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# **Signs of Stability in North Korean Workers' Party: Bellwether of Political Change?**



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**A Research Paper**

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*EA 87-10041  
September 1987*

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# **Signs of Stability in North Korean Workers' Party: Bellwether of Political Change?**



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**A Research Paper**

This paper was prepared by  Office of  
East Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are  
welcome and may be directed to the Chief,  
Northeast Asia Division, OEA 



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**Scope Note**

This paper marks an initial effort to exploit a small but significant increase in information on North Korea's tightly closed society. [Redacted] the media and academic coverage we have always relied on heavily, has given us a somewhat firmer—if still tentative—basis for judgments on political trends in North Korea. [Redacted] important aspects of North Korea's political institutions may be changing to firm the underpinnings of a leadership transition as the end of President Kim Il-song's long rule approaches. The results of the Seventh Congress of the Korean Workers' Party, which some [Redacted] believe will be held soon, should provide a test of this hypothesis. [Redacted]

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**Signs of Stability in  
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**Summary**

*Information available  
as of 2 September 1987  
was used in this report.*

President Kim Il-song's management of the Korean Workers' Party during his 40 years in power has reflected his control of all aspects of life in North Korea. The party has functioned at his personal direction, and he has prevented it from developing an institutional identity. The KWP's weakness has been strikingly evident in the transient nature of Central Committee membership:

- Since 1946, 85 percent of Central Committee members have held seats for only one or two terms, and never have members reelected from one Central Committee made up a majority of the new one.
- Moreover, very few alternate Central Committee members rose to full membership at succeeding congresses, and rarely have alternates served more than once.

Kim's routine shuffling of Central Committee membership suggests he has sought to protect his position by preventing others from building individual power bases or developing the experience and knowledge to challenge his policies. His management contrasts with many other Communist systems, where leaders build a stable cast of loyal officials once they have consolidated power. Moreover, unlike in North Korea where KWP instability is the rule, high Central Committee turnover elsewhere often reflects major changes in top leadership, massive social upheaval, or both.

The recent pattern of Central Committee membership and promotions, however, suggests Kim may now view a strong, more institutionally experienced party leadership as a key underpinning to the transfer of power to his son, Kim Chong-il. Beginning with the Sixth KWP Congress in 1980, we have seen a significant decline in Central Committee turnover:

- Fifty-eight percent of the full Central Committee members and 25 percent of the alternates were reelected in 1980, the highest figures since 1948.
- Overall, incumbents made up 47 percent of the new Central Committee, the highest proportion in KWP history.
- Fewer membership changes have occurred in the 12 Central Committee plenums since 1980, and the number of alternate members elevated to full membership has increased significantly.

The results of the next KWP congress—which could come as early as next year—will test our hypothesis that Kim is permitting the Central Committee a greater measure of stability. Retention of half or more of the Sixth Central Committee members, in our view, would establish a trend toward a more institutionalized form of leadership.

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Even if Kim builds a large measure of continuity into the Central Committee at the next party congress, whatever changes occur should offer clues as to how policy is made and power relationships maintained in North Korea. In particular, we will look at the standing of key military and economic figures:

- Kim has kept the proportion of military members of the Central Committee stable to ensure civilian control. Whether he will continue to follow this pattern is a key question, as is the proportion of military officers he selects for Politburo positions.
- Changes in the economic team could provide insight into Kim's satisfaction with the party's approach to solving North Korea's serious economic problems.
- A comparison of the rank order and numbers of senior military and economic officials in the KWP should give us some indication of political-economic relations and how both sides will fare in competing for scarce resources.



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### Signs of Stability in North Korean Workers' Party: Bellwether of Political Change? [Redacted]

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#### Historical Institutional Weakness

Under President Kim Il-song, North Korea has been one of the world's most stable and centralized dictatorships. Kim's influence on all walks of life is pervasive, but it is particularly striking in his management of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP),<sup>1</sup> over which he maintains a firm grip. [Redacted] academic observers, and diplomatic sources agree that Kim's personal power and prestige have dominated the KWP throughout his 40 years in office. Examples of his control abound:

- Kim has ignored party rules calling for a congress every five years and, [Redacted] [Redacted] has total discretion over the timing—and, we assume, the substance—of these sessions.
  - He has overruled party leaders on key initiatives, particularly if he sees a threat to even a small measure of his personal control. [Redacted] Kim intervened last year to block an initiative supported by a majority of Central Committee members and economic experts to introduce Chinese-style economic reforms—limited decentralization and toleration of some private enterprise.
  - Kim firmly controls the choice and terms of those serving on the Central Committee and Politburo. [Redacted] [Redacted] North Korean officials rise or fall "almost daily" in accordance with Kim Il-song's whims. [Redacted]
- [Redacted] We believe the party plays a role similar to that of most other ruling Communist parties. It organizes and surveils public participation in political and social life and recruits individuals into the bureaucracy. Party membership almost certainly is a prerequisite to career advancement in all professions. Press reporting indicates that party officials run government, social, and religious organizations, and the media constantly exhort the public to defer to KWP leadership in all areas. [Redacted]

