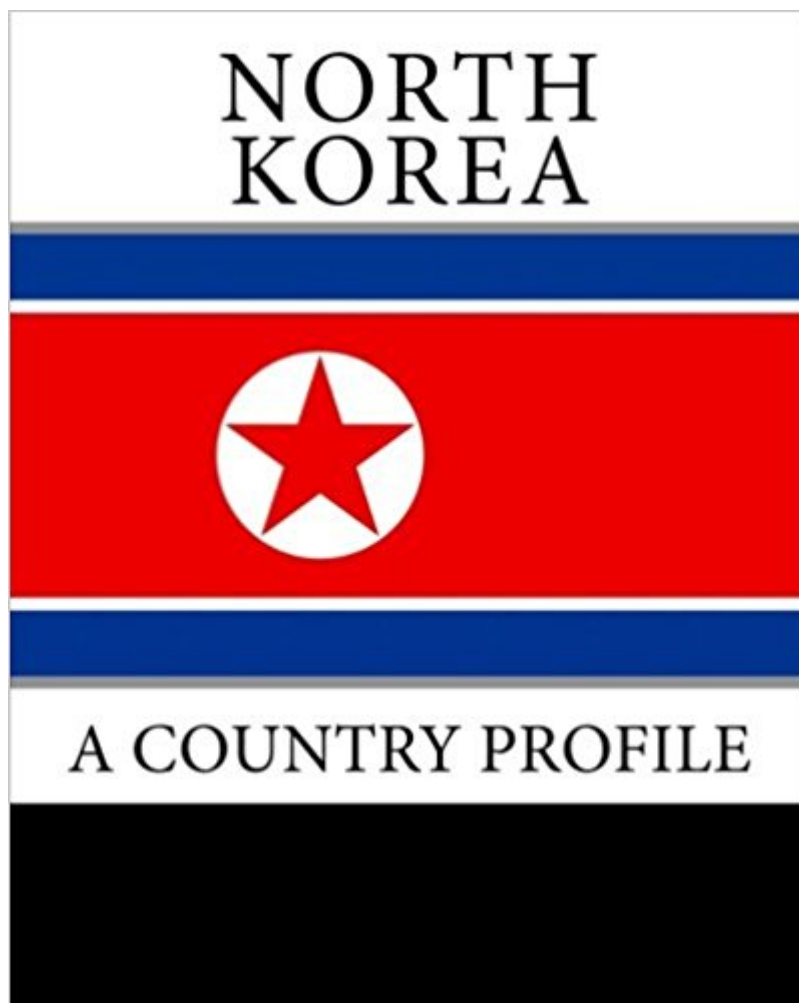


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North Korea: A Country Profile



Synopsis

North Korea is a country in East Asia, occupying the northern half of the Korean Peninsula. Its capital and largest city is Pyongyang. The Korean Demilitarized Zone serves as the buffer zone between North Korea and South Korea. The Amnok River and the Tumen River form the border between North Korea and the People's Republic of China. A section of the Tumen River in the far northeast is the border with Russia. The peninsula was governed by the Korean Empire until it was annexed by Japan following the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. It was divided into Soviet and American occupied zones in 1945, following the end of World War II. North Korea refused to participate in a United Nations-supervised election held in the south in 1948, which led to the creation of separate Korean governments for the two occupation zones. Both North and South Korea claimed sovereignty over the Korean Peninsula as a whole, which led to the Korean War of 1950. The Armistice Agreement of 1953 ended the fighting; however, the two countries are officially still at war with each other, as a peace treaty was never signed. Both states were accepted into the United Nations in 1991. North Korea is a single-party state under a united front led by the Korean Workers' Party (KWP). The country's government follows the Juche ideology of self-reliance, developed by the country's former President, Kim Il-sung. After his death, Kim Il-sung was declared to be the country's Eternal President. Juche became the official state ideology when the country adopted a new constitution in 1972, though Kim Il-sung had been using it to form policy since at least as early as 1955. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and a series of natural disasters, a famine occurred, causing the death of 900,000 to 2 million people. Facing these circumstances, leader Kim Jong-Il adopted Songun, or a "military-first" policy in order to strengthen the country and its government. Although North Korea is officially a socialist republic, many outside media organizations report that it is a totalitarian Stalinist dictatorship with an elaborate cult of personality around the Kim family and one of the worst human rights records of any country. North Korea is the world's most militarized nation with a total of 9,495,000 active, reserve, and paramilitary personnel. It is a nuclear weapons state, and has an active space program. Due to the government's secretive nature and its reluctance to allow in foreigners, North Korea is today considered the world's most isolated country and has thus been given the moniker "The Hermit Kingdom" by some.

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