

Pivot to Southeast Asia? Republic of Korea's New Southern Policy

Dr. Hoo Chiew-Ping

National University of Malaysia

hoo@ukm.edu.my

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Outline

- Overview of ROK's Old/New Southern Policy
- New Southern Policy
- Similarities and differences of ROK's NSP and ROC's NSP
- A trend in pivoting to Southeast Asia?
- Conclusion

Overview

- Moon Jae-in administration introduces Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility (NAPCOR) as its administration's attempt at promoting multilateralism as its diplomacy core
- It's actually a continuation of Park Geun-hye's Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI)
- Moon coins the term “balanced foreign relations”, which is sensitive and problematic given ROK's position between the US & China
- During Moon's first foreign state visit to Indonesia on 9 November 2017, the “New Southern Policy” 신 남방정책 (新南方政策) is revealed



“It is my goal to elevate Korea’s relationship with ASEAN to the level of its relations with the four major powers around the Korean Peninsula, and pursue a new policy to dramatically improve our cooperation with ASEAN” – Moon Jae In

Overview

- NAPCOR is a multi-directional diplomatic initiatives, aiming to revive successes of the past president's policies
 - New Northern Policy: China, Russia
 - New Western Policy: Europe
 - New Southern Policy: ASEAN, South Asia, Australia, & New Zealand
 - Unannounced (New Eastern Policy): Japan
- e.g. Roh Tae-woo (1988-1993)'s successful *Nordpolitik* is now a 'New *Nordpolitik* policy' under Moon Jae-in, incorporated under NAPCOR
- The previous "Southern Policy" was practiced during Chun Doo-hwan administration (1980-1988)

New Southern Policy (NSP)

- Also known as '*New Sudpolitik*'.
- Right after his inauguration in May 2017, President Moon unprecedentedly sent a special envoy to ASEAN
- Elevate the levels of diplomacy and closeness with the states in southern region, including Southeast Asia (ASEAN), South Asia (India), and Australasia (Australia and New Zealand)
- Under the NSP, the agendas are tied to NAPCOR's goal of 'national security through peace'.
- Thus, the major pillars include economic cooperation, peace diplomacy, and mediating conflict through multilateralism



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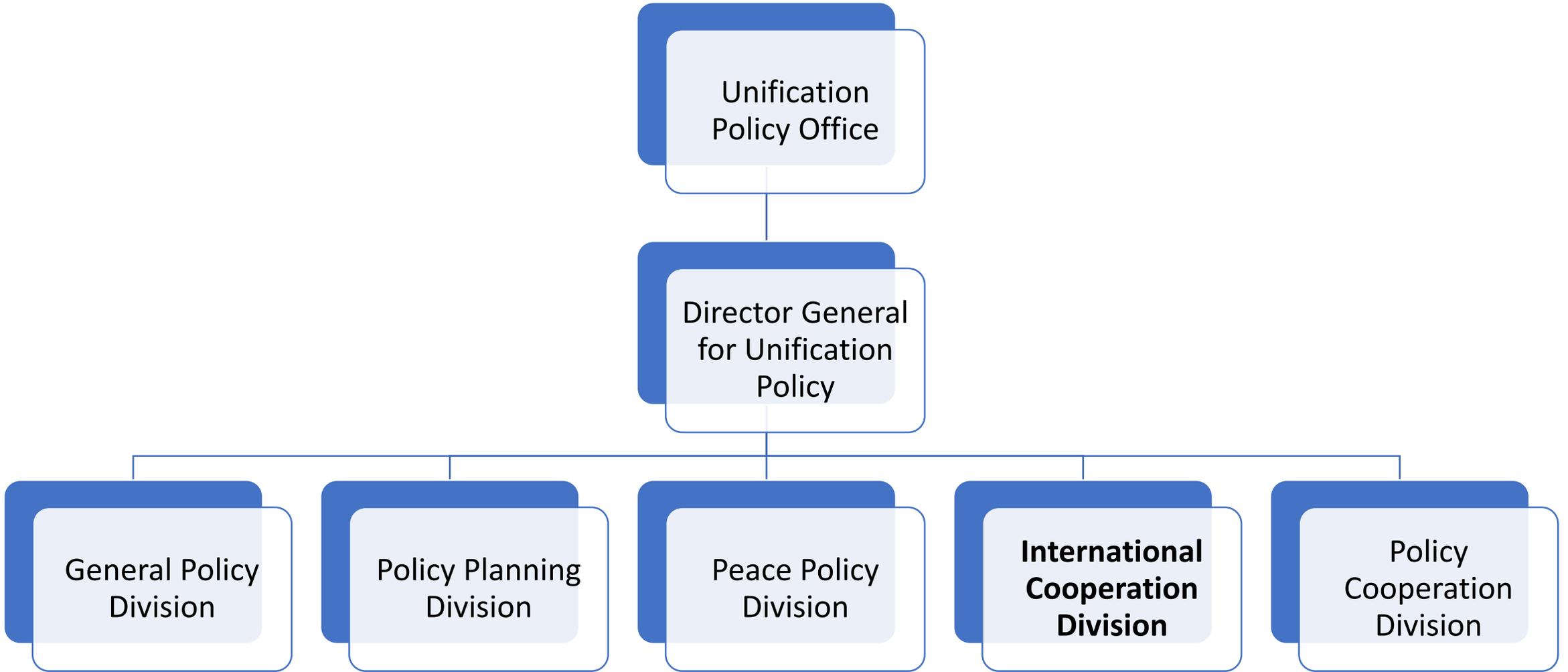
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Main agenda of ROK's NSP: ASEAN & Southeast Asia

