

## *Chapter 6*

# **The Security Strategy of North Korea's Kim Jong Un Regime: A Japanese Perspective**

*Hiroyasu Akutsu*

### **Introduction**

The year of 2016 is the fifth since the official establishment of the Kim Jong Un regime in North Korea. There have been no changes to the new line of simultaneous economic development and nuclear and missile development that was officially announced one year after the regime's founding or to the what is effectively North Korea's first-ever nuclear doctrine. While attempting to follow this path by upgrading its substantive nuclear weapon and missile capabilities, the Kim Jong Un regime is making a vigorous push to become a *de facto* nuclear weapons state. There have meanwhile been reports about North Korea's conventional forces indicating a high likelihood the country is refurbishing multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) that until recently were thought to be aging. As for internal politics, for the past four-and-a-half years the Kim Jong Un regime has been propped up by a reign of terror conducted via a purging of leaders, including military officials—so as to strengthen loyalty toward Kim Jong Un himself—and by sudden and frequent personnel reassignments. It is not easy to ascertain how steadily the construction of this new regime founded on terror will proceed, but there are no signs of regime “collapse” in the foreseeable future. Furthermore, no economic growth is projected for any time soon. So then, just what sort of security strategy and military policy is the Kim Jong Un regime planning?

This essay will illuminate the key elements of the Kim Jong Un regime's security strategy and military policy, provide an outlook for the future direction of the regime's strategy and policy, and explore what policy implications this could have for Japan.

## **1. The Kim Jong Un Regime's Security Strategy: Strengthen the Regime's Powerbase, Continue Efforts Toward Achieving Two Key Strategic Goals**

### *Strengthen the Regime's Powerbase*

When the Kim Jong Un regime was established in 2012, the author offered the following outlook for the future:

... North Korea will probably continue pushing hard toward building a “strong and prosperous state (or great power)” based on the “military-first policy.” In the process, Kim Jong Un may, as did Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, create his own ideology of governance and his own leadership style, based on purges and a reign of terror. If he does so, the current group-led system known as the “Kim Jong Il system minus Kim Jong Il” will likely become more authoritarian.”<sup>1</sup>

As it turns out, as of February 2016 figures who were regarded as persons of great influence in 2012 have already disappeared from the center of power: Jang Sung Taek (held important positions in the Politburo of the Workers' Party, Central Military Commission, Administration Department and National Defense Commission), Kim Kyong Hui (younger daughter of Kim Il Sung, husband of Jang Sung Taek) and Chief of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army (KPA) Ri Yong Ho. It would seem that, under Kim Jong Un's “unitary leadership system,” the dictatorship of his is growing stronger rather than that of the group-led system. Ri Yong Ho was purged in July 2012, as was Jang Sung Taek in December 2013. Ma Won Chun, head of the National Defense Commission's Designing Department, was also purged in 2014, along with Defense Minister Hyon Yong Chol in 2015. Furthermore, after Jang Sung Taek's purging, current Secretariat of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) Choe Ryong Hae, who had risen to the second-highest position in the regime next to Kim Jong Un, was temporarily exiled to a farm in the countryside. Additional purges and a continued reign of terror intended to strengthen the regime are expected on into the future.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hiroyasu Akutsu, “Mietekita Kim Jong Un Taisei to Sono Ansen Hosho Seisaku no Hoko” (The Kim Jong Un regime made apparent thus far and the direction of its security policy), *NIDS Commentary*, No.24, January 23, 2012, <http://www.nids.go.jp/publication/commentary/pdf/commentary024.pdf>.

### ***Continue Efforts Toward Achieving Two Key Strategic Goals***

The two key strategies Kim Jong Un has carried on from his grandfather and father are the construction of a strong and prosperous socialist nation and an end to America's hostile (or suppressive) policy toward North Korea. With regard to this "strong and prosperous nation," in 2012, on the 100th anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth, Kim Jong Un upheld the slogan of "opening the grand gate (to a strong and prosperous nation)." In 2010, however, near the end of Kim Jong Il's reign, the wording had been "strong and prosperous great nation." From this point onward, however, "strong and prosperous nation" was used with much greater frequency due to lowered expectations of achievement. Now the word "nation" is normally used. The concept of this "strong and prosperous nation" involves at least three aspects or stages: a politico-ideological giant, a military giant and an economic giant.

