



Kim Jong-un's 2015 New Year Speech

Recommended Citation

Peter Hayes and Roger Cavazos, "Kim Jong-un's 2015 New Year Speech", NAPSNet Special Reports, January 30, 2015, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/kim-jong-uns-yyyy-2-15-new-year-speech/>

by Peter Hayes and Roger Cavazos

January 1, 2015

I. Introduction

Peter Hayes and Roger Cavazos analyze Kim Jong-un's 2014 New Year's speech. They find that the speech provides important clues about North Korea's perception of its domestic and international environment. Kim laid out his priorities primarily to a domestic audience, but many of the areas he wishes to develop, such as improving the economy and also advancing two specific industries; metallurgy and chemical will also necessitate some degree of opening to the outside world. His priorities also require some amount of external reaching out to North Korea or at least non-rejection of North Korean overtures. Kim reaffirmed his "byungjin" policy of simultaneously developing two fronts: the economy and nuclear weapons. He also upholds the decision to rid the party of "anti-party counterrevolutionary factionalists". Perhaps in a nod to common experience, the Korean and Chinese language versions characterize the factionalists as "sectarian filth" or "sectarian dregs 宗派污泥浊水". The English-language version is much more anti-septic. Under normal 'songbun' dictates the Kim family would have been subject to jail for being so closely related to a known traitor, but Kim Jong-un established himself as a law unto himself and immune from effects of the law. He is well along the way to establishing himself as the third heir in the "Baektu line". There were almost no "untrodden paths" in the 2014 address as Kim stuck to roughly the same formulae used in the 2013 New Year's address. North Korea raises the prospect of conflict - and nuclear conflict at that - in the coming year. This may bode an even more contentious relationship between the U.S. and North Korea in the upcoming year of the Wooden Horse, and will surely be an irritant in U.S.-China relations if not managed well. However, there are particular opportunities for the international community to interact with North Korea on energy efficiency and energy conservation efforts. North Korea clearly wants to convey the impression they are concerned about nuclear war. However, for the second New Year's address in a row, North Korea has failed to mention nuclear weapons as a "treasured sword" and therefore not a topic for negotiation. The best way to ascertain North Korea's concerns and intentions is to ask them directly by engaging in Track

2 or Track 1.5 discussions.

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II. Report by Peter Hayes and Roger Cavazos

Kim Jong-un's "Fresh Leap Forward" 2014 New Year Speech

Kim Jong-un 2015 New Year Speech: An analysis

Kim Jong-un made his second ever New Year's Speech on 1 January 2014.[\[1\]](#),[\[2\]](#),[\[3\]](#) It was unclear in 2013 if Kim Jong-un's New Year's speech [\[4\]](#) ,[\[5\]](#) ,[\[6\]](#) was a one-off or a new trend. Given exactly two data points (2013 and now 2014) we still can't say for sure, but things are at least moving toward Kim Jong-un differentiating himself from his father, Kim Jong-il and more closely hewing toward Kim Il-sung's tradition of personally addressing the country and thus providing electronic presence upon the entire country.

Kim Jong-un's 2013 speech overall tone was one of exhortation to fulfill the vision laid out by Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il to unify Korea (under North Korean rule). The means for fulfilling the vision are to study their previously promulgated blueprints, build an economic giant via science and technology, improve the peoples' living conditions, strengthen its military might and ensure the people are "possessed of profound cultural knowledge. Kim's speech followed a tried and true formula but did add a few new twists. He named specific industries on which he'd like to focus. He also tied development to science and technology given the context that North Korea was flush with technological success after having successfully launched a satellite less than three weeks prior to the speech. Some also saw Kim's overtures to South Korea as new. However, his offers amounted to asking South Korea to quit being South Korea. External strategic context received approximately one page of the speech or just over 10% of the speech, but only Japan was mentioned by name; South Korea is referred to using the euphemism "compatriots"—not dissimilar to this year's reference, although Kim refers to the treachery of South Korean authorities and to their "reckless confrontation." It is hard to tell from the few textual clues whether North Korea is now adopting a harder line against South Korea.

