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## DPRK: What Course?

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**Abstract.** Much attention has been paid to the development of political processes in the country prior and after the sudden death of Kim Jong-il in December 2011, including the transfer of power to the new leader Kim Jong-un, and also to the situation within the ruling elite. This article also examines the DPRK's relations with Russia, China, the United States, the Republic of Korea, and certain other countries, as well as the influence of the events in Libya on the prospects of resolving the nuclear problem of the Korean Peninsula.

**Keywords:** *DPRK, transfer of power, Korean Peninsula, security, nuclear problem, international relations.*

The past two years were full of major events on the Korean Peninsula and in the life of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, each of which deserves an individual discourse due to its internal or international political importance. Some of them, like the incident with the South Korean corvette "Cheonan" and the artillery duel at Yonphyondo Island, which placed the North and the South of the Korean Peninsula on the brink of war, have already been discussed in our journal.<sup>1</sup> The meaning and significance of others, such as a conference of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) held on September 28, 2010, after a 44-year-long interval, have become more understandable after the sudden death of the DPRK leader Kim Jong-il on December 17, 2011. The demise of that leader has opened a new and unpredictable stage in the country's development.

The situation in the DPRK, contrary to the expectations of many western and South Korean analysts, continues to remain stable, so far. The process of **transfer of supreme power** to Kim Jong-un, representative of the third generation of the Kim family, has passed smoothly and does not seem to meet any visible objections on the part of the main groupings of the ruling elite – the army, party, special services and state apparatus.

The Politburo of the CC of the WPK, which has been continuously ruling the country, proclaimed Kim Jong-un the Supreme Commander of the Korean Peo-

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ple's Army at its meeting on October 8, 2011, in compliance with the "behest" of Kim Jong-il, and also adopted a decision in which Kim Jong-un was named as "the only heir of Kim Jong-il and the only center of leadership, unity and cohesion of the WPK." But he has not yet received other high posts which his father held.<sup>2</sup>

Kim Jong-un (b. January 8, 1983, or 1984) is the third son of Kim Jong-il known to the outer world. The decision to appoint the heir and begin training him for his far from simple duties was taken by Kim Jong-il in early 2009, almost immediately after a relative rehabilitation of health following a stroke he suffered in August 2008 (certain analysts tend to refer the beginning of this process to 2006).

Such choice of a "successor" in the presence of his two living elder brothers does not fully correspond to the Confucian traditions. But such cases have already been in the history of Korea. Apparently, Kim Jong-il thought that Kim Jong-un, by virtue of his personal qualities, would more successfully cope with the difficult mission of the "continuer of the revolutionary cause" started by his grandfather Kim Il-sung.

As follows from what was said in the documentary film shown on January 8, 2012, the birthday of the new leader, by the DPRK Central TV, Kim Jong-il did much to acquaint his successor with the state of affairs and entire work ahead of him beginning from early 2009, including their trips together to exercise leadership on the spot at army units, economic enterprises, and various institutions and organizations.

The **Conference of the Workers' Party of Korea** held on September 28, 2010, was the decisive stage of the presentation of the successor to the party and people. The Conference also renovated and augmented the CC WPK, Central Auditing Commission and Control Commission of the WPK. The plenary meeting of the CC WPK held on the same day elected members and candidate members to the Politburo (17 and 15 persons, respectively), including the Politburo Presidium (five persons), secretaries of the CC (11 persons), and formed the CC Secretariat. The meeting also elected the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the party (19 persons). One of the novelties was the publication of the biographies of the members and candidate members of the CC Politburo of the WPK, as well as a list of department heads of the CC WPK appointed by the plenary meeting.

The Party Rules revised by the conference note that its "only guiding ideas" are the ideas of *chuchkhe* (*juche*) created by Kim Il-sung. The document also declares the party's adherence to the "revolutionary principles of Marxism-Leninism" and its intention to fight opportunism, revisionism, sycophancy, and other "reactionary trends."<sup>3</sup>

A day earlier an order issued by the Commander-in-Chief of the Korean People's Army Kim Jong-il conferred the rank of General of the Army on Kim Jong-un and Kim Jong-il's younger sister Kim Kyong-hui, who held the post of the head of the light industry department at the CC WPK. Three more highly-placed

civil and military officials were promoted to the similar rank. On that day the Chief of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army Ri Yong-ho was promoted to the rank of Vice Marshal.

The sense of a quick military promotion of these figures, first of all of Kim Jong-un, becomes clear after analyzing the personal make-up of the higher party organs. Kim Jong-un and Ri Yong-ho became deputies of Kim Jong-il in the WPK Central Military Commission.

A year earlier, on April 9, 2009, at the First Session of the 12th Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK the National Defense Commission (NDC) was noticeably renovated and enlarged (up to 13 persons). At that time certain amendments were made to the "socialist Constitution" of the DPRK adopted in 1972 (previous amendments were made in 1992 and 1998). Some innovations of 2009 were so radical that they were not published for the outer world to see until 2010.

The main innovation was the appearance in the Constitution of a special section "Chairman of the National Defense Commission," in which it was directly said that the person holding this post is the "supreme leader of the DPRK."<sup>4</sup> The list of his duties additionally included leadership in "all state matters," ratification and denunciation of important international treaties, the right to pardon, and declaration of the state of emergency and martial law and mobilization.<sup>5</sup>

Subsequently the NDC composition has somewhat changed: some of its members died (like the First Vice Chairman, Vice Marshal Jo Myong-rok), others were dismissed due to health reasons (Jon Pyong-ho and Ju Sang-song). The most important change was the promotion of Jang Song-thaek from the simple NDC member to its Vice Chairman, which took place at the Third Session of the 12th SPA on June 7, 2010, with Kim Jong-il's participation.

