

Presentation 1: History of Purges in North Korea and Prospects for the Kim Jong Un Regime

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1. Introduction

Jang Song Taek's sudden execution by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in December of 2013 was a shock not only for South Korea but also the world. This shock stemmed from the fact that Jang was both the "Number Two" in Kim Jong Un's regime and Kim's own uncle. Moreover, Jang had played a decisive role in helping the younger Kim take over power. Despite all this, Jang was killed in quick fashion by the regime in one of the most brutal and inhumane ways possible.

Purges are extreme political acts typically seen in dictatorships. At a fundamental level, purges are aimed at ridding the political playing field of potential foes. North Korean history has been no stranger to purges throughout the years. It would not be an exaggeration to describe the 70 years in which the Kim clan has held control over North Korea as an "era of purges."

Kim Il Sung, who reigned over the country from the late 1940s until his death in July 1994, maintained his hold on power by executing numerous political foes. The elder Kim passed his power on to his son, Kim Jong Il, who also successfully consolidated his power by carrying out countless purges. Recently, power was passed on to Kim Jong Il's son, Kim Jong Un. In view of such a history, Jang's execution does not come as a surprise.

Simply put, Jang's execution shows the inherent cruelty and inhumanity of the nearly 70 years of rule by the Kim clan over North Korea. There is plenty of reason to expect that Kim Jong Un will continue to execute whoever stands in his way to consolidating power over the country and hide the fact that he lacks real leadership experience.

This paper will examine what execution means in North Korea by looking at the history of execution by generation and analyze through this history the characteristics of North Korea politics. The paper will then draw conclusions from this analysis about future purges and potential policy directions on the part of the regime.

2. A History of North Korean Purges

1) The Kim Il Sung Regime

After gaining power in North Korea with the help of Soviet forces, Kim Il Sung moved to consolidate his power by eliminating certain groups of communists and nationalists led by Cho Man-sik. When the Korean War was at its peak, Kim eliminated Alexei Ivanovich Hegay and other supporters of the Soviet Union and successfully purged Pak Honyong and other members of the Workers Party of South Korea (WSPK; in Korean: 남조선로동당 or 남로당) for supposedly being "American spies." Purges of the WSPK began during the Fifth Plenum of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) Central Committee, which was held for three days in December 1952.

During this meeting, Kim Il Sung successfully arrested various leading members of the WSPK, including Pak.¹ All of those arrested were then tried at North Korea's highest court for their alleged attempt to overthrow the country and for being American spies. Their trial began on August 3rd, just

¹ Other members who were arrested include: Jo Il Myung (Jo Du Won) • Park Seung Won • Lee Gang Guk • Yoon Sun Dal • Baek Hyung Bok • Bae Cheol • Lim Hwa • Lee Won Jo • Jo Young Bok • Maeng Jong Ho • Seol Jeong Sik

three days after they were indicted, and the group was sentenced just four days after their trial began. Most of those indicted were sentenced to death and forced to turn over all of their assets to the state. Pak Hyon-yong, on the other hand, was indicted by the court more than two years later on December 3rd, 1955 on December 3rd, 1955. Just two weeks later, on December 15th, Pak was sentenced to death and forced to forfeit of all his assets. He was executed on July 19th, 1956.

It is a well-known fact that Kim Il Sung affixed blame for losing the Korean War to the WSPK to eliminate his potential political foes. The Soviet faction's Alexei Hegay committed suicide on July 2nd, 1953.² The North Korean leader continued to conduct purges of his real and perceived enemies, including the WPSK's Kang Mun Seok, and Bang Ho San from the Yen-an (Chinese) faction in April 1955.

The purges of those from the Yen-an and Soviet factions, such as Choi Chang Ik (Yen-an faction) and Park Chang Ok (Soviet faction), were important turning points in the history of purges during the Kim Il Sung period. The Yen-an and Soviet faction were two major groups that challenged Kim Il Sung's authority by opposing to his policy to promote heavy industry. They ended up being purged for being "counterrevolutionary traitors and sectarian insurgents" by Kim Il Sung and his Manchuria faction.

