

Foreign Policy and South Korean Democracy: The Failure of Party Politics

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Abstract

Political parties are engaged in confrontation concerning the newly emerged social division on foreign policy issues that has belatedly risen after fifteen years of democratization in South Korea. Despite continuing, though not thorough, internal reforms, political parties have shown a severe lack of capacity to reflect about and moderate the new foreign policy conflicts. The rise of the new generation, the launching of the Sunshine policy during the 1998-2003 period, and the transition to an information society have contributed to the failure of party politics to deal with increasingly polarized and divisive foreign policy issues. Using three case studies, the dispatch of South Korean troops to Iraq, the ratification of the South Korea-Chile Free Trade Agreement, and the Tokdo Island dispute, this essay shows that political parties have been unable to mediate and moderate foreign policy conflicts in newly democratized South Korea. Much weakened party discipline, the tendency toward blame avoidance among national assemblypersons, the rising influence of NGOs, and confrontation politics under divided government have clearly constrained political parties from alleviating foreign policy conflicts in South Korea.

On a nice weekend in November 2003, tens of thousands of young people filled the Seoul City Hall Square, protesting the president's decision to send South Korean troops to Iraq. This massive rally led President Roh Moo Hyun to realize the paradox of protest politics, a recent trend in South Korean politics. While his election to the presidency in 2002 was considerably aided by the young generation's anti-American rally in protest against the tragic death of two schoolgirls in an accident by an American military vehicle,¹ President

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¹ For more about this, see Hoon Jaung, "President Roh Moo-Hyun and the New Politics of South Korea," *Asian Update* (New York: Asia Society, 2003), and Byung-Kook Kim, "The US-ROK Alliance: Anti-American Challenges," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 2, no.3. (May 2003).

Roh discovered that protest politics helped to polarize the issue of troop dispatch, while political parties could not manage the conflicting issue. Until 3,000 South Korean troops left for Iraq in August 2004, the president was alone in persuading protesters and liberal NGOs to support his decision to send stabilization forces to Iraq, without due support, or at least involvement, even from his own party.

The troop dispatch case has demonstrated not only the dilemma for President Roh but also new developments and underdevelopments in South Korea's foreign policymaking process. On the one hand, it shows that foreign policy has belatedly emerged as a significant domain in electoral contests as well as in party politics. Triggered by the schoolgirl incident, the alliance with the United States became a crucial issue in the late stage of the 2002 presidential election. Voters found themselves highly polarized along lines for and against a close alliance with the United States that shaped their electoral choices to a great extent. In 2003-2004, sending troops to Iraq illustrated the rise of division in foreign policy as manifested in a fierce and protracted conflict over the pros and cons of supporting the American invasion of Iraq. Now, the public is highly divided in foreign policy issues such as the alliance with United States, dealing with North Korea, and coping with the growing tide of globalization. In other words, the old consensus on key foreign policy issues—forged in the 1960s and the 1970s and which persisted even after South Korea's democratization in 1987—has broken down.

Further, party politics has shown its limitations by not being capable of reflecting upon and moderating the new social divisions concerning foreign policy matters. Despite recent party reforms, party politics does not seem to perform its function of moderating conflicting interests in the area of foreign policy. Political parties remain peripheral actors, whereas the president and the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) take center stage in dealing with conflicts regarding the United States-Republic of Korea (ROK) alliance and economic globalization. Both internal disarray and vulnerability to specific interests constrain political parties from moderating foreign policy conflicts in a coherent manner.

This essay explores the institutional and political sources of the parties' failure to reflect upon and moderate the social divisions in foreign policymaking. How and why did foreign policy issues emerge as salient political issues belatedly after fifteen years of democracy? What institutional and social changes have occurred in South Korean party politics? How do such changes restrict the political parties' role in representing conflicts in foreign policies? Does the rule of moderating competition work for South Korea's limited multiparty system?² This essay argues that weakened party discipline, NGO influence, confrontation in divided government, and the rise of candidate-centered money politics obstruct the parties' role of moderating foreign policy conflicts. After exploring these issues, we will end this essay by offering some measures for further reform in party politics that would enhance its capacity to

lessen conflicts. We will also discuss a future research agenda.

The Belated Rise of Foreign Policy as a Contentious Arena

Since the democratic transition of South Korea in 1987, South Korean citizens have increased their involvement and participation in the nation's policymaking process to a great extent.³ The governmental policymaking process has become, gradually if not dramatically, more open and accountable to the public than before, but with a major exception. The foreign policymaking process has remained largely intact, while untouched by democratic pressures. In the early 1990s, President Roh Tae Woo achieved a historic breakthrough in South Korean foreign relations by normalizing relations with China and Russia, the former communist empire, without consulting with the National Assembly or attending to public opinion.⁴ In a similar vein, President Kim Young Sam allowed only a few close aides and ministers to participate in the decision-making process of resolving the first North Korean nuclear crisis with the Clinton administration in 1993 and 1994. He informed the National Assembly and his own governing party of crucial decisions on a vague and post-facto basis.⁵ Apparently, public opinion was not counted as a constraining factor. That is, foreign policymaking remained in the secret garden of the president, who was largely insulated from democratic control and public involvement.

It was during the 2002 presidential campaign that foreign policy abruptly emerged as a contentious and salient political issue. When a U.S. Military Court decision found not guilty soldiers who accidentally had killed two schoolgirls during an off-base training exercise, it triggered nationwide candle-light vigils protesting allegedly reckless reaction by both the American and South Korean governments in November 2002. Henceforth, issues of American troops in South Korea, the U.S. role on the Korean peninsula, and the future of the ROK-U.S. alliance became crucial campaign issues between candidate Roh Moo Hyun and his archrival, Lee Hoi Chang. The young generation and the liberal wing of South Korean society advocated a self-reliant foreign policy, while criticizing the overbearing influence of the United States on South Korea's

² It is widely accepted in political party studies that a limited multiparty system produces centripetal competition, whereas an extreme multiparty system is likely to lead to centrifugal competition. That is, a limited multiparty system, such as the South Korean three-party system, lessens social conflicts rather than enflames them. Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

³ For a comprehensive review of this, see Doh C. Shin, *Mass Politics and Culture in Democratizing Korea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴ Cheol-Un Park, *Testimony to the Right History* (in Korean) (Seoul: Random House Joong-Ang, 2005).

