

South Korea's Climate Change Diplomacy: Analysis Based on the Perspective of 'Middle Power Diplomacy'

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I. Introduction

Before 2008, South Korea's interest in climate change diplomacy was practically non-existent. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was established in 1992, and most post-1992 Korean administrations assumed the position of developing country and maintained a passive stance as an observer of international climate change issues. The Kim Dae-jung administration responded most actively to the UNFCCC, launching 'the Committee for Climate Change Convention' headed by the prime minister and established a comprehensive national plan on climate change. Even these efforts, however, led to no noteworthy diplomatic accomplishments. While Korea retained developing country status in relation to the UNFCCC, it was an economically advanced middle power with Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) membership; it was also, at the time, one of the world's largest greenhouse gas emitters. Korea's pre-2008 climate change diplomacy can be described as passive and did not leverage or reflect the nation's position internationally. Korea was aware that it would not be able to hold onto its developing country status forever, yet, still made no notable efforts on the climate change front in search of where to assume a leadership role.

From 2008, however, South Korea's climate change diplomacy made remarkable strides. Upon declaring 'Low Carbon Green Growth' as the national vision, Korea built a national brand image around the concept "Green Growth", becoming a recognized 'green' leader on the global stage. For instance, Korea's Minister of Environment Young-sook Yoo chaired the 10th Meeting of the OECD Environment Policy Committee at a Ministerial Level that



took place from March 29 to 30 in Paris. It was the first time the Korean environment minister was appointed to serve as the chair of the OECD meeting, attesting to OECD's recognition of Korea's global leadership in advancing green growth (Kim, 2012).¹ Korea's efforts were also lauded by Achim Steiner, the UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director as follows:

While many countries have factored some level of environmental investment in their economic stimulus packages, it is in Asia where the green economy has seen the biggest green light...The Republic of Korea's strategy cuts across a wide swathe of sustainability challenges from renewable energy and waste to transport, freshwaters and forestry - fostering a green recovery and transforming it into a vision of green economic growth and underlining a new and dynamic strategic direction and journey that we are delighted and excited to share (United Nations Environment Programme, 2000).

Korea, which had been a passive observer in global climate change politics, suddenly took on a leadership role in the diffusion of the concept of green growth around the world. How can Korea's remarkable transformation be interpreted? This paper offers an analysis from the standpoint of 'middle power diplomacy.' The Lee Myung-bak administration discovered a niche in the specialized area of climate change and made diplomatic efforts for Korea to take on a leadership role, and this process exhibited various behavioral patterns of middle power diplomacy.

Then what is middle power diplomacy? Research on 'middle power' took off with the end of the Cold War in 1989. Works by Stokke (Sokke, 1989), Pratt (Pratt, 1990), and Cooper and his colleagues (Higgott and Cooper, 1990; Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal, 1993; Cooper, 1997) laid the foundation for the study of middle power diplomacy. Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal's research, in particular, made significant contributions to delineating the concept of 'middle power' through a detailed analysis of the diplomatic behavioral patterns of middle powers. According to them, middle powers tend to engage in 'middlepowermanship.' It is defined as "[the] tendency to pursue multilateral solutions to international problems, [the] tendency to embrace compromise positions in international disputes, and [the] tendency to embrace notions of "good international citizenship" to guide its diplomacy (Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal, 1993: p.19)." Middle powers thus engage in unique behavioral patterns that make them catalysts, facilitators, and managers. Catalysts trigger and promote special global issues while facilitators build coalitions based on cooperation and managers develop and advance international institutions and norms.



Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal posits that these three types of middle power behavioral patterns are linked to niche diplomacy, which involves “concentrating resources in specific areas best able to generate returns worth having (Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal, 1993: pp.25-26).” Some of the representative examples of middle power niche diplomacy include Canada’s peace-building efforts that led to the Ottawa Treaty, Norway’s conflict mediation, and Denmark’s green ODA.

John W. Holmes, in the meantime, asserts that the most distinguishing characteristic of middle power diplomacy is the “reduction of tensions between the two politico-strategic combatants of a bipolar cold war (Nossal, 1989: p.50)” based on his analysis of Canada’s diplomacy. Although Holmes’ argument stresses a middle power’s role as mediator, it is contextually limited to the Cold War age of the US-Soviet rivalry and focuses only on a middle power’s role in security, economy, and other areas of hard politics. Wang and French define ‘middle powers’ as “countries that are neither at the apex nor the bottom of the international power structure” and contends, “Middle powers’ are not so much defined by their size as by their behavior...Active involvement in global governance would be a natural characteristic of middle powers (Wang and French, 2013: pp.985-986).” That is, for them, middle powers are characterized by their active involvement in upholding international standards and norms.

Based on a critical and comprehensive review of existing studies, this paper provides that the following four identities exemplify the distinctive characteristics of middle power diplomacy: (1) early mover, (2) bridge, (3) coalition coordinator, (4) norm diffuser. These identities involve middle powers (1) elevating their respective statures in the international society by adopting the ‘me first’ approach and leading by example, (2) mediating between opposing groups and seeking measures that would satisfy all parties involved, (3) building coalitions of like-minded states to advance shared interests and address common concerns, and (4) contributing to the global diffusion of norms and standards. Korea found a niche for itself in the area of climate change and carried out diverse diplomatic actions to gain prominence in that niche. The four behavioral patterns above effectively coincide with the behavioral patterns exhibited by Korea in its climate change diplomacy. The purpose of this research is to thoroughly analyze these patterns.

The paper begins with an examination of the developments that led to the politicization of the issue of climate change in international society. Section II thus details the process by which greenhouse gas emissions, once a topic of interest limited to the scientific community, rose to prominence as an international norm requiring a political solution by state actors. It also looks at how the conflicting interests of diverse countries ultimately resulted in the formation of an incomplete climate change regime. Section II closes with a



discussion on a niche wherein middle power diplomacy can make meaningful contributions to breaking the deadlock in which the global climate change regime finds itself. Section III provides an analysis of Korea's climate change diplomacy from the standpoint of middle power diplomacy. It starts out with a discussion on Korea's diplomatic approach to climate change, identifying the distinguishing traits of Korea's climate change diplomacy by era. This is followed by an analysis of the specific aspects of Korea's climate change diplomacy, drawing on the four behavioral patterns that define middle power diplomacy. Finally, Section IV offers a discussion on the implications and meaning of Korea's middle power climate change diplomacy.

II. Global Politics of Climate Change

1. Historical Development and Characteristics

Climate change, among numerous environmental challenges, is the most recent issue to have gained prominence. The destabilizing trend of carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentration in the atmosphere was discovered in the mid-20th century, but the discovery remained confined to the scientific community. Humankind began taking note of the problem of climate change in the early 1970s, with the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) held in Stockholm, Sweden in 1972 serving as the catalyst. Climate change was the key issue on the agenda. Talks led to the founding of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and large-scale conferences on climate change hosted by the United Nations came to be held regularly. Nevertheless, the idea that the international society needed to enact a political resolution to the issue of climate change did not take hold until the 1980s.

It was in the 1980s that the world started to take notice of just how serious climate change was. By the late 1980s, the need for a political response by the international society was put under the spotlight as a growing body of scientific evidence underscored that climate change was indeed real and caused by human activities. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), cofounded by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and UNEP in 1988, played a pivotal role in proving the actuality and seriousness of climate change as well its anthropogenic nature. The second assessment report by the IPCC in 1995 stated that evidence pointing to human activities as one of main causes of climate change was positive and that the observed trend of global warming was not a naturally occurring phe-



nomenon. The report also stated that the sustainability of the ecosystem would be put at serious risk if greenhouse gases (GHGs) continue to increase at the existing rate, thus serving as a wakeup call for the world. The second IPCC report is also the scientific basis of the Kyoto Protocol, which was adopted in 1997.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was opened for signature in May 1992. The Convention officially kicked off at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June of the same year when 154 nations became signatories, thereby laying the most important organizational foundation for overseeing global climate change issues. After the establishment of the UNFCCC, the first Conference of the Parties (COP1) was held in Berlin at Germany's suggestion. The key issue of interest at COP1 was whether UNFCCC would effectively lead to GHG emission cuts by signatory nations. The discussions at COP1 resulted in the Berlin Mandate, an agreement to set GHG mitigation 'targets and time' frames.

