

# **Policy Recommendation for South Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy: Climate Change**

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**February 2015**

## Knowledge-Net for a Better World

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Climate change is considered one of the most important issues for which the international community must come together to address. The global climate change regime is at a crossroads between extinction and survival. Discussions on the specifics of the post-Kyoto regime, which began at COP13 in 2007, are still adrift due to disagreements over whether developing nations should be subject to binding emission commitments as well as over emission targets and timeframe. A final decision on the post-Kyoto regime after 2020 is planned to be made in 2015 at COP21 in Paris, but prospects are not rosy.

Since 2008, South Korea has made significant strides on the climate change front. The nation has carried out active climate change diplomacy under the banner of 'Low Carbon Green Growth.' On the back of this effort, the nation is now the host of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) secretariat and has turned 'Green Growth' into a distinctive national brand.

Amid the changing landscape in global climate change politics, Korea must solidify its national stance and make proposals in regards to the new regime. Korea is currently the world's seventh largest CO<sub>2</sub> emitter, and the nation's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are consistently on the rise. Hence, Korea must actively engage in global climate change negotiations in order to avoid major losses while contributing to bringing about a global agreement. Korea's proposals must be founded on careful consideration of how the various options regarding the structure and mechanisms of a post-Kyoto regime and resulting scenarios may affect Korea's national interest and international stature. And this has to be based on meticulous observations and calculations on what the next global climate change regime will look like and where the other member countries stand on the matter.

Assuming universal participation as per the Durban Platform, the means of arriving at



country-specific emission targets and timeframes will pose the greatest hurdle toward an agreement. There are several possible standards for setting GHG emission targets under the new regime. First is using GHG emissions as a standard. However, an agreement will not be reached if it is proposed that every nation cut its respective total emissions by a set percentage. This is because there will be opposition from China, India, and other developing countries whose emissions are high but whose historical responsibilities for climate change are relatively small. Grandfathering is a method that most respects the independence of member nations as emission targets is set in proportion to current emissions. However, this does not coincide with the goal of cutting GHG emissions to combat climate change. Therefore, the international community is considering per capita and other unit-based emission schemes.

A case-in-point is the ‘contraction & convergence’ approach, which is being examined as a candidate for the post-Kyoto regime. As per this approach, member nations would be required to get their respective per capita emissions to a set global average by a certain year. This approach would ease resistance from China and India, which are high-emitting nations but also very populous.

The second method uses GDP as the standard. The first approach that could be considered involves equalizing the GDP-to-net welfare ratio or the abatement cost ratio for the sake of fairness. However, this would put equal burden on developed and developing nations, the latter whose historical responsibility for climate change is relatively small. As such, an agreement would be difficult to reach. Another notable approach under consideration is the GHG intensity scheme, wherein emission targets are assigned based on the emissions-to-GDP ratio. By linking GHG emission targets with economic growth, the approach could minimize loss to national economic competitiveness. However, the principle of fairness may be compromised because of the approach’s heavy emphasis on growth.

The third is a mixed approach. It would involve creating an integrated national portfolio comprised of population, per capita GDP, cumulative emissions, total emissions, per capita emissions, rate of emissions increase, and GHG intensity. An example of a mixed approach currently in use is that of Greenhouse Development Rights (GDR). GDR uses per capita cumulative emissions and GDP as a mixed indicator for a given nation’s responsibility and capacity. A multi-stage approach could also be considered. With this approach, different emission goals and timeframe would be assigned in consideration of the member nations’ divergent stages of development. Multiple stages could be set up, from the commitment-free lowest stage to the highest stage of the most stringent binding commitments, and in so doing, engender gradual changes in national systems.

The fourth is a bottom-up approach wherein emissions targets are not set and left to



the discretion of each nation. If this approach were adopted, nations would only cooperate in the areas of technology transfers, financial support, and emissions trading. There would be no obligations to fulfill, so member countries could carry out self-regulating and voluntary GHG emissions efforts. This bottom-up approach is called ‘intended nationally determined contributions (INDC).’ Governments have focused and evaluated positively INDC since COP19 in Warsaw. Currently, the possibility that it will be accepted as the post-Kyoto regime in COP21 is very high. However, the scheme is lacking in terms of accountability and consistency, so its impact would be limited in tackling an issue of as great a global importance and urgency as climate change.

The Korean government must make detailed calculations on the benefits and drawbacks that each of these options would entail for Korea and rank the options accordingly. In addition, it must also think beyond national interest and thoroughly deliberate on the fairest and most effective means of inducing universal participation before starting negotiations. This must be accompanied by government-wide information exchanges and the clear delineation of Korea’s position.

