

**NORTH KOREA IN 2015-2016: PATH
OF RECLUSIVE TYRANNY**

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Executive Summary

1. North Korea has apparently chosen isolation over engagement. Although it is in desperate need of engaging the world, the First Chairman of the National Defence Commission Kim Jong-un's obsession with full control of power, through purging, executing, demoting and replacing of his top associates, has further isolated his country.
2. Its continued single-minded pursuit of nuclear advancement has also impeded its path of engagement. On 6 January 2016, North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test and announced that it had successfully completed a hydrogen bomb test. North Korea is likely to continue to come under a reclusive tyrannous regime, rather than one that internationalises for its survival.
3. During the past four years at the helm, Kim Jong-un's primary concern has been to consolidate his power particularly over the military. Kim has replaced top military personnel frequently. In 2015 alone, 40% of the top 15 positions in the military were replaced versus 19% of 94 important positions of the party and social organisations.
4. Kim's exercise of abusive power is best exemplified by the public execution of the Minister of People's Armed Forces Hyeon Yeong-cheol in April 2015, 14 months after the execution of his uncle Jang Song-thaek.
5. In 2016, the most important political event will be the Seventh Congress of the Korean Workers' Party in May. In preparation of the congress, the entire North Korean society has been mobilised to increase Kim's personal fund.
6. The bottom-up process of selecting party posts and representatives will be paired with launching mass-mobilised projects, upholding slogans and holding rallies.
7. On the diplomatic front, a nuclear North Korea apparently takes a *revisionist strategy*: to change the rule of the game in Northeast Asia, in particular inter-Korean

relations. North Korea-China relations will be further strained because of the January 2016 nuclear test.

8. China, the only remaining ally of North Korea, believes that Pyongyang's nuclear test damages Beijing's international standing. Bilateral relations are not likely to be improved in a few years even though Beijing may not abandon Pyongyang for strategic reasons.
9. North Korea is highly likely to conduct a long-range ballistic missile firing as well. Besides the strategic utility of the nuclear and missile development, Kim believes that the payoff of the tests for beefing up his leadership will outstrip the negative international fallout.
10. With the nuclear test, North Korea, which used to consider the South an important source of resources, seems to have given up on developing the bilateral relations as evidenced by the fatal shooting of a South Korean tourist at the Mt Keumgang tourist spot.