

Kim Jong-il: Strategy and Psychology

by Michael J. Mazarr

In October 2006, Kim Jong-il's North Korea again seized international attention. With its claimed underground nuclear test, Pyongyang upped the ante in its confrontation with the United States and the world community and appeared to return to its established habit of manufacturing crises. And, as always, outside observers began once again to engage in endless speculation about the motives and reasons behind North Korean policy. Most of this analysis tends to refer to North Korea as if it were a unified entity, a classical rational actor on the international scene. Of course, it is not; it remains a dictatorship that, although in all likelihood riven by factional disputes and palace intrigue, nonetheless largely reflects the preferences of one man—Kim Jong-il. In similar examples of tyrannies dominated by a single figure—Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union, Saddam's Iraq—outsiders in fact discovered that, when those countries later opened up and documents came pouring out, the opinion of a single man usually determined large-scale state policy.¹ If the situation in North Korea is the same, discovering Kim Jong-il's worldview, his personality, and his political psychology becomes essential to understanding the challenge posed by North Korea. And yet comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding Kim the man.²

The lack of consensus about Kim's essential character is on display in various public statements by those who have known or encountered him. Routinely described as a tyrant, despot, and madman, Kim in the popular imagination looms as a sort of Asian cross between Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler. President George W. Bush has famously said that he "loathes" the North Korean leader. The North's most prominent defector to date—Hwang Jang-yop, Pyongyang's former chief of ideology—has characterized Kim as arrogant, impatient, rageful, and cruel.

Others have been more charitable. Professor Stephen Haggard of the University of California, San Diego, suggested after Kim's summit with Kim Dae-jung, the president of South Korea (Republic of Korea, or ROK), that "Kim Jong-il appeared relaxed, magnanimous and—above all—in complete control. Stereotypes of an insecure recluse . . . can no longer be justified."³ The former U.S. ambassador to South Korea, Don Gregg, has argued that "For all his defects, [Kim] demonstrates a willingness to learn from neighboring countries' economic policies and to differentiate his rule from that of his father" and reports that former South Korean president Kim Dae-jung told him that Kim Jong-il was "highly intelligent and a flexible thinker."⁴ After their 2000

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meetings, former secretary of state Madeleine Albright was almost generous in her praise: Kim was “very decisive and practical and serious,” a “good listener and a good interlocutor.” One Clinton White House official said bluntly at the time, “We misdiagnosed this guy.”⁵

University of Hawaii professor emeritus Dae-sook Suh has rightfully suggested that we need to see Kim Jong-il “as he is, rather than a distorted version.”⁶ But the paucity of verifiable facts about Kim makes this a difficult challenge. Virtually everything we know about him comes secondhand from sources of sometimes uncertain veracity who—whether coached on their comments, as sometimes charged, or not—may see good reasons to offer scandalous anecdotes about Kim Jong-il’s habits. What little direct evidence we possess is sketchy, drawn from outsiders who spent a few hours or a few days in Kim’s company, hardly enough time to make conclusive judgments about his personality. Even more than in the cases of many other dictatorial heads of state, from Hitler to Stalin to Saddam Hussein, Kim’s personality remains the subject of guesswork.

Kim Jong-il: A Brief Biography

Kim Jong-il was born in either 1941 or 1942, depending on whose history you believe, in a military encampment outside Khabarovsk in Siberia, where his father was leading anti-Japanese guerrilla units.⁷ He was given the Russian nickname, Yura, which remained in use until he was in his teens.⁸ As with all children in the guerrilla camps, it is likely that he was subjected to intense ideological indoctrination in communist dogma as a youth.⁹ His mother, Kim Jong-suk, was also a guerrilla fighter with Kim Il-sung, and she performed a variety of functions for the group.

In 1948, Kim Jong-il’s little brother—the smaller boy was probably five years old at the time—died while the two were swimming in a pond. Some reports suggest that Kim accidentally killed his sibling by playfully pushing him into deep water repeatedly until the younger boy drowned, but this remains speculative.¹⁰ The next year, Kim’s reportedly stern but beautiful and loving mother died during childbirth—a tragic and devastating loss to any young boy. With his father off building his socialist paradise, Kim and his surviving younger sister, as Peter Maass tellingly puts it, “became de facto orphans.”¹¹

The psychoanalyst Ronald Turco has speculated on the psychological effects of these profound early traumas, suggesting that viewing his younger brother’s death “may have ‘hardened’ Kim to the suffering and losses of others.” Turco explains that children who lose a parent before adolescence may be “unable to mourn the loss”—a gap that creates vulnerability to psychological damage later in life. Turco himself conjectures that Kim has “never ‘given up’ his mother suffers from extreme feelings of inferiority” and has a de-

gree of depression “which he manages to assuage with various forms of gratification. He needs to control everything and everyone in his environment and has a primitive need to destroy anything that interferes with an illusion of power and adulation.”¹²

Early reports from those who encountered Kim as a child point to an intelligent, questioning, anxiously ambitious young man who worked hard to ingratiate himself with his dictator father. Defectors contend that the young Kim was role-playing himself as a tyrant from a young age, calling his young friends “ministers” and “bellowing orders” at them.¹³ As he grew into his teens and twenties, Kim then had to negotiate a complex series of potential hurdles to his assumption of power—most notably he had to outmaneuver a number of relatives, such as uncle Kim Yung-ju, stepmother Kim Song-ae, and half brother Kim Pyong-il, who may have had their own ambitions to rule. Others, such as Nam Il, the former guerrilla partner of Kim Il-sung, and an obscure vice premier named Kim Dong-kyu, were reportedly brushed aside and killed.¹⁴

If a variety of direct and indirect reports are to be believed, these various experiences—the death of Kim’s mother and frequent absence of his father; the drowning of a sibling, perhaps an accident to which Kim himself contributed; and the creation of a family of rivalrous in-laws offering little affection and a great deal of competition for power—bred in the young Kim Jong-il an intense insecurity, a lifelong pattern of desperately seeking affection, in particular fatherly regard.¹⁵ “Early eyewitness accounts portray the younger Kim as painfully insecure and erratic, with darting eyes and halting speech.”¹⁶ Many reports describe a generally shy and retiring individual who shunned outsiders, crowds, and public attention.¹⁷

