

INTEREST GROUPS AND FOREIGN POLICY IN SOUTH KOREA: A CASE STUDY

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This article analyzes the role of interest groups in South Korean foreign policy with a particular reference to 'Nordpolitik', the diplomatic initiatives taken by the Roh Tae Woo government to improve the country's relations with the communist countries north of its borders. More specifically, this work hopes to show that South Korea's interest groups, such as the political parties, the military, the business circle, the media, and the anti-communist organizations, gained some measure of autonomy in the wake of 'June 29 Declaration' of 1987, enough to voice their views on many foreign policy issues including those relative to Nordpolitik, but they had a minimal success in affecting Nordpolitik. It hopes to shed some light on the interacting between interest groups and foreign policy in a typical society undergoing a profound transformation from a authoritarian system to a democracy. It will be a very interesting case study in the barren field of the relationship between interest groups and foreign policy decision-making in South Korea.

Interest groups are "aggregates of individuals who interact in varying degrees in pursuance of common interest" (Bill & Hardgrave 1981: 121). Interest groups in advanced, pluralistic societies such as the United States are autonomous in the sense that they can freely pursue their own interests unfettered by governmental control. In the American setting, it is considered highly proper that individuals organize themselves into groups to articulate their interests and to make their views known to policy makers, and their constitutional rights under the First Amendment to do so have not been seriously questioned.

However, interest groups in South Korea, as in many other Third World countries, did not share similar characteristics with their counterparts in pluralistic societies. A strong state, with a concentration of power in the government, and an unstable political situation, all militated against the emergence of strong, autonomous interest groups free to pursue their selfish interests. Groups in Third World countries are often created by the government for the purpose of mobilizing the masses in its nation-building process. That being the case, they remain for the most part servile to the government, rarely trying to promote their narrowly defined interests.

Their status began to change in South Korea somewhat, however, in the wake of the 'June 29 Declaration' of 1987, which was a watershed event for democratization. They began to enjoy a greater autonomy in voicing their views and making demands on society even at the expense of overall societal interests. In some instances, interest groups were free to express their diverse opinions on foreign policy issues relevant to their interests. When 'Nordpolitik' was first enunciated as a major foreign policy of the Roh Tae Woo government in 1988, various groups, including the political parties, the military, the business circle, the media, and the anti-communist organizations came forward with their views. It is, therefore, important to discuss to what extent these

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interest groups played roles in Nordpolitik which was touted as a towering diplomatic achievement of the Roh Tae Woo government. Given the grievous gap in the literature having to do with the role of interest groups in South Korean foreign policy decision-making, this case study, even without heavy theory and framework, will shed some light on the interaction between interest groups and foreign policy in a typical society undergoing a profound transformation from an authoritarian system to a democracy. This article basically aims at providing information on the subject.

1. THE POLITICAL PARTIES OF 1 ROH AND 3 KIMS

In the December 1987 presidential election, the ruling Democratic Justice Party(DJP)'s candidate Roh Tae Woo barely won with 36.6% of the popular vote, while Kim Young Sam finished second with 28%, Kim Dae Jung and Kim Jong Pil came in third and fourth with 27.1% and 8.1% respectively (*Chosun Ilbo* December 19, 1987). The marginal success in the presidential election provided the Sixth Republic with a shaky start to begin with; the disastrous outcomes for the governing party in the National Assembly elections of April 1988 added a further setback to the government. Winning only 87 seats out of the total 224 and 38 at-large seats out of 75, the government party was relegated to a minority status, creating an anomalous situation that came to be known as *yeoso yadae*, namely "a small ruling party with a large opposition."

