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# Former US envoy says North Korea's future uncertain

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT DECEMBER 19, 2011 Recommend  PRINT  REPRINTS  E-MAIL  SHARE 

Ambassador Stephen W. Bosworth, a former special envoy to North Korea, said tonight that Kim Jong Il's death is "a shock in some ways" but not a huge surprise to Korea watchers because the dictator had been ill for some time.

Bosworth served as the US special representative to North Korea from February 2009 until two months ago when he stepped down and Ambassador Glyn Davies was named his successor.

Bosworth, who is dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Medford, said he never met Kim personally despite his role as the point of contact between the United States and the reclusive Asian government.

"Very few Americans have," he said.

Bosworth said he is confident that the US and other countries with intense interest in the fate of North Korea will be vigilant in coming weeks.

“It’s a difficult time in terms of North Korean policy. I think we, [the US], will work with South Korea and China and Japan to make sure this situation is not disruptive to that region,” he said by phone moments after returning to his Boston home and seeing the news of Kim Jong Il’s death on TV.

He added that while few details are known about the succession plans for North Korea’s leadership, it is widely believed that Kim Jong Il’s third son, Kim Jong Un, will take the post because his father appointed him as his successor in September 2010.

“But, he’s not going to have the same sort of authority that his father or grandfather had,” Bosworth said, citing the age of Kim Jong Un, who is believed to be in his late 20s.

Bosworth added that the inner workings of North Korea’s political elite is seldom fully understood by outsiders, especially those in the West.

“This is not a country regime that we know all that much about its inner workings,” said Bosworth. “They make Albania’s government during the Cold War look transparent.”

He added a note of caution.

“We’re going to have to be careful,” he said. “North Korea is a serious problem under all circumstances and now with this political upheaval they’re going to be very anxious and sensitive.”

The Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Boston declined comment.

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