And yet this portrait of an essentially introverted young man must be laid alongside the reality of someone whose behavior in his carefully controlled, sycophantic, behind-the-scenes world of power is and has for decades been bullying, self-confident, and disrespectful. From a relatively young age, a number of defectors have suggested, Kim was bossing others around, telling his superiors—at school, in the military, in the government—what to do. “The traits most frequently mentioned,” Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig explain, “are Kim’s independence, arrogance, and lack of respect for seniors. . . . Kim is energetic; he works, thinks, and talks fast.”¹⁸ In many ways, this apparently paradoxical combination—insecurity and an overbearing self-confidence—makes perfect sense from a psychological standpoint: it is, in fact, as we shall see, the defining attribute of the narcissistic personality.¹⁹

In 1960 Kim Jong-il began his university studies, focusing on political economy. After graduation he performed a number of jobs, gradually worked to reshape the leadership cadre

of the country, revamped film and opera of North Korea, and perhaps most important headed a drive for ideological purity under “KimIlSungism.” When Kim Il-sung took his frequent and famous inspection trips around the country, his son often traveled with him and gradually began issuing his own guidance. Famously, he got into film directing, beginning with the aptly titled *Sea of Blood*. Gradually during the 1970s, the succession plan to Kim Jong-il took shape. By most accounts, this was a drawn-out affair in which North Korean officialdom was in some cases only slowly won over to the idea that Kim Jong-il, who began to be called “the Party Center” in official North Korean publications, would follow his father into power.

It is widely believed that Kim Jong-il masterminded North Korea’s most prominent terrorist acts—the 1983 Rangoon attack in which 17 visiting South Korean officials died, and the 1987 bombing of a Korean Air Lines (KAL) aircraft that killed 115 people. A North Korean agent allegedly involved in the KAL bombing—who was arrested in Bahrain and delivered to the South Korean government after a failed suicide attempt—claimed that Kim Jong-il ordered the attack. The commonest interpretation of these allegations of terrorism is of a Kim Jong-il desperate to prove to his father, and perhaps others in the North Korean hierarchy, that he possessed the toughness to rule.

By most accounts, the succession was not a smooth or direct process. There are rumors of assassination attempts against Kim Jong-il by rivals, and it is known that in 1976–77 the younger Kim’s portraits were taken down in the capital and references to the Party Center ceased for a time. By 1979 they were back, however, and from then until Kim Il-sung’s death in July 1994, the younger Kim was positioning himself in posts that offered him increasing authority over daily life in the North. By the time his father died, Kim Jong-il—who would become known as the Dear Leader—was already the de facto head of state.

General Personality Characteristics

What sort of person emerges from the cloudy accounts that we have of Kim Jong-il? The conventional portrait is of a typical dictator—cruel, self-promoting, living in exceptional luxury at a series of expensive and well-guarded palaces, suspicious of all others. There may be some cracks in this psychological facade, however, that put him in a category slightly different from a Saddam Hussein or Josef Stalin.

Kim’s generalized cruelty and lack of empathy for his people is not in doubt. The behavior of the state he rules so meticulously testifies to such a personality; and specific, hard-to-verify anecdotes reinforce the image of someone with a capacity for ruthlessness. As with Stalin, the pattern may have begun early in life: one report by a North Korean offi-

cial claims that as a child Kim took pleasure in crushing insects.²⁰ Others paint the boy Kim as a rough, bullying child who would bite and attack other children.²¹ Defectors report incidents of Kim’s ordering the assassination of rivals and jilted allies. Whatever the truth of these specific allegations, someone so obsessive about the details of his murderous state must surely be well aware of the scale and horrific conditions of his numerous gulags and work camps.

And yet there is debate about the actual degree of Kim’s inherent cruelty. A number of sources paint him as ambitious but not “especially bloodthirsty” during his youth and rise to power.²² Although some have suggested that Kim, for sport, does watch the ideological interrogation of accused senior officials, beyond those accounts we have no persuasive public evidence of a streak of visceral brutality that we see in Saddam Hussein and many African dictators—no personal murders, no gleeful observation of torture. North Korea’s mass terrorism against its citizens largely takes the form of indirect murder—killing through starvation, killing through overwork in gulags—rather than direct mass murder on the scale of Pol Pot or Saddam Hussein or Adolf Hitler. Some chance exists that Kim’s penchant for viciousness is more bounded than other dictators’ and that he has convinced himself that the privations endured by his people are primarily the fault of outside enemies, especially the United States.

This is all speculative, of course, and substantial classified evidence of Kim the personal torturer could exist, but I think a reasonable case can instead be made for Kim the self-promoter and self-protector. Kim may well be an individual for whom brutality and bloodthirstiness are not essential aspects of his personality, as they have been for some dictators, but are merely products of his needs for recognition and safety, for example.

Kim Jong-il has famously been portrayed as a heavy drinker. Defector reports, including some from former bodyguards, have confirmed this image.²³ Kim has been rumored to be under orders from his doctors to reduce his drinking; nonetheless, at one summit dinner with Kim Dae-jung, Kim Jong-il reportedly guzzled several glasses of wine. He has also been a heavy smoker. In his personal habits, then, Kim seems to be a man given to excess, determined to tempt fate and push the limits—and yet also willing to some degree to listen to the advice of others and moderate his actions.

All dictators become partly enclosed in a cocoon of self-delusion, but there are indications that Kim Jong-il makes a real effort to remain informed about the world. Those who have met with him suggest that he follows foreign media carefully.²⁴ He boasts of watching CNN and other international news, and visitors report that he seems well-informed about world events.

Like many dictators, Kim can be engaging, charming, and even attentive to guests when he decides that it will serve his interests. When he kidnapped the South Korean actress Choi Eun-hee, for example, he reportedly treated her well, inquired about her needs, sent her flowers, and invited her to dinners.²⁵ Madeleine Albright, Kim Dae-jung, and many other visitors report encountering a humorous, thoughtful man who can listen as well as talk and who provides good company. Here, too, we find perhaps a slight divergence from a typical dictator's personality: although men like Saddam, Hitler, and Stalin could charm others at times, most who met them nonetheless reported a coldness, a callousness, and most of all an inability to seriously engage with those around them in true give-and-take. Kim seems somewhat more flexible, somewhat less dogmatic on these admittedly very tentative measures.