The *yeoso yadae* situation profoundly affected the abilities of the Roh government and the ruling party to exercise control over domestic politics. The government was ill-equipped to fend off the twin demands from the opposition to bring to justice the wrongdoers from the Fifth Republic and to conduct an inquiry into the 1980 Kwangju Incident, in the face of the added pressure to honor its campaign promises to hold a midterm referendum on President Roh's performance. The surge for a fresh initiative toward reunification by the students and the *jaeya* (the popular opposition) forces at the time, coming as it did during one of the worst labor unrest in Korean history, forced the government to conclude that democratization alone could not mollify the opposition. Turning to 'Nordpolitik' by the government under those circumstances was a well-calculated political move.

Recognizing a big stake in the outcome of 'Nordpolitik', President Roh kept his tight grips on it from the very inception to the end. There was every incentive for the President to pursue the Northern Policy with zeal, as its success was expected to boost his domestic standing, breathing life into his lackluster government. Only his closest aides from the Presidential Secretariat and the Agency for National Security Planning, were taken into his confidence. No doubt, the government's monopoly on intelligence on the socialist countries was no small advantage to the government.

The ruling DJP—later DLP(Democratic Liberal Party) after its merger with two other parties from the opposition in January 1990—had better access to privileged information than the opposition. Through meetings of the Supreme Party-Executive Coordinating Council, the government kept the ruling party apprised, to a certain extent, of the progress of 'Nordpolitik', but did not allow the party to be more than a rubber stamp. To be sure, the ruling party's voice in 'Nordpolitik' grew a little stronger after the three-

party merger, as shown when its Executive Chairman Kim Young Sam visited the Soviet Union in March 1990.¹ But the role of the party in 'Nordpolitik' was very much limited to aiding the government in its efforts to enhance its popularity, as those in charge of the Northern Policy in the government very jealously guarded their turf and were not willing to share the highly classified information with the people in the party.

The opposition parties were kept mostly in dark, let alone being sought into the policy formulation. National Assemblyman Cho Soon Sung, a scholar-turned politician who was a leading expert in the opposition camp, once bitterly complained that the Roh government did not make any effort to keep the opposition parties informed as to the progress of the Northern Policy. He was briefed on North Korea once a month by Unification Minister Lee Hong Koo, but the information given to him was sketchy and peripheral. Even the assemblyman's close personal relationship with Foreign Minister Choi Ho-joong proved to be of little consequence when it came to gaining access to the privileged information.²

Bereft of the opportunity to have a meaningful input into the government's 'Nordpolitik', the opposition parties sought to expound their own versions of 'Nordpolitik'. The Party for Peace and Democracy (PPD), which emerged as the largest opposition party in the general election of April 1988, for example, started its own 'Nordpolitik', taking advantage of the increasing visits to Seoul from socialist countries in connection with the Seoul Olympics. The party leader, Kim Dae Jung, busily put forth his own ideas as an alternative to the government's 'Nordpolitik'. In May 1988, he proposed an inter-Korean party leaders' meeting to discuss and map out plans for co-hosting of the Olympics. Then, in June, in a keynote speech to the National Assembly, Kim proposed a non-aggression pact between the South and the North, a joint establishment of a "national park or unification ground" in the DMZ and, also, the dispatch of a delegation to North Korea for the purpose of persuading Pyongyang to participate in the Seoul Olympics. He even called for an alteration in the relations between Taiwan and South Korea if it would help improve relations between Beijing and Seoul. He was the first among South Korean politicians to propose in public the need to modify South Korean-Taiwan relations for the improvement of Sino-South Korean relations (*Joongang Ilbo* June 29, 1988).

Although he agreed to the basic tenets of the government's 'Nordpolitik'--namely, to reach Pyongyang via Moscow and Beijing--, he was opposed to using 'Nordpolitik' to isolate North Korea. It is striking that his version of 'Nordpolitik' took into account North Korea's sensibilities; perhaps, it could be attributed to the fact that his party had within its ranks some anti-government, progressive activists since the 1988 general election (Yoo Se-Hee 1990: 86).