⁵ Joel Wit, et al., *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 2004).

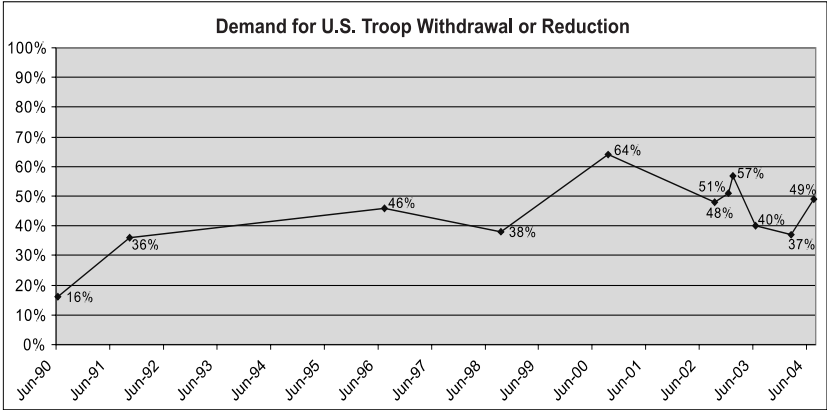
politics, security, and economy. The older generation and the conservative stream argued for the need of a close alliance with the United States for the sake of continuing economic prosperity and security cooperation in Northeast Asia. Such division not only dominated policy debates between candidates in November and December, the last two months in the presidential election campaigning, but also greatly affected the majority of voters' choices in the December 19 election.⁶ That is, the 2002 presidential election was the first democratic election in which foreign policy played a major role.

Why did the social conflict on foreign policy issues, after fifteen years of being submerged, burst out in 2002? What social changes were responsible for the rise of this foreign policy division? What political factors helped to break down the old consensus on foreign policy?

Let us begin by examining the rise of the foreign policy division, with a focus on the perception of the South Korean public.

Through the authoritarian era and the democratic era until 2002, there was a social consent, which was largely “manufactured” by governing elites on key foreign policy issues. The majority of the public consented to the governing elite’s view for a close alliance with the United States, a confrontational relationship with North Korea, neomercantile foreign economic strategies, and so forth.⁷ Such social consent began to disintegrate beginning in the mid-1990s.

Figure 1. Changing Attitude toward U.S. Troops among the South Korean Public



Source: East Asia Institute Public Opinion Research Center, *Dataset of Koreans' Perception on Foreign Relations*, 2004.

⁶ Gyu-Hyung Roh “Campaign Polls and the 16th Presidential Election,” *Shin Dong-A* (February 2003): 347-353. More than 50 percent of the respondents said that issues of South Korea’s relationship with North Korea or the ROK-US alliance affected their voting choice.

⁷ Chung-In Moon and Kim Taewhan, “South Korea’s International Relations: Challenges to Developmental Realism?” in *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, ed. Samuel Kim (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

For instance, whereas the large majority of the public favored the presence of American troops in South Korea until the early 1990s, public opinion started to experience a sea change. Since the mid-1990s, about half of the respondents to polls have expressed their demand for the withdrawal or reduction of American troops as shown in figure 1 above. It is a striking change, given that only 16 percent of the respondents endorsed such a demand in a 1990 survey. In a similar vein, the South Koreans' view of North Korea has gone through a dramatic change since the late 1990s. More people have adopted a "brother in trouble" image of North Korea than before, while many still maintain an "enemy" image of North Korea. Specifically, the young generation (ages 20-39) increased its brother image of North Korea by about 20 percent during 1996 to 2003. In contrast, the older generation (ages 50-69) has not changed its traditional image of North Korea in any meaningful way.⁸ In a nutshell, South Korea has emerged as a highly polarized society with regard to its security alliance, national identity, and national strategy.

One conventional explanation for the rise of foreign policy polarization has to do with emergence of a new generation. Having grown up in the age of democracy and economic affluence and with a lack of memory of the Korean War, the new generation in South Korea has developed greater values of self-reliance and assertiveness than the older generation. While the older generation sticks to its understanding of the United States as a "big brother" that provided huge economic and military aid until the early 1970s, the new generation believes that an equal and fair relationship should be the backbone of the alliance between South Korea and the United States.⁹ Thus, the new generation and older generation have displayed a clear-cut cleavage with regard to foreign relations.

It should be noted that the new generation rises, not from a social vacuum, but through a historical event that inspired new ideas and a new worldview.¹⁰ In 2002, it was the World Cup Soccer Game that served as a catalytic inspiration for the rise of the South Korean *enfant terrible*. Successful hosting of the

⁸ Ho-Keun Song, "Value Changes in South Korean Society: The Rise of the 2030 Generation," paper presented at the Conference on the Rise of a New Generation and New Politics in South Korea, Seoul, April 18, 2004.

⁹ A recent survey found that, whereas 38.6 percent of young South Koreans (ages 20-29) responded that South Korea should be more independent from U.S. influence, only 17.3 percent of older respondents (ages 50-59) endorsed such a viewpoint. Also, 12.1 percent of the young generation (ages 20-29) supported a closer alliance with the United States, and 40.6 percent of the older generation (ages 50-59) was highly supportive of a strong alliance with the U.S. See BBC World Service Poll, December 2004. Quoted from Naeyoung Lee, "The Politics of Generation in South Korea," presented at the Asia Foundation Conference in Washington, D.C., January 26, 2005.