At that time notable shifts were made in the Cabinet of Ministers endorsed quite recently – in April 2009. The 80-year-old Choe Yong-rim was elected Premier, three Vice Premiers were recalled from their posts and six new Vice Premiers were appointed.<sup>6</sup> Judging by many things, these changes have been caused by considerable economic and social losses due to the poorly prepared and implemented money reform at the end of 2009.

The new members of the above-mentioned party and government bodies were appointed on the initiative and by agreement of Kim Jong-il. They were called to become assistants, advisers and even tutors of Kim Jong-un.

As a result, experienced functionaries are now present in every sphere of party work and state management, on whom Kim Jong-un can firmly rely and who have been brought to the highest bodies of the party and state with due account of their ability, first, to give good advice to the young leader, and secondly, to take upon themselves everyday supervision of individual fields of work until the young leader accumulates enough experience.

Such persons in foreign policy are, probably, the present nominal head of state Kim Yong-nam, member of the Politburo Presidium and Chairman of the SPA Presidium; member of CC Politburo and Vice Premier Kang Sok-ju (both

worked at the international department of the CC WPK and the Foreign Ministry), Politburo member Choe Thae-bok, CC WPK secretary and Chairman of SPA, and also candidate member of the Politburo, secretary of the CC WPK and head of its international department Kim Yong-il.

As far as military matters are concerned, Kim Jong-un can rely on advice and experience of such military commanders as the Chief of General Staff, Vice Marshal Ri Yong-ho, the minister of the People's Armed Forces of the DPRK Vice Marshal Kim Yong-chun, the First Deputy Head of the General Political Department of the Korean People's Army, General of the Army Kim Jong-gak, and the Chief of Staff of the NDC, General of the Army Hyon Chol-hae.

On the whole, such system of leadership during a transition period is practically identical to the one used in the DPRK during the first years after Kim Il-sung's death.

So far Kim Jong-un is mostly playing the role of a symbol, the "figure head" of the regime. However, in the future he will hardly share power with anybody; like his father after the death of Kim Il-sung he will rule single-handedly, but relying on the circle of people who have been brought into the highest party and government bodies by Kim Jong-il. Numerous personnel shifts during the 2009-2010 period show that the now demised leader did all he could to evaluate properly the competence and abilities of individual members of the leadership, as well as the highest party and government bodies.

It would be appropriate to try to answer the question as to what – the army or the party – occupies the leading position in the political system of the DPRK. Three circumstances can give a clear answer to it. First, the announcement of the death of Kim Jong-il was signed by the above-mentioned bodies in the following order: CC WPK, CMC WPK, NDC DPRK, Presidium of SPA DPRK, Cabinet of Ministers of the DPRK. Secondly, Kim Jong-un holds the post of the Vice Chairman of the CMC WPK and is not member of the NDC. Thirdly, it was said in the jointly written editorial article on the New Year that all servicemen should "take to their heart the thoughts of the party" and protect its CC headed by Kim Jong-un "even at the cost of their life."<sup>7</sup> The present and last editorial articles show that although the army remains the "support" and even the "main driving force" of the revolution, it plays this role according to the will and plan of the party.

It is hardly possible that there would be a kind of a "tandem", for example, with Jang Song-thaek, husband of Kim Jong-il's sister. There is the absolute leader who concentrates power in his hands and around himself. Other members of the DPRK leadership (they are called "corresponding officials" in the country), even if they rival with one another, it would only be for the right to be heard by the new leader more often.

Undoubtedly, family members, as is known from history of many countries, quite frequently become confidants of the ruler and are more trusted. So, Jang Song-thaek's influence can become quite weighty in questions of domestic policy and selection of personnel.

However, assertions of some analysts that Jang Song-thaek is allegedly the “prince regent” for the new leader seem far-fetched and unconvincing. His party (candidate member of the CC WPK Politburo) and government (Deputy Chairman of the NDC) posts are somewhat lower than those of the Chief of the General Staff Ri Yong-ho, who is one of the three members of the CC WPK Politburo Presidium still alive (along with Kim Yong-nam and Choe Yong-rim). Besides, Ri Yong-ho, along with Kim Jong-un himself, holds the post of Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the Workers’ Party of Korea.

As follows from the jointly written New Year article of the three leading Korean newspapers of January 1, 2012, which sums up the results of the past year and maps out tasks for the coming year, there will be no visible changes in the political course pursued under Kim Jong-il. The party, army and people are offered the already known formula – “Kim Jong-un is Kim Jong-il today.”<sup>8</sup>

In assessing the possibility of any future changes it is important to bear in mind that, as experience of the DPRK itself shows, the formal post held by a person in the North Korean official hierarchy often does not correspond to his real political “weight.” After the death of Kim Il-sung, as members of the “old guard” left the political scene, Kim Jong-il’s closest advisers were not officials of the highest rank, not the ageing Politburo members, or ministers, but younger and energetic first deputy heads of important sections of the CC WPK. Jang Song-thaek emerged precisely from this circle of leaders.

Taking into consideration the age of the present leaders of the DPRK (among the 27 members and candidate members of the CC Politburo still alive 11 men are over 80, 10 over 70 and only one is below 60), the repetition of the same scenario of changing the leadership within the next two-to-three years seems quite possible. So Kim Jong-un has a chance to surround himself with younger people selected by him personally, if he manages to stay in power within the next few years. In this case Jang Song-thaek and his wife Kim Kyong-hui have a definite advantage compared with other members of the higher leadership – both of them are noticeably younger: 66 years of age each.

Most experts and politicians tend to see a clearer picture of the situation in the North Korean leadership during the celebration of the 100th birth anniversary of Kim Il-sung (April 15, 2012). During that period it will be possible that a new leader will take one of the highest party or government posts (General Secretary of the CC WPK, Chairman of the National Defense Commission, or any other). True, it may happen that one of the offices of Kim Jong-il will remain his “forever,” as was the case of Kim Il-sung, who remained with the title “President” for all time to come, and a new post will be chosen for Kim Jong-un.