*No Job Security.* Rapid turnover in the Central Committee<sup>2</sup> is one of the clearest indications of the degree to which Kim has controlled the party. The Central Committee appears to have been a transient body with very little stability in either full or alternate membership. According to our analysis, based on data from published sources [Redacted] going back two decades, the turnover in membership has been dramatic:

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- Of the 317 people who have served as full Central Committee members since 1946, 51 percent served only once, 34 percent twice, 9 percent three times, and 3 percent four times. Only Kim Il-song and the late Premier Kim Il served on all six Central Committees. In short, turnover has been exceptionally high (see table 1).
- Judging from [Redacted] research by Western and South Korean scholars, Kim Il-song also has tried to ensure that controlling groups or factions did not persist from one Central Committee to another. Only in 1948 and 1980 did a majority of Central Committee members retain their seats after a reelection. A progressively smaller percentage of members were reelected at the congresses held between those dates. Members reelected from the previous Central Committee have never made up a controlling majority of a new one (see table 1 and figure 1). For example, while 70 percent of the First Central Committee elected in 1946 was reelected in 1948, the Committee's size was increased to the point that these veterans made up only 45 percent of the new body. [Redacted]

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<sup>2</sup> We believe the KWP Central Committee is assigned a role similar to its counterparts in other Communist systems—it provides the stamp of decisionmaking authority, confers elite status on its members, and serves as the leadership's tool to assign and promote officials. The KWP "chooses" a ruling Politburo, administrative Secretariat, and other departments and commissions, which—according to research by Western and South Korean academic observers—are more influential than government ministries. [Redacted]

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**Table 1**  
**Korean Workers' Party Central Committee Reelection**

	1946 First Congress	1948 First Congress	1956 First Congress	1961 First Congress	1970 First Congress	1980 First Congress
<b>Total</b>	<b>43 (?)</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>248</b>
Number of full members	43	67	71	85	117	145
Number/percent of full members reelected from previous Committee		30/70%	29/43%	28/39%	31/36%	68/58%
Number of alternate members	?	20	45	50	55	103
Number/percent of full members who were alternate members of previous Committee		?	5/25%	12/27%	15/30%	12/22%
Number/percent of alternate members reelected from previous Committee		?	2/10%	1/2%	7/14%	14/25%

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Membership statistics also show that the Central Committee lacks a regularized leadership promotion system, pointing to another area of KWP institutional weakness and instability. Historically, relatively few alternate Central Committee members have been promoted to full membership at succeeding congresses (see table 1 and figure 1). Alternate members also seem to come and go frequently. For instance, only 24 of the 273 alternate members elected to their positions between 1948 and 1980 had served more than once. Kim Il-song most often appears to have recruited Central Committee members from the party rank and file and from local bureaucracies rather than from among the alternate Central Committee membership. Despite the rapid ascension of those chosen, he also has demoted them just as suddenly. [redacted]

the leadership at the Fifth Party Congress in 1970—because of economic policy failures, according to Western and South Korean scholars—but reappeared in a government role in 1973. He was elected to the Sixth Central Committee in 1980. [redacted]

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A high turnover rate also is evident in subordinate elements of the Central Committee. These subgroups, staffed with Central Committee members, provide administrative support to the party. For example, of the 43 people serving during 1946-80 on the Central Auditing Commission—which oversees KWP expenditures—only three were elected more than once. As another case in point, Kim retained less than 20 percent on average of the Inspection Committee's membership during that period. [redacted]

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Moreover, Kim has at times reappointed Central Committee members after having demoted them at a previous party congress (see table 2, page 4). Yi Chong-ok, currently a Politburo member and one of North Korea's three vice presidents, is an outstanding example. Yi was on the Third and Fourth Central Committees and was a member of every North Korean cabinet between 1948 and 1970. He dropped out of

**Comparison With Other Communist Parties.** Kim Il-song's policy of routinely shuffling leading party personnel contrasts with many other Communist systems, where leaders build a stable cast of loyal officials once they have consolidated their power. Members of Central Committees in many other parties have been more likely than their North Korean

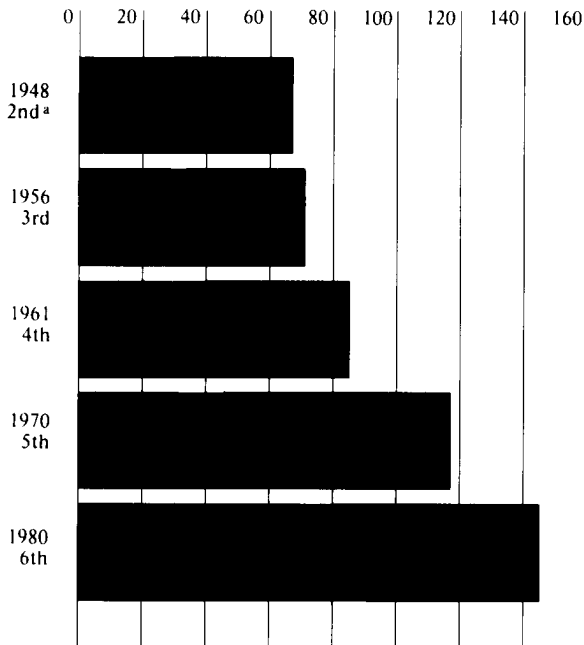
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**Figure 1**  
**Korean Workers' Party Central Committee:**  
**Full Members**

*Number of members*

- Full members reelected from previous Central Committee
- Full members who were alternates on previous Central Committee
- New full members



<sup>a</sup> Congresses.