¹⁰ The rise of the so-called '68 generation in Western democracies in the late 1960s was also triggered by the historical events such as the Vietnam War, a worsening environmental crisis, and the nuclear crisis in Western Europe.

world's biggest sporting event and the miraculous performance of the South Korean team sparked the national pride and assertive self-expression of the new generation. Whenever the South Korean team won a match, hundreds of thousands of young South Koreans filled the Seoul City Hall Square, which quickly became a new icon of national pride and solidarity among the new "World Cup Generation." Unlike the older generation which had been through the miseries of the Korean War, painful poverty, and long and hard work, the new generation viewed South Korea as a self-confident, self-reliant, assertive, and free society. For its members, the verdict of the American military court concerning the schoolgirl incident hurt this newly discovered national pride and served as a critical catalyst to trigger an anti-American rally.

The rise of the young generation as a political force was also helped by the phenomenal transition of South Korea to an information society. Over a short period of time since the mid-1990s, South Korea has achieved one of the most swift and enviable swings in the global wave toward evolution into an information society. The majority of South Koreans, especially those in the young generation, have obtained easy access to high-speed Internet at home, in school, in the workplace, or in the cybercafé. They spend tens of hours a week acquiring news, circulating information, debating, and simply talking online.¹¹ Connection through Internet has provided the new generation with networks, spontaneity, and mobilization capacity in developing salient political issues. It was just one online posting by a school teacher that prompted hundreds of thousands of citizens to join candle-light vigils in the memory of the schoolgirls who were killed by the American military vehicle.

The foreign policy division also results from the Sunshine policy, an ambitious and bold engagement policy toward North Korea by the Kim Dae-jung administration during 1998 to 2003. Based on personal belief and decades-old preparation, President Kim, upon assuming the presidential office, quickly and passionately engaged North Korea with the goal of reconciliation and cooperation on the Korean peninsula.¹² His painstaking efforts culminated in the historic summit meeting in Pyongyang between President Kim and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il in 2002. The summit led to gradual, if not remarkable, changes between the two Koreas in terms of socio-cultural exchanges, economic cooperation, and declining military tension. There followed increased family reunions, joint enterprises in the Gaesong industrial

¹¹ As of 2003, South Korea ranked seventh in a world survey of countries' transitions to becoming information societies. Korean National Computerization Agency, "World Survey of Transition to Information Society," 2004.

¹² For an overview of the Sunshine Policy of Kim Dae-jung, see Yong-sup Han, "The Sunshine Policy and Security on the Korean Peninsula: A Critical Assessment and Prospect," *Asian Perspective* 26, no.3 (2002): 37-69, and Haksoon Baik, "Assessment of the Sunshine Policy: A Korean Perspective," *Asian Perspective* 26, no.3 (2002): 13-35.

complex in the North, joint sport and cultural activities, and frequent meetings of ministers from the two Koreas on various issues.

These new developments have brought about significant changes in the mindset of South Koreans, especially among the young generation. Enhanced information about and increased contact with North Korea has reinforced the North Korean image of “brother in trouble,” while alleviating the image of North Korea as an enemy. That is, the South Korean perception of North Korea experienced a significant transformation from overall hostility to divisive view between the older and new generation toward North Korea, the so-called South-South conflict (*Nam-Nam Galdeung*). The newly emerging cleavage not only involves a changing perception toward North Korea but also places tremendous stress upon South Korea’s relationship with the United States, a key ally, the nation’s largest trading partner, and biggest aid-provider for the last five decades. In other words, the Sunshine policy has not simply brought about inter-Korea reconciliation but also has stimulated a structural reconsideration, if not reorientation, of South Korean foreign relations. In sum, the old foreign policy consensus, which was largely forged in the 1960s and the 1970s, has given way to a sharply polarized division on key foreign policy issues. The appearance of the new division calls for reflection on the roles of party politics, which also have gone through tremendous changes.

Changing Party Politics: From Charismatic Parties to Fluid Parties

Despite continuing criticisms about lagged development, South Korea’s parties and party system have gone through substantial changes in terms of organization, social rooting, transparency in political money, and policy formulation since 1987. Changes have been particularly dramatic since 2002, as charismatic party leaders such as Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young Sam retired from politics.¹³ That is, we may divide the evolution of South Korean party politics into two phases: the 1987 system (1987-2002), characterized by regionalism, charismatic leaders, and a low level of institutionalization, and the post-1987 system (2002-present), marked by programmatic competition, internal decentralization, and increased openness to supporters.

Having gone through such a structural transformation, the Korean party system is seen as having lost its capacity to moderate foreign policy conflicts. There are three main sources for the incapacity, if not failure, of political parties to moderate foreign policy conflicts: (1) internal decentralization and consequent decline of party discipline, (2) the politics of blame avoidance

¹³ For more about the evolution of party politics in South Korea, see Hoon Jaung, “Elections and Political Parties,” in *Institutional Reform and Democratic Consolidation in Korea*, ed. Larry Diamond and D.C. Shin (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000).

among national assemblymen, and (3) confrontation politics under recurrent divided government.

Decline of Party Discipline in the Shift to a Fluid, Undisciplined Party

The incapacity of political parties to moderate foreign policy divisions has to do with recent changes within individual political parties. Both the retirement of charismatic leaders Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young Sam and changes in Party Law and Political Finance Law ended the era of the charismatic personal party that dominated South Korean party politics following the democratic transition in 1987. The most crucial and immediate outcome of this shift was a dramatic decline of party discipline within individual parties. Party members, in particular, members of the National Assembly, who had only slim autonomy from charismatic leaders, came to command remarkably enhanced autonomy in terms of voting within the Assembly Hall, political finance, and policy-making formulation.

