

## **NORTH KOREA'S FACTORS OF STABILITY AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

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### **Abstract**

The paper presents the author's views on factors of North Korea's domestic stability and future developments. In spite of chronic economic problems and drastically complicated international environment, the North Korean leaders have managed to retain their positions, ensure political and social stability and sustainable control over a situation in the country. It was recently demonstrated by smooth succession process after Kim Jong Il's death, and earlier by successful coping with aftermath of the currency reform and hosting in 2010 and 2012 two Worker's Party of Korea (WPK) conferences to promote a successor and renovate the WPK's top governing bodies. There are neither signs of any open display of discontent with Kim Jong Un take-over, nor emergence of any kind of organized opposition. A number of factors, which could become a potential source of destabilization and which some circles abroad pin so many hopes on, have clearly not worked. But in the future the situation may change under the impact of both domestic and external factors unfavorable for the ruling elite as well as a result of the contradictions within the elite itself. World developments' possible negative consequences for domestic political stability, including impact of recent events in Libya and in several other North Africa and Middle East countries were being mitigated by intensification of activity of all-embracing system of political education, strengthening control over information from abroad and struggle against ideas alien to the Korean-style socialism. Economic problems and, first of all, a food problem remain a major challenge for the regime. Libya's lesson is hardly to encourage the DPRK to abandon her nuclear deterrent. However, priority allocation of resources for the military is hindering economic modernization. This is fraught with serious consequences for political and social stability in the future. It is becoming ever more difficult for North Korea to solve complicated economic problems independently and it is compelled to open door wider for foreign expertise, investment and assistance. Kim Jong Un's performance in safeguarding the ruling elite's position and in pulling the country out of crisis without making too many concessions to "outside forces" will be the key factor which will determine his political future. One can't expect Kim Jong Un's leadership to be much more democratic or less cautious in implementing any reforms. Remaining rather conservative in domestic politics, the North Korea leaders will be very pragmatic in economics and very tough in negotiating for more safer place for their country in the world.

Key words: DPRK, succession, regime stability, transformation, reforms

## 1. Introduction

During the last two decades the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), in spite of incessant pronouncements of the "collapse theory's supporters and other numerous predictions of North Korea's imminent demise, has managed to cope with loss of its major political and military allies, withstood military threats from its main adversaries, and, finally, evaded total downfall of the country's economy.

Though situation in North Korea is still rather complicated, it remains generally stable. The ruling elite, brought up to power by the country's former leader Kim Il Sung, have succeeded in ensuring smooth transition of power to Kim Jong Un, maintaining political and social stability and sustainable control over the country. The regime proved to be strong enough to cope rather successfully with turbulent aftermath of the currency reform of 2009 and, after 44 years-long break, held two conferences of the ruling Worker's Party of Korea (WPK) in 2010 and 2012 to promote the country's next generation's leader in absence of slightest signs of any opposition to the move.

In this paper the author will present his personal opinion on major factors which ensured this remarkable result which may well be an object to envy by many statesmen, politicians and quite a few regimes that had perished during this turbulent period in the world politics. The paper also examines some major challenges the regime is facing with. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the position of the IFES.

## 2. Ruling Elite's Unity as a Major Domestic Factor of Stability

According to Vladimir Lenin's classical teaching the two absolutely necessary conditions for a revolution to occur are, firstly, that is an "upper strata", or ruling elite can not rule any longer as it did before while a "lower strata", or people do not want to live like it did before. Both conditions are seemingly not the case in North Korea, at least for the time being.

First of all, the North Korean leadership has succeeded in preventing at an early stage emergence of any faction within top party bodies, to say nothing of any civic group or mass organization, capable of challenging the existing system. Potential sources of discord which some foreign observers used to pin so much hopes on during the last two decades, have clearly failed to bring about destabilization of the regime.

Infighting between "conservatives" (ideologists) and "technocrats" (pragmatics) which many analysts expected to exacerbate after, firstly, Kim Il Sung's death and Kim Jong-il's death last year, if it is really going on, is being waged behind the scene. The North Korean conservatives have demonstrated staggering ability, whenever it was necessary, to become successful pragmatics (with virtually no major trump cards in the hands they made major world powers to negotiate with DPRK on the nuclear problem for two decades, and actually on equal footing). And reformers were wise enough to realize that factional infighting and drastic leaps in policy course can trigger processes that eventually could lead to unleashing processes beyond their control.