[Redacted]

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counterparts to retain their seats from congress to congress (see figure 2 and table 3, page 5). When there have been instances of high turnover elsewhere in the Communist world, they often have reflected major changes in top leadership (Soviet Union and Vietnam in 1986), massive social upheaval (Poland, 1980-81), or both (China after 1965). But the KWP has a record of membership instability despite the absence of social or leadership crises in North Korea since the Korean war. [Redacted]

The regularity with which other Communist leaderships promote alternate Central Committee members to full membership status also demonstrates the institutional instability of the KWP. Not only do most ruling parties select a greater percentage of new full Committee members from alternate ranks, but they also tend to reelect incumbent alternates. A comparison of Soviet and North Korean promotion rates is noteworthy and appears in table 4, page 5. East European parties also have had a more predictable promotion system than the KWP. For example, 30 of the 50 new full Central Committee members elected in 1981 at the 12th Bulgarian Communist Party Congress had been alternate members of the previous Central Committee. [Redacted]

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Several Asian ruling parties similarly appear to have had a more institutionalized promotion system than the KWP. At the 1986 Vietnamese Communist Party Congress—which resulted in a major leadership shakeup—24 out of 38 new full Central Committee members had been alternates at the previous congress. Six of the other 12 alternates retained their positions. Mongolian Communist Party promotion rates are lower than those of Vietnam, but still higher than in North Korea. In Mongolia, 30 percent of new full members elected in 1981 and 44 percent at the congress in 1976 had been alternates. [Redacted]

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Only the Chinese Communist Party appears to have had a promotion rate as low as the KWP's. Only 12 percent of alternate members of the Chinese Communist Party's 11th Central Committee elected in 1977 became full members of the 12th Central Committee in 1982. Fourteen percent stayed on as alternates. Unlike North Korea, where there have been no discernible leadership fights or shakeups for a generation, China in this period experienced considerable internal tussling. We believe the low promotion rates resulted in large part from major social disturbances—the rehabilitation of leaders who had been purged during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, the demotion of those who had purged them, and the considerable factional infighting in the party during this time. [Redacted]

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**Table 2**  
**Patterns of Reelection of Full Central Committee Members**

	First Congress	Second Congress	Third Congress	Fourth Congress	Fifth Congress	Sixth Congress
1946 First Congress	43	30	12 (2) <sup>a</sup>	(1) <sup>a</sup>	2	2 (1) <sup>b</sup>
1948 Second Congress		67	29	11 (1) <sup>c</sup>	3 (1) <sup>d</sup>	2
1956 Third Congress			71	28	10	6 (1) <sup>e</sup>
1961 Fourth Congress				85	31	13 (3) <sup>f</sup>
1970 Fifth Congress					117	68
1980 Sixth Congress						145

<sup>a</sup> Kim Ch'ang-man and Yun Kong-hum were not reelected to the Second, but to the Third Congress. Of the two, only Kim was reelected to the Fourth Congress.

<sup>b</sup> Ho Chong-suk was elected to the First, Second, Third, and Sixth Congresses, but was not reelected to the Fourth and Fifth Congresses.

<sup>c</sup> Yi Puk-myong was elected to the Second and Fourth Congresses, but not to the Third.

<sup>d</sup> Pang Hak-se was elected to the Second, Third, Fifth, and Sixth Congresses, but not to the Fourth Congress.

<sup>e</sup> Yi Chong-ok was elected to the Third, Fourth, and Sixth Congresses, but not to the Fifth Congress.

<sup>f</sup> Ch'oe Kwang, Yi Chao-yun and Yim Kye-ch'ol were elected to the Fourth and Sixth Congresses, but not to the Fifth Congress.

### The Rationale: What Could Lie Behind the Pattern?

We do not know why Kim Il-song has routinely shuffled Central Committee membership, but the pattern, which buttresses the notion that his rule is personal and pervasive, suggests several reasons:

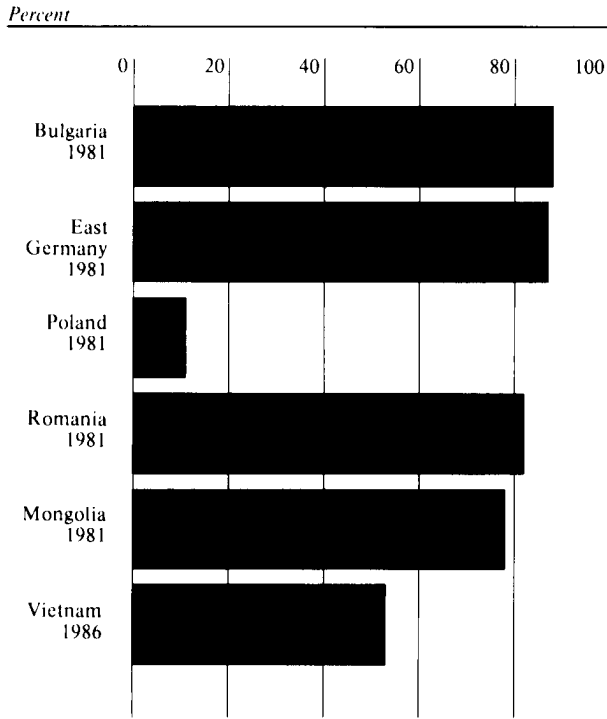
- By keeping KWP officials off balance, Kim has impeded the creation of individual power bases and made his subordinates dependent on his personal favor.
- Kim Il-song also has kept others in leadership positions from building a network of grateful subordinates by ensuring that government officials and Central Committee members have owed their positions solely to his discretion or that of his son and designated heir, Kim Chong-il.
- And, by keeping the KWP in flux, Kim has ensured that he or his chosen minions can dominate all aspects of policymaking without being threatened by those who have the backing and knowledge to challenge their views. [redacted]

