

Korean Diplomacy in the Era of Multilateral Diplomacy

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INTRODUCTION

The international community is entering a new era of globalization and unlimited competition for material gain, leaving behind a Cold-War era characterized by ideological confrontation. Globalization, powered by information and communications technology, is bringing about great changes in the international community, generating conflict between advanced countries and developing countries and leading advanced countries to institutionalize globalization through such organizations as World Trade Organization (WTO). Developing countries, however, seeing globalization as the cause for increased inequality of wealth, are resisting it. The end of the Cold War led to outbreaks of civil war within nation-states and to emergence of ethnic and religious conflicts issues. Non-security issues, such as the environment and human rights that were largely ignored during the past, have surfaced, leaving the international community with a myriad of issues to resolve. Since national solutions are no longer sufficient to resolve most of these issues, international organizations are holding

conferences, both within and without, to resolve the issues. Some are calling this new mode of problem resolution “conference diplomacy.”

In this way, the international community is opening an era of vibrant and universal multilateral diplomacy. Also gaining ground is multilateral diplomacy on a regional basis, which tries to resolve issues on the regional level. In addition, there is a recent move toward another form of multilateral diplomacy, based on inter-regional cooperation, such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Along with the global transformations, the success of the inter-Korean summit initiated a full-scale discussion on peace and cooperation on the Korean peninsula, the last remnant of the Cold War, and multilateral diplomacy is in full swing in order to support inter-Korea relations. Charting the course for future Korean diplomacy in the international community, in light of transitions taking place, is vital, and such an endeavor requires examination of the post Cold-War diplomatic environment.

CHANGES IN THE POST COLD-WAR DIPLOMATIC CLIMATE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR KOREAN DIPLOMACY

What is the nature of the changes in diplomatic environment faced by Korea in the post Cold-War era? While there has been an array of changes in that environment, the focus will be limited to those critical changes relevant to Korean diplomacy. The interdependence theory of the liberalist point of view also explains some of the changes in the international environment.

Changes in the Diplomatic Environment

A. Vibrant Debates on Non-security Issues and South-North Confrontation

During the security-oriented Cold-War era, non-security issues such as environment and human rights were neglected. Now, these

issues appear frequently at the top of the agenda in the international community. In addition, other areas, such as equity, justice, and diversity and the problem of poverty, the issues that are being challenged by globalization, are being raised. Aside from these, the strengthening of inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), being re-evaluated as important actors in the post Cold-War era, and democratization issues are frequently debated. While, once Cold-War ideology formed the boundary separating East and West, today, the differing opinions of advanced countries and developing countries, has shifted that boundary. It now divides North from South.

In order to form a partnership between the North and the South, the developing countries are demanding investments by advanced countries in developing countries, expansion of official development assistance (ODA), cancellation of foreign debts, transference of scientific technologies and knowledge, and special treatment for developing countries within the trade system. The basis of their demand places emphasis on the reality of their marginalization and dependency on the advanced countries, caused by the accelerated process of globalization and liberalization in the post Cold-War era. In addition, the developing countries are demanding a greater role in the international community and reestablishment of their status through UN reform, pointing out the monopoly of a select few advanced countries in the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council. While developing countries are focused on economic issues, advanced countries are focused on the actualization of democracy, market economy, social development, sustained development, and human rights, considered to be the principles of the world order in the 21st century. In this vein, advanced countries emphasize the need for developing countries to expand democracy and human rights, to end disputes, and to root out corruption in order to develop their economies and to join the process of globalization. While the first priority for developing countries is to overcome the gradual increase in the gap of wealth between rich and poor countries due to globalization, the advanced countries in their

aggressive move for globalization are concentrating their efforts in blurring national boundaries, thus easing the transfer of goods, services and currencies, as well as in global expansion of such universal values as democracy and human rights. Consequently, in order to exercise leadership in the international community, it is most important to be able to deal with such issues. In other words, emphasis should be on mitigating the economic problems confronting developing nations as well as on actualizing the universal values of humankind.

