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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

25 June 1986

North Korea: Kim Chong-il in Charge



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Summary

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Our judgment that Kim Il-song's son will succeed him as absolute ruler of North Korea has been strengthened by new information from several sources,

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Kim Chong-il, reportedly a self-centered workaholic, already manages North Korea's day-to-day affairs, although his father apparently retains control over foreign policy. The younger Kim's long-term survivability is more problematic.

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Kim Chong-il appears to be responsible for several new policy directions. He wants to modernize his country, for example, and probably is behind limited efforts at economic reform, but he is having trouble overcoming the inertia inherent in North Korea's rigid bureaucratic structure. He hopes to attract Western capital to North Korea, suggesting he may have pushed for the joint venture law passed in 1984, but he is uncomfortable around foreigners and knows little about the West except what he learns from movies and television.

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This memorandum was prepared by Office of East Asian Analysis, and Office of Leadership Analysis. Information available as of 25 June 1986 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Korea Branch, Northeast Asia, OEA, .

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Among his international contacts, Kim Chong-il prefers the Chinese over the Soviets, but on policy issues recognizes the importance of good relations with Moscow and apparently has not blocked stronger bilateral ties. We have only limited information on Kim Chong-il's views on reunification of the peninsula, but the little we do know suggests it may not be the all-consuming goal it has been for Kim Il-song. []

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The Transition Takes Shape

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[] North Korean media continue to quote both Kims as authorities for policy guidance and ideological inspiration; Kim Il-song, in fact, appears at more important public affairs than his son. Nevertheless, it is clear [] that Kim Chong-il is assuming an increasingly prominent role and has taken over many of his father's responsibilities:

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- [] the younger Kim makes decisions on nearly all matters without seeking his father's counsel. 25X1
- [] the younger Kim already leads the Korean Workers' Party and is his father's heir. 25X1
- Reporting from US military and other sources also indicates the son is playing a growing role in the North Korean-South Korean dialogue.
- [] increased attention to Kim Chong-il in the media and in private conversation among educated North Koreans [] 25X1
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It is also clear, however, from the evidence available that Kim Chong-il remains loyal to his father. For most of his public and private life, Kim Chong-il--even more than other North Koreans--has been dominated by his father's views. [] the son's political education consisted largely of observing, implementing, and glorifying his father's policies. [] Kim Chong-il has had virtually no contact with anyone challenging the official line. Moreover, the pervasiveness of his father's insistence on conformity appears to have impeded, and perhaps prevented, the emergence of rival courtiers who could fan rivalry between father and son. [] Kim Il-song, for his part, views Kim Chong-il as the guarantor of his legacy. []

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The steady drumbeat of public adulation for both Kims is designed to prepare the North Korean populace for the dynastic succession, and the little we know about North Korean political dynamics suggests that Kim Chong-il possesses all the levers of power he should need to assert control once his father dies. There is no evidence of any organized opposition to the Kims. [redacted]

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[redacted] The Kims control all personnel matters; [redacted] no other official has any power base because all serve at the whim of father and son.

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- Many leading government and party posts are staffed by the Kims' relatives.
- Defense Minister O Chin-u, Kim Il-song's old comrade-in-arms who is ranked third in the leadership, reportedly is Kim Chong-il's leading factotum. His obsessive flattery of Kim Chong-il belies his status as Kim's elder. [redacted] O is genuinely dedicated to the succession, although his fawning behavior could well mask other plans, possibly an intention to push the son aside once the father dies. The military would be best placed to take over if Kim Chong-il stumbles, but we have no evidence suggesting O Chin-u is not loyal to his masters.
- Ho Tam, Premier Kang Song-san, and Foreign Minister Kim Yong-nam are among the younger leaders most sources claim owe their positions to Kim Chong-il. In addition, one US scholar has noted that 83 percent of the Politburo and 57 percent of the Central Committee that emerged from the last Party Congress (when the son became the official heir) belong to this younger generation and presumably are beholden to Kim Chong-il. [redacted]

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An Authoritarian Leader

[redacted] as the emerging and future head of North Korea, he will demonstrate many of the characteristics that have marked his father's leadership. Like Kim Il-song, he is a micromanager who intervenes in every project, taking an ad hoc approach to managing events:

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- Kim works 19 to 20 hours a day and demands his staff work in shifts around the clock.
- The slightest deviation from his orders can result in demotion or imprisonment. For example, Kim had his brother-in-law (an architect) exiled to a minor rural post because he introduced slight modifications to Kim's design of an aquarium.
- On the other hand, Kim Chong-il is lavish in his attention to his favorites, and, often on the spur of the moment, will promote officials who please him, regardless of the bureaucratic chain of command. [redacted]

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[redacted] despite his power, he is an insecure man whose need for constant and uncritical admiration almost certainly reflects underlying doubts about his own self-worth. Although [redacted] he realizes public displays of affection are insincere, his desire for adoration makes him susceptible to syncophancy. [redacted] he does not let flattery change his decisions on key policy issues, but we believe it may, at times, impair his ability to make objective assessments. While Kim Chong-il is a political pragmatist, he also can act on impulse, making rash decisions or promises he later forgets completely. [redacted]

