

Kim Jong-un's 2019 New Year Speech: What Did He Say? And Why?

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*The message of **Chairman Kim Jong-un's** 2019 New Year speech was mainly addressed to the people of North Korea; he was telling his people the need for constructing a "New Socialism" that can allow North Korea to survive and prosper, even if the current peace process does not fully succeed.*

The "New Socialism" is protected by the Juche philosophy, enforced by the principles of egalitarian distribution of wealth and income. and made more efficient by harmonious relation between the free market et the government-run economy.

The speech is divided into three themes: the economic system based on the new socialism, North South relations and the nuclear issue.

Of these three themes, the most important one is about the new socialism which takes up as much as 70% of the speech. The part dealing with the North-South relations represents about 10% leaving remaining 20% for the issues of denuclearization

1. **New Socialism**

In the mind of Chairman Kim, the new socialism must be embodied into the economic system. The new economic system is a system which is capable of providing, for the people, equal opportunity to participate in economic activities and equal benefits of economic development. The most important basis of the new socialism is the Juche philosophy which stresses the absolute importance of self reliance in thought and self sufficiency in economic matters. In fact, up to now, one of the most significant factors responsible for the survival of the North Korean regime, despite the terrible sanctions, has been the Juche philosophy.

Chairman Kim Jong-un announced in his speech the basic approach to the development of the major sectors of the economy including the primary sector, the manufacturing sector and the service industry represented by the tourist industry. Chairman Kim tells the people what to do and how to do in order to improve the productivity and the creativity of each sector.

Another important element of his new socialism is the balance between the free market economy and the government-run economy. In the new socialism, the free market is allowed but it should be in harmony with the government-run (Party-run) economy. However, the speech is not clear on the demarcation line between the two regimes; this is one of the major challenges of the new socialism.

Chairman Kim seems to be aware of the fact that without honesty, competence and strong devotion, the new socialism cannot succeed. He specifically mentions what he expects from his government and party officials. He warns against the abuse of power conferred to the government institutions and officials. He provides an important space in his speech for the danger of bureaucracy and the damaging effect of corruption.

He is keenly aware of what has happened in the South. The conservative government's abuse of power and corruption has led to the worst case of wealth and income inequality, which is now threatening the very growth of the South Korean economy.

In his speech, Chairman Kim is saying that the *raison d'être* of the new socialism is the happiness of the people. He is saying that the whole system is for the people and run by the people. This point is repeated countless times in Chairman's speech.

However, the whole system should be managed under the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK). Here, Chairman Kim's doctrine is a departure from his father's and grandfather's position; these two leaders were above the party.

Nevertheless, Chairman Kim makes efforts to show that his new socialism does respect his ancestors' vision of the society; his vision of the future is in harmony with the aspiration of the past. This is symbolically shown in the selection of the speech site and his manner of delivering the speech.

He delivered his speech in an office where the pictures of his father and grandfather were behind and above his armchair where he was sitting. These pictures represented the past which Chairman Kim Jong-un cherishes and respects.

The manner of delivering the speech was also an important aspect of Chairman's speech. He tried to show his readiness to accept a new model of leadership away from his ancestors' authoritarian leadership; he wanted to show that he is not above the Party; he wanted to show that he can lead his people like any other leaders of the civilized world. It is not by chance that he was wearing a Western suit with a simple tie; he read down the text with no applause.

Chairman Kim Jong-un tries to show the harmony between the past and the future. In the past, the North Korean socialism was represented by *kimilsungism* and *kimjongilism*; this doctrine had three ingredients: *Juche* philosophy, egalitarian distribution of wealth and income and Confucian value. Under **Kim Il-sung** and **Kim Jong-il**, the Confucian value was very important; the leader was conceived as benevolent Confucian father and the people must obey the leader like Confucian son or daughter. In the new socialism (*kimjongunism*), the Confucian value seems to be replaced, partly, by the authority of the Workers' Party

2. North-South Relations

The part of Chairman Kim's speech reserved for the North-South relations is small but the message is clear. The fate of the Korean race and the Korean peninsula is entirely determined by Koreans in the North and the South and no interventions of outside forces are tolerated in the matter of determining the future of the Korean peninsula.

Some of the media of the West seem to take this as narrow-minded nationalism and even possible factor of making cracks in the Seoul-Washington alliance. I believe that it is more

than natural that Koreans decide themselves their own future. If the Seoul-Washington alliance is damaged because of this nationalism, the alliance is not worthwhile.

The second message related to the North-South relations is that the North has been doing its best to create peace and common prosperity. Through the three North-South summits, a firm mutual commitment for peace and mutual prosperity has been made. Above all, by virtue of the Military Agreement of September 2018, wide military buffer zones were established; in these zones, no military exercises are allowed. The military liaison offices have been established; the DMZ has been demilitarized. These measures are telling the world that there will be no more war on the Korean peninsula.

These messages have an important implication for Washington's Korea policies. South Korea has sent a non-equivocal message to Washington that the US should think twice before attacking North Korea. Even though the war-time military control is in the hands of Washington, **it could be difficult to mobilize the South Korean forces in time of war against North Korea without the consent of the South Korean government;** it is unlikely that Seoul would give such consent.