At the same time, those who have worked with the private Kim describe a man who is emotional, quick to anger, and sometimes violent. "When he is angry," a former sister-in-law would claim, "he can make every window in the house shake."²⁶ His degree of apparent interaction with outsiders may be largely for show; one psychoanalyst who has researched Kim's personality concludes:

*I believe he is a man who can "turn on the charm" but who is innately "cold" and dispassionate in intimate relations. He is ill at ease with people especially in public settings and has never had to please others to get what he wants. . . . His personal detachment is evident however charming he attempts to be.*²⁷

There is strong evidence that Kim is a fully engaged leader, that he is closely involved in the details of governing. In one widely reported incident, during Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to Pyongyang in October 2000, the U.S. delegation gave Kim a list of more than a dozen questions about the technical specifications of North Korea's missile programs. The Americans expected Kim to hand them to an aide; instead he answered many of the questions from memory. Defectors who have worked near him describe a night owl who reads hundreds of reports from officials of his regime and who routinely calls people in the middle of the night with questions or guidance.

Russian officials who rode trains with Kim during a 2001 trip from North Korea describe a smart, well-informed, even reform-oriented leader. One of them later told a reporter that Kim "is an emotional person, but he is a professional. He knows what he is doing. He plans several steps ahead."²⁸ The most famous North Korean defector—former chief of *juche* ideology Hwang Jang-yop—has said that Kim "micromanages every detail of government business";²⁹ the South Korean film director Shin Sang-ok, kidnapped by North Korean agents in 1978, reports that Kim "is a

hardworking, clever micromanager. He is in total control of his government and country."³⁰

Finally, in Kim's worldview, we see the constant repetition of a single theme: the urgent, passionate demand that outside powers—particularly the United States—recognize, negotiate with, and respect him. One South Korean newspaper publisher, in North Korea during the summer of 2000 with a media delegation, reported that Kim Jong-il insisted that he knew very well that his missile program did not give him any ability to strike the United States without being annihilated in response. "But I have to let them know that I have missiles," Kim reportedly said. "I am making them because only then will the United States talk to me."³¹ One Russian diplomat told an American reporter about Kim's remarks about the controversies surrounding his weapons program: "I see it this way: if I'm being talked about, then I'm on the right track."³²

Kim's urgent desire for attention may have been on display during his 2001 trip to Moscow. When invited for an informal, impromptu dinner with Vladimir Putin at the Russian president's residence, Kim was deeply impressed, if the observations of his Russian hosts are a valid guide. One Russian official present at the time later wrote that it was as if "the dinner changed Kim Jong Il's personality. Before that, he'd been a little reserved. But after Moscow, he was more open, trusting, gentle." After his unscheduled meeting with Putin, Kim Jong-il himself supposedly remarked, "If I am treated diplomatically"—apparently he means here impersonally, stiffly, with a focus on interests rather than relationships—"I become a diplomat myself. But Putin was sincere with me, and I opened my heart to him." The same official reported that Kim and other North Korean officials also characterized Madeleine Albright's Pyongyang visit in oddly emotional terms. "Throughout the reception," one North Korean official insisted, "she kept holding [Kim Jong-il's] hand," and before the reception she had "changed the brooch on her dress—put on a miniature heart instead of the American flag."³³

In broad terms, we find in Kim Jong-il many elements that point to an unqualified image of a merciless, power-hungry dictator—and a few hints that we may be dealing with someone slightly more flexible, nuanced, and restrained than that. To bring some coherence to our view of Kim Jong-il the man, it could be helpful to employ alternative models of political psychology. Two have most frequently been employed to analyze Kim: the idea that he is a classic "malignant narcissist," on the model of many earlier dictators; and the notion that he is nothing more than a typical feudal-era Confucian leader dressed up in twenty-first-century garb. As I will argue, I think neither of these models tells the full story, but both offer interesting clues to understanding—and determining how to deal with—North Korea's obscure leader.

Analytical Model 1: Classic Malignant-Narcissist Dictator

The most common psychological portrait applied to dictators and tyrants is a variant of the common personality type of narcissism. In simplest terms, the concept of narcissism refers to a personality type passionately trying to compensate for insults to self-esteem—often suffered as a child and especially often through fractured family relationships—with exaggerated self-regard. At base, the narcissist is a contradictory or split personality, marrying extreme self-regard and grandiose ambitions with intense subconscious insecurity and self-loathing. One result is a personality prone to seeing the world in the black-and-white terms of friends and enemies—the internal conflict becomes externalized and projected onto the world, with the good and grandiose self warding off attacks from those who would injure its self-esteem and security. Other elements of narcissism include poor human relationships and limited empathy.

Narcissism is characteristic of many people, especially leaders, and is not always destructive if kept within boundaries.³⁴ Some analysts have outlined an extreme version in which the negative aspects of the personality type are magnified (stronger doses of paranoia, for example, and poor impulse control) and have termed the result “malignant” narcissism. A malignant narcissist is in it for himself—for the power and adulation—and has only an indirect or instrumental relationship with his cause or ideology. The achievement of power adds fuel to existing psychological fires, and the practice of absolute power “can act as a kind of narcotic” for the narcissist. Malignant narcissists will use their power to promote an exalted self-image, to strictly control their environment, and to annihilate actual or potential opposition.³⁵

Apart from the dangers of paranoia and a Manichean worldview, one major risk of a malignant narcissist in a leadership position is the leader’s lack of an ability to respect boundaries. The scholar Betty Glad suggests that the grandiosity and the “consequent limited reality testing” of the tyrant “are apt to lead him into behavior that turns out to be self-defeating. Tyrants may tempt fate . . . or undertake reckless adventures.” The more power they get, it seems, the more extreme and reckless will be their behavior.³⁶

Saddam Hussein is a classic case study of this type, and the argument for Saddam as malignant narcissist has been persuasively laid out by the political psychologist Jerrold Post. Saddam had as troubled a childhood as Kim: his mother reportedly tried to commit suicide and then to abort him; his father died before he was born; after his birth, his mother rejected him for the first three years of his life—only to take him back after she had remarried, to a man who was

by all accounts abusive. This is a prototypical seedbed of narcissism, and Saddam displays the basic characteristics of the type, from self-promotion to a messianic view of his role to paranoia and a black-and-white worldview that sees only loyal sycophants and dedicated enemies. One result is an utter lack of empathy: Saddam has “a flexible conscience,” Post concludes; “commitments and loyalty are matters of circumstance, and circumstances change. If an individual, or a nation, is perceived as an impediment or threat, no matter how loyal in the past, [that entity] . . . will be eliminated violently without a backward glance.”³⁷