A few political and institutional changes were responsible for the shift from charismatic personal parties to fluid parties. The transformation began with decentralization of the nomination process within political parties. In February 2002, Kim Dae-jung's Democratic Party (the successor to the Peace Democratic Party) decided to introduce an American type of primary system in selecting its presidential candidate for the December 2002 election. The Democratic Party pursued this new experiment as it faced the retirement of president Kim Dae-jung, the last charismatic party leader, and mounting pressure from the public to democratize the process of candidate selection. The new primary system was a remarkable success, mobilizing 1.7 million voters into its two-month long primaries in sixteen regions and leading to the surprising rise of candidate Roh Moo Hyun, who eventually won the 2002 election.¹⁴

The success of the primary system in the Democratic Party has forced the Grand National Party, or GNP (successor to the New Korea Party), the main rival of the Democratic Party, to follow suit in adopting a primary system. More significantly, political parties expanded the primary system into candidate nomination for the parliamentary elections. The decentralization of selecting parliamentary candidates has lessened party discipline in a dramatic way. National assemblymen, whose candidacies were largely handpicked by charismatic party leaders in the past, have become more accountable to the electorate than to party leaders. Together with the separation of the party chairmanship from the presidential office,¹⁵ it has reduced party discipline, a

¹⁴ For more about the origin, processes, and impact of the newly introduced primary system in South Korean party politics, see Hoon Jaung, "Goals Seen, Effects Unseen: Comparative Study of the Rise and Effect of Primary Systems in American and South Korean Politics" (in Korean), *Korean Legislative Studies* 8, no.2 (Fall 2002): 178-206.

crucial tool of charismatic party leaders.

Another major change for weakened party discipline came from reforms in political finance. Changes in the Political Finance Law and consequent enhanced transparency have brought about the transition from party-centered money politics¹⁶ to candidate-centered money politics. In the age of charismatic parties, party leaders raised most political money, both by legal and illegal means, and distributed it to national assemblymen of their own parties. Support organizations for individual national assemblymen and state subsidies for central party organizations only accounted for a small share of total political money inflow.¹⁷

A few but crucial changes in the Political Finance Law were introduced in early 2004. The new Political Finance Law virtually prohibits anonymous contributions, which had been a major source of political money for charismatic leaders. It also enhances the monitoring power of the National Election Commission and thereby increases the transparency of the inflow of political money further, which in turn has reduced the once untenable influence of party leaders in money politics.¹⁸ As a result, national assemblymen have come to rely more upon their own support organizations to raise political and campaign money than in the past. In other words, the locomotive of money politics has moved from party leaders to individual candidates and national assemblymen. In sum, party leaders have lost two crucial tools of their firm control over political parties: money and candidate selection. This has meant the rise of fluid, undisciplined parties, replacing old charismatic personal parties.

¹⁵ Along with the introduction of a primary system, the Democratic Party pursued related reforms such as the separation of the party chairmanship from the presidential office, which served as a crucial means of the imperial president to control his own party. See Democratic Party, *Special Committee Report for Party Development and Internal Decentralization* (in Korean) (Seoul: Democratic Party, 2002).

¹⁶ As party leaders sustained tight control over charismatic personal parties, party-centered money politics was nothing less than party leader-centered money politics.

¹⁷ For instance, the share of state subsidy accounted only for 19.8 percent, 13.7 percent, and 7.6 percent of the whole income of South Korea's three major parties in 1992. The share increased to 51.8 percent, 20.3 percent, and 42 percent in 1999. As there was a huge number of illegal political contributions to party leaders until the mid-1990s, the share of state subsidy was even smaller than these figures indicate in the total flow of political money. Data is quoted from Jinyoung Kwak, "A New Perspective on the Democratization of the Korean Party System" (in Korean), paper presented to the Ewha BK 21 Research Team, 2005. The data are available from the National Election Commission, *Annual Reports of Party Activities and Fiscal Reports* (in Korean).

¹⁸ In early 2004, there were major changes in the Political Finance Law that enhanced the transparency of contributions and the spending of political money to a great extent. For instance, real name transactions are mandatory for political contributions and spending over 1.2 million KRW (about U.S. \$1,200). Such transactions must be conducted by means of credit card or money order rather than in cash (article 2). Also, campaign finance managers must use only registered bank accounts in spending and raising political money (article 36).

The rise of undisciplined fluid parties has changed the mode of conflict management among political parties. Charismatic personal parties had dealt with social and political conflict along party lines in a strict sense. As charismatic personal parties were highly coherent organizations, although coherent around personal leaders, party leadership conducted interparty negotiation when confronted with salient political issues, such as South Korea's membership in the OECD (1995) and transformation of the military (1993). Once interparty negotiation was achieved, there was an extremely rare chance that there would be a revolt by party members. Such negotiation at the level of party leadership has become improbable with the transition to fluid parties. Enhanced decentralization within individual parties has remarkably reduced the power of party leadership that is in charge of interparty negotiations. Even when party leaders reach agreement on a certain issue, they cannot be certain whether such agreement will oblige their own party members.

The Politics of Blame Avoidance among National Assemblymen

Another change hindering the moderation of conflict in party politics is the rise of blame avoidance among national assemblymen. Given reduced party discipline and a primary system for candidate selection, national assemblymen are more likely to be responsive, even vulnerable, to the preferences of the electorate than ever before. That is, national assemblymen have increasingly been confronted with tough choices between party-line voting and pressure from their representative districts. Typically, they have succumbed to pressure from their constituencies and brushed aside partisan stands.

Recent changes inside and outside of the National Assembly have further intensified the politics of blame avoidance among national assemblymen. First, parliamentary voting in the National Assembly Hall has become more transparent than ever before. The introduction of electronic voting has made most roll-call voting data available to the public.¹⁹ Moreover, the phenomenal growth of NGOs since the 1990s²⁰ has led to the rise of watchdog NGOs that closely monitor voting records and other legislative activities of national assemblymen. For instance, the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, arguably the most powerful NGO in South Korea, publishes an annual evaluation of all individual lawmakers' activities, including roll-call voting, participation in committees, legislative outcomes, and turnout rate in

¹⁹ There are two kinds of roll-call voting—open and closed. The result of a closed roll-call vote is not disclosed to the public. National Assembly Law allows national assemblymen to decide the mode of roll-call voting, which has been the subject of criticism among watchdog NGOs.