This year, only the United States receives a "by name" mention, although it is a dubious honor since the context is negative. The mention may foreshadow even more outright confrontation between the United States and the DPRK in the coming year - something sure to be an irritant in the US-China relationship.

Kim invoked some variation of "Kim Il-sung" by name or title 10 times in 2014 and 10 times in 2013. Kim also raised "Kim Jong-il" by name or title 9 times in 2014 and 11 times in 2013. In so doing, Kim is clearly establishing himself as the (Confucian) filial pious son as well as ensuring orthodoxy to build up his credibility and smoothly transfer or routinize charisma.[\[7\]](#)

Speech Context: Struggles within and without

Domestic context:

Speeches always take place in a context. For Kim's 2014 New Year Address, his primary audience and context is domestic. According to Rodong Sinmun ([/劳动新闻](#)), an acknowledged and authoritative voice of the Workers Party of Korea, North Korea's notable achievements for 2013 were[8]:

Kim Jong-un's New Year Address - to the Army and the People. Order is important here. Military first politics (*songun*/ [/先军](#)) are still clearly in the lead; a 3rd nuclear test, the historic 31 March 2013 plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Workers Party of Korea setting the new strategic line on parallel and simultaneously developing two fronts: the economy and nuclear weapons, also known as *byungjin nosun* / [/平行发展](#).

The 7th Session of the 12th Supreme People's Assembly[9],[10] on the day after the plenary meeting, was singled out as significant for adopting the law on Kumsusan Palace and for *sui generis* writing into North Korea's constitution that they consider themselves a "nuclear weapons state" among other achievements. (NOTE: North Korea's self-declaration as a "nuclear weapons state" is NOT the same as the international legal status accorded by signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In fact, North Korea specifically disavows seeking the status of NPT-Nuclear Weapons Statehood).

North Korea is proud of their commemorations of the 60th anniversary of the Fatherland Liberation War or [/抗美援朝](#); for Anglophones this is known as the Korean War and in China it is known as [抗美援朝](#). North Korea does not mention any other countries party to the war. They also catalog their 160 gold medals in more than 70 international games as signal successes of 2013.

Construction of their war museum and other monumental structures across the country were built "in the spirit of the speed on Masik Pass". "Masikryong speed/ [/马息岭](#)" is associated with Kim Jong-un just as "Hui'chon speed/ [/熙川](#)" was associated with Kim Jong-il and "Chollima speed/ [/千里马](#)" was associated with Kim Il-sung. They are all meant to signify the speed and diligence with which North Koreans are able to work. On a Weberian sociological level, as Heonik Kwon and Byung Ho-Chung might relate, those pronouncements are meant to invoke the founding revolutionary spirit of North Korea. We ignore North Korea's partisan struggle mind-set at our peril.

Finally, the article makes what they likely consider the most important points, namely that Kim Jong-un met with and unified or consolidated important constituencies to include the cell secretaries of the Workers Party of Korea[11] (Cell secretaries serve as "the Party's nerve endings in the masses" and are responsible for lowest unit of the Party.), youth groups (thus ensuring the youth start and remain are forever under his control as they grow up in North Korea), light industrial workers (the means of production) and Korean People's Army company commanders and political instructors. As a whole, the report is meant to show that all groups are unified under Kim Jong-un.

International context:

North Korea was almost certainly aware that China released their 2014 diplomatic[12] and commercial[13] priorities about two weeks prior to Kim's New Year's speech. Japan also released their Defense priorities for 2014 and beyond.[14], [15] However, Kim's speech completely ignores those publicly promulgated priorities. His slight may arise from two broad cases: North Korea doesn't consider either country as a threat -or as a bulwark - to their external security; or Kim's domestic priorities take precedence over all foreign concerns. Yet *byungjin nosun* / [/平行发展](#) or "parallel development of nuclear weapons and the economy" seem to require at least

some external interaction and a relatively peaceful external environment whereas Military First policy or *songun* / 先军 thrives in an environment of external hostility.

