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East Asia Review

19 September 1978

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North Korea: Continuity, Not Change

There was strikingly little that was new or innovative in the pronouncements from North Korea on the occasion of its 30th anniversary. President Kim Il-song, in a major address on 9 September, continued to profess North Korea's readiness to resume a dialogue with South Korea, but on terms that clearly remain unacceptable to Seoul. Kim was relatively restrained in his criticism of US support for Seoul--a pattern that has remained more or less consistent since the Carter administration announced its plans to withdraw ground forces from South Korea last year.

The minimal representation from the Soviet Union for this important anniversary--contrasted with the presence of China's Teng Hsiao-ping--provided further confirmation of North Korea's more pronounced tilt toward Peking. The regime publicized progress on a number of longstanding construction projects in industry and transportation, but its claims of overall economic achievement remained characteristically vague. In an unusually direct and positive manner, Kim Il-song endorsed several domestic campaigns linked to Kim's behind-the-scenes efforts to promote his son, Kim Chong-il, as his successor.

Policy Toward Talks

Kim Il-song devoted considerable effort to describing North Korea's attitude toward talks with the US and the Pak government in South Korea. The exercise seemed artfully designed to deflect international attention from Pyongyang's continued unwillingness to permit the present South Korean Government a meaningful role in talks on the future of Korea.

Kim opened his discussion on dialogue with a new formulation that seemed to endorse tripartite talks on Korea--a concept that gained currency for a short time last spring when the Yugoslavs raised the idea. Kim

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said: "We leave the door open for a conversation with the US and with the South Korean authorities and political parties, too." In elaborating on this theme, however, Kim made clear that he still has in mind a two-track approach involving separate conversations with the US and the South Koreans.

With the US, Kim wants to negotiate a withdrawal of US military forces and a peace agreement. In North Korean phraseology, these talks are aimed at enabling the Korean people to regain their national sovereignty. According to Kim, Pyongyang will negotiate only if the US approaches the talks with a genuine desire to seek a single, unified Korea. Implicit is the notion that only one Korean entity should represent the Korean people at the talks, and that this entity "naturally" should be the North Korean Government.

The purpose of the long-stalled North-South dialogue, on the other hand, is to achieve national union. The North is prepared to reopen discussions with the South if the "South Korean authorities" demonstrate a sincere desire for reunification. Kim reiterated the longstanding requirements for abolishing the "Yushin" constitution (which legitimizes Pak's control), ending the emergency decrees, and legalizing the activities of political movements of all persuasions--preconditions anathema to the Pak government.

Kim also held out the prospect that the North was prepared to "promote unity" with political parties in the South regardless of present institutions and ideologies, and he invited political representatives from the South to "come and operate in the northern half of the republic." This appears to be yet another empty gesture designed to contrast the North's alleged open political environment with the "fascist suppression" in the South. North Korean propaganda called attention to the fact that a "South Korean People's Delegation" was present at the ceremonies in Pyongyang.

Moderate Toward the US

In criticizing the US, Kim Il-song called in a general way for the US to end its support for the Pak government. The demand for a withdrawal of US troops was

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added almost as an afterthought and given Kim's remark that the action should occur "as soon as possible," in a manner not suggesting any great urgency. Kim also did not question the sincerity of the US withdrawal plan or charge that the US was increasing tension in South Korea--two themes that North Korean propaganda has stressed during the past summer.

Kim's restraint probably can be explained in part by the nature of the occasion and the presence of a large number of delegations from Third World countries that have little understanding of the military balance in Korea or the stabilizing role of US forces in that equation. Even so, Kim's speech will presumably set the policy lines for at least the next several months. The continued absence of the customary shrill anti-US rhetoric indicates that Pyongyang, is prepared to hold its propaganda fire, probably at least until the first US combat elements formally begin their departure, despite its serious misgivings about the slow pace and partial nature of the withdrawal.