B. Enlarging the Role of Non-Nation-State Actors

The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is becoming increasingly important with the emergence of supranational issues, attending the proliferation of democracy after the Cold War. Such issues cannot be resolved at the national level or by IGOs.¹⁾ In addition to the end of the Cold War, advances in technology have contributed to the increase in the number of NGOs, as well as to their influence. Specifically, advances in new technologies have blurred physical national boundaries, making it difficult for countries that oppose the activities of NGOs to regulate the flow of information via the Internet and fax, or their mutual influence. After the end of the Cold War, with the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio as the starting point, NGOs have participated not only in the official meetings of international conferences, but also in the preparation process, in an effort to have their views reflected in the decisions. Moreover, by having NGO forums concurrent with international conferences, NGOs have sought to influence the leaders of participating countries. As evidenced by the 1999 ministerial meeting of WTO in Seattle, the 2000 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the 2000 spring annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (IBRD) in

1) Jessica T. Mathews, "Power Shifts," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 76, no.1 (January/February, 1997), pp. 58-66.

Washington, and the 2000 annual general meeting of the IMF and the World Bank in Prague, NGOs, joined in international solidarity, are making their voices heard by hindering the progress of the international conferences. Such a series of changes in the state of affairs is leading governments and inter-governmental organizations to realize that the establishment and maintenance of a new world order cannot materialize peacefully among nations without the consensus and cooperation of non-governmental organizations, and partnership with civil organizations.

Not only do NGOs play an important role in the international arena, they also play an important role in domestic policy-making, as well as the execution of these policies. Therefore, it would be no exaggeration to say that the success or failure of a foreign policy hinges on cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

C. The Prevalence of Multilateral Summit Diplomacy ²⁾

Starting from the 1990 summit meeting on children's issues, with the participation of presidents and prime ministers from 71 countries, there have been many large-scale summit meetings, such as the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), attended by presidents and prime ministers from 102 countries, and the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, attended by presidents and prime ministers from 117 countries out of 186 participating countries. The frequency of such multilateral summit meetings is apparent simply by looking at the number held just in year 2000. First, there was the G-8 Summit Meeting, the meeting of the seven Western advanced countries and Russia, held in Okinawa from July 21 to 23. In addition to summit meetings of advanced countries, there were summit meetings among the developing countries, both globally and regionally. For example, the summit meeting of G-77 and China was held in April 2000, in

2) Park Jae-young, *Political Theory of International Organizations* (Seoul: Beopmunsa, 1998), pp. 265-272.

Havana, Cuba, for the first time since it was established in 1964. The G-15 Summit meeting of developing countries, though smaller in scale, was held in June of 2000 in Cairo, Egypt. In July, 37 heads-of-state came together in the capital city of Togo, Lom, to participate in the Thirty-sixth Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit, and in August, 14 heads of member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) held the annual summit meeting in Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia. In November, the inter-regional organization of both advanced and developing countries, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit was held. Unlike in the past, when summit meetings were held only among countries of the same economical status or of the same region, an increasing number of summit meetings include both advanced and developing countries. Representatives of 67 countries participated in the first Europe-Africa Summit in April in Cairo, Egypt. In October, ten Asian countries, 15 member countries of the EU, and the President of the European Commission participated in the third ASEM in Seoul, Korea. Also, the 2000 G-8 Summit in Japan provided an occasion for the heads of developing countries to express their concerns to the international community. Separate from the summit meetings for the countries within the same economical category or of the same region, the 2000 Special Session of the UN General Assembly was held in Geneva, in order to assess the achievements made at the 1995 Social Summit of Copenhagen, which was open to participation by all countries. Moreover, in September, the UN held the Millennium Summit.

While the international conferences of the Cold-War era were oriented to working-level meetings, international conferences in post Cold-War era display more political color, and the mass participation by heads-of-state coupled with the frequency of multilateral summit meetings illustrates the seriousness of international issues stemming from globalization, as well as the complexity of such issues that can no longer be solved by a single country alone. Moreover, multilateral summit meetings are becoming a preferred means of resolving

international issues, based on the logic that heads-of-state can come to a more useful comprehensive political agreement than can be reached at working-level meetings, and that heads-of-state are more accountable and attentive, and thus more effective in translating the resolutions into action.

D. Transformation of North Korea

Without the incorporation of North Korea into the international community, such issues as nuclear and long-range missile development programs, human rights issues, South Korea had no other choice but to present these issues in the UN and multilateral conferences, thus making multilateral diplomatic stage the ring in which the two Koreas staged their fights. Due to the conflicts between North and South Korea, Korean diplomacy had limited influence in international organizations. Firstly, South Korea was forced to waste energy on exhaustive diplomatic warfare with North Korea, while at the same time, it had to consider the implications of conflict resolution and inter-Korea relations when approaching the issues of the international community. For example, whenever a draft proposing the removal of the U.S.-imposed economic sanctions on Cuba was introduced in the UN General Assembly, South Korea had to oppose the draft and take the minority position with the U.S. and Israel, in view of the effect of such a move on North Korea.