²⁰ The number of NGOs exploded in the 1990s. According to a survey, the number of NGOs increased from 3,800 in 1996 to 6,800 in 1999. As of 1999, 56.5 percent of South Korea's NGOs had been established in the 1990s. See Chang Ho Lee, "The Explosion of NGOs," paper prepared for the Civil Society Institute, Joong-Ang Ilbo, 2001.

plenary sessions—which the public has largely welcomed.

In addition, the 2000 parliamentary election served as a critical turning point in the rapid rise of NGOs' influence. About five hundred liberal NGOs across the country established an organization called Citizen Coalition for the 2000 Election that pursued “blackmail” campaigning against approximately one hundred candidates who had been involved in corruption or had awkward voting records in the parliament.²¹ As 69 percent of those “blackmailed” candidates failed to be elected, NGOs displayed their forceful influence on national assemblymen once again.²² Thus, the high tide of blame avoidance results from increased vulnerability of national assemblymen to their district voters, to organized interests such as farmers, and to liberal NGOs. Consequently, blame avoidance prevents national assemblymen and parties from wanting to be involved in polarized or politically sensitive foreign policy issues, such as troop dispatch or Free Trade Agreement ratification.

Confrontation Politics under Divided Government

Another factor contributing to the lack of moderation of conflict is related to the recurrent emergence of divided government and consequent confrontation politics among political parties. Since the democratic transition in 1987, divided government has emerged as a normal rather than an exceptional phenomenon in South Korean politics.²³ From President Roh Tae Woo to President Roh Moo Hyun, every president has been faced with a National Assembly controlled by an opposition party or parties. Whereas Roh Tae Woo (1988-1993) and Kim Young Sam (1993-1998) broke away from the difficulties of divided government by pursuing a party merger or even by buying opposition or independent national assemblymen into their own party, Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) and Roh Moo Hyun (2003-present) did not have or have not had such luxury with the decline of the imperial power of the president. As a result, President Kim Dae-jung severely suffered from the confrontation politics of divided government. Roh Moo Hyun has been subject to the same confrontation, which culminated in the impeachment voting against him by the GNP-controlled National Assembly in March 2004.

Although divided government has been problematic repeatedly, major actors in South Korean politics have failed to invent effective ways to deal with

²¹ Ki-Suk Cho and SunWoong Kim, “Did the Blackmail Campaigning Reduce the Turnout Rate in the 2000 Election?” (in Korean), *Korean Political Science Review* 36, no.1 (April 2002): 63-183.

²² Public opinion polls repeatedly show that NGOs rank as the most trusted social organizations by the South Korean public. In polls conducted in 2001 and 2004, NGOs ranked first, above educational institutions and the judicial branch. *Hankook Daily*, January 18, 2005.

²³ For the institutional, social, and political sources of divided government, see Hoon Jaung, “Political, Social, and Institutional Sources of Divided Government in South Korea” (in Korean), *Korean Political Science Review* 35, no.4 (December 2001): 107-127.

problems that it causes. The gridlock between the executive and legislative branches results from a lack of institutional incentive and the culture and practice of nascent mutual accommodation. The president is not well equipped with the means and devices to persuade national assemblymen, in particular, opposition party members, to support his policy agenda. Given the five-year, single-term tenure and the nonconcurrent election cycles between the president (five years) and National Assembly (four years), the president has had difficulty in persuading his own party members as well as opposition party members to back his policy agenda.²⁴ Also, the lack of communication channels, official and unofficial, between the president and National Assembly hampers the politics of persuasion by the president. South Korean presidents and National Assemblymen have not cultivated the practice of bipartisan cooperation and mutual accommodation, which are crucial elements for effective governance in divided government. As a result, divided government has led to confrontation between the president and National Assembly, the two major actors in foreign policymaking, rather than to efficient checks and balance.

Three Case Studies

The above analysis shows that foreign policy has finally emerged as the main battleground for democratic politics in Korea. At the same time, political parties have undergone structural transformation to become increasingly ineffective institutions, incapable of engaging in responsible deliberation on difficult foreign policy issues—and also unwilling to do so. As illustrated in the following three case studies, party politics has aggravated rather than moderated foreign policy conflict in South Korea, a pattern that is especially noticeable under the condition of divided government.

Troop Dispatch to Iraq

When the U.S. government asked the South Korean government to send South Korean troops to help stabilize Iraq after the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in August 2003, the decision quickly became arguably the most crucial and irritable foreign policy issue for the Roh Moo Hyun administration. It was a vital test for President Roh Moo Hyun, whose election in 2002 was evidently helped by the rising tide of anti-Americanism among the young generation, but who nevertheless needed American cooperation in resolving the second North Korean nuclear crisis.²⁵ In other words, the American request would mark a critical juncture in the future of the newly emerging foreign policy division, as it would shape the future of a vital pillar of South Korean foreign policy—the

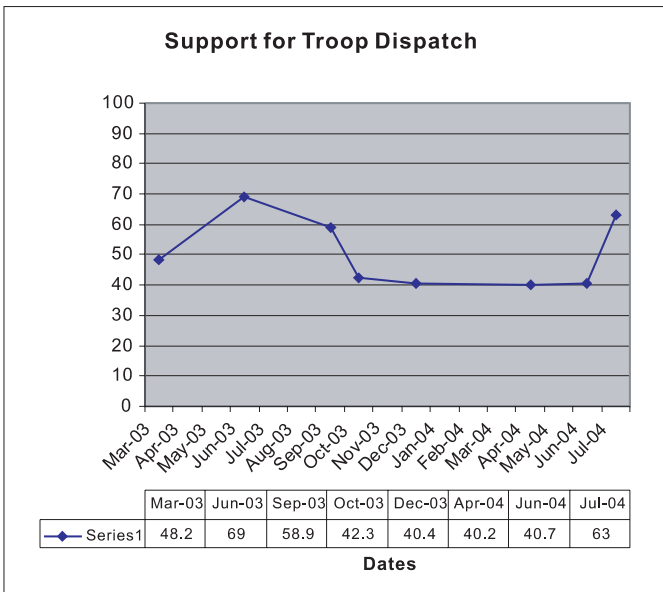
²⁴ Since Richard Neustadt's seminal work, *Presidential Power* (New York: John Wiley and Son, 1960), it has been widely accepted that the most crucial basis of presidential power is the ability to persuade.

alliance with United States.