Foreign Guests

By Pyongyang's count, there were 109 foreign delegations present for the national day. North Korea's willingness to provide air service was an important factor in encouraging a large turnout. The guest list was headed by two chiefs of state--President Rahman of Bangladesh and President Ratsiraka of Madagascar. Many of the so-called "delegations" were in fact headed by ambassadors resident in Peking who attended the ceremonies in Pyongyang as "special envoys" of their home governments.

Kim Il-song took advantage of the situation to expand on the now familiar North Korean theme that the Third World should form a united front to oppose the machinations of the imperialists and "dominationists." The Chinese have endorsed North Korea's attacks on the so-called "forces of domination" and have used the term in the context of criticizing Soviet "hegemonistic" ambitions. In his speech, however, Kim Il-song seemed to go out of his way to point out that small as well as large countries can act as forces of domination. This may be an attempt by Kim to soften the anti-Soviet overtones of the expression.

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Chinese Tilt Evident

Since the visit by Chinese party leader Hua Kuo-feng in May, North Korea has moved closer to the Chinese position on a range of international issues. The relative ranking of the Chinese and Soviet delegations at North Korea's national day ceremonies accurately reflected the current inclination toward Peking. Politburo member and senior Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping was ranked third among the visitors; the Soviet representative, Vice President Matchanov, was listed among the last of the delegations.

Teng Hsiao-ping's group met separately with Kim twice during the visit. Kim did not meet separately with the Soviet delegation--an omission that is even more glaring in view of the fact that Kim did extend this courtesy to some 20 other visiting delegations. The low rank of the Soviet delegation--Matchanov holds a largely ceremonial government post--undoubtedly was intended by Moscow to signal its displeasure with North Korea's drift toward Peking.

There were some slight hints of discord, however, in North Korea's treatment of their Chinese guests. Pyongyang consistently gave favored protocol treatment to the visiting heads of state from Bangladesh and Madagascar, while Peking portrayed Teng as the honored guest. Pyongyang's official news service also failed to carry the occasional anti-Soviet remarks made by the Chinese.

Economic Development

The major portion of Kim's speech was devoted to describing North Korea's efforts to develop its domestic political and economic base. Even so, Kim was unusually reticent on specific economic goals and achievements. Kim made no reference, for example, to the ambitious "10 prospective goals" that are the major targets of North Korea's current seven-year economic development plan (1978-84).

In the weeks preceding national day, however, the North Korean press carried nearly daily accounts of the

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completion of a number of longstanding capital construction projects that should figure prominently in the seven-year plan. These include the claimed opening of a major crosscountry expressway between Pyongyang and Wonsan and the commissioning of the first stage of the Chinese-supplied oil refinery, the Ponghwa chemical plant. Kim Il-song sent a message thanking the Chinese technicians who assisted in the construction of the oil refinery, but by holding the commissioning ceremony on 7 September, one day before the arrival of Teng Hsiao-ping, North Korea seemed to have denied Teng an opportunity for a public relations windfall.

A Boost for the Son's Succession

Many among the foreign guests present probably were aware of Kim Il-song's behind-the-scenes campaign to groom his elder son, Kim Chong-il, as his successor. But few present probably noted that in his major address, the elder Kim provided an unusually strong endorsement for several domestic political campaigns and slogans closely associated with his son.

Specifically, Kim said that North Korea should continue to develop the "three-revolution Team Movement" whose "advantages and vitality have been confirmed in practice." These teams, made up of party functionaries, technicians, and students, have been dispatched since 1973 to various work sites to spur production and improve the performance of local cadre. The South Korean press has jocularly characterized these teams as Kim Chong-il's "shock troops"--an appellation that comes close to describing their mission.

Kim also called for a mass production emulation campaign, known as the "Movement to Capture the Red Flag of the Three Revolutions," to be "unfolded briskly." This exhortation contrasts markedly with the relatively modest endorsement that Kim gave the movement when it was first revealed in late 1975. North Korean newspapers have made clear that the Red Flag movement was organized by the "party center"--a codeword used to describe the activities of Kim Chong-il.