And yet, perhaps in part because of his lack of strong core commitments, Saddam, like nearly all dictatorial narcissists, could sometimes display remarkable flexibility in reversing course if doing so served his own interests. “He is not impulsive, he acts only after judicious consideration, and he can be extremely patient; indeed, he uses time as a weapon,” Post explains. Like many such personalities—because of their intensely self-centered mental process and because, especially over time, they tend to retreat into a cocoon of sycophants and self-delusion—Saddam saw events through an extremely misshapen lens. “While he is psychologically in touch with reality, he is often politically out of touch with reality. Saddam’s worldview is narrow and distorted,” Post concludes. Nonetheless, Saddam’s main goal was staying in power. “Considering himself a revolutionary pragmatist, Saddam is at heart a survivor. . . . Saddam was by no means a martyr.” Yet overreaching was still possible on issues that he perceived as essential to his self-worth; he could also get on “a euphoric high” and fall prey to wildly optimistic wishful thinking in service of his self-constructed hero image.³⁸

Josef Stalin shared many of these same characteristics. “His pronouncements assumed scriptural authority,” Betty Glad writes in language that echoes Kim Jong-il’s ruling habits, “and sycophantic adulation and glorification became the norm.” Stalin “presented himself as the fount of wisdom,” even in areas where he had limited knowledge. He furiously rejected anyone who opposed him; when Stalin heard even a rumor that someone had criticized him, his daughter later said, “he would put him down now as an enemy,” even if he had known the person for years. “‘So you’ve betrayed me,’ some inner demon would whisper.”³⁹

Such dictators suffer from one particular symptom of grandiosity: the belief that they embody the state, and vice versa. What was good for Saddam and Stalin was good for Iraq and the Soviet Union; their self-centeredness reached historic proportions and engulfed nations. As much as this pattern reflects a shocking megalomania, it may also suggest a potential qualification to their self-awareness of cruelty. When you have defined yourself as the state, when the nation and the people and the leader become one, what is good for the leader is good for the people. Most dictators,

in other words, may actually believe—deeply, truly, to their core—that they are acting in the best interests of their people because it has become one and the same with their interests.

Exhibit 1 captures the basic elements of a narcissistic dictator, and these elements make it easy to see why so many analysts have put Kim Jong-il into this category.⁴⁰

His childhood—sheltered, ideological, populated with few if any people capable of changing his views, lacking regular infusions of information that would cause him to challenge his worldview—seems perfectly suited to the manufacture of a malignant-narcissist dictator’s typical narrowness of thought and rejection of ideas or facts contrary to his expectations. The grandiosity of his role is reflected in the crushing cult of personality characteristic of the North Korean state, a tale that begins with a Christ-like birth story: Kim’s birth—so says North Korean propaganda—was “foretold by a swallow, and the event itself was marked by the appearance of double rainbows and unseasonable blooms.”⁴¹ His official biography stresses the revolutionary credentials of his family, Kim Jong-il’s own benevolence and care for his people, and perhaps above all his unremitting allegiance and support for his father.⁴²

Reports from those who have encountered Kim offer ample evidence of the personality traits and behavior patterns of a classical narcissistic dictatorship. One North Korean youngster, who later fled to live in Europe, described an Orwellian scene involving Kim’s son, Kim Jong-nam: the boy was raised almost in captivity, never permitted to wander outside his compounds, and spoiled with vast playrooms full of Western toys.⁴³ There are numerous reports of “pleasure groups” of young women, selected from the most beautiful and talented young North Korean girls, who provide entertainment, massages, and other personal services, including sex, to the Dear Leader. Kim is frequently described as totally self-centered, demanding that others fawn over him. One report, based on the account of a former bodyguard,

suggests that “Kim became furious if he wasn’t the center of attention: he got upset if he saw people shaking hands while he was in the room, scolding them for ignoring him.”⁴⁴

The Russian diplomat who traveled by train with Kim in the summer of 2001 later characterized the interactions between Kim and his top officials as stunningly sycophantic. “When they entered,” the Russian later wrote, “they bent reverently in a low bow and rested in this position until they got a barely noticeable sign from the general that they could straighten up.” The officials were only permitted to refer to Kim indirectly—“As the Beloved Chief said,” and the like.⁴⁵ Defectors have described a man consumed with paranoia and fear of foreigners and outsiders, suffering from an intensely suspicious mentality and a willingness to toss aside even the most sycophantic followers if he senses something amiss.⁴⁶

In another classic dictatorial trait, Kim reportedly enjoys pitting subordinates against one another, both to keep their ambitions under check and for the voyeuristic pleasure of watching the resulting fireworks.⁴⁷ Kim is said to be, as were Hitler and Saddam before him, a hypochondriac, fearing germs and having all of his food pre-tasted.⁴⁸ Like other narcissistic tyrants, Kim provides himself with a life of heroic luxury. He loves horses and, reportedly, has a stable full of them as well as impressive collections of racing cars and boats, expensive wine and cognac, and battalions of personal chefs. The Hennessy company in 1994 admitted that Kim Jong-il bought more of its product than any other single customer, perhaps in the range of \$750,000 annually.⁴⁹ There are reports of a giant swimming pool inside his main residence in Pyongyang.

And yet there are holes in this portrayal—pieces of evidence and reports that Kim’s personality and behavior may not be as extreme as those of some other narcissistic tyrants. His biographer, Michael Breen, does not find the malignant-narcissist model completely persuasive: some

Exhibit 1. Elements of the Malignant Narcissistic Dictatorial Personality

- Severe insult to self-esteem in early life, usually involving parental death or trauma;
- Urgent need to promote grandiose version of self;
- Paranoia and assumption that threats and conspiracies are everywhere;
- Lack of any true degree of empathy for other people; view others as tools; no significant restraint from conscience;
- Refusal to accept limits; tendency to overreach, especially after long period of rule;
- A general pragmatism; main goal is to stay in power rather than serve an ideology; can therefore be flexible and change policies at time.