In February 1989, Kim Dae Jung visited five European countries including the Soviet Union and Hungary. During his visit to Hungary, he met with its head of state, Buruno Strauss. He was the first opposition party leader that had opened party-level contacts with East European countries and had set foot on Soviet soil. He did all this on his own

¹In the talks with Gorbachev, Kim Young Sam called for a summit meeting between Roh Tae Woo and Gorbachev for the sake of a Soviet-South Korean normalization. Later it became known that Kim had gained an affirmative response from Gorbachev.

²Interview with National Assemblyman Cho Soon Sung.

without much help from the government. Asked whether he had a consultation with the Roh government prior to his trip, Kim said nothing of a briefing or offering of information by the government; instead he claimed that the government was engaged in the behind-the-scenes plot to disrupt his visit.³

The PPD moved quickly to put forth its North Korea policy. In November 1989, Kim Dae Jung proposed that North and South Korea allow freedom of communication; that is, free access to each other's radio and television programs, something which all the other political parties were opposed to. In his meeting with President Roh on January 11, 1990, he proposed independent party-level contacts with North Korea. Roh responded that he would give the idea "a careful consideration." In that context, within a week, Kim offered to send his party's delegates to Pyongyang, if the government would grant its approval. But the party's overtures toward North Korea were doomed to failure, given the government's lukewarm support.

Although the Reunification Democratic Party(RDP)'s presidential candidate Kim Young Sam came in second after Roh in the December 1987 presidential election, the RDP was relegated to the position of the second largest opposition party after the general elections of the early 1988. To overcome its inferior position, the RDP tried to outmaneuver its rival, the PPD, with an even bolder proposal. In a keynote address to the National Assembly in June 1988, the party leader Kim Young Sam asserted that his personal visits to Pyongyang, Beijing, and Moscow would not only improve inter-Korean relations but also expand South Korea's diplomacy. Even so, he was not able to overtake Kim Dae Jung in his approach to dealing with socialist countries, including North Korea, as his party's programs on 'Nordpolitik' were still not fully developed.

However, within a year, Kim Young Sam achieved some diplomatic success in 'Nordpolitik', seemingly ahead of Kim Dae Jung. In June 1989, Kim Young Sam visited Moscow at the invitation of E. Primakov, Director of the Institute of World Economic and International Relations (IMEMO). While meeting with the Soviet people at various levels, Kim obtained Moscow's agreement to allow about 200 elderly ethnic Koreans in their 60s and 70s in the Soviet Sakhalin to return to their homeland by the end of the year (*Chosun Ilbo* June 8, 1989).

While in Moscow, he even met with Ho Dam, Chairman of North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland (CRPF). When Ho insisted at the meeting that Kim pay a visit to Pyongyang to meet with Kim Il Sung, he, instead of accepting the invitation for himself, called for a summit meeting between Roh Tae Woo and Kim Il Sung, echoing the government's position. For placing the national interest and transcending party lines ahead of his personal and party's interests, Kim Young Sam and his party seem to have pleased the people.

Kim Young Sam is also said to have delivered President Roh's message to the Soviet authorities, suggesting that he, unlike Kim Dae Jung, held a prior consultation with the government (Kim Young Sam 1982: 18-30). His visit provided his party with a new momentum to stand at least at parity with Kim Dae Jung's PPD.

Kim Jong Pil's third opposition party, the New Democratic Republican Party (NDRP), took a rather non-committal posture toward 'Nordpolitik'. He and his party were not given to trying aggressively to compete with other opposition parties. If they

³Interview with Kim Dae Jung, former President of the PPD.

had a position, it was that the government was pursuing 'Nordpolitik' with abandon without deliberating the merits and demerits pertaining to the policy, and that the other opposition parties were too rash in their attempts to exploit the issue. The party was to maintain a balancing act between the government and the other opposition parties.