Thus, the North-South military agreement would compel Washington to reconsider its military strategy for the Korean peninsula.

Chairman Kim's speech touches another important part of the North-South relations. It is the economic relations. One thing is clear; Pyongyang desperately needs economic development, for the very survival of the regime depends on it. South Korea also needs very badly the development of the North Korean economy.

The economy of South Korea has shown deep malaise in recent years. Obviously many factors explain this trend, but the basic reason is the conservative government's 58 years of pro-Chaebol and pro-export policies that have inevitably led to the Chaebols-government collusion, which, in turn, has produced the culture of corruption. Once the corruption culture is settled in, the fair trade, the creativity and the productivity of the economy are hard to maintain. The result is clear; the culture of corruption hurts severely the international competitiveness of Chaebols and South Korea. The internal mismanagement of business, the wasteful horizontal expansion of companies and the illegal corporative activities of Chaebols are also significant factor of weakening competitiveness of the Korea economy.

What is more damaging is the shrinking trickling-down effects of Chaebols' business on job creation. Chaebols enjoy almost unlimited privileges given by the government and get the lion share of financial and human resources allocation, but they create only 15% of jobs.

Chaebols exports create fewer jobs because of automation of the production of goods exported on the one hand and, on the other hand, the increasing use of imported parts used for the production of goods exported. Moreover, the pro-Chaebol and pro-export policy has alienated the small-and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) resulting in dangerously unequal income distribution in favour of Chaebols. Remember this. The SMEs represent 99.9% of the total number of enterprises and 85% of jobs. Decreasing income of SME workers worsens the income distribution.

It is now common knowledge that the good way to revitalize the South Korean economy is to participate actively in the process of the economic development of the North Korea. The combination of the South's money and technology with the North's immense natural

resources and low-cost well disciplined labour force would surely open a way to the rapid development of the North's economy and, at the same time, the revival of the dynamism of the South's economy.

In his speech, Chairman Kim expressed the ideas of reopening the Gaesung Industrial Complex and Mt. Keumgang-San tourist resorts. These two establishments are the proof of the legitimacy, the creativity and the productivity of North-South cooperation; they show that economic benefice can overcome ideological divide.

The essence of Chairman's speech regarding the North-South relations is this. The North-South cooperation is vital not only for the peace process but also for common economic interest; it will continue regardless of the outcome of Washington-Pyongyang negotiations.

3. Denuclearization

Regarding the issue of denuclearization, Chairman Kim delivered the following messages.

First, he has officially declared, through his own voice, in front of the world, that he is ready for "complete denuclearisation". It is the first time that he declared himself his pledge for FFVD (Final Fully Verified Denuclearization); this is a clear manifestation of Kim's sincere commitment for denuclearization.

Second, he promised the four "Nos" regarding nuclear weapons: "No Production", "No Use", "No Tests" and "No Proliferation". In fact, these pledges constitute a moratorium on the existing nuclear weapons.

Chairman Kim did not mention anything about the disposal of the existing nuclear weapons. This is the matter to be negotiated with Washington.

Third, Chairman Kim is ready to meet President Trump any time to produce an outcome that would be welcomed by the international community. This means that he has something that would meet Washington's demand.

But, there is still deep mistrust between Pyongyang and Washington; this is not surprising; after all, they have been enemies for 70 years. Washington seems suspicious about Pyongyang as Pyongyang mistrusts Washington.

What Washington wants is pre-FFVD and post- compensation (lifting of sanctions) But what Pyongyang desires is sequential simultaneous gives-and-takes which means gradual FFVD matched by gradual compensations. In this way, the mutual mistrust can be dissipated. As long as Washington insists on its previous position, Pyongyang will not go; the whole process may end.

Fourth, this is important. Chairman Kim says that, if President Trump does not fulfill the Singapore agreement, he will go "May way". There are various interpretations of this statement. There are some who are saying that North Korea might resume nuclear testing and missile launching. But this is absurd; after all, Kim promised the four Nos.

Hence, there must be some other hidden meaning. There are two possible scenarios.

First, North Korea will go to China asking it to lift the sanctions. This could, of course, increase the Sino-US tension, but, given the commercial war and technology battle, China

might increase its economic cooperation with North Korea even risking secondary sanctions against it. Chairman Kim's visit to Beijing on January 7 might provide a chance to discuss possible alternative means to bring peace on the Korean peninsula..

Second, Chairman Kim is telling the North Korean people to be ready to build a new socialist country, even if the peace process with Washington fails. Here is what he said:

"Our country can march forward and build our socialism suitable to our needs through the determination and the efforts of our people; we can do this without any external aid."

What comes out of Chairman Kim's speech is this. North Korea is ready for FFVD but it cannot go any further, unless Washington trusts Pyongyang and provides rewards which are acceptable to Chairman Kim and his people.

It is hoped that the coming Washington-Pyongyang Summit will be able to write the last page of the Cold War.

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