



IVAN ALLEN COLLEGE
THE SAM NUNN SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY, TECHNOLOGY, AND POLICY

Red Rogue: The Persistent Challenge of North Korea

Thursday, October 18, 2007

At Georgia Tech's Clary Theater on October 18, 2007, **Dr. Bruce Bechtol**, an associate professor of international relations at the U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College, spoke regarding his new book, *Red Rogue: The Persistent Challenge of North Korea*. Dr. Bechtol, who is also an adjunct professor of diplomacy at Norwich University and who sits on the board of the East Asian Review, is a former intelligence officer with the Defense Intelligence Agency and a retired Marine and has spent many years analyzing U.S. national security issues in Northeast Asia and the security environment of the Korean Peninsula.

Dr. Bechtol divides his book into two parts: 1) the North Korean threat (including the DPRK's nuclear, conventional, chemical, and biological abilities), and 2) how the U.S.-ROK alliance counters the North Korean threat. By using the Diamond model, a framework of analysis which examines the strategic capabilities of both North Korea and the U.S.-ROK alliance, Dr. Bechtol analyzes the threat that North Korea poses and reaches conclusions on how to best confront the DPRK.

According to Dr. Bechtol, one of the most important priorities for North Korean leader Kim Jong Il is to maintain his military. By doing so, Kim is able to maintain his control over the North Korean regime. However, since 1990 there has been a decline in the training and capability of the North Korean military due in part to sanctions and external pressure from the international community. This has forced North Korea to use hard currency to keep its military updated, which has been extremely difficult. There has been only one incident of insubordination in North Korea credited to the eroding conditions of the military. This incident took place in 1996 as the army's 6th corp planned a coup attempt against Kim Jong Il. However, the commanding general of the 6th corp told Kim about the coup planning and was subsequently promoted, while each of the 6th corp's officers was executed. Dr. Bechtol noted that it was no coincidence that North Korea's worst starvation issues are in its northeast province, where the 6th corp was located in 1996.

Following a detailed discussion on North Korea's missile systems, Dr. Bechtol discussed the importance for North Korea of continued Chinese support to the DPRK. North Korea can help guarantee continued Chinese support through, 1) preventing large numbers of North Korean citizens from defecting to China in the lead-up to the 2008 Olympic games, and 2) working to secure continued Chinese investment in North Korea, which has risen 350% over the past 5 years.

Dr. Bechtol argued that it was important for Kim Jong Il to, "maintain momentum in alienating the ROK public from the U.S.-ROK alliance." In 2003 North Korea became openly declarative regarding ROK politics and elections. By trying to influence South Korea's younger generations and the "386" (born in the sixties and after) generation, North Korea – through its use of intricate

propaganda - attempted to move ROK politics away from the strong U.S.-ROK alliance and toward a more engagement-oriented policy with North Korea.

Dr. Bechtol stated that perhaps the most important issue which Kim Jong Il currently faces is who will succeed him in the event of his death. Reports have even indicated that progress in the Six-Party Talks have at times been postponed so that Kim could focus more on the lines of succession in North Korea. The question of succession takes on an even greater importance due to the recent reports of Kim's failing health. Kim Jong Il is a diabetic, due at least in part to his many years of smoking and drinking. Succession by any of Kim's three sons is problematic, and Dr. Bechtol cautioned in believing too strongly that the military would take over North Korea in the event of Kim Jong Il's demise.

Dr. Bechtol concluded the event by arguing that the best way to face the North Korean threat is through containment and deterrence, and the only way to properly deter a continued North Korean threat is through a strengthened U.S.-ROK military alliance.