At the same time awareness of being «in the same boat» does not exclude existence of different approaches and even disputes between conservatives and advocates of changes, including those in economic policy. Such discussions were prompted by dire economic situation in the middle of 1990s, and sometimes have been made public. Some publications in the WPK's news outlets contained, inter alia, criticism of unnamed supporters of non-traditional industrial structure of the

country with its emphasis on heavy industry and rejected views of “some people” who were arguing in favor of the transition to the so-called "export model" of the country's development.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, the so-called "contradictions" between the DPRK Foreign Ministry officials and the North Korean military, which reportedly from time to time surfaced at the talks with the U.S.A., with the passage of time look ever more like a product of wishful thinking. While recognizing the fact of the military's strong positions in the DPRK's leadership and their more rigid stance in dealing with the U.S.A., it would be misleading to overestimate their influence or imagine that their core interests differ much from those of the civil branch of the regime's ruling elite.

Among major factors behind the current seemingly solid unity of the North Korean elite is also that both hard-liners and pragmatics have learned a lot from the fate of some top leaders in the former East Europe's socialist countries as well as in a number of third worlds' countries. Trials on former Communist parties' Politburo members in Europe, and ex-Presidents in Middle East, Africa and Asia, miserable fate of Iraqi and Libya ruler's and their generals happened to be a very convincing argument employed by those in North Korea who warn against rocking the boat and call "to share life and death with the Leader". The DPRK's reaction to the events in Libya is the latest confirmation of the lesson leant in Pyongyang.<sup>2</sup>

This approach is supported by numerous strata of middle and even low-level WPK and government officials across the country, army and security forces' officers, managers of industrial enterprises and agricultural cooperative farms who, along with their family members, would lose literally everything in case of the regime's collapse or unification by absorption.

As to the conflict of generations within the ruling elite, which may have taken place in 1980-1990s, it has been by now virtually over for natural reasons: Kim Il Sung's “comrades in arms” have almost left a political arena. The results of the WPK's conferences held in September of 2010 and in April of 2012, composition of the WPK's top bodies, in particular, testified to the fact that remaining representatives of the first and the second generations of “revolutionaries” will compete not for the top position, but for the places among closest aids to Kim Jong Un, who represents the third generation of the incumbent leadership.<sup>3</sup> The Party, army and people were presented with already well known from the history of the DPRK and other countries formula: "Kim Jong Un is today's Kim Jong Il."<sup>4</sup>

Recent promotions and earlier reshuffles led to placing seasoned and experienced functionaries into every sphere of the Party and government activity whom Kim Jong Un can rely on. They were placed in the Party and state top decision-making bodies because, firstly, they were expected to give good advice to the young leader, and secondly, will assume the daily management of the particular sectors until the new leader acquires enough experience.

In foreign policy, these persons are likely to include a nominal head of state - member of the Presidium of the Political Bureau of the WPK Central Committee (CC), President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) Kim Yong Nam, member of the Political Bureau, Deputy Prime Minister Kang Sok Ju (both made their careers in the WPK CC International Department and the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs ), member of the Political Bureau, Secretary of the WPK CC, Chairman of the SPA Choe Tae Bok, as well as a alternative member of the WPK CC Political Bureau , Secretary of the WPK CC, Director of the WPK CC International Department Kim Yong Il.

In military affairs, Kim Jong Un is likely to have advice of the “gang of four” Vice Marshals, recently promoted by him. They are Chief of the KPA Main Political Department (MPD) Choe

Ryong Hae, Minister of the People's Armed Forces Kim Jong Gak, first Deputy-Minister of the People's Armed Forces Hyon Chol Hae and Chief of the KPA General Staff Hyon Yong Chol, who is a newcomer among the top brass.

In general, such a system of leadership during the transition period is almost identical to the one that was used in North Korea in the first years after the death of Kim Il Sung.

So far Kim Jong Un serves as a symbol, a regime's "face". However, in the future, he is unlikely to share the top power with someone else. He - like his father after Kim Il Sung's death - would rule alone. His power base is the circle of those persons who were selected by himself or, earlier, by Kim Jong Il. A number of signs, especially the numerous personnel changes during 2009-2011 indicate that the diseased Leader tried to align carefully the balance of powers among top officials as well as among top Party and government bodies. However, swift removal of Ri Yong Ho demonstrated that nobody's place is permanent

In this context some experts' claim that Chang Song Taek is allegedly a "regent" for the new Leader seems unconvincing. It is also unlikely occurrence of a duumvirate or tandem with Chang Song Taek. There is an absolute leader, around whom the power is concentrated. And other members of the leadership (usually referred to as "relevant employee") will compete only for the opportunity to have the Leader's ear more frequently than others.