## Recommendations

### 1. Korea must Transition from Indistinct Bridge to Active Leader

Korea has defined its diplomatic role in global climate change politics as a ‘bridge’ between developed and developing nations. An important function of middle-power diplomacy is indeed mediating between advanced and developing countries when disagreements arise. In terms of vision, however, Korea’s climate change diplomacy lacks clear character and has remained indistinct, merely lingering in the ‘bridge’ rhetoric. Despite being an OECD member nation, Korea has a developing nation status in the UNFCCC and do not have binding commitments even for the second commitment period. Korea announced that it would take the initiative and lead by example by adopting the highest possible emission target for a developing nation (30% cut from BAU levels by 2020). However, Korea also made it clear that the pledge was voluntary and nonbinding. That is, Korea has expounded colorful diplomatic rhetoric but only went so far as proposing a voluntary emission goal.

As of 2012, Korea had the world’s 15th-highest GDP, 31st highest per capita GDP, and 7th highest level of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. If despite its global stature, Korea does not take on any



meaningful responsibilities and merely stresses its developing-nation status and the accompanying commitment exemption, it is bound to be criticized by advanced countries. From the standpoint of developing nations, in the meantime, Korea's Green Growth strategy may be construed as more growth- rather than green-oriented and thus merely replicating the climate-change-inducing activities of advanced nations. To avoid being regarded as a fence-sitter reaping the benefits of both sides of the fence, Korea must take sincere and meaningful action while also assuming active leadership responsibilities. Furthermore, the nation must come up with a more detailed definition of 'Green Growth' and draw on its knowledge competencies to devise and disseminate Green Growth implementation strategies to faithfully carry out its norm diffuser role as a middle power.

## **2. Korea must Craft Meaningful Leadership Approaches on the International Stage**

To strengthen its leadership role, Korea must find areas of specialized focus and actively propose them to the international community. Korea has developed unique mechanisms like unilateral CDM and the NAMA registry, suggested them to the international community, and contributed to addressing climate change. They were effective ideas Korea could propose as a developing country. However, it is now time for Korea to engage in diplomatic efforts befitting a middle power. To this end, there are several ideas Korea could consider.

### **2a. Korea must Contribute to Creating a Long-term Fund to Assist Developing Countries.**

Korea should draw up a strategy so that it can play an active role in global climate fund negotiations while proposing measures that will place the GCF at the center of the efforts to long-term capitalization under the new global change regime. In this regard, President Park Geun-hye's speech at the UN Climate Summit was appropriate, urging funding for the GCF and reiterating Korea's commitment to responsibly fulfilling its funding pledge. Korea must make use of diverse regimes, such as the G-20 and APEC, to persistently push for the completion of GCF's business model and the capitalization of GCF.



## **2b. Korea must Actively Leverage the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), the First International Organization Founded under Korea's Leadership, to Disseminate the Green Growth Model.**

GGGI's foremost role is formulating Green Growth plans for nations around the world, especially developing nations, and disseminating Green Growth norms to all corners of the globe. As the host country of GGGI, Korea must actively pursue Green Growth assistance projects for developing nations and make substantive progress in this regard. An important diplomatic test facing Korea is whether it can build a GGGI-centered global network for activities pertaining to the formulation of Green Growth strategies and thus serve as an effective hub for developing nations vulnerable to the impacts of climate change but lacking the means to address them. Meanwhile, Korea can also pursue technology assistance to developing nations by linking the activities of the Green Technology Center (GTC), founded to promote research on green technologies, with those of GGGI. If this happens, Korea would be building a green diplomatic triangle comprised of financial, strategy, and technology assistance for developing nations. In the process, Korea can disseminate its Green Growth vision, and by devising and implementing climate change strategies for developing nations, share the perspectives and actions of participating developing and developed nations to build up the nation's track record of success.

## **3. Korea must Reiterate its Sincerity and Commitment to Low Carbon Green Growth**

The green diplomacy the Lee Myung-bak administration pursued under the Low Carbon Green Growth banner from late 2008 to late 2012 became a national brand, contributing to boosting Korea's stature in the climate change arena. With the launch of the Park Geun-hye administration in 2013, 'Low Carbon Green Growth' was relegated to the lower rungs of Korea's domestic and foreign policy priorities. The Committee on Green Growth, the control tower for Green Growth policies, was downgraded from a presidential to a ministerial committee, thus stripped of substantive authority. The Green Growth Planning Unit, a key subunit of the Committee on Green Growth, was dissolved altogether. Major government ministries, including the Ministry of Environment; Ministry of Trade, Industry & Energy; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Ministry of Strategy and Finance saw a dramatic reduction in 'Green Growth-related' functions and work. No longer does Korea use every global conference as an opportunity to promote the 'Low Carbon Green Growth' banner, and although the country put in extensive diplomatic efforts to host the GCF secretariat, it has



yet to come up with a specific plan for fulfilling its financial commitment.