The vigorous participation by political parties with regard to the country's foreign policy matters, to the extent that they did in a free atmosphere, was rare in the annals of modern South Korean politics. The intense rivalry among the parties surrounding 'Nordpolitik' undoubtedly spurred the government to redouble its efforts to improve ties with socialist countries. However, as long as the government played a dominant role in 'Nordpolitik', political parties in both camps were not to have any meaningful role in the Northern Policy. Their party-level efforts toward 'Nordpolitik' had little effect on the government's 'Nordpolitik'. Perhaps the only occasions they could probe into the policy was when they conducted, *ex post facto*, the audit and inspection of the government's policies concerning 'Nordpolitik' through the interpellation of Ministers involved in 'Nordpolitik' during the plenary session or before the Committee of Foreign Affairs and Unification of the National Assembly. Otherwise, the political parties, despite their recalcitrance, had to endure the status of spectators rather than that of participants with effective power over the policy.

2. The Military

The military offered strong resistance to 'Nordpolitik' in the early period of the Roh Tae Woo government. Coming as it did against the backdrop of rampant vilification of the military by politicians and in the media, the military expressed considerable displeasure with the overall situation in the country. It reached such a boiling point that the outgoing Army Chief of Staff, General Park Hee Do, lashed out in June 1988 against the politicians and the media in unequivocal language.

In the name of democratization and the open-door policy, helmets and army shoes are ridiculed on the podium of the election sites. I cannot help but be greatly angered and anguished over such a humiliation on the army (Sung Moon Pae 1992: 342-3).

The diatribe levelled against the military by the media and the politicians was not intended to denigrate the intrinsic role of the military in defense of the country against enemies, but was to prevent the recurrence of military involvement in politics. Given the several decades of military dominance in South Korean politics, the criticisms directed at the military were, to a considerable extent, justified and brought about the desired results of diminished military influence in politics.

However, President Roh's "July 7 Declaration" that North Korea no longer should be considered an enemy but as a part of the whole national community, was particularly offensive to the military. This notion that North Korea was no longer an enemy did not settle well with the South Korean military establishment that had been for decades steeped in preparing itself against possible North Korean military attack. The military viewed such a drastic turnaround in the government's policy towards North Korea as premature at best, in light of the students' call for a march to Pyongyang, the highly fervent labor agitation, and the restless farmers. The military was fearful that the

government's hasty push for 'Nordpolitik' might encourage the leftists.

The widely-shared sentiments in the military were given expression by the Superintendent of the Korea Military Academy, Lieutenant General Min Byung Don, when he delivered on March 21, 1989 a public criticism of 'Nordpolitik' in his commencement address to the 45th Class. Forgoing both a customary salute and a nod to President Roh before and after he spoke, the superintendent asserted that "people have such confused perceptions about which are hostile and which are friendly countries that they do not know who our enemy is" (U.S. Library of Congress, 1992: 137). It is clear that his was not a lone voice at the time, as it is well known that his remarks were preceded by exchanges of views with many of his colleagues in the military (*Shindonga*, April 1992: 236).

Six months later, the Commander of the Third Army, General Koh Myung Seung, offered a similar criticism of the government's 'Nordpolitik'. During his briefing on the national security situation in the central forward area to the President, heads of major political parties, and other dignitaries, Four-Star General Koh took advantage of the occasion of a large-scale firepower demonstration to express his concerns with the relentless agitation by the leftist elements in the country and attributed the relaxation of people's security consciousness to the government's rash pursuit of 'Nordpolitik' (*Shindonga*, July 1990: 229-30).

Asked in an interview whether his statements reflected the views of the military, Mr. Koh replied that "the views of the Commander of the 3rd Army, which represents half of South Korea's army troops, can be seen as those of the military."⁴ He even added that:

About a week before the firepower demonstration, Defense Minister Lee Sang Hoon issued a directive indicating that I need to support 'Nordpolitik' during the briefing. But, this was against my judgement. After consulting with Lee Chong Ku, the Army Chief of the Staff, I was given the green light to speak my mind to express my own views. After my briefing, surprisingly, no one ever dared argue about my presentation.⁵

This comment implies that General Lee, the Army Chief of the Staff, agreed with Koh's views on 'Nordpolitik' and that the military's resistance to it seemed almost unanimous.