The exact status of Kim Chong-il is difficult to ascertain because the younger Kim does not make public

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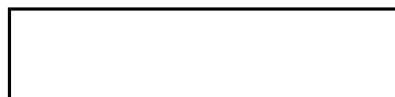
appearances, and the regime does not mention him by name. Through an elaborate use of honorific expressions in the media, the regime nevertheless keeps the North Korean populace--and knowledgeable foreign audiences--aware of the son's activities. These endorsements by Kim in a major anniversary address indicate that his son is gradually consolidating his position and that the campaign to groom him as successor may be entering a new and more intensive phase. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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- 2 August Kim Il-song presides over a joint party-government meeting to assess the results of the meeting of non-aligned foreign ministers in Belgrade in late July. The report praises the "concerted action" the Asian states took in supporting a pro-Pyongyang resolution on Korean reunification, but it acknowledges that the discussion of the agenda items produced "some controversy."
- 12-30 August A Chinese party delegation makes a friendship visit to North Korea. The delegation meets Kim Il-song on 28 August.
- 18 August -
1 September A Chinese military delegation led by Deputy Defense Minister Su Yu makes a friendship visit to North Korea. Kim Il-song receives the delegation on 30 August.
- 21 August Visiting Chinese military official Yang Te-chih pledges that Chinese armed forces will come to North Korea's assistance "if Kim Il-song and Hua Kuo-feng issue the order, in case of necessity." In a statement broadcast on 30 August, Yang amplifies on the conditional pledge, saying that the Chinese will intervene if South Korea and the US "dare to invade" North Korea.
- 23 August A 20,000-ton cargo ship, the Yonpungho, is launched at the west coast port of Nampo.

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- 26 August The North Korean leadership attends the opening of a six-story exhibit hall in Pyongyang built to display foreign gifts given to Kim Il-song.
- 28 August At a reception for the visiting Chinese party delegation party secretary Kim Yong-nam, who is responsible for Pyongyang's relations with foreign Communist parties, is identified for the first time as a full member of the elite Political Committee of the Korean Workers Party.
- 2 September Kim Il-song attends the opening of an east-west expressway between Pyongyang and Wonsan. The Army's "1550th Engineer Unit" is given credit for building the highway.
- 3 September Kim Il-song attends a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the opening of the "third stage" of the Pyongyang subway. He also tours a new apartment district in Pyongyang.
- 5 September Foreign visitors begin arriving for the North Korean national day. According to Pyongyang, a total of 109 foreign delegations attend.
- 6 September North Korea announces that, in consideration of "good neighborly relations," it is releasing a Japanese fishing boat that "intruded deep into western coastal waters" on 4 September.
- 7 September The first stage of a Chinese-supplied oil refinery (the "Ponghwa chemical plant") near Sinuiju in northwest North Korea is put into commission. Kim Il-song sends a message of thanks to Chinese technicians for their help.

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- 7-14 September A delegation from the USSR led by Vice President Matchanov attends national day ceremonies. The Soviet group is placed near the bottom of the long list of visiting delegations. Kim Il-song does not meet separately with it.
- 8 September Kim Man-kun, recently named chairman of the Pyongyang municipal people's committee, is identified for the first time as a member of the Political Committee of the Korean Workers Party. Kim, a veteran cadre, was at one time a leading agricultural specialist.
- 8-13 September Chinese Politburo member and senior Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping heads the Chinese delegation attending national day ceremonies. Teng meets twice with Kim Il-song (8 and 12 September) and makes a side trip to Hamhung (11 September).
- 9 September Kim Il-song makes an 80-minute "historic report" at the main ceremony marking North Korea's 30th anniversary.
- 11 September Kang Hui-won, a relative of Kim Il-song and long-time administrative chief of Pyongyang city, is identified for the first time as a vice premier.
- 12 September The Vietnamese news agency reports an alleged admission by the North Korean Ambassador in Hanoi that North Korean newspapers went against party policy when they reprinted excerpts in early August from an article by the Chinese Defense Minister criticizing Hanoi's treatment of ethnic Chinese (the Hoa people) in Vietnam.

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