When considering the security policy of the Kim Jong Un regime, we must give thought to the policy it inherited from its predecessor as well as the new regime's own policy. After the end of the Cold War, two common policies between the Kim Il Sung regime and the following Kim Jong Il regime were *the construction of a strong and prosperous socialist nation/great nation* and *an end to America's hostile/suppressive policy toward North Korea*. There are three facets to building a strong and prosperous (socialist) nation: A politico-ideological giant, a military giant, and an economic giant. A politico-ideological giant refers to a strong nation equipped with the *Juche* (self-reliance) ideology of Kim Il Sung and the *Songun* ("military-first") ideology of Kim Jong Il. A military giant means a strong nation fully outfitted with military capabilities with a nuclear deterrent at their core. Finally, an economic giant is a strong nation that has become rich and prosperous by achieving economic development, which has been the biggest challenge for North Korea since the Kim Jong Il era. In addition to these three aspects, in the latter days of the Kim Jong Il regime the concept of being "a science and technology giant" also gained prominence,<sup>2</sup> and it would seem the Kim Jong Un regime is also focusing on accomplishing this goal.

In fact, since its founding the Kim Jong Un regime has progressed with two interrelated development projects: long-range ballistic missiles and "rockets to carry Earth observation satellites." In 2013, North Korea created the Ministry of Atomic Energy Industry to accompany its development of nuclear weapons and atomic energy, and also

---

<sup>2</sup> It is thought that this concept was officially specified in the "New Year Address" the *Rodong Simmun* newspaper carried on January 1, 2010.

began speaking of becoming a “space giant” when it established the National Aerospace Development Administration. Moreover, in the “Report on the Activities of the Party Central Committee” presented at the 7th Congress of the WPK in May 2016, a section under the heading “In Order to Complete the Great Undertaking of Socialism,” Chairman of the WPK Central Committee Kim Jong Un personally characterized “the construction of a scientific and technological giant” as “an important goal whose accomplishment should be given priority.” Since science and technology result in furthering military and economic might, it should be no wonder that North Korea would use these two fields to try and achieve its goals. Accordingly, it is possible that some of North Korea’s defense expenditures are being routed to spending on science and technology.<sup>3,4</sup>

Meanwhile, North Korea has left the definition of the other pillar of its grand strategy—the end of America’s hostile policy toward North Korea—vague. This stance demonstrates a strategic ambiguity, but what we can speculate from North Korea’s actions thus far is that among the messages included therein may be advocacy for a transition from the ceasefire to a peace treaty, guarantees of the communist regime’s continued existence, recognition as a *nuclear weapons state* and the dissolution of the U.S.-South Korea alliance. So how in fact is North Korea acting to achieve an *end to America’s hostile policy*?

### ***The New Strategic Byungjin Line as a New Key Strategy***

Kim Jong Un has hinted at one answer to this question: North Korea’s new strategic line of simultaneous economic and nuclear weapons development. Learning lessons from the days of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Un cited this two-pronged development approach as a key strategy for North Korea at the end of March 2013, one year after the new regime had been established. This point has repeatedly been stated in the initial “works” of Kim Jong Un.<sup>5</sup> For example, the first time he spoke publicly about the new line was when

---

<sup>3</sup> *East Asian Strategic Review*, March 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Kim Jong Un, “7th Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea, Report on the Activities of the Party Central Committee,” *Korean Central News Agency*, May 7, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> The particularly important essays, speeches, letters and statements of North Korea’s Supreme Leader are called “works.” Kim Jong Un produced 32 such works between 2012 and 2015. However, two of them were not created directly by Kim Jong Un himself, but are rather summaries of his remarks compiled by propagandists working in the North Korean government. These two works are “A Speech at a Statue Raising Ceremony at Kim Il Sung Military University” on October 29, 2012 and “A Letter to Social Studies Graduate Students and Activists Ahead of the 60th Anniversary of DPRK’s Founding.”

he delivered the “Report at the Party Central Committee General Meeting” on April 2, 2013. He said:<sup>6</sup>

