



# The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History

By Don Oberdorfer, Robert Carlin

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Ever since Korea was first divided at the end of World War II, the tension between its northern and southern halves has riveted—and threatened to embroil—the rest of the world. In this landmark history, now thoroughly revised and updated in conjunction with Korea expert Robert Carlin, veteran journalist Don Oberdorfer grippingly describes how a historically homogenous people became locked in a perpetual struggle for supremacy—and how they might yet be reconciled.

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## **The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History** By Don Oberdorfer, Robert Carlin Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

“A true public service...a clear and unpretentious journalistic narrative of the past quarter-century's public and behind-the-scenes political and diplomatic efforts to solve the Korea question. It is a well-reported if unfinished story, well told by someone who has been a Korea-watcher for almost four decades.... Probing behind events to reveal the machinations of key politicians, generals, and bureaucrats, often re-creating the dynamics shaping their behavior, is the strength of this book.... Oberdorfer chronicles with impressive detail the pathos of the nuclear crisis and the freezing of North-South relations it precipitated. What emerges from *The Two Koreas* is a portrait of precisely why the peninsula is so volatile: two rivals competing for national legitimacy in a culture where compromise is tantamount to defeat.... Oberdorfer refrains from punditry and predictions, letting his powerful material tell the story.”

—***The Boston Globe***

“[A] lucid, balanced, thoroughly credible account of the last 25 years on both sides of the armistice line.”

—***The New York Times Book Review***

“Riveting.... *The Two Koreas* majestically fulfills Oberdorfer's goal of drawing attention to the role outside powers have played in the two Koreas' history.”

—***The Washington Post***

“[A] fine book.... [Oberdorfer's] gripping narrative should chasten our leaders and inform our citizenry about the continuing perils and costs of America's involvement with Korea. At a time when frivolous sensationalism dominates the media, [*The Two Koreas*] illustrates the virtues of a life given to honest, independent, inquiring journalism.... [It is] a detailed insider's account of the period since President Nixon opened China.... Oberdorfer excels at weaving together the characters and events of the period (often ones that he covered as a reporter) with more recent interviews with major participants in Washington, Seoul, Pyongyang, Beijing and Tokyo. He also pays more attention than usual to the work of scholars on Korea. What results is not really the history of the two Koreas but of American relations with Korea in the last 25 years. Oberdorfer is often definitive on that subject, deploying information that even specialists do not know.”

—**Bruce Cumings, *The Los Angeles Times***

“[A] gripping narrative... *The Two Koreas* is a masterful analysis of one of the enduring Achilles' heels of US foreign policy.”

—***Los Angeles Review of Books***

“This truly important work will, without question, become the standard against which other books on modern Korea will be judged.”

—**Donald P. Gregg, former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea**

“Oberdorfer is one of America's keenest analysts of the international scene.”

—**James A. Baker III, former U.S. Secretary of State**

"[A] fine new book.... Oberdorfer is the sort of well-informed and conscientious journalist with a lifetime of experience that academic specialists can learn a lot from, and general readers will find this a lively, interesting, accessible, and satisfying book. It is not quite a contemporary history of the two Koreas (there are only a few Korean voices, and large swaths of domestic Korean history are left out), but it is the best history of the past 30 years of American-Korean relations.... Oberdorfer pens remarkably accurate portraits of a string of South Korean presidents.... *The Two Koreas* should give pause to those who think we should fight wars to keep the instruments of war out of the wrong hands."

—*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*

"A most timely book to understand what could happen if North Korea implodes or attacks South Korea."

—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

"Oberdorfer, veteran *Washington Post* diplomatic correspondent who has met every South Korean president on their home ground and every North Korean foreign minister during their annual trips to the United States, does an excellent job of filling in the blanks in our knowledge of events from 1953 until today.... The picture Oberdorfer presents is by no means a clear view of sweetness and light and democracy on our side, and communist tyranny and terror on their side."

—*Florida Times-Union*

"A fine overview of Korea's recent past."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Combining the depth and authority of a first-rate textbook with the readability of a good novel, [*The Two Koreas*] has proven to be a wonderful teaching tool for instructors and students alike."

—**Carter J. Eckert, Professor of Korean History, Harvard University**

"A useful primer on policy."

—*The Weekend Australian*

"Though he is an old Asia hand who has made many visits to the Korean peninsula—including two to North Korea—he deliberately keeps himself out of this book. Mistrusting his impressions, Oberdorfer, a retired diplomatic correspondent for *The Washington Post*, researched exhaustively, conducting more than 450 interviews. The result is a comprehensive and informative...account of postwar Korean history, from the Korean War to the rise of democracy in the South to the nuclear-weapons crisis in the North."

—*The Globe and Mail*

"An authoritative and readable work of history that will inform [Oberdorfer's] colleagues and the public at large as they watch the future of the Cold War's last remaining division unfold.... Even for those who know a lot about recent diplomacy, Oberdorfer fills in gaps, having interviewed many key participants."

—*USA Today*

"Packed with great details and anecdotes which bring the whole extraordinary saga [of the two Koreas] to life... [Oberdorfer] is particularly good at detailing how the South gained the military and economic upper hand from the 1980s onwards as the North's communist backers deserted it. He sheds much light on how the Soviet Union stepped in to bankroll Kim Il-sung after China reduced its support under new leader Deng Xiaoping. And how with the Soviet Union's collapse seven years ago, North Korea, refusing to contemplate reforms, went into economic free-fall.... Oberdorfer's description of the friendship forged between [Carter and Il-sung]...is worth the price of the book alone.... [A] skillful mixture of reportage and history which opens the door to understanding what will happen next."

—*South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong)

“Engrossing, informative, wise. A rare achievement, the best account yet of a tragically divided country.”

—**Ezra Vogel, Director, Asia Center, Harvard University**

#### About the Author

Don Oberdorfer wrote for the "Washington Post" for twenty-five years, and is currently Chairman of the U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies. He lives in Washington, D.C.

Robert Carlin is a Visiting Fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University and former chief of the Northeast Asia Division in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, U.S. Department of State. He lives in Washington, D.C.

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