A Study on the Use of MILLITARY Forces in the NORTH KOREAN Regime

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of the North Korean People’s Army from early establishment of the regime to present in North Korea and to identify whether Kim Jungeun is reducing the military force on contrary to the former reign for reorganizing into a normal socialist state.

North Korea focuses all national capacities on the North Korean People’s Army and the North Korean People’s Army is serving as an exclusive tool of the leader since the establishment of North Korean regime. During the Kim Ilsung period, he organized the North Korean People’s Army, ousted the political opponent, and used the North Korean People’s Army as the tool for completing Juche Ideology. During the Kim Jungil period, he used North Korean People’s Army to stabilize the regime and solve severe financial difficulties caused by the collapse of socialist planned economy system and fall of socialist states in Eastern regions. He also overcame crisis by using North Korean People’s Army in overall national industries.

It was the Kim Jungeun period that controlled and reduced North Korean People’s Army. Kim is showing the wills toward denuclearization by claiming for relieving sanctions against North Korea and guaranteeing the current system. In North Korean regime, however, ‘Nuclear Weapon’ grants self-confidence to North Korean People’s Army and residents, stabilizes the system, and serves as a tool for advantageous negotiation result by threatening and pressuring South Korea and the United States. Kim will never give up nuclear weapon. Also, North Korean military system will stay firm and reveal its side as military state.

[Keywords] Military First, North Korea, Nuclear, Kim Jung Un, A Military State

1. Introduction

North Korea is a closed and abnormal military-centered socialist state. In a normal socialist system, the party makes the decision on military issues and holds the authority. The basic models for socialist state are the Soviet Union and China. In regard to basic structure, the North Korean People’s Army is thoroughly in charge of enforcement under the Communist Party. In contrary, North Korea has been maintaining its regime based on violence, force, and fears essential for dictatorial powers since the early establishment of regime.

In the early stage of North Korean regime, Kim Ilsung seized the power and established dictatorship by using the armed anti-Japanese forces[1]. As the power was handed down to Kim Jungil, the role of North Korean People’s Army went beyond regime stabilization and social control and it was expanded to all industries and ideology. In Kim Jungeun regime, the powers were handed down for 3 generations unprecedentedly in the modern and contemporary history. Kim Jungeun regime showed an aspect of normal socialist state where all the powers of North Korean People’s Army are transferred to the party. Also, control and reduction on the North Korean People’s Army enlarged by the Military First Policy during Kim Jungil regime and oust and demotion of military personnel led to
weakening of North Korean People’s Army. Considering the phenomenal aspects, it seems that Kim Jungeun is reorganizing North Korea into a normal socialist state.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of the North Korean People’s Army from early establishment of the regime to present in North Korea and to identify whether Kim Jungeun is reducing the power of North Korean People’s Army on contrary to the former reign for reorganizing into a normal socialist state.

2. The Role of North Korean People’s Army in Kim Ilsung Regime

2.1. The background of establishment of the North Korean regime

Right after independence, Kim Ilsung could not exercise much influence in North Korea. Although he led armed anti-Japanese force and participated in anti-Japanese movement, he was pushed out by other socialist politicians in terms of political position. In response, Kim Ilsung focused on dominating all armed forces armed anti-Japanese forces. Based on such dominance over the forces, the Soviet Union supported Kim Ilsung. He soon seized the Workers’ Party of Korea and secured political position.

Kim Ilsung could get supports from the Soviet Union, oust the political opponent after the Korean War, and establish his own regime because he had dominance and control over the North Korean People’s Army based on the armed anti-Japanese force. Politicization of military often happens in socialist states. In North Korea, however, the North Korean People’s Army went beyond politicization and showed its side as a military state after the establishment of the regime. The party dominated by the Kim Ilsung’s North Korean People’s Army became the base for completing the dictatorship. Furthermore, the North Korean People’s Army played a crucial role in succeeding the power to Kim Jungil[2].