Nor does his speech pay the slightest attention to Japan's new National Defense Priorities for FY 2014. Japan's new priorities for 2014 and beyond show a marked shift in funding priorities from ground forces to Naval and Air Self Defense Forces to deal with regional issues; China and South Korea are extremely concerned about the direction they think Japan is heading. The funding priority shift for Japan is consistent with the security environment articulated in Japan's new National Security Strategy. The guidelines single out China and North Korea. The funding priorities also demonstrate a shift toward capabilities such as Airborne warning squadrons to alert of danger and Aegis-equipped destroyers to deal with threats kinetically. This is not surprising since Kim's primary audience is domestic. However, it may also indicate he doesn't view China or Japan as particularly threatening - or helpful. North Korea's neighbors feel Japan's reactions to North Korea is negatively impacting their national security environment.

Speech Content: Continuities and Changes

Continuities:

While there is a fondness for the "untrodden path", this New Year's address stuck to many of the same themes and messages as 2013. It was roughly the same length (~4,300 words vs ~4,100 words in 2013); many of the same topics; many of the same exhortations, all delivered in a similar format. There is reassurance in the continuity. Despite being fairly opaque most of the time, the New Year's address contains information: 1) North Korean leaders (that is Kim Jong-un) want to emphasize domestically; 2) North Korea believes this information is basically true (the Korean version is meant for North Korean domestic consumption. The English and Chinese-language versions vary in nuance, but do not differ significantly in substance) and 3) the propaganda is used to lead - not deliberately mislead North Koreans [\[16\]](#), [\[17\]](#), [\[18\]](#) North Korea continues to acknowledge via various modalities that their economic system is not delivering everything that its citizens desire. North Korea wants to improve its economy and its security, but it will absolutely not brook any infringement on its sovereignty.

China is also likely somewhere between annoyed and concerned that North Korea again calls upon Koreans "in the North, in the south and abroad" to work toward Korean reunification. China has almost two million ethnic Korean citizens.

Changes: Raising a fierce wind

Kim promises that 2014 for North Koreans will be one of "grandiose struggle" (a phrase which we take to mean "characterized by greatness of scope or intent", not the standard English meaning of grandiose-- "seeming to be impressive or intended to be impressive but not really possible or practical"). 2014 will be "a year of sea changes," one in which the DPRK will make "a fresh leap forward"—not a great leap, or the same old leap, but a fresh start, a new type of leap, on all fronts. The goal, he says, is to make the DPRK an "economic giant," a goal repeated twice (from which one might deduce that the DPRK is less than an economic giant, if not an economic midget) and completely undefined (thereby leaving much room for shortfall in the future). Critical to the credibility of this goal—and Kim's emphasis on various "vanguard sectors"—is his notion that science and technology applied to economics makes it possible for the DPRK to take a "shortcut" to building a modern ("knowledge-based") economy.

This notion of science and technology as a "propellant" for the economy is combined with ideological and cultural mobilization, also referred to as a "propellant" which together, Kim suggests, will

enable the DPRK to lift itself by its own bootstraps, only in this case, without any bootstraps, by virtue of these two propellants. A shortcut avoiding “what” is also not stated, but might be inferred to refer to institutional reforms, adoption of markets, emulation of Chinese or Vietnamese or other transitional economic strategies. We will only know in hindsight whether they are able to manage the internal tensions and contradictions in a way that will permit meaningful economic reform, but there’s little evidence that either propellant enables a depressed economy to levitate towards economic growth.

Kim shifted priorities slightly within economic development. Kim’s emphasis on metallurgical and chemical industries makes a great deal of economic sense since developing those two industries requires developing a knowledge base and logistical infrastructure that will positively impact many upstream and downstream activities. , Of course, from a non-proliferation perspective, metallurgy is a key enabler for everything from building missiles (even on an artisanal scale) to uranium enrichment (on an industrial scale) to civilian nuclear use to weaponizing nuclear material. Chemical industries also support various industries, but the more immediate and mid-term questions arise from industrial pollution likely to be created from a resurgent chemical industry. North Korea’s love of Computer Numerical Controlled machines is on display again. There are likely propaganda reasons to highlight those machines, but those in the nuclear industries also immediately understand their importance to “parallel development” of the second front on nuclear weapons.