As demanded by our present circumstances and the advancement of the revolution, the Party Central Committee presents a new strategic line—a two-fold line—concerning concurrent progress in building up the economy and an arsenal of nuclear arms as a strategic line intended to construct a strong and prosperous state... What the United States fears most is our possession of a nuclear deterrent that is miniaturized, lightweight and diversified. Fearing that if we, with nuclear weapons in our possession, succeeded in reconstructing the economy, their hostile policy against North Korea would come to an end; they are making the final struggle... Nuclear weapons are a reliable deterrent against war. They will protect and guarantee the sovereignty of our people. If we gain firm possession of the capability to conduct precision strikes with nuclear weapons, then no invader will be able to attack us. The greater our nuclear strike capability becomes, so too shall our ability to deter invaders make equal gains. Our opponent is the United States, the largest nuclear-armed state in the world and they constantly threaten us with their nukes. Under these circumstances, we must make a robust effort to increase the quality and quantity of our nuclear might. A powerful nuclear arsenal will bring peace, great prosperity and happy lives for our people. The new line will direct great resources toward building up the economy and improving the lives of the people, at low cost and without increasing defense expenditures. In addition, the leadership and steel fortitude we have inherited has produced an atomic energy industry with endlessly plentiful resources of uranium. The Party's new line will strengthen our nuclear arsenal by relying on our independent atomic energy industry while also providing us with a rational path toward solving our electrical power issues. The new line carries on, deepens and develops the two-fold path of economic and national defense policy realized by the President and General Secretary. Constructing an economic power will require the stimulation of pioneering sectors of the people's economy—power, coal, metals, rail transport—as well as our basic industrial sectors. We will have to instigate a transformation of agriculture and light industry. We must become

---

<sup>6</sup> Kim Jong Un, “Report at the Party Central Committee General Meeting,” *Korean Central News Agency*, April 2, 2013.

a knowledge economy power through advances in science and technology. We must focus on developing our space science technologies in order to launch and develop numerous practical satellites of various types, such as communications satellites... We must diversify our external trade, pulverize the hostile sanctions and blockade schemes, and create advantageous opportunities to construct an economic power. In the munitions industry, we must take another step forward to develop into a nuclear weapons powerhouse. We must produce even more precise, miniaturized nuclear weapons and means of their delivery, and ceaselessly develop nuclear weapons technology, in order to aggressively develop nuclear weapons with advanced formidability. (*Emphasis added by the author.*)

The wording of the underlined sentence, which says “Fearing that if we, with nuclear weapons in our possession, succeeded in reconstructing the economy, their hostile policy against North Korea would come to an end; they are making the final struggle...” may seem to be a very unusual line of thought, but one possible interpretation is that “if North Korea becomes a nuclear weapons powerhouse and an economic power, then the United States will have no choice but to treat North Korea as an equal, and that is what the U.S. fears.” At the very least, the statement probably means that North Korea cannot rest easy unless it reaches this stage. Whatever the case may be, since this thinking forms the solid foundation of the new line, North Korea has no apparent intention of changing this policy in the foreseeable future. Kim Jong Un reiterated this position in the “General Report on the Activities of the Party Central Committee” he delivered at the 7th Congress of the WPK in May 2016, in which he said, “Our Party’s new line is not a temporary measure to cope with a rapidly changing situation, but rather a strategic line we should hold to eternally out of the supreme interests of our revolution. It is the most appropriate and revolutionary path that will construct a prosperous socialist power as soon as possible by raising an iron wall of national defense with nuclear forces at its heart and by further spurring our economic buildup.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Kim Jong Un, “7th Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea,” General Report on the Activities of the Party Central Committee,” *Korean Central News Agency*, May 7, 2016.

## 2. The Military Policy of the Kim Jong Un Regime

### *Military Policy Heavily Weighted Toward Nuclear and Missile Capabilities*

One thing that must be pointed out with regard to the military policy involved in the process of constructing the new regime is that the idea of creating a power relationship of “party on top and army below,” in which the role of the KPA is strengthened under the supervision of the WPK, is a particularly strong aspect. Although on April 13, 2012 North Korea failed to launch a ballistic missile it calls a “satellite,” the one it launched on December 12 that year was successful, as was the state’s third nuclear test conducted on February 12, 2013. North Korea then touted its successful launch of a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) in May 2015, conducted a fourth nuclear weapons test of a “hydrogen bomb” on January 6, 2016, and launched another ballistic missile labeled a “satellite” on February 7 of that year. Under the new line of simultaneously building up the economy and a nuclear arsenal, North Korea is attempting to increase its nuclear weapon and missile capabilities with the aim of strengthening its deterrent against the United States. Meanwhile, since 2013 North Korea has cut its national defense spending from 16% to 15.9%, a level that was sustained in 2015. These monetary figures lend credence to Kim Jong Un’s statement that the regime will focus on building up the economy without increasing defense expenditures, in accordance with the new line. However, spending on science and technology is projected to have risen to 5% of the budget in 2015, and we cannot deny the possibility that North Korea is spending money on military capabilities such as nuclear weapon and missile development in the name of scientific and technological advancement. Whatever the case may be, an emphasis on nuclear weapon and missile capabilities is founded on North Korea’s military policy under the Kim Jong Un regime.