2.2. Kim Ilsung’s establishment ‘Juche’ ideology

One of the distinguished characteristics of North Korean People’s Army is that the tendency of ‘Politicization’ of military is stronger than other socialist states. North Korean People’s Army has been developing in close relation to maintaining the North Korean system and regime[3].

Kim Ilsung’s establishment of the Juche ideology was the time when ‘Politicization’ of military had the most influence. Juche Ideology is defined as the combination of national independence and Korean nationalism. It starts from a simple proposition of excluding foreign power’s intervention and making a country where the residents are the owner. However, Juche Ideology emerged in 1950s when Kim Ilsung started to eliminate potential competitors and expand political position by mobilizing the North Korean People’s Army. Kim Ilsung used Juche Ideology to oust his political opponents, factions in the Soviet Union and China[4].

Considering that establishment of North Korean regime was possible through the support from Soviet Union and role and sacrifice of China during the Korean War, Juche Ideology is a theory that starts from the contradiction. However, Kim Ilsung ideologically developed Juche Ideology and used as a mean to control North Korean residents and to deify himself. In ideological development of Juche Ideology, North Korean People’s Army served as the driving force. Kim Ilsung used the power of North Korean People’s Army and he strengthened his power to make excuse and eliminate the powers strengthening and opposing his authority. In the early stage of North Korean regime, Kim Ilsung used the North Korean People’s Army under control to eliminate each communist faction such as Soviet Union Fraction, Gapsan Fraction, and Yeonan Fraction. Internally, Kim Ilsung was partially deified by the North Koreans as an image of friendly father through charismatic speech and close contact with residents[5].

In conclusion, Kim Ilsung used the power and fear of North Korean People’s Army to establish Juche Ideology, eliminate enemies, and promote internal stabilization based on supports from North Koreans.
3. The Role of North Korean People’s Army in Kim Jungil Regime

3.1. Stabilization of hereditary rule

After Kim Ilsung’s long-term rule over 40 years, Kim Jungil completed the long succeeding training and became the supreme leader of North Korea. As Kim Jungil was trained as a successor for a long time, he smoothly took over the regime.

Kim Jungil promoted a new political ideology called “Military First Policy”. Military First Policy stabilizes internal system, exercises influence on overall society as the executing organization directly under Kim Jungil, and utilizes military force on industries and foreign currency earning. Such Military First Policy emerged as Kim Jungil was attracted to loyalty and driving force of North Korean People’s Army as he took the key military post. Also, Kim Jungil felt difficulties in unity and control over the party and North Koreans due to continuing financial difficulties and natural disasters after taking over the regime[6].

After the collapse of socialist states in Eastern regions in 19902 and contradiction in planned economy system, North Korea couldn’t get supports from the Soviet Union and China. Although the power was peacefully transferred to Kim Jungil, North Korea faced external issues from international situation, natural disasters, and the severe famine. This made Kim Jungil regime to stabilize the regime as the priority task. Kim Jungil felt that Kim Ilsung’s party-based ruling regime cannot sustain internal stabilization. In response, Kim Jungil suggested Military First Policy as the new ruling system.

Kim Jungil used the North Korean People’s Army under his control to block opposition from political parties and North Korean residents. He also made the North Korean People’s Army to operate national industries and earn foreign currency to revive the economy.

3.2. Excessive expansion of North Korean people’s army and militarization of North Korea

Kim Jungil continued his regime under Military First Policy by ignoring the party-military relationship in socialist states.

Kim Jungil regime’s one of the characteristics is the military-centered dictatorship and Kim Jungil directly controlled the overall affairs focusing on National Defense Committee without holding or operating multiple conference systems in the parties[7]. North Korea explains that Military First Policy is “A political method for solving issues regarding revolution and construction under military-first principle and for promoting overall socialist works by having North Korean People’s Army as the base of revolution”[8].