Recent changes in inter-Korea relations raise the question of how to maintain South-North cooperation while still dealing with issues such as human rights in North Korea in the international diplomatic arena. The changes nevertheless provide a good opportunity for South Korea to transform its image: Instead of being passive, a country with which the international community must deal, it can play an active role in resolving international issues.

Implications of Korean Diplomacy

The changes in the international community have provided

favorable conditions in which Korea can become a successful player in the arena of multilateral diplomacy. The changes and their positive effect on Korean diplomacy result from a new perception of South Korea as an exemplary nation that has successfully actualized the demands of the advanced countries on developing countries. In other words, given Korea's achievements in democracy, human rights, and development, the advanced countries see it as a model country that should be emulated by developing countries. Moreover, the developing countries themselves regard Korea as a successful case that provides them with hope for the same success. These factors have enabled Korea to become an important player in the international community, a nation that can make proposals on critical issues, as well as a mediator between countries with serious conflicts of interest. Korea's new role as a major player strengthens as it takes responsibilities as council member, committee member, and chair in general meetings. Its international status has also resulted in the appointment of Korean representatives to high-ranking positions in the secretariats of international organizations.

President Kim Dae-jung's Nobel Peace Prize has fortified this trend and has generated synergistic effects, providing Korea with more leadership in multilateral diplomacy, in particular in summit diplomacy. With the third ASEM in Seoul, South Korea has now gained a leadership role in inter-regional cooperation.

While Korea has succeeded in its bid to play a leadership role in the international community, such macroscopic elements alone do not guarantee the success of Korean diplomacy. Hence, it is important to examine in detail how Korea can strengthen its diplomatic capacity.

WAYS TO STRENGTHEN DIPLOMATIC CAPACITY

Respecting Universal Human Values

When a country is called upon to answer for issues involving the

international community, it is generally difficult for the accusing country to wield any influence on that issue or on other related issues.

In the past, democratic rule in South Korea was so precarious that it was often the object of international debates; however, it is now recognized by other countries as one of the leading nations in promoting democracy in Asia, although it has fallen short of gaining advanced nation status in human rights. This fact was indicated at the first International Conference of the Community of Democracies held in Warsaw June 26-28, 2000. Ministers and deputy-ministers from 108 countries around the world convened to discuss ways to proliferate democracy and the future directions of the international community, and their efforts resulted in the adoption of the Warsaw Declaration.³⁾ With democracy and preservation of human rights as the main policy objectives, seven countries, including South Korea, the U.S., Poland, the Czech Republic, Chile, India, and Mali, were on the preparation committee of the Conference. A decision to hold the second International Conference of the Community of Democracies in Seoul further strengthens Korea's role as a leader in international efforts to expand democracy.

President Kim has played an important role in establishing democracy and human rights in Korea, as well as bringing about reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas. Considering the fact that the leadership of Korea as a nation and the personal leadership of President Kim come from pursuit of universal values, it is vital for Korea to actualize these values.

Enlargement of Popular Support Base for Foreign Policies

In the past, domestic policies had little influence on foreign policies, since the two were clearly partitioned. Moreover, popular opinion had little bearing on foreign policies. However,

3) *Hankyung Newspaper*, June 27, 2000, June 28, 2000.

circumstances have changed drastically with the end of the Cold War. Because of the interdependence of nations, any change in one country has repercussions on other countries, blurring the boundaries between domestic and foreign policy. Consequently, it has become increasingly difficult to decide and carry out foreign policy without popular support. Especially, in view of growing organized popular demonstrations against globalization, governments need a popular support base for their foreign policies. A case in point took place very close to home. Given that Korea was, itself, assisted by foreign troops during the Korean War, it would logically be assumed that there would be relatively little opposition to the proposal to send a peacekeeping force to East Timor. Strong popular opposition, however, almost led to a withdrawal of the proposal, demonstrating that governments need popular support in order to successfully carry out their foreign policies.

In recent times, civil organizations have taken on the roles of both critic and advisor in their governments foreign policies, and thus the need to educate people about international issues is greater than ever before. Now that President Kim Dae-jung has received the Nobel Peace Prize, efforts to establish democracy and human rights must go beyond national boundaries, adding another burden to the utilitarian nature of Korean diplomacy. Thus, Korean non-governmental organizations can provide vital assistance. For example, if the Korean government and Chinese government should again disagree on the invitation of Tibet's Dalai Lamas to Korea, the conflict can be mitigated by non-governmental organizations who can pressure on the Chinese government.