As a salient and highly divisive issue, the question of sending troops to Iraq virtually dominated the South Korean political debate until 3,000 troops departed to Kirkuk in Iraq in August 2004. Both the advocates and critics of sending troops were vocal and active in expressing their beliefs. As figure 2 shows, South Korean society was highly divided on this issue. The young, liberal, nationalistic camp of society fiercely rejected President Roh Moo Hyun's decision to send troops as a betrayal of his nationalistic campaign pledges. In contrast, older, more conservative, and internationalist-leaning citizens welcomed the presidential decision as a pragmatic move.

Faced with such a daunting dilemma, however, political parties have been largely derelict in moderating this tension. Reduced party discipline, blame avoidance within divided government, and the influence of NGOs all contributed to the failure of party politics. First, weakened party discipline has hampered political parties from shaping coherent positions on the issue. Although core supporters of President Roh Moo Hyun once demonstrated

Figure 2. Public Support for Sending Troops to Iraq



Source: *Chosun Daily, Joon-Ang Daily, Dong-A Daily*, various issues in 2003 and 2004.

²⁵ The first North Korean nuclear crisis broke out in 1993 as North Korea withdrew from the Non-Proliferation Treaty in early 1993. The crisis was resolved in the Agreed Framework in Geneva in 1994. The second crisis began in 2003, with further complication by uranium enrichment nuclear activity in North Korea.

their solidarity by splitting away from the old governing Democratic Party (established by former President Kim Dae-jung) and by forming a new party (having only forty members in the National Assembly) in September 2003, they showed a lack of party discipline when faced with this polarizing issue. As President Roh Moo Hyun revealed his plan in November 2003 to send troops, after months of strategic ambiguity,²⁶ the newly formed Uri Party fell into a fierce internal brawl. While most senior members showed lukewarm support for the president's decision, junior members rejected the decision of the president as an instance of political expediency. One student activist-turned-national assemblyman even waged a hunger strike, demanding revocation of the president's decision.²⁷ Even the floor leader of the Uri Party, Kim Geun-Tae, publicly showed his uneasiness with the presidential decision. Such internal fracas within the presidential party revealed clearly the newly emerged dynamics of a lack of party discipline since 2003.

The main opposition party, the Grand National Party, also experienced internal dissent concerning the American request for troop support. While most national assemblymen of the GNP supported the plan to send troops with their emphasis on the ROK-U.S. alliance, some members did not hesitate to show their opposition to the decision, pointing to the highly polarized public opinion. A few junior members even joined a bipartisan Anti-sending Troops Group with some Uri Party members, while others publicly demanded a nonbinding vote for the legislative approval of the president's decision.²⁸ In sum, given the lack of party discipline and effective party leadership, both the president's party and main opposition party could not figure out a coherent position on the volatile issue, even after the president had asked the National Assembly to provide approval by the end of 2003. The inaction of political parties provided ample opportunity for NGOs, both liberal and conservative, to dominate the political debate on this issue.

The paradoxical structure of divided government and consequent blame avoidance also hindered the active involvement of political parties in the issue. To the surprise of many people, when President Roh decided to help the Bush administration by sending a stabilizing force to Iraq in November 2003, he set both his own Uri Party and the GNP off balance. Members of the Uri Party, a liberal, nationalist-leaning party, were faced with a tough choice between ideological consistency and political support for their president. The choice was even tougher for the opposition GNP. Although its pro-ROK-U.S.

²⁶ President Roh employed strategic ambiguity until his decision to send troops to Iraq in order to alleviate domestic opposition as well as to negotiate effectively with the Bush administration on terms of troop deployment. Seong-Hoon Lee, "Analysis of Decision Making Process of Sending Troops to Iraq: A Two-Level Game Analysis," *Military Review* 39 (2004): 57-76.

²⁷ *Chosun Daily*, October 20, 2003.

²⁸ *Hangyoreh Daily*, October 21, 2003.

alliance position had to welcome President Roh's pragmatic approach to the issue, the GNP could not be a major advocate of the decision due to political reasons. Most of all, the highly divided public opinion impeded the GNP from supporting the decision because it might antagonize the liberal wing of society to a great extent, and the parliamentary election was only months away in April 2004. Furthermore, President Roh's approval rating was so low that the opposition GNP could not find any substantive incentive to support the flagging president.²⁹ That is, the GNP did not have any reason to share the burden of blame with the troubled president for the bold decision to send 3,000 troops, the second largest non-American troop force sent to Iraq.

Finally, the enhanced role of NGOs in election campaigning obstructed political parties, especially the GNP, from supporting the decision to send South Korean stabilization forces to Iraq. Liberal NGOs, which had already demonstrated their forceful influence on voters' choices with their "blackmail" campaigning in the 2000 parliamentary election, pledged to wage such blackmailing campaigns against the national assemblymen who would vote to send the troops. Given that the parliamentary election was only a few months away, national assemblymen tended to be risk-averse by distancing themselves from the issue. Even under pressure from the president, national assemblymen delayed the approval for another two months until they passed it by a comfortable majority of 150 to 57 in February 2004.