COP3, held in Tokyo, Japan in December 1997, resulted in the adoption of the UNFCCC Kyoto Protocol, which details the GHGs targeted for mitigation; targets, time, and method of mitigation; and nations subject to legally binding emission commitments. The Kyoto Protocol clearly stipulates the GHG emissions reduction targets and periods for the 39 nations of Annex B.² The crux of the Kyoto Protocol is Annex B nations must work to curb GHG emissions and that each nation's total GHG emissions during a specified reduction period must not exceed the designated percentage of base year (generally 1990) emissions. In effect, the Annex I nations had to pledge to cut GHG emissions by 5.2% or lower on average by 1990 levels during the first commitment period (2008-2012).

The Kyoto Protocol provides for a number of flexibility measures to enable developed countries to meet the emissions targets and deadline. First, the Protocol does not forbid or demand any specific domestic policy and leaves the method of GHG emissions reduction to the discretion of each country. Second, CO₂, CH₄, N₂O, HFCs, PFCs, and SF₆ are designated for emissions mitigation, and it is up to each country to determine in what combination and by what method the emissions of these six GHGs will be cut. Third, any sink for reducing GHGs in the atmosphere can be used, regardless of type. Accordingly, parties to the protocol can tabulate the amount of CO₂ sequestered by all carbon sinks in their respective countries and include it in their respective emissions mitigation volume. Fourth, emissions reduction exceeding the pledged target set in Annex B can be applied to meeting future targets. To secure such means of flexibility, the so-called 'Kyoto Mechanisms' were adopted. Emissions trading (ET), joint implementation (JI), and clean development mechanism (CDM), which comprise the Kyoto Mechanisms, are all designed to cut costs by allowing flexibility in the actions each nation chooses to take to meet its Kyoto Protocol commitments. The essential



purpose was to encourage various actors to curb GHG emissions in the most efficient manner possible.

While the Kyoto Protocol demands rigorous mitigation commitments from developed nations, it does not subject non-Annex I developing nations to any such obligations. Article 10 of the Kyoto Protocol, which has to do with developing countries, stipulates, “All Parties, taking into account their common but differentiated responsibilities and their specific national and regional development priorities, objectives and circumstances, without introducing any new commitments for Parties not included in Annex I.” Thus based on the Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) principle, the Protocol imposes emissions reduction obligations only on developed countries. The greatest structural flaw of the Kyoto Protocol is that it does not require any mitigation commitments from developing countries. This roused strong opposition from the U.S. and other industrialized countries from the get-go and played the most decisive role in the U.S.’ refusal to ratify the Protocol and eventual withdrawal from it.

The crisis caused by the U.S.’ withdrawal was ultimately overcome, and the Kyoto Protocol went into effect in 2005 on the back of the EU’s leadership. However, the fundamental problem of developed-country-only emission commitments remained unresolved. As such, with the first commitment period (2008-2012) around the corner, revisions had to be made to the Kyoto Protocol. It was this awareness that led to the Bali Action Plan at COP13 in 2007 and the resulting adoption of the Bali Roadmap, under which the Parties agreed to come up with a new regime based on long-term cooperative action by COP15 in Copenhagen. The Bali Roadmap stipulates that developing countries, unlike their developed counterparts, are to discuss nationally appropriate mitigation actions (NAMA) as regards GHG emissions. In other words, developing countries would not be subjected to legally binding reduction commitments. Rather, they were to come up with mitigation actions for voluntary implementation appropriate for their respective circumstance. Furthermore, it was stipulated that actions to reduce GHG emissions for both developed and developing countries would be undertaken in measurable, reportable, and verifiable (MRV) manners. However, COP15, at which an agreement on the post-2012 regime was to be arrived at, came to a close with no major breakthroughs, just the largely cursory Copenhagen Accord. The U.S. and other developed nations were dissatisfied that no binding emission commitments were stipulated for developing countries. China and G77, on the other hand, were strongly opposed to legally binding emission obligations for developing countries, citing the historical responsibility of developed countries. Thus, reaching an agreement became ever more elusive.

In the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action announced at COP17 in 2011, it is stated that “Parties have agreed to develop a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed out-



come with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties.” That is, an agreement was reached to develop a new legally binding protocol applicable to all signatories.” However, there was no agreement on when and in what manner developing countries would participate. At COP18 in Doha in 2012, the Kyoto Protocol was extended to 2020 and a deal was reached to come up with a post-Kyoto, post-2020 regime in accordance with the Durban Platform by 2015 at COP21 in Paris. However, it is projected that a substantive agreement will be difficult to conclude even at COP21 if the discord between developed and developing countries over the issue of binding emission commitments for developing countries, especially advanced developing countries, remains unresolved.

<Table 1> Key Results of UNFCCC COP

COP	Year/Location	UNFCCC Decision(s)	Outcome
1	1995/Berlin	Set up temporary group to negotiate GHG emissions reduction, agreed to come up with binding post-2000 emission commitments by COP3	Berlin Mandate
2	1996/Geneva	Agreed to propose legally binding numerical emissions targets to be met within a set commitment period	
3	1997/Kyoto	Arrived at protocol with binding force, adopted legally binding mitigation commitments for developed countries, deferred mitigation obligations for developing countries, adopted market-based Kyoto Mechanisms	Kyoto Protocol
4	1998/ Buenos Aires	Drafted detailed action plan to finalize issues unresolved in Kyoto and address developing countries’ concerns at COP6, Argentina and Kazakhstan as developing countries express willingness to take voluntary emissions reduction efforts	Buenos Aires Plan of Action
5	1999/Bonn	Discussed compliance with Buenos Aires Plan of Action	
6-1	2000/ The Hague	Talks suspended due to US withdrawal from Kyoto Protocol and discord between EU and the Umbrella Group	
6-2	2001/Bonn	Reached agreement with EU’s concession to recognize Kyoto Mechanisms and sinks, discussed means and financing of fulfilling emissions commitments, conferred on (except US) Kyoto Protocol regime	Bonn Agreement



7	2001/ Marrakesh	Agreed on operational regulations of Kyoto Mechanisms and Kyoto Protocol implementation measures	Marrakesh Accords
8	2002/ New Delhi	Developed countries urged to transfer technology and extend support to developing countries to tackle impacts of climate change, discussed future direction for improvement of Kyoto Protocol, Russia declared deferment of ratification	Delhi Ministerial Declaration
9	2003/Milan	Conferred on means of using the Adaption Fund to help developing countries better adapt to climate change, undertook detailed discussion on application of CDM, reviewed agreement compliance	
10	2004/ Buenos Aires	Formulated Buenos Aires Plan, discussed support to developing nations and issues expected to arise after the first commitment period	
11	2005/ Montreal	Held first COP after Kyoto Protocol entered into force, agreed to extend Kyoto Protocol beyond 2012 and raise GHG emissions targets, initiated reducing emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) discussions	
12	2006/Nairobi	Confirmed consultation schedule for setting developed countries' emissions mitigation targets for the second commitment period; adopted five-year plan for climate change adaptation by developing countries; discussed including carbon, capture, and storage (CCS) as CDM project	
13	2007/Bali	Devised basic MRV roadmap for negotiations on post-2012 climate framework and specified the adoption of a decision by COP15, adopted dual-track negotiation scheme (Track 1-UNFCCC track for the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA) to discuss developing countries' participation in emission reduction efforts, adaptation, technology, and finances Track 2-Kyoto Protocol track for Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP) to discuss further emission cuts by developed countries)	Bali Roadmap



