

Sejong Policy Brief



THE SEJONG INSTITUTE

No. 2021-1-2 (January 28, 2021)

Executive Summary

WPK's 8th Party Congress and the Change of Power Structure



LEE Ki-dong

(kdkee5@naver.com)

*Senior Research Fellow,
Institute for National
Security Strategy*

*This article is written based on the author's personal opinions
and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.*

Executive Summary

- (Resurrection of Secretary System) Revival of a system that is advantageous for strengthening the Party's unified leadership system
 - At the 7th Party Congress in 2016, the phrase "Eternal General Secretary" was deleted from the preface of the Party protocol which gave a prior notice of the revival, and confirmed that there is high compatibility between the reinforcement of the unified leadership and the secretary system.
 - As Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau, Kim Jong Un has no problem in controlling the Political Bureau. Also he aims to strengthen the accountability of the standing committee by formally dispersing authorities such as vesting the right to social processing, under the principle of collective guidance of the Political Bureau,

- (No presentation of the indigenous idea of guidance in the Kim Jong Un's era) Maintaining ideological identity through harmony of succession and development
 - While maintaining the Kim Il Sung-Kim and Jung Jong Ilism as the supreme platform, the people-first politics was changed to the basic politics instead of Songun politics.
 - Although changes in leadership have been considered such as emphasizing the people-first politics ideology, they chose the harmony between the opportunity (promoting people's support) and challenges (deriving visible economic performance) that people-first politics has.

- The ruling method of "Son-first, Gun-later (party first, military later)," radical generation change, establishment of Kim Jong Un's interest department and

forward stationing

- Military elites has reduced in the political bureau composition while the Party and economic elites make rapid strides.
- Compared to the 7th Party Congress, the whole political bureau (secretariat) vice-chairman (secretary) and ten out of twelve members of the Party Central Military Commission were replaced.
- Establishment of Kim Jong Un's main interests, which are tightening the Party discipline (disciplinary research department), setting the five-year national economic development plan (economic policy office), strengthening party leadership on the military (military administration office), newly establishing social stability (legal affairs office) and arranging on the front

■ (No presentation of new strategic route) Absence of alternatives other than the focused-concentration route

- Kim Jong Un emphasized “reinforcement and maintenance strategy” at the Party Congress consensus and suggested that existing strategies will be reinforced and overhauled. Meanwhile, the the Party Congress came with the conclusion thaa “socialist economic construction is the most essential revolutionary task for which we should focus and put all our energy,” and affirmed the willingness to continue the economy-concentrated route as a strategic path.
- Reinforcement of national defense power is defined as “collateral for economic construction” and “powerful means of securing diplomatic performance” and emphasized that it is an instrumental character of economy and diplomacy. Simultaneously, considering the unchanging external conditions and the uncertainty of the internal vision, it is implying a willingness to utilize the “different strategic position” realized by strengthening national defense power for external purposes.

- (Nothing new on the national economic development five-year plan) Choice and concentration reflecting resource scarcity and constraints
 - Promoting practical business plan, such as emphasizing “things that can be done”
 - It is just a listing of projects that have already been presented in an editorial of the Rodong Sinmun (North Korean Newspaper) after the Fifth Plenum of the 7th Central Committee, including the emphasis on “unified national leadership.”

- (Sticking to the U.S. confrontation strategy) Preparing a breakthrough by putting pressure on the U.S.
 - The principle of “strong for strong, kindness for kindness” is merely a change in the existing expression of “conversation for conversation, confrontation for confrontation” principle, and an additional adjunct word “continuously” is used which contains the meaning of continuity.
 - Introducing newly developed high-tech weapon system and releasing the SLBM can be seen as an aim for a “bluffing effect” to induce the U.S. policy to engage with North Korea. ❖

※ Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.