>			Kim Jong Nam's visa is denied by French government <sup>26</sup>
<b>2003</b>	Ko Young Hui, Kim Jong Il's third wife and mother of his second and third sons is elevated to Respected Mother status <sup>27</sup>	Kim Jong Chol, Kim Jong Il's second son, takes a post in the government's Information and Instruction Department <sup>28</sup>	
<b>2004</b>		Kim Jong Chol holds posts in the organization department of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party <sup>29</sup>	
<b>2007</b>	Kim Jong Chol and Kim Jong Un are taken by Kim Jong Il on a series of military inspections to ascertain who performs best <sup>30</sup>	Kim Jong Il designates his son Kim Jong Un as his successor in a directive to the Workers' Party <sup>31</sup>	

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<sup>24</sup> Kim Jong-Il's Song in Training for Succession: South Korean Radio. (November 4, 1999). *Agence France Presse*.

<sup>25</sup> North Korea's Kim Jong-Il Ponders his Future. (February, 2004). *Defence & Foreign Affairs' Strategic Policy*.

<sup>26</sup> Mystery on DPRK Leader's Eldest Son Viewed as Linked to Succession Issue. (December 17, 2002). *World News Connection*.

<sup>27</sup> Heirs to the Kingdom. (March 10, 1993). *Newsweek*.

<sup>28</sup> Heirs to the Kingdom. (March 10, 1993). *Newsweek*.

<sup>29</sup> Researcher Says North Korean Leader is Grooming Son as Successor. (September 1, 2004). *Associated Press*.

<sup>30</sup> North Korean Leader's Son Visits Pyongyang Twice this Year. (August 28, 2007). *BBC*.

<sup>31</sup> Kim's Brother-in-law Said to Mastermind N. Korea's Leadership Succession. (February 16,

	<b>Individual Level: Popular Propaganda</b>	<b>State Level: Political Appointments</b>	<b>International Level: Recognition and Support</b>
<b>2008</b>	The word “grandson” is used by propaganda units to underline paternal bloodline <sup>32</sup>		
<b>2009</b>	Lectures are being held in Pyongyang to promote Kim Jong Un and his accomplishments <sup>33</sup>  The state television broadcast a fictional children's program, “Good Heart of the Third Child.” North Korea starts using the name Kim Jong Un in house broadcasts <sup>34</sup>	Kim Jong Un starts a low-ranking job at the National Defense Commission <sup>35</sup>  North Korean parliament, military, and embassies receive orders to pledge allegiance to Kim Jong Un <sup>36</sup>  Kim Jong Un takes a deputy director-level position in the Workers' Party <sup>37</sup>  Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un visit the State Security Department <sup>38</sup>	Kim Jong Un oversees the case of two American journalists detained after they travelled to the China-North Korea border <sup>39</sup>
<b>2010</b>	Kim Jong Un’s official image is published for the first time by the North Korean state media <sup>40</sup>	Kim Jong Il promotes six people including Kim Jong Un and his sister Kim Kyong Hui to the rank of general	

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2009). *Yonhap News*.

<sup>32</sup> North Korea Succession Campaign Began in 2001, South Agency Says. (July 24, 2009). *BBC*.

<sup>33</sup> A Succession Saga Goes Silent; Source Attribute Apparent Suspension of Campaign to N. Korean Leader’s Improved Health. (September 11, 2009). *The Washington Post*.

<sup>34</sup> North Korea Succession Campaign Began in 2001, South Agency Says. (July 24, 2009). *BBC*.

<sup>35</sup> Kim Jong-Il’s Son Promoted to North Korean Defence Panel in Hint of Future Succession. (April 27, 2009). *Global Insight*.

<sup>36</sup> Third Son of North Korean Leader Kim Jong-il Tipped as Successor. (June 2m, 2009). *Global Insight*.

<sup>37</sup> Kim’s Son Gets Party Job to Prepare for Succession: Lawmaker. (October 6, 2009). *Agence France Presse*.

<sup>38</sup> Report: Kim Jong Il Puts Son as Head of Spy Agency. (June 24, 2009). *The Associated Press*.

<sup>39</sup> Report: Kim Jong Il Puts Son as Head of Spy Agency. (June 24, 2009). *The Associated Press*.