### *A “Nuclear Doctrine” Under the New Line*

Until April 1, 2013 there had only been scattered North Korean statements on possessing nuclear arms, but on this date the country compiled its first written policy document on the issue, which the Supreme People’s Assembly enacted into law. The title of the legislation translates as “a law on consolidating the position of nuclear weapons state for self-defence.”<sup>8</sup> It contains the following provisions.

---

<sup>8</sup> “Law on Consolidating Position of Nuclear Weapons State Adopted,” *Korean Central News Agency*, April 1, 2013.

“Law on Consolidating the Position of Nuclear Weapons State for Self-Defence”

1. The nuclear weapons of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea are a legitimate means of defense which we have no choice but to ready against the continuously growing hostile nuclear threat the United States poses against our Republic.
2. Until the world has been ridden of nuclear weapons, the nuclear forces of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea shall serve to deter and repel invasion and attack upon our Republic, and shall inflict a devastating retaliatory strike against the homelands of invaders.
3. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea shall take concrete measures to prepare against the growing and grave threat of invasion and attack by hostile forces, as well as to strengthen our nuclear deterrent and retaliatory strike capabilities both qualitatively and quantitatively.
4. In the event that other hostile nuclear-armed states invade or attack our Republic, the nuclear forces of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea shall be used to repulse said incursions and inflict retaliatory strikes only with the final command of the Supreme Commander of the Korean People’s Army.
5. So long as non-nuclear-weapon states do not conspire with hostile nuclear-armed states in acts of invasion or attack against our Republic, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea shall not use nuclear weapons against said states or threaten them with nuclear weapons.
6. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea shall safely store and manage nuclear weapons, and shall strictly comply with regulations on guaranteeing the safety of nuclear weapons tests.
7. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea shall establish systems and methods for storing and managing nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons technology and weapons-grade nuclear materials so as to thoroughly guarantee against their illegal spread.
8. Once the hostile relationships with hostile nuclear-armed states have been resolved, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea shall endeavor to cooperate internationally on nuclear non-proliferation and the safe management of nuclear materials in accordance with the principles of mutual respect and equality.
9. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea shall fight to eliminate the risk of nuclear war and build a world that is ultimately free of nuclear weapons, is opposed to a nuclear arms race, and actively supports international nuclear arms reduction efforts.
10. The relevant institutions shall take thorough practical measures in order to enforce this law.

A look at these provisions makes it immediately evident that the law satisfies the minimum requirements for a nuclear doctrine. Namely, the first provision shows that the nuclear deterrent is directed at the United States, the fourth describes the chain of command, the fifth rules out first use, the sixth describes management of nuclear weapons and the seventh addresses the handling of nuclear materials and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. The wording of this seventh provision about “systems and methods for storing and managing nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons technology and weapons-grade nuclear materials so as to thoroughly guarantee against their illegal spread” could indicate that North Korea wants to make this a point for compromise in negotiations with the United States the regime expects to engage in in the future, in that North Korea would vow, at the least, to not allow nuclear weapons, related technology or weapons-grade nuclear materials leave the country if the United States officially recognizes North Korea as a nuclear-armed state. It is inconceivable at present that the United States would accept this proposition, but that does not dilute the significance of North Korea's expectations to the contrary. North Korea suggested as much around the time it conducted its fourth nuclear weapons test in January 2016. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) made a “special report of great importance” when it announced North Korea's first successful test of a hydrogen bomb. The next day, the 7<sup>th</sup>, the *Rodong Sinmun* newspaper ran a government statement announcing the same feat. The title of that article translates as “First Fully Successful Hydrogen Bomb Test by *Juche* Korea.” A look at the content of the statement in this “report of great importance” suggests that it is highly consistent with the aforementioned nuclear doctrine, and, as such, the doctrine most likely formed the foundation of North Korea's nuclear strategy under Kim Jong Un. The main points in the “report of great importance” are as follows:

1. This test employed a miniaturized hydrogen bomb based 100 percent on North Korea's original technology.
2. As a responsible nuclear-armed state, North Korea shall not use nuclear weapons so long as our sovereignty is not encroached upon by hostile forces, and shall not under any circumstances transfer related means or technologies.
3. However, this test is an act of self-defense against hostile forces such as the United States. North Korea shall not give up development of nuclear weapons so long as the United States' hostile policy toward North Korea continues.
4. North Korea shall sustain efforts to qualitatively and quantitatively improve its nuclear deterrent.

