



The Last Days of Kim Jong-il

Bruce Bechtol

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North Korea has remained a thorn in the side of the United States ever since its creation in the aftermath of the Korean conflict of 1950-1953. Crafting a foreign policy that effectively deals with North Korea, while still ensuring stability and security on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia as a whole has proved very challenging for successive American administrations. In the wake of ruler Kim Jong-il's death in December 2011, analysts and policymakers continue to speculate about the effect his last years as leader will have on the future of North Korea.

Bruce Bechtol, Jr. contends that Kim Jong-il's regime (1994-2011) exacerbated the threats that North Korea posed, and still poses, to the world. Bechtol explains how North Korea presents important challenges on five key fronts: its evolving conventional military threat, its strategy in the Northern Limit Line (NLL) area, its nuclear capabilities, its support for terrorism, and its handling of the succession process.

Bechtol's analysis clears up the persistent mystery of how Kim Jong-il's dysfunctional government in its final years was able to persist in power while both presenting a grave danger to its neighbors and setting the stage for the current government. This work addresses issues important for policymakers and academics who must deal with those in power in North Korea.

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