While the politics of blame avoidance constrained national assemblymen from serious debate, both liberal and conservative NGOs clashed over the issue. Liberal NGOs were more organized, better connected with the common people, and more active, both online and offline, than conservative NGOs. After the president revealed his plan to comply with the Bush administration's request, the liberal NGOs' Alliance against Troop Dispatch to Iraq organized protests across the country every weekend, mobilizing thousands of protesters in several cities. The protests were jointly organized among various organizations, including labor, farmer, and teacher unions throughout November and December 2003. Also, NGOs orchestrated cyber-attacks on the Internet homepages of the Presidential Office in their protest against the decision. In other words, while party politics and parliamentary procedures remained largely silent, it was the president and members of NGOs who largely prevailed in the process of debating the size, composition, and dispatch schedule of the stabilization troops.

²⁹ Due to the initial chaos and sluggish economy, in 2003, President Roh's approval rating was uncharacteristically low in his first year of his five-year tenure. In September and October, the South Korean public gave him only a 25-30 percent approval rating, according to Korea Gallup.

The Ratification of the FTA with Chile

When the South Korean government and Chilean government finally reached a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in October 2002, the issue of FTA ratification seemed to be manageable as well as highly salient for political parties. It was important that an ROK-Chile FTA was the very first such agreement for South Korea, the eleventh largest trading country in the global economy. It also looked somewhat manageable for political parties, as the majority of the public, though by a small margin, supported the ratification based upon the perceived need for enhanced bilateral and multilateral commitment to cope with the rising tide of globalization.³⁰ Yet, the actual road to ratification was much more protracted and chaotic than expected. Political parties painstakingly took sixteen months to pass the ratification bill, after four abortive attempts in the National Assembly Hall. During the tumultuous sixteen months, there were brutal social confrontations, obstructions of legislative procedures, and even an unprecedented threat on national assemblymen who got in the way of ratification.

On the surface, political parties seemed to be successful in performing their role to represent social interests in approving the first FTA of South Korea; the National Assembly passed the bill with the support of the majority of the public and protected minority rights by passing a bill to guarantee a huge subsidy to farmers. However, political parties have failed to moderate the social conflict concerning the FTA, as the social unrest of farmers did not subside, even after the parliament began to work on the farming subsidy bill in late 2003. Also, political parties performed only a marginal role in drafting a compensation program for the political minority, the inflicted farmers. Furthermore, the procedure of majority rule was severely thwarted in the process of passing the ratification bill and during intraparty debates.

Reduced party discipline, enhanced vulnerability to district pressure among national assemblymen, and the shift to candidate-centered campaign financing are the principal causes for the crude management of social conflict over the FTA ratification. First, the decline of party discipline had a significant impact at various political stages of ratification, both positively and negatively. In positive terms, as soon as the administration sent the FTA ratification bill to the National Assembly in early 2003, about forty national assemblymen from both the governing and opposition parties, all of whom were from rural districts, formed a bipartisan anti-FTA group. Such a bipartisan group, although it was an informal gathering, was not even conceivable under the tight control of the charismatic leaders, Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae-jung. Whereas floor

³⁰ A bare majority of 50 percent of the public favored the FTA with Chile, whereas 46 percent, a large minority, opposed the agreement. See SIS Research and Consulting, "Public Opinion on ROK-Chile FTA," 2003. Furthermore, 66.4 percent of the respondents believed that the FTA with Chile would help the South Korean economy.

leaders of both parties made their parties' support for ratification clear from the very beginning, revolts from rural districts were both vocal and effective in representing the minority voice. These legislators called for huge subsidy programs for farmers, who would be damaged by imported agricultural goods from Chile. Occasionally, they even joined farmers' rallies, protesting against the FTA with Chile.

Yet, as political parties attempted to pass the FTA ratification bill in late 2003, the lack of party discipline deteriorated into a lack of procedural discipline on the floor of the National Assembly. On December 30, 2003, as the plenary session prepared for the vote on the ratification bill, forty members of the so-called anti-FTA group physically obstructed the process of voting itself.³¹ Such obstreperous behavior repeated itself three more times, until the National Assembly finally passed the bill on February 16, 2004, by a vote of 162 to 71. Whereas tight party discipline often frustrated the aggregation of social interests, particularly those of the social minority, in the past, vulnerability to district pressure and weakened party discipline were the sources of the obstructions to smooth voting procedures within the National Assembly, a crucial underpinning of the democratic process.

The augmented vulnerability of national assemblymen and the enhanced influence of liberal NGOs were highlighted by the fact that there was a fierce disagreement between supporters and critics of ratification with regard to the mode of roll-call voting. While proratification parliamentary members favored closed roll-call voting, opponents of the ratification bill strongly demanded open roll-call voting. As farmer organizations and liberal NGOs declared another blackmail campaign against pro-FTA candidates in the coming election, supporters preferred closed roll-call voting in which an individual member's voting record would not be revealed to the public.

The uneasiness of the pro-FTA members came not just from the growing power of liberal NGOs to blackmail candidates during campaigning but also from recent changes in campaign finance. As the Political Finance Law discouraged and even prohibited big donations from corporations, small contributions by individual supporters came to account for a large share of the political contributions to national assemblymen. That is, the corporate sector, a huge benefactor and supporter of the FTA, lost one of its significant means to influence pro-FTA national assemblymen. In other words, the ratification of the FTA not only demonstrated the inability of political parties to manage the paradox of an organized minority (farmers) and an unorganized majority (the public), but also it showed the rise of the political influence of protectionists, such as farmers and trade unions, and the decline of the influence of internationalists, such as large corporations, in South Korean trade politics.

³¹ *Chosun Daily*, December 31, 2001.

Diplomatic War of Tokdo Island against Japan

When in March 2005 one small local government in Shimane-ken, Japan, passed a resolution to declare “the Day of Tokdo” (in Japanese, Takeshima) to assert Japanese control over a small island in the East Sea, political parties in South Korea were vigorously campaigning for upcoming by-elections in April 2004. Like most by-elections, the April elections would serve as a verdict on the president’s performance as well as on the performance of the political parties in control of the government and in opposition to it.