We can interpret the second of the points above as a declaration of intent to abide by non-proliferation. Furthermore, Kim Jong Un himself stated the following in the “General Report on the Activities of the Party Central Committee” he presented at the 7th Congress of the WPK in May 2016, which was referenced earlier in this essay.

As pronounced earlier, our Republic, as a responsible nuclear-armed state, shall not use nuclear weapons first unless our sovereignty is encroached upon with nuclear weapons by aggressive hostile forces. We shall faithfully fulfill our duty to the international community to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and shall endeavor to realize a world free of nuclear weapons.<sup>9</sup>

North Korea will likely stick to the argument that it is already a “responsible nuclear-armed state” and continue asserting that it will fulfill the obligations that status entails.

Kim Jong Un’s Personal Supervision of Military Activities and Related Operations<sup>10</sup>

Kim Jong Un’s strong commitment as Supreme Commander to the military aspects of the new line was made clear by his remarks, referenced earlier, in the “Report at the Party Central Committee General Meeting” on April 2, 2013, but we can also identify this strong commitment from how often he directly supervises military drills and exercises at military facilities and other sites related to the military. Kim Jong Un personally supervised the operation of the KPA and other military activity 73 times in 2014 (of which 23 were drills or exercises) and 45 times between January and October of 2015 (of which eight were drills or exercises). Although in 2015 he was in attendance at a slower pace than in 2014, events like his presence at an SLBM launch in May would suggest his particularly great interest in improving the quality of North Korea’s military capabilities, including combat capabilities in particular.

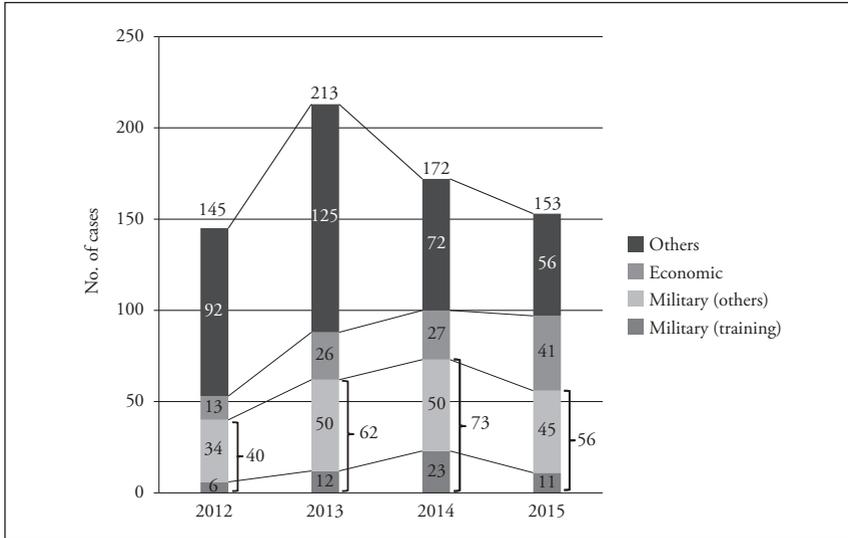
First Chairman Kim Jong Un personally supervised military air operations five times in 2012 and three times in 2013, but then much more in 2014 when he did so 12 times. There were five such occasions in January through October 2015. We can thus speculate that the First Chairman considers air power an important matter, along with naval power as exemplified by the SLBM launch. We can also presume from the

---

<sup>9</sup> Kim Jong Un, “7th Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea, “General Report on the Activities of the Party Central Committee,” *Korean Central News Agency*, May 7, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> The section below is based on pages 78-90 in the third chapter of “East Asian Strategic Review 2016,” which is entitled “The Korean Peninsula: North Korea’s Advanced Nuclear and Missile Capabilities, and South Korea’s Response.”

preceding that First Chairman Kim Jong Un is engaging in more direct supervision of military drills and exercises. In addition, this would indicate a very high probability that North Korea's military provocations of other countries is due not to independent action by some elements of the KPA, but rather stem from direct orders handed down by Kim Jong Un himself.



