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United States Department of State
Bureau of Intelligence and Research

The Secretary's Morning Intelligence Summary

August 25, 1994

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DPRK: Slow-Motion Succession

Kim Jong Il has apparently been hospitalized, creating a leadership vacuum and slowing consolidation of his succession. The lack of firm leadership has allowed a reopening of old debates on policy toward the South and the economy; so far, US-DPRK relations appear unaffected.

Seven weeks after his father's death, Kim Jong Il has still not taken over as head of party and state. The official North Korean explanation — that a new leader cannot be installed while the people are still in mourning — is wearing thin. Evidence is accumulating that there are other forces at work.

Indisposed

There have been numerous reports that Kim Jong Il is ill. Several sources say he has diabetes, perhaps complicated by other ailments. Illness would explain Kim's prolonged absence from public view at a time when he should be highly visible. It may also have created a leadership vacuum when the system can least afford it. If Kim does not make an appearance on National Day early next month, new questions will arise about his position.

Not ready for prime time

An unattributed August 21 Pyongyang radio talk on the succession implicitly admitted that the process was incomplete. The talk noted that even when the successor is "designated in a timely manner, it does not mean that the question of the leader's successor is completely solved." The commentary emphasized that work remains to be done in building the party's organizational and ideological foundations and in establishing the successor's "leadership system" — both tasks that a symposium last December credited Kim Jong Il with having successfully completed.

Under attack?

There are other signs that the succession may be sputtering.

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Since Kim Il Sung's funeral, moreover, North Korean media have urged that Kim's legacy be followed without deviation, implying concern about a potential challenge to the succession. Such concerns may have been heightened by recent radio broadcasts praising Kim Il Sung's skill in dealing with foreign leaders — a sensitive topic in view of Kim Jong Il's reputed discomfort around foreigners.

Policy debate

With the succession process temporarily slowed, the leadership debate has apparently reopened on two crucial policy areas: reunification and the economy. This is all the more surprising in that Kim Il Sung had set a definitive line in both areas before his death, coming out strongly in support of policies long favored by Kim Jong Il. In particular, the younger Kim had pushed hard for giving priority to light industry, a policy finally enshrined in a major plenum decision last December. In the past few weeks, however, there have been unattributed radio talks (the classic vehicle for airing differing leadership views) emphasizing the importance of heavy industry and conspicuously failing to mention the plenum decisions.

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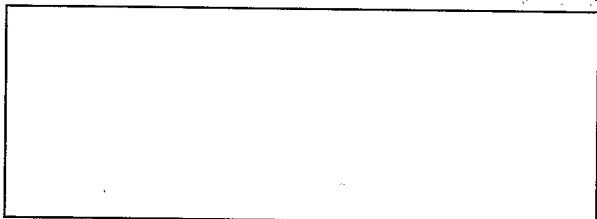
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Iron broom

The leadership lineup (Korean Workers' party Politburo members, party secretaries, and vice pre-

miers) is unchanged. The only anomaly has been the ranking of Korean People's Army vice marshals ahead of the party secretaries on two ceremonial occasions. Kim Jong Il will have to make some leadership changes soon, to root out pockets of opposition and put his own stamp on his regime. The reference in the August 21 radio talk to establishing the "successor's leadership system" suggests that this unfinished business will be addressed soon.

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