

International Affairs Forum Interview

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By Jason Miks

Brad Glosserman is executive director of the Center for Strategic and International Studies' Pacific Forum in Honolulu and a contributing editor to The Japan Times. He is also coeditor of Pacific Forum's quarterly electronic journal, Comparative Connections, and director of the Young Leaders Program.



International Affairs Forum: With ever unpredictable North there is of course no way of knowing for sure, but would you expect North Korea to conduct more missile tests as it has said it might?

Brad Glosserman: I think the North Koreans are trying to make a political statement rather than a military one, and to a large degree I think they've made it. And I think the caveat you opened with is correct – anybody that tells you they know what North Korea is thinking is either lying or dangerous. We just don't know everything that North Korea is doing and why. Everything is speculative and so we have to start any discussion with caveats like that.

Nonetheless it is very clear that the North Koreans are never happy with being told that their freedom of action is being circumscribed. I think that the North Koreans have fairly much anticipated that the United States and Japan would be upset with this and I think that's why they did it. I don't think they expected the Chinese to come down particularly hard and to a certain degree I think they like making it clear to the Chinese and the rest of the world that they are not under their thumb. I think the UN Security Council resolution was a lot more than people expected so I would argue that although it doesn't go as far as the Japanese and Americans would like, it has more meat than anybody would have expected at the outset. On that level I think the North Koreans are probably a little bit surprised as well.

I don't think the North Korean response was a surprise, though. You wouldn't really expect them to say "I'm sorry". So there was the rhetorical blast. But now I wouldn't be surprised if you saw them back off and perhaps looking for new avenues and ways to engage the United States and get them back into the bi-lateral discussions which are so important to them. And I think they will try to extort some more rewards from the South Koreans and the Chinese in the way of financial assistance as they've traditionally done. I think they've made their point and got the attention of the world. They have perhaps realized there are some red lines which they should not be crossing. I think they will keep the rhetoric at a high level but they will

not make any stupid gestures because they realize that at this point another missile test would truly take away the support that they have traditionally had from some countries like China or even Russia.

IA-Forum: What do you think the U.S. should do now to move forward on the issue?

Glosserman: The United States has got to work with the other parties in the six party talks. North Korea's strategy is always 'divide and conquer'. It feels as long as it is hearing different messages from participants that it will listen to the one that is most favorable.

What the United States needs to do is go back to Beijing and Seoul – those are the two most important countries in the context of this stage of the negotiations – and try to make sure that they don't soften their line or defect from the consensus in the UN resolution. And then try to reinforce the message that North Korea has to return to the talks.

The best thing might be for China to call an informal meeting of the six nations and if the North Koreans don't come then the five meet without them. The six party talks should go forward anyway. The Chinese have been reluctant to do this as they feel it would antagonize Pyongyang, but I think they recognize now that sometimes Pyongyang sometimes needs to be antagonized if in fact there is going to be any progress. That really is the first step at this point.

IA-Forum: The relationship between President Bush and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has been very close. Do you think this will continue with Koizumi's successor and what effect has the relationship had long term for the two countries?

Glosserman: I think the Bush-Koizumi relationship is the best it could ever be and I think it is the standard by which personal relationships are going to be judged. But at the same time the relationship is far more than a personal relationship. There have been some issues there, but that powerful personal relationship has insulated the two from a lot of criticism. Koizumi has been loyal and Bush places a strong emphasis on loyalty to friends. Koizumi has been more loyal than almost any other world leader. The president will therefore never cross him in public. The beef issues and the Yasukuni shrine visits might be troubling for the president, but I don't think he will say much about these in public. The question now is will the next prime minister enjoy something of the insulation from personal attacks that Koizumi has enjoyed.

The questions of the long term make-up of the relationship are very interesting. What has happened is that Koizumi has pushed a personal agenda regarding the normalization of Japanese defense and security politics and in doing so has institutionalized and pushed a vision of the alliance that in many ways locks in this relationship for his predecessor, absence some serious crisis. The alliance statement that was released in the June 29th summit was a further attempt to lock in the gains.

IA-Forum: Japan has become increasingly assertive under Koizumi. What impact do you think this will have on the region?

Glosserman: That depends what you mean by assertive. I think there is certainly an attempt on the part of the Japanese to reconfigure their role in the region. The current leadership, and I think a number of Japanese citizens, feel that the proper measurement or prism to evaluate Japanese behavior is over the last 60 years rather than the 15 years between 1930 and 1945. So the Japanese are saying 'we have made outstanding contributions to peace security and prosperity, therefore we deserve to get recognition for that'. And personally I think that is what is behind the UN council bid.

I don't anticipate there is going to be a great deal of retreat from that course. I don't think that this means that the Japanese are out to assume a leadership role, though here we are reaching out into some highly contested terrain. My opinion is that the Japanese are worried about status and not responsibility. Some people are. I think the Koizumi is, and I would expect what you are going to see is Japan being increasingly assertive about its recognition. But I am not so sure you are going to see the Japanese pushing their view on every issue globally. I think with North Korea's venomous statements and hostile actions such as kidnapping some Japanese citizens, that it is a very particular case. So I would not expect the Japanese to be as aggressive in foreign policy strategies as they have been on this one.

IA-Forum: What do you think are the biggest challenges for the region?

Glosserman: I think it is an unprecedented moment in history when you have two rising powers in China and Japan, and I think if you bring India into the mix you even have a third. So that's issue number one.

I think issue number two is an increasing concern about energy security and the recognition that all governments need to be increasingly attentive to securing energy resources. Now this is, at the same time, a great opportunity for co-operation and so I would think that if handled properly then all of the governments could work together to think creatively about ways that they can co-operate. A third issue I think is very important is the question of demographic change. What you see are aging societies in Japan, South Korea and apparently Thailand. It is unclear what impact these shifts will have broadly on society, but there will be a profound impact on their outlook.

There are also questions of national identity. The Japanese for example are far more confident this generation and want to be valued differently. The new Chinese generation expects to resume its place on top. In South Korea there is the transition to democratic politics. There you have all three countries grappling with their identity and who they are and what their place in the world is.

There are other factors such as resource depletion and the problems being created by China's breakneck economic growth such as acid rain and chemical spills.

And a final tension, which I think is hard to measure, is the very way in which Asia is emerging and the development occurring within the region. Borders are coming down, the

region is developing. And yet I don't sense a commensurate shift in the thinking of the governments. There are many issues such as pandemic disease or terrorism which these countries have traditionally said 'are not our problem', but in an increasingly integrated world they are. There are all sorts of anecdotes which reflect the inability of governments to face up to this new reality.

For example at a meeting of one of the national security councils in south-east Asia – I'll spare the name – I asked: "Tell me about radioactive sources in your country. How many radioactive sources do you have?" And the guy, a very senior government official, responded "None. We have no nuclear active sites." I responded "I know that. What I want to know is, for example all your hospitals have radioactive material. You have radioactive isotopes that you use for health care". These can potentially be used in terrorism. But it just has not been registered that there are several thousand radioactive sources that a terrorist group would be perfectly happy to put around a bunch of explosives. These are issues they need to be prepared to face – it is not somebody else's problem.

IA-Forum: Thank you very much for your time.

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