Sure, family members (as we know from the history of other countries) are often placed closer to the ruler, they may enjoy more confidence. So Chang Song Taek and his wife's influence, especially in matters of the domestic policy and the selection of personnel may well be one of the weightiest.

When assessing the likelihood of change in the future, it is important to bear in mind that, as the experience of the DPRK has shown, a formal position held by a person in the North Korean official hierarchy, often does not reflect his/her real political "weight". After Kim Il Sung's death, as soon as representatives of "the old guard", because of their physical condition, were leaving the political arena, Kim Jong Il rather quickly picked up as his closest aids the officials who didn't have the highest ranks - neither the elderly members of the Politburo, nor ministers, but younger and more capable first deputy directors of the most important departments of the WPK CC. Chang Song Taek has emerged exactly from this level of the Party's functionaries.

Taking into consideration the age of the majority of members of North Korea's top leadership (among the Politburo's 33 members and alternate members 11 people are over 80, 12 over 70 and only one - under 60 years old), the repetition of this scenario of the leadership's change during the next two or three years is looks quite possible. So, Kim Jong Un, if he manages to stay in power for the next several years, has all chances to surround himself with much younger aids, whom he would choose himself.

The celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birthday (April 15) and the follow-up events made this picture much clearer. Kim Jong Un was awarded with top Party and government positions, though under slightly different titles of the WPK First Secretary (instead of Secretary-General) and National Defense Commission (NDC) First Chairman. The original titles were "forever" assigned to Kim Jong Il, as it had happened with Kim Il Sung, who got the title of "eternal president". The relevant changes were made in the WPK Chapter and the country's constitution.

The whole range of events of April, 2012 in North Korea have drawn a line under succession process and made us to accept that the system of hereditary power transfer built by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il during almost a half-century period proved to be quite instrumental for fulfilling the task.

### 3. Military-First Policy and Its Consequences

The increased role of the military in North Korea, given especially a dynastic nature of the existing regime, can be seen as another round of traditional, centuries-old rivalry of two main branches of the ruling elites in Korea - civil and military. That kind of struggle for the ruler's attention and prestige was flaring up and down in Korea under all regimes. Each of the factions has been provided with a place closer to the "throne", depending on personal inclinations of the ruler and his vision of the hierarchy of threats to his power and the country's security as a whole.

North Korea's transition to the regime of a "besieged fortress", to usage of primarily military methods of management and organization of the society has been, in fact, the response of the ruling elite to the emergency situation the country was facing with at home and abroad since the 1990s. Traditional reliance on use of force in settling all the issues, characteristic for the views and political practices of the North Korean leadership, deeply rooted in their partisan's past encouraged its decision to rely on the army as the guarantor of its rule and the DPRK's sovereignty.

Facing the West's new strategy of humanitarian intervention, shocked by drastic change in relations with two major allies (both Russia and China established diplomatic ties with South Korea) and being submerged in doubts concerning ability of their own ruling party to maintain control, the regime had virtually no option but to seek support from the most disciplined, organized and armed force in the country – the Korean People's Army.

It is not surprising that in the time of crisis the army was considered the most organized and effective force, able to both protect the country from external threats, and ensure political stability inside, avoid a complete collapse of the economy. The official propaganda started to introduce the idea that in North Korea the army performs the role of a "strike team" not only in defending the homeland, but also in socialist construction.<sup>5</sup>

There are certain grounds to admit that resorting to *songun*, or the military-first policy in a crisis situation North Korea was facing with in the middle of the 1990s, in view of the policy's objectives – retaining power and maintaining political and social stability – proved to be successful. It is more difficult to answer to the question whether the policy will be able to mobilize the support necessary for a program, if there is any, of economic modernization. The military organization is able to rather quickly translate orders down and ensure their execution. However, it may prove to be not suitable for the harmonization of different interests, the search for compromises and to mobilize broad support for a creative political course.<sup>6</sup>

The military-first policy was declared to remain a "strategic course", which Pyongyang should stick to indefinitely – "so long as there is imperialism and the revolution continues." It seems that in the foreseeable period the fate of the North Korean-style socialism will be directly linked to the level of the country's military might, which is now seen as synonymous with national power of North Korea.