Such appointments can take place at the forthcoming conference of the WPK (definitely extraordinary) in mid-April 2012 and a regular annual session of the Supreme People’s Assembly of the DPRK that takes place in early April.

The party forum and the SPA session, which are likely to be timed to the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Kim Il-sung’s birth, as many experts believe,

will enable those concerned to understand how firm the positions of the new leader of the country are.

The DPRK leadership, as follows from the decrees of the Politburo of the CC WPK and calls of the CC WPK and the WPK Central Military Commission, regards this data as one of the most important events in the country's life and intends to use the occasion for the further legitimization of the regime and stabilization of the political and economic situation in the country.

The content of three jointly-written New Year editorial articles for the years 2010-2012 shows, among other things, that the DPRK leadership has been making certain corrections to **economic and social policy** in recent years, namely, more emphasis is now laid on the development of the light industry, agriculture and improvement of the well-being of the population.<sup>9</sup>

According to information supplied by the Central Telegraph Agency of Korea, Kim Jong-il made 65 trips around the country in 2010 connected with economic matters, twice as many as in 2009. As to Kim Jong-un, he made 61 such trips after the WPK conference prior to 2012, 33 of them together with his father.<sup>10</sup>

The point is that in the course of tackling the task to build a "strong and prosperous power" put forward in 1998, this goal in ideology (absolute domination of the official ideas of *chuchkhe*) and in the military sphere (creation of nuclear weapon) has already been achieved. It was supposed to reach this goal in the economic sphere, too, in 2012. The editorial article of this year, apparently reflecting definite problems connected with reaching this goal, instead of "power" wrote of a "strong and prosperous state" and reminded of the food problem existing in the country and the urgent need for its solution in order to build such state.<sup>11</sup>

The country's economic policy is now distinguished by greater emphasis on the need to introduce scientific and technological achievements, primarily, the original "*chuchkhe*" methods of the production of metals, fertilizers, computerization of production processes, in short, the creation of the so-called "economy of knowledge."<sup>12</sup> The countrywide congress of scientific-technical workers, which took place on March 31, 2010, was devoted to the problem of searching for ways to solve these tasks. The visit to China of the Chairman of the State Committee on Science and Technology of the DPRK Ri Ja-ban in August 2010 had the same aim in view.

A shortage of the domestic sources of accumulation for the modernization and technological rearmament of the economy gave an impetus to the adoption of a whole range of measures to draw investments from abroad and improve state management in this sphere. In January 2010 the city of Rason, which is the center of the oldest trade economic zone in the DPRK on the shore of the Sea of Japan, was declared a city governed from the federal center. At about the same time an announcement was made about the setting up of the Tephun International Investors Group and the State Development Bank called upon to draw and consolidate foreign investments resources.<sup>13</sup>

Another step in this direction was the creation of two special economic zones along the border with the PRC on Hwanggumpyong and Wihwado islands, which was endorsed by the decree of the Presidium of the SPA of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of June 6, 2011. On June 8 and 9, 2011, the opening ceremonies of these zones were held in China, as well as of the zone of joint management and development of the Rason trade economic zone. There was also a meeting of the Korean-Chinese commission on the joint development and management of these zones. The Korean side was headed by Jang Song-thaek and the Chinese side – by Chen Deming, the PRC Minister of Commerce.

True, certain Chinese experts express doubts as to the ability of North Koreans to draw sufficient Chinese investments for the first two projects. They pay attention to the fact that Beijing is more interested in the Rason Project, which gives the PRC access to the Sea of Japan, or the “East Sea of Korea,” as it is called in the DPRK.<sup>14</sup>

In early February 2012 it became known that the PRC received on long-term lease for fifty years three of the six terminals in the South Korean port of Rajin and intends to invest in the development of the Rason trade economic zone about \$3 billion, and build an electric power plant, airport, railway line and other objects there.<sup>15</sup>

In the conditions of the western trade economic blockade and the irreconcilable position of South Korea, trade between the DPRK and China continued to grow at record rates. In 2011 alone the volume of trade turnover between the two countries increased by 62.5 percent and reached \$5.63 billion as against \$3.46 billion in 2010. The North Korean export to the PRC during that period more than doubled and reached \$2.46 billion, and import grew by only 33.8 percent. The main items of North Korean export were minerals, primarily, coal and iron ore, and that of import was oil.<sup>16</sup>

The marked growth of trade economic ties between the **DPRK and PRC** and their new quality have been a direct result of the unprecedentedly intensive political dialogue between the two countries at a summit level. Suffice it to recall that Kim Jong-il visited the PRC four times during 2010 and 2011.

The Chairman of the DPRK Cabinet of Ministers Choe Yong-rim made two visits to the PRC in that period. Besides, the Politburo member, secretary of the CC WPK and Chairman of the SPA Choe Thae-bok, after the termination of the WPK conference, went to Beijing to inform the Chinese leadership of its results and was received by Hu Jintao. In November 2010 he again visited the PRC as the head of a delegation of the SPA DPRK. The member of the Politburo of the CC WPK and Chairman of the Presidium of the SPA of the DPRK Kim Yong-nam visited the EXPO-2010 in Shanghai in April-May 2010, where he also met with Hu Jintao.

The Chinese side replied with visits of a number of high official delegations timed to remarkable dates in the history of the Chinese-North Korean relations.

