



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

“The State of Asia: The Bush Administration’s Record and the Next Administration’s Challenges,” by Dr. Victor Cha

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

On the afternoon of February 20, 2008 at Georgia Tech’s Student Center Ballroom, Dr. Victor Cha, Professor at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service and Director of Asian Studies at Georgetown University, spoke on the state of affairs in East Asia during the Bush administration and the challenges that await the next U.S. administration. Prior to returning to Georgetown, Dr. Cha served as Director of Asian Affairs at the White House National Security Council and Deputy Head of the U.S. Delegation to the Six-Party Talks. Prior to government service, Dr. Cha published several books and journal articles, including the award-winning *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* and *Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies*. Dr. Cha is the recipient of numerous academic awards including MacArthur Foundation Fellowships and two Fulbright Scholarships and is currently writing a book on the politics of sport in Asia and the Beijing Olympics.

In his speech, Dr. Cha addressed the widely-held belief that the U.S. is facing its own demise in East Asia due to the rise of China, the rise of Asian nationalism, and poor U.S. policy-making. Critics believe that the U.S. has been too singularly focused on counter-terrorism while allowing the rise of China and neglecting U.S. relationships with its allies. However, Dr. Cha argued that the conventional wisdom regarding the rise of China and the demise of the U.S. in East Asia has been greatly exaggerated. The U.S. position in East Asia is strong and the new administration will be handed an Asian policy with relationships that are not as bad as they have been made out to be. During the Bush Administration, the U.S. has built a cooperative relationship with China, deepened its relationship with Japan, the defense alliance relationship on the Korean Peninsula has been strengthened, and a multilateral negotiation process has been put into place in North Korea that has yielded results.

Regarding North Korea, the U.S. has achieved real results based on an established diplomatic process. These results include the beginning of the disablement of North Korea’s Yongbyon nuclear reactor (8 of 11 steps have been completed) and the placement of nuclear experts from South Korea, Russia, China, Japan, and the U.S. on the ground in North Korea to verify the disablement process. Despite these results, the Bush Administration’s policies toward North Korea have been widely criticized by all sides of the political spectrum. The political left has argued that the administration has pursued a policy of regime change and coercion and only changed policies after North Korea tested a nuclear weapon in October of 2007. The political right has argued that the U.S. was placing all of the right pressures on North Korea and wrongly

gave up its position of power for the *temporary* shutdown of the Yongbyon reactor. Despite these criticisms, Dr. Cha argued that there have been three core principles that have guided U.S. policy toward North Korea during the Bush administration: 1) Attain a peaceful diplomatic solution; 2) Deal with the issue through multi-lateral negotiations; and 3) Negotiate with the purpose of testing North Korea's position – this includes flexible negotiations to test whether North Korea is serious about denuclearization.

Dr. Cha argued that the challenge for the next administration, whether democratic or republican, is that it will have to work hard to speak to some very basic principles that have been successful in the East Asia region: 1) Asian-American and American interests are best advanced by investing in U.S. bilateral alliances based on values such as pursuing free and fair trade in the region and enlisting regional partners in multi-lateral solutions to issues – e.g. the Six-Party Talks; 2) Encouraging a pragmatic working relationship with China while maintaining a very deep, broadening alliance with Japan – this is very important for regional stability; and 3) Building a Northeast Asian Security Institution – a potential outgrowth of the Six-Party Talks which needs the establishment of rules, norms, and principles in order to be successful long-term.

Following his speech to a larger audience of 120 attendees, Dr. Cha spent an hour and a half in a small roundtable discussion with Georgia Tech faculty and students. The event, set-up for Georgia Tech students to have the opportunity for greater one-on-one interaction with Dr. Cha, involved a dozen undergraduate and graduate students and included discussion on the application of International Relations Theory to real-world government work, use of Dr. Cha's Hawkish Engagement Theory in U.S. policy toward North Korea, and the best avenues for Georgia Tech students to enter into federal government employment, among other topics.