

# GRASSROOTS POWER, COERCIVE DIPLOMACY, AND THE FAILURE OF WESTERN ENGAGEMENT WITH NORTH KOREA

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This article argues that the civilian population in North Korea is Pyongyang's centre of gravity; partly the source of its power and the determinant of its foreign policy. The country's pursuit of nuclear weapons is aimed not only at deterring foreign aggression, but also creating an external threat. The existence of a credible external threat demonstrates the need for national solidarity, thereby ensuring regime survival. Regime survival is defined not in terms of protection from foreign aggressors, but avoidance of domestic dissent. The use of coercive measures to respond to the North Korean nuclear question alienates the civilian population, thereby advancing Pyongyang's goal of regime survival through social cohesion. The alienation of the civilian population is significant in explaining why the international community has been unable to find the right answer to the North Korean question. Engaging positively with the civilian population will create the conditions under which Pyongyang can view compromise as its best alternative.

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## INTRODUCTION

For almost six decades, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has been pursuing its nuclear programme amidst fierce opposition from the international community.<sup>1</sup> One of the key antagonists of the country's nuclear ambition is the United States (US). The US has masterminded western economic sanctions against DPRK in order to compel the DPRK

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