Source: "First Chairman Kim Jong Un's movements, by sector (2012-15)," *East Asian Strategic Review 2016*, pg. 88.

Note: "Military (training)" includes direct instruction given at attack tactical exercises, artillery training, flight training, mobile force training, launch tests and the like, while "Military (others)" includes troop inspections, etc. "Economic" includes inspection visits made to factories and farms, etc., while "Others" includes attendance at national events and audiences with foreigners, and so forth.

Furthermore, although North Korea's slogan of the "unitary leadership system" formally means a monolithic ideology system by the Party, leadership has actually been exercised through a reign of terror, as demonstrated by the aforementioned series of purges and First Chairman Kim Jong Un's personal direction of the military. A monolithic ideology system by the First Chairman has come to better define the phrase, as it would seem the regime is becoming more of a one-man dictatorship under Kim Jong Un.

### ***Conventional Forces and Special Forces***

Among its conventional forces, North Korea is deploying very slender vessels (VSV), which are high-speed boats with stealth capabilities. The South Korean navy has warned that the VSVs are outfitted with MLRS and torpedo tubes, and that the new boats represent an upgrade to the ability of North Korea's special forces to conduct surprise amphibious assaults. Judging from reports on First Chairman Kim Jong Un's frequent personal direction of military forces and facilities, we can surmise that he has great interest in strengthening his air power,<sup>11</sup> in addition to his naval power. The coordinated use of special forces assets, such as stealth high-speed boats, and its naval and air power would likely increase the threat stemming from North Korea's ability to engage in asymmetrical warfare.

And as for North Korea's potential to carry out operations in cyberspace, the General Reconnaissance Bureau, an agency of the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces, has been at the heart of efforts to upgrade asymmetrical offensive capabilities, but there is little information on how these assets are operated. In South Korea, reports have stated that North Korea carried out a cyberattack on a South Korean nuclear power plant operator in December 2014, while other reports have said it is likely that a large cyberattack against Seoul Metro computers was conducted in July 2014. Reportedly, there were 184,578 such attacks in 2013, 370,713 in 2014 and 350,188 in 2015 as of September. Major media organizations and a financial institution for agricultural cooperatives were also hit by a big cyberattack in South Korea in March 2013.

North Korea has also executed cyberattacks against American companies. An incident in which U.S. movie distribution company Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc. was hit from November to December 2012 is already well-known. The KPA convened the First Reconnoitering Officers' Conference for officials in charge of espionage and cyberwarfare against South Korea and other foreign countries. The event, which was held in North Korea in June 2014, indicates that the regime will likely upgrade its foreign espionage and cyberwarfare capabilities even further.

In addition, it is highly likely that North Korea has begun using its cyberwarfare assets as a new means of obtaining foreign currency since the United Nations Security Council imposed financial and economic sanctions in response to the January 2016 nuclear weapons test and the ballistic missile launch the following month. Large-scale cyberattacks on financial institutions in Asia and Ecuador came to light that May, which

---

<sup>11</sup> North Korea refers to this as "air and anti-air" forces.

North Korea or organizations with ties to the regime are suspected of carrying out. It would seem that North Korea, in accordance with the new policy line, is strengthening its conventional armed forces with a focus on asymmetrical assets such as special forces, while at the same time upgrading nuclear weapon and missile capabilities.

### *Means of Provocation*

Another matter worth pointing out is a change in how North Korea fabricates provocations. Until recently it would militarily provoke South Korea by various methods. Examples include military provocations along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and the Northern Limit Line (NLL), nuclear and missile launch tests, cyberattacks and so forth, but in recent years we have also seen North Korea use political and non-military means of provocation, such as taking Americans within or near its borders into custody and holding them for ransom. There have been seven such incidents since Kim Jong Un came to power.<sup>12</sup> Reportedly, at least two Americans are in North Korean custody at present,<sup>13</sup> as well as one Canadian.<sup>14</sup> North Korea responded to international criticism and pressure after its fourth nuclear weapons test and following missile launch by releasing a video of an American prisoner making a public confession.<sup>15</sup>

