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Kim Jong Un's New Year Address and the Nuclear Test: a Prelude to the "Ambitious Blueprint"

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First Secretary of the Worker's Party of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Kim Jong Un's New Year address has been released. Not even a week later the country's fourth nuclear test was carried out. As expected, the self-centered explanations both in Korea and abroad have been confusing. If the New Year address and the nuclear test are to be understood properly, we should move beyond superficial explanations of the verbiage or analyzing the contents. Instead we need to carefully interpret how they view the current state of affairs in their country and through what kind of spirit are they striving to bring about favorable outcomes by going into the minds and hearts of the DPRK policy-makers. After doing this, we must finally judge what kind of influence the DPRK's efforts will exert on the current situation.

The most important characteristic of this year's New Year address is that it is a prelude to the Seventh Congress of the Worker's Party of Korea which will be held for the first time in thirty-six years. The militant slogan of the party and people in 2016 is evident: "Let us usher in a golden age in building a thriving nation this year when the Seventh Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea is to be held!" The address also serves notice that "The congress will proudly review the successes our Party has achieved in the revolution and construction under the wise guidance of the great leaders, and unfold an ambitious blueprint for hastening final victory for our revolution." Therefore, this year's New Year

address can be seen as an advanced look at the blueprint both for 2016 and for the Seventh Congress of the Worker's Party.

The Domestic Blueprint: A Strong Country Based on Economy, Politics, Military, and Civilization

The 2016 New Year address begins by briefly listing the achievements of the previous year and then moves on to drawing up this year's blueprint under the framework of the three revolutionary capabilities – North Korea, South Korea, and the world which have formed the basic views of DPRK policymakers since the 1960s. Starting from the domestic blueprint, Kim Jong Un first emphasized that "We should concentrate all our efforts on building an economic giant to bring about a fresh turn in developing the country's economy and improving the people's standard of living," and in light of this went on to say, "Our Party maintains the improvement of the people's living conditions as the most important of the numerous state affairs." In the 2014 New Year address the following statement was made: "Strengthening defence capabilities is the most important of all state affairs, and the country's dignity, people's happiness and peace rest on powerful arms."

However, the blueprint does not differ significantly from the four major fronts policy of economy, political ideology, military, and civilization. Building an economically strong country is emphasized together with socialist political ideology, the

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country’s defense capacity, and building the best culture. Also, in order to “open the efflorescence of civilization of the age of the Workers’ Party” this year, through the Seventh Congress of the Worker’s Party, there is an emphasis on the supremacy of collectivist competition and self-strength for building a strong socialist country.

The Unification Blueprint: Adherence to Self-reliance, Peace, Great National Unity

Continuing on, the New Year address also draws a blueprint for “national reunification and improved inter-Korean relations.” This blueprint repeats the three main principles of self-reliance, peace, and great national unity from the July 4th Joint Communiqué. First, Kim Jong Un states that, “We should reject foreign intervention and resolve the issues of inter-Korean relations and national reunification independently in keeping with the aspirations and demands of the nation.” He goes on further saying, “The south Korean authorities should discontinue such a humiliating act as going on a tour of foreign countries touting for cooperation in resolving the internal issues of the nation.” Moving on to the second principle he states, “It is fundamental to realizing the country’s reunification to prevent the danger of war and safeguard peace and security in the Korean peninsula,” and later goes on to say, “The U.S. and south Korean authorities must discontinue their extremely dangerous aggressive war exercises and suspend acts of military provocation that aggravates tension in the Korean peninsula.” On the third principle Kim Jung Un states, “If they are sincere about improving inter-Korean relations and reunifying the country peacefully, the south Korean authorities must not seek pointless confrontation of systems, but make it clear that they intend to respect

and implement with sincerity the three principles for national reunification, the June 15 Joint Declaration, and the October 4 Declaration.” He additionally stated, “We will also have an open-minded discussion on the reunification issue, one of the national issues, with anyone who is truly desirous of national reconciliation and unity, peace and reunification.” To read this blueprint correctly, we must first note that the DPRK’s strategy toward South Korea is pursued on three fronts – diplomacy, military, and politics. Secondly we must pay attention to the fact that when the DPRK says “anybody,” it does not truly mean that but rather they are pointing out their counterpart who should be following the DPRK style of self-reliance and peace. Therefore, inter-Korean relations in 2016 cannot be simplified down to pessimism and expecting military tensions or optimism with the hope of reconciliatory cooperation. Rather than looking at the relationship as one-dimensional, it should be tackled from a threefold complex perspective. Also, a policy which correctly understands and responds to the DPRK’s talk of “anybody” must be prepared.

