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**North Korea under Kim Jong Un; Present and Future**

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**<ABSTRACT>**

1. North Korea; Present

North Korea (officially called “Democratic People’s Republic of Korea”) has a very unique system, which is different from its origin, the Soviet one. First, politically North Korea is a feudalistic dynasty whose authoritarian leaders come from the same family. It is also a theocracy, since its leaders are like a god. Its ‘Great Leader’ is above any laws and higher than any other leader in the world. Second, North Korea is a militaristic state. National priority is placed on building a militarily powerful state. More than 30 percent of its national budget goes to the military. All people are mobilized very often for military purpose. Third, however, North Korea is a very weak and failed state in terms of economy, suffering from chronic shortage of food, electricity and hard currency. More than several hundred thousands of people starved to death since the late 1990s and more than half of its major industrial factories have stopped due to electricity shortage.

How has such a country survived as a state, without any political turmoil? For it has a robust controlling and propaganda mechanism; PDS (public distribution system), terror and watchdog, state monopoly of mass media & information. People are taught from birth to respect their leaders just like god by various means of personality cult, including regular rituals and mass rally.

‘Almighty and Great’ leaders of North Korea have attempted to improve people’s living standard. Kim Jong Il, father of the current leader Kim Jong Un, introduced in 2002 elements of market economy into the central-planned economy, and allowed traditional farm markets to grow. The so-called ‘Measures to improve economic management system’ was taken after the Chinese reform, but could not succeed due to resistance from ideologically conservative group of the Party and military. Despite its failure, his reform efforts brought some change into the North Korean society. Economically people would not depend on the state but stand independent, resulting in weakening the state control over people. Growing markets with imported goods, predominantly from China have given people access to outside information through secretly smuggled DVD’s and USB’s.

After consolidating his political power, Kim Jong Un has started sort of reform efforts to improve ‘people’s living standard’, whereas holding on to developing nuclear weapons. In June 2012, younger leader Kim Jong Un introduced measures to offer more autonomy in management and more share of products to economic units. In May 2014, he moved further in giving more share of products to workers and farmers. He has also made efforts to develop economy by attracting foreign investments in special economic zones. He designated 19 local areas across the country as ‘Regional Economic Districts.

1. North Korea; Future Prospect

Is the North Korean regime under the young and unexperienced leader stable?

According to ‘Political Instability Task Force Model’ by Professor Jack Goldstone, whom I met in 2010, we can use four index – Infant Mortality Rate, Discrimination in Politics & Economy, Conflicts with Neighboring Countries, Political Regime- to judge whether or not a state is stable. North Korea has been and is still very unstable in the first three index, but very strong in the last index. Professor Goldstone said the last one, Political Regime or Institution is the most important factor for stability in an authoritarian state like North Korea. I agree with him, and I believe the Kim Jong Un regime at its fourth year is stable politically and appears to stay quite long in the future.

In the longer term perspective, however, I am doubtful whether unity of ruling elites and people’s loyalty will be strong enough for the younger Kim to yield his almighty power. His leadership would be put into test, probably, because of his precarious personality and unrealistic policy instructions, for instance, ‘covering all the land with grass.’ Another downside is his isolation from the international community. North Korea remains the only ‘axis of evil’ dubbed in 2002 by former U.S. President Bush. His nuclear development program and human rights violation will bring his regime under fire from the world community. Will the nuclear weapons continue serve as leverage for him to extort resources from South Korea and its allies? Or will it lead him into deeper diplomatic isolation, even from China, and consequently weaken unity and loyalty among his elite groups.

In conclusion, it would not be likely that we see any ‘coup from above’ or ‘revolution from above’ in the foreseeable future. North Korea under Kim Jong Un will be muddling through.