

Meltdown: The Inside Story of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis

by Mike Chinoy

St Martin's Press

New York, 2008

\$49.95, 288pp

ISBN 9780312371531

A crisis on the Korean peninsula may not be far off. The 'Dear Leader,' Kim Jong Il, is sixty-six. He is rumoured to have suffered a stroke, and the succession is not secure. Regional governments have contingency plans in place for scenarios including regime collapse in Pyongyang. While that is not likely, it is not unthinkable either. And Australians cannot afford to believe that our security concerns lie only south of the equator.

Mike Chinoy, a longtime CNN correspondent and China specialist, has written a valuable record of the Bush administration's efforts to prevent North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons. This can hardly be deemed a foreign policy success. Indeed, North Korea tested nuclear weapons in 2006, defying the so-called 'international community.'

But as is so often the case, hope triumphs over experience. Chinoy is vulnerable to the delusion of many Western liberals that the denuclearisation of North Korea could be achieved by 'real' or 'meaningful' negotiations. He assumes that if the United States and its allies give the regime sufficient bribes, and concede it the status that it craves, North Korea will agree to give up its nuclear weapons. Indeed, Chinoy has predictably applauded the latest 'breakthrough' with North Korea.

But it should be apparent, after a decade and a half of nuclear crises with North Korea, that the regime not only has no intention

of giving up nuclear weapons, but has proliferated fissile materials to Iran and Syria. Indeed, Chinoy unwittingly highlights the central problem with 'arms control'—the democracies get lulled into complacency while authoritarian regimes lie and cheat. This is an especially common delusion in Australia, not least among the 'English school' followers of the late Professor Hedley Bull, who dominate courses in our universities.

Chinoy's book is also testimony to the widespread delusion, so prevalent when Bill Clinton came to power in 1993, that 'it's all economics now.' In fact, it's hard to find a better example than North Korea of a state with a busted economy that is still able to hold to ransom even the United States, the 'sole surviving superpower.'

North Korea, which has good mineral and other resources, was developed as the industrial heartland of the Korean peninsula under Japanese occupation (1910–1945). The largely agricultural south was much poorer. But capitalist South Korea, allied to the United States after the Korean War, has decisively won the economic battle with the communist north. Its economy is now some forty times larger now than North Korea's. The average North Korean soldier now is several centimetres shorter than his South Korean counterpart—a consequence of widespread malnutrition. Yet South Korea has been utterly unable to translate this into political leverage over North Korea.

Why? The North Koreans, although they would not be able to win a war, could destroy Seoul with rocket and artillery attacks. They hold the South Korean capital hostage. North Korea has

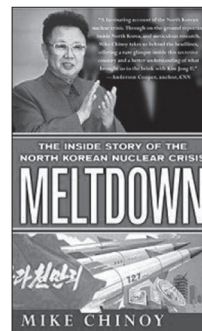
also developed weapons of mass destruction to check overwhelming American conventional and nuclear power, and thus holds America hostage as well.

Moreover, even though the Clinton administration seriously contemplated destroying the nuclear reactor at Yongbyon in 1994, as Chinoy recounts, the US lacks a viable military option against North Korea. One of the reasons that the Bush administration invaded Iraq in 2003 was because it could. That was never an option in relation to North Korea, not only because of the mass casualties likely in South Korea, and the large cost in American lives, but also because the United States cannot ignore the interests of nearby China, a nuclear-armed great power.

Chinoy's book is valuable for the detailed account of the infighting within the Bush administration over North Korea. But it is clear that Chinoy's heart is with the 'moderates'—Colin Powell and Richard Armitage in particular—rather than 'hardliners' such as Vice President Dick Cheney, former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and former arms control chief John Bolton.

In the final days of the Bush administration, the 'moderates' enlisted Condoleezza Rice on their side in negotiating yet another deal that promises the 'denuclearisation' of North Korea. They did so to create a foreign policy 'legacy' for Bush, who has had few other successes. Given the long and dismal history of 'negotiating' with North Korea, this deal will no doubt go the way of all the others. North Korea will pocket any concessions and simply demand more, lying and cheating as usual.