Fulfilling the Obligations of a Developed Country

With the admission to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) in 1996, Korea prided itself on reaching the status of developed countries. However, in regards to legal and moral responsibilities of a developed nation, Korea has

tried to maintain its status as a developing country. First of all, OECD member-nations are committed to contribute 0.7% of their GNP for official development assistance (ODA). At present, the average contribution to ODA by developed countries is only 0.3% of the GNP, and the figure is much lower for Korea, at 0.035%. Granted, it would be a burden for Korea to raise its contribution in the midst of economic hardship; however, it needs to make a mid- to long-term plan to raise the contribution to the present average rate, and strive to reach that goal.

Another problem facing Korea in relation to its legal obligation as a developed country is its contribution to the regular budget of the UN and the peacekeeping operations expenditure. Currently, Korea's allotment for the regular budget of the UN is approximately 1%, and the actualization would raise it to approximately 1.8%. As for peacekeeping operations expenditures, Korea is classified in the C group with other developing countries, an allotment of one-fifth that of the UN regular budget. In order to fulfill its obligation as a developed country, the apportionment rate for the formal budget should be applied to the apportionment for the peacekeeping operations expenditure.

While actualizing the apportionment would be a great burden for Korea at present, but in order for Korean diplomacy to reach the level of developed countries, it must be preceded by speedy actualization of such issues. By fulfilling its global obligations, even if it means cutting corners in the national budget, Korea can become a true leader in the international community.

Establishment of Self-Determined Position

In the arena of multilateral diplomacy, for example, in the UN, Korea has been passive. Rather than standing on its own, Korea has taken a position on international issues based on the decisions of other countries. Hence, when asked about Korea's position on a particular issue, many diplomats respond that "Korea's position is to

have no particular position.”

Korea's loyalty to the G-77, even after gaining OECD membership, led many developed countries to approach it with caution. In the multilateral diplomacy, shifting allegiances between developed and developing countries could cause a country to become a target for suspicion on both sides. Korea must recognize this fact and from now on, work to develop its own stance on the issues.

Pursuit of Enlightened Self-Interest

Due to the gradual deepening of interdependence of the international community, we now live in a world in which a change in one aspect of the community has an immediate global effect. This is becoming more the case with the fast pace of globalization, thus at such times, it is even more important to maintain coexistence and joint governance. To that end, countries should make enlightened self-interest the cornerstone of multilateral diplomacy. Especially in the case of Korea, where the engine of development has been the export of goods despite its lack of natural resources, the pursuit of enlightened self-interest is much needed. What is essential to the exporting country are the purchasing power of the importing country, the region to which it belongs, and the maintenance of world peace. Instead of expecting a free ride from other countries, it is important to take the initiative by actively pursuing such a favorable environment.

Voluntary Observance of Declarations without Binding Force

As mentioned above, because national solutions are inadequate to deal with most of the post Cold-War issues, large-scale international conferences are held to resolve them. Due to differences in opinions on resolution, heads of state are replacing cabinet and administrative members as participants in international conferences. The lack of binding force of the decisions made among heads-of-state

in summit meeting facilitates consensus, however, decisions are made merely talk.

From two standpoints, however, more accountability on decisions made in summit meetings is likely to be seen. Regarding the UN Millennium Summit Declaration, the UN will conduct an annual evaluation of each member country as to how implementation of Summit resolutions is proceeding. Moreover, some Korean civic organizations have announced that they will be monitoring the President's implementation of articles he promised to carry out with other heads of state.

It is no longer possible to ignore the decisions made at summit meetings as mere diplomatic gestures. In the global political climate, heads-of-state must show willingness to carry out their promises. Therefore, in order to build a solid foundation of diplomacy, Korea must back its promises with other countries, demonstrating a willingness and a commitment to see them actualized.

Currently, digital divide is a key issue in the international community, and much attention is being given to it in multilateral conferences. As a result, the international community has declared its commitment to cooperate with one another in a global effort to narrow the digital divide. Armed with its expertise in information technology, Korea is leading other nations in the world in the global effort to mitigate the problem of digital divide. Similarly, Korea needs to show the same level of commitment and effort in other fields as well.