Kim Jungil’s ruling style naturally led to increased political influence of North Korean People’s Army. As military personnel took more positions in committees and North Korean People’s Army had higher economic interests from earning foreign currency, the military expansion became remarkable in the North Korean society. Furthermore, Kim Jungil continuously developed nuclear weapon through military to sustain North Korean regime and gain financial support by encouraging conflict with South Korea. As a result, nuclear development and military first policy made the military as the supreme enforcement agency without any competitor. This led to excessive increase in authority and interests of North Korean People’s Army and resulted in the military regime for Kim Jungil’s dictatorship.

4. Role of North Korean People’s Army in Kim Jungeun Regime

4.1. Meaning of control and reduction of military

After Kim Jungil passed away in 2011, Kim Jungeun soon took over the regime and returned to a normal socialist state’s party-military relationship. North Korean People’s Army
played a significant role in Kim Ilsung’s establishment of regime and Kim Jungil’s overcoming of economic and regime crisis. While Kim Jungil executed Military First Policy, Kim Jungeun regime returned to Workers’ Party-centered regime. Such phenomenon is found in controlling and reducing the North Korean People’s Army such as military personnel’s frequent demotion and reinstatement, ousting, and personnel replacement to empower the Workers’ Party of Korea and state authorities.

While Kim Jungil was trained for a long time as a successor, Kim Jungeun had to take over regime without getting enough training. Thus, Kim Jungeun might have perceived that North Korean People’s Army could threaten his power. The position and role of North Korean People’s Army are threatening and inescapable in dictatorship. In response, Kim Jungeun blocks such threatening by retiring and purging out key military personnel under excuses[9]. Kim Jungeun controlled and reduced the North Korean People’s Army under the idea that excessively enlarged North Korean People’s Army with varying interests from Kim Jungil regime would largely threaten his dominance.

Another reason for Kim Jungeun’s control and reduction over the North Korean People’s Army is to suggest his own ruling style. Like Juche Ideology of Kim Ilsung and Military First Policy of Kim Jungil, he needed his own ruling style. This was to make North Korean parties and North Koreans to perceive that the transfer of power of legitimate and to deify him like Kim Ilsung and Kim Jungil. In response, Kim Jungeun imitated Kim Ilsung’s public friendly style rather than Kim Jungil’s fearful and authoritative Military First Policy. Kim Jungeun attempted close contacts with North Korean residents and tried to resemble the image of Kim Ilsung. In addition, the names of positions and operation methods for Workers’ Party of Korea are similar to Kim Ilsung regime[10].

Kim Jungeun controlled and reduced the North Korean People’s Army to consolidate his own power from the early stage. Based on such control and reduction over North Korean People’s Army, Kim Jungeun changed excessive military-centered system which might threaten him into a party-centered system.

4.2. True meaning of declaration on denuclearization

In 2018 New Year’s address, Kim Jungeun threatened the United States and South Korea by saying “Whole American states are within our range of nuclear strike and I always have a nuclear button on my desk at office”. After shooting Hwasong-15 successfully, Kim Jungeun declared completion of nuclear power and emphasized North Korea as a nuclear state internally and externally. As previous researches pointed out, Kim Jungeun tries to relieve sanction and pressure on North Korea under the excuse of blocking military treats from the United States and improving North-South relationship[11].

In 2018 New Year’s address, North Korea threatened South Korea and the United States by declaring nuclear power of North Korea. In PyeongChang Olympic, Kim Jungeun declared denuclearization by encouraging conciliation between North and South Korea to improve North-South relationship. The purpose of declaration on denuclearization is to make the United States perceive North Korea as a nuclear state, sign a peace treaty to secure regime, and relieve sanctions against North Korea. Nuclear weapon and missile are the prides of the North Korean People’s Army and they were used as propaganda for making North Korean residents to perceive stable regime and strong and prosperous state. Kim Jungeun’s declaration on denuclearization could have a huge influence on North Korea which had been sustained through North Korean People’s Army since Kim Ilsung regime and it could largely threaten the Kim Jungeun regime. To understand why Kim Jungeun would bring treats upon him, it is necessary to understand the meaning of nuclear weapon to Kim Jungeun and North Korea.

