

# Seoul's northern policy rests on U.S.-Korea alliance

by Linda de Hoyos

Using its successful hosting of the Summer 1988 Olympics as its diplomatic springboard, the Republic of Korea has embarked on a foreign policy revolution aimed at bringing about the eventual reunification of the divided Korean peninsula. The new tack was officially named "the Northern Policy" by South Korean Foreign Minister Choe Kwang-su in an interview with the *Korea Times* Nov. 1, but it was first put forward in the speech to the United Nations General Assembly by President Noh Tae Woo on Oct. 4.

Noh began his carefully worded speech by noting that the "joy of liberation" from Japan in 1945 "soon turned to despair over the tragic division of our homeland. . . . As a matter of convenience in the process of disarming the defeated colonial forces, a line of artificial division was drawn through the mid-section of the Korean peninsula along the 38th parallel. The decision to divide our land was made against the will of the Korean people, dictating the fate of the nation in the decades to come."

Now, Noh made clear, South Korea's economic success, which has transformed its postwar agrarian-based society into a fully industrialized nation, combined with its entrance as a nation on the international scene with the hosting of the Olympics, has given Seoul the momentum to attempt to reunify the Korean peninsula, implicitly under the hegemony of the South.

It was out of well-founded fear of this eventuality, that the North Korean regime of Kim Il Sung had launched into a frenzy of threats against the South's holding of the Olympics without full co-hosting with Pyongyang, the North Korean capital. North Korea's plans to wreck the Olympics with acts of terrorism and sabotage were, however, squelched by the Soviet Union, which sent then-KGB chief Boris Chebrikov to Pyongyang in September to issue Moscow's threats of retribution should North Korea pursue its terrorist mode.

In his UNGA speech, President Noh issued his offer to the impoverished North: "I have taken concrete steps to pave the way for free trade between the northern and southern sides of Korea. We must transform the North-South Korean relationship, so that we can reconnect every roadway, whether a major highway or a little path, linking the two sides which remain disconnected now. Then we could be enabled to go on to develop our common land, by combining our

human, technological, and financial resources."

"Reconnecting every roadway" implies a massive effort from the South to develop the Northern economy, since as is known, the paved roads of South Korea abruptly turn into rubble dirt roads as soon as the border is crossed.

Sending signals to the West and East bloc alike, Noh requested that "our allies and friends will contribute to the progress and opening of North Korea by engaging Pyongyang in expanding relations. . . . [and that] those socialist countries with close ties to North Korea continue to maintain positive relations and cooperate with North Korea even as they improve their relations with us."

Noh also used the forum of the United Nations to call for a six-nation conference on the Korean peninsula, to include China, Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States, along with the two Koreas. The conference proposal, however, has been rejected by both North Korea and the Soviet Union.

## Opening up the trade front

In the meantime, however, Seoul has taken strides to open up economic relations with China and the Soviet Union. The Koreans' strong point is their international renown in building roads, bridges, and canals. South Korea has been in the forefront of infrastructure building throughout the Middle East, and also in Libya, with a reputation of being able to build roads faster and better than anyone in the world.

The deputy chairman of the Soviet Chamber of Trade and Industry spent six days in South Korea in the middle of October, and it is expected that agreements will be reached for the opening of trade offices in both Seoul and Moscow in December, when Yi Sun Ki, president of the Korea Trade Promotion Corporation (KOTRA), goes to Moscow.

The centerpiece of any South Korean-Soviet trade cooperation pact would be South Korean participation in the development of Siberia. Although Japan is Moscow's favored partner in this endeavor, the Soviets appear to have run into a stonewall from Tokyo on the issue of the return of the four Kurile Islands Russia seized from Japan in the final hours of World War II (see article, page 9). "Big business groups are mapping out strategies to penetrate into Siberia," the *Korea Times* reported. . . . Active participation in socialist nations' development projects will be the new avenue for Korea's

economy in the days to come. Daewoo, Samsung, and Lucky-Goldstar have been busy tapping out possible participation in the project 'against all odds.' "

However, as the Koreans are also careful to note, Soviet joint venture laws hand all the risk to the foreign investor, with very little opportunity to reap the benefit. In the case of China, which does not have diplomatic relations with Seoul either, steps have been taken to increase and acknowledge the sizable secret trade that exists between Seoul and Beijing through Hong Kong.

