

The  
Presidency in  
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No. 6

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This product presents a policy-oriented summary of Presidency in Korea 2013 roundtable

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## The Limitations of Statecraft and the Presidency

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In an effort to address the challenges facing South Korea since its democratization in 1987, the East Asia Institute (EAI) has proposed new institutional strategies for the desirable role, power, and responsibility of the president through the projects *The Presidency in Korea* in 2002 and *Presidential Transitions in Korea* in 2007. Today, the rapid growth of social networking technologies creates new dynamics which requires South Korea to meet the demands for increased political participation and interactive communication.

In response, the EAI has reviewed achievements from previous government administrations and launched *The Presidency in Korea 2013*, which seeks to develop governance that will facilitate the decision-making process of the president engaged in this new political environment.

On July 12, 2012, Professor Hyung Jun Park who has served as the Senior Secretary to the President for Political Affairs during the Lee Myung-bak administration was invited to speak at the sixth round table meeting. The following is a summary of the meeting.

### The Limitation of State Capacity

Considering all the various aspects involved in managing state affairs, reforming or remodeling the nation to a planned-level cannot be done through simply the president's leadership alone. Not only are there certain limits to the state's capacity under today's conditions,

there are also the effects of the Blue House staff, the difficulty with government bureaucracy, and relations with the National Assembly. Therefore, in order to have a successful presidency, the right diagnosis as well as an effective prescription for the expected obstacles is required.

A president's capability to manage state affairs is constrained by the state's capacity. Four points need to be considered in this regard. First, conceiving of state autonomy is problematic given that the concept of nation-state sovereignty has been weakened due to globalization where the power of the markets and civil society is growing. As the significance of external affairs becomes more important in South Korea, the nation sometimes heads in an unintended direction from what a president expected. For example, when President Lee Myung-bak entered office, he had to adopt his policies to cope with the global economic crisis instead of pushing ahead with his planned policies to enhance the economy.

The second aspect is that the administration must address the level of anticipation from the people that has increased greatly since democratization. The authoritarian governments of the past had the luxury of being able to push through policies under their strong leadership. The governments of today, however, find it difficult to take the initiative due to their limited capacity. This can even result in a national crisis when the government overestimates its capacity and pushes through policies that are beyond its limits.

The third aspect is the severe polarization within South Korean society. Social welfare is still at a poor level and there are certain limits to the capacity of the government to solve this problem. However, since the actual disparity that people feel is more severe than the statistics show, policies to solve the structural aspects of social polarization is crucial. At the same time, the government must learn to sympathize with the interests of the people. The gap that exists between the reality and the expectations among the people is not just about policies or the system, but rather a more general problem about politics.

The fourth and final aspect is the fact that the capability of the state is weak in terms of knowledge and information. In the past, the state was strong in information capabilities when compared to other sectors of society to the extent that the state had a monopoly over information. However, such control over knowledge and information has been weakened as the role and capacity of the private sector has increased significantly. This would imply that the term “knowledge government” is no longer an accurate description. On top of that, the culture of a bureaucratic society where even talented officials are reluctant to practice creative ideas or policies makes it harder for governments to implement preemptive measures to the changing circumstances.

#### **Managing the Blue House Staff**

A successful presidency will be assisted by staff that is able to act as the helmsman in managing statecraft. However, it is difficult to maintain consistency in statecraft considering the frequent changes in Blue House staff that occurs in the five year, single-term system.

Generally, the Blue House staff consists of those who were actively involved in the president’s election campaign rather than people who are skilled in statecraft. At the same time, the skilled and talented personnel from the previous administration are immediately excluded due to ideological differences. The outcome is that the incoming administration is in a situation where amateurs are managing professional statecraft.

In order for a new administration to prove its ability, a learning period is required. However, there is little patience for this among the people and the media. With no room for mistakes, there is concern that it will be difficult to recover trust that is likely to be lost at the beginning of the administration. Thus, the Blue House must possess a plan that is concerned with the statecraft mechanism, issue management, and relation-building with other government officials. This includes contingency plans in the event of a crisis occurring. Considering the reality where a crisis can happen at any time and always unexpectedly, the ideal operational mechanism is one where government officials can take care of managing state affairs and Blue House staff can focus on the crisis. The Lee administration was able to manage the global financial crisis well because of a well-constructed crisis management system.

#### **Strengthening the Role of Public Relations**

The Blue House is a political organization, yet any incoming administration must understand that it consists of state affairs, policies, and public relations. The difficulties of communication are often found and experienced at every moment. The root of this problem comes from officials who tend to view coordi-

nation as a form of competition between different divisions and thus ignoring the fact that all policies are political issues. On top of that, these divisions tend not to look at the big picture. Thus, the different division heads in the Blue House who are in charge of managing and coordinating staff should not only be competent in state affairs, policies, and public relations but should also act as a “control tower” that can facilitate communication between the different divisions. The absence of communication between the different divisions usually results in conflict over policies and misunderstandings due to miscommunication in the process of delivering policies. The case of the *Cheonan* sinking is an example of unnecessary misunderstanding among Blue House staff which was caused by the poor handling of communication.