Harmonizing Bilateral and Multilateral Diplomacies

Due to the fast progress in inter-Korea relations following the inter-Korean Summit on June 15, some parties have expressed concern about the diminishing role of multilateral talks, now overshadowed by bilateral talks. However, these concerns turned out to be unfounded. Vibrant multilateral diplomacy soon followed in efforts to attain global recognition of the agreements that came out

of the inter-Korean Summit. For instance, in the G-8 Summit in Okinawa, the Millennium Summit, the ASEM, and the UN General Assembly, the international community welcomed inter-Korean cooperation, and passed special proclamations and presidential statements, calling for sustained cooperation between the two Koreas. This occasion showed the importance of multilateral diplomacy through the regional organizations, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, and global organizations, such as the UN, as the stage for Korean diplomacy. In addition to bilateral diplomacy, the recognition of the importance of multilateral diplomacy must be sustained.

In most cases, the declarations and resolutions generated from large-scale international summit meetings and the UN generally lack legal binding force. Given the nature of multilateral diplomacy, Korea sometimes play an important role in multilateral diplomacy; however, it should not be content with exercising influence on multilateral talks that lack binding force. Rather, in order to gain greater bargaining power in organizations that do generate resolutions with binding power, such as WTO, Korea needs a carefully planned strategy and must evaluate the capability of every diplomat that is appointed.

CONCLUSION

The post Cold-War predominance of multilateral summit diplomacy has evolved because a national solution is no longer adequate to deal with issues of the times. Moreover, given the vast differences of opinion and interests in the international community, summit meetings are becoming more common because the discretionary powers of heads-of-state are required for efficient resolutions. Another rationale favoring summit meetings is that participating heads-of-state can be held more accountable for resolutions adopted: thus, they can be effectively implemented in

each country. Another contributing factor to the prevalence of multilateral summit meetings is that it provides an opportunity for the participating countries to hold bilateral talks, at low expense, during the summit meetings in order to discuss issues pending between the interested parties.⁴⁾

President Kim Dae-jung, through his courage and consistency in supporting and promoting democracy and human rights in Asia, has become an exemplary figure and has gained leadership in the region. His pursuit of universal values is exemplified by his support of Aung San Suu Kyi's fight for human rights in Myanmar, known for its abominable human rights record. That, as well as his appeal to the Korean people for citing the necessity of peacekeeping operations in East Timor to protect human rights, has brought him a leadership role in regional organizations, such as APEC.

Despite the trend of liberalization and cooperation that swept the world following the Cold War, North Korea remained obstinately against the changes, threatening the international community, including its neighboring countries, with nuclear and ballistic missile programs, earning itself the title of "rogue state." Risking severe criticism from Korean groups hostile to North Korea, the President consistently pursued his sunshine policy, which led to the inter-Korean Summit and the subsequent inter-Korean Joint Declaration, demonstrating to the world that peace is achievable when pursued with the right strategy, patience and consistency. For his achievement, Kim earned recognition from the international community as a champion of peace. President Kim has risen, not just in Asia but in the eyes of the world as a remarkable leader. His status as a competent statesman was further strengthened by the official praise of the international community at such global-scale

4) The UN promotes the participation of non-government organizations pursuing the public good of the international community through parallel conferences during multilateral conferences, in the hope that it will act as a catalyst in narrowing the differences in opinions among countries.

summit meetings as the Millennium Summit, for his efforts toward the inter-Korean Joint Declaration. Finally, that recognition culminated in his receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize.

By acting as the head of the host country for the third ASEM and by successfully presiding over the summit, President Kim has extended his leadership role from inter-regional cooperation in Asia-Pacific to Asia-Europe. As a result, he has gained recognition as an able leader who can act as the linch pin in forming a network among Asia, North America, and Europe, the three important areas in the post Cold-War era.

Korea has risen in status in the international community, primarily due to President Kim's international status, illustrating more clearly, that the country needs to sustain that new status on its own merits. In order to achieve this goal, the basis of President Kim's international recognition should be the first consideration: his pursuit of universal values such as democracy and human rights and his consistent and sustained policy on North Korea, through which he was able to achieve inter-Korean cooperation.

In this context, Korea needs to exert greater efforts toward realizing universal values domestically. It must abandon opportunistic diplomacy and embrace a diplomatic stance that is based on principles. Instead of maintaining a noncommittal position between developing and developed nations that yields little more than short-term leverage, Korea must contribute actively to creating world peace and stability. Then, and only then, will it join the ranks of advanced countries. Diplomacy centered on the pursuit of universal values poses the risk of losing practicability. However, the risk can be mitigated by creating a civil society in which enlightened citizens and their non-governmental organizations play a critical role in policy-making.