According to the speech, the DPRK intends to go on a building spree of vertical, horizontal and monumental construction. They also want to build three sets of power stations, but there is no mention of linking into Northeast Asia’s transmission and distribution grid. Such expressed desires are normal for New Years’ Addresses. The addresses must omit many details lest they drag on too long, but “bootstrapping” exhortations are especially void of practical details such as where the money or other resources will come from to support monumental edifices or infrastructure projects.

Kim does not refer to the DPRK’s own “non-negotiable treasured sword / 宝剑” but he does beat the drum of nuclear threat no less than five times in the speech, referring to nuclear war in and around the Korean peninsula, “frantic US “military exercises for a nuclear war against the north,” “hostile forces’ manoeuvres for a nuclear war against the DPRK,” “the dark clouds of a nuclear war against us hovering over the Korean peninsula,” and least but not least, the risk of “accidental military skirmish” resulting in a deadly nuclear catastrophe” from which the “United States will never be safe.”

Lest anyone doubt that Kim Jong-un is in charge or dares to think of challenging his rule, he declares that the purge of his Uncle Jang Song-Taek and related “factionalists lurking in the Party” consolidated the Party. In case anyone missed it, he goes on to refer to “single-hearted unity under his and the Party’s leadership four times. Signaling on-going purification and purging, Kim states:

“It is imperative to establish the monolithic leadership system in the Party, definitely ensure the purity of Party ranks and improve the militant functions and role of Party organizations. We should intensify ideological education among officials, Party members and other working people to ensure that they think and act at all times and in all places in line with the Party’s ideas and intentions with the steadfast faith that they know only the great Comrades Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il and our Party. We should ensure that they approach with political awareness even the slightest phenomenon and element that infringe on the unity of the Party and revolutionary ranks and undermine their single-hearted unity, and eliminate them in a thoroughgoing way. They should wage a vigorous struggle to stamp out any sort of alien ideology and decadent lifestyle which may undermine our system and thus resolutely smash the enemy’s schemes for ideological and cultural infiltration.”

This line does not augur well for institutional reform and openness to new ideas and practices within the DPRK's economy as the basis for becoming an economic giant. It should also impart a sense on those outside of the DPRK of the urgency and delicacy of creating strong people-to-people links with the DPRK.

Conclusion:

Even though Kim's New Year's speech is primarily for domestic consumption, it has many implications for external parties, especially the ROK, China, and the United States. Kim clearly wants to convey the impression that he is concerned with nuclear war. Yet, just as in his 2013 address, he never refers to North Korea's nuclear capability as a non-negotiable treasured sword/ 宝剑. It is unclear if the omission was purposeful and indicates a willingness to negotiate or if it was omitted for another reason.

As we saw last year, Kim has the capability and will to raise the stakes. The attempt to become an economic giant is highly unlikely to work, and in reality, China controls the degree to which Kim Jong-un can deliver significant economic growth, infrastructure investment, or welfare gains via the service and agricultural sectors. One can read the purge and on-going purification to achieve "single minded unity" as part of the DPRK "retreating to the mountain" (a classic defensive tai chi move that also draws the adversary in close for counter-attack).

The stakes are so high in relation to the DPRK's stability and the nuclear threat in Korea that it is incumbent upon all parties—the United States included—to explore what each of these elements means, and where there are entry points that might move the DPRK to a less tumultuous future, even if less "grandiose."

One immediate, low-cost antidote is talking. Talking is not a "reward" but a "prophylaxis" strategy meant to prevent a larger problem. As the United States and China attempt to implement a "new type great power relationship / 新兴大国关系" discussions about and with North Korea can be one method of creating a working definition of the relationship. The Six Power-Iran deal also laid out the general principle that in a complex, gridlocked, and nuclear threat strategic environment, the best approach is to seek a comprehensive security settlement in which nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and only then does implementation of cooperative measures begin. What might constitute such a cooperative security settlement in Northeast Asia, including a nuclear weapons-free zone, is a possible beginning point of bilateral and multilateral dialogue with Pyongyang that could lead to constructive outcomes in 2014.