As part of its bid to host the GCF secretariat, Korea pledged to deliver \$40 million over a four-year period from 2014 and 2017, but the means of raising this fund still remains uncertain. In effect, Korea is at risk of being accused of green-washing, spouting short-term Green Growth rhetoric without making a wholehearted commitment or pursuing domestic and global changes. Therefore, in order to become a leading middle-power in global climate change politics, Korea must focus on effectively internalizing Green Growth before engaging in related diplomatic rhetoric, and in so doing, elevate the nation's international reputation.

It is understandable that advancing the previous administration's flagship policy can be a political burden on the current administration. However, giving up the national brand of 'Green Growth' does nothing to further Korea's national interest given global trends and the time and effort Korea has invested. In the long run, transitioning to a green economy and sustaining green diplomacy will be crucial to furthering national interest, so the government must exercise political determination to advance Korea's national interest and global standing in the green arena. On September 23, at the UN Climate Summit, President Park Geun-hye discussed Korea and other nations' understanding of and role in the effort to combat climate change as follows:

“First, we need to see climate action not as a burden, but as an opportunity... Investing in the chance to unlock new energy industries and jobs, can ignite fresh engines of future growth. Second, technology and market-based solutions should be at the center... To encourage the private sector to lead, markets should reward carbon-cutting innovations. Third, all countries need to be on board. For developing countries, however, cutting CO<sub>2</sub> can be a burden. To help them invest in needed capabilities and build markets, the developed world should transfer technology and know-how... The early capitalization of the GCF is vital to the launch of a new climate regime next year... The Korean Government pledges up to 100 million dollars to the GCF, including the 50 million we are currently paying.”

#### **4. Korea Should Look to Building Multidimensional Coalitions**

Korea must persuade undecided nations and ally with as many likeminded nations as possible. Korea founded the five-nation Environmental Integrity Group (EIG) with countries (Switzerland, Mexico, Lichtenstein), which like Korea, belong neither to the advanced nation bloc of the developing nation bloc and is participating in UNFCCC talks as a part of





this negotiation group. Until 2008, Korea maintained a passive stance on the climate change front, so EIG's value lied in its position of neutrality. However, Korea should now put serious thought into going a step further and creating multidimensional negotiating coalitions to maximize national interest and to promote its beliefs in every pertinent issue.

One of the most notable recent developments at the UNFCCC is the growing number of negotiating groups. Negotiations used to be led by the following six groups: European Union (EU), Umbrella Group, EIG, G-77/China, Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), and Least Developed Countries (LDCs). At COP 19 in 2013, however, a wider spectrum of varying interests was set forth with the addition of the following ten negotiating groups: African Group, Arab Group, Central American Integration System (SICA), Independent Alliance of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC), Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), Coalition for Rainforest Nations, Mountains Landlocked Developing Countries, Cartagena Dialogue for Progressive Action, Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDCs), and BASIC (Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2013). A given nation is no longer a member of a single group but belongs to multiple groups as per geographical and political interests in order to actively respond to UNFCCC's complex agenda.

Korea, too, can no longer advance its diverse interests and exercise international Green Growth leadership only through the neutral position championed by the EIG. Accordingly, Korea should consider joining forces with other likeminded nations to create new negotiating groups. Among the 18 members states of the GGGI (Australia, Cambodia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ethiopia, Guyana, Indonesia, Kiribati, Mexico, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, South Korea, the Philippines, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and Vietnam), Australia, Norway, Indonesia, Paraguay, Philippines, and Vietnam share common interests with Korea. Korea could thus think about forming a coalition with these countries for the balanced promotion of environment and growth under the Green Growth banner.

In addition to diversifying negotiating groups, Korea must think about ways to make use of various regimes. The second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol has been extended to 2020, and an agreement must be reached on the post-2020 global climate change regime by 2015. Against this backdrop, Robert O. Keohane and David G. Victor propose not only utilizing UNFCCC and other universal regimes but also leveraging small clubs, such as MEF (Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate Change), G20, G8, and G8+5 (Keohane and Victor 2011, 9-16).