Kim Jungeun says that North Korea stands
against Trump’s hardline policy toward North Korea and development of missile to protect the principle of ‘Protecting Regime At All Costs’ and that North Korea is on an equal footing with the United States. North Korean nuclear weapon is the mean to stand against the United States as the world’s strongest nation. Also, North Korean nuclear weapon relieves sanctions toward North Korea and promotes North-South cooperation to overcome the financial crisis. Furthermore, North Korean nuclear weapon holds strength in converting the expense of storing conventional weapons into economic field. However the ultimate goal of nuclear weapon is to stabilize the regime and secure the system[12]. Considering the 3 North-South Summits and two North-US meetings regarding Kim Jungeun’s declaration on denuclearization, North Korea isn’t showing significant movement until now. Kim Jungeun uses nuclear weapon for propaganda to stabilize the regime and enhance negotiating power by threatening South Korea and the United States.

5. South Korea’s Response to North Korea’s Changes

In the case of the former Soviet Union, the military was thoroughly subordinate by the Communist Party. The decision on all military affairs was made by the party, and the party political office oversaw the defense. China has a real defense-related authority by the Party Central Military Commission. In other words, both the Soviet Union and China control the party. The basic model of the Party-military relationship of the normal socialist state system is that of the former Soviet Union and China. As the Kim Jong-un regime enters, it seems to follow the basic model of the party-military relationship between the former Soviet Union and China. However, the biggest difference in North Korea is that the military is not directly controlled by the Party. The North Korea military is the army of its leader and exists in terms of personal security and maintenance of power. And there is no real change in the Kim Jong-un regime either.

The details of military use by the North Korea regime are shown in Table 1.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Surface role</th>
<th>Practical application</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim Il-sung</td>
<td>The army of the party</td>
<td>Establishment of regime maintenance of the system regime propaganda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Jung-il</td>
<td>Military first</td>
<td>Create a fear maintenance of the system leading infrastructure industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Jung-eun</td>
<td>The army of the party</td>
<td>Use of international Negotiations external threat regime propaganda</td>
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It is too early to judge the party-centered state system, which the Kim Jong Un regime has ostensibly shown so far, as a shift to a normal socialist country. This is because they continue to use nuclear force demonstrations that have mobilized the military for their own interests.

South Korea has a record of wasting national power several times in North Korea disguised peace offensive. This is an important historical resource for establishing a policy toward North Korea in the future. Also, we should refrain from foolish responses that support first and expect change. To this end, South Korea will have to make sure that North Korea makes a substantial change before inducing support and change. South Korea should discuss with the international community the mitigation or withdrawal of sanctions against North Korea, and show a thorough cutoff from North Korean military threats. In conclusion, it is necessary to clearly understand the actual changes of the North Korean military and the Kim Jong-un regime intention to abandon its nuclear program, and induce economic support and change for North Koreans.
6. Conclusion

Kim Ilsung established the North Korean regime by utilizing the North Korean People’s Army. This is the military-first dictatorship differentiated from general socialist states. During the Kim Ilsung regime, the North Korean People’s Army played a crucial role in establishing the regime and consolidating the Juche Ideology by purging out the political opponents. In the collapse of planned economy system and fall of socialist states, the North Korean People’s Army protected the regime and participated on overall national industries to show its aspect of military state to the world. On contrary, Kim Jungeun is promoting the aspect of a normal party-centered socialist state by reducing the power of North Korean People’s Army. However, Kim Jungeun is pretending to reduce military power and turn into a normal state to make the United States secure the North Korean regime and break away from sanctions against North Korea. If North Korea continuously fails to gain interests from negotiation with South Korea and the United States, Kim Jungeun would use nuclear weapon and missile to threaten and pressure South Korea and the United States like Kim Ilsung and Kim Jungil did. The military system continuing from the establishment of North Korean regime still stays firm and the North Korean People’s Army will be power of Kim Jungeun in the future. Thus, South Korea should identify the fundamental intentions of Kim Jungeun and carry out negotiations with North Korea accordingly.

7. References

7.1. Journal articles


7.2. Thesis degree


7.3. Books


7.4. Additional references

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