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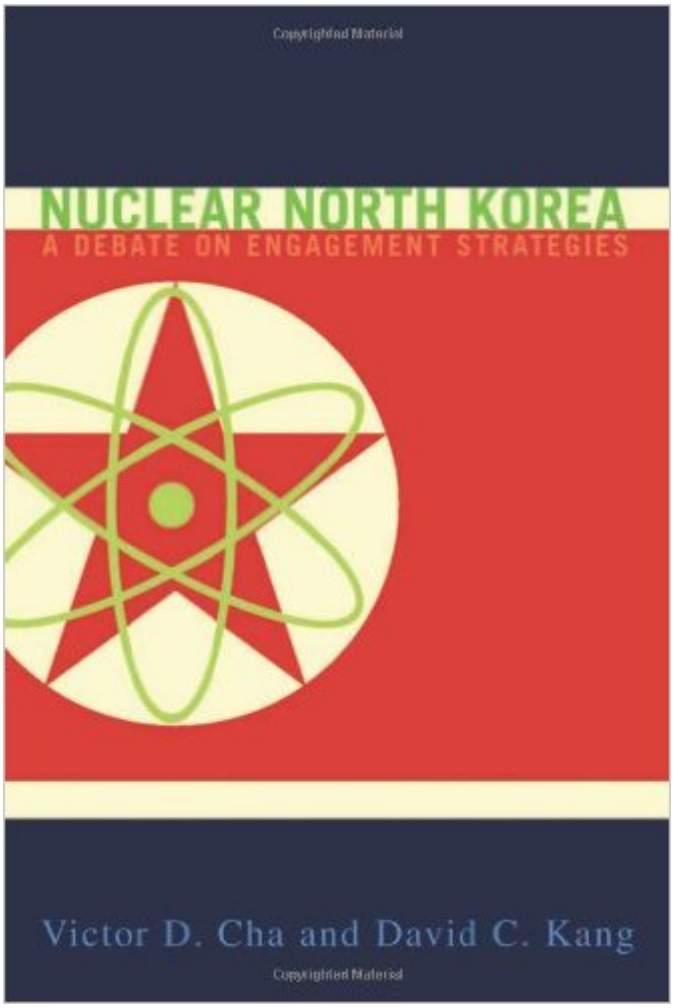
Nuclear North Korea: A Debate On Engagement Strategies



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Synopsis

The regime of Kim Jong-Il has been called "mad," "rogue," even, by the Wall Street Journal, the equivalent of an "unreformed serial killer." Yet, despite the avalanche of television and print coverage of the Pyongyang government’s violation of nuclear nonproliferation agreements and existing scholarly literature on North Korean policy and security, this critical issue remains mired in political punditry and often misleading sound bites. Victor Cha and David Kang step back from the daily newspaper coverage and cable news commentary and offer a reasoned, rational, and logical debate on the nature of the North Korean regime. Coming to the issues from different perspectivesâ •Kang believes the threat posed by Pyongyang has been inflated and endorses a more open approach, while Cha is more skeptical and advocates harsher measuresâ •the authors together have written an essential work of clear-eyed reflection and authoritative analysis. They refute a number of misconceptions and challenge much faulty thinking that surrounds the discussion of North Korea, particularly the idea that North Korea is an irrational nation. Cha and Kang contend that however provocative, even deplorable, the Pyongyang government’s behavior may at times be, it is not incomprehensible or incoherent. Neither is it "suicidal," they argue, although crisis conditions could escalate to a degree that provokes the North Korean regime to "lash out" as the best and only policy, the unintended consequence of which are suicide and/or collapse. Further, the authors seek to fill the current scholarly and policy gap with a vision for a U.S.-South Korea alliance that is not simply premised on a North Korean threat, not simply derivative of Japan, and not eternally based on an older, "Korean War generation" of supporters.This book uncovers the inherent logic of the politics of the Korean peninsula, presenting an indispensable context for a new policy of engagement. In an intelligent and trenchant debate, the authors look at the implications of a nuclear North Korea for East Asia and U.S. homeland security, rigorously assessing historical and current U.S. policy, and provide a workable framework for constructive policy that should be followed by the United States, Japan, and South Korea if engagement fails to stop North Korean nuclear proliferation.

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Customer Reviews

Professors Cha and Kang come at the current and historic crisis in North Korea from different angles: Cha from a more "realist" view of international relations, Kang from a more "liberal" view. The book is a series of several chapters written alternately by Cha and Kang with each pair of chapters focusing on one aspect of the Korean problem. Both view North Korea as being entirely "rational," and make a point to discredit 30-second sound byte types of analyses of North Korea’s decisionmaking process. Cha finds that it is perfectly rational for North Korea to attack or go nuclear even if the end result has a high probability of resulting in total destruction, because the status quo is so unbearable that the North is willing to bear the risk. Kang suggests that increased economic development, integration into the world economy, and the introduction of market forces will alter North Korea’s cost-benefit analysis and push it away from violent military action or the active pursuit of a nuclear weapons program. In the end, both agree that the default strategy for the United States is engagement.Cha and Kang do a good job of bringing intellectual depth to a debate that is often over-simplified. It makes a good read for the average reader while remaining a strong academic work of its own. This is not a history book--it is a book examining academic questions with real-world implications.

After the first Gulf War, several second/third world countries made the observation that the technical and other advantages possesed by the U. S. make it imperative that any country concerned about an attack from the United States have nuclear weapons. I note that I don’t see President Bush talking much about attacking North Korea. General Gary Luck offered a quick sound bite on the costs of a war in N. Korea: "one million casualties, one trillion dollars in industrial damage and lost business."In this excellent book the authors attempt to bring some sense to the scare headlines so loved by the news media -- Newsweek called the North Korean leader, "Dr. Evil." The book is written by two professors, one a bit more hawkish, one a bit more dovish. They present their views, they discuss the others viewpoint, they then try to come up with an overall plan that makes sense.A

million casualties -- somebody better come up with a plan that’s better than TV’s talking heads.With this book I also highly recommend "North Korea at a Crossroads" by Suk Hi Kim.

Victoe Cha is one of the authorities in studying Korean Peninsula. This book addresses the challenges of North korea’s nuclear weapon programs and its threat to US allies in the region. The author analyzes the strategies for dealing with North Korea’s nuclear weapon programs with both progress and failure.

Well written and easy to follow. I especially love the way the book is set up. Two authors who lean towards slightly different directions (hawk/dove) in regards to how America should engage with North Korea, present their argument while also responding to the other’s arguments in alternating chapters.

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