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Policy Priority: Economic Modernization

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Kim is already using his authority to try to change selected North Korean policies. P'yongyang's press campaigns clearly identify Kim Chong-il's preference for technical experts over ideological zealots to implement his push for development of light industry and to improve the standard of living. [redacted] a "general understanding" among party and government officials that Kim Chong-il is attempting to correct his father's economic mistakes--although no one refers to any of Kim Il-song's "mistakes" in front of either Kim. The younger Kim reportedly wants to open North Korea to new economic methods and to adapt Chinese economic reforms. Kim's interest in modernization suggests he may have been behind P'yongyang's joint venture law, passed in 1984 and patterned after the Chinese model. This law is designed to attract Western technology and capital. We believe North Korean media calls for increased reliance on technical expertise in industry is evidence that Kim Chong-il's reform efforts are under way. [redacted]

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Kim's modernization policies will face a variety of roadblocks, perhaps most important his own management style, which will dissuade even senior officials from offering candid advice and no doubt stunt initiative in the bureaucratic ranks. Other factors that will hold back his efforts probably include:

- Raw material shortages. [redacted] enterprises are reluctant to share scarce resources, and do so only when Kim Chong-il orders them to.
- A bureaucratic obsession with security. For example, while Kim Chong-il reportedly is behind the public North Korean effort to promote a tourist industry, he has commented that the great number of closed military areas in North Korea will prevent the country from attracting many foreigners. [redacted]

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Failure of expensive, highly publicized public works projects also could set back modernization efforts, and might weaken Kim Chong-il as well. For example, [redacted] the Namp'o lock gate--a major project personally supervised by Kim--is constructed on an inadequate foundation and is settling rapidly. [redacted] problems there might reflect badly on Kim Chong-il. [redacted]

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Foreign Policy

Although change in North Korean economic policy is possible under Kim Chong-il's guidance, we expect continuity in foreign policy, at least over the short term, in part because Kim Chong-il--[]--has less to do with international affairs than with other aspects of North Korean affairs. []

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[] Kim is uneasy around foreigners, a fact substantiated by press coverage that makes it clear that Kim Il-song, but not his son, greets foreign visitors. While the elder Kim often receives gifts personally, his son almost always receives them only after they have first been handed to a "responsible official." Pro-P'yongyang Koreans living in Japan have reported that, while they can expect an audience with Kim Il-song, they probably cannot expect to meet his son. Kim Chong-il's apparent xenophobia could well be associated with his need for uncritical adoration. His reluctance to meet foreigners probably reflects less his fear of non-Koreans than his concern about entering a situation that would expose his lack of knowledge or ability to handle himself on an international stage. []

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North Korea [] is now doing all it can to improve relations with Tokyo and Washington. The North may believe its role in the North-South dialogue and offer to end military exercises, for example, go a long way toward meeting US conditions for direct contacts. []--P'yongyang believes the United States will be unresponsive as long as President Reagan is in office. []

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The defectors report Kim Chong-il considers the United States and Japan "fantasy islands," presumably because of their wealth, but perhaps also because he absorbs so much of what he knows about the outside world from Western films and television. [] for example, he believes capitalists are like the gangsters he has seen on film. But given his interest in modernization and reform we believe it is reasonable to expect Kim Chong-il will continue present efforts to improve economic ties to the West and may be willing to open North Korea to limited doses of Western culture. []

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A major feature of North Korean foreign policy over the past two years has been improving ties to the Soviet Union, and we expect Kim Chong-il will stay that course, despite his personal preference for the Chinese. He lived in China as a child, and [] has great regard for Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang. [] Kim has referred to the Soviets as "barbarians" and "hairy armed animals." [] Kim Chong-il has little regard for East European "beggar nations" with the exception of Romania--perhaps because it is the only other Communist country with dynastic pretensions or because it is the only East European country to cultivate a relationship with North Korea.) []

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The differences in Kim's treatment by Moscow and Beijing may both reflect his preferences and reinforce them. Kim was entertained lavishly when he visited China in 1983, but he has yet to visit the USSR, and it is clear the Soviets are reluctant to recognize his succession publicly. North Korean press reports of last December's visit

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by Soviet Foreign Minister Schevardnadze highlighted the presence of father and son at the meetings. Soviet reports, on the other hand, barely mentioned Kim Chong-il. Moreover, while Schevardnadze issued a public invitation to Kim Il-song to come to the USSR, press coverage of his visit only noted that "other invitations" also were made, presumably a reference to Kim Chong-il. []

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Despite widespread public and diplomatic speculation, Kim Chong-il did not head the North Korean delegation to the Soviet Communist Party Congress in February 1986. Explanations varied between those who thought the two sides had agreed that Kim would not receive the attention he deserved and others who argued there had been friction over protocol. We believe the latter contention. As early as September 1985, [] Soviet officials preferred Kim be only a member, rather than the head, of the delegation. []

