



The Three Facets of Kim Jong Un's 2018 New Year's Speech

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KIM JONG UN'S 2018 NEW YEAR'S SPEECH HAS SPARKED BOTH anticipation and concern over a potential thaw in inter-Korean relations. The two Koreas became viciously hostile towards one another during the Korean War in the early 1950s, and the tough road from the July 4th South and North Joint Statement in 1972 to the Inter-Korean Summit in 2007 was paved with six instances of hope for reconciliation that ended in frustration over failure. Today's hope for another chance must not follow the tragic pattern of the past, so it is critical to establish an understanding of the true meaning of Kim Jong Un's New Year's Speech of January 1, 2018.

Conducting a content or big-data analysis of this speech will not provide an adequate understanding of the meaning that lies hidden beneath the text. This article introduces an Asian method of hermeneutics known as *yi yi ni zhi* (以意逆志), which can be translated as "using textual comprehension to trace the author's intent." This hermeneutical methodology requires readers to hear the speaker's inner voice (意) and examine their world so that they might place themselves in the mind of the speaker to better understand what that person is trying to pursue (志). It is our goal to forecast North Korea's trajectory for 2018 by aligning our perspective with that of Kim Jong Un and subsequently analyzing his speech from this point of view.

Kim Jong Un's New Year's Speech of 2018 did not differ greatly from those of the past. It began with a

summary of the successes of the prior year and proposed a blueprint for the upcoming year with the 'three revolutionary capabilities,' a concept employed since the mid-1960s, as its framework. Kim Jong Un began his address by extending sincere greetings to "all the people and service personnel, the compatriots in the South and abroad, and the progressive peoples and other friends across the world." He then stated that the country achieved an "indestructible milestone in the history of building a powerful socialist country" in 2017 even though "the moves of the United States and its vassal forces to isolate and stifle our country went to extremes." He emphasized "the accomplishment of the great, historic cause of perfecting the national nuclear forces" as "an outstanding success" of 2017, and then boasted of the "notable headway in carrying out the five-year strategy for national economic development" and "successes...made on the scientific and cultural fronts."

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Finally, he concluded that “all the successes...are the triumph of the *Juche*-oriented revolutionary line of the Workers’ Party of Korea” despite “the sanctions-and-blockade moves the United States and its vassal forces perpetrated more viciously than ever before to stamp out the rights to sovereignty, existence and development of the DPRK.”

However, North Korea’s counterintuitive effort to overcome the existing danger posed by nuclear weapons by developing additional nuclear technology is only worsening the security situation. Despite this, Kim Jong Un put forth the rallying cry, “Let us launch a revolutionary general offensive to achieve fresh victory on all fronts of building a powerful socialist country!” as if the achievement of building nuclear weapons in order to strengthen North Korea’s domestic capacity would prove to be the key factor in overcoming the current crisis. On the first front, he emphasizes that North Korea should “enhance the independence and *Juche* character of the national economy and improve the people’s standard of living” for “the socialist economic construction.” As “a shortcut to developing the self-sufficient economy” he gives “precedence to science and technology” and requests “innovations in economic planning and guidance.” On the second front, he proposes a comprehensive development of socialist culture.

On the third front, Kim Jong Un pushes for further consolidation of the country’s self-reliant defense capabilities, stating “the nuclear weapons research sector and the rocket industry should mass-produce nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles, the power and reliability of which have already been proved to the full, to give a spur to the efforts for deploying them for action.” The fourth front addresses “political and ideological might,” stating: “All Party organizations should never tolerate all shades of heterogeneous ideas and double standards of discipline that run counter to the Party’s ideology, but strengthen the single-hearted unity of the whole Party centered on its Central Committee in every way possible.”

Next, Kim Jong Un underscores the strengthening of the nation’s unification capacity as a tool for North Korea’s continued survival in the face of numerous existential threats. North Korea’s unification capacity depends upon its domestic capacity, and Kim Jong Un elaborates the steps necessary to strengthen them both as follows. First, “a peaceful environment on the Korean peninsula” should be created by easing “the acute military tension between the North and the South.” Second, North Korea is willing to open its “doors to anyone from South Korea, including the ruling party and opposition parties, organizations and individual personages of all backgrounds, for dialogue, contact and travel.” Third, “the authorities of the North and the South should raise the banner of national independence higher than ever before” and “they will resolve all the issues arising in bilateral relations on the principle of By Our Nation Itself.” And fourth, North Korea is “willing to dispatch our delegation” to the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games, and “with regard to this matter, the authorities of the North and the South may meet together soon.”

Lastly, North Korea’s effort to strengthen its international power is limited by increasing international sanctions and deterrence in response to its continuing development of nuclear and missile technology. Nevertheless, Kim Jong Un asserted in his New Year’s Address that North Korea will stand against “the imperialist forces of aggression” as a “nuclear power,” while stating it will also continue to “develop good-neighborly and friendly relations with all the countries that respect our national sovereignty and are friendly to us.”

Kim Jong Un’s New Year’s Address clearly outlines the three facets of North Korea’s survival strategy for 2018. With this in mind, the South Korean government should implement the following policies in collaboration with the international community in order to successfully resolve the situation on the Peninsula and build a lasting peace.

First, it should be recognized that there is a



distinct gap between the two Koreas as far as their perspective on the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games. We can hope that North Korea's participation in the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics will act as a stepping stone for further dialogue to better the inter-Korean relationship, but whether it does or not will depend on how the Koreas manage this perception gap. North Korea's decision to dispatch a delegation does not mean that the country intends to change its position on the three revolutionary capabilities. Rather, it is another way of bolstering these capabilities. Meanwhile, South Korea is hoping that North Korea's participation in the Olympics will be an opportunity to better the inter-Korean relationship, a goal that North Korea's 2018 survival strategy explicitly states as well. The impact of this meeting between the two Koreas will be made clear after the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, when the ROK conducts a joint military exercise with the US and North Korea resumes its nuclear test. A true path to improved inter-Korean relations will unfurl only if North Korea seeks a new, twenty-first century strategy of coexistence that goes beyond its historical focus on strengthening the three revolutionary capabilities.

North Korea continues to mass produce nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles and conduct test launches under the assumption that this strategy will ensure their survival. However, North Korea must recognize on its own that the crisis on the Peninsula has been created by these very acts, and find a new way to combat perceived threats against itself, its counterpart, and the world. As long as North Korea continues to develop nuclear technology, it will never be free of the international sanctions imposed by the US, China, and other stakeholders. A strong deterrence system should be constructed rapidly in order to neutralize the North Korean nuclear threat on the Korean Peninsula and in the Asia-Pacific region. North Korea is facing increased economic hardship and reduced political capacity as its efforts to become a nuclear state result in international isolation. However,

South Korea and other neighboring states should not hesitate to suggest a new framework of a complex peace and prosperity system, which will guarantee the survival and prosperity of a denuclearized North Korea.

Lastly, as the three revolutionary capabilities are changing, North Korea must consider pursuing a new twenty-first century survival strategy. While outside pressure can be an important incentive, efforts to change internally will be the most critical element in this shift. North Korea is already undergoing economic marketization and informatization via high technology in the socio-cultural sphere. During this historical transition, the South Korean government must also make a long-term push so that North Korea can adopt a new *Byungjin* (parallel) policy of pursuing non-nuclear security and economic development that aligns with political and ideological values of the twenty-first century. ■

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