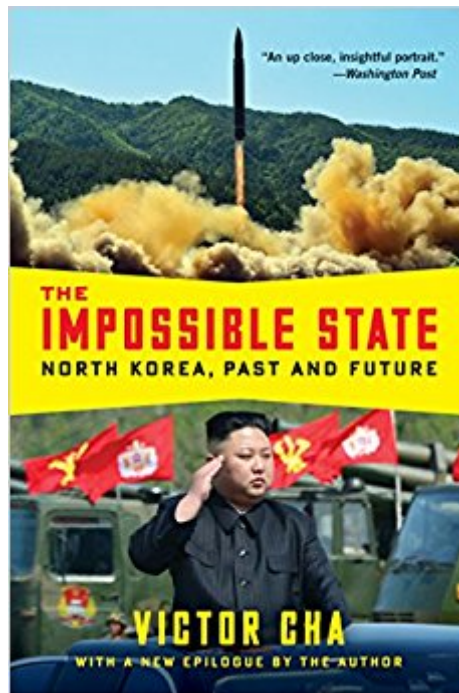




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The Impossible State: North Korea, Past And Future



Synopsis

“A meaty, fast-paced portrait of North Korean society, economy, politics and foreign policy.” -Foreign Affairs
The definitive account of North Korea, its veiled past and uncertain future, from the former Director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council
In *The Impossible State*, seasoned international-policy expert and lauded scholar Victor Cha pulls back the curtain on this controversial and isolated country, providing the best look yet at North Korea’s history, the rise of the Kim family dynasty, and the obsessive personality cult that empowers them. He illuminates the repressive regime’s complex economy and culture, its appalling record of human-rights abuses, and its belligerent relationship with the United States, and analyzes the regime’s major security issues—from the seemingly endless war with its southern neighbor to its frightening nuclear ambitions—all in light of the destabilizing effects of Kim Jong-il’s recent death. How this enigmatic nation-state—one that regularly violates its own citizens’ inalienable rights and has suffered famine, global economic sanctions, a collapsed economy, and near total isolation from the rest of the world—has continued to survive has long been a question that preoccupies the West. Cha reveals a land of contradictions, one facing a pivotal and disquieting transition of power from tyrannical father to inexperienced son, and delves into the ideology that leads an oppressed, starving populace to cling so fiercely to its failed leadership. With rare personal anecdotes from the author’s time in Pyongyang and his tenure as an adviser in the White House, this engagingly written, authoritative, and highly accessible history offers much-needed answers to the most pressing questions about North Korea and ultimately warns of a regime that might be closer to its end than many might think—a political collapse for which America and its allies may be woefully unprepared.

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Customer Reviews

“An up-close, insightful portrait. . . . The Impossible State is a clearheaded, bold examination of North Korea and its future.” (Washington Post)

“Essential reading for all North Korea watchers. . . . An informative and enjoyable read.” (Library Journal (starred review))

“Cha demonstrates an intimate familiarity with the regime’s contradictions. . . . The thesis is clear: the world’s most closed-off state needs to open up to survive, but breaking its hermetic seal may well precipitate its demise.” (The New Yorker)

“An eye-opening view of the closed, repressive dictatorship of North Korea. . . . A useful, pertinent work for understanding the human story behind the headlines.” (Kirkus Reviews)

“A meaty, fast-paced portrait of North Korean society, economy, politics, and foreign policy by an expert who has studied the regime as a scholar and interacted with its officials.” (Foreign Affairs)

“Ask those who deal with national security what worries them most and at the top of the list or near it you’ll always find North Korea, a place about which we know little to nothing. That’s why Victor Cha’s book is so valuable.” (Bob Schieffer, CBS News Chief Washington Correspondent)

“The Impossible State is provocative, frightening, and never more relevant than today as an untested new leader takes charge of the world’s most unpredictable nuclear power.” (Andrea Mitchell, NBC News Chief Foreign Affairs Correspondent)

In *The Impossible State*, seasoned international-policy expert and lauded scholar Victor Cha pulls back the curtain on provocative, isolationist North Korea, providing our best look yet at its history and the rise of the Kim family dynasty and the obsessive personality cult that empowers them. Cha illuminates the repressive regime’s complex economy and culture, its appalling record of human rights abuses, and its belligerent relationship with the United States, and analyzes the regime’s major security issues—from the seemingly endless war with its southern neighbor to its frightening nuclear ambitions—all in light of the destabilizing effects of Kim Jong-il’s death and the transition of power to his unpredictable heir. Ultimately, this engagingly written, authoritative, and highly accessible history warns of a regime that might be closer to its end than many might think—a political collapse for which America and its allies may be woefully unprepared.