On October 23-25, 2011, the member of the Standing Committee of the CC CPC Politburo, Vice Chairman of the State Council Li Keqiang was on a friend-

ly visit to the DPRK. He had meetings with Kim Jong-il, Chairman of the Presidium of the SPA of the DPRK Kim Yong-nam and the head of government Choe Yong-rim. An agreement on economic and technical cooperation between the governments of the two countries was signed.<sup>17</sup>

The visit of the possible future premier of the PRC to the Korean Peninsula had an ostentatiously balanced character – right after his visit to Pyongyang Li Keqiang immediately made an official visit to Seoul, where he met with the President of the Republic of Korea Lee Myung-bak and held negotiations with the Prime Minister of South Korea Kim Hwang-sik.<sup>18</sup>

In the North Li Keqiang received confirmation of Pyongyang's consent to a speedy resumption of the six-party negotiations, and in the South he reached agreement on doubling the swap line of the Chinese yuan-South Korean won line from 180 to 360 billion yuan within the next three years.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from that, a delegation of the CPC headed by the member of the Politburo of the CC CPC Li Yuanchao visited Pyongyang in June 2011. It held a “strategic dialogue” with the Korean side, which was represented by the member of the Politburo of the CC WPK and its secretary Choe Thae-bok.

Quite a few not so high officials from the PRC who visited the DPRK in 2010-2011 were received by Kim Jong-il, including the head of the International Liaison Department of the CC CPC Wang Jiarui in February 2010, and the PRC State Council member Dai Bingguo in December 2010.

On October 26, 2010, Kim Jong-il, together with members of the Central Military Commission and secretaries of the CC WPK, laid wreaths to the tombs of Mao Zedong's son Mao Anying and other Chinese volunteers who gave their lives during the Korean War, as a sign of respect for the Chinese side.<sup>20</sup>

The main political result of these exchanges and symbolic signs was a consent of the Chinese leadership to continue rendering every assistance and support to its Northeast neighbor and ally. After the death of Kim Jong-il eight high Chinese officials, including Hu Jintao, visited the DPRK Embassy in Beijing to express their condolences. The Chinese side immediately adopted a decision to supply the DPRK with 500,000 tons of food products and 250,000 tons of oil.

The political and economic presence of the PRC in North Korea and China's intercession for North Korea in the international arena, which was especially vivid in China's blocking the attempts of the U.S.A., South Korea and their allies to condemn the DPRK for the alleged sinking of the South Korean corvette “Cheonan” in March 2010 and the bombardment of Yonphyondo Island in November 2010, prompted *The New York Times* to note acridly that China “was colonizing the DPRK.”<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, the state of the **relations of the United States with the DPRK**, which have still more deteriorated as a result of the above-mentioned incidents in 2010, and also the unresolved **nuclear problems of the Korean Peninsula** have alarmed certain representatives of the American foreign-policy establishment. The voices of the critics of the “strategic patience” course adopted by the Obama

administration toward the DPRK prompted by South Korea, which believed in a rapid crumbling of the North Korean regime, began to be heard ever louder.<sup>22</sup>

The sides continued, as before, to disregard mutual concerns. The North Korean proposals on the resumption of the six-party negotiations and bilateral American-North Korean contacts, which were transmitted to the American side through the Governor of New Mexico, B. Richardson, who visited the DPRK on December 16-21, 2010, were actually ignored by the U.S.A.

In reply Kim Jong-il and his “heir” ostentatiously left unanswered the request for a meeting with the country’s leaders by the former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who headed a delegation of former presidents and premiers of several countries visiting the DPRK.

A spokesman of the DPRK Foreign Ministry has resolutely condemned the actions of the U.S.A. in Libya, having pointed to a direct connection of the nuclear disarmament of Libya with the subsequent aggression against that country. The North Korean side also emphasized that the Libyan events confirmed the correctness of the path they have chosen, namely, the “priority of the army” and the creation of the means of self-defense, which proved quite valuable for preventing war and protecting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>23</sup>

A dialogue on human rights, which began with a trip of a U.S. State Department delegation headed by the United States Special Envoy for Human Rights in the DPRK, R. King, to the DPRK on May 24-28, 2011, was not continued. True, one of its results was the release from prison “on humane considerations” of the U.S. citizen Jon Yong-su, sentenced in the DPRK.

Contacts along the “second” and “third” tracks were more successful. After mutual visits of the delegations of the Associated Press and the Central Telegraph Agency of Korea in January 2012 an AP office was opened in Pyongyang. A delegation of the Asian Society and the son of the well-known American religious leader Billy Graham have also visited the DPRK. Exhibition performances of North Korean taekwondo athletes took place in Boston and New York in June 2011.

By the end of August 2011 the Obama administration has obviously realized that the direct forcible pressure on the DPRK was fruitless and decided to render it urgent humanitarian aid to a sum of \$900,000 in connection with floods that swept the country.

In October 2011 the United States appointed the experienced diplomat Glyn Davies, a new Special Representative of the Secretary of State for North Korea Policy. At about the same time the new head of the U.S. delegation at the six-party talks Clifford Hart took up his duties. It is indicative that South Korea also replaced his previous representative at these negotiations – the new person was Lim Sung-nam.

The U.S.A. and the DPRK resumed contacts with a view to working out the conditions for the resumption of the six-party negotiations. In July 2011 in New York and in October in Geneva the so-called fact-finding contacts took place

between the two sides. The Americans were interested, above all, in North Korea stopping work on the development of its uranium nuclear program and also abandoning cooperation with Iran in the sphere of nuclear technologies. On November 18, 2011, the Central Telegraph Agency of Korea issued an official commentary in which Pyongyang assured Washington that it did not help Iran create nuclear weapons.<sup>24</sup> At the same time the Koreans continued to insist on their right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. On November 30 a representative of the DPRK Foreign Ministry made a statement informing about successes in the construction of an experimental light-water reactor and production of low-enriched uranium fuel.<sup>25</sup>

Judging by reports of the western mass media, by the middle of December 2011 the sides succeeded to reach a compromise on this issue and were about to announce it on December 17, but the death of Kim Jong-il prevented them from doing it. However, the Americans hurried to state that they “were open for diplomatic contacts” with the new leadership of the DPRK.<sup>26</sup>

On the results of the third meeting of representatives of North Korea and the United States in Beijing on February 23-24, 2012 the former agreed to introduce a moratorium on nuclear tests and the launchings of long-range missiles and promised to stop work at a plant enriching uranium at the nuclear center in Yongbyon and allow the IAEA to inspect it.