An interesting question is whether or not those criticisms were politically motivated.

Were they intentionally and systematically designed to discredit President Roh by the Chun Doo Hwan camp? Both generals who publicly denounced 'Nordpolitik' were considered proteges of Roh's immediate predecessor, a fact neither of them denied. But it seems inconceivable that they should criticize the government's policy solely to chastise the President for his mistreatment of their mentor, President Chun, as there was no *myungboon*--good reason--to do so at a time when their mentor was in a self-imposed exile at a remote Buddhist temple in the deep mountains of Solak, taking personal responsibilities for alleged irregularities during his term in office. What is more plausible is that the two generals were manifesting their contempt for President Roh for his lack of leadership in general and personal loyalty to his immediate predecessor.

By and large, it is fair to say that the military was resolutely against the Roh

⁴Interview with the former Four-Star General Koh Myung Seung.

⁵Ibid.

government's impetuous pursuit of 'Nordpolitik' to win the people's support in its early phase. While the military acquiesced in the government's efforts to improve the nation's relationships with the socialist countries, the manner and speed in which the government carried out 'Nordpolitik' were very upsetting and confusing to the military. The government's abrupt change of attitudes to deal with the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea as friends, while the National Security Law was still branding North Korea as an "anti-state organization," created some ideological ambivalence in the minds of the military personnel, as they had been thoroughly trained to view North Korea as an implacable enemy. All of a sudden, with the recasting of North Korea no longer as an enemy, the military lost a sense of mission. The South Korean military no longer had an enemy to defend itself against. It was tantamount to a unilateral disarmament on the part of South Korea's military establishment, as there was no reciprocal response from North Korea.

Confronted with serious challenges from within his own military, President Roh took a few steps to counteract the mounting resistance from the military to his 'Nordpolitik'. He seems to have waged an indirect war with the military by employing the media, which lashed out against the military's involvement in domestic politics. At the same time, the government waged a tireless campaign in the military to dwell on the necessity of its new policy towards the socialist countries. Furthermore, Roh did not hesitate to exercise his constitutional authority as Commander in Chief of armed forces. Within a matter of a week following his public criticism of 'Nordpolitik' in the commencement address at the military academy, General Min was summarily dismissed from his post as Superintendent of the Korea Military Academy. In the case of General Koh, President Roh, in spite of his earlier invidious briefing, waited until his term expired before retiring him from the military.

But, Roh made very little effort to appease the generals who were opposed to his policy. He proceeded to replace the mavericks in the military with his stalwarts who would support 'Nordpolitik'. By the middle of his term, he had appointed generals loyal to him to the important posts in the military. From then on, the military's open disavowal of Roh's policy began to dissipate gradually, especially following the merger between the ruling party and two opposition parties into a gigantic Democratic Liberal Party in January 1990.

3. THE BUSINESS CIRCLES

Reactions in the business community were, understandably, in stark contrast with those in the military. The business community was out at the forefront applauding the new move by the government, as it saw a new horizon encompassing added markets to do business in. The government seemed to be motivated more by political considerations, while the business seemed to be more interested in economic opportunities. It was truly a welcome move at a time when the Korean business had to diversify its overseas markets in the face of ever mounting protectionism in industrialized countries. The prospects of expanding into China and Eastern Europe truly excited its imagination; the unflinching support the business community rendered to 'Nordpolitik' was, more or less,

expected.

Small and medium-sized enterprises saw main business opportunities in China on account of low transportation costs, cultural affinity, and geographical proximity; while large enterprises had comparative advantages in advancing toward markets in the Soviet Union and East European countries. Small and medium businesses were somewhat repelled by the cultural dissimilarity, high transportation costs, and the general unfamiliarity of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, while those disadvantages could be more readily overcome by big businesses (Yoo Se Hee 1990: 90). Whatever the reasons, the business community, as a whole, rallied behind 'Nordpolitik'.

