

Summary of Keynote Speech in Jeju Forum 2015*

Middle Power Leadership for Multilateral Cooperation

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Let me reflect on one lesson which Canada and Korea learned by working together. In 1990 Canada initiated the North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue ? a track-two process to encourage a common approach to the tensions in North East Asia. I was Canada’ s Foreign Minister at the time, and recall, in particular, the leadership in that process of the late, and far-sighted, Dr. Kim Kyung Won. That modest but important initiative encouraged and allowed a frankness and discussion among parties in North-East Asia who had rarely had the chance for broad dialogue. It was an early spark which helped facilitate the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, and the Six-Party Talks.

What is noteworthy is that this dialogue was the sort of initiative which only middle-powers could take, because larger powers were imbedded in, and protective of, their own security arrangements.

Much of the world’ s focus today is on countries which have the capacity to be dominant powers ? specifically the United States of America and the People’ s Republic of China. There is absolutely no doubt that their inherent ambition and power, the interests they share, and the tensions between them, are of paramount importance. But other actors matter too, including the growing capacity of the growing number of significant “middle powers” countries here like Korea, and Canada, and Indonesia, and Australia, and Malaysia and others.

In fact, middle powers matter more than we once did, because the tensions between dominant powers can lead them to narrow their focus, and often, therefore, to limit their capacity to lead or stimulate change. Middle powers, by contrast, often have much more flexibility in opening new

dialogues, reaching across existing boundaries, and encouraging the skeptical or the constrained to explore new options.

There is a long list of essential work in international relations for which middle powers are often better suited than stronger powers:

- * mediation in cases where stronger powers are mistrusted
- * moderation on issues which might be unpopular or contentious in Washington or Beijing
- * compromises which are often easier for smaller powers to initiate
- * simply being in the “middle” and not in the lead.

Often, in a superpower age, leadership had to come from the top. In this era, where several nation-states have significant power, and some non-state actors have increasing influence, there is a need for more leadership from beside. What is central is not who sits at the head of the table, but rather what the various members at that table can accomplish together.

That is unusually important in a period where the challenge is not to provide new pews for those who think alike, but to build opportunities, and alliances, where there is a chance to express, and reconcile, the significant differences which mark modern times. In significant cases, that broader process can also take account of the rising power of forces that are not nation-states ? such as non-governmental organizations, foundations like the Gates Foundation, environmentalists, and socially-responsible corporations which have acquired new prominence and influence in an era where information moves instantly and everywhere.

Being “in the middle” is familiar to both Korea and Canada. We are “middle powers” in both our capacity, and our geography. We each live beside a dominant power.

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Each contemporary middle power has its specific interests and strengths. However, we also have a strong shared interest, and that is to make the multilateral system work, because that contributes to an international order based on agreement, not simply power, or force and smaller powers, and middle powers, have a greater need for rules and order.

Advancing that shared interest is never easy, but it is particularly important here and now now in a period of increasing internal and international conflict, and here, in the broad Asia-Pacific, where there has always been potential turbulence.

The pertinent question for us, right now, is: how might multilateral approaches and institutions help

stabilize the Asia-Pacific region during this period of a dramatic shift in the balance of power, China's ascent, and new challenges to American primacy?

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