The International Blueprint: Peace Treaty with the U.S. and the Nuclear Test

Finally, the New Year address provides a blueprint for strengthening the DPRK’s international capability by stating that the U.S. should forego its “hostile policy towards the DPRK,” and went on to state a demand of replacing “the Armistice Agreement with a peace pact to remove the danger of war, ease tension and create a peaceful environment in the Korean peninsula.” Going further the address says that, “Our Party and the government of our Republic will further strengthen solidarity with the peoples of the world who are opposed to aggression and war,

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domination and subordination, and develop relations of friendship and cooperation with all the countries that respect our national sovereignty and are friendly to us.”

In a statement released on October 17, 2015, a spokesperson for the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Relations said that, “There are two ways for ensuring peace on the peninsula. The first one is the Cold War way in which the DPRK has to bolster its capability for self-defence with its nuclear force as a pivot in every way so as to cope with the increased nuclear threat and war provocations of the U.S.” The spokesperson continued to say that, “The other way is for the U.S. to roll back its hostile policy towards the DPRK and respond to the call for concluding the peace treaty with the latter so as to ensure genuine and lasting peace based on confidence.” Furthermore, the spokesperson made it clear that if the U.S. evaded the conclusion of a peace agreement then it would see nothing but the “DPRK’s limitless bolstering of nuclear deterrence.” After receiving a negative response from the U.S. who continues to harbor doubts about the sincerity of the DPRK, the spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry of the DPRK continued repeating the same comments made before and on December 16, 2015 reconfirmed that if a peace treaty with the U.S. is not concluded then the DPRK does not have any intention on giving up its nuclear weapons.

The DPRK carried out its fourth nuclear weapon test on January 6, 2016. The government statement that followed made it clear that, “There can neither be suspended nuclear development nor nuclear dismantlement on the part of the DPRK unless the U.S. has rolled back its vicious hostile policy toward the former. The army and people of the DPRK will steadily escalate its nuclear deterrence of justice both in quality and quantity to reliably guarantee the future of the

revolutionary cause of Juche for all ages.”

However, in striking difference to their expectations, if they continue to strengthen their nuclear capabilities, the DPRK’s economic future looks even bleaker with each step.

An Anachronistic 19th Century-style Blueprint

The DPRK’s “ambitious blueprint” that was described in the 2016 New Year address is more nineteenth century than it is twenty-first century. The countries of East Asia were too late in building modern states through a strategy of cultivating domestic self-strength and seeking independent military and economic power in order to survive their modern encounters with the European countries that were moving toward and colonizing the East. In the end, Japan succeeded, Korea failed, and China went through a period of chaos. Twenty-first century Asia-Pacific states have kept the strengths of the nineteenth century blueprint while keeping busy drawing a new blueprint to supplement the weaknesses thereof to create something suitable for the twenty-first century. Actors using this new blueprint are networked states that have started to fuse into the matrix of modern states. The international stage in the current era has become a complex one where concepts such as emerging culture, ecological balance, knowledge of advanced technology, and joint governance are intertwined with the older concepts of national prosperity and military power, supplementing their limits altogether. The performance of the actors on this new stage incorporates competition, cooperation, and co-evolution that are suitable for a new fitness landscape in international relations of the twenty-first century. In this type of environment it will be difficult for the DPRK to find its footing using a nineteenth century blueprint.

A Twenty-First Century-style New Blueprint Needs to be Prepared

The “ambitious blueprint” that the DPRK will announce at the Seventh Congress of the Worker’s Party of Korea will have to be prepared in two stages as explained in detail in the book *Future of North Korea 2032: Coevolutionary Strategy for the Advancement* produced by the East Asia Institute. In the first step, the DPRK will have to pursue a threefold survival strategy by re-inventing its four major fronts based on the parallel strategy of security without nuclear weapons and economic development. Also, the DPRK’s economic development must be planned by accepting that inter-Korean relations should involve cooperation based on nationality rather than class. Secondly, the DPRK must overcome the outdated distinction between socialism and capitalism and simultaneously utilize the advanced capitalist countries of the U.S. and Japan and the advanced socialist country China. However, striving to succeed in the first step alone is insufficient to successfully survive in the new Asia-Pacific order of the twenty-first century. Therefore, a new transformative blueprint needs to be devised which is suitable for the fitness landscape of the new century, and this directly corresponds with the second stage.

If, rather than its current “ambitious blueprint,” the DPRK desires to build a rising twenty-first century nation and to draw a new blueprint suitable for the twenty-first century, its own independent effort should be given priority. At the same time, the Republic of Korea should enlist the help of the relevant neighboring countries including the U.S., China, Japan, and Russia to strengthen sanctions and deterrence against the DPRK’s poor choices such as developing nuclear weapons while at the same time pushing forward co-evolutionary efforts for a new

policy that can help the DPRK make positive choices such as a new *byungjin* policy based on non-nuclear national security and economic development. ■

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