Source: Jerrold Post, “Kim Jong Il of North Korea: In the Shadow of His Father,” in Jerrold Post, *Leaders and Their Followers in a Dangerous World: The Psychology of Political Behavior* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004)

of Kim's actions seem to reflect typical Korean or Confucian patterns and are not necessarily dictatorial in the malignantly narcissistic sense that Post and others contend. Kim's paranoia, for example, is not unjustified, given the very real threats to his regime.⁵⁰

Many reports suggest that Kim is at least somewhat willing to acknowledge the flaws of the North Korean system—and even the limitations to his own carefully cultivated image within his country. “He’s aware of his unpopularity,” film director Shin Sang-ok has suggested. “Once, when I was walking next to him during a public event, the crowds cheered wildly. He whispered to me, ‘I’m not fooled. This is a lie.’”⁵¹ He has shown an ability to apologize for mistakes—admitting to Japan, for example, the North’s role in abducting Japanese citizens. He has also questioned his own decisions on the basis of new information; one example has been his agreement with the Hyundai corporation to shift the planned site of an investment zone away from the Chinese-border location he had initially had in mind.⁵² The signals are mixed, but some reports point to multiple overlapping avenues of influence in North Korea running to Kim from military and party sources as well as the indication that some degree of debate and discussion is allowed at the lower levels.⁵³

One observer of Kim's psychology—a South Korean government psychologist, Lee Kun-hu—has suggested that Kim actually has a “light-hearted personality” that is more artistic than power hungry. Kim is “passionate and tends to have the characteristics of an artist not bound by rules,” Lee has said. Kim needed traits like control, calculation, and power seeking to survive in his context, but his grounding personality “is strong in a sentimental aspect and weak in reason. . . . Kim Jong-il’s showmanship or sense of humor seems inborn,” Lee concludes.⁵⁴ “Light-hearted” may be a questionable term to apply to the chief of one of the world’s vilest dictatorships, but Lee’s formulation does help remind us of the many conflicting aspects of this most perilously mysterious man.

Analytical Model 2: Neofeudal Confucian

After a series of discussions with American, Russian, and South Korean officials and academics who had met Kim, writer Peter Maass cobbled together a vision of “a dictator who is not crazy like Idi Amin or bloodthirsty like Saddam Hussein.” Kim was not, Maass had concluded, as much the brandy-swilling, execution-ordering playboy “that the popular myth makes him out to be. Instead, his dictatorship mixes high technology with Confucian traditions: a kind of cyberfeudalism.” Kim’s regime, Maass contends, “is best understood as an imperial court, clouded in intrigue, not unlike the royal households that ruled Japan, China and, throughout most of its existence, Korea itself.”⁵⁵

Such notions form a second common approach to understanding Kim Jong-il, in this case as a leader who shares much in common with the more tyrannical versions of Confucian leaders past and present. Observers who favor this approach stress the importance of seeing Kim in cultural context. Many of his behaviors—which through one lens appear callous, confusing, or perfectly suited to a malignant narcissist—appear as rational when seen through a different lens, that of a hypertraditional, hierarchical Confucian system. This does not excuse his cruelties or excesses; indeed, the Confucian approach to leadership stresses the indissoluble bond between leader and led as well as the intense responsibility of the leader for his people, very much like a revered patriarch’s responsibility to his family. And yet the empirical realities of Confucian systems have often diverged from the compassionate ideal, and it is in this context that Kim could emerge as a classical Confucian leader.

The writer Jasper Becker has outlined a number of similarities between Confucian systems and Kim’s regime. North Korea embodies a caste system, for example, in which a thin top rank of elites runs the country and enjoys the spoils: there are dozens of caste-type ranks based on class background, including a de facto slave class of indentured servants, which also existed in traditional Confucian societies. The state controls the economy in the North and sustains intensely close surveillance of the population. The overall pattern, for Becker, conforms closely to a feudal Confucianism.⁵⁶ Andrew Scobell has laid out a number of similar parallels:

Pyongyang’s ideology is “neo-traditionalist” in several aspects: it is backward looking rather than forward looking, focuses on reverence for and obedience to elders and superiors, and makes the supreme leader the personification of the nation. The focus is on a nation-wide cult of the ancestor—the deceased patriarch, the founder of the dynasty: Kim Il Sung. . . . There is a consuming focus on building, maintaining, and worshipping portraits, monuments, and edifices to the departed leader.

Scobell describes such practices as a “latter day form of traditional (Confucian) ancestor worship focused around a cult of the founding emperor of the dynasty.”⁵⁷

North Korea’s cult of personality functions much like a state religion, and in this sense it mirrors the secularist state spiritualism of Confucianism. One Western diplomat who had served in North Korea told Bradley Martin that the regime most reminded him of “a Catholic state in the Middle Ages.” This was no typical dictatorship, he seemed to be suggesting—this was reverential neofeudalism with a Confucian case.⁵⁸ The same connection emerges in the plans for a

twenty-first-century dynasty;⁵⁹ Kim's infamous gift giving and drinking bouts, seen as examples of a licentious child, are in fact classical avenues to relationship building in a Confucian context.

Like the malignant-narcissist portrait, however, the parallels to neofeudal Confucianism are incomplete—as suggested, in fact, by the psychological picture we have of Kim himself. As we have seen, a standard portrait of Kim as a young man is that he very self-consciously ignored Confucian values of respect for elders. One niece who fled the North has said that Kim Il-sung was an “all-out Confucian,” whereas Kim Jong-il “in his personality has something like West European individualism or a trait of being very liberal.”⁶⁰ His sense of humor, lightness of manner at times, and general personality style hardly count as Confucian. One interpretation may be that the Confucianism is for public consumption, to legitimize the regime and place it in recognizable context for the North's people, whereas Kim's actual personality, his style of rule, and many other factors reflect far different realities.

Personality and Strategy

One must be extraordinarily hesitant to draw any remotely encouraging signs from Kim Jong-il's personality profile. We are, for one thing, mainly guessing: as any professional psychologist will be quick to warn, conducting personality assessments at a distance on the basis of anecdotal, sparse, and sometimes conflicting evidence of uncertain veracity is a challenging endeavor. Then, too, there are the moral considerations involved—the North Korean system is a ghastly insult to human values, and imagining that the fully involved manager of such a monstrosity could be anything other than a monster seems to strain credulity. Probably the safest course is merely to dump Kim into the basket of malignant narcissistic tyrants, write off any ability to deal constructively with him, and be done with it. This is, in a sense, the thrust of current U.S. policy—to declare moral outrage with Kim and refuse to furnish him with any recognition or legitimacy until he changes his behavior.

