



Success in heading north?: South Korea's master plan for Arctic policy



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ABSTRACT

South Korea's seven governmental ministries and agency jointly announced a "Master Plan for Arctic Policy" on December 10, 2013. This represents the state's first comprehensive Arctic policy document. This paper aims to analyze the Korean government's Master Plan from both the legal and policy perspectives, as well as to make constructive comments for its improvement. Environmental changes, the need for scientific research, growing economic optimism about the Arctic region, and political leadership have led South Korea to head north. These four factors form the basis for the Master Plan. This document outlines Korea's vision (to be a reliable and responsible partner in this polar region), three policy goals, four strategies, and thirty-one projects connected to the Arctic region. The formation of the Master Plan has been an opportunity for South Korea to organize and compile all the various Arctic activities independently conducted by governmental ministries and agency. In order to improve South Korea's Arctic policy since the Master Plan, the author recommends that the nation prioritize its projects according to its needs and the feasibility of each project. Prudence is required in the drafting and implementation of Arctic policy to respect Arctic states' sovereignties and sovereign rights over the Arctic areas. Finally, strengthening cooperation with the Arctic states and at Arctic forums is indispensable. In particular, bilateral cooperation is essential for South Korea to perform economic activities such as the exploration for oil and gas.

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1. Introduction

Since South Korea was admitted to the Arctic Council as an observer on May 15, 2013, the country has devoted much attention to heading north. Evidence of this is "A Master Plan for Arctic Policy," which was announced by South Korea on December 10, 2013 [1]. The Master Plan is South Korea's first comprehensive and concrete policy regarding the Arctic [2]. The South Korean government has publicly promoted it and begun to cooperate with Arctic states in accordance with the plan [3]. This paper aims to analyze the core of South Korea's policy embedded in the Master Plan, and to discuss what is needed for its successful application. Such an examination will allow those interested in the Arctic to understand how South Korea identifies itself as an Arctic player.

This paper is based on qualitative research, including analyses of the Master Plan and related government documents, relevant literature reviews, and in-depth interviews with several individuals directly involved in the drafting of the Master Plan or Korea's Arctic activities. An analysis of primary source materials, governmental documents, and second-hand data was conducted to collect facts and background information. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data regarding circumstances of the

drafting process of the Master Plan that is not found in written text [4]. Interviewees were from the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of South Korea (MOF), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of South Korea (MOFA), the Korea Maritime Institute (KMI), the Korea Polar Research Institute (KOPRI), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark as an Arctic state in cooperation with South Korea, and Hyundai Glovis, the Korea shipping company that accomplished a pilot commercial voyage via the Northern Sea Route (NSR) in 2013. MOF and MOFA participated in drafting and adopting the Master Plan. The interview with MOFA was conducted by phone, while the interview with MOF was performed by email. The two Korean government research institutions dealing with the Arctic issues, KMI and KOPRI, provided assistance to drafting of the Master Plan such as collecting data about Korea's Arctic activities. The author conducted in-person interviews with those responsible for the Arctic issues in these institutions. The questionnaire sent to the two ministries and two institutions is composed of four sections: (1) background of the adoption of the Master Plan; (2) its drafting process; (3) detailed comments on its contents; and (4) follow-up measures after its adoption. Additional email interviews with KMI and KOPRI were undertaken for further information about Questions (3) and (4). The phone interview with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark focused on the nation's views about Korea's Arctic-related activities including those in the Arctic Council and bilateral cooperation. An in-person interview with Hyundai Glovis

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was conducted to collect information about its navigation on the NSR. All interviews have been transcribed (checked by interviewees) and in-person interviews were recorded with the interviewees' consent.

According to the annex to the Master Plan, South Korea understands that the Arctic is “commonly defined as the Northern region above latitude 66°30'N or limits of the eternal frozen earth permafrost” [1 (translation by the author)]. In the Master Plan, the Arctic Ocean refers to “the ocean surrounded by North American and Eurasian continentals,” which “covers an area of 14 million square kilometers” and “occupies three percent of the whole ocean in the world” [1 (translation by the author)].

