

Experts see possible power struggle in North Korea

By Donna Leinwand Leger, USA TODAY

Soon after announcing [North Korean](#) leader Kim Jong Il's death, the country's ruling [Central Committee](#) quickly proclaimed his youngest son, Kim Jong Un, the "great successor" of [North Korea's](#) revolution, hoping to avert any doubt of who would control the secretive regime.

The young Kim's grip on power, however, may be shakier than the committee wants its people to believe, experts say.

Despite Kim Jong Il's clear anointing of his son three years ago, North Korea may become embroiled in a violent power struggle, [Cato Institute](#) senior fellow Doug Bandow said.

The son "has had little time to establish himself," Bandow said. "There are several potential claimants to supreme authority in the North, and the military may play kingmaker."

As Kim Jong Il became increasingly unwell, he took steps to position his youngest son, born to his third wife in either January 1983 or 1984, to seize power. His father promoted him to the Workers' Party Central Committee, North Korea's governing Cabinet, at a party convention in September 2010. Soon after, his father elevated him to the rank of general in the North Korean Army, according to [Global Security](#).

"Under the leadership of Kim Jong Un we should turn our sorrow into strength and courage and overcome the present difficulties and work harder for fresh, great victory of the Juche revolution," an announcement from North Korea's official news agency said. "All the party members, servicepersons and people should remain loyal to the guidance of respected Kim Jong Un and firmly protect and further cement the single-minded unity of the party, the army and the people."

Little is known about the younger Kim, and no photos of him as an adult appear to exist. He was educated at the International School of Berne and Kim Il-sung Military University. He is reportedly a fan of [NBA](#) basketball. A former personal chef to Kim Jong Il who wrote a book about the family under a pseudonym calls Kim Jong Un "a chip off the old block" who resembles his father physically and in demeanor.

If Kim Jong Un can hold power, experts expect little change in the country's policies.

"It appears unlikely that he will be a transformative figure for the country," said Sarah McDowell, a senior analyst and Asia-Pacific desk head for IHS, a global information company.

Kim Jong Il's death "has plunged the isolated state of North Korea into a period of major uncertainty," McDowell said. "There are real concerns that heir apparent Kim Jon Un has not had sufficient time to form the necessary alliances in the country to consolidate his future as leader."