In reply the United States confirmed that it had no hostile intentions with regard to the DPRK and is ready to make steps to improve relations “in the spirit of mutual respect, sovereignty and equality.” True, such promises have been given more than once in the past two decades, which did not prevent the two sides from finding themselves on the brink of an armed conflict several times.

Washington also promised to supply the DPRK with 240,000 tons of foodstuffs by monthly consignments of 24,000 tons. However, it would be too far-fetched to assert, as quite a few analysts did, that the DPRK exchanged nuclear weapon for rice. It was rather another attempt to make contacts with the United States more stable. Pyongyang announced that its moratorium would only be valid for the time of a “fruitful dialogue” with Washington.

Meanwhile, the data published by the U.S. Department of Commerce show that the deliveries of foodstuffs and other commodities from the United States to the DPRK in 2011 increased more than twofold as against 2010 (from \$1.9 million to \$5.1 million), although they were only one-tenth of the 2008 level, when the figure was \$52.2 million.<sup>27</sup>

It looks like the Korean “chessboard” will be a scene of a new combination: the United States, having failed to get China’s agreement for the DPRK disintegration, now tries to make an advance “from the rear” – certain American analysts hint on the possibility of establishing something like “strategic partnership” with the DPRK under the new leader. The North Koreans, who hardly feel very comfortable with the growing dependence on China, are prepared “to play into the hands” of the Americans. The Vice Foreign Minister of the DPRK Ri Yong-

ho who was on a visit to the United States in early March, according to mass media reports, met with Henry Kissinger and invited him to visit his country.

Kim Jong-il's trip to Russia, which was regarded by most Seoul analysts as successful, has forced Lee Myung-bak's administration to make appropriate conclusions: in a couple of days after its completion, on August 30, 2011, one of the authors and promoters of a harsh course toward the DPRK, the South Korean Minister of Unification Hyun In-taek was fired because his implacable stand toward North Korea became a cause of the unprecedented worsening of **inter-Korean relations** – the worst during the entire postwar history.

It should be borne in mind that this rollback began when Lee Myung-bak's administration, which came to power in the Republic of Korea in February 2008, refused to fulfill agreements reached at the Second Inter-Korean Summit between Kim Jong-il and Roh Moo-hyun in October 2007, and also when the Republic of Korea expressed the desire to “play the first fiddle” in resolving the nuclear problem, promising the DPRK economic assistance, and even security guarantees, instead. The North Koreans could not agree with the latter, because they held the view that the main threat to their security came from the United States, and this was why they were forced to resort to creating nuclear weapon.<sup>28</sup>

The inter-Korean relations still more deteriorated in 2010 at the time of the incident with the corvette “Cheonan” and the bombardment of Yonphyondo Island. The North Koreans categorically denied their involvement in the incident with the South Korean vessel and insisted that their experts be allowed to participate in the investigation. Availing themselves of Seoul's refusal, they accused the South Koreans of fabricating the incident. Doubts as to the DPRK involvement in the matter have been voiced not only in South Korea, but also in the United States; in particular, the former U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea Donald Gregg contributed an article to *The New York Times* on the subject, which evoked great repercussions.<sup>29</sup> On the whole, Seoul and its allies have not succeeded in winning broad international support of their version of the “Cheonan” incident, all the more so in persuading the UN Security Council to censure the DPRK.

Meanwhile, in an interval between these two incidents the North and the South managed to agree on another meeting of members of disunited families, which took place in Kymgansan from October 30 to November 5, 2010.

At the beginning of 2011 the North Koreans launched a virtual “peaceful offensive” toward the southern neighbor. Apparently, Pyongyang took into account the position of the PRC which had to rebuff criticism from its experts in the country, and also those from abroad, for the actual support of the DPRK in the incidents of 2010. The North Koreans anticipated (or were informed by the Chinese) that B. Obama and Hu Jintao during the latter's visit to the United States in January 2011 in their joint statement called on the Korean states to start a “sincere and constructive dialogue” with a view to improving relations.

Pyongyang has decided, at least formally, to support the new Chinese three-stage plan on resuming the six-party talks, which took into account the demands

of the Republic of Korea and its chief ally the United States. The PRC proposals envisaged a dialogue on the nuclear problem of the Korean Peninsula as the first stage, resumption of American-North Korean bilateral contacts as the second stage, and resumption of the six-party talks themselves as the third stage.

In any case, the Joint Statement of the Government, Political Parties and Public Organizations of the DPRK published on January 5, 2011, called on the South Korean side to resume unconditionally the inter-Korean dialogue (the conditions presented by the Republic of Korea included demands of apologies for the incidents of 2010). As the first measure to improve relations the North Koreans proposed to renounce hostile propaganda against each other.<sup>30</sup>

Three days later the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland announced the restoration of certain communication channels between the North and the South, and also proposed to resume contacts concerning the implementation of the Kymgansan tourist project and the Kaesong industrial zone.<sup>31</sup>

On January 21, 2011, the Minister of People's Armed Forces of the DPRK addressed an open letter to the Minister of National Defense of the Republic of Korea containing a proposal to hold high-level military negotiations aimed at reaching a *détente* on the Korean Peninsula. On February 3, 2011, the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK addressed a message to the parliament of the Republic of Korea calling for a dialogue between parliaments of the two countries on the problems of inter-Korean relations.