The authorities claimed their determination to pursue the "strategic line" aimed at massive military build-up regardless of any "changes in situation", including a "level of tension" or

“détente” in international relations, "hard" or "soft" approach to North Korea by the “imperialist nations”.

The task was set not to depart from the course for the sake of solution of "current" economic and social problems, because, according to official propaganda, a “failed economy can be restored, but losing a war means destroying the very foundations of the country”.<sup>7</sup>

The demand to concentrate all efforts on strengthening the defense capabilities made it so far impossible to fulfill the task set by North Korea’s leaders, namely to build a "in the near future” an "economically powerful nation." The aim should have been achieved in 2012, marking the 100th anniversary of Kim Il Sung’s birth. However, the task seemingly remained unfulfilled. To the contrary, the existence of a rather acute food problem was officially recognized.<sup>8</sup> One can hardly doubt that the priority allocations of resources for the military virtually excluded the possibility of economic modernization.

Kim Jong Un’s maiden speech in public, made on April 15, 2012 confirmed the adherence to this “farsighted strategy”. The new leader called to “eternally glorify the dignity of military-first Korea” and “first, second and third” strengthen the army “in every way”.<sup>9</sup>

Such policy directives, if being implemented could seriously complicate the settlement of the nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula and hinder the normalization of inter-Korean relations, since, in fact, the course envisages North Korea’s keeping its nuclear deterrent under any circumstances.

As negative consequences of this line for the country’s economy will be mounted on, the army may be perceived by the society as a conservative and even reactionary force hindering overcoming the current economic difficulties and achieving the prosperity, recently promised by Kim Jong Un.<sup>10</sup> This, in turn, is fraught with serious consequences for political stability in the country.

The promotion of Choe Ryong Hae, a party official with no military background to the top military position along with the removal of Ri Yong Ho, professional soldier and Chief of the KPA General Staff caused rather lively expert’s discussion about possible retreat from the military-first policy. It is remarkable that the move met no visible resistance from the military. This fact allows us to answer the question – is it the army or the Party who currently dominates the DPRK’s political system? Along with what was mentioned above, three more circumstances help us to clarify the situation. Firstly, the announcement of Kim Jong Il’s death was signed the above-mentioned bodies in the following order: the WPK CC, the WPK Central Military Commission (CMC), NDC, SPA Presidium, and the DPRK Cabinet. Secondly, Kim Jong Un started his career as deputy Chairman of the WPK CMC, not in the NDC. Thirdly, the joint New Year editorial said that all soldiers have to "accept wholeheartedly the ideas of the Party" and to defend the Party Central Committee headed by Kim Jong Un at a "cost of life". Both the current and last year's editorials unambiguously indicate that although the army is a “pillar” and even "the main driving force" of the revolution, she plays this role in accordance with the will and intention of the Party.<sup>11</sup>

This is not the military rule, but rather the rule by relying on the military. Generally, the experience of the former socialist countries in the 1980-90s has shown that the top military commanders, though holding conservative views, took a largely passive stance towards the unfolding events. There is no reason to expect that they can initiate any major changes, especially

directed toward liberalization of the regime. But they also proved to be incapable to play a leading role in any coup aimed at conservation of the obsolete order.

However, the main point to keep in mind is that both civil and military branches of the ruling elite are interested first of all in ensuring the DPRK's survival. Two previous decades demonstrated futility of attempts by outside forces to detect, single out, the more so to support any person or a group as an alternative to the ruling family. All efforts to crack this unity from the outside have so far proved to be unsuccessful, which ultimately happened to be a key factor of North Korea's survival as a sovereign entity.

#### **4. China as a Major External Factor of the DPRK's Survival**

China's position is of key importance for North Korea's survival. For China, because of its strategic, political and prestigious considerations, liquidation of the DPRK is absolutely unacceptable. Such an outcome would result in the U.S.A. control over the whole Korean peninsula and stationing of the American armed forces directly on the Chinese land border.

The United States seems have far-reaching and for the time being covert plans concerning the Korean peninsula. These plans envisage for securing a stronghold right on the Chinese border in view of ever growing U.S.-Chinese rivalry and the U.S. "hedging" strategy towards China.