A wide range of party members were purged from these two groups. These included Choi Chang-ik (member of the standing committee and vice-premier, Yen-an faction), Park Chang-ok (member of the central committee and vice-premier, Soviet faction), Yoon Gong-heum (member of central committee and the minister of commerce, Yen-an faction), Seo Hwi (candidate and chairman of the General Federation of Korean Trade Unions, Yen-an faction), Lee Pil-gyu (candidate and chairperson for machine industry, domestic communist party), Kim Gang (chairperson for the Ministry of Education and Propaganda), Go Bong-gi (member of central committee and party chairman for South Hwanghae province, Yen-an faction).

All of these people were expelled from their posts and struck off the party list. Yoon Gong-heum, Seo Hwi, Lee Pil-gyu and Kim Gang fled to China, and Lee Sang Jo, who had been North Korea's ambassador to the Soviet Union, entered a life of exile there with help from the Chinese. Kim Il Sung pushed forward execution of the rest of Yen-an and Soviet factions by hosting meetings in August, September, and December. These meetings continued until 1958 with a final meeting in March of that year. Kim Du-bong, Park Ui-wan and Oh Gi-seob were executed, and Jang Pyeong-san, the head of the Fourth Army Unit, and Kim Ung-do, the vice-premier of the Ministry of National Defense, were also purged.³

The 15th Plenum of the Fourth KWP Central Committee on May 25th, 1967, witnessed a major purge of those who opposed Kim Il Sung. This meeting allowed Kim to remove many of the last elements of opposition towards his rule, including Park Geum-cheol and Lee Hyo-soon, among others. With all its enemies vanquished, the Manchurian faction became the sole holder of power in the country with Kim Il Sung as its leader.⁴ North Korea has traditionally placed significant political importance on this meeting because it marks the start of the idolization of Kim Il Sung and the

² Seo Dong Man, 『North Korean Socialist System Establishment History (1945~1961)』, (Seoul: Seon In, 2005), pp. 436-447.

³ Seo Dong Man, pp. 537-583, p. 830; Hwang Jang Yeop, 『I Saw the Truth of the History』, (Seoul: Han Wool, 1999), pp. 108-109.

⁴ The domestic communist party is also called as "Kapsan Faction," which refers to those who were involved in the "Kapsan Working Committee Incident" in 1937.

establishment of a one-man leadership system.⁵ At the time, Kim Jong Il had finished college and just started working at the KWP, and it is well-known that the younger Kim helped his father lead this major purge.

The last group to be purged during the Kim Il Sung era was the Manchurian faction. Members of the Manchurian faction were former guerillas who had fought against the Japanese with Kim Il Sung in the 1930s and 40s. During the Fourth Plenum of the Fourth People's Army Party Committee, which was held from January 4th to 14th, 1969, Kim Il Sung ruthlessly purged his former compatriots. Those purged included Kim Chang Bong, who was a vice-premier and premier of Ministry of National Defense, and Heo Bong Hak who was the minister charged with operations against South Korea. Choi Gwang, the chief of staff (who was later reinstated) and Jeong Byeong Gab, who was the commander of the Third Army Group, were also accused of being "counter-revolutionary traitors and sectarian insurgents." They were arrested at the meeting, and some of them, such as Kim Chang Bong, Heo Bong Hak, Jeong Byeong Gab, were executed secretly in May 1972.

As the above history shows, purges were the basis of power struggle in North Korea as Kim Il Sung used them to consolidate his control over the country.

2) The Era of Kim Jong Il

It is not an exaggeration to say that purges in the Kim Jong Il era had begun even before he was nominated as the successor to Kim Il Sung. As mentioned earlier, it is because Kim Jong Il took a decisive role in eliminating Park Geumcheol, Lee Hyosun, and Kim Doman in the 15th Plenum of the Fourth Party Central Committee in May 1967.