The role of public relations is not just about delivering information but is also about organizing policies effectively. In most cases, figures from the media are appointed as the head of public relations and are thus competent in this field. However, public relations and relations with the press are different, which means there are limits in coordinating an effective policy making process. Another problem is that even though the importance of public relations has grown in an era of open communication, the role of the Blue House and its public relations office has weakened. Effective communication is not just about the hardware but also about the software. It does not matter how much information the government produces as it would all be meaningless if it is not delivered properly. Despite this obvious point, the government still focuses more on the hardware rather than on developing the contents or marketing government information. When the new administration organizes the Blue House upon its inaugura-

tion in 2013, there needs to be some deep consideration on how to manage public relations in regards to the problems outlined above.

### **Management of the “Inner-Circle”**

No matter which administration is in power, under the single-term, five-year system, the emergence of an inner-circle is likely. Such an inner-circle consists of a few powerful people within the administration who deal with personnel matters and the management of the important political offices. If this inner-circle has a clear philosophy on statecraft, a dynamic ability of balancing, and ethics of self-moderation, it would avoid political problems. However, if it becomes a political faction due to power struggles, serious political conflicts would arise within the presidential administration. In particular, if the inner-circle appoints personnel based on special connections, resistance within the government will develop. This could lead to a problem between the inner-circle and the Blue House and, in turn, could act as an obstacle in managing state affairs. In this regard, it would be better to simply check the emergence of an inner-circle at the beginning of the administration and ensure a smooth management of state affairs.

### **Three Leadership Qualities for the Next President**

Future presidents should possess political leadership qualities that will enable them to realize their election pledges and policies. As mentioned before, it is important to recognize the limitation of the national capacity. When this premise has been set, the president and

the Blue House can address state affairs and embrace other views from different voices in society. With this approach, future presidents will be able to move away from the “barricade politics” of the past and can then fulfill the expectations of the public through sympathy and integration. It is time that a president utilizes a flexible leadership which can encompass the different generations and regions within South Korea. Furthermore, future presidents should also include the following three qualities.

**Popular Leadership:** Popular support is an essential requirement for a successful presidency. As social polarization grows, political leadership that can touch the heart of the people is crucial. According to research conducted on U.S. presidents, there were many who endured low popularity ratings despite their high achievements, such as Lyndon B. Johnson. There were also those who depended upon high ratings rather than successful achievements, such as John F. Kennedy. And there are the rare cases of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan who succeeded in connecting their policy achievements with popular support. However, gaining popular support is not something that can be achieved in one go, thus, these examples show that the importance in the qualities of language, character, and knowledge.

**Global Leadership:** Diplomatic relations in a globalized era are dependent on a leader’s individual capabilities and communication skills. Due to conflicting interests between countries, a leader should have some personal charm in order to persuade other heads of states and to develop positive diplomatic relations. The reason why many widely recognized leaders of developed countries are from financial backgrounds is because they have distinguished expertise and experience in op-

erating in an international environment. Even a leader of a relatively small country can gain popular support and power as a leader if one proposes a desirable vision that the world should aim for. In the case of President Lee Myung-bak, he has achieved global leadership through his Green Growth Vision, improving friendly relations with other countries, hosting the G20, and managing the effects of the global financial crisis. Future presidents in South Korea should also exercise similar global leadership which can link South Korea’s national interests with a global agenda.

**North Korea Policy:** Since North Korea is becoming a more important challenge in both domestic and foreign affairs; an effective policy will be a requirement for the next president. Shifting from ten years of the Sunshine Policy under the previous progressive governments, the current conservative government has used a more principled approach toward North Korea, yet no significant results have been achieved. During the next administration’s term, the president will have to assess the stability of Kim Jong-un’s regime and consider the direction of change in North Korea. In this respect, in order to carry out effective policies toward North Korea and construct a new order on the Korean Peninsula, the new administration must also be able to read the international environment and use strategic thinking. ■

## **About the Speaker**

### **Hyung Jun Park**

Hyung Jun Park received his PhD from the Department of Sociology, Korea University and is now teaching at the Department of Sociology, Dong-A University. He has served as a member of the National Assembly, Joint Spokesperson of the Grand National Party, the Blue House Chief Spokesperson, Senior Secretary to the President for Political Affairs of the Executive Office of the President, and Special Assistant to the Blue House for Social Affairs.

## **Moderator**

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