



The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History

By Don Oberdorfer

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The struggle between the two Koreas has repeatedly claimed the headlines of the world in acts of terrorism and heroism, showdowns over nuclear weapons programs on both sides of the lines, the sudden deaths of leaders, and historic turning points in the relationship with the outside powers of Japan, Russia, and China. Don Oberdorfer lived through many of these crises as a journalist for the *Washington Post*. Building on his extensive experience, many previously unavailable documents, and unparalleled access to the leadership circles of the two Korean states and the great powers, he has written a gripping narrative history of Korea's travails and triumphs over the past quarter century. The involvement of the outside world—including a chilling account of the nuclear showdown that brought the United States perilously close to war with North Korea in 1994—receives extensive treatment and special emphasis. Korea represents the last vestige of the Cold War. *The Two Koreas* places that political tension within a historical context, looking at democratic South Korea and communist North Korea through the lens of the past twenty-five years. Oberdorfer's work is the definitive text of contemporary Korea.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Oberdorfer first toured Korea in 1953 courtesy of the U.S. Army and returned often on the Asia beat for the Washington Post. In the present volume, his accounts of the conflicts of the last 20 years, appraisals of leaders based on interviews in Korea, Japan, Washington, and Moscow, and incisive policy analysis form a detailed and insightful history of North and South Korean politics and U.S. policy. Particularly engrossing is the analysis of relations between Moscow and Washington and their defiant clients, which turned domestic rifts into world conflict from the 1950s through the potentially nuclear crisis of 1994 and the present famine. The obvious comparison is with Bruce Cumings's commanding *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (LJ 2/15/97). Cumings analyzes the evolution and nature of Korea's political economy over the last few centuries. Oberdorfer brings to life the events, leaders, and decisions of the last 20 years. Larger public and academic collections will want both volumes. —Charles Hayford, Evanston, Ill.
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From Kirkus Reviews

An old Asia hand offers a briefing that's more notable for the breadth than for the depth with which it addresses the issues still dividing North from South Korea. Oberdorfer (*The Turn*, 1991, etc.) starts his narrative in 1972, the first time that Pyongyang representatives had openly visited Seoul since the peninsular country was partitioned in the wake of WW II, and then reviews the ongoing negotiations on reunification. The author (a former Far East correspondent for the Washington Post) goes on to detail the South's blood-sport approach to politics at a time when the continued presence of Kim Il Sung lent the North a measure of stability. By way of example, the KCIA gunned down Park Chung Hee, opening the way for Chun Do Hwan. Following deadly riots in 1987, another would-be strongman, Roh Tae Woo, bested reformers Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam for the presidency, leaving him to oversee the 1988 Olympiad successfully staged in Seoul. In the meantime, Beijing gave Seoul a jolt, following Moscow's lead and establishing diplomatic relations with South Korea. Shortly before the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's founding father died in mid-1994, the wider world and Washington became gravely concerned about the Red state's nuclear capabilities. Jimmy Carter helped avert a full-blown crisis, however, and Kim's son (Kim Jong Il), who inherited an economy on the rocks, is coping as best he can with famine and a host of other daunting internal problems. Yet the impoverished North continues its efforts to subvert the flourishing South. Even so, Oberdorfer is reluctant to predict whether, let alone when, the two Koreas will be reunited. Indeed, he exits on the breezy note that there's no telling what may happen in a country so full of surprises. A fine overview of Korea's recent past, which will leave most readers frustrated by its lack of analysis on what might lie ahead for this divided nation. (b&w photos, not seen) -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

The Two Koreas, Don Oberdorfer's fine book covering the last quarter-century of Korean history, contains the only detailed account of the frightening 1994 crisis over North Korea's nuclear program. Based on inside information that Oberdorfer garnered from interviews conducted with key officials in Washington and around the world, his gripping narrative should chasten our leaders and inform our citizenry about the continuing perils and costs of America's involvement with Korea, which began 52 years ago when American troops marched into Seoul amid the ashes of Imperial Japan's defeat. But *The Two Koreas* does much more than that: At a time when frivolous sensationalism dominates the media, it illustrates the virtues of a life given to honest, independent and inquiring journalism. -- *Los Angeles Times Sunday Book Review*, Bruce Cumings

In *The Two Koreas*, Oberdorfer has drawn on extensive interviews, his own past reporting and a careful search of documentary material that has become available in South Korea and elsewhere--including records opened up by the post-Communist governments in Russia and East Germany. From this material he constructs a lucid, balanced, thoroughly credible account of the last 25 years on both sides of the armistice line ... -- *The New York Times Book Review*, Arnold R. Isaacs

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Anthony McDonell:

This *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* book is simply not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you obtain by reading this book will be information inside this book incredible fresh, you will get information which is getting deeper anyone read a lot of information you will get. That *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* without we understand teach the one who reading through it become critical in pondering and analyzing. Don't possibly be worry *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* can bring if you are and not make your case space or bookshelves' turn out to be full because you can have it within your lovely laptop even telephone. This *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* having very good arrangement in word in addition to layout, so you will not truly feel uninterested in reading.

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