Some of these initiatives received a certain impetus (there have been contacts at a working level between military officials of the two countries), although they ended without result. Contacts have also been established between scientists of the two countries with a view to studying the volcanic activity of Paektusan Mountain, sacred for the Koreans. However, some contacts have only aggravated the problems facing the two sides due to their irreconcilable positions.

One of the most acute problems was that of resumption of tourist trips of South Koreans to Kymgansan. The South Korean government refuses to give approval to this undertaking without receiving official apologies of the North Korean side for the incident involving a South Korean tourist shot by a North Korean sentry in the summer of 2008. As a result, the North Koreans announced the confiscation of the property belonging to the South Korean company Hyundai Asan in that district and evaluated at about \$350 million, began to look for alternative influx of tourists to the zone, and invited Chinese tourists there. With this aim in view, a special zone of international tourism in Kymgansan Mountains was organized by a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK on April 29, 2011.

However, these efforts have not resulted in a mass influx of Chinese tourists to Kymgansan, although their number in the DPRK greatly increased in 2011. Meanwhile, the North Koreans unofficially hint to their fellow compatriots in the south that the Hyundai objects in Kymgansan are being preserved intact.

The Kaesong zone remains the only major economic project which withstood all inter-Korean “frosts.” At present there are more than 120 medium-sized and small firms of the Republic of Korea working there, and almost 50,000 North Korean laborers and specialists work at their enterprises. The spare parts, equipment and semi-manufactured goods imported there and manufactured commodities exported from there comprise a lion’s share of inter-Korean trade. In 2011, due to additional sanctions introduced by the Republic of Korea after the 2010 incidents, its volume diminished by 10 percent and amounted to \$1.71 billion.

Another serious obstacle in inter-Korean relations has been the launching by various South Korean right-wing organizations and groups of defectors from the DPRK of balloons toward North Korea, which, along with money, consumer goods, etc. carried leaflets and other propaganda stuff calling for the overthrow of the existing regime.

As has already been a case in the history of inter-Korean relations, the main events in 2011 took place behind the scenes. The South Korean President, realizing that his political role in inter-Korean relations could hardly be assessed as positive, established secret contacts with the DPRK while in Beijing in May 2011 with a view to arranging a summit meeting. The essence of the South Korean proposals was contained in the condition that should the DPRK apologize for the 2010 incidents, which looked for the North Koreans as the expression of “regret” for them and a promise to renounce nuclear weapon, South Korea would be ready to hold three inter-Korean summits during 2011-2012 in Panmunjeom, Pyongyang and, finally, Seoul, inviting Kim Jong-il to the Second Nuclear Security Summit planned there at the end of March 2012. The very fact of such contacts was made public by an official of Cheongwadae (Blue House), which was sharply repudiated by a spokesman of the National Defense Commission, who said that the DPRK did not intend to do business with the “treacherous group of Lee Myung-bak.”<sup>32</sup>

Using as a pretext the fact that Lee Myung-bak’s administration did not send official condolences in connection with the death of Kim Jong-il, but only expressed regret addressed to the citizens of North Korea, the National Defense Commission of the DPRK confirmed this position in its statement of December 30, 2011.<sup>33</sup> It cannot be excluded that Pyongyang put an end to hopes to reach an agreement on anything serious with the President of South Korea, who will become a “lame duck” by the middle of the year, because he has no right to be reelected for another term at the elections in December 2012.

At the same time the North Koreans stated that they were ready to let in all South Koreans who wished to come for the funeral of Kim Jong-il. However, the South Korean authorities allowed only two groups to go to Pyongyang on a private visit. They were headed by the widow of the former president of South Korea Kim Dae-jung and the widow of one of the sons of Chon Chu-yong, who heads Hyundai Asan. Both of them had a brief meeting with Kim Jon-un and were received by Kim Yong-nam, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme

People's Assembly. But the time for discussing the vital problems stirring the two sides was definitely inappropriate.

**The relations of the DPRK with Japan** remained in an impasse. North Korean scholarly and public organizations published from time to time memoranda and statements accusing the Japanese of terrorism for the murder of Queen Min in 1885, claimed their country's right to Dokdo Island and to rename the Sea of Japan to the "East Sea of Korea."

At the same time in March 2011, after the natural disaster and terrible accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, the DPRK Red Cross Society donated \$100,000 to the Japanese Red Cross Society.

In October 2011 Kim Jong-il said in an interview to ITAR-TASS that in order to normalize relations with the DPRK Japan "should first of all draw a line under the past crimes committed against our country and our people."<sup>34</sup>

Having come across the harsh diplomatic pressure of the U.S.A. and its allies, the DPRK noticeably stepped up its efforts in other directions of foreign policy during 2010-2011, for one, in working with the leading specialized agencies of the UN, participating in big international forums, and developing contacts with countries of the European Union, Africa and Southeast Asia, and first and foremost, Vietnam and Laos.

The Chairman of the Presidium of the SPA Kim Yong-nam visited Gabon, Gambia and Senegal in March-April 2010; in Senegal he took part in the opening ceremony of the "Monument to Revival of Africa" put up with the DPRK assistance.

The DPRK Foreign Minister Pak Ui-chun made a trip to Southeast Asian countries (Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Indonesia) in July 2010 and took part in the work of the regional forum of ASEAN in Hanoi. A year later he participated in similar events in Bali, and also visited Mongolia, Malaysia and Singapore.

During the same period the President of Laos and leaders of such international bodies as the World Health Organization, the International Red Cross, the World Food Program and the Interparliamentary Union, as well as the Deputy Secretary General of the UN visited the DPRK.