14	2008/Poznan	Agreed on extending financial assistance to help least developed countries tackle impacts of climate change, approved forest protection mechanism as effort to combat climate change, undertook negotiations on regime after the first commitment period	
15	2009/ Copenhagen	Agreed to stabilize rise in global temperature to 2°C or below, agreed on financial assistance to developing countries (\$30 billion by 2012 and \$100 billion per year by 2020), pledged to voluntarily submit deeper emission cut targets (developed countries) and emission mitigation plans (developing countries)	Copenhagen Accord
16	2010/Cancun	Passed decision to set up Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Climate Technology Center (CTC), stressed importance of forests by expanding of REDD to REDD+	Cancun Agreements
17	2011/Durban	Agreed to set up new binding GHG mitigation regime applicable to all parties; discussed amount of financial contribution by developed countries to the GCF; Canada withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol; Japan, Russia, and New Zealand expressed intention to withdraw from the second commitment period	Durban Platform
18	2012/Doha	Extended Kyoto Protocol to 2020, agreed to conclude an agreement on post-2020 regime by COP21, added nitrogen trifluoride (NF3) to list of GHGs for second commitment period, limited 'hot air' credits, approved setting up GCF secretariat in Korea, formalized principle of 'loss and damage'	Doha Gateway
19	2013/Warsaw	Agreed to conclude a blueprint for a new climate regime before COP21, used 'contributions' rather than 'commitments' to describe all parties' emissions mitigation efforts, set up 'loss and damage' compensation mechanism, completed REDD+ negotiations	



2. Deadlock

COP17 held in 2011 in Durban, South Africa brought both hope and despair to the international community. The cause for hope came from the agreement to set up a new regime that was “applicable to all parties” as discussed in the earlier section. It meant the dissolution of the CBDR principle—i.e., deferment of developing country obligations, which had brought the Kyoto Protocol to an impasse. All parties would be subject to binding emission targets commensurate with their respective capabilities. However, there was despair too as it proved to be very difficult to build a binding GHG mitigation regime applicable to all parties. At Durban, Canada became the first developed country to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol, while Japan, Russia, and New Zealand declared that they too would withdraw at the start of the second commitment period unless dramatic improvements are made to the existing regime. With the world’s second biggest CO₂ emitter the U.S. out of the picture, the EU would be the only developed country remaining should Russia (fourth largest CO₂ emitter), Japan (fifth), and Canada (eighth) withdraw. Hope and despair at Durban both centered on the issue of binding GHG emission commitments for developing countries, especially the advanced developing countries, such as China, India, Brazil, and South Korea. Durban thus served to clearly demonstrate the deadlock at which the global climate change regime currently finds itself.

There is hardly any fundamental opposition to the CBDR principle, not even from developed countries. Scientific evidence makes it clear that climate change has been triggered by the large amounts of historic GHG emissions by industrialized countries. Thus, there has been a gradual acceptance of the notion that developed countries must spearhead global emissions reduction efforts and pay for related costs (Gardiner, 2004: pp.578-579). However, for developed countries to take the lead is one thing; for developed countries to be exempt is something else completely. The U.S. withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol when its insistence on binding commitments by developing countries was not accepted. That is, its dissatisfaction is focused on the complete exemption of obligations for developing countries. While the U.S. agreed with the principle that developed countries must take on a relatively larger share of the burden, it demanded that all parties must participate in the GHG mitigation efforts in some capacity, citing the fact that developing countries bear partial responsibility for climate change given their rapid industrialization and population growth (Okereke, 2010: pp.49-50).

Senator Robert C. Byrd, who sponsored the Byrd-Hagel Resolution and stopped the U.S. from ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, offered the following argument in his conversation with Senator Jeff Bingaman on July 25, 1997:



Byngaman: I was greatly encouraged by the remarks on this issue made by the sponsor of this resolution [who said that] countries at different levels of development should make unique and binding commitments of a pace and kind consistent with their industrialization... and consistent with a fair sharing of any burden... Would it be correct to interpret the use of the words “new commitments” in both phases as suggesting that the United States should not be a signatory to any protocol unless Annex I Parties and Developing Country Parties agree to identical commitments?

Byrd: That would not be a correct interpretation of the resolution. [I said and] deliberately repeated it for emphasis: “Finally, while countries have different levels of development, each must make unique and binding commitments of a pace and kind consistent with their industrialization.” I believe that the developing world must agree in Kyoto to binding targets and commitments that would begin at the same time as the developed world in as aggressive and effective a schedule as possible, given the gravity of the problem and the need for a fair sharing of the burden. That is what the resolution means. The resolution should not be interpreted as a call for identical commitments between Annex I Parties and Developing Country Parties (Harris, 2000: pp.234-245).

Byrd thus set forth that while developing countries need not make the same level of GHG emission commitments as their developed counterparts, they should nonetheless make binding pledges by setting mitigation targets and devising a detailed plan for meeting these targets in line with their respective levels of development. That is, the crux of the U.S.’ argument was that while developing countries need not fulfill the same commitments as developed countries, they, as members of the international community, should still share some of the burden from the get-go in some form. Moreover, the U.S. and EU position at earlier COPs was that the advanced developing countries, whose actual level of development is close to that of developed countries, must commit to binding emissions targets (Stevenson, 2011: p.1000). However, this matter was not addressed in the Kyoto Protocol, leading to its rejection by the U.S., which had demanded the participation of all parties.

When it comes to the issue of climate change, the term ‘developing country’ does not refer to an economically developed country but a country that has been emitting GHGs for some 200 years since the Industrial Revolution and thus bears the historical responsibility of causing climate change. The underlying notion of CBDR is that given this historical responsibility of developed countries, they have the duty to limit GHG emissions to avoid further



exacerbating climate change even if this may comprise their future economic growth. Along the same line of reasoning, a ‘developing country,’ as opposed to a ‘developed country,’ is not a country that is economically underdeveloped but a country that has a relatively smaller historical responsibility for climate change. As such, the interpretation that came to be accepted as the most reasonable as regards to the contentious issue of applicability was that developing countries were exempt from the immediate ‘commitment’ to cut GHG emissions but should begin ‘non-binding and voluntary’ emissions reduction efforts commensurate with their respective capabilities to tackle climate change, a challenge common to all of humankind.

This deadlock brought the Kyoto Protocol regime to breaking point toward the end of the first commitment period. The first and most important cause was the CBDR principle. Binding commitments were applicable only to developed countries, while the same obligation was deferred for advanced developing countries, which are also some of the world’s largest CO₂ emitters (China [largest], India [third largest], South Korea [seventh largest], Indonesia [ninth largest]). This was met with fiercest opposition from developed countries. The U.S., the only developed country that did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol, was very clear from the get-go that it would not join if advanced developing countries, particularly China and India, did not participate. Even the EU, which has led the Kyoto regime, insisted on a new agreement ‘applicable to all Parties’ starting with the second commitment period and spearheaded the adoption of the Durban Platform. It was announced at COP18 in Doha in 2012 that a post-Kyoto regime applicable to all parties is to be agreed on by 2015. However, major advanced developing countries like China, India, and Brazil whose economic growth is in full swing, continue to insist on non-binding, voluntary participation, citing the historical responsibility of developed countries. In the meantime, the leading developed countries of the US, Canada, Japan, and Russia are either opposed to or lukewarm toward a post-Kyoto regime, pointing to the issues of national competitiveness and the non-participation of developing countries. Accordingly, international negotiations that aim at the creation of a new global regime to combat climate change find itself amid choppy waters.