Kim's strategy has not been cost free. His failure to allow development of functional expertise almost certainly has deprived him of a strong supporting cast for managing the day-to-day affairs of state. Moreover, we agree with those Western and South Korean academic observers who believe Kim has left subordinates unprepared to make even minor decisions without his personal guidance, thereby worsening an already ponderously inefficient bureaucracy. In addition, Kim's personnel policies and personal rule have prevented the party, which should be the institutional backbone of a Communist society, from developing the kind of historical memory and institutional expertise that would give it real strength. [redacted]

### A Move Toward Greater Institutional Stability?

The paucity of inside information on the North Korean leadership, party apparatus, and policies makes us cautious in forming judgments about political trends in P'yongyang, but information on personnel shifts since 1980 suggests some changes may be under way in Kim Il-song's approaches to Central

**Figure 2**  
**Percent of Non-Korean Communist Party**  
**Central Committee Membership Reelected**



**Table 3** Percent  
**Full Central Committee Members**  
**From Previous**  
**Party Congress**

Albania	USSR	China	North Korea
83 (1986)	45 (1986)	47 (1982)	58 (1980)
80 (1981)	75 (1981)	44 (1977)	36 (1970)
46 (1976)	87 (1976)	37 (1973)	39 (1961)
95 (1971)	69 (1971)		43 (1956)
			70 (1948)

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**Table 4** Percent  
**Alternate Central Committee Member**  
**Promotions**

CPSU		KWP	
Year	Total New Full Membership	Year	Total New Full Membership
1981	50	1980	15
1976	59	1970	17
1971	43	1961	21

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Committee membership. In particular, it appears he is becoming somewhat more willing to give Central Committee members a degree of tenure:

- Fifty-eight percent of full members of the Fifth Central Committee were reelected at the Sixth Central Committee in 1980, reversing the trend toward progressively lower retention rates evident since 1956 (see table 1).
- In addition, while the rate of promotion from alternate to full membership remained low compared with that of other Communist parties, 25 percent of alternate members of the Fifth Central Committee were reelected in 1980—another record.

- Overall, in 1980, incumbents made up 47 percent of full Central Committee members—the highest proportion in KWP history. Kim Il-song also doubled the number of alternate members—an unprecedented development—perhaps to provide a greater pool of candidates for promotion.

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In reviewing an October 1985 Central Committee list [redacted] we have noted few changes on the Central Committee since the Sixth

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### *The Government Side*

*It is not clear whether the rate of turnover in the North Korean Government—as opposed to the KWP—is declining. In addition, the relative unimportance of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA—the country's parliament) as a decisionmaking body makes it difficult to assess the significance of personnel shifts. Retention rates have alternately increased and declined in successive SPAs elected since 1962—or since Kim Il-song completed the purge of his factional adversaries. Because Kim apparently uses some SPA seats to reward war veterans and model workers, the turnover pattern suggests he permits some delegates so honored to "win" two successive SPA elections, and then replaces them.*

*Turnover has been high on the primary SPA organs, the Central People's Committee (CPC), and the Standing Committee. The CPC—in existence only since the Fifth SPA in 1972—appears to be the more important of the two, because Kim Il-song and other KWP Politburo members dominate its membership. Changes in Politburo membership are reflected on the CPC. The Standing Committee, consisting of lower level Central Committee and SPA members, typically changes one-half to two-thirds of its members at each new SPA session.*

*The Administration Council, North Korea's cabinet, serves a more practical role than the SPA in implementing KWP policies. The SPA formally elects the*

*Administration Council, but in fact only ratifies Kim Il-song's appointments. Kim has changed the size as well as the composition of cabinets considerably over time, and has often merged ministries and commissions only to separate them again soon. Therefore, it is difficult to draw any conclusions concerning the structural strength of government institutions. Kim typically has reappointed one-fourth to one-third of a cabinet. The highest retention rate was in 1967, when 20 members (61 percent) of the 1962 Administration Council continued to serve.*

*One academic observer suggested in 1980 that the increase since 1972 of the number of ministers reappointed to the same posts suggested greater "stability and continuity" than in the past. This scholar ignored the decline in longevity of premiers and vice premiers during the same period. Administrative Council appointments in SPA sessions since his analysis (in 1982 and 1986) suggest Kim continues to reappoint only a small number of ministers to their posts. The trend regarding premiers and vice premiers is unclear; the premiership has changed twice since 1982, but four vice premiers of the Seventh Administration Council have retained their posts.*