Delegations of the European Parliament, and also of the parliaments of Germany, Italy, UK, France and a number of other European countries have visited the DPRK. In turn, the Chairman of the DPRK Supreme National Assembly Choe Thae-bok visited Britain in March-April 2011, and the DPRK parliamentary delegation made a trip to several European countries in November 2011.

North Korean athletes took part in the World Football Championship in the South African Republic and in the 16th Asian Games in Guangzhou (PRC) in 2010, and in September 2011 they held the world championship in taekwondo organized according to the rules of the International Taekwondo Federation (as against the World Federation of Taekwondo recognized by the International Olympic Committee).

The years 2010 and 2011 were a period of a noticeable revitalization of **Russia's policy on the Korean Peninsula**. In 2010 Russian diplomacy, using both

bilateral channels and UN opportunities, played the decisive role in preventing a large-scale armed conflict between the North and the South of Korea after the incident on Yonphyondo Island. The year ended with a visit of the DPRK Foreign Minister Pak Ui-chun to the Russian Federation on December 11-16. He had negotiations with his Russian colleague Sergei Lavrov and was received by the Speaker of the Federation Council Sergei Mironov.

In 2011 Moscow concentrated on the search for ways to resume the six-party negotiations on the nuclear problem of the Korean Peninsula and the creation of an economic foundation for a stable peace and cooperation in the area.

These problems were discussed during a visit to the DPRK of the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation A. Borodavkin on March 11-14, 2011. The Russian side advocated the immediate resumption of the six-party negotiations and emphasized the importance of the DPRK undertaking a number of practical constructive steps in the interests of the negotiation process and declaring readiness to return to the negotiation table without any preconditions on the basis of the Joint Statement of the PRC, DPRK, Russia, Republic of Korea, U.S.A. and Japan of September 19, 2005. North Korea should also introduce a moratorium on producing and testing nuclear weapons, and also launching missiles with the use of ballistic technologies. It should also agree on inspection of the object enriching uranium by IAEA experts and inclusion of the "uranium dossier" of the DPRK on the agenda of the six-party negotiations, and invite IAEA inspectors to return to the nuclear center in Yongbyon.<sup>35</sup>

With due account of the 2010 events, the Russian side advocated the resumption of a dialogue and the establishment of cooperation between the North and the South of Korea and promised to assist in facilitating this process. It was admitted that the Russian proposals to start tripartite projects on linking the railway networks of Russia, the DPRK and the Republic of Korea, the construction of a gas pipeline from Russia to the Republic of Korea through the DPRK territory, and the building of an electric power transmission line along the same route are quite promising.<sup>36</sup>

A report issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry on March 14, 2011 on the results of consultations in Pyongyang noted that the Korean side voiced its support of these approaches to the above-mentioned tripartite economic projects, as well as the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.<sup>37</sup>

On that very day the Russian mass media reported, referring to the press service of the Russian Ministry of Finance, that Moscow is ready to resume negotiations on the settlement of the DPRK debt to Russia reaching \$11 billion.<sup>38</sup> Running ahead, we should note that the regular round of these negotiations took place in June 2011, and by September the two sides agreed in the main on the scheme of resolving the problem.<sup>39</sup>

In the replies of a representative of the DPRK Foreign Ministry to questions of the Central Telegraph Agency of Korea on the results of A. Borodavkin's visit published on March 15, 2011, it was noted that the Korean side was ready to take

part in the negotiations without any preconditions and was not against any discussions of the problems put forward by the Russian side on the principle of “simultaneous actions” contained in the Joint Statement of the Participants in the Six-Party Talks of September 19, 2005. Thus the Koreans gave it to understand that while accepting the Russian proposals they had the right to expect certain reciprocal steps on the part of the United States and its allies.<sup>40</sup>

In his interview to the Central TV of China on April 7, 2011, on the eve of his visit to the PRC, President D. Medvedev of Russia paid much attention to the Korean subject and touched on the plans of the Russian side to include the above-mentioned problems in high-level political discussion. The head of the Russian state spoke, first, for continuing contacts with the DPRK on the nuclear problem; secondly, for granting it “certain impetus” in order to make Pyongyang understand that “there is no alternative to cooperation and that nuclear energy and nuclear programs should be absolutely peaceful. It is only in this case that success might be achieved.”<sup>41</sup>

The discussion of these problems was continued during a visit to the DPRK of the Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation M. Fradkov, who met with Kim Jong Il on May 17, 2011. Although official reports of the meeting were very brief, due to obvious reasons, the information in the Korean Central Telegraph Agency’s report about the presents, which the guest from Russia gave to Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un, showed that Moscow de facto recognized the latter as his father’s heir. This was done in the same manner as in the 1980s, when high, and not too high, Soviet delegations, along with presents to Kim Il-sung had something to give to his successor Kim Jong-il.<sup>42</sup>

However, the main subject discussed by M. Fradkov in Pyongyang became clear only next month when the Russian and foreign news media published reports about a possible meeting between the North Korean leader and President D. Medvedev in Vladivostok, where the Soviet leader was supposed to arrive to see preparations for the APEC summit. But the meeting did not take place.

Although the Kremlin has officially denied rumors about the forthcoming Russian-North Korean summit, certain mass media continued to assert that “negotiations were indeed planned and the Kremlin was prepared for it.” As the *Kommersant* wrote, the reason for the breakdown of the meeting was the leakage of information about the plans of Kim’s trip to Vladivostok. In view of this the North Korean side, worried as it was over Kim Jong-il’s safety, cancelled it.<sup>43</sup> There were other versions, too. For instance the POLIT.RU site, referring to intelligence sources, asserted that the sides had differences on the agenda of the meeting.<sup>44</sup>

However, on August 20 it became clear that the visit had been indeed planned, when a report appeared on the site of the President of Russia about Kim Jong-il’s visit to the Russian Federation which began on that day and “the main event of it was to be a meeting with D. Medvedev.”<sup>45</sup>

Such meeting took place in Ulan-Ude on August 24, 2011. Its main result was the confirmed readiness of the DPRK to return to the six-party talks without pre-

conditions and in the course of them to resolve the problem of introducing a moratorium on nuclear tests and launchings of intercontinental ballistic missiles.<sup>46</sup>

The economic component of the meeting was a political approval at the top level of the project of building a gas pipeline from Russia to the Republic of Korea via the territory of North Korea. In turn, the President of the Republic of Korea Lee Myung-bak supported this project in a number of his speeches in the autumn of 2011 and confirmed it during his meeting with the Russian President in St. Petersburg in early November 2011.

