













In North Korea, the Propaganda and Agitation Department (PAD) of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) heads the country's control and surveillance apparatus in the propaganda realm. The PAD takes the lead in ensuring that all forms of propaganda, ranging from state media and fine arts to lectures at museums, support and fall in line with the regime's official policy line.<sup>6</sup> Given the importance of the department's work, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il are widely known to have provided guidance to the PAD and reviewed higher-level statements or articles on sensitive issues prior to dissemination.<sup>7</sup> Unless there has been a significant change from those days, we can assume that Kim Jong Un follows this practice.<sup>8</sup>

## The Analytic Framework: LATTE Method

Propaganda analysis is a time-tested method of deciphering the underlying intentions of closed regimes like North Korea. It has a long history that goes back to World War II, when analysts used Nazi propaganda to draw inferences about German policy calculations.<sup>9</sup> This methodology reverse engineers a regime's decision-making process—what decisions are made, when, and why—and contextualizes the circumstances under which the decisions are made.

Today, this method is known to some as LATTE, an easy-to-remember acronym coined by Robert Carlin.





vehicles.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, Pyongyang issued a decidedly more authoritative Foreign Ministry "spokesperson's press statement (*taebyonin tamhwa*)" in reaction to the U.S. *National Security Strategy* in 2017.<sup>13</sup> In 2018, the North responded to the *Nuclear Posture Review* in the form of a Foreign Ministry Institute for American Studies "spokesperson's answer (*taebyonin taedap*) to KCNA," which was a downgrade from 2017 but a higher level than 2019.<sup>14</sup> The drastic downward shift in the level of North Korea's criticism of the United States in 2019 reflects diplomatic engagement that was well under way between the two countries by early 2019. Criticism of the United States did not altogether disappear, but Pyongyang put it into a decidedly lower-level vehicle, a move that in and of itself was meant to be consistent with and signal Pyongyang's continued effort to engage the Trump administration.

Higher-level communications are the most important because they are aligned more closely with official regime policies—those at the highest levels actually being policy statements in themselves—

## *Audience*

This element refers to whom a North Korean public message is being directed—the intended target. North Korea targets different pockets of the audience to maintain policy flexibility or shield certain parts of the audience from sensitive information while voicing or even reinforcing its message to intended recipients.

The two broad categories of the audience are internal and external. Messages intended for the domestic audience are available on domestic media outlets such as radio, television, and newspapers. The North Korean authorities understand that these media outlets are monitorable by outsiders. Therefore, any information that they deem to be too sensitive for outsiders' consumption—for example, any events or news that signal people's noncompliance with the law or regulations—is disseminated via the "Third Broadcast," a nationwide cable radio network that cannot be accessed from the outside.<sup>15</sup> Messages targeting external audiences are transmitted via KCNA and various North Korean-run websites, as well as social media platforms like YouTube. The average North Korean does not have access to the Internet and these communications.

The central question revolving around "audience" is: was this information carried domestically as well as externally, or just externally? This question is important because when the regime disseminates information externally but not internally, it usually means the message is too sensitive for domestic consumption, the regime wants to maintain flexibility in policy, or both.



reaction to high-level U.S. officials' comments or United Nations resolutions concerning North Korea in recent years will show that a one- or two-day lag between an issue or event and the North's reaction is the norm.

Prolonged silence can be significant if North Korea remains mum on an issue to which it has historically responded. Prolonged silence almost certainly is deliberate, and it can mean Pyongyang is exercising restraint, waiting to see how events unfold, undecided on what to say, or storing up a sea of negative rhetoric for the right time to unleash it. For example, in a break with past practice, North Korean media remained silent on Lee Myung-bak's election (2007) and inauguration (2008) as South Korean president. Then, a little over one month after Lee's inauguration, North Korea issued a rare, authoritative "commentator (*ronpyongwon*)" article refuting point by point the Lee administration's North Korea policy and warning it to "not miscalculate our patience and silence thus far."<sup>23</sup> This article marked the beginning of an anti-Lee media cycle.

### *Tone*

If we liken a North Korean message to a packaged item, the first three elements of LATTE deal with the information on the outer packaging—the sender (level), recipient (audience), and the date stamp (timing) on the package. The fourth element, "tone," leads us to examine the article inside: the content or substance of the North Korean message. Substance covers language, omissions of language, placement, and if available, photos. Language is wording: formulations, adjectives, adverbs, conjugations, and conditionality.

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<sup>23</sup> , "

" [Commentator, "What the South Korean Authorities Will Gain Through Anti-North Confrontation Is Only Ruin"], *Rodong Sinmun*, April 1, 2008, p. 2.



Examining tone requires knowing what language to key in on, building a baseline of historical patterns, and comparing and contrasting to similar past events or statements.

For example, the wording in the Kim leader's telegrams to the Chinese president on major occasions is a good indicator of the state of bilateral relations. Compare these two passages from Kim Jong Un's telegrams to Xi Jinping marking the 55th and 60th anniversaries of the DPRK-China Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in 2016 and 2021, respectively (*bold added by the author for emphasis*):

2016: "It is the consistent stand



came to a pause after two weeks, when the United States and South Korea proceeded with their









pronouncements are not equal measures of North Korean policies. For example, Kim Yo Jong's "press statements" have generated strong interest given her proximity to Kim Jong Un. Her title as vice director of a party department is not high in the official leadership hierarchy, and the

Serious analysis of North Korea is not impossible. It just requires a rigorous application of the right system, and th

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