# Beyond Succession

27 APRIL 2026

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In the past years the world has been surprised by the public appearance of Kim Jong-un and his young daughter, confirmed to be Kim Ju-ae. With the first appearance in late 2022, many Western responses analysed it as a succession narrative. For many people it symbolises the welcoming of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's future leader. Even though it is an understandable way to analyse it, it misses something deeper. The public visibility of Kim Ju-ae is less about the future leader of the Kim dynasty, it is about projecting a dynasty that has the confidence that would be in power for many more decades.

North Korea's global visibility has always been used as a strategic political tool to send a message or to position itself in the global sphere. Nothing

is accidental, every public movement is a message. Kim Jong-un chose to introduce his daughter to the nation and the world during missile tests, military parades and other official events, which demonstrates the regime's more powerful symbol of sovereignty and permanence of the Kim dynasty.

Moreover, the message is also directed to the national elite, promoting that the dynasty is secured. This is important since the historical transitions of leaders in North Korea have been unstable and uncertain. Introducing a potential successor while reaffirming the military power of the country indicates continuity and stability.

North Korea does not have a formal mechanism for naming a successor, Kim Jong-un spent years outside the public eye until shortly before he became the leader. Hence, his daughter's public appearance could have a different meaning. However, the fact that Kim has allowed international media to acknowledge his daughter represents a significant step forward for the regime.

The timing of Kim Ju-ae's appearances is not accidental, since North Korea has been positioning itself as a powerful state; with the accelerated weapon testing programme, missile technology and its deepened alignment with Russia. A state that is economically and diplomatically isolated needs to project an internal strength since the same strength is often put in question. Hence, demonstrating its growing strategic leverage – mainly by its relations with Russia and a non-Western alignment- and its long-term regime stability, allows the Kim dynasty to reinforce domestic legitimacy and external credibility.

These new movements and alliances can also create some concern since they question the traditional belief of how North Korea responds to pressure. Previously, it was widely assumed that the economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation and external pressure on Pyongyang would make the country act more cautiously. However, this can become less effective if North Korea perceives itself as strategically protected by closer ties and allies, in this case Russia and China, which provide economic support and a shield against international pressure. This greater sense of security can reduce incentives for restraint, leading to pursuing more military provocations, strategic ambitions and more action in regional or international affairs.

If Pyongyang feels secure internationally, through new partnerships and domestically through a long-term view of the dynasty, the prospect for meaningful diplomatic engagement decreases. A regime that perceives itself as weak can negotiate; a regime that perceives itself as strong rarely does.

Kim Ju-ae's new appearances will continue to generate debate about succession in the Kim Dynasty. However, a broader message needs to be understood: it demonstrates that the regime is not only surviving, but that it believes it is thriving. Thus, the question should not be "will she succeed him?" but rather "what can this reveal about how the regime is perceived?".

It demonstrates confidence, stability and long-term vision of regime continuity.