The business community usually exercised its influence through the Federation of Korean Industries (FKI), which maintained a direct link with the Roh government. The FKI, comprised solely of business employers, was established in 1961 at the behest of the government and has enjoyed a high degree of autonomy from the government in its activities. The Roh government, for example, made no attempt to influence the selection of the organization's president; the FKI merely sought the government's tacit assent. The FKI, like similar organizations, was regulated by the Civil Law, but did not receive financial support from the government. In fact, the financial independence of the organization made the autonomy possible.

The FKI usually employed both direct and indirect methods in influencing the government. It interacted with high-level officials in the government, such as the Prime Minister, Minister of Economic Planning Board, Senior Secretary for Economic Affairs to the President, Minister of Finance, and Minister of Trade and Industry, with whom it could exchange views on matters pertaining to the current "Northern Economic Policy" issues. It is no secret that the FKI freely offered its opinions and recommendations to the government concerning the economic ramifications of the Northern Policy.

The FKI's indirect method of influencing the government was not without merit. The FKI, from time to time, held symposia and seminars on economic conditions in the socialist countries and recommended appropriate strategies the government should consider adopting to advance into their markets. As early as 1984, the FKI held a seminar in cooperation with the *Newsweek* magazine on the economic situation in China and published a book on the investment environment and opportunities in various provinces in China (The Federation of Korean Industries, 1991: 201). The FKI sometimes adopted a resolution and issued a statement outlining the course of action that the government ought to pursue. It sponsored meetings to discuss the investment environment in Qingdao City in China, together with sending fact-finding delegations to the socialist countries to make feasibility studies. It also disseminated valuable information to business people through pamphlets on economic conditions in various socialist countries. The FKI, in those regards, truly reinforced the works of the Korea Foreign Trade Association (KFTA), a non-profit private organization whose role was to promote Korea's external trade.

Both methods served their useful purposes, but the FKI is known to have preferred the direct method of influencing to the indirect one (Kim Young Rae 1990: 249). Given the near monopoly of decision-making authority lodged in the government which had not yet shed its semi-authoritarian nature under the Sixth Republic, it is easy to understand why the FKI preferred to interact directly with the government. The FKI's

interaction with the government concerning its Northern Policy after its initial enunciation was considered all the more important, but the former's influence upon the latter was marginal. The government did not allow the issue to be deliberated in the National Assembly or seek input from the business community during the formulation of the policy. The FKI as well as the KFTA was excluded in the formulation of 'Nordpolitik'. There was very little official consultation between the government, the FKI and the KFTA.

In addition to the FKI, the Ministry of Economic Planning Board during the Roh government created the International Private Economic Council of Korea (IPECK) in October 1988 in cooperation with some business organizations for the purpose of promoting direct economic contacts with the socialist countries. The creation of the IPECK which lasted until December 1991 was an obvious move to circumvent the Chinese reluctance to deal with the Korea Trade Promotion Corporation (KOTRA), which was a quasi-official organization. The IPECK played some role for 'Nordpolitik' as a main negotiating partner with China, true to its original intent, but its influence on the government is thought to have been rather marginal. Being a creature of the government, it could neither free itself from the dictates of the government nor shed its semi-official character.

In 'Nordpolitik', the government's power *vis-a-vis* economic pressure groups and business people was considerable. The government could control and dominate the businesses through export financing, export insurance, and subsidies to businesses to induce direct investment. In particular, economic interest groups had only to apply pressure on the government to open trade offices and conclude trade, investment protection, and double tax prevention agreements with the socialist governments with the aim of reducing risks in hithertounexplored markets.