Kim Jong Il's purge of political opponents had officially begun in the period right after he was nominated as successor. Kim Jong Il was selected as the secretary of the KWP's Central Committee during the 7th Plenum of the Fifth Party Central Committee in September 1973 and became the politburo member of the party in the 8th Plenum of the Fifth Party Central Committee. When he was nominated as the successor, he first purged his stepmother and younger siblings, accusing them of being "derelicts." Kim Jong Il removed his stepmother, the secretary of the Chosun Democratic Women's Union, from office and banished Kim Pyeongil, his younger sibling, to diplomatic establishments abroad. In addition, he purged Kim Seongae's brother, Kim Seonggap, who was secretary of the Party in Pyongyang at the time, and he also purged Kim Seongae, Kim Pyeongil, and all the followers of the "derelicts." The purge of political opponents was conducted according to the Ten Principles for the Establishment of the One-Ideology System, which was created by Kim Jong Il. Kim Jong Il also purged North Korean Vice-President Kim Donggyu, a former member of the band of Partisans led by Kim Il Sung, for not agreeing with the nomination of Kim Jong Il. Moreover, he politically buried partisan Choi Yonggeon who used to be the chief of the Supreme People's Committee and vice-president. On the other hand, Kim's uncle, Kim Yeongju, who was considered an obstacle in the succession process, was dismissed from the head of the organization and demoted to deputy premier. He was later placed under house arrest in Yanggangprovince. In addition, Kim purged the publicity secretary of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP), Kim Doman, who was a close associate of Kim Yeongju, along with International Secretary Park Yonggu.

In the early 1980s, Kim further purged the head of the National Security Agency, Kim Byeongha, and in the early and mid-1990s, he purged those who had taken part in the failed Frunze

⁵ North Korea argues that the "The 15th Plenum of the Fourth KWP Central Committee was the decisive

moment in which unification and consolidation of the party was strengthened and the party as a whole was brought together by Kim Il Sung's ideas of revolution and Juche." 『History of Korea Workers' Party 』 , (Pyongyang: Korea Workers' Party Publisher, 1991), p. 432.

Academy Coup and 6 Army Corps rebellion.

The 'Simhwajo Case' showed the true character purges that occurred during the Kim Jong Il era. The 'Simhwajo Case' started up when Suh Gwanhui, the secretary of the KWP, was publicly executed in August 1997 after being accused of being recruited by the U.S. during the Korean War to work as a spy. Due to the case, Suh Yunseok, the KWP politburo's general secretary, Moon Seongsul, the general secretary of the KWP's Central Committee, and Park Seungil, the general secretary of the Nampo Party committee were arrested and executed. In addition, the corpse of former Minister of Agriculture Kim Mangeum was dug up and beheaded.

3) The Era of Kim Jong Un

Kim Jong Un was never groomed properly to take over the reins of power when he was officially recognized as successor at the Third KWP Party Conference in September 2010. After gaining power, the new North Korean leader, who was still in his twenties, proceeded to purge almost everyone whom his father provided to assist him within two years.

The first target of elimination was U Tong Chuck, the first vice-minister of North Korea's National Security Agency, and a high-level military figure who had helped carry Kim Jong Il's body to its final resting place. He was purged only four months after Kim Jong Il's death. Minister of the People's Armed Forces Kim Young Choon, a key figure in the regime, was demoted to the post of "head of the military" within four months. Kim Jong Gak, first vice chief of bureau of Political Safety Division of the General, became head of the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces after Kim Young Choon. However, within eight months of Kim's death, he was dismissed on December 2012, and became the head of the Kim Il Sung National War College.

Lee Yeong Ho, who was highly favored by Kim Jong Il, was purged within seven months of Kim's death. Lee was the first high-level official who was officially purged in the Kim Jong Un era. Over the past two years, the premier and director of the Korean People's army's state was replaced; 20 above the level of commander; 38 which consists 40% of total 96 officers who were above the level of department head of the Central Party; and 47% of 118 officers who were at the level of Cabinet ministers was replaced.

The one who adorned the peak of the purge during the Kim Jong Un era was the purge of Jang Song Taek. Jang Song Taek's purge began on November 2013 with the purge of Jang's closest confidants, including Lee Ryong Hwa, first vice minister of administration of the KWP, Jang Su Gil, vice minister, and others, and reached its climax on the 12th of December.

To secure the justification of Jang Song Taek's execution, Kim Jong Un formally held an enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Korean Worker's Party and decided to purge Jang Song Taek and acted out a scene of arresting him on the site. And On 12th of December, that is four days after the enlarged meeting, hold State Security Agency's Special Military trial and gave a decision of direct execution of Jang Song Taek.

Hereby, within two years of power succession, Kim Jong Un, by ruthlessly and quickly executing Jang Song Taek who played a crucial role in sustaining the Kim's regime, he not only succeeded power of his ancestors, but also demonstrated to the international society that the history of purge is being inherited for three generations.