I have been interested in North Korea for some time now and have read several books, both fiction and non-fiction, about the country. Other books approach the topic from various angles and levels of detail. Frankly, some books are so thick with detail they are impregnable for the general reader. I just wanted a book that would give me a readable, succinct insight into the society in toto, not a minute-by-minute examination of its history. The Impossible State achieves this goal by giving a readable overview of the country without getting hopelessly bogged down in minutia. I highly recommend this book to those of us with curiosity about how this dysfunctional nation operates in this modern world.

It took me a long time to get through this book. The author presents a great deal of information in a somewhat confusing way. I think a good editor could probably help clean it up a bit as the book reads like a college text. The author tries to break down his views into sections based on historical timeline, presidents, countries, and regime leaders. Therefore, some information is presented again and again. That said, I found the author's behind the scenes stories very interesting. I learned quite a bit about a very confusing country. However, I disagree with the author's assertion that the regime is destined to fall in the next 3-5 years. North Korea is not America and their people are used to living in poverty and have accepted it to support their diet. The comparisons to what happened in the Middle East (Egypt) are dubious at best. The North Korean population is much more isolated. Will the North Korea regime collapse? Yeah, eventually. Question is, will the regime try to take South Korea with it? Recommended for anyone with an interest in the backstory of North Korea. Note-author wrote this prior to Kim executing his uncle.

I learned a lot about North Korea that I did not know. I was in Jr high during the Korean War and all I remember I mostly got from movies. The big thing I remember was how Truman brought Gen MacArthur home in disgrace and the defiant ticker tape parade in the General's honor in New York. TV had only recently come to our neighborhood in Western PA. and watching, in real time, something happening far away was exciting. People did fear the U.S. getting into a "big" war with China and were relieved when the U.S. got out of the battle. I knew nothing of the history of North Korea or anything about its people. Even today I just thought of North Korea as a weird place with really weird leaders. And as scary because these weird people could possibly blow up a lot of the U.S.. So I was grateful to learn so much more from this book.

"The Impossible State" is author, academic, and former National Security Council official Victor Cha's extended analysis of North Korea, both its past and its possible future. Cha draws extensively on his experiences in visiting North Korea and in having negotiated with its officials to present an in-depth look behind the official mask; he finds a disfunctional authoritarian state that survives by brutalizing its citizens and bullying its neighbors. "The Impossible State" is not strictly speaking a linear history of North Korea. Cha moves back and forth in his narrative between the present, the recent past and the remote past, capturing the history of North Korea and the evolution of U.S. policy toward Pyongyang and its leaders. The historical narrative is detailed but accessible to the general reader. It traces how North Korea, which thanks to outside aid was both economically and militarily stronger than the South after the Korean War, but has since become a basketcase dependent on the threat of nuclear war to avoid being ignored altogether. Cha is to be praised for taking an unblinking look at why Pyongyang cannot afford to negotiate away its nuclear weapons capabilities, and why economic reform of its moribund economy might be the undoing of its authoritarian government. Cha is also clear-eyed about the potential costs to South Korea of a Korean peninsula that unifies in the manner of East and West Germany. Cha's narrative can be repetitive in places, and he not unnaturally feels compelled to defend the record of the Bush administration in its dealings with North Korea. However, these features are minor blemishes in a very insightful book on North Korea, recommended to the general reader and the student.

The Impossible State starts off with the surprising history of the Kim family and then details the various ways this state has defied all odds by not being overthrown by its own downtrodden people or destroyed by a combined US/ROK offensive. Mr. Cha's main focus is on the various US policies towards North Korea during the 90's and early 2000's, particularly the nuclear disarmament efforts. If you're interested in what it's like for the average North Korean to live in a totalitarian state; there are other books that cover that subject. This book is about nuclear policy and relations with South Korea.

Although several years old, this is still very prescient and contains lots of information I didn't know about the origins and early years of North Korea. Very useful given the current conflict.

A complicated topic. Very thoughtful analysis and a useful introduction to what North Korea is and why it does what it does. It also tells as much about China and why a stable Korea (North and South) means something to the Chinese. My only observation is that the text reads a bit like a

research paper and therefore it tends to go back and forth a bit on the same issues. And it reads long, so you need to have an interest in reading, putting it down and then reading again. It was also a bit remarkable to read something complimentary about George Bush and foreign policy. This is not conventional wisdom, and with the passage of time perhaps he deserves a better place in history than he has been given to date. I think the reader will readily appreciate that this is not a superficial analysis and is a worthy read for anyone who has an interest in global affairs.

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