And yet that approach is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. First, fairly strong glimmers of evidence—recounted above—show that Kim is something more (or less) than a prototypical, closed-minded, inflexible, unquenchably aggressive malignant narcissist; there might be more flexibility here, more potential for restraint, and more psychological investment in outside attention than is typically assumed, and Kim may at least be willing to constrain and cap some of his provocative activities in exchange for the external attention and recognition that he craves. His pressing psychological need for recognition, in other words, may trump the parallel but perhaps less urgent personality traits of aggressiveness and pushing limits.⁶¹ He says he wants recognition, and with that in hand he would

mute his behavior. The time has come to test this offer, in part because, to the extent we can hazard a guess about this difficult subject, what we know of his mental makeup suggests that his offer might actually rest on meaningful psychological foundations.

A distinction is available within the broad category of “malignant-narcissist dictators” that may help sharpen our view of Kim Jong-il. One could separate pragmatic leaders whose main goal is continued rule and who see little attraction in martyrdom from those leaders for whom their ideology—their cause—comes first, even before survival, and would therefore gladly immolate themselves and their state in service of that ideology. The first set could be described as pragmatic survivors; the second are fanatical ideologists. Hitler belongs in the second camp, as might a younger Fidel Castro; Saddam, he of the disgraceful spider-hole surrender, belongs in the first, as does Stalin. To the extent that we have any basis on which to make the comparison, Kim emerges as a hard-nosed survivor rather than an ideological fanatic. This again suggests that his ambitions are constrained by pragmatic calculations.

Second, any strategy grounded in ignoring Kim will fail because he will not allow the outside world that luxury. As he has repeatedly proved, he has more than enough instruments of state provocation to force world and U.S. attention onto the North. The North's military capabilities, combined with Kim's apparent need for recognition, add up to a problem that will ultimately demand active intervention. The only question is whether that intervention is in the direction of reducing the risk of war or courting it.

It is worth mentioning that the oft-repeated worry that engaging Kim will strengthen and perhaps extend the rule of his regime may be correct—but it is also irrelevant to U.S. strategy. It is irrelevant because the alternative of trying to starve his regime of enough food, hard currency, and other goods so that it simply implodes is not open to us; and it is not open because South Korea and China have no interest in such an outcome. They can and will carefully meter their provision of economic trade and aid to avoid a collapse. The implication—if forcing a collapse is out of the question,⁶² we must engage a ruthless dictatorship—may be morally troubling. It is also inescapable.

Third and finally, therefore, engaging Kim Jong-il and his regime now makes sense because of the alternatives. Given Kim's apparent need for attention and the North's need for concessions, ignoring or sanctioning him absent the offer of a serious engagement can lead, ultimately, in only one direction: rising tension, escalating North Korean provocations, a growing gulf between the United States and South Korea, and perhaps ultimately conflict. Then, too, we have to ask about the psychological makeup of the alternatives to Kim Jong-il within the North Korean hierarchy. Can we

honestly believe that his sons would be any better? History furnishes precious few examples of third-generation dictators of sound and moderate mind. Younger North Korean military leaders (the so-called third generation), too, may be the most hard-line in their views—which would make some sense, given the propagandistic fire hose that has been trained on them from birth and the sycophantic extremes required for advancement in the North Korean system.⁶³ Hard as it may be to believe, Kim Jong-il—with his working knowledge of the outside world and its major trends, his seeming awareness of his own system’s weaknesses, his occasional willingness to change course, and above all his possible psychological dependence on positive attention—may be our best hope to tame the North Korean threat over the next several years.

What policy, finally, does this recommend? I would propose a very serious and substantial engagement of Kim Jong-il and his regime, combined with continued strong indications of military deterrence. To be very clear: my conclusion is not that Kim is a completely reasonable and normal national leader; nor do I contend that we need urgently to attend to his “wounded self” and treat him as a victim. His regime is dangerous and cruel, and Kim Jong-il himself has shown a willingness to engage in brinkmanship, terrorism, and state repression to achieve his ends. But the key question is whether his political psychology profile suggests the possibility of an inevitably rough and incomplete accommodation that would address basic U.S. and allied interests. On this very limited scale, I do find evidence that attending to Kim’s need for recognition and desire for security guarantees could create momentum and leverage for such an accommodation.

Kim Jong-il is almost undoubtedly self-centered, hostile to direct criticism, interested primarily in expanding his own power, grandiose in his self-conception, and cruel. But he may also be self-reflective and well-informed enough to recognize the limitations to his ambitions. He might be pragmatic enough to value continued rule over a glorious self-destruction in service of *juche*. And he might possess the psychological basis to respond—personally and emotionally as well as pragmatically—to a substantial offer of engagement. I offer this proposal not on the assumption that it *will* work; our understanding of Kim’s personality is far too incomplete for any bold predictions. My argument is merely that we do have enough hints that it *might* work to justify making the effort, especially when the potential security value of a meaningful accommodation is so high and the alternatives to engagement remain so unappetizing.

To take the second part of the proposed strategy first: The reality of Kim’s aggressive boundary testing and excessive ambition (not to mention the mind-set of his military) makes it imperative to continue to deny the North any hope of a successful war on the Korean peninsula. Such a goal im-

plies several obvious steps—continued attention to the health of the U.S.-ROK security alliance, a moratorium on any further U.S. troop withdrawals from the peninsula, and strong efforts to have all regional parties broadcast an unambiguous message to the North that any military adventurism will be met with overwhelming force from the North’s traditional enemies and a complete absence of support from its erstwhile friends.

Once these steps are in place, the United States, speaking in the company of the other members of the six-party talks to magnify the multilateral impact of the change, could declare an immediate and unconditional willingness to open direct diplomatic relations with North Korea. It could announce a nonaggression pledge, dispatch high-level delegations to Pyongyang, and begin lifting a number of economic sanctions on the North. Washington would specifically express a desire to meet and talk with Kim himself. In exchange, the United States would ask for a simple recommitment to the eventual achievement of a goal the North has long publicly endorsed: a nuclear-free Korean peninsula. The United States would push this engagement along these lines as fast as the North would allow, taking every opportunity to put senior U.S. officials in direct talks with Kim Jong-il.

