

Moon and South Korea's Global Role: Evolution Not Revolution

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President Moon Jae-in's foreign policy legacy will be defined by the inter-Korean reconciliation process and, to an extent, potential North Korean steps towards denuclearisation. But South Korea's foreign policy goes beyond developments in the Korean Peninsula. It has regional and global dimensions as well.

Emphasis on the global dimension has grown exponentially since Lee Myung-bak's presidency. His successor, President Park Geun-hye, also emphasized the global component of South Korea's foreign policy. President Moon is no different. Indeed, this is an area in which he is building on the policy of his two predecessors. President Moon is thus focusing particularly on the issues of development assistance, green growth and, to an extent, multilateralism. For there is a consensus in South Korea that these are areas in which the country can contribute to global affairs.

As a middle power, South Korea cannot afford to be a leading voice in all kinds of foreign policy issues. It has to focus on a smaller number of areas where it can excel and try to become an agenda-setter. Development assistance is an obvious choice. South Korea became the first country to graduate from aid recipient to aid donor when it joined the OECD's Development Assistance Committee in 2010. Under President Moon, Seoul remains committed to boost its aid to 0.20 per cent of GDP by 2020. This would be a significant increase since 2010. Yet, it would still place South Korea towards the lower end of the spectrum among developed countries.

South Korea's foreign policy has a global dimension, with priority given to development assistance, green growth and multilateralism. Taking a page from his two predecessors, President Moon Jae-in is focusing the global component of his foreign policy on these three issues. In the area of development assistance, South Korea emphasizes knowledge sharing. It serves as an example to developing countries across the world. But Seoul also strives to become an agenda-setter in this area, building on the Busan Principles of Aid Effectiveness and Busan Global Partnership. When it comes to green growth, South Korea self-styles as a global leader. The Seoul-based Global Green Growth Institute and South Korea's leading role in the Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 are central to the Moon government's policy in this area. As for multilateralism, the Moon government wants both Koreas to bid together to host the 2032 Olympic Games. Seoul also remains supportive of the UN, WTO and other multilateral institutions.

Where South Korea truly excels is in knowledge sharing. South Korea is an example for other developing countries eager to learn how the country went from poor to rich in the space of two generations. KOICA, the Korea Development Institute and graduate schools at leading South Korean universities have trained hundreds of policy-makers from Southeast and South Asia, Africa and Latin America. South Korean officials are actively

involved in UN development agencies. And South Korean development workers are very active across developing countries, especially in Southeast Asia.

Seoul has the ambition to be an agenda-setter in this area. Thus, the Busan Principles of Aid Effectiveness were agreed in 2011, followed by the Busan Global Partnership launched in 2014. Then-Secretary General of United Nations Ban Ki-moon was instrumental in the principles and partnership bearing the name of South Korea's second largest city. Successive South Korean governments have held the annual Busan Global Partnership Forum and similar events, such as the annual Busan Global Water Forum, to keep their country at the forefront of the development debate. This continues under President Moon.

Green growth is another area in which President Moon is building upon the legacy of his predecessors. South Korea self-styles as a leader in this area. Indeed, the Global Green Growth Institute, an international organization originally launched in 2010 and comprising 28 member countries, is based in Seoul. Again, then-Secretary General Ban was a central figure in helping South Korea secure this agency and now is, in fact, chairing the institute. Under President Moon, the GGGI continues to be actively involved in green growth debates.

Bringing green growth and sustainable development together, South Korea was one of the founding members of the Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 commenced earlier this year. The P4G, as it is known, has a special focus on the sustainable development goal. Participation in the initiative helps Seoul to position itself as a bridge between developed and developing countries, as its aid policy does. Indeed, President Moon made a point of attending the first P4G summit held in October in Denmark. He delivered one of the keynote speeches.

Arguably, President Moon has slightly deviated from his predecessors when it comes to multilateralism. Former President Lee sought to position South Korea as a host of high-level multilateral meetings and events. Most notably, South Korea became the first non-Western country to host the G20 summit in 2010 and also hosted the first Nuclear Security Summit outside of the United States in 2012. President Lee also successfully led South Korea to win the race to host the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic Games held earlier this year. Under his successor, former President Park Geun-hye, South Korea worked to become the host of the second Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank annual meeting – the first to be held outside of China. Jeju Island went on to host the meeting in June 2017.

The Moon government seems to link the hosting of events to its efforts to bring about inter-Korean reconciliation. Thus, the government's signature move has been to propose a joint bid from both Koreas to host the 2032 Olympic Games. If successful, this would be the first time that the Olympic Games are hosted by two cities. It would be reminiscent of the 2002 football World Cup jointly hosted by South Korea and Japan. This was the first time that two countries hosted this event.

Meanwhile, South Korea still lends its support to global and regional institutions such as the United Nations, the WTO, multilateral development banks and international financial institutions including the IMF. Seoul continues to provide important financial and human resource support to these institutions. For example, South Korea is the sixth largest provider of peacekeepers among OECD members. Furthermore, earlier this year it renewed its capacity development partnership with the IMF for another five years. But multilateralism is in retreat, most notably in the area of trade. The Moon government has had to adapt and turn to bilateralism which has been especially clear in the area of trade.

All in all, the Moon government's global role involves a high degree of continuity from his predecessors. There are no glaring differences between liberals and conservatives with regards to the foreign policy areas that South Korea should prioritize at the global level. This is common for most middle powers. They understand that there are certain

niche areas in which they can have an impact but cannot affect all aspects of international relations. By focusing on aid provision, green growth and, to an extent, multilateralism, President Moon is following a well-known path for South Korea's global role.

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