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We do not have a coherent picture based on plausible reporting to explain North Korea's current tilt toward the Soviets, but some of Kim Chong-il's statements [] confirm our speculation that it is motivated by practical considerations and pique with the Chinese. Kim Chong-il apparently shares [] a general North Korean belief that Moscow is more reliable than Beijing as a source of economic and military aid. Although he has [] warm regard for the Chinese, he [] recognizes that Moscow "has the money." In addition, he complained [] about China's indirect trade with South Korea and noted that frictions over the economic relationship are damaging Sino-North Korean relations. []

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In view of Kim Chong-il's realistic appraisal of his country's reliance on Soviet aid, we do not believe his differences with Moscow pose an immediate threat to the blossoming Soviet-North Korean relationship. We judge a Kim Chong-il visit to Moscow likely, perhaps this year. In the longer run, the son could reverse his country's tilt toward Moscow if Western aid and Chinese-style reforms prove beneficial to the North's economy, and if he comes to perceive China as a more reliable source of economic aid. In addition, perceived personal slights by the Soviets could eventually affect Kim's view of the bilateral relationship. []

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Reunification

[] Korean reunification remains a key issue for Kim Il-song, but the information we have on the younger Kim's views indicates he may not be as obsessed with it. [] he has some doubts about the advantages of reunification, at the same time highlighting his limited understanding of the South's economic success. []

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[] in line with his growing power, Kim Chong-il is increasingly involved with policy toward the North-South dialogue. We believe reunification will remain a powerful theme on both sides of the DMZ, and the

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younger Kim almost certainly will pay it lip service to strengthen his claim to be his father's successor. Kim once told [redacted] all South Korean intellectuals, advanced technology, and industrial achievements would become "his" once the peninsula was reunified, but he does not now appear interested in using force to achieve that goal. [redacted] both he and his father have denied O Chin-u permission to invade the South. Nonetheless, pressure from military advisers probably will lead the younger Kim to reserve this option if economic modernization efforts founder and diplomatic initiatives fail to stem North Korea's declining fortunes.

[redacted]

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Could Things Change?

The limited evidence we have suggests Kim Chong-il will indeed succeed his father and already is guiding an increasingly wide range of both domestic and foreign policy activity. If opposition does exist in P'yongyang, it must be one of the best hidden political movements in the world. We still know very little about North Korea, however, and cannot judge with confidence the political preferences of leaders who currently guard every word to prevent running afoul of Kim Il-song and his son. [redacted]

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Although the initial succession appears fairly secure, we believe Kim Chong-il's prospects for a long tenure will depend on his ability to maintain the loyalty of younger North Korean political and military leaders and--at the same time--to ameliorate his country's serious economic problems. Indeed, the defectors doubt the younger Kim will be able to stay in power after his father is gone. They believe he lacks Kim Il-song's charisma and that North Korea's troubled economy and repressive political system cannot hold together without the elder Kim. We are inclined to believe the younger Kim initially will be able to consolidate his authority, and that any leaders opposed to him will need time to overcome their organizational disadvantage. [redacted]

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We note the possibility that Kim Chong-il, who reportedly is a reckless driver and at one time had a drinking problem, could die before his father. We believe the North is thoroughly unprepared for this eventuality; it would force Kim Il-song to rethink completely North Korea's future. The elder Kim would not only have to build an entirely new succession scenario but might even consider reunifying Korea by force before his death brings with it the specter of domestic instability. [redacted]

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Appendix: Personal Data

Kim Chong-il, aged 44, is the son of Kim Il-song by his first wife, Kim Chong-suk. He is married to a woman in her late 30s and has a son about 15 and a daughter about 12. [redacted] rumors that he keeps a mistress, with whom he has a son, and that he has had at least one liaison with a young actress [redacted]

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[redacted] Kim Chong-il is devoted to the memory of his mother, who died when he was eight years old. She is the object of yet another North Korean cult of personality. Kim apparently resents his stepmother, Kim Song-ae. [redacted] Kim Chong-il cuts her figure out of photographs. In 1978--before Kim Chong-il became heir apparent--his stepmother was prominent in publicity surrounding the visit to North Korea of Romanian President Ceaucescu and his powerful wife, Elena. Kim Song-ae's presence at official functions apparently was needed to balance the attention given to her Romanian counterpart. Her pictures also were prominent in Romanian coverage of the Ceaucescus' 1985 visit to P'yongyang, but North Korean papers carried no pictures of her--presumably at the direction of Kim Chong-il. [redacted]

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[redacted] Kim Chong-il considers himself obese and unattractive; he wears high-heeled shoes and sports a piled-up hair-do in order to make himself look taller. Although he encouraged [redacted] new styles into North Korean clothing, he continues to wear Mao-style tunics, reportedly because he fears Western dress would make him look too fat. Kim Chong-il once was a heavy drinker but cut back after warnings from his doctors. He reportedly is imaginative and has some musical aptitude--he plays the piano. [redacted]

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[redacted] Kim Chong-il is an "absolute" materialist who believes money can do anything. He reportedly has access to his "own" gold mine, which he need not account for [redacted]

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