Once talks were under way, Washington would lay out two main goals: an end to the North’s missile program and a rollback of its nuclear program, initially to its level at the time of the 1994 Agreed Framework and subsequently to complete disarmament. Further, large-scale and concrete benefits could be offered to the North for progress toward those goals. The process of engagement would be aimed initially at reducing the military threat posed by the North and eventually at laying the groundwork for a somewhat more stable and incremental process of change. If progress could be made on the nuclear and missile issues, perhaps new momentum could be created in the direction of a formal peace treaty between the two Koreas, and from there to additional outside investment in and engagement with the North.

The resulting negotiations would be tough, slow, and filled with numerous North Korean threats and bluster. There is no way to create a simple and smooth dialogue on such fundamental security matters—not with a dictatorship, not with a state whose swirling court intrigues will guarantee bitter arguments about any potential concessions, and not with officials steeped in the Korean manner of negotiating. Patience and determination will be required during a period when critics of engagement will have a series of field days pronouncing the naïveté of a credulous U.S. administration being fooled yet again by a dictator. There is, of course, no certainty that the talks will produce the necessary concessions from the North, but there is certainty that they will not do so quickly.

The ultimate prize, of course, is a stable transition of North Korea toward greater openness, reform, and eventually unification with the South. That result is inevitable; the North Korean system will not survive forever in a globalizing world. The question is under what conditions change arrives. To serve the long-term interests of everyone in the region for stable, incremental unification—as well as to address the urgent questions of nuclear and missile proliferation—a tough-minded yet sincere engagement of North Korea is long past due. The political psychology of Kim Jong-il, while hardly offering reasons for unqualified optimism, nonetheless suggests at least a tentative possibility that such engagement could have its desired effect on the dominant leader of North Korea.

Michael Mazarr is a Professor of National Security Strategy at the U.S. National War College, a position he assumed in May 2002. Previously, he served as the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Henry L. Stimson Center in Washington, DC. From 1995 until 1999, Dr. Mazarr worked at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), where he edited the Washington Quarterly, directed the New Millennium Project and acted as the Dean of the Young Leaders Program. Dr. Mazarr has a Ph.D. in Policy Studies from the University of Maryland and an A.B. and M.A. from Georgetown University. The views expressed in this article are his own and do not reflect the opinion of the National War College or the Korea Economic Institute.

Endnotes

1. An excellent example comes from the recent evidence of the workings of the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein, unearthed through dozens of interviews with his former senior officials and reviews of thousands of Iraqi government documents; see Kevin M. Woods et al., *Iraqi Perspectives Project: A View of Operation Iraqi Freedom from Saddam's Senior Leadership* (Norfolk, Va.: U.S. Joint Forces Command, Joint Center for Operational Analysis, 2006), especially 1–17.
2. Existing English-language materials on Kim to this point consist largely of dozens of very short, anecdotal newspaper and magazine accounts; passing attention in larger works about North Korea as a whole; a brief and mostly historical political psychology assessment by Jerrold Post; a single book-length biography by Michael Breen; and an impressionistic personality profile by psychoanalyst Ronald Turco.
3. Quoted in Sam Dealey, “North Korea’s Dear Leader,” *American Spectator*, December 2000/January 2001, 55.
4. Don Gregg, “My Turn: Kim Jong Il—The Truth Behind the Caricature,” *Newsweek*, February 3, 2003.
5. Quoted in Thomas Omestad, “A Not-So-Kooky Kind of Guy,” *U.S. News and World Report*, November 6, 2000, 32.
6. Quoted in Carol Clark, “Kim Jong Il: ‘Dear Leader’ or Demon?” CNN In-Depth Special, 2000, www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2000/korea/story/leader/kim.jong.il/.
7. Famously, his official North Korean biography refers to a historic birth on the famed Mount Paektu in Korea, but Russian archival sources and eyewitness accounts firmly indicate a Siberian birthplace.
8. Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, *North Korea: Through the Looking Glass* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 85.
9. Bradley K. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), 205.
10. Jerrold Post references the accounts of two North Korean defectors to this effect. See Post, “Kim Jong Il of North Korea: In the Shadow of His Father,” in Jerrold Post, *Leaders and Their Followers in a Dangerous World: The Psychology of Political Behavior* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 243.
11. Peter Maass, “The Last Emperor,” *New York Times Magazine*, October 19, 2003, 42; Michael Breen, *Kim Jong-il: North Korea's Dear Leader* (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons Asia, 2004), 51.
12. Ronald Turco, *Kim Jong Il and the Korean Dilemma* (Beaverton, Ore.: Imago Books, 2005), 66, 69, 71–72.
13. “Testimonies of North Korean Defectors: Hwang Jang-yop Speaks,” www.fas.org/irp/world/rok/nis-docs/hwang2.htm. Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig refer to Kim as “a wild child who frequently got into trouble”; *North Korea*, 85.
14. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea*, 88.
15. This impression is left by Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 204–11. His account, as do many others, relates the claim—really more of a rumor—that Kim Il-sung for a time favored Kim Pyong-il, a son by his second wife, as a potential successor, in part because he looked more like his father than Kim Jong-il.
16. Evan Thomas, “Kim Jong-il: Women, Wine and Weapons,” *Newsweek*, January 13, 2003, 26.
17. Jasper Becker quotes a European diplomat who knew both Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il as making this distinction and arguing that the son “hated to attend meetings and preferred to work behind the scenes”; Becker, *Rogue Regime: Kim Jong Il and the Looming Threat of North Korea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 129.
18. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea*, 2; see also Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 206–7.
19. It also, as Michael Breen has reminded us, makes sense from the perspective of Korean culture, in which the sometimes pushy, self-centered behavior of young male children—especially of high-ranking officials—may be tolerated while they are still young; Breen, *Kim Jong-il*, 57. A few sources claim his childhood involved many of the same rigors faced by all young North Koreans and that he was not overly pampered; see the comments of North Korean defector Lee Hang-koo in Mark Magnier, “Kim Jong Il Profile,” *Orlando Sentinel*, January 19, 2003.
20. Dealey, “North Korea’s Dear Leader,” 54.
21. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 205.
22. The quote is from Breen, *Kim Jong-il*, 66; for a similar argument, see Turco, *Kim Jong Il and the Korean Dilemma*, 73, 95.