### **3. Future Outlook**

Lastly, the outlook for the Kim Jong Un regime indicates there is little chance it will succeed in the short term with the economic development part of the new line, although it is highly likely it will be comparatively quick in proceeding with the buildup of its nuclear forces (including missile capabilities). With regard to building up the economy, although there were reports after the establishment of the Kim Jong Un regime that Pyongyang's citizens were living better lives and free market reforms were being implemented, various financial and economic sanctions imposed from abroad are among the factors that make it just as unlikely as before that North Korea will become an "economic power" anytime soon. Instead it is highly probable that more nuclear weapons tests will be conducted. Missile tests are becoming more frequent as North Korea improves its missile capabilities. The country is also speeding up the pace of upgrades affecting range, flight stability,

---

<sup>12</sup> As of the time this essay was written, the imprisoned individuals have been released in five of these seven cases.

<sup>13</sup> *CNN*, January 22, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> *CBC News*, December 15, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> *BBC News*, March 16, 2016.

ability to change launch direction and launch pad mobility. The situation with domestic politics, in the meantime, indicates a good likelihood that as the figures at the heart of the Kim Jong Un regime frequently shift around, Kim Jong Un's dictatorship will continue to strengthen while North Korea follows the current path of building the "unitary leadership system."

In North Korea's plans for strengthening its nuclear arsenal, the development of nuclear weapons and of missile technology go hand-in-hand, but the most worrying thing is if North Korea becomes able to deliver a nuclear weapon to Japan by learning how to mount a nuclear warhead onto a Nodong missile, which is capable of striking any target in Japan. In terms of Japan's security, it would be impermissible for North Korea to possess the ability to attack Japan with a Nodong if the regime signals the intent to attack or to try and block Japanese action. It is highly likely that the Nodong has already been readied for combat. North Korea's capabilities allow it to attack anywhere in South Korea and Japan with ballistic missiles. The regime is also enhancing its ability to target Guam with the Musudan missile.

### **Conclusion: Summary and Policymaking Implications**

Although this is the fifth year since the official establishment of the Kim Jong Un regime in North Korea, there have been no observable changes to the basic path it initially set for security strategy and military policy. There have been no changes to what amounts to North Korea's first-ever nuclear doctrine or to the new line of simultaneous economic and nuclear weapons development officially announced one year after the regime's founding. Instead, the Kim Jong Un regime has been pushing vigorously to become a *de facto* nuclear weapons state as it works to upgrade its substantive nuclear weapon and missile capabilities. The economic development part of the new strategic line still remains far from achieving the goal of becoming an economic giant. The state of North Korea's nuclear capabilities is characterized by marked efforts to diversify, miniaturize and mount a warhead on a missile. It is highly likely that the armed forces built around this nuclear arsenal will continue undergoing an upgrade process at a greater or lesser pace. Moreover, there are reports indicating a high likelihood North Korea is refurbishing its MLRS that until recently were thought to be aging. Of utmost importance is Kim Jong Un's growing personal involvement in upgrading North Korea's military capabilities. In addition to his hands-on management of the economy, often Kim Jong Un personally supervises the army and its facilities, including military exercises and drills. The ability to frequently mobilize personnel for these exercises and drills signifies that he possesses a relatively

stable command structure. For the past four-and-a-half years the Kim Jong Un regime has been propped up by a reign of terror conducted via a purging of leaders, including military officials—so as to strengthen loyalty toward Kim Jong Un himself—and by sudden and frequent personnel reassignments. It is not easy to ascertain how steadily the construction of this new regime founded on terror will proceed.

However, there are no signs of an end to the Kim Jong Un regime's security strategy and military policy so long as the regime remains in place and maintains its determination to upgrade its military capabilities, even if these efforts are slowed by limitations arising from rationing of resources and the various sanctions in place. Rather, we can expect North Korea to continue down its current path. As it has done in the past, the country will probably find clever ways of accessing funds to continue building up its armed forces, primarily by developing nuclear weapons, even if ties with China or Russia deteriorate. Under the Kim Jong Un regime, North Korea seems set on pressing ahead toward completing its nuclear arsenal, no matter how many times its nuclear weapons tests or missile test launches fail.

To conclude, there are no particularly new implications for Japan's defense policy toward North Korea's threat. That is to say, it is paramount that Japan continues to work with the United States and South Korea in doing everything we can to deal with North Korea's drastic, provocative actions. It is especially important for Japan to examine and move ahead with various ways of cooperating, including intelligence sharing, with South Korea.