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Congress. According to the list, 10 Central Committee plenums were held during 1980-85, adding 25 new full members—six had been alternates in 1980—and 15 new alternates. Despite these changes and opportunities for turnover, almost 90 percent of full members and alternates retained their posts

The two most recent Central Committee plenums (February and December 1986) provide further evidence that the KWP may be developing a more institutionalized promotion system. Although these

plenums added more new full and alternate members, most members elected in 1980 still held their positions. In particular, 146 out of the 152 full Central Committee members and all but one of the alternates who were not promoted in October 1985 reportedly retained their seats in December 1986. According to North Korean media reports of plenum proceedings, eight of the 13 full members elected in February 1986 had been alternate members—an extremely high percentage in North Korean terms. We are not certain

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that more alternates were promoted at the next plenum in December. But the January 1987 list [redacted] of the full Central Committee membership shows that five more alternates made full Central Committee membership [redacted]

[redacted]

The North Koreans rarely publicize demotions, and some Central Committee members may have been dropped unceremoniously from the rolls. The most recent list indicates that Politburo members demoted since October 1985 have retained their Central Committee memberships. This would fit Kim Il-song's historic pattern of shuffling Central Committee members in and out of the top leadership. But at least six of those dropped from the Politburo lost their parliamentary seats last fall and may have lost their Central Committee membership as well. [redacted]

[redacted]

**Testing the Hypothesis.** Whether the pattern inside the party since 1980 will hold should be evident after the next party Congress.<sup>3</sup> If Kim Il-song has in fact decided to give the KWP greater institutional stability, it could reflect a realization that his country's—and his dynasty's—future depends on the party's soundness. Kim is preparing to transfer power to his son, Kim Chong-il, an unproven leader lacking his father's legitimacy, revolutionary credentials, and charisma. A strong, more experienced, and stable party leadership could well represent a major underpinning for his son, and for the very success of the transfer of power itself. [redacted]

<sup>3</sup> Under the party's rules that stipulate congresses should be five years apart, the Seventh Congress is already two years overdue. Rumors are circulating in Western and Japanese press and diplomatic circles that Kim recently reversed a decision to call the congress this year or next. [redacted] the success of efforts to implement the current Seven-Year Economic Plan may be a factor in determining when the congress will be held. [redacted]

**Politburo Membership Trends**

*The pattern of membership stability is less clear for the Politburo than for the Central Committee. As in other Communist states, the Politburo is North Korea's senior policymaking body. All five members elected to the Politburo in 1946 retained their positions in 1948, reflecting the balance among competing factions before Kim Il-song consolidated his control, according to South Korean and Western academic analysts. Kim had achieved near total power by the Third KWP Congress in 1956, when six of the seven members of the 1948 Politburo lost their jobs. Only three members of the 1956 Politburo remained in place in 1961, and Kim dropped 73 percent of the 1961 Politburo before the end of the Fifth Party Congress in 1970. These changes probably reflected differences with hardline military leaders over reunification policy. Seven of the 11 Politburo members kept their jobs between 1970 and 1980, but Kim increased that body's size to 19 full members, diluting the incumbents' influence.*

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*Promotion to the Politburo has been somewhat more institutionalized than on the Central Committee; most new members come from the ranks of those who earned their spurs on the Central Committee. Nonetheless, Kim has not regularly chosen full Politburo members from those who have previously served as Politburo alternates.*

[redacted]

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The experience of Albania—another small, maverick Communist state that was ruled for more than 40 years by its founding dictator, Enver Hoxha—offers evidence that Central Committee stability can ease the transfer of power. Eighty percent of Albanian Workers' Party (AWP) full Central Committee members kept their jobs at the AWP's 1981 and 1986 congresses, (see table 3). In our view, stability cushioned the shock from the bloody split in 1981 between

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Hoxha and Mehmet Shehu, his longtime second in command, and helped smooth the way for Ramiz Alia, Hoxha's political heir, who led the party apparatus by the time Hoxha died in 1985. Persistent flux in the KWP could prevent North Korea from achieving a similarly seamless transition if there is turmoil after Kim Il-song passes the mantle or dies, bequeathing power to Kim Chong-il. [redacted]

Retention of half or more of Sixth Central Committee members, in our view, would establish a definite trend toward more stability in the KWP, continuing the relatively high retention rate (58 percent) of the Sixth Congress. The next congress also will give some indication whether the Central Committee's promotion of alternate members is becoming more institutionalized. The high rate of promotion from alternate to full membership—50 percent or more—evident in the Soviet and other ruling parties would be extraordinary for the KWP, given its history. But even an elevation of 30 percent or more would be significant, especially in light of the unprecedented increase in the absolute number of alternates between 1970 and 1980. Similarly, a decision to retain large numbers of alternates in their present posts would provide evidence of an attempt to develop structural stability.<sup>4</sup>