The purge in the Kim Jong Un's era, has its similar characteristics with his father's in a way that was performed under the intention to strengthen its vulnerable power base and to prevent usurpation of power. In other words, the purge has its strong characteristics of power struggle just like his grandfather Kim Il Sung's.

3. Viewing the Characteristics of North Korea's Politics through the history of purge

1) Characteristics appeared in the process of purge

As mentioned before, the political history that continues from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un can also be called the history of purge. This shows that the relationship between North Korean politics and purge is inseparable.

The reason why North Korea's politics cannot be separated from the purge is because North Korean society is maintaining one man dictatorship system following the path of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un. In particular, because not only criticizing against the dictator is restricted but also challenging against one man dictatorship power is much more restricted. But the purge, even under Kim Dynasty, was not performed thoughtlessly.

There are some differences in terms of justification and means of purge in North Korea, but there is commonality that it is performed when the crisis in maintaining the regime occurs or when any critical moment comes. This is the first characteristic that appeared during the purge process during the 70 years of Three Kim Dynasty.

When we look back at the history, sometimes to eliminate the political opponent who can be a direct threat in maintaining the power, and sometimes to create the necessary conditions and environments, they make blameless people a political sacrifice and purge.

All regimes under Kim Dynasty, tried to evade the crisis by shifting responsibilities on to political rivals to purge them, when policy failure caused by mistakes and lack of leadership, and when pain aggravates and the complaint and resist upsurges, and when the regime is tottering or when is at risk. The case when Kim Il Sung purged in August 1956 took opportunity to purge the Soviet group and the Yeonan group at Plenary meeting or when Kim Jong Il executed Seo Kwan Hee, Secretary of Agriculture of Rodong Party in 1997, known as the 'Shimhwajo Case' and Kim Jong Un's purge of Jang Song Taek was also because there was a common cause - a crisis occurred as North Korean people's pain aggravated - inherited.

The second feature is that most victims of purges in North Korea had been purged in charge of being a spy or anti-party, anti-revolutionary criminal. To put North Korean people's pain and extreme dissatisfaction to sleep, and to withdraw their attention, they ticket victims of purge and execute them as 'espionage or anti-party, anti-revolutionary criminal' which is what North Korean people considers the greatest crime.

Third, purge of political opponent in North Korea takes place faster and the method of purge is crueller as a crisis of regime gets more serious. When Kim Il Sung hold the members of the Workers Party of South Korea (Namrodang) responsibility for war defeat, and stigmatize them as espionage and quickly and purged them, and when Kim Jong Il purged Seo Kwan Hee in 1997, and Park Nam Gi in 2010, they used the same method. Additionally, you will realize that Kim Jong Un used the same method to purge when you look back the recent case when he carried out public execution of his uncle Jang Song Taek after charging him as the 'anti-party, anti-revolutionary criminal' only four days after the trial.

2) The characteristic of purge in the era of Kim Jong Un

Compared to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il's era there is no difference in Kim Jong Un's era in the fact that the purge is still in the process. And Of course, purge in Kim Jong Un's era is similar in a way that it is to strengthen and prevent the usurpation of power. However, we can find that there is some characteristic that differs from Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. The greatest characteristic of purge in Kim Jong Un's era is that it shows an ultimate of impersonality in terms of process and method of purge.

In fact at Kim Il Sung's era when the purge was mostly taken, there were many cases of arrest on the site, but they did not purge in public, even when they were purged as spies. At least, they kept the last fidelity. In fact, the public execution of victims of the purge, has been introduced more regularly during Kim Jong Il's era. Kim Jong Il, to put the complaint that reached its extreme, to sleep, chose the method of 'public execution' that is higher in grade of shocking and fearful to North Korean people. But Kim Jong Un not only arrested and publicly put his uncle on trial but also publicly executed him, announced its results with lightning speed, only four after the trial. With this, Kim Jong Un not only was branded as an inhumane person but also became the epitome of cool-headedness and hard-heartedness.

With this, it is an action to maximize the propaganda effect of fear politics through purges, that Kim Jong Un revealed the process in detail, to the public. But never overlook that this paradoxically show how the current pain of North Korean people, and the rage and resentment is growing. In other words, as much as propaganda effect North Korea wants to see, there is seriousness of dissatisfaction and pain from North Korean people.