What should worry Australians about this book is that Chinoy,



like so many Americans, focuses only on what he conceives to be American strategic interests. Thus, he underestimates the risk that the North Korean missile and nuclear threat to Japan will so undermine Japanese confidence in the US 'nuclear umbrella' that Japan will decide that it needs its own nuclear weapons.

In Bush's final days in office, the Japanese show palpable anger at the president's betrayal of Japanese interests in striking this latest 'deal' with North Korea. The response of the Bush administration is that Japan just has to get out of the way. So much for the 'realists' in the Bush administration, who used to pillory Clinton for his 'appeasement' of North Korea.

Yet Japan has all it needs to make nuclear weapons, except warhead technology. And that would not stop Japan for long. It's not just North Korea that Japan is worried about. A far bigger threat is China, which targets Japan with nuclear weapons. Indeed, Japan may be starting to think that it can no longer rely on US-extended deterrence where China is concerned.

Chinoy, like many American liberals, is inclined to underestimate the fear that drives policy in many countries now that the Cold War is over. If Japan comes to think that it can no longer afford to rely on the US 'nuclear umbrella' that sheltered it during the Cold War, our region could soon see the rapid spread of nuclear weapons. The US focus on North Korea should begin with the need to keep Japan reassured, not with the delusion that 'real negotiations' would lead to North Korea's abandoning nuclear weapons. But with Obama about to succeed Bush, that is a faint hope.

Reviewed by Robyn Lim

Grand New Party: How Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream

by **Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam**

Doubleday

New York, 2008

US\$23.95, 256pp

ISBN 9780385519434

With Democrats in control of the presidency and both houses of Congress, the Republican Party is set to experience the period of introspection and infighting that inevitably follows electoral defeat. A work germane to these reflections is *Grand New Party* by Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam, modestly subtitled *How Americans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream*.

Despite the elite media obsession with the Iraq War and 'unilateralist' US foreign policy, public disenchantment with the Bush administration stems from domestic failures more than military adventurism, and this is the focus of *Grand New Party*.

Slightly more than half the book is devoted to a history of modern US conservatism, beginning with the maternalist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. The authors then attempt to diagnose the domestic policy shortcomings that have cost the Republicans the working-class base Ronald Reagan won over three decades ago. Finally, they prescribe key elements of a new policy agenda designed to woo them back.

The lengthy historical survey may seem excessive to readers enjoying broad familiarity with twentieth-century US politics. It is nonetheless necessary, as the authors use this survey as a source of insights with which to diagnose contemporary failures.

The book's central thesis is that both major political parties have failed to acknowledge the challenges that beset the American working class. Most Republicans would agree with the authors' sketch of a Democratic Party that actively undermines the social mores that, while burdensome for affluent coast-dwelling elites, are a necessity for hard-pressed working-class Americans struggling to maintain the family stability that stands between them and poverty.

Yet while the Republican Party caters to this need with its social policies, the authors argue that it turns a blind eye to the growing income disparities between socioeconomic classes, which are entrenching the power of an educated elite and undermining the American Dream of class mobility. It also ignores the growing sense of economic insecurity faced by working Americans, even before the financial crisis, about the safety of their jobs in an economy marked by offshoring of increasingly high-end activities.

The authors argue that the current trend will lead to a politics driven by greater xenophobia and economic populism, with the US morphing into something more akin to a European welfare state. If the Republicans are not interested in proposing a solution to working-class insecurities, the Democrats will.

Douthat and Salam paint a grim picture of the possible future:

Imagine higher taxes, vastly expanded public sector employment, infantilized upper-middle-class men and women who live with their parents because their jobs don't pay them enough to buy a house of their own, illegitimacy rising toward 50 percent and a growing social services bureaucracy that steps in to pick up the slack, plunging birthrates as rearing