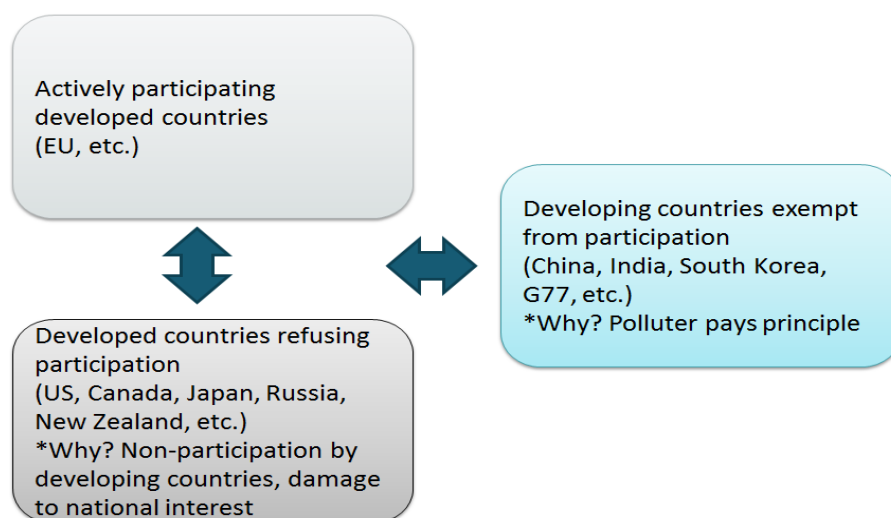
The second limitation of the Kyoto regime involves the issue of scale. The 192 signatory nations that comprise the regime meet once a year over a period of two or so weeks to discuss issues and seek solutions. It has become evident that this large-scale and short-term operational scheme is not efficient given the divergent and opposing interests that are represented. Accordingly, some are voicing the need for ‘club politics (Keohane and Victor, 2011: p.9).’ In other words, there are calls for an attempt to efficiently reach agreements through a small gathering of key countries responsible for most of the world’s GHG emissions rather than rely on a regime like that of the Kyoto Protocol wherein all countries of the international society participate. The US-led Major Economies Forum (MEF) is a notable example of club politics at work. Addressing climate change as the main agenda at G20, G8, G8+5, and other gatherings of world’s leading nations can also be regarded as a form of



club politics. However, there is also strong opposition to such an approach. Some question the legitimacy of a new regime founded outside the UN framework as well as the legitimacy of the rules agreed upon by a small handful of nations that do not include members of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which are most directly impacted by climate change.

To resolve these two problems, developing countries should make legally binding mitigation commitments commensurate with their respective capabilities. So far, however, China and other G77 countries are refusing to commit, agreeing only to voluntary, non-binding participation in the regime. Another means of resolution would be for the U.S. and other developed countries to accept the deferment of commitments for developing countries into the second commitment period. However, most developed countries of the Umbrella Group have expressed their intention to withdraw unless there are binding emission commitments by developing countries. Furthermore, without meaningful participation of advanced developing countries, which produce large amounts of GHGs, there is no practical way to combat the global crisis of climate change. Therefore, the very possibility of a post-Kyoto regime hinges on the question of developing country participation. Against the backdrop of this standoff, what if an advanced developing country that is as powerful and emits as much GHGs as a developed country declares that it will actively curb emissions and encourage its neighbors to do the same? It is unlikely that developed countries like the Umbrella Group will change their stance. However, the situation is such that with a change in position of an advanced developing country, a niche might be created for a possible breakthrough in the deadlock. South Korea's climate change diplomacy that is detailed in the following section demonstrates the appropriate identity a middle power must assume and the actions it must take in such a situation.

<Graph 1> Two Conflicts on Binding Commitments for Developing Countries





III. South Korea's Climate Change Diplomacy: From the Perspective of 'Middle Power Diplomacy'

1. Historical Development: From Passive Observer to Active Leader

The discussion on climate change diplomacy began in South Korea during the Roh Tae-woo administration in 1992 upon the founding of the UNFCCC. South Korea's position at the time was that typical of a developing country. In response to the establishment of the UNFCCC, South Korea supported the CBDR principle, which placed the burden of responsibility on developed countries, and insisted that they must transfer technology and offer financial assistance to developing countries in order to tackle climate change. Domestically, the Ministerial Meeting on the Global Environment, chaired by the prime minister, was set up to respond to international discussion. Nevertheless, it can be said that South Korea's overall awareness on addressing climate change was lacking at the time.

President Kim Young-sam's 'Civilian Government (*Munmin Jeongbu*)' was inaugurated in February, 1993. There were three main developments in South Korea's climate change diplomacy during the Kim Young-sam administration. First, South Korea joined the UNFCCC. The treaty was cited as a means for South Korea to voice its position in the global stage, transition to an energy-saving industrial structure, and minimize related costs and responsibilities by leveraging Korea's status as a developing country. The UNFCCC was ratified domestically without much debate on December 14, 1993. Second, South Korea made it clear that it would maintain its 'developing country' status when it joined the OECD, and this was approved by OECD member states. The OECD authorized South Korea's membership on October 11, 1996. Korea's accession was ratified by the National Assembly in November, and in the following month, South Korea became an official member state of the OECD. Immediately thereafter in April 1997, South Korea withdrew from G77. It was a *de facto* declaration that Korea had entered the ranks of industrialized countries. However, South Korea had joined the UNFCCC as a developing country, and there was also consent from OECD members that South Korea would maintain its developing country status even upon its accession to the OECD. Accordingly, the country was able to retain its developing country status with regard to the UNFCCC. Third, the Kyoto Protocol was adopted at COP3 toward the end of the Kim Young-sam administration on December 11, 1997. However, Korea did not come up with any specific diplomatic strategies and held fast to its passive position of merely supporting the argument that binding emission commitments were only applicable to developed countries and that South Korea and other developing countries were exempt from making such commitments. South Korea was at the brink of sovereign insolvency due to the Asian



Financial Crisis and had just signed an agreement for an IMF bailout program on December 3, 1997. As such, the nation did not have the wherewithal for the UNFCCC. Furthermore, there were concerns that GHG emissions reduction could exacerbate the severe economic crisis the country was facing. In sum, while the international society took important steps to tackle climate change, South Korea did not devise any special strategies and was merely a passive observer during Kim Young-sam's presidency.

President Kim Dae-jung's 'People's Government (*Gungmin-ui Jeongbu*)' took office on February 25, 1998, and South Korea signed the Kyoto Protocol later that year on September 25. During the Kim Dae-jung administration, several institutional frameworks were set up to effectively respond to the Kyoto Protocol. First, the Pan-governmental Organization for Climate Change Convention headed by the prime minister was established in April 1998. Then in September 2001, the body's status was elevated from a mere 'meeting' of relevant ministers to a committee and was named the Committee for Climate Change Convention, chaired by the prime minister and comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Energy, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Science and Technology, and other specialized government agencies. The Committee was founded to serve as an integrated coordinating body. However, it became mired in the conflicts and rivalries of bureaucratic politics and is assessed to have failed in carrying out its intended function. Second, comprehensive national plans to address UNFCCC were devised. The first plan of February 1999 and the second plan of June 2000 outline the following as the main tasks: strengthening negotiation competencies, curbing GHG emissions and developing technologies for energy efficiency, bolstering emission mitigation measures, building the basis for statistical tabulation and analysis, and inducing public participation. Third, efforts were made to enact comprehensive law legislation on climate change. On December 21, 2011, 20 members of the National Assembly, including Assemblyman Lee Jeong-il, an independent, sponsored a bill for global warming prevention. On the 27th of the same month, 23 legislators, including Assemblyman Lee Ho-ung of the Millennium Democratic Party, proposed a bill on GHG mitigation measures. The two bills represented the very first proposals for framework legislations on climate change. However, they were met with strong opposition from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Energy, which represent the interests of the industrial sector. The Environment and Labor Committee of the National Assembly ultimately failed to mediate between government ministries of clashing interests. The bills, deemed inadequate in representing the divergent positions of wide-ranging social sectors, never made it to the floor and subsequently discarded.