Both the political context of a pending election and the vulnerability of political parties to political activist groups have shaped the political parties’ management of the explosive, delicate, and complex issue of Tokdo Island. Apparently, political parties were successful in accommodating the feelings of outrage among South Koreans against Japanese irritation on the island, a source of historical animosity between the two neighboring countries. Polls showed that more than 90 percent of the public favored assertive reaction of the government to the situation.³² As a response to the public outrage, the leader as well as members of the opposition GNP demanded that President Roh take a firm and assertive stance against the Japanese annoyance. Also, the GNP and the governing Uri Party passed a bipartisan resolution asking for revocation of the Shimane-ken government’s resolution. They even launched a Special Committee for Tokdo Island and Japanese History Textbooks within the National Assembly on April 6, 2005, that would be in charge of public diplomacy for an international community front and a domestic front to strengthen South Korea’s position on the issue.³³

However, if we explore the complexity of the public attitude and political-economic relationship of the two countries, the political parties did not seem to consider the social interests in a balanced manner, but instead, simply seemed to ride the wave of the public’s anger. The South Korean public attitude toward Japan is complex, dynamic, and multidimensional, as the neighboring countries have been through “love-hate” relations for at least several hundred years. Most of all, the South Korean attitude toward Japan is not as simple as the initial reaction of outrage indicated. In spite of an angry reaction to the Tokdo Island issue, the majority of the public, 71 percent, held the realistic notion that the relationship between the countries should be “based upon South Korean national interest in terms of economy and regional security,” rather than on national sentiment.³⁴ In other words, the public demonstrated its understanding about the tremendous interdependence of the economies of the two countries. They even seemed to accept the necessity of making a Free Trade Agreement

³² *Hankook Daily* Poll, June 10, 2005.

³³ *Hangyoreh Daily*, April 6, 2005.

³⁴ *Hankook Daily*, June 10, 2005.

with Japan. Also, the public showed its knowledge of, if not its enthusiastic endorsement for, a Japanese role in resolving the second North Korean nuclear issue within the multilateral framework of the six-party talks.

In a stark comparison with the complex and multidimensional orientation of the public, political parties simply concentrated on currying public favor in the light of its fury. On the one hand, this simplistic reaction was motivated by the upcoming by-election. As President Roh Moo Hyun had recovered remarkably in his job approval rating from a dismal 24 percent in late 2004 to 50 percent in April 2005, by taking an assertive—even an aggressive—stance on the Tokdo issue,³⁵ political parties were hoping to collect more electoral support with a nationalistic rejoinder. Furthermore, the vulnerability of political parties to activist groups forced them to ride the tide of public anger. Various political activist groups escalated the Tokdo issue, which always has been a highly volatile topic in South Korean politics since the first eruption of public sentiment over the matter. Some nationalistic pastors waged a hunger strike in protest against Japanese aggressive action on the island. Hundreds of young volunteers showed their nationalistic passion by applying to be stationed for National Guard duty on Tokdo Island. It is often the case that political activists tend to be more radical on political issues than the general public.³⁶ Because South Korean political parties have become more susceptible to the pressure of such activists than before, their ability to reflect carefully on foreign affairs matters has become hindered and distorted.

Conclusion

In contrast to the high expectations for democratic accountability in South Korea regarding foreign policymaking, this essay has argued that political parties, a main engine of democratic accountability, largely have been incapable of reflecting carefully upon foreign affairs matters and mitigating the newly emerged foreign policy division in South Korea. Yet, such assessment does not entirely support the realist perspective that emphasizes the value and necessity of the insulation of foreign policymaking from democratic pressures. Given the high tide of democratization and globalization, insulated foreign policymaking is neither highly possible nor even desirable for any democratic political system.

Rather than debating the principle of democratic accountability, we need to suggest reform measures and a research agenda that can help to enhance our understanding about and advance democratic foreign policymaking. First, we

³⁵ Gallup Korea, *Monthly Political-Social Public Opinion Survey*, December 2004, April 2005.

³⁶ Pippa Norris, "May's Law of Curvilinear Disparity Revisited: Leaders, Officers, Members and Voters in British Political Parties," *Party Politics* 1, no.1 (1995): 29-47.

should debate strategy and a roadmap for further reform toward a new balance among openness, cohesion, and stability in political parties. As we have discussed, South Korean political parties have improved their openness to the voters significantly in recent years, but at the expense of internal cohesion and stability, which obstructs the parties' ability to mitigate foreign policy division. As American parties attempted post-reform changes after the 1970s reform movement, South Korean parties need further reform to rejuvenate a balance between openness, cohesion, and stability after internal decentralization and greater openness to voters during the 2002-2004 period. For instance, super-delegates for presidential candidate nomination and improved ethical standards for parliamentary members would eventually increase the parties' capacity to lessen foreign policy conflict with more stability and cohesiveness.

Second, students of South Korean foreign policymaking should look closely at the role and capacity of the president in the management of foreign policy conflict without the help of political parties. Given the heavy involvement of the president and absence of parties in dealing with democratic pressures, we may say that the foreign policymaking process tends to be delegated rather than representative. Until South Korea's democratic transition, studies of foreign policymaking concentrated on the leadership style, worldview, and relations of staffs of the president, who was an imperial decision-maker. In addition to this traditional research agenda, we need to investigate how the president copes with democratic pressures from the public and the role of NGOs in making foreign policy decisions. That is, future study should focus not only on the incapacity of parties but also on the success of the president in accommodating social division surrounding foreign policy issues. Only after examining the president's role and its relation to inactive political parties, will we be able to have a better understanding about the balance between democratic accountability and the effective pursuit of the national interest in South Korean foreign policy.