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On September 29, Chairman Kim Jong-un delivered his policy speech at the Fifth Session of the 14th Supreme People's Assembly. It is speculated that Chairman Kim's rather sudden policy speech was due to the need to deliver several new messages both internally and externally.

First of all, it is speculated that through his policy speech, Chairman Kim attempted to appease and encourage officials whose morale has fallen. Throughout the year, Chairman Kim has repeatedly criticized party, government and military officials for negligence, abuse of authority, bureaucracy, and corruption. However, such criticisms against officials were difficult to find in this speech. Instead, a positive evaluation of officials, which for a while has been absent from Chairman Kim's remarks, was also included in the policy speech. This attitude is assessed as Chairman Kim's need to break away from his existing way of ruling that only crucified the officials of the party, government, and military, to revive their spirits and boost their morale. The increased demand for policy resulting from the so-called "triple

distress” of sanctions, COVID-19, and natural disasters has strained the responsibilities and burdens of party, government, and military officials. Moreover, as a result of Chairman Kim Jong-un’s efforts to quell the dissatisfaction of the general public by tightening discipline among officials, many officials who had previously earned their living through bribery and privileged distribution of their institutions’ profits were now faced with economic hardships. Therefore, Chairman Kim seems to have decided that in order to facilitate implementation of tasks such as the five-year economic development plan, it is necessary to give officials some breathing room.

On the other hand, it seems that Chairman Kim Jong-un tried to express his will to further strengthen the people-first politics, which prioritizes people’s lives above all, through his policy speech. Chairman Kim issued an order to “increase the area under cultivation of rice paddies and upland rice nationwide, and more than double the area sown for wheat and barley.” In addition, he demanded that “the number of goats and cows be greatly increased,” and to implement the Party’s childcare policy, ordered that “the national milk production should more than triple the current level.” In other words, he expressed his will to feed the children milk and provide citizens with rice, bread, butter and cheese. Chairman Kim also gave an order to “unconditionally guarantee raw materials

and materials necessary for the production of consumer goods, in advance of at least six months.”

In a situation where the country suffers from an insufficient total amount of food, the idea of guaranteeing white rice, wheat flour, and increased milk production does not seem to match the reality of North Korea. However, it cannot be denied that these policies are part of Chairman Kim Jong-un’s own approach to the people-first politics.

Chairman Kim Jong-un devoted much of his speech to explain his policy toward South Korea. Regarding the end-of-war declaration, which President Moon Jae-in had proposed again in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly, Chairman Kim claimed, “Before declaring the end of the war, respect for each other should be guaranteed, and prejudice towards the other side, unfair dual attitudes, hostile viewpoints and policies must first be withdrawn.” He also announced, “We have no purpose or reason to provoke South Korea and have no intention of inflicting harm,” adding that, “South Korea needs to move away from its serious sense of crisis and victimization, and its delusion that it must contain North Korea’s provocations.” He also expressed his intention to restore inter-Korean communication lines from the beginning of October as part of an effort to materialize a swift revival of inter-Korean relations. Meanwhile, regarding the United States, Kim evaluated that even after

the Biden administration took office, “the United States’ military threat and hostile policies have not changed at all; rather, its types and means of expression have become more cunning.” He also asserted that although the United States insists on diplomatic involvement and dialogue without preconditions, these are only a façade to deceive the international community and cover up hostilities.

Chairman Kim’s harsh remarks toward the United States through his policy speech, while presenting a more moderate attitude toward South Korea compared to the past, suggest his attempts to improve relations with South Korea at a time when the United States is not accepting North Korea’s precondition for resuming dialogue, the initial withdrawal of its hostile policy. Thus, North Korea may likely hope for a breakthrough, via improved inter-Korean relations, in improving internal and external conditions. Although North Korea has put forward various prerequisites for improving relations, such should not be ignored as long as the two sides have begun engaging in conciliatory gestures, such as the restoration of inter-Korean communication lines. If inter-Korean dialogue is realized through this opportunity, North Korea will then have begun its first full-fledged commitment to external affairs since the no-deal Hanoi Summit, thus making the proposal in the speech of restoring inter-Korean communication lines much more significant. Some of the conditions North Korea has demanded are difficult to accept, but in accordance with the principle of reciprocity,

it is necessary to discuss the possibility of exchanging them with some of the conditions we demand. Therefore, it is also necessary for the South Korean government to consider proposing high-level talks to discuss various issues, including the issues first demanded by North Korea, such as on mutual respect and double-standards. If North Korea sincerely hopes that “the inter-Korean relations can be restored as soon as possible and that lasting peace can be established on the Korean Peninsula,” North Korea will have to respond to our proposal for dialogue.

Keywords: Kim Jong-un, policy speech, people-first politics, inter-Korean dialogue, inter-Korean communication lines, end-of-war declaration