

Dec 20 2011

## South Korea's Northern policy in the post- Kim Jong-il era

LSE IDEAS



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The volatile condition of Pyongyang after Kim Jong-il's death is asking from Seoul the answer to the Korean puzzle. South Korea's Lee Myung-bak administration, its term beginning in 2008, faces a new challenge from the Kims. The Lee regime which has had hostile relations with Kim Jong-il and had a number of battles in the West Sea of Korea is silently observing the post-Kim Jong-il NK. The South Korean press reported that there were missile launches in the East Sea of North Korea, but the SK leadership did not make any official reaction toward this military action of Pyongyang. Seemingly, the SK elites are very careful with the demise of NK Premier and delay their strategic decision on the new regime of Pyongyang. Seoul did not dispatch any representative to Pyongyang but conveyed its condolences to the North and put the ROK armed forces on emergency stand-by. At this moment, regarding the SK response and limited information of new NK leadership, it is still very unclear whether the death of Kim Jong-il will open another détente period in the Korean Peninsula or will not make any change in the bitter relations between the two Koreas. Clearly, it is up to Pyongyang to keep or change its hostile policy toward Capitalist South. As usual, SK will need to react toward the new NK policy. However, such a passive strategy would not help the third Kim regime re-consider its relations with Seoul but also worsen the security of both Koreas. The Lee administration might worry about taint on its anti- North Korean policy if it helps the new Kim regime stabilize its basis in NK. But the most serious problem, now, is that the political instability in NK and possible power conflicts between/among potential heirs of Kim Jong-il could threaten South Korea's security, too. 'Korea' is not a big land. The civil war or local warfare inside NK can extend to the South. That is, for its own safety, South Korea should make efforts to reduce the chaos in its brother nation.

Without any doubt, the first goal of Lee is to establish its national security and reduce the risk of war whereas the new NK government aims to gain the control over its country and win the hearts and minds of military leaders. Seoul must consider the North Korean intention and attempt to attain its goal based on its support for the new Kim regime. Pyongyang might require funds in order to 'buy' the loyalty of NK military commanders. Currently, the two Koreas have stopped running their joint business in Kaesung, the second largest city in NK, due to a series of military conflicts after 2008. This Kaesung industrial zone was one of the major sources of NK income. And if the South proposes the resume of economic cooperation to Pyongyang and promises an instant economic benefit for NK government, this would encourage the new regime to increase the political exchanges with the Lee regime. And this is not purely economic logic; the economic cooperation between two Koreas naturally leads the political recognition of the new regime in the global politics. The successor of Kim Jong-il would want the international recognition for his inheritance in order to reduce the domestic challenge. Especially, the approval from Beijing for the heir would be decisive. In this situation, South Korea's economic and political support for the new regime would help the Chinese decision and further stabilize the North Korean politics. Therefore, Seoul has to prepare its new diplomatic approach toward Pyongyang and use this crisis for the reconciliation between the two Koreas.

The people with 'moral' or 'idealistic' ideas could criticize this practical program and argue that SK should not support the 'evil' Kim regime. However, to denounce such an 'evil' government does not necessarily encourage the 'moral' politics in NK. If the new regime loses its control over its military leaders, there could be a conflict between/among the military officials. And this would harm the security of South Korea and even result in the advent of more aggressive regime in Pyongyang. In the current situation, the realistic program is more appropriate for peace in East Asia.

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