But, at all times, it was the government that steered the course of events in 'Nordpolitik', even though it worked through private business groups as when it used the Daewoo Group as the channel of exchange with the North. The government pretty much held the business community on a short leash. Designating a particular business group appropriate for each occasion kept the business groups from competing among themselves with abandon and enhanced the nation's economic efficiency. Should the interests of the business be at variance with those of the government, the business was expected to yield to the government.

4. THE MEDIA AND THE ACADEMICS

Ever since the freedom of the press was guaranteed in the famous "June 29 Declaration" which firmly posited that "the government cannot control the press nor should it attempt to do so" (Roh Tae Woo 1992: 295), the Roh government saw an unprecedented upsurge of muscular media activities. Labor unions were allowed to organize inside the media and the resident reporting system of assigning correspondents to provincial cities was reintroduced. Thereafter, major newspapers were allowed to station correspondents in provincial cities. The Bureau of Information Policy, which controlled the media through daily press guidelines (*Bodo Jichim*), was abolished. The

much-abhorred press card system, which allowed only those who had been accredited by the government to practice in the media, was abandoned with dispatch (Youm & Salwen 1990: 317). The Basic Press Law of 1980 was abrogated in November 1987, to be supplanted later by the Act on Registration of Periodicals and the Broadcast Act. Once a periodical was registered, the registration could not be revoked summarily by a government decree; a court order was required (Ibid: 314-5). This led to an inundation of a great number of periodicals and newspapers never before imagined in South Korea's history. Freedom of the press was truly coming of age. Statistics tell the story: within a four-year period (1987-1991), the number of daily newspapers in South Korea increased from 30 to 87, almost a 300% increase, and the number of magazines rose from 201 to 1,314, roughly a 650% increase (Chong Chin Sok 1992: 134).

As 'Nordpolitik' was a dominant concern of the government, the media coverage of the issue was far-reaching and extensive. The media, by and large, recognized the necessity of coming to terms with the socialists, and the government received favorable evaluations from the media for achieving significant diplomatic successes in normalizing relations with ideological foes, thus significantly enhancing the nation's self-respect as a full-fledged sovereign state.

Even though the media did not question the intrinsic merits of 'Nordpolitik', they did not spare their criticisms at the way the government went about promoting the policy. The media invariably considered the government's moves too impetuous and shrouded too much in secrecy without making efforts to mobilize national consensus. The criticisms by the media sometimes led to some modification in the government's policy, but fell short of changing the direction of the government. The high level of secrecy in conducting 'Nordpolitik', the widespread venality among journalists who allowed themselves to be compromised by cash-filled envelopes, and the lack of expertise in the media on the socialist countries set limits on their positive influence on the government. The media often resorted to sensationalism for commercial purposes without taking sufficiently into account what it might do to the national interest. A good case in point is when they read into the whole process, much more than they should, a possible strain 'Nordpolitik' might bring on U.S.-South Korean relations.

The role of academics in affecting 'Nordpolitik' in terms of its process, manner, and timing was not negligible. Academics, in general, tended to be more judicious than the people in the media, but freely offered their critical judgments on the government's 'Nordpolitik'. Even though the government had better access to critical information on the socialist countries, the academics, too, had sufficient information from abroad to base their criticisms upon. Frequent contacts the academics had with appropriate government officials in charge of the nation's foreign policy at academic seminars and conferences provided natural forums for exchanging views.

Furthermore, the intimate personal relationships forged through school and regional ties among government officials, the academics, and the media personalities provided informal channels of communication between the government and the people outside the government. Many of them either hailed from the same hometowns or graduated from the same universities and had maintained their personal ties throughout their lives. Government officials could be former colleagues of academics or former students of senior academics. The carefully nurtured personal ties over many years readily served as

means whereby exchanges of views could be facilitated with great ease. But, even the academics had only marginal influence on the government's officials, because only a handful of people were involved in the formulation of 'Nordpolitik'.