Upping the ante, President Noh further announced from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Nov. 4 that South Korea would be willing to give "active support" to economic restoration works in Vietnam, if the Hanoi government withdraws its troops from Kampuchea.

As to the North, Seoul has put numerous offers of economic aid on the table. In his U.N. speech, Noh called for the creation of a brand new city on the site of the current Demilitarized Zone, to be inhabited by both reunited families from the North and South.

On Nov. 1, Seoul Communications Minister O Myong said that the South is willing to assist the North in the modernization of its outdated communications system. Seoul has 3.4 million telephone lines, against Pyongyang's 80,000 lines. Added O: "If the North agrees, we are willing to install a video conference system linking Seoul and Pyongyang to facilitate inter-Korea talks."

South Korea is also studying the resumption of inter-Korean electricity transmission, which has been cut off for the last 40 years, reported Yonhap Nov. 4. The South is immediately capable of supplying 200,000 kilowatts of energy an hour to the north, if agreed, said South Korean Energy and Resources Minister Yi Pongso. The delivery would have to be preceded by the construction of an electricity cable line some 60 kilometers long linking South Korea's Munsan relay station, and North Korea's Pyongsan station. South Korea's power generation, mainly by thermal and nuclear power plants, has reached 19.02 million kilowatts an hour; the North's produces 8.7 million, mostly with hydropower and thermal power. "We will be able to supply free electricity to the North, if it suffers a shortage of rainfall," stated Minister Yi.

To a significant degree, within South Korea, the impetus for these proposals comes from the 4 million people who fled the North in the aftermath of World War II and then during the Korean War. Arriving with nothing but what they could carry on their backs, these "northerners" have played a major role in the industrialization of the South, which until the last two decades, was the most underdeveloped area of the Korean peninsula.

The response from North Korea, however, has not been promising. On Nov. 8, the North Korea Central News Agency published a communiqué with Pyongyang's proposal for the peninsula's reunification. The North pointedly rejected

the idea of cultural and trade exchanges—since the comparison between the two countries is a severe point of embarrassment to the North.

The communiqué instead focused on the military side, with the first point being the withdrawal of U.S. ground forces from South Korea, followed by proposals for arms cuts by both North and South, and the conversion of the demilitarized zone into a "peace zone." The communiqué also called for the eventual creation of a democratic confederate republic, to be known as Koryo.

In short, Pyongyang, maintaining its insane profile, insists that negotiations be limited to a direction which aims at the removal of U.S. troops.

### **Importance of U.S.-South Korea alliance**

But in point of fact, as South Korean Foreign Minister Choe Kwang-su pointed out in an interview with the *Korea Times* Nov. 4, "The 'Northern Policy' can only be pursued efficiently on the basis of the solid R.O.K.-U.S. security cooperation." This is by no means negated by President Noh's call for a lowering of the U.S. military profile, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* Nov. 1. Noh stated that steps to do so would include: 1) eventually freezing South Korean troops from U.S. operational control; 2) moving U.S. military headquarters out of Seoul; 3) revising the status-of-forces agreement to give Korean courts more jurisdiction over U.S. servicemen involved in criminal acts; and 4) removing U.S. Armed Forces Network telecasts from Korean channels.

In part, Noh is attempting to accommodate to a backlash of anti-Americanism that has been spurred in large part by U.S. actions against South Korean trade. "It is more than natural, that a sovereign state should have the power to control its own military forces."

However, unlike the Council on Foreign Relations or the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, which are calling for a unilateral withdrawal of U.S. ground forces from South Korea, leaving only a U.S. air capability, President Noh said: "This is not the proper time to discuss reductions of American forces or a change in the command structure."

Only "when relations between the two Koreas improve, and there is a definite guarantee that tension will be reduced and peace secured and cooperative relations between the south and north are established, that will be the time to think of changing the present command structure."

Although President Noh has attempted to take advantage of the appearance of a decrease in tensions between the superpowers to put forward proposals for the peninsula's reunification, the gravest danger to his "Northern Policy" would be to subsume it under the New Yalta "regional deals" now under negotiations between the Kremlin and the State Department, in particular by Undersecretary of State Gaston Sigur. Any encasing of Noh's proposals under negotiations for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea, automatically knocks out Noh's own bargaining position.