After disappearance of the U.S.S.R. and collapse of socialism in the East European countries the U.S.A. had expected an early collapse of the North Korean regime. Absorption of the North by the South under the military-political aegis of the U.S.A. would allow the Americans to establish control over unique strategic vantage points in Asia located on the borders of Russia and China—the very powers which don't agree with the U.S.A.'s global dominance.

Liquidation of the DPRK not only would conclude the process of revision of the World War II results in Northeast Asia (NEA), but also would mean a revision of the Korean war of 1950-1953. The deployment of the U.S. armed forces with their precision weaponry along 1360 km-long overland border with China and the 17 km-long border with Russia would result in drastic changes in the military-political situation in Northeast Asia and in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole.<sup>12</sup>

In view of such plans Washington's appeals to Moscow and Beijing to take part in certain multilateral efforts with the ultimate aim of liquidating the DPRK look somewhat arrogant. The Russians and the Chinese actually are being called upon to help with their own hands to bring the American soldiers to their borders.

China understands the negative consequences such the outcome would have for her security interest in Northeast Asia. Therefore Beijing, despite its displeasure with some of Pyongyang's actions, cannot afford to "yield" North Korea. The Americans, in turn, understand that any attempt to take hold of what China considers its sphere of influence for hundreds of years would mean a major quarrel with the world's largest country, and the consequences of such attempt are unpredictable.

Beijing can't afford to sit idle and look how the Korean peninsula will be turned into the U.S. bridgehead for pressure upon China in already unwrapping grandiose rivalry of these two of the most powerful economic and, probably, military powers of the world. Loss of North Korea would seriously undermine China's prestige and international standing in Asia and all over the world. China, probably, even would have to postpone indefinitely her plans concerning Taiwan.

The U.S. prudence demonstrated so far in Korea can be explained by the only circumstance - unlike in the Middle East, there is a powerful Chinese factor in NEA. The United States, probably, are not ready to a head-on clash with China over North Korea. It would be a conflict with one and a half billion people, and the Americans would think more than twice before to resort to a military option in Korea.

Therefore the U.S.A. are trying to lure the Chinese to its side by promises that after the North Korea's "disarmament" will be concluded, the U.S. forces will not be deployed in the North and return to the south of the 38th parallel or that the American strikes will be limited only to the North Korean nuclear facilities. At the same time the Americans in every way possible tried to sow alienation and mistrust between China and North Korea, particularly by compliments, including made on the top-level, concerning a "constructive role" allegedly demonstrated by Beijing during the Six-Party talks.<sup>13</sup>

In view of the above mentioned interests on the Korean peninsula, Beijing, apparently, will try henceforth to utilize all political and diplomatic methods available as well as necessary economic resources to ensure the DPRK's survival. At the same time China will encourage North Korea in every possible way to exercise restraint in foreign policy and to go on with economic transformation which would lessen political and economic cost for China to support the regime.

## **5. Prospects for Change**

The joint New Year editorial of the three leading North Korean newspapers (January 1, 2012), which summarizes the last year's achievements and outlines the objectives for the current year, promised that there will be no any significant changes in the course, which had been pursued by Kim Jong Il.<sup>14</sup>

Really, probability of radical reforms from "above" like Gorbachev-style perestroika in the USSR is highly unlikely to occur in North Korea. Pyongyang hardly had been inspired by results of perestroika in the USSR, which led to the removal of the ruling Communist Party and its leader from power and to the country's disintegration.

A "peaceful revolution from below" like in East Europe appears to be also impossible in North Korea because of almost total absence of elements of civil society in the country. All-embracing system of social control and mass mobilization, absence of independent media, lack of modern communication and regular transportation network between the country's various regions, available to ordinary people, restrictions on a freedom of movement within the country makes impossible any open wide-spread mass display of discontent with the official policy

Resolute rejection by the authorities of "bourgeois" theories of pluralism, division of powers etc. so far prevented emergence and public activity of any organized groups or popular movements capable to offer to the North Koreans political, economic, social values or programs, different from the official ones.

The international situation's possible negative consequences for internal political stability Pyongyang is trying to neutralize by intensification of activity of comprehensive system of political education, strengthening control over inflows of information from abroad and by struggle against ideas alien to the Korean-style socialism, intensifying surveillance over all spheres of the North Korean society.

In particular, the campaign of struggle against "ideological - cultural penetration of imperialists" was intensified. Those forces been accused of attempting to introduce by all means the "reactionary bourgeois ideology, culture and rotten way of life" into the North Korean society.