5. ANTI-COMMUNIST PRESSURE GROUPS

A very significant group that serves as a natural watchdog on the nation's relations with communist countries is the anti-communist group. From the very inception of the Republic, anti-communism stood at the very core of the nation's foreign policy; that was accentuated especially following the three-year-long fratricidal war that brought more than 6 million North Korean refugees to South Korea. As the government appeared to be pursuing 'Nordpolitik' relentlessly, creating mental confusion in the people's ideological make-ups, a number of anti-communist organizations, such as the Korean Anti-Communist League (later renamed as "The Korea Freedom League (KFL)" in February 1989), the Freedom Protection League (FPL), and the Council for Five Northern Provincial People (CFNPP), obviously became very agitated and approached the whole concept of 'Nordpolitik' with wary eyes.

In spite of the constraints various groups imposed on the government, their overall influence on the government in 'Nordpolitik' was rather marginal. They conducted seminars, held rallies, and adopted resolutions to discredit North Korea, but spared the government from outright criticism. They echoed the government's criticism of the radicals who were busy trying to make intemperate contacts with North Korea. Many groups, in fact, were semi-official organizations, financially supported by the government. The KFL, for example, received more than 2.6 billion *won* a year.⁶ Naturally, groups like those are expected to tow the government line. Even private groups such as the FPL and the CFNPP shied away from outright criticism of the government's handling of 'Nordpolitik'; they merely attacked the radical elements or, at most, the confounding social atmosphere. But this does not mean that the people in those pressure groups did not voice their personal criticisms against 'Nordpolitik' at private meetings with the government officials.

6. IMPLICATION FOR THE SUNSHINE POLICY

In conclusion, it is fair to say that interest groups in South Korea did not have a significant influence on 'Nordpolitik', even though they gained an unfettered freedom to express their views on foreign policy matters since the "June 29 Declaration." They were, by and large, coopted by the government and went along with the government. Even the military's vociferous resistance to the Roh government's 'Nordpolitik' in its initial period seemed to have had little influence. The media's strident criticism of the government's handling of 'Nordpolitik' hardly altered its direction. Nor were anti-communist groups any more effective on account of limited financial resources.

The South Korean government should take the biggest blame for marginal roles of

⁶Interview with Choi Ho-joong, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and President of the KFL.

interest groups in 'Nordpolitik'. As the Roh government set its utmost goal on the success of 'Nordpolitik' to prop up its fragile legitimacy, it sought to keep a monopoly on the intelligence on 'Nordpolitik' involving only a handful of people around the President in the policy formulation. Therefore, interest groups were barred from gaining access to valuable information on the Northern Policy. Even in a case when these groups could obtain solid intelligence, they had a limited capability to influence on the government because they were financially dependent on the government and the heads of these groups were usually appointed by the government. What is more, social atmosphere was not conducive to the operation of interest groups. A large part of Korean people were not familiar with interest groups voicing views that sometimes went against the government's.

This study has a strong implication for the current Kim Dae Jung government's sunshine policy of engagement with North Korea. This policy was designed to draw North Korea into the embrace of South Korea and the Western countries with economic, cultural, and political lures, even in the absence of Pyongyang's swift change of attitudes.

Though the manner and speed of the implementation of policy has been questioned in some quarters of Korean society, the policy has been given fairly good points in terms of consistency and enthusiasm. Interestingly enough, this sunshine policy has many similarities with 'Nordpolitik'. First, the Blue House takes the helm of the policy probably because of its importance for the government. Second, various government ministries seek to curry favor with North Korean authorities without enough interministry consultation. Third, and no less important, interest groups are more or less irrisistant and coopt for the government except for a few cases when one of the major daily newspapers brought up the issue of Kim Dae Jung government's founding ideology. That being the case, political changes effected during the past two decades, even though the interest groups were granted the freedom to operate, failed to endow those groups with the power to exercise a meaningful influence on foreign policy. It is still a tall order for us to expect to see autonomous interest groups in South Korean foreign policy decision-making. Future students should be given the task of clarifying more detailed reasons for the lack of autonomy of interest groups.

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