23. Donald McIntyre, "The Supremo in His Labyrinth," *Time Asia*, February 11, 2002, www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,201976,00.html.
24. Maass, "The Last Emperor," 38. Hyundai officials who have met extensively with Kim confirm this view; Magnier, "Kim Jong Il Profile."
25. Breen, *Kim Jong-il*, 84.
26. Breen, *Kim Jong-il*, 103.
27. Turco, *Kim Jong Il and the Korean Dilemma*, 77.
28. Maass, "The Last Emperor," 40, 60.
29. "Testimonies of North Korean Defectors: Hwang Jang-yop Speaks."
30. "Backtalk: Inside Kim Jong Il," *AsiaWeek*, December 7, 2001.
31. Maass, "The Last Emperor," 41.
32. Thomas, "Kim Jong-il," 28.
33. "Kim Jong Il: Bow When You Don't Say That Name," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 14, 2003. The diplomat was Konstantin Pulikovsky, and these quotes are taken from the book he wrote about his experience, *Orient Express: Across Russia with Kim Jong Il*.
34. See for example Michael Maccoby, *The Productive Narcissist: The Promise and Peril of Visionary Leadership* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003); and Maccoby, "Narcissistic Leaders: The Incredible Pros, the Inevitable Cons," *Harvard Business Review* 78, no. 1 (January–February 2000).
35. Betty Glad, "Why Tyrants Go Too Far: Malignant Narcissism and Absolute Power," *Political Psychology* 10, no. 10 (2002), 6–7, 20–21, 25.
36. *Ibid.*, 7–9, 17, 27–33.
37. Jerrold M. Post, "Saddam Hussein of Iraq: A Political Psychology Profile," in *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders*, ed. Jerrold M. Post (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 335–66; quote is from 339.
38. Post, "Saddam Hussein of Iraq," 342, 349–50. All of these descriptions are borne out in detail by the evidence from Saddam's former regime; see the *Iraqi Perspectives Project*.
39. Glad, "Why Tyrants Go Too Far," 5.
40. Jerrold Post, for example, has concluded of Kim that "the characteristics he displays indicate that he has the core characteristics of the most dangerous personality, malignant narcissism." Post, "Kim Jong Il of North Korea," 255.
41. Dealey, "North Korea's Dear Leader," 54.
42. *Kim Jong Il: Brief History* (Pyongyang: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1998), 1–4; www.korea-dpr.com/library/103.pdf#search=Kim%20Jongil.
43. Jasper Becker, "North Korea: At Home with the Kims," *Asia Times*, October 11, 2003; www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/EJ11Dg04.html.
44. MacIntyre, "The Supremo in His Labyrinth."
45. "Kim Jong Il: Bow When You Don't Say That Name." Michael Breen urges us to see such behavior in a Korean cultural context, which might make it appear somewhat excessive but not radically unusual; Breen, *Kim Jong-il*, 93.
46. "Testimonies of North Korean Defectors: Hwang Jang-yop Speaks."
47. There are reports of Kim starting an argument between his aides and then retreating to another room to watch the debate by closed-circuit television; Becker, *Rogue Regime*, 129.
48. "Testimonies of North Korean Defectors: Hwang Jang-yop Speaks"; Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 215.
49. Dealey, "North Korea's Dear Leader," 54.
50. Breen, *Kim Jong-il*, 94–96.
51. "Backtalk: Inside Kim Jong Il."
52. Breen, *Kim Jong-il*, 96–110, makes the case for Kim's flexibility as a leader. One Korean scholar whom I consulted for this research said he had even heard, during a visit to the North, that some of his own suggestions had found their way to the top of the North Korean regime—perhaps to Kim himself—and that senior officials were giving them consideration.
53. Ken E. Gause, "North Korean Civil-Military Trends: Military-First Politics to a Point" (Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, September 2006), 5, www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB728.pdf.
54. Quoted in Breen, *Kim Jong-il*, 106.
55. Maass, "The Last Emperor," 41, 46. The theme of family intrigue, based on comments from intelligence officials, also features in Gordon Fairclough, "Pyongyang Palace: The Family Saga of Kim Jong Il," *Wall Street Journal*, October 10, 2003, 1. Psychoanalyst Ronald Turco also emphasizes the Confucian cultural traditions at work for Kim and contends that this ought to moderate portraits of Kim as a traditional dictator figure, at least in terms of how Kim sees himself; see *Kim Jong Il and the Korean Dilemma*, 75.
56. Becker, *Rogue Regime*, 74–76.
57. Andrew Scobell, "Kim Jong Il and North Korea: The Leader and the System" (Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, March 2006), 27, www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB644.pdf.
58. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 261.
59. Scobell, "Kim Jong Il and North Korea," 15.
60. Quoted in Breen, *Kim Jong-il*, 107.
61. One should not take the "motherless boy perpetually in search of affection and father figures" too far, but there is some evidence that this basic dynamic remains strongly at work in Kim. The same basic urge could explain his emphasis on exquisite things: With his mother dead, his father rarely around, and his stepmother both cruel and plotting his political destruction, Kim, Bradley Martin has surmised, "had to find solace in possessions" at a young age, "such as the automobiles he drove while still a schoolboy, and in receiving expressions of admiration and deference from servants and officials, schoolmates and playmates"; Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 211. Could it be that his missiles and nuclear program are his

latest and best versions of fast cars, enjoyable for their own sake and useful as avenues to “expressions of admiration and deference”? “My sense over the years,” journalist Michael Breen has speculated, “has been that the driving force” behind Kim’s succession “was the effort by a son to maintain his father’s affection and support”; Breen, *Kim Jong-il*, 68.

62. This discussion lays aside the important question of whether pushing the North in the direction of fragmentation would be a good thing to do even if China and South Korea *would* agree to it. Such a policy would be extremely dangerous, carrying the risk of manufacturing the one circumstance in which Kim’s regime sees no alternative to a military attack on the South, perhaps including the use of nuclear weapons.

63. See, for example, Gause, “North Korean Civil-Military Trends,” 16–17.

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