



ISS Risk Special Report:

DPRK: Analysis of its 2016 Nuclear Test and Satellite Launch – Why Now?



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Executive Summary

As well documented by the media, last month, the DPRK conducted a fourth nuclear test followed by a satellite launch. This test came despite international condemnation and heightened sanctions. If considered in isolation, the behaviour seen coming out of the North over the past few months might easily be compartmentalised with the same old rhetoric and posturing that we have all begun to expect from the regime. This report provides a different analysis of the recent nuclear tests by viewing them in a broader context. We, at ISS Risk, believe that, rather than just bellicose behaviour, these tests are a clear indication that changes are taking place within the DPRK. These changes are based on the transition away from the Songun ('Military First') policy toward a 'Country First' policy, indicating a reduction in Korean People's Army (KPA) power and a movement toward economic development.

In this report we support such bold assertions by analysing Kim Jung Un's statements over the past few years, but most specially, from the recent joint meeting between the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) and KPA. Additionally, the report provides a snapshot of the economic developments that have already occurred over the past five years, including "shadow markets" and the introduction of a property market, which the government are actively facilitating.

We so easily question the North's behaviour when we view it from our international perspective. After investigating beyond initial expectations, we conclusively assert that the latest nuclear tests have more to do with internal matters than international ones. With these tests, Kim is illustrating to his people that the transition away from the traditional Songun policy is possible. He is giving them confidence that the country is secure and they can, therefore, begin focusing on progressing the country economically. As ground-breaking as we would like this report to be, all it took was the simple application of rational thinking. When the DPRK does something of such magnitude, we must look inward in order to truly understand what is triggering such behaviour. When viewed without preconceptions, the current situation with the DPRK is more comprehensible than it is put out to be.