The Kim Dae-jung administration, which set up a domestic comprehensive institutional basis for addressing climate change, did make a lot more progress than its predecessors on



the diplomatic front as well. COP5 in 1999 was meaningful in that the South Korean Government put forth a more active diplomatic position than in the past. Korea expressed its intention to make ‘voluntary and non-binding’ GHG emissions reduction efforts if a sweeping agreement is reached on a new means of participation for developing countries. When pressure from developed countries later mounted for developing countries to partake in emission mitigation efforts, South Korea pondered the best course of action for safeguarding Korean national interests while not compromising the nation’s international stature. The resulting outcomes were the proposal for unilateral CDM and the establishment of the Environmental Integrity Group (EIG) at COP6.

President Roh Moo-hyun’s Participatory Government (*Chamyeo Jeongbu*) was inaugurated in February 2003. No notable climate change policy was adopted during the Roh administration apart from the third comprehensive national plan to address UNFCCC in February 2005 and the revised and expanded version of the third plan in March 2006 after the Kyoto Protocol went into effect. The Kyoto Protocol, which was on the verge of dissolution due to the U.S. withdrawal, went into force in dramatic fashion with Russia’s ratification. South Korea, in the meantime, still did not have GHG mitigation targets, and related policies were being formulated by the business-friendly Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Energy. Due to this lack of response capabilities concerning climate change, the country maintained its passive diplomatic stance. It was with the Lee Myung-bak administration that South Korea shed its passivity and began taking the lead in active middle power climate change diplomacy.

President Lee Myung-bak took office in February 25, 2008, and the Lee administration, under the guiding principle of ‘Low Carbon Green Growth,’ made noteworthy strides on the issue of climate change. On the domestic front, the Presidential Committee on Green Growth was founded, the National Strategy and Five-Year Plan for Green Growth were announced; Framework Act on Low Carbon Green Growth, Smart Grid Promotion Act, and Green Building Construction Support Act were enacted; and sector-specific GHG emissions reduction targets were set. In the international arena, Korea pledged GHG mitigation targets, founded the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), expanded green overseas direct assistance, drafted the Declaration on Green Growth, proposed a green growth strategy at Rio+20, and came to host the GCF secretariat. For its significant achievements, Korea was recognized as a foremost leader and benchmark case in climate change response by the UNEP and OECD. When it comes to the issue of climate change, Korea, as a middle power state, was never more diplomatically active and its global leadership role never more notable than during the Lee administration starting in 2008.



<Table 2> South Korea's Diplomatic Position at COPs

COP	Year/Location	South Korea's Diplomatic Position
1	1995/Berlin	Stressed the strengthening of developed countries' pledges and the importance of technology transfer to developing countries
2	1996/Geneva	Underscored the necessity of financial assistance and technology transfer to developing countries
3	1997/Kyoto	Explained the difficult situation Korea was facing due to the Asian Financial Crisis, publicized Korea's work on transitioning to an eco-friendly industrial system and other voluntary efforts at combatting climate change
4	1998/ Buenos Aires	As regards binding commitments for developing countries, highlighted the principle of CBDR and the need for a set grace period to alleviate related burden
5	1999/Bonn	Expressed for the first time Korea's willingness to participate in voluntary and non-binding GHG mitigation efforts
6-1	2000/ The Hague	Proposed and spearheaded the founding of EIG, proposed unilateral CDM, expressed willingness to partake efforts at global Kyoto Protocol ratification by 2002
6-2	2001/Bonn	Maintained existing position on CDM, technology transfer to developing countries, and other main issues pertaining to Kyoto Protocol implementation and undertook negotiations to muster support for unilateral CDM
7	2001/ Marrakesh	Pushed forward national registration system project; built cooperative ties at first-ever Asia Group Meeting; maintained concrete cooperative ties with Brazil, Mexico, and other developing countries
8	2002/ New Delhi	Joined EIG talks, closely collaborated with Mexico, declared Korea's Kyoto Protocol ratification
9	2003/Milan	On behalf of EIG, proposed joint R&D to promote technology transfer
10	2004/ Buenos Aires	On behalf of EIG, called for the development of new GHG emissions reduction method that take into consideration developing countries' circumstances and requested technology transfer to developing countries by developed countries
11	2005/Montreal	Expressed intention to participate in efforts on countering climate change in a manner that does not impede sustained economic growth; reviewed post-2012 voluntary and non-binding emissions mitigation method; stressed developed countries' greater weight of responsibility; pursued entry of Korean experts into the newly established Compliance Committee and other relevant bodies; welcomed adoption of unilateral CDM



12	2006/Nairobi	Set forth opinion that binding mitigation commitments should only be applicable to developed countries even after 2012, raised the need for securing the continuity of the Kyoto Protocol and improvements to relevant processes in order to spur CDM, held the position that it is premature to revise the Kyoto Protocol
13	2007/Bali	Presented Korea's fourth national comprehensive plan on countering climate change, expressed active interest in taking part in talks regarding the post-2012 regime, held the position that developed countries should make binding commitments for deeper emission cuts while developing countries should make voluntary mitigation efforts
14	2008/Poznan	Confirmed interest in taking part in talks regarding the post-2012 regime, maintained position set forth at COP13
15	2009/ Copenhagen	President Lee Myung-bak presented Korea's 'Low Carbon Green Growth' policy in keynote address, declared voluntary emissions target (30% below BAU levels by 2020), proposed NAMA Registry for registering developing countries' voluntary GHG mitigation activities, declared establishment of GGGI, announced Korea's intention to serve as a bridge between developed and developing countries by adopting the 'me first' approach, proposed hosting COP18 in Korea
16	2010/Cancun	Confirmed intention to serve as a bridge between developed and developing nations and champion the position of middle powers, expressed desire to host COP18, stressed establishment of NAMA Registry, proposed setting up a body for joint technology development and transfer, publicized Korea's Framework Act on Green Growth and GHG/Energy Target Management scheme, reported founding of GGGI, presented the G20 Seoul Declaration
17	2011/Durban	Expressed desire to host GCF Secretariat, stressed that requiring identical binding commitments from all parties could result in the level of commitments being standardized downward, supported voluntary emissions reduction for developing countries, welcomed establishment of NAMA Registry
18	2012/Doha	Selected as the official host of GCF Secretariat
19	2013/Warsaw	Declared determination to have GCF up and running as quickly as possible, urged contributions from developed nations in raising funds for GCF, announced talks to raise long-term climate fund for developing countries



2. Characteristics and Behaviors of South Korea's Middle Power Climate Change Diplomacy

(1) Early Mover

'Early mover' is the first notable feature of Korea's middle power climate change diplomacy. The country has been building up its international standing on the climate change issue by taking initiatives and voluntary actions both domestically and internationally. As detailed earlier, there are two schisms that characterize the global landscape in regards to climate change. The first division is among developed country groups. It stems from industrialized countries' differing respective positions on national interest and developing country participation. The second division is that between developed and developing countries over responsibility and developing countries' participation in GHG mitigation efforts. Active emissions reduction by advanced developing countries is one of the best ways to alleviate these two divisions and break the deadlock. Both schisms owe themselves to the issue of emissions reduction by developing countries. China, India, Korea, and other advanced developing countries, in particular, which are in the ranks of the world's ten largest GHG emitters, are the very cause of the divisions as well as the key to undoing them.