- Diversifying and expanding the diplomatic and economic relations, thereby reduce South Korea's dependence on the U.S. and China (re: THAAD issue)
- To provide alternatives in international cooperation in relations to the Korean Peninsula peace initiative
- Three main domains:
 - Politics and diplomacy: gain regional support on Moon government's initiatives and policies
 - Economic, trade, and prosperity: enhancing trade ties and investments
 - Strategic and security issues: regional cooperation on North Korean issues, bilateral ties of SEA-NK, lessons from ASEAN and ARF

Main agenda of ROK's NSP: ASEAN & Southeast Asia (cont.)

- Three targeted outcome:
 - a community for the people that connects people to people and minds to minds (people-centered diplomacy);
 - a community of peace that can contribute to peace across Asia; and,
 - a community of co-existence and co-prosperity where ASEAN countries thrive together with reciprocal economic cooperation
- Moon declared NSP before a clear strategy content had been officially formulated

Pivot to Southeast Asia?

- The NSP includes not only ASEAN, but also India and Australia + New Zealand
- Nonetheless, ASEAN has been highlighted repeatedly and consistently throughout Moon's campaign and policy pronouncements
- Cooperation with ASEAN aimed at institutional level, building upon the ASEAN Plus platforms
- Bilateral cooperation with respective ASEAN member states is yet to be materialized
- The policy is supposed to be mid- to long-term, rather than short- to mid-term
 - Reduce ROK's credibility and Southeast Asian states' confidence in the prospect of enhanced stature comparable to other great powers

A comparison of ROK's NSP and ROC's NSP

ROK's NSP

ROC's NSP

Same geographical scope, operational models (economic policies mutual/reciprocal investment and people-to-people ties), and strategic objectives (increase respective soft powers and increase stakes of SEA countries in Korean Peninsula/cross-straits relations)

- Finding a “way out” from US-China rivalry
 - Short- to mid-term
 - Focus on ASEAN-Korea enhanced engagement, growing from limited-to-economic-dimension engagement
- Finding a “way out” from constrained international space
 - Projected to be long-term
 - Built upon past engagements and enhance comprehensive cooperation

Conclusion

- ROK's NSP is the first attempt by the Korean government to specifically placing ASEAN at the forefront of policy agenda
- However, region's career diplomats and policymakers are aware of South Korean government's shortcoming: prioritize European experience over Southeast Asian in international cooperation dimension (the case of NAPCI & New *Nordpolitik* announcement in September ahead of New *Sudpolitik*)
- While ASEAN and its member states welcome Moon government's initiative, past experience advises caution and low expectation due to unclarified policy content for implementation