

Direction of North Korea Strategy after Kim Jong Il's Death: Calmly Making Arrangements for the Future

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In a society like North Korea, where power is highly concentrated at the top and the supreme leader holds all authority, the death of that supreme leader creates a massive aftershock. Furthermore, at a time when the succession system is still precarious and the domestic environment is in bad shape, the leader's death can have tremendous impact on the future course of the country.

In the immediate aftermath of Kim Jong Il's death, for the time being it appears likely that the succession system centered on Kim Jong Eun will continue to operate. However, the Kim Jong Eun succession system faces several problems. As globalization spreads and information access increases across the world in the 21st century, the North is burdened with the task of justifying its anachronistic third generation succession. Kim Jong Eun has also inherited an economic crisis, international sanctions, a restive public, and a failed state on the verge of bankruptcy.

Clearly, the power structure of the succession government and its internal and external policies will have major repercussions not only for the North Korean people but for us as well. Therefore, in response to Kim Jong Il's death we must prepare our strategy, particularly taking into account

the following factors.

First, thorough preparation is needed to manage the crisis on the Korean peninsula. At this point it would be appropriate for our government to operate an emergency response system across all sectors, while the military makes its own preparations. This can be considered an appropriate pre-emptive measure, considering that in the past North Korea's regime solidarity and internal dissatisfaction were often redirected externally in the form of provocations against the South.

Second, we need to clearly express our hope that North Korea will be able to stabilize and change gradually from within. No one on either side of the peninsula desires to see the political uncertainty and military clashes that can break out in the process of power transition. Furthermore we must work to persuade the new North Korean leadership to pursue denuclearization and reform/opening policies and cooperate in building a healthy inter-Korean relationship. We also should make use of the fact that North Korea has been hoping for favorable external and internal conditions for the sake of the large-scale events it has planned for early next year to commemorate the country's self-proclaimed emergence as a "strong and prosperous country."

Third, it would be wisest for our government to continue its current policy stance of trying to show flexibility while sticking to certain core principles. We should watch closely for signs of changes in North Korea's situation, but at present a continuation of our basic policy direction, with a mind to expanding humanitarian aid, cooperation, and exchange while securing communication channels with the North, will be helpful not only in managing the crisis on the peninsula but also in encouraging the North's new leadership to change its policies.

Fourth, on the international stage, we must work to build close coordination networks to exchange information on the North Korean situation and forge consensus on strategy. As a matter of course, this will require tight cooperation among South Korea, the US and Japan. Also essential will be cooperation with China, which has access to information and significant influence over North Korea. We should also seek to prepare a favorable external environment, via various international consultations, in order to encourage the new North Korean leadership to adopt policies on denuclearization and cooperation with the South and with the international community.

Fifth, internal stability is essential. The South Korean public has developed a certain degree of immunity to such 8-megaton news flashes as Kim Jong Il's death or nuclear tests. After the news of Kim Jong Il's stroke and his worsening health condition, our

society has built up its tolerance in anticipation of the shock that his death might bring. A fresh outbreak of South-South conflict between progressives and conservatives in the South, such as the conflict over condolence messages at the time of Kim Il Sung's death, would benefit nobody. At this point in time, we must remain calm and watchful in response to Kim Jong Il's death, while taking a mature stance of working together with the North to prepare for the future of the Korean people. We also need to display an aura of self-restraint and maturity to the international community in dealing with the inevitable debates that will break out at the government level.

Our society's mature stance will contribute to reducing the sense of "Korea risk" in the wake of Kim Jong Il's death and maintaining our international creditworthiness. By demonstrating our ability to stably manage the aftershocks of Kim Jong Il's death, we can increase international faith in our capacity to manage crises and the potential of our economy.

With the death of Kim Jong Il, we have reached another inflection point in the history of North Korea and the Korean peninsula. Whether or not this will have a positive effect in inducing North Korean change and Korean unification largely depends on us. Now is the time when we must remain cool-headed and objective in watching for signs of change in the North, while making long-term arrangements in preparation for improving the North Korean people's quality of life and leading them down the road to unification.