<sup>40</sup> NKorea Prints Photos of Heir Apparent Kim Jong Un. (September 30, 2010). *The Associated*

	<b>Individual Level: Popular Propaganda</b>	<b>State Level: Political Appointments</b>	<b>International Level: Recognition and Support</b>
<b>2010</b>	<p>A shrine is also reportedly being built in North Korea to honor the birth place of Kim Jong Un<sup>41</sup></p> <p>The two Kim appear at a military parade together, and portraits of Kim Jong Un are now being handed to the public<sup>42</sup></p>	<p>Kim Jong Un is appointed vice chairman of the Central Military Commission of the ruling Workers' Party as well as member of the party's Central Committee<sup>43</sup></p> <p>Changes to the Party Charter now allow the head of the Party to also run the Central Military Commission, thus ensuring that one person can be in control of both military and state affairs at the same time<sup>44</sup></p>	<p>Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un travel to China<sup>45</sup></p>
<b>2011</b>	<p>A villa is being built for Kim Jong Un, who is also seen wearing an otter fur hat which is only reserved for North Korean leaders<sup>46</sup></p>	<p>Kim Jong Un becomes head of North Korea's State Security Department<sup>47</sup></p> <p>Kim Pyong Il, half-brother of Kim Jong Il is put under house arrest upon his return from his diplomatic post in Poland<sup>48</sup></p>	

the Dear Leader and now apparent regent, have been promoted. The young man was also being touted abroad with his father prior to his

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*Press.*

<sup>41</sup> North Korea Converting Heir-apparent's Birthplace Into a Shrine. (July 21, 2010). *East Asia Intelligence Reports* (Newswire).

<sup>42</sup> Kim Jong-un Attends North Korean Military Parade. (October 10, 2010). *The Guardian*.

<sup>43</sup> Kim Jong Un Elected Vice-Chairman of Central Military Commission. (September 29, 2010). *China People Daily*.

<sup>44</sup> Power Shift Detailed in North Korean Party Charter. (January 21, 2011). *Voice of America*.

<sup>45</sup> North Korean Leader Kim Jong-il Visiting China with His Son. (August 26, 2010). *The Guardian*.

<sup>46</sup> Kim Jong-un Hat: Power Goes to the Korean Heir's Head. (February 1, 2011). *The Telegraph*.

<sup>47</sup> "Gang of 7" Behind Kim Jong Un. (December 29, 2011). *The Chosun Ilbo*.

<sup>48</sup> Kim Jongil's Brother 'Under House Arrest in Pyongyang. (July 1, 2011). *The Chosun Ilbo*.

death, as well as given the military grades to become the supreme commander of forces in North Korea. There are noticeable changes from the years when Kim Jong Il assumed power after his father, however. Starting with the Dear Leader's reorganization of relative power among various organizations, and his focus on security apparatus, the Party has been relatively weakened, thus leaving Kim Jong Un with important choices to make when it comes to which system to privilege. In the late 2000s, Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un made a number of on the stop guidance visits together, and appeared to have privileged visiting organizations that were managing security (Hyeong Jung Park, 2011). Pitting institutions against one another in order to keep their power in check has, however, weakened cohesion among those various actors (Scott Snyder, 2010). This could be rather problematic in the future for a country that has such a tight control over its people, and which has spent an incredible amount of resources and time in creating a unified picture of North Korea that is presented to its own people, and to the outside world. Kim Jong Un appears willing to retain as much control as possible, however, and the fact that his own legitimacy has been rooted within the military, whereas his father's originated within the Party, provides an added twist in the succession. Kim Jong Un's family connections therefore come as a crucial variable in stabilizing the succession: Jang Song Taek's political connections will serve Kim Jong Un, while Kim Kyong-hui's military links create the third side of what Ji calls North Korea's "family triumvirate" (2011), a system that is neither as patrimonial and personalistic as Kim Il Sung's era nor as sultanistic as Kim Jong Il's rule.

## Conclusions

Upon Kim Jong Il's death, there was little doubt that Kim Jong Un would become the next leader as he was seen as the new commander beside his father's body during all official ceremonies. At the same time, the North

Korea media reported on the leadership change, and internal propaganda also placed the young man as the natural heir to the North Korea supreme position. For all purpose, Kim Jong Un is the one slated to be in charge, and there have been few reports, if any, of contention within the elite or within the people. But will the Kim cult reach, as Jo states, “the point of diminishing returns?” (1986, p. 1105)

When looking at the cases of Nicaragua and Haiti, there are quite a lot of striking similarities with the North Korea example. Those cases forecast extremely violent regimes that concentrated power within specific elite, and that did not take into consideration rural and middle class needs. Moreover, each of these countries has experienced economic problems due to policies that were not designed to ensure the state’s survival. Natural disasters have, in the case of Nicaragua and Haiti, accelerated popular uprising and eventually the leaders’ overthrow.

