

Technology & Resources

The new industrial revolution

The recent announcement that the threshold of 400 parts per million (ppm) of CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere of our planet had been exceeded went virtually unnoticed. In a Hollywood film, this kind of news might have roused world public opinion while heads of state gathered at emergency summits. Instead it fell on deaf ears, overshadowed by news of the financial crisis or tensions between military powers.

by Ascanio Vitale

Educated in Switzerland, a lover of music and westerns, and a basketball fan: sounds like any young kid who's had a privileged international education. A European perhaps, or an American. Instead, this chubby young man is one of the 'thorns' in the side of the western

world. His name is Kim Jong-un, he's 30, he has a gormless smile and a dangerous 'profession': dictator of North Korea, third heir of a dynasty that has ruled the reclusive country since 1953.

Amid the nuclear and missile tests of recent months, as tensions rose around

Pyongyang, the real question was both simple and frightening: is he really a madman? The best response may have come from *The Guardian*, on April 5, the day after the final go-ahead for a nuclear attack on the United States, a step no one in the entire North Korean pantheon would have ever dreamt of taking.

The apparent madness of the callow dictator follows a logic that's rather easy to infer. One of the youngest heads of state in the world, Kim only wants to guarantee his future and continue the 'family business'. To build a future he needs money, and that money – in the form of aid – can only come from the Pyongyang regime's enemy number one: the United States.

No one outside his own country seems to take Kim Jong-un seriously. Last November, the American satirical newspaper *The Onion* sarcastically played up his powers of seduction, naming him the winner of their (fake) survey for Sexiest Man Alive For 2012: "With his devastatingly handsome, round face, his boyish charm, and his strong, sturdy frame, this Pyongyang-bred heartthrob is every woman's dream come true". Points in his favour were his "impeccable fashion sense, chic short hairstyle, and, of course, that famous smile".

The article was accompanied by photos of the young leader at his most alluring: on horseback, at a military parade, during a school inspection, saluting the crowds. What is young Kim doing in all these pictures? Simply watching on. The only thing the images have in common is the youthful president's total inaction. Except for one in which he's clumsily holding a gun, posing as if he's about to take an improbable shot.

➤ A sustainable challenge

Climate change is the greatest challenge facing the world in the coming years: the fate of a large proportion of the planet's population hinges on it. The increasingly negative effects of climate change are felt by hundreds of millions of people. Hurricanes, floods, droughts, tropical diseases spreading to higher latitudes beyond the tropics are just the first signs of an unstable climate that mankind can no longer control.

Worldwide industrial policy choices cannot ignore the need for joint actions. Technological progress has already provided us with many solutions and science has indicated the conditions necessary to tackle the problem. The effective implementation of these measures now depends on political and

business leaders, particularly those in the industrialised countries. This includes emerging markets such as China and India, which now feature prominently in the sad list of countries with the highest emissions of climate-changing gasses.

Implementing suitable governance and sustainable production models to transform the climate change battle into a global opportunity for a new industrial revolution is the only solution that might enable us to combine the need to contain emissions with a truly sustainable economic and industrial model. Sustainability can actually be reproduced on a global level and it can guarantee a truly democratic approach to consumption and provide genuine safeguards for our natural resources.



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But these analyses are overly simplistic. In spite of his apparent immobility, the Pyongyang dictator's movements are actually carefully studied. According to South Korean intelligence sources, Kim spends most of his time at military events and activities. In fact, 73 of the overall 192 events he attended in 2012 were military-related. In the sovereign's scale of importance, politics comes next, with 45 public outings, while the economy is in third place, with 37 events. Contact with the army is vitally important to the young leader, much more so than for his father, Kim Jong-il. In 2011 (until his death in December),

out of the 145 public engagements Kim Jong-il attended, only 39 were dedicated to the armed forces. "Kim Jong-un's aim", claims Jang Se-yul, a former maths teacher who spent 10 years in the North Korean army's cyber spy unit before defecting to South Korea, "is to win the military's trust. They don't trust him yet, and they're looking for strong signals from him". The dynasty's heir is willing to do anything to win this trust, as the former North Korean spy explains: "I witnessed huge celebrations after the regime conducted its first nuclear test in 2006. Now it won't let go of the fantasy that

having nuclear weapons will make it invincible". Meanwhile, the regime's propaganda machine is building up an image of a 'beloved and powerful' leader, a man with a flair for the arts and music, who can compete in all sports and is well versed in international affairs.

The portrait painted is of a renaissance man, a sophisticated intellectual who has tried his hand at everything. Never mind that Swiss newspaper *Le Matin* proved that the young Kim was an average student who often skipped classes. After all, geniuses always warrant forgiveness. **E**