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IV. ATTACHMENT 1: KIM JONG UN’S NEW YEAR ADDRESS, eNGLISH LANGUAGE

Jan. 1, Juche 104 (2015)Thursday

http://www.rodong.rep.kp/en/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2014-01-01-0001&chAction=T

New Year Address (Rodong Sinmun provided English-language translation)

Kim Jong Un

Dear comrades,

Dear service personnel of the Korean People's Army, all the people and other compatriots,

Having seen out 2013, a year in which we left a remarkable footprint on the road of the sacred march of the Juche revolution, we are seeing in the new year 2014 filled with confidence in the future and revolutionary self-respect.

Reflecting the boundless yearning and high respect of all the service personnel and people for the great President Kim Il Sung and General Kim Jong Il, I would like first to pay the highest tribute and New Year greetings to them.

I extend tribute also to the martyrs who dedicated their precious lives to national defence and socialist construction last year and New Year greetings to all the service personnel and people who are opening a new era of the country's prosperity following the leadership of our Party.

And greeting the new year I wish that the families across the country would overflow with greater happiness and joy.

My New Year greetings go also to my compatriots in the south, who are fighting for independence, democracy and national reunification, to my compatriots abroad, who are devoting their all to the prosperity of their motherland, and to the progressive peoples of the world and other foreign friends, who love justice and peace.

Last year was a proud year in which the entire Party, the whole army and all the people waged an all-out offensive in support of the Party's new line of developing the two fronts simultaneously and thus achieved brilliant successes in building a thriving socialist country and defending socialism.

Last year our service personnel and people, firmly rallied behind the Party, exalted the brilliance of the ideas and cause of the President and the General and strengthened the political and ideological might of our revolutionary ranks all the more.

Through the political events held in celebration of the 65th anniversary of the founding of the DPRK and the 60th anniversary of victory in the Fatherland Liberation War and in the whole course of last year's struggle, they demonstrated their firm faith and will in holding the President and the General in high esteem and carrying forward their imperishable exploits to posterity.

Our Party's policies of respecting the people and loving them and the people's hearty loyalty of trusting and following the Party as they would do their mothers have become integrated, and thus the blood-sealed ties between them have reached a new, higher stage.

In the seething period of the effort for building a thriving country last year we took the resolute measure of removing the factionalists lurking in the Party. As our Party detected and purged the anti-Party, counterrevolutionary factionalists at an opportune time and with a correct decision, the Party and revolutionary ranks were further consolidated and our single-hearted unity was solidified to the maximum. Through this struggle our Party affirmed that as a party that serves the people, it will fully discharge the honourable mission it has assumed for the times and history and devote its all to the good of the people by enhancing its militant functions and role.

Last year we consolidated our capabilities for self-defence and achieved a brilliant victory in the acute showdown with the imperialists.

The scientists, technicians and workers in the sector of defence industry, by going beyond the

cutting edge of military science with steadfast faith and mettle, demonstrated the strength of Songun Korea and rendered great services to consolidating the national defence capabilities. The officers and men of the Korean People's Army and the Korean People's Internal Security Forces, cherishing the spirit of defending their leader and motherland unto death, defended their Party and leader, country and people at the risk of their lives and smashed the reckless moves of the enemy for igniting a nuclear war and their rackets of confrontation with the DPRK at every step, thus highly exalting the dignity and might of their country.

Though the circumstances were harsh and complicated last year, our service personnel and people, by pooling their efforts, achieved great successes in the struggle to build their country into an economic giant and improve the people's standard of living.

An upsurge was brought about in production in several sectors and units of the national economy, and the foundations of the self-supporting economy were further consolidated. The officials and working people in the agricultural sector in particular made innovations in production even under difficult conditions and unfavourable natural climate and thus contributed to improving the people's standard of living.

The service personnel and other builders set up numerous monumental structures for the prosperity of their country and well-being of their fellow people and ushered in a heyday of construction.

