

### **Interpreting Korea Today: Legacies and Current Posture**

In his presentation Thursday February 27<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Frank Plantan discussed Korea. He started off with an explanation of the recent execution of Kim Jung-un's uncle, Jang Song Teak. A major point Dr. Plantan made was that not only Jang, but his entire family, including the children, were executed along with him. Any reference to Jang or his family has been obliterated. He was seen as a threat to the regime, so he was removed.

Dr. Plantan continued with a look at the history of Korea, with a quick summary of the foreign invasions, starting with the Mongol invasion. He very briefly addressed the Japanese invasion in the early 1600s as well as the effects on Korea of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars. His list of conflicts and invasions of Korea ended with the Soviet invasion of North Korea and the Korean War.

The next major point of the presentation was a section on the governance and leadership of North Korea. The country is under the Juche system, one that focuses on national self-reliance. The system stresses isolationism, industrial development and limited exports, and collectivized agriculture. The problem with this system is that it only supports the military and the leadership.

North Korea is considered a failed state. It faced famines in the 1990s that killed somewhere between 240,000 and 3.5 million, depending on sources. In the 1980s, the Soviet Union demanded that North Korea repay its debts, but that never happened.

The North Korean leadership keeps control of the country through the Korean Workers Party and the National Defense Commission. The leader is treated like a god, and is seen as a father figure to the whole nation, regardless of how the rest of the world views him. In the mid-1990s, the military began to take a more active role in day-to-day life and the production, both industrial and food, which gave the military first claim.

People ask how a government like this is sustained. The easy answer is the black market. The North Korean government has a division called Bureau 39. Through connections to organized crime all over Asia and Europe, income is generated through all sorts of illegal activities, from drug and human smuggling, to counterfeiting and even insurance fraud. China has also been considered as a major backer of the North Korean economy, but as Dr. Plantan stated, these figures are highly exaggerated. If China were to pull all support, North Korea would not collapse.

Under Kim Jong-un, the north is developing missiles at a rapid pace. Also of concern is the human rights record. Torture and inhumane treatment, executions, political prison camps, and other abuses make North Korea among the worst offenders in history. If someone is designated an enemy of the state, three generations of the family are punished, in the same manner as Jang Song Taek and his family.

Another important point in this subject is the group of North Koreans that illegally cross the border into China. If these illegals marry a Chinese citizen, the marriage is actually considered to never have happened. A similar situation is with the children of such relations. These children have no political identity, they are not considered to be Chinese or Korean, and they have no access to any kind of government facilities. For example, there is no access to education for any of these children, because they legally do not exist.

The last point Dr. Plantan made is the need to engage North Korea in some way. Currently, the United States is still in a state of war with North Korea. There was an armistice, but no official treaty. In May 2009, South Korea joined the Proliferation Security Initiative, prompting the north to abrogate the armistice with the south. North Korea is threatening war, and something must be done. Somehow, the United States has to engage North Korea and open up the country to the rest of the world.

### **2013-2014 Program Topics / Schedule**

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| April 24 | The International Drug War and Implications for Foreign Policy           |
| May 15   | The Future of the Transatlantic Relationship from a European Perspective |
| May 20   | Greek Embassy Trip   |

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