

# A Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

SHARPLY HIGHER FOOD PRICES are weighing heavily on the dining tables of consumers worldwide. In poorer parts of the globe, including many in developing Asia, these price rises pose a serious threat to political stability if they continue unchecked. As Lester R. Brown says in the first essay of our cover package, “the current food situation is unlike anything we’ve seen before.” It is not driven by any single event, but rather trends that have reshaped the world’s supply and demand for agricultural products.

While the limits of nature have played their part in contributing to the latest food crisis, a mixture of political miscalculations, policy blunders and other man-made causes bear the main burden of responsibility. From the unintended consequences of US ethanol fuel policies on the global price of grains to the impact of neo-liberal agricultural trade policies on the ability of poor countries to feed themselves, what policymakers do, or fail to do, is affecting the livelihood of an increasing number of the world’s population. The politics of food can, indeed, be perilous.

As with so many problems that are global in nature, the current food crisis is hitting the poor the hardest. Our cover stories highlight the impact on a number of countries in Asia, but nowhere is the situation graver than in North Korea, a country that is no stranger to hunger. Here too, a failure to adopt the right mix of policies is literally taking food off the table. The country now faces yet another famine. In the politics of food, unequal portions, it seems, are the price of bad policymaking.

**Chung-in Moon**  
Editor-in-Chief

In this issue of *Global Asia*, we debate whether the Proliferation Security Initiative—a cornerstone of the Bush administration’s efforts to keep weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of hostile states and terrorist groups—would be more effective under UN control. It is a debate that highlights suspicions of American leadership under a presidency marked so often by unilateralism. But it also highlights doubts about the effectiveness of the UN’s multilateralism in the face of such a grave security risk. Elsewhere in this issue, we analyze the implications of new presidencies in Taiwan and Russia, and the impact of the recent earthquake in China on the political dynamics in the country. We also survey the oil and gas industry in Indonesia to explore its untapped potential. Finally, we review a recent biography of Goh Keng Swee, one of the founding members of Singapore’s ruling party and a key minister of finance, defense and education in the early years of the republic.

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As always, don’t hesitate to tell us what you think by emailing us at [editorial@globalasia.org](mailto:editorial@globalasia.org).

Sincerely yours,

**David Plott**  
Managing Editor