This is the 'regime complex' proposal. The idea is to first use diverse smaller regimes to discuss pledges, market mechanisms, technology transfers, financial assistance, and other issues that are difficult to resolve at the UNFCCC and then make final decisions at the UNFCCC. The club approach is more effective in terms of flexibility and adaptability, so



Keohane and Victor contend that it can make up for the UNFCCC regime's lack of efficiency.

The parallel-track approach of leveraging both universal regimes and fragmented regimes has already proven effective in raising funds for developing countries' climate change adaptation and is expected to play a meaningful role in the post-Kyoto regime. Hence, it is high likely that climate change will become a high-priority issue on the agenda of diverse regimes, including MEF and G20. Against this backdrop, Korea must go beyond making mere preparations for these coming changes but focus on securing leverage by making proposals and taking on significant roles, thus engaging in active club diplomacy.

## 5. Issue Linkage: Linking Environment and Security

The Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative, which the current administration is actively promoting, takes a functional approach of starting with soft issues, such as climate change, nuclear energy safety, energy security, disaster relief, and cyber security, and gradually expanding the scope of dialogue and cooperation to harder issues. Given their geographical proximity, Korea, China, and Japan have long been considering various trilateral environmental regimes to cooperate on cross-border environmental issues. Korea, China, and Japan are three of the world's foremost energy consumers and carbon emitters (China: no. 1, Japan: no. 5, Korea: no. 7 in GHG emissions). Trilateral cooperation is more pressing than ever before given the challenges posed by climate change and nuclear energy safety. Furthermore, as it is very difficult for the Korean government to engage North Korea on hard issues, it would be effective to first bolster cooperation on soft issues by extending support for reforestation and transferring technologies on new and renewable energy, and in turn, ease tension and promote peace on the Korean peninsula. In short, Korea must devise a functional diplomatic approach of linking environmental, energy, and climate change issues with other issues to strengthen cooperation and ultimately improve regional security.

The theoretical discussion on using environmental issues to diffuse tension and build peace was started recently by Alexander Carius. Carius proposes three environmental approaches. With the first approach, parties to a dispute can build peace through environmental cooperation if the dispute stems from environmental issues, including unconditional exploitation of natural resources, destruction of ecosystems, and devastation of livelihoods based on natural resources. Carius suggests two options: either reduce pressure on resources that people rely on economically (easing) or strengthening institutional capacities to respond to environmental changes (adaptation). Peace parks are a benchmark case of this approach in action. The idea is to designate/develop peace parks in transfrontier conservation zones to ease tension and strengthen environmental conservation. A prime example is the peace park



in Cordillera del Condor established by Peru and Ecuador in 1998.

With the second approach, parties to a military/security conflict create a mechanism for tackling common environmental challenges, and in so doing, can naturally expand the scope of dialogue to political issues and seek measures to diffuse tension and build peace. The environment is one of the few issues that can sustain dialogue between parties of intense military conflict even when political or diplomatic dialogue breaks down. Therefore, using environmental challenges as a medium for peace building can be very effective. Moreover, sharing information for a common goal and working together to address environmental challenges can also ease mutual distrust and suspicion. As per the third and final approach, sustainable development is promoted to safeguard peace. For instance, although the conflict between Israel and Palestine does not stem from water shortage, resolving the issue of sharing water resources is an important prerequisite to peace. In other words, the joint management of a shared resource can not only spur dialogue but can also be essential to peace building.

Carius' discussion resonates with the Korean government's Northeast Asia initiative in many respects. The Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative is an approach that aims to use climate change and other soft issues to build trust through cooperation and then gradually expand the scope to lay the foundation for diffusing hostility and promoting political cooperation. The government's current plans include founding a Northeast Asia nuclear safety and security commission and initiating talks on a DMZ international peace park. The initiative thus involves policy implementation on specific issues of common interest to gradually build trust through expanded exchanges and dialogue in order to build peace. This is very similar to Carius' proposal.

Carius' theory, however, fails to provide specific mechanisms that can translate environmental cooperation into peace building. Moreover, there is no examination of why environmental cooperation sometimes leads to successful peace building but fails to do so at other times. That is to say, the process by which environmental cooperation leads to peace is based not on the logic of causality but that of justifiability. While environmental challenges, which are soft issues, can create a platform for dialogue, this does not mean that they will diffuse tension in security-related matters, which are hard issues. Linking environment and security must go beyond mere justifiability or optimism of 'because that is what should happen' or 'because that will probably happen.' The linkage requires financial and human resources as well as a high level of political determination to 'make it happen.' ■



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