In the case of North Korea, the famine and drought of the 1990s were seen by many as factors that would bring a collapsing Pyongyang to its knees. However, North Korea managed to ride out the storm because of a specific attribute that no other cases studied here have: a nuclear weapons program. The “bomb economics” operates at several levels. First, it galvanizes the North Korean population against a specific enemy that lays outside of its borders, which in this case is the United States. As such, the population does not necessarily need to be convinced by the leader of the reasons why sacrifices have to be made. Second, state politics are designed to support the nuclear program as well, because benefits can be gained from it. The obvious benefit is that it guarantees North Korea’s survival because of nuclear deterrence theory: this has proven quite effective during Kim Jong Il’s passing, as there was no external attempt to prevent Kim Jong Un from taking power. Other benefits are monetary: concessions can be, and have been gained through blackmail, with North Korea receiving money and resources in exchange for steps toward freezing or dismantling its program. Benefits can also be gained from exporting the technology or selling parts to other states, thus

providing a steady source of revenue.

Just like Nicaragua, an important aspect of North Korea's survival and of Kim Jong Un's potential regime stability is the ability he would have to control the military, and thus control the usage of military technology, as well. The Somoza/Debayle family always made sure they were in command of the National Guard, and this is a crucial aspect of North Korea's regime: Kim Jong Un's promotion to General earlier in September 2010 could be seen as an indication that the military was integral in the succession process as it had to see him as a legitimate member, a potential ally, or a definite hierarchical force to reckon with.

The variable that is most problematic in North Korea, however, is the seemingly dangerous international environment it has to deal with, and that the other countries analyzed in this paper did not have to face, except perhaps Syria. In this sense, managing a potential power revolution within the region is North Korea's main concern, as there does not seem to be any revolutionary force within the country that could lead to an upsetting of the regime à la Nicaragua, for example. Indeed, there are no recorded underground political or revolutionary forces in North Korea, and even if some were to develop following the recent power change, they would most likely be quenched due to the denunciation and reporting culture that has been established in North Korea over the past few decades. Likewise, if contention was to eventually bring Kim Jong Un down, the North Korea military would most likely be the only organ strong enough to control power and maintain a sense of order. It is also unlikely that the military would relinquish power to create a free society, and the military's allegiance to Kim Jong Un might eventually diminish just as the Tonton Macoute's militia supported Jean-Claude Duvalier at first, before distancing itself from Haiti's ruler.

Finally, most North Korea people have learned to "play the game" in order to be rewarded by the North Korea government, or at least to avoid being sanctioned. Scenes of public wailing following both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il's deaths appeared largely incomprehensible to

foreigners who could not understand why North Koreans were so shaken at the death of their dictators. However, the subsequent arrests of those who appeared “insincere in their grief” reveals that many North Koreans conform to specific state directives because it is in their best interest to do so. Ultimately, North Korea’s situation is also similar to that of Haiti for another reason: though North Korea is not an island, its isolation and hermetic borders prevent just about all of its population from seeking economic and political security abroad.

A source of danger might still come from outside interventions in a similar vein to that of the United States in Iraq, however, but as seen through history, the United States has been reluctant to intervene in a specific political regime’s affairs, even though it was a party to Nicaragua and Haiti’s respective downfalls. With no real interference from the international world, much rests onto Kim Jong Un’s ability to perform the role he was relatively quickly trained for, and for North Korea’s surrounding elite to manage the transition so as to maintain their own way of life. As for the North Korean population, it might not be foolish to expect that a younger generation of leaders such as Kim Jong Un manage to capture the essence of their father and grandfather’s regime, while at the same time creating a political and economic niche for themselves. The cases of Syria, Azerbaijan, and Congo clearly show that younger leaders who were not necessarily destined and groomed to become political successors have assumed power and now fully embody the political institutions of their countries. North Korea observers should monitor closely how Kim Jong Un will interact with the international community. While the international community has stayed relatively passive during the recent transition, reactivating diplomatic and economic links with Pyongyang on the basis of a new power elite is the only sensible option to reduce insecurities on the Korean peninsula, and one of the only ways to find out whether Kim Jong Un is really the most powerful man in North Korea. One might expect, however, to find more hard-line policies coming from Pyongyang, because of Kim Jong Un’s

affinity with the Korean People's Army, as "North Korea's tougher external policy originated partly from the military's interest in enhancing its domestic political status and thereby pressuring other domestic actors to respect the military's privileges" (Hyeong Jung Park, 2011, p. 9). With the reelection of Barack Obama as President of the United States, one can reasonably assume that no preemptive strikes will be launched on Pyongyang from Washington, but the political volatility on the Korean peninsula is likely to remain, with Beijing quietly supporting North Korea and therefore tacitly accepting Kim Jong Un as North Korea's new leader for the sake of what Ji calls China's "Korean policy of crisis aversion" (2011).



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