

Impact Players

Pak Yong-sik

By Katheryn Lee

Who is he?

Pak Yong-sik is the new Minister of the People's Armed Forces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and a four-star general in the DPRK Korean People's Army (KPA).

Prior to his promotion, Pak was the Deputy Director of the KPA General Political Bureau and a three-star general since early 2015. Previously Pak served as a Department Director in the Ministry of People's Security and as Vice Chairman of the special investigation committee on the missing Japanese nationals in 2014. Since Kim Jong-un came into power in December 2011, Pak has rapidly risen through the military ranks, evident in his rise from a two-star to four-star general in just over one year. Under Kim Jong-il's government, Pak was a major general for nearly ten years from 1999 before he was promoted to a lieutenant general in 2009.

Why has he been in the news?

On July 11, the DPRK's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) televised Pak's high-level bilateral talk with a Laotian military delegation in his new capacity as DPRK's Minister of the People's Armed Forces. Although Pak had already been making frequent appearances with Kim Jong-un since May 2015, this was the first time that DPRK media had officially mentioned and confirmed his new position.

Furthermore, the July 11 newscast also sheds some light on the fate of Pak's predecessor, Hyon Yong-chol, who reportedly was purged and potentially executed on charges of treason, mainly for dozing off while Kim Jong-un was making a speech during a military rally earlier in April 2015. Pak's promotion marks the sixth time that the Minister of the People's Armed Forces has been replaced by Kim Jong-un.

What can we expect from him?

Appointing Pak Yong-sik, who rose to prominence through the KPA General Political Bureau, as the new defense minister may be seen as an effort by Kim Jong-un to exert political control over the KPA. Since this position has traditionally been held by military elites such as Hyon Yong-chol and Jang Jong-nam, Pak's promotion reflects the increasing dominance of political officials within Kim Jong-un regime. The promotion of other notable figures from the General Political Bureau, such as Kim Won-hong, who is the current Minister of State Security and Kim Su-gil, who recently became the Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea Pyongyang City Committee, exemplifies this recent change in power structure in Pyongyang.



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