This paper explores the contents of the Master Plan after examining the background and drivers for its announcement. This is followed by constructive comments for the improvement of the South Korean policy.

2. Background

2.1. South Korea's history of going north

Table 1 shows South Korea's Arctic-related activities in chronological order up to its announcement of the Master Plan for Arctic

Policy.

South Korea began its polar activities in the Antarctic by ratifying the Antarctic Treaty in 1986. The Arctic did not draw its attention until the early 2000s. In 2002, South Korea had tangible results in Arctic-related activities by joining the IASC and installing an Arctic Station called The Dasan in Ny-Alesund, Norway [8–10]. There was no notable performance, however, by South Korea in the Arctic after this construction until 2008, when it attended the meetings of the Arctic Council as an ad hoc observer for the first time. It was primarily scientific cooperation on the Arctic by the South Korean government that occurred during this period. In this regard, it seems that South Korea had not identified any decisive or direct interest in heading north at that time, except scientific goals.

South Korea's Arctic-related activities have increased and diversified notably since 2008. South Korea continued to submit applications for observer status to the Arctic Council from 2008 until its obtainment in May 2013. The President of South Korea visited Arctic states and discussed Arctic issues with them several times during 2008–2013. South Korea also constructed a 7487-ton icebreaker research vessel, the Araon, in 2009 and has carried out research activities on this vessel in the Arctic Ocean every year since 2010.

Table 1
South Korea's main activities relating to the Arctic (2000–2013).

2001	October	The Korean Arctic Science Council (KASCO) was established.
2002	April April June	South Korea joined the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC). The Arctic Station (The Dasan) was installed in Ny-Alesund, Norway. The Korea National Committee on Polar Research (KONPOR) was established by integrating KASCO.
2008	September	South Korea applied for permanent observer status in the Arctic Council and began attending Council meetings as an <i>ad hoc</i> observer. The President of South Korea, Myung-bak Lee, visited Russia.
2009	July November	South Korea's application for permanent observer status was not approved by the Arctic Council. President of South Korea, Myung-bak Lee, visited Sweden. South Korea constructed an icebreaker research vessel, Araon.
2010	July–August September November	Araon navigated the Arctic Ocean. The President of South Korea, Myung-bak Lee, visited Russia. Four MOUs were established regarding cooperation for exploring natural resources in Greenland.
2011	March May May July–September November	The 12th Arctic Science Summit Week (ASSW) was held in Seoul, South Korea. The President of South Korea, Myung-bak Lee, visited Denmark. A decision on South Korea's submission for observer status was deferred by the Arctic Council. Araon navigated the Arctic Ocean. The President of South Korea, Myung-bak Lee, visited Russia.
2012	June July–September September September September November	KOPRI concluded an MOU on research cooperation with the International Arctic Research Center (IARC) of the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Araon navigated the Arctic Ocean. The President of South Korea, Myung-bak Lee, visited Denmark (Greenland). The President of South Korea, Myung-bak Lee, visited Norway and concluded two MOUs with Norway on cooperation in shipping and shipbuilding. South Korea adhered to the Treaty regulating the Status of Spitsbergen and Conferring the Sovereignty on Norway (The Svalbard Treaty). The Plan for the Advancement of Arctic policy was established by the South Korean government.
2013	February May May July August–September December	Promoting Arctic-related activities was mentioned in President Geun-hye Park's 140 major government tasks (2013–2017). South Korea obtained observer status in the Arctic Council. President Park ordered the preparation of a comprehensive Arctic policy at a meeting with senior secretaries. The Arctic Policy Framework Plan was approved at a meeting of external economic ministers. Araon navigated the Arctic Ocean. South Korea's seven governmental ministries and agency jointly announced the Master Plan for Arctic Policy.

Source: Established on the basis of information from [5–7].

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