#### Broader Policy Implications

Beyond testing our hypothesis about party continuity, we expect the next party congress, whenever it is held, to offer insights into North Korean politics and policy directions. We will look at the complexion of the Central Committee for clues as to how policy is made and power relationships are maintained at the top. In North Korea's case, as in other Communist systems, we pay special attention to the role and status of the military (see appendix), which has long been closely controlled by Kim Il-song and could be a critical factor in ensuring—or spiking—Kim Chong-il's succession. Kim appears to have allowed the military a

<sup>4</sup> A failure of the Seventh Congress to match the retention rate of the Sixth would not necessarily mean Kim Il-song's succession plans are in jeopardy. It could suggest that Kim is unwilling to relinquish control to KWP institutions. A return to a higher turnover rate could also indicate Kim's disapproval of current Central Committee members' performance [redacted]

degree of stability on the Central Committee. In fact, since 1980 military representation has remained stable. [redacted]

But there are signs of change on the Politburo, one level up. If our information is generally accurate, nearly all military members of the Sixth Central Committee have retained their seats. But it is clear from North Korean announcements that fewer military leaders now serve on the Politburo than in 1980. Only two of the eight military members serving as full or alternate Politburo members after the Sixth Congress still held their posts in 1986 (see table 5). One officer, Ch'oe Hyon, died several years ago, and five apparently were demoted. Further, Defense Minister O Chin-u, 77, has been convalescing since September 1986 from a serious automobile accident, apparently leaving Chief of Staff O Kuk-yol as the only senior military leader actively shaping regime policy. [redacted]

We lack the inside story on these developments and can only suggest explanations:

- Kim may simply be replacing older military leaders on the Central Committee with younger officers who do not yet have the stature for Politburo membership. In fact, the North Korean media have announced the elevation of several younger officers. We assume all of them owe their positions to Kim Chong-il, who, [redacted] [redacted] has had significant influence over personnel decisions since the mid-1970s. The promotions announced in February 1987 of Colonel-General Yi Pong-won—a full Central Committee member—to Deputy Chief of the Defense Ministry's Political Bureau, and of Yi-Pyong-uk—an alternate Central Committee member—to Colonel-General and Vice Defense Minister are particularly noteworthy. Both officers appear to be rising stars. The latter's new responsibilities suggest that he may be a candidate for early promotion to full Central Committee membership.
- Alternatively, although there is no evidence of military discontent with Kim Il-song, he may be removing those military figures who could command the political and military clout to challenge

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**Table 5**  
**Korean Workers' Party Politburo <sup>a</sup>**

1980		1986	
Full Members	Alternate Members	Full Members	Alternate Members
Kim Il-song	Ho Tam	Kim Il-song	Kye Ung-tae
Kim Il	Yun Ki-bok	Kim Chong-il	Chon Pyong-ho
<i>O Chin-u</i>	Ch'oe Kwang	<i>O Chin-u</i>	Hyon Mu-kwang
Kim Chong-il	Cho Se-ung	Pak Song-chol	Kim Pok-sin
Yi Chong-ok	Ch'oe Che-u	Yim Chun-chu	Ch'oe Kwang
Pak Song-chol	Kong Chin-tae	Yi Chong-ok	Kang Hui-won
<i>Ch'oe Hyon</i>	Chong Chun-ki	Yi Kun-mo	Chong Chun-ki
Yim Chun-chu	<i>Kim Chol-man</i>	So Chol	Cho Se-ung
So Chol	Chong Kyong-hui	Ho Tam	Hong Si-hak
<i>O Paek-yong</i>	Ch'oe Yong-nim	Yon Hyong-muk	Yi Son-sil
Kim Chung-nin	So Yun-sok	Kang Song-san	
Kim Yong-nam	Yi Kun-mo	Kim Yong-nam	
<i>Chon Mun-sop</i>	Hyon Mu-kwang	<i>O Kuk-yol</i>	
Kim Hwan	<i>Kim Kang-hwan</i>	Hong Song-nam	
Yon Hyong-muk	Yi Son-sil	So Yun-sok	
<i>O Kuk-yol</i>			
Kye Ung-tae			
Kang Song-san			
<i>Paek Hak-nim</i>			

<sup>a</sup> The names of military leaders are in italics.

[Redacted]

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Kim Chong-il. Past purges of military leaders demonstrate the elder Kim is not reluctant to dismiss those who represent a potential challenge.

- And, it is possible that these personnel shifts may reflect policy disputes driven by sharper competition between the military and civilian sectors for resources. We have seen some evidence that the military may be giving way to civilian economic demands. In 1986, the North Koreans publicly claimed to have transferred 150,000 soldiers from the "front lines" to economic construction projects, and in July of this year P'yongyang announced it would discharge 100,000 troops by the end of the year, presumably to free up labor for civilian economic activity. [Redacted]

In any case, whatever we can learn about the background of future Central Committee members could provide some clues concerning the critical issue of

political-military relations. Whether Kim retains or replaces military leaders who have been dropped from the Politburo, whether he promotes younger officers to the Politburo and other leadership organs, and whether he changes the percentage of military Central Committee members and continues to permit military members greater job security than their civilian counterparts are key questions. [Redacted]

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Given the troubled state of the North Korean economy, we believe *economic policy management* is another critical area to watch, because a faltering economic program could undermine elite and popular support for Kim's dynastic succession scenario. The economy clearly is struggling, and the leadership appears dissatisfied with the country's performance—Kim Il-song admitted to Japanese journalists that his country's economic development is "slow." According