Another important event has passed almost unnoticed against this backdrop, namely, that on August 25-27, simultaneously with Kim Jong-il's trip, there was a regular, Fifth, Session of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade Economic and Scientific-Technological Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the DPRK in Pyongyang, which was preceded by the Russian decision to grant the DPRK 50,000 tons of wheat as a food aid.

Although the two sides have not yet reached the stage of tripartite meetings to discuss the gas project, bilateral contacts between Gazprom and representatives of the DPRK and RK proceeded well enough during the autumn of 2011. The project was finalized in the Russian-North Korean direction during a visit of the Minister of Oil Industry of the DPRK Kim Hui-yong to the Russian Federation on September 13-20 and his talks with the chairman of the Gazprom Board A. Miller. At the end of November-beginning of December 2011 there was a meeting of the Russian-North Korean working group in Moscow on the construction of the gas pipeline.

As follows from an interview of the Russian Ambassador in Pyongyang V. Sukhinin, the new leader of the DPRK Kim Jong-un also supports the construction project of the gas pipeline, and contacts on the subject between the corresponding departments of the two countries continue.<sup>47</sup>

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On the whole, the preceding two years have shown that the possibilities of Russian-North Korean political and economic interaction have not been exhausted. Russia remains a serious and independent participant in solving the problems of the Korean Peninsula.

The death of the former leader of the DPRK was in the center of world attention and caused a wave of the most varied repercussions and forecasts. Many leaders in the West (the U.S.A. and EU) and in the East (Japan, South Korea) do not conceal their worries over the possible course of the new Pyongyang leadership.

"The moment of truth" has come to all those who have interest in the Peninsula. They will have to ascertain their position toward the new leader of that country. He has not yet scored any achievements, neither has he made any blunders that could smear his political reputation and make him unacceptable partner.

Our partners in the six-party negotiations should be recommended not to push young Kim into the Cold War trenches (attempts are already being made to “demonize” him by leakages of certain intelligence information about his allegedly “terrible” temper and responsibility for the bombardment of Yonphyondo Island in November 2010), but, on the contrary, give him a chance by demonstrating readiness to regard him as a partner. The partner countries should propose jointly to search for resolving controversial problems, try to do away with certain real apprehensions which do exist in the DPRK on seeing the fate of the leaders of certain countries living through the Arab Spring, and help dispel other fears (perhaps, unsubstantiated) felt by the North Korean side.

The schedule of the major international forums in 2012 gives Russia an exceptional chance to “introduce the new DPRK leader to the outer world.” An invitation to the APEC Summit in Vladivostok in September 2012 as a guest could allow him to make an acquaintance of the leaders of the major world powers, primarily, the nearest neighbors, and, possibly, to open a new page in the DPRK relations with some of them.

To the South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, during the four years of whose rule his country’s relations with the DPRK took a turn to the worst of the Cold War time, Vladivostok will give the only chance to hold an inter-Korean summit and improve his unenviable political heritage in the inter-Korean relations.

Such trip could also open new opportunities for diplomatic maneuver with a view to reviving the six-party negotiations on the nuclear problem of the Korean Peninsula.

In these circumstances and taking into account the practically complete absence of information about and a great interest in the new DPRK leader, the leaders of the U.S.A., Japan and other states could find an opportunity to meet with him on a “neutral territory,” in Vladivostok, quite acceptable. Russia could play the role of a mediator in organizing such meetings.

Besides, Vladivostok is the only acceptable place for the North Koreans from the point of view of Kim Jong-un’s personal security. They will never agree to send him to Seoul or elsewhere (perhaps, with the exception of China).

The main thing is that this step could enable Moscow to win back a political initiative in Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific Region after President Obama put forward the idea of Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2011, and thus demonstrate the existence of Russian own approaches to solution of Asian problems.

Such invitation could exert the most favorable influence on the forthcoming steps of the DPRK leadership in the international arena and inside the country and make them more responsible and predictable. The complex international situation and the difficult domestic economic situation, the consent of the DPRK to resume the six-party negotiations on the nuclear problem without preconditions, and numerous attempts to improve inter-Korean relations during 2011 show that the new leader and his close advisers, if one is to believe assertions about the intention

to follow the course mapped out by Kim Jong-il, will quite probably try to use the invitation for a dialogue rather than turn away from the doors opened for them.

Besides, this invitation could have a positive effect on the stabilization of the situation in the DPRK and the consolidation of the new leader's positions, who could thus gain certain international recognition. Thus the possibility of the struggle for power in the North Korean upper crust, on which certain foreign "well-wishers" count, would be reduced.

The active foreign policy proclaimed by Russia presupposes the presence of well-thought-out national interests and initiatives for their implementation. With regard to Korea they boil down to the following two tasks – the prevention of threats to the security of Russia emerging from the territory of the Korean Peninsula and assistance to reconciliation and economic cooperation between the two Korean states with Russia's participation. Both these tasks are quite urgent in the light of the forthcoming summit and Russia's chairmanship in APEC. Russia is given a chance to use for their solution the new opportunities created by the latest developments on the Peninsula.

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