Secondly, the fact that Kim Jong Un eliminated or purged many people, only less than two years after he came into power. As mentioned before, only after four month of Kim Jong Il's death, he eliminated most of the eight members who carried Kim's body, starting with U Tong Chuck, the vice minister of State security agency. In such procedure, Lee Young Ho, the chief of staff and Jang Song Taek, vice chairman of North Korea's National Defense Commission, were purged, Kim Young Chun minister of the people's armed forces and Kim Jong Kak, first vice chief of Political bureau, was removed. Jang Song Taek who was key influential person and uncle of Kim Jong Un, was executed along with his close allies. Choi Young Rim cabinet Prime Minister was replaced by Park Bong Joo and many Party, Administration and Military executives were replaced or eliminated. As such, the massive purge that took less than two years shows how vulnerable Kim's hold of power is. This is because Kim Jong Un came to power, as if he was pushed into something, only within three years of nomination as a successor and only within two years of its formulation.

Third feature is that the decision and execution of the purge was carried out swiftly. When talking about the speed of purge it is never a shame to use the expression 'flash of lightning'. In the case of Lee Yong Ho, Chief of staff, he was dismissed on 15th of July, seven days after his official worship at the Kumsusan Memorial Palace with Kim Jong Un on the 8th of July 2012, to commemorate the 18th anniversary of Kim Il Sung's death.

Same with Jang Song Taek. The last time he appeared in an official meeting was 7th of November 2013 when he met Antonio Inoki, the member of the House of Councilors. And after a month, 8th of December, the decision of Jang Song Taek's purge was taken place at an enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Korean Worker's Party and four days after, he was executed.

Of course, the investigation began from around the middle of November and both the meeting and the decision of purge were nothing but formal procedures. Nevertheless, there is no

other expression than 'flash of lightning' to express swiftness of the purge process of Jang Song Taek, who was under boss and uncle of Kim Jong Un.

Even Kim Il Sung, who purged so many rivals, took two years and four months to put a trial and sentence Park Hun Young to death, Kim's greatest political rival, and executing him after seven months. Of course, members of the Workers Party of South Korea (Namrodang) besides Park Hun Young, were put into trial three days after the prosecution and were sentenced to death four days after the trial but their execution is known to be proceeded after a long time.

4. Future Considerations

To forecast the future of Kim Jong Un, we need to look back on Kim's whereabouts during his two years in power. In particular, we need to analyze the background of why he severely purged Lee Yong Ho and Jang Song Taek.

More than anything, the purges of Lee Yong Ho and Jang Song Taek were an outcome of mutual conflict. Of course, as mentioned before, their purges had strong political characteristics. Common sense tells us that Kim's power base must be weak because he came into power only two years after he was formalized as successor. It is also true that Lee Yong Ho and Jang Song Taek were direct disturbances and threats to Kim's power. But if you look more closely, it is clear that the purge was an outcome of mutual conflict and loyalty.

Also, we cannot ignore that Jang's purge was an outcome of economic difficulty caused by international economic sanctions. How many "crimes" Jang was accused of actually had a direct connection with Jang's purge? Maybe corruption or improper relationship with women, drugs and others were only used to justify the purge. Ultimately, Jang Song Taek is only a political victim, a "sacrificial lamb" of all the mistakes and faults of the Kim dynasty.

But there is one part to note among North Korea's justifications for Jang's purge. North Korea pointed out that Jang Song Taek was "pro-American" for selling precious underground resources to foreign countries. Of course, mutual conflict and strife surrounding rights among the elite is one of the important causes of the purge. This shows that the purge happened during the fight for winning a small pie, aggravated by the economic situation as a result of sanctions and pressures from the outside world.

Then the question is, can this pie grow bigger when Kim's power becomes more stable and economic difficulties are lessened? The chances of this, however, are small. As a result, this means we may see another major purge like that of Lee Yong Ho and Jang Song Taek's in the future. What is particularly notable is the movement of Choe Ryong Hae. For him there is nothing to fear because of his increase in power after the purges. We have to look carefully actions he might take to manage the inevitable conflict between himself and his rivals.

Also, we should never overlook the fact that Choe Ryong Hae could stage a coup on Kim Jong Un, because in terms of the "Baekdu bloodline," he is no different from Kim Jong Un. For this, we should turn our interest to the possibility that the impact of Jang Song Taek's purge might kick in. In other words, we must always be aware that the current discontent over Kim Jong Un's could fall by the wayside due to Jang's purge.