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**Is Kim Chong-il at Fault?**

*It is uncertain what impact the country's economic problems have had on Kim Il-song's confidence in his son, who according to [redacted] media coverage is deeply involved in economic decision making. On the one hand, some Western academic and media observers believe Kim Il-song is continuing to promote younger economic officials on the basis of Kim Chong-il's recommendation. On the other hand, [redacted] the elder Kim is disappointed with his son's stewardship.*

[redacted] in 1984

*Kim Il-song permitted Kim Chong-il to take charge of the effort to meet the many unfulfilled goals of the Second Seven-Year Plan (1977-84). [redacted]*

*[redacted] the result was growing shortages of food, energy, and building materials as the younger Kim shifted resources to such grandiose projects as the Nampo Lock Gates (a tideland reclamation project also designed to improve sea and land transportation) and construction of facilities for P'yongyang's bid to cohost the 1988 Seoul Olympics. By late 1986, [redacted] the elder Kim's concern over economic deterioration had led him to increase his personal supervision and delegate less responsibility to Kim Chong-il.*

[redacted]  
to [redacted] Western academic, media, and diplomatic observers, the North has again failed to meet most economic goals despite that fact that its Second Seven-Year Plan (1978-84) was extended two years, to the end of 1986. Moreover, the published goals of the Third Seven-Year Plan (1987-93) represent some drawing down from ambitious plans promulgated earlier in the decade. [redacted] severe food shortages, and P'yongyang media have complained that the country's "strained" railroad system is unable to transport adequate supplies between mines, industries, and consumers. [redacted]

As a result, North Korean media commentary has noted that both Kims want party officials either to increase their functional competence or permit experts to work without interference. As early as 1985,

[redacted] the KWP was stressing practical skills over "ideological purity" in identifying officials for promotion. [redacted]

We believe the consequences of economic problems help explain the recent shuffling of the country's management team. In addition to the demotion of Vice Premier Kim Hwan:

- *Kang Song-san*, Premier since January 1984, was reassigned to the party Secretariat last December, although P'yongyang media continue to cite him as a Politburo member.
- *Yi Kun-mo*, former chairman of a KWP Economic Management Committee, is the new Premier. Western press sources contend his appointment indicates that the North has lost interest in Chinese-style reforms. *Hong Song-nam*, the new First Vice Premier, also has an economic background. According to North Korean media, both were promoted to full Politburo membership in December.
- *Yon Hyong-muk*, who had been First Vice Premier only since 1985, returned in December 1986 to his previous post on the Secretariat. Yon also retained his Politburo position. In contrast with Kang Song-san, he has remained prominent on public occasions, and appears to retain a voice in economic matters.
- *An Sung-hak*, alternate Politburo member since 1983, appears to have suffered a precipitate fall. References in the North Korean press indicate that in December 1985 he left the party Secretariat, where he had specialized in light industry, to become a vice premier and chairman of the Chemical and Light Industry Committee. But two months later he was abruptly removed from those jobs and

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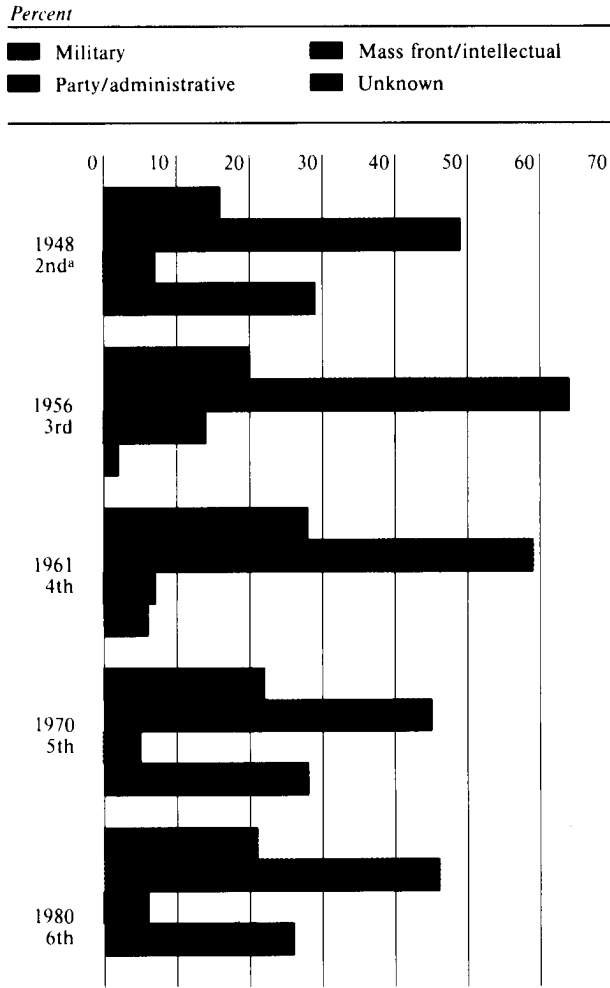
from the Politburo and relegated to a provincial government post. An was made subordinate to an official only recently appointed to the Central Committee, and has not been noted in public since December 1986, raising doubts that he retains his own seat. An Sung-hak may have fallen from Kim Il-song's favor because of poor management of the development of light industry—an important theme of the new seven-year plan, according to North Korean media commentary. [redacted]