Having turned out in response to the Party's appeal to create the "Masikryong speed," they carried out many construction projects, like the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum, Unha Scientists Street, Munsu Water Park and Masikryong Ski Resort, in a short period as befitting the creations of the era of the Workers' Party by displaying burning patriotic enthusiasm and working with devotion. In this way, they showed their country's proud appearance, which is changing with each passing day, and ensured that the people's laughter of happiness could ring out louder. Those who turned out for the reclamation of the Sepho Plateau and other large-scale construction projects tamed Nature, overcoming difficulties, thereby opening a breakthrough in realizing the Party's far-reaching plan at an early date.

Also, the sector of culture, including sports and education, made fresh strides last year.

True to the Party's intention of building our country into a sports power, a strong wind of conducting sports swept the country, and our trustworthy sportspeople won gold medals in international competitions and thus highly exalted the honour of their motherland. Preparations for enforcing a universal 12-year compulsory education were successfully promoted, many achievements made in the sector of science and technology, and up-to-date medical facilities introduced for the improvement of medical services for the people. The sector of musical art created many famous works of our times, inspiring loyalty in all the service personnel and people and encouraging them to wage a dynamic struggle and perform great feats.

The shining victories and successes we achieved last year can be ascribed to the fact that the entire Party, the whole army and all the people, in support of the revolutionary and people-oriented lines and policies of our Party and its wise leadership, waged a heroic struggle with an indomitable faith and will to build a thriving socialist country without fail.

Through last year's struggle we clearly demonstrated that our ideology, our strength and our way are the best and no force can check our sacred cause advancing to accomplish a far-reaching ideal and goal.

I extend heartfelt thanks to all the service personnel and people, who adorned the meaningful year

2013 with eye-opening successes by displaying boundless loyalty to the Party, warm affection for their country and unparalleled self-sacrificing spirit.

Comrades,

The new year 2014 will be a year of grandiose struggle, a year of sea changes, in which we will raise a fierce wind of making a fresh leap forward on all fronts of building a thriving socialist country and thus usher in a golden age of Songun Korea.

Our struggle of this year is a worthwhile struggle to translate the people's beautiful ideals and dreams into reality at an early date and a victors' march leading to the venue of grand festival for celebrating the 70th anniversary of the founding of the glorious Workers' Party of Korea.

In this hope-filled year we should usher in a great heyday in the revolution and construction by quickening the heroic march with enthusiasm and confidence in victory.

"Let us raise a fierce wind of making a fresh leap forward on all fronts of building a thriving country filled with confidence in victory!" -- this is the militant slogan our Party and people should uphold this year.

This year we should ensure that the sectors of agriculture, construction and science and technology hold the torch of innovations in the van and the flames of the torch flare up as flames of a leap forward on all the fronts of socialist construction.

This year is a meaningful one that marks the 50th anniversary of the theses on socialist rural question made public by President Kim Il Sung.

We should clearly prove the validity and vitality of the theses by waging the ideological, technological and cultural revolutions dynamically in the rural areas and bringing about a decisive turn in agricultural production. This year we should keep up agriculture as a major thrust of our effort in the struggle for economic construction and improving the people's standard of living, and concentrate all our efforts on farming. The agricultural sector should proactively introduce scientific farming methods and do farm work in a responsible manner so as to hit without fail the target of agricultural production set by the Party. It should improve animal husbandry and do greenhouse vegetable and mushroom farming on an extensive scale so as to ensure that larger quantities of meat, vegetables and mushrooms are supplied to the people.

We should usher in a new heyday of construction this year.

V. ATTACHMENT 2: Original Korean language address on Rodong Sinmun website

http://www.rodong.rep.kp/ko/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2014-01-01-0001&chAction=L

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VI. Attachment 3: Chinese-language translation provided by Rodong Sinmun on their website

亲爱的同志们！

http://www.rodong.rep.kp/cn/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2014-01-01-0001&chAction=L

亲爱的人民军官兵、全体人民和同胞兄弟们！

Vii. Nautilus Invites Your Responses

The Nautilus Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this report. Please leave a comment below or send your response to: nautilus@nautilus.org. Comments will only be posted if they include the author's name and affiliation.

View this online at: <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/kim-jong-uns-yyy-2015-new-year-speech/>

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