Propaganda claimed that demise of socialism in the USSR and other socialist countries has taken place not because of their military or economic backwardness but because "ways for imperialism's ideological and cultural expansion were open." The conclusion was made that "the imperialists' yellow wind is more dangerous than a nuclear bomb".

The USSR's collapse prompted the process of replacing old communist dogma with traditional political and moral values developed within the Confucian cultural area. They are being appealed to ever more frequently. Resurrection and growing influence of traditional political values in the region was mentioned by a number of Russian prominent specialists.<sup>15</sup>

By all accounts, a severe food, and in more general terms, economic situation which led to the growing social tension in the country is a major problem the North Korean leaders are facing with right now. Exactly severity of the food situation made it impossible for the authorities not to mention it the joint New Year editorial of January 1, 2012.<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, like in the 1930s in the Soviet Union, whose political system at the time is very similar to the present-day DPRK, majority of the North Koreans are inclined to put the bulk of blame on local officials who are believed to fail to implement in a proper way the directives of the Leader, as well as on "imperialists" and their "flunkies" who incessantly make attempts to strangle "the Korean-style socialism".

When assessing severity of food situation in the DPRK one should always keep in mind that the northern part of the peninsula for centuries suffered from lack of food because of climate and other natural conditions. The North Koreans' ration was very modest during almost the whole period of the country's history and well before 1945. Providing decent feeding to the population had never been among top policy priorities neither for local feudal lords nor for Japanese colonial authorities. Transparent border with China helped a lot to alleviate the food situation.

There are also huge problems in industry, transport system, social infrastructure, housing, medical care. All of them need huge investments and fundamental renovation

One can only hope that removal of Ri Yong Ho, who seemingly was a leading figure in the military branch of the ruling elite, is a first sign that Kim Jong Un and his "inner circle" not only understand those problems, but also get political will to address them. It looks like that the regime can't ignore any more the urgent issues and further postpone economic transformations. The events led to series of revolutions in various countries, starting from East Europe in the end 1980s to North Africa and Middle East in 2011 demonstrated that self-isolation from the challenges the country is facing with could prove to be very dangerous and provoke uncontrollable chain of actions which could result in a regime change.

## **6. New Approaches to Ensuring Stability**

The process of economic integration and globalization in NEA seems to provide us with new opportunities for engagement with the DPRK. Realization of multilateral economic projects in the region looks like a better and more sophisticated method to accelerate this process. Those projects will open not only new opportunities for business cooperation and economic integration, but also will serve to strengthening of confidence, peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region.

More active involvement of North Korea in globalization and cooperation processes in NEA may bring about positive changes in Pyongyang's international behavior. Experience of dealing with the DPRK testifies that excessive pressure and coercion have led, in majority of cases, to greater suspicion and hostility, while engagement and respect for certain positions shaped by history's legacies, brought about a cooperation and compromise. Only a genuine economic and political engagement can convince Pyongyang that international community had taken on a road leading to North Korea's gradual and peaceful integration in existing international political and economic order instead of forcing on the country a regime change scenario.

That's why Russia disagrees with those advocating postponing practical implementation of multilateral economic projects such as linking the Trans-Siberian railway with the inter-Korean railroad, a gas pipeline and an electricity supply line from Russia via North Korea to South Korea until the nuclear problem on the peninsula is resolved.

Moscow is convinced that Pyongyang's participation in multilateral economic projects is very likely to further promote positive changes in domestic situation and international behavior of that country.

For an example, the railway project will have a positive effect on normalization of situation in North Korea's transportation system and in economy as a whole. When North Korea's railways become an integrated component of the international transportation system formed mainly by more advanced countries, they inevitably should be brought up to the level of those neighbors. It will mean a jump to qualitatively higher level of technology, equipment, management, and finally, economic efficiency in that and related spheres of economy.

There is another important side of the project. Comparing with Free Economic Zones (FEZ) with rather narrow boundaries, the railway will pass actually through all North Korean territory. It will bring about wider "openness" to North Korea than any other economic project. Cooperation will take place on more vast territory and because needs of railway transportation should be satisfied through efforts in various sectors of North Korea's economy, the project will benefit all of them.

The same could be said about the project of a gas pipe-line from Russia through North Korea to South Korea. In this case North Korea can gain not only from transit payment. They also will get access to stable supply of Russian gas. It is possible to expect that the project will bring about development of some related sectors of North Korea's economy. The effects mentioned in case of the railway project should be also counted on.