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We believe past economic failures have made the success of the new plan a top priority as North Korea moves toward its first-ever political transition. The next party congress could provide clues as to which economic officials retain Kim Il-song's confidence and which functionaries will be rewarded for the successes of particular economic sectors or showcase construction projects. In addition, the turnover rate of Central Committee and Politburo members responsible for economic activity will be an indication of whether continuing economic difficulties are serious enough to cause the elder Kim to discard the relative stability evident on the Central Committee since 1980. North Korea will remain one of the most difficult societies to assess, but we believe analytical comparison of the new Central Committee and Politburo with their predecessors will yield a greater—if still tentative—understanding of policy implications. [redacted]

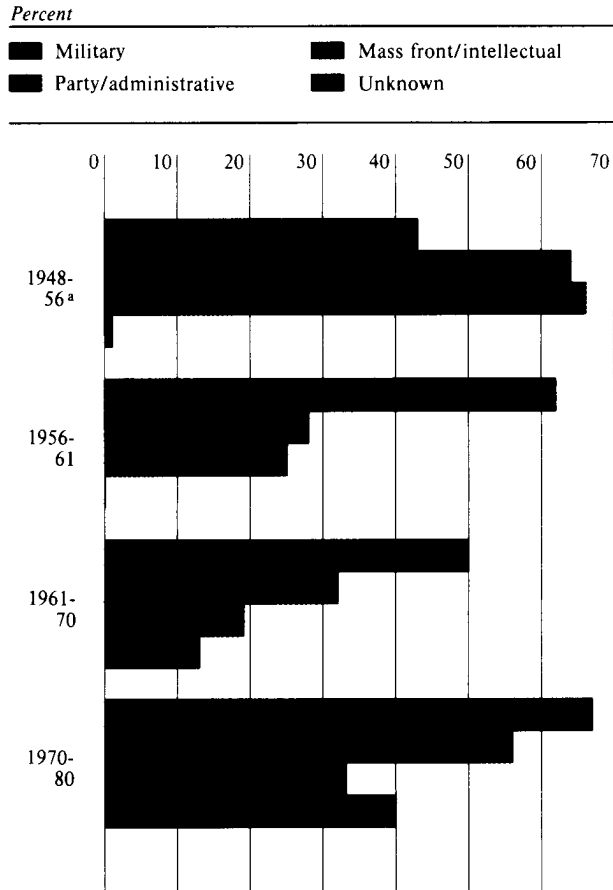
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**Figure 3**  
**North Korea: Functional Breakdown of Workers' Party Central Committee Members**



<sup>a</sup> Congresses.

**Figure 4**  
**North Korea: Retention of Full and Alternate Members of Korean Workers' Party Central Committee by Function**



<sup>a</sup> At least two military members of the Central Committee in 1948 were killed in the Korean war.

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## Appendix

### The Political Role of the Military

The military's role is particularly important in North Korea:

- It has the major responsibility for carrying out Kim Il-song's cardinal goal of Korean reunification.
- Its huge manpower and equipment requirements absorb a large share of the country's resources.
- It provides a labor force for many priority construction projects and assists with agricultural and industrial production. [redacted]

Over the years, Kim Il-song's behavior has strongly suggested that he pays close, continuing attention to the political role of the military. [redacted]

[redacted] he, like other Communist rulers, has subordinated his country's military establishment to civilian party rule. In the 1960s, Kim purged some military leaders—including at least six Central Committee members—who, according to Western and South Korean academic researchers, opposed his decision to postpone plans to reunify Korea by force.

[redacted] in 1970 Kim purged at least two more generals who opposed Kim Chong-il's succession. And, in 1982, Kim removed the Defense Ministry from the cabinet, placing it directly under KWP control, according to North Korean press sources. At the same time, Kim has supervised the growth of a powerful and expensive military establishment. The Korean People's Army (KPA)—including its ground, air, and naval arms—absorbs about 20 to 25 percent of North Korean GNP. [redacted]

In managing the military's representation on the Central Committee, Kim appears to have followed a strategy that has limited its numbers but allowed officers to serve longer than their civilian counterparts. As in other Communist societies, this co-opts generals, making senior military officers members of the political elite, while keeping them under the watchful eye of the civilian leadership. Judging from those Central Committee members whose functions we can identify—figure 3 demonstrates that there are

many on whom we have no information—military officers have never held more than 30 percent of Central Committee seats. On the other hand, as figure 4 shows, Kim Il-song has been more inclined to allow military than nonmilitary members to serve more than once. [redacted]

The apparent stability in military representation contrasts sharply with the experience of China. There, in the late 1960s, after the Army moved to quell disorder during the Cultural Revolution, military membership on the Central Committee rose to 45 percent. It has dropped precipitately since then, to 16 percent today—a figure roughly in line with the ratio prevailing in the 1950s, according to Western academic observers. Unlike contemporary Chinese leaders, Kim Il-song has never needed to use the North Korean military to bail him out of a serious social crisis, which almost certainly has helped him subordinate the Army to his political control. [redacted]

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