



Nuclear Showdown: North Korea Takes On the World

Gordon G. Chang

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“If we lose, I will destroy the world,” said Kim Jong Il, supreme leader of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Kim’s regime insults all of us. Its very existence is an affront to humanity’s sense of decency and challenges accepted notions of politics, economics, and social theory. More important, North Korea threatens us.

The Great Leader, as Kim now calls himself, can change the course of history with an act of unimaginable devastation. He possesses an arsenal of nuclear weapons and the ballistic missiles to deliver them. Today he can hit most of the continent of Asia and even parts of the American homeland. In a few years—probably by the end of this decade—the diminutive despot will cast his shadow across the globe: He will be able to land a nuke on any point on the planet.

Even now, everyone is at risk. North Korea has said it might sell weapons to others, thereby making itself the first “nuclear Kmart.” Who wants to live in a world where anyone with enough cash and a pickup truck can incinerate a city?

For six decades, America has tried every tactic to stop Kim’s Korea, but it has failed each time. The current approach—providing aid and assurances of security in return for an end to weapons programs—mimics the failed diplomacy of the 1990s. Negotiations, sponsored by China, have yet to produce an enduring solution.

Unfortunately, Kim has paid no price for destabilizing the global order. In fact, many countries, including America, reward him for his fundamental challenge to the international system. Perhaps that is why the world is now further away from a solution to the Korean nuclear crisis than it was a decade ago.

In a contest that will be decided by finesse more than power, Kim is winning. If he ultimately prevails—and time is running out for Washington—his success will probably result in a quick erosion of American power. The world’s strongest nation does not have much of a future if it cannot defend its most vital interests against a reviled autocrat like Kim from a small country like North Korea.

The current conflict with Kim Jong Il is a crisis like no other, perhaps the twenty-first century’s moment of greatest consequence. This is where the world writes its history for the next hundred years. *Nuclear Showdown* is the first and only major study to look at all dimensions of this crisis. Gordon G. Chang proposes solutions that go beyond the conventional suggestions seen elsewhere.

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