Why realization of these projects is becoming ever more important? It seems that nowadays the DPRK is more, than ever before, aware of the hard imperative - in order to survive in the modern world order, it is necessary to take new approaches to solution of economic problems.

Among remarkable signs of departure from the previous rigid stance were "State economic measures" of July 2002, decisions to go ahead with economic exchanges with South Korea and establish special trade and industrial zones, such as Kaesong, and most recently on the border with China. Recent reports about further changes in economic policy announced on June 28 suggest that the process is going to become irreversible one.

We should build up on these new developments and use the opportunity for promoting all kinds of economic and economic-related ties with North Korea. Economic cooperation will help to develop her economy; to make the North Koreans more prepared to live in a modern society. In other words, only engagement will help to lessen the huge gap existing between two parts of the

country and to cut down the unification's cost. During the process, it will help to enlarge in the North ever growing strata of people interested in stable cooperative relations with the outside world.

There is a younger part of the ruling elite, growing both in numbers and influence, whose value orientation is close or similar to those in societies with liberal democracy and market economy systems. This stratum includes mainly young party and state bureaucrats, managers of joint ventures, export-import and general trading companies, which by their structure and functioning methods sometimes resembles very much South Korean chaebols in the 1970-1980s. The group also includes some military officers, technical specialists and students, who got their education and training abroad, some prominent figures in arts and culture. Those people could be compared, to a certain extent, to so-called "386 generation" in South Korea and can be considered as representatives of the emerging "middle class" in the DPRK.

That doesn't mean at all that Kim Jong Un's administration will be much more democratic or less cautious in implementing any reforms. In any case, those reforms and transformations will be exercised very cautiously, in a step-by-step manner to ensure maintaining political and social stability. Remaining rather conservative in politics, the new North Korean leadership will be very pragmatic in economics and very tough in negotiating for such a unification formula which would ensure for them an appropriate social status and material well-being in the unified Korea. The same approach will be taken by Pyongyang concerning the settlement of the nuclear problem.

Kim Jong Un's performance in safeguarding the ruling elite's power and in pulling the country out of the current crisis without making too many concessions to "imperialists" will be the key factor which will determine his political future.

## **7. Conclusion**

There are enough grounds to conclude that in the foreseeable future North Korea's new leader will stick to politico-ideological directions which have been set forth in Kim Il Sung –Kim Jong Il's times.

Pyongyang's efforts in domestic policy will be concentrated on consolidation of the existing power system and maintenance of political stability. The main support for the regime still comes from the army and the whole bunch of security services. Rejection of "bourgeois values" - democracy, pluralism, openness and reforms will be emphasized.<sup>17</sup>

The ruling elite most likely will continue the line of upholding "socialist ideals", prevent penetration into the country of ideas and a way of life "alien" to the "Korean-style socialism", avoid radical reforms which could fatally undermine the existing system. Attempts to put on brake negative processes in social and economic sphere with the help of ideological campaigns and mass movements of various kinds will be continued.

Recent years were marked by the DPRK's active maneuverings on the international arena. However North Korea hardly will agree to wide-scale cooperation with the South Korea in non-economic spheres. Pyongyang is likely to limit the inter-Korean relations within frameworks of mainly "official-level diplomacy" with a view of maximizing economic gains while minimizing cultural and humanitarian exchanges.

At the same time several trips by Kim Jong Il to China and Russia in 2010-2011 along with recent pronouncements by Kim Jong Un, especially four patriotic tasks set by him, are signs of more

serious than ever before intention to map out an economic strategy which would allow the country to cope with current uneasy economic situation.<sup>18</sup> It is becoming ever more difficult for North Korea to solve complicated economic problems independently. That why North Korea will be compelled to open door wider for foreign expertise, investment and assistance.

It is highly desirable to not waste time, but to use these opportunity for developing various kinds of economic and economic-related ties as the only available channel to engage North Korea and promote its integration into the world community. Russia believes that “we should make attempts, we should talk, and we should try and offer incentives to North Korea to make it see that there is no alternative to cooperation”.<sup>19</sup>

It is worth emphasizing once again that, because of some circumstances mentioned above, we have no other sustainable channel, except economic one, to realize human, cultural and information exchanges between North Korea and outside world and thus to begin real integration of the country into the world community. The last, but not the least point to mention is that it is the only channel which North Korea herself is really interested in maintaining open and sustainable.

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