Korea's 'early mover' strategy was an appropriate means of tackling the two schisms. The expression 'early mover' was first used by President Lee Myung-bak as follows at the 34th G8 Summit held in Japan in July 2008: "Korea will not hesitate to become an 'early mover' in the international community regarding climate change and energy problem (Park, 2008)." In the following year on December 17, President Lee Myung-bak underscored Korea's early-mover approach as a middle power in the keynote address at COP15 in Copenhagen: "If we wish to make any real difference, the only way is to take action together. Instead of saying 'you first' we should start by saying 'me first.' Tackling climate change must begin with each of us doing our own part and once we do we can start a truly positive cycle around the world (*Yonhap News*, 2009)." In stressing the 'me first' approach in the speech, President Lee Myung-bak declared that Korea, an advanced developing country exempt from UNFCCC's binding emission commitments, will curb GHG emissions and lead by example.

So what was Korea going to 'do first' and how? First, Korea made a pledge to the international society to meet the most rigorous emissions targets for a developing country. Until then, Korea, which was exempt from binding commitments on curbing GHG emissions, had not proposed any mitigation or time targets whatsoever.



As promised, Korea announced its own mid-term mitigation goal. As a non-annex I country, we made a voluntary and unilateral pledge that satisfies the highest demand recommended by the international community. As you know, the Korean economy has always been very energy-intensive. For the last fifteen years, our GHG emissions almost doubled. For such a country, meeting this pledge is no easy task at all. But, Korea chose to be an early-mover when it comes to tackling climate change. Various stakeholders met numerous times to listen to each other's concerns and needs. And in the end, we came to an agreement. We all agreed that we must do this because acting first is good for us and good for the world. Yes, I believe a 'Me first attitude' is the fastest way to save our planet (*Yonhap News*, 2009).

The 'highest demand recommended by the international community' here refers to 30% below BAU level by 2020 (4% cut from 2005 emissions levels) as the mitigation target for developing countries recommended by IPCC is in the range of 15 to 30%. Despite economic difficulties at home, South Korea demonstrated its determination to be an early mover. Then in July 2011, the Korean Government came up with a draft proposal for curbing GHG emissions and devised detailed emission mitigation goals and roadmaps for seven sectors.

<Table 3> Below-BAU Mitigation Targets by Sector

Industry	Generation	Transport	Buildings	Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery	Waste	Public and Other	Nation as a Whole
18.2%	26.7%	34.3%	26.9%	5.2%	12.3%	25%	30%

Source: Greenhouse Gas Inventory & Research Center of Korea, "GHG Mitigation Targets"

The second action taken was setting up a domestic institutional framework (policies and laws). In his first year in office, President Lee Myung-bak declared 'Low Carbon Green Growth' as the new administration's national vision in a speech delivered on August 15, 2008 to celebrate the 63rd anniversary of national liberation and the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Korea.

Today, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Korea, I want to put forward 'Low Carbon Green Growth' as the core of the Republic's new vision. Green growth refers to sustainable growth which helps reduce greenhouse gas emission and environmental pollution. It is also a new national development paradigm that creates new growth engines and jobs with green technology and clean energy.



This was followed by policies and laws that were put in place to realize Low Carbon Green Growth. On the policy front, the Presidential Committee on Green Growth was founded to serve as a control tower. The Committee's purpose was to direct the government's green growth policies by devising pertinent national strategies and to serve as policy coordinator between government ministries. On July 6, 2009, the Presidential Committee on Green Growth announced 'the Five-Year Plan for Green Growth (2009-2013)' and declared Korea's goal of becoming one of the world's top seven and top five green nations by 2020 and 2050, respectively. The Plan delineates the following three strategies to reach this goal: (1) Adapt to climate change and realize energy independence, (2) Develop new growth engines, (3) Enhance the quality of life and elevate Korea's international standing. The Plan also details ten policy directions and fifty tasks for implementing these strategies.

On the legislative front, the Framework Act on Low Carbon Green Growth, a comprehensive legal basis for responding to climate change, was enacted in April 2011. The Act stipulates overarching measures to combat climate change, including the establishment of the Presidential Committee on Low Carbon Green Growth, mandatory formulation and implementation of a basic plan on countering climate change every five years, and provision of support for the development of green technologies and new renewable energy. The Lee administration thus institutionalized measures for Korea to combat climate change through domestic legislations. This sets the Lee government apart from its predecessors, whose focus was more on responding to the UNFCCC rather than climate change.³ President Lee Myung-bak proudly described Korea's efforts and milestones as an early-mover developing country in his keynote speech in Copenhagen:

In the case of Korea, we set up 'Low Carbon Green Growth' as our new national vision. We are annually investing 2% of our GDP into R&D on new green technologies and green infrastructure. For this, the Basic Law on Green Growth is about to be passed by the end of this year. We will do our best to reduce carbon emissions but also seek new engines of growth that will ensure sustainable development, more jobs and a greener future.

(2) Bridge

'Bridge' is a keyword in middle power diplomacy. Conceptually, a middle power is at a position between that of a great power and a small power. Accordingly, a middle power as a bridge serves as a link between a great power and a small power, playing the role of mediator when the two sides are at odds and of a channel for communication when there is a breakdown in dialogue. As regards to



the issue of climate change, a middle power's role as a bridge is essential for breaking the deadlock the international society currently finds itself in. There is China and other developing countries on one side, standing in sharp opposition to the U.S. and other developed countries of the Umbrella Group on the other. To resolve this standoff, a middle power sides with neither groups and continues to propose ideas that opposing sides can accommodate.

As of 2011, China was the world's biggest CO₂ emitter followed by the U.S. Upon overtaking the US in 2005, China is currently responsible for some 30% of the world's GHG emissions. At this rate, China's emissions volume is projected to be double that of the U.S. by 2015 and equal to the combined emissions of the U.S. and EU by 2020. Nevertheless, China maintains that developed countries should continue to be subject to binding emission targets while refusing to hold any international responsibility for GHG emissions necessary for its own national economic growth. As such, China's position is likely to not only shape the global climate change regime but even also determine the regime's very survival.

The U.S. is only second to China in GHG emissions. U.S. CO₂ emissions account for around 15% of the global total. The country is adhering to a nationalistic position as evidenced by the fact that it is the only developed country that did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol from the get-go. Ever since President Obama took office, his progressive-leaning administration has expressed its strong determination to make deep GHG emissions cuts. However, citing the erosion of U.S.' national competitiveness and the absence of developing country participation, Congress is blocking the passage of a bill to federally mandate GHG mitigation. In the U.S., an international treaty is not ratified unless it is domestically legislated through an agreement reached by various stakeholders (DeSombre, 2000). Therefore, it is difficult to expect the US to take on a leadership role in combatting climate change both globally and domestically on the back of the executive branch's efforts alone.

China is holding fast to the CBDR principle and insisting on binding commitments for developed countries and voluntary mitigation for developing countries. The U.S., in the meantime, is refusing to be part of the Kyoto regime and is determined to go solo unless the world's largest GHG emitter China participates. Diffusing this standoff holds the key to building a post-Kyoto regime and bolstering the global regime for countering climate change. The EU has taken on a leadership role on various fronts to break this deadlock, but its range of actions is limited given that it too is a developed country bearing the historical responsibility for climate change. Against this backdrop, South Korea took on the self-designated role of a bridge. The very first task listed in the diplomatic action plan for 'the Five-Year Plan for Green Growth (2009-2013)' is as follows: "Serve as a bridge between developed and developing countries by making constructive proposals at climate change negotiations." This is indicative of the foremost priority of Korea's climate change diplomacy at the time: serving as an effective bridge to raise Korea's stature in the international community.

Korea, even though of developing country status, did try to put forth proposals that both



developed and developing countries would find acceptable, even before the Lee Myung-bak administration. A case in point is unilateral CDM.⁴ Korea devised the scheme and proposed it to the international society at COP6 in 2000. CDM awards a developed country with emission reduction credits when its investments in a developing country lead to GHG emission cuts. As developing countries are not subject to emission reduction commitments according to the Kyoto Protocol, there were no provisions for emission mitigation activities between developing countries. Homing in on this point, South Korea proposed unilateral CDM, an instrument that would extend credits to a developing country for domestic investments or investments in another developing country that result in GHG mitigation. Unilateral CDM is beneficial to developing countries as they can get credits for making investments within their respective borders. For developed countries, it is an incentive to encourage emissions mitigation efforts by developing countries. At first, the proposal was met with opposition from both sides: developed countries regarded it as a means for advanced developing countries to evade responsibility while developing countries considered it an indirect form of a binding emission commitment. Nonetheless, the proposal's validity and importance were eventually recognized, and unilateral CDM was adopted by the parties to the UNFCCC.⁵

The NAMA Registry, proposed by the Lee Myung-bak administration, also illustrates South Korea's understanding of its role as a bridge between developed and developing countries. NAMA Registry is a scheme wherein developing countries can register voluntary efforts to curb emissions with the UNFCCC and receive credits for certain mitigation actions. Developing countries can thus get international recognition for domestic emission reduction actions and thus participate in the global effort to curb GHG emissions in a meaningful manner. And based on this, they are also rewarded with financial and technological assistance. For developed countries, the Registry ensures MRV mitigation efforts by developing countries, thus securing the transparency of the relevant assistance they provide to developing countries. It also promotes voluntary developing country participation. President Lee Myung-bak stressed these points in his keynote address at the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly in September 2009:

Korea has proposed to establish a Registry of Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) of developing countries at the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with a view to inviting developing countries to voluntarily participate in mitigation actions and providing the international support that they need (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2009)."



The Korean government has thus endeavored to devise and propose measures for the international community that would satisfy both opposing sides. However, the tour de force of South Korea's 'bridge diplomacy' was its winning bid to host the GCF secretariat, a feat that went beyond the mere proposal of ideas. GCF is an international climate change fund founded to support developing countries with GHG emissions mitigation and climate change adaptation. GCF can be regarded as an international apparatus with bridge-like features as it is where funds are pooled from developed countries and financial assistance extended to developing countries. It would not be farfetched to say that the Korean government applied all its capabilities to achieve the remarkable feat of winning the bid to host the GCF secretariat.

It was decided at the 112th Ministers meeting for International Economics on November 25, 2011 that Korea would make a bid to host the GCF. At COP17 in Durban, the environment minister, who headed the Korean delegation, expressed Korea's desire to host the GCF in his keynote address. Korea was the first nation to announce such a bid. At the unofficial talks, Korea also proposed to host the second GCF Board meeting, finance the operations of the interim secretariat, and host a GCF-related international forum. South Korea's active and engaging approach was welcomed by both the developed countries, including the U.S., Canada, Japan, Australia, Germany, and Switzerland, as well as the developing countries, such as Mexico, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, Egypt, and Indonesia (Ministry of Strategy and Finance, 2012: p.23).

Six nations made their bids to host the GCF: Germany, Mexico, Namibia, Poland, South Korea, and Switzerland (Green Climate Fund, 2012a: pp.6-7). Winning the bid required votes from at least 13 out of the 24 member states of the GCF Board. Korea's odds were very slim⁶ as the nine European nations on the board (seven EU nations, Norway, and Georgia) had decided to support Germany and the developing nation votes were expected to be split among Korea (Asia), Mexico (South America), and Namibia (Africa) (Ministry of Strategy and Finance, 2013: p.38). Under the circumstances, not only the president but also the prime minister's office, Ministry of Strategy and Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Ministry of Environment as well as the city of Incheon and even the National Assembly focused all their capabilities into winning the bid to host the GCF secretariat.

Korea presented six main reasons that it would be the best host for the secretariat. First, Korea is optimized for the role of a bridge between developing and developed countries as it understands both the difficulties facing the former and the concerns of the latter. Second, Korea, which designated green growth as the national vision, is a benchmark case in the effort to combat climate. Third, most of the major international environmental organizations are in Europe and North America, and even Africa has the UNEP, but Asia is not home to any. Fourth, while South Korea is of a developing country status, it still made a voluntary pledge of \$40 million in funding support to the GCF. Fifth, Incheon's Songdo is a conveniently located eco-



friendly city. Fifth, the I-Tower in Songdo was available to the CGF for permanent, rent-free, and immediate residence (Ministry of Strategy and Finance, 2013: pp.40-41). Korea also stressed its national competencies and determination as a strong middle power, citing its active role as a bridge in the global arena and its early-mover approach at home regarding the efforts to counter climate change.

The US, Spain, Czech Republic, Belize, Egypt, and Philippines were the six nations appointed to comprise the GCF secretariat Host Country Evaluation Committee. The GCF Board would vote based on the report from the Evaluation Committee, which assessed the bids in the following four categories: (1) legal status, (2) privileges and immunities, (3) financial arrangements, administrative and logistical support, (4) local facilities and conditions. Mexico (yellow light rating in (4)), Poland (red light rating in (2)), and Namibia (yellow light rating in (1) and (4)) did not make the cut. Switzerland, Korea, and Germany, in the meantime, received green light ratings in all the evaluation categories (Green Climate Fund, 2012b: pp.7, 10, 13, 16, 17, 20, and 23). Through a secret ballot at the second meeting of the GCF Board, Korea won the bid to host the GCF Secretariat (Green Climate Fund, 2013: p.7).

There were four main reasons behind the GCF Board's decision to award the bid to Korea. First, Korea had pledged a GCF corporate entity status for the GFC and \$2 million in funding, the first large financial pledge by a country without binding emissions commitments. Second, the overwhelming consensus was that it would be preferable to establish the GCF secretariat at a location distant from the UNFCCC secretariat in Bonn, Germany. Third, Korea is in a region of the world projected to show the highest rate of economic growth, and in turn, the highest increase in GHG emissions. Fourth, Korea had founded GGGI, and the 18 member states of this international organization on climate change were also members of the GCF Board. Furthermore, the shift to the Low Carbon Green Growth paradigm, which Korea had continued to champion, is one of the most important principles held by the GCF (Schalatek, 2013: p.14). In sum, the outcome owed itself not only to Korea's geographical location and willingness to make financial contributions but also represented the international society's recognition of the country's domestic and foreign efforts.

(3) Coalition Coordinator

It is not easy for a middle power to go up against opposing large powers to lay down its demands and win international society's approval even if the validity of the demands are partially recognized. Accordingly, middle power diplomacy requires building a cooperative network of nations of similar international stature or with common interests on a given issue. A noteworthy example of a coalition of middle powers is the EIG, founded at COP6 in 2000 on the back



of Korea's proposal.

Understanding EIG's uniqueness requires an examination of the power configuration of the UNFCCC. There are six official UNFCCC negotiation groups. EU is the de facto leader of the UNFCCC. The 27 member states that comprise the EU reach a consensus before negotiations and operate as a single political actor at the negotiating table. The Umbrella Group is a loose coalition of eight non-EU industrialized countries at odds with the EU over the operations of the Kyoto Protocol. These two groups make up the developed country bloc with binding emissions obligations. Group of 77 (G77), founded in 1964, is the foremost coalition of developing countries. China has joined forces with this group, representing and championing G77's positions. AOSIS is composed of island nations that are especially vulnerable to the rise in sea level caused by climate change. The LDCs, in the meantime, are the world's 50 poorest countries that lack the resources and means for climate change adaptation (Kasa, Gullberg, and Heggelund, 2008: pp.118-125).

<Table 4> UNFCCC Party Groupings

Negotiation Group	Member States
European Union (EU)	EU's 27 member states
Umbrella Group	Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, United States
Environmental Integrity Group (EIG)	Mexico, Liechtenstein, Monaco, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland
Group of 77/China	G77, China
Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)	43 low-lying and small island countries
Least Developed Countries	50 least developed countries

Source: United Nations Convention on Climate Change, "Party Groupings"

Within this developed countries-versus-developing countries negotiation structure, it was only natural for South Korea to be included in the developing country bloc. Korea was indeed part of G77 and supported coalition's negotiation positions when COP was first launched. However, Korea became a member of OECD and also one of the world's top ten GHG emitters. Korea's developing country status no longer seemed fitting, and pressure was mounting from developed countries for Korea to make emission mitigation commitments. Against this backdrop, Korea opted for a strategy of creating a negotiation group comprised of middle powers that were neither developing nor developed countries and of building a coalition of countries with common interests to take collective action.



South Korea, which belonged neither to the EU or the Umbrella Group of advanced countries nor to the G77 coalition of developing countries, established EIG with Switzerland, Mexico, Lichtenstein, and Monaco⁷ and began participating in negotiations to advance EIG's interests and concerns. With the recognition of EIG as an official negotiating group at COP6, Korea could have participated in formal and informal negotiation meetings. Given that most UNFCCC negotiations take place at negotiation group sessions, forming the EIG and being granted access to these sessions was a major diplomatic feat for Korea.

Since its establishment in 2000, the EIG has adhered to its position of neutrality, striving to maintain an appropriate balance between the developed countries and developing countries negotiation groups. The opening statements of the negotiation groups at COP17 in Durban effectively demonstrate their respective positions. As for the two developed country groups, the EU called for a comprehensive framework to which all members of the international community could agree while the Umbrella Group urged China, India, and other advanced developing countries to take on binding mitigation commitments. The developing countries, on the other hand, emphasized the balance in having those that have polluted the most take responsibility for their actions. EIG, in the meantime, maintained its neutrality and adhered to fundamental principles, siding with neither the developed countries, which stressed capability-based obligations, nor with the developing countries, which held fast to the CBDR principle.

<Table 5> COP17 Opening Statements of the Negotiation Groups

Negotiation Group	Opening Statement
EU	"Durban should address the gap in the level of ambition, a common international accounting system and a process to deliver a new global comprehensive legally-binding framework to be completed by 2015."
Umbrella Group	"We supported a transition towards a climate change framework including all major economies, taking into account countries' respective capabilities."
EIG	"We agree on key elements of an international regime after 2012, We launch a process to further strengthen the regime in the mid-term, We agree on the key elements of a shared vision, including a long-term global goal for emission reductions and a date for peaking of global emissions"
Group of 77/China	"We supported a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol as a part of a balanced and comprehensive outcome for Durban."
AOSIS	"We supported a process to scale up the ambition of mitigation pledges; a second commitment period; a Durban mandate for a legally-binding agreement in accordance with the Bali Action Plan; operationalizing the new institutions established in Cancun; and reviewing the adequacy of the long-term global goal for emission reductions."

Source: Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2011



Then at the meeting of the UNFCCC Ad Hoc Working on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP) in June 2014, EIG expressed support for a legally binding instrument that subjects all member nations to emission reduction commitments. However, it also stated that the commitments must be at ‘different depths,’ thus stressing that the respective circumstances of the nations be taken into consideration:

The EIG calls for a legally binding instrument with all Parties taking appropriate mitigation commitments which include clearly defined targets or actions, under the same rules but at different depths in terms of type of commitment, timing, and level of effort according to CBDR/RC and equity (United Nations Convention on Climate Change, 2014).

In short, EIG has continued to maintain the basic position that it respects the agreements of the UNFCCC and that it supports the creation of a post-Kyoto global regime to combat climate change. At the same time, the group has remained strictly neutral, not expressing clear support for neither the CBDR principle advanced by the developing countries nor the idea of binding commitments commensurate with respective capabilities advocated by the developed countries. As a nation of developing country status but with developed country capabilities, South Korea is assessed to have effectively leveraged EIG, a partnership network bound together by common interests and concerns, to secure the nation’s unique standing, and in so doing, advance its interests.

Although it went largely unnoticed, another coalition-building effort by South Korea is worth examining. It is the Korean-Danish Green Growth Alliance that was signed in May 2011. It was a strategic partnership between ‘first mover’ Denmark and ‘fast mover’ Korea for the latter’s realization of Low Carbon Green Growth. Lars Løkke Rasmussen, the Prime Minister of Denmark at the time, assessed the alliance as follows:

Denmark was a ‘first mover’ on green growth and we have made our country a real life example of how to create economic growth without using more energy. Korea is a ‘fast mover’ on green growth. One thing that we have both understood is that ‘first movers’ and ‘fast movers’ alike cannot afford to rest on their laurels in the race to become the winners of tomorrow’s green economy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, “Strategic Partnership and Green Growth Alliance”).



At the first meeting in 2011, the two nations signed six MOUs, which included those on hydrogen-powered vehicles, fuel cells, energy efficiency, and wind power industry. Another 14 MOUs were concluded at the second meeting in 2012. Particularly noteworthy is that Korea and Denmark sought to generate a synergy effect by signing ten MOUs in science-technology and marine shipping, the two areas of forte for both nations. Leveraging this bilateral environmental partnership, Korea and Denmark also agreed to strengthen cooperation on the global stage on issues of common interest, including turning GGGI into an international organization and declaring support for green growth at the Rio+20 conference. It appears that for Korea, this partnership will be used as a springboard to enter into alliances with diverse first 'green' movers with the goal of elevating Korea's standing in international society.

(4) Norm Diffuser

Middle power diplomacy is always shaped in part by the establishment and diffusion of international norms. As stated before, Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal classify middle powers as catalysts, facilitators, and managers based on their diplomatic behavioral patterns. Managers are described as follows: "Managers emphasize institution-building, creating formal organizations or regimes, and developing conventions and norms (Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal, 1993: p.26). That is to say, one of the defining characteristics of middle power diplomacy is its contribution to building international institutions or developing international norms as regards to global issues. On the climate change front, Korea has not been a norm creator or norm entrepreneur like the EU (Germany and the UK in particular), but as a middle power, it has carried out the role of a norm diffuser.

In terms of norms, it was with the idea of 'green growth' that Korea first stepped to the fore and played an active role in its diffusion. The concept of green growth, which made its debut in January 2000, began circulating in the international community through the World Economic Forum in Davos (*The Economist*, 2000). The adoption of Seoul Initiative for Green Growth at the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (MCED-5) held in Seoul in March 2005 triggered an active discussion on the green growth in all corners of the world, and 'green growth' appears frequently in documents issued by global organizations, including the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), UNEP, OECD, and G20.⁸

The UNESCAP defines 'green growth' as follows:

Green growth can be defined as economic progress that fosters environmentally sustainable, low carbon and socially inclusive development. Pursuing



green growth involves outlining a path to achieving economic growth and well-being while using fewer resources and generating fewer emissions in meeting demands for food production, transport, construction and housing, and energy (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2012: p.17).

In terms of definition, green growth does not appear all that different from sustainable development. Sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need (United Nations General Assembly, 1987).” Sustainable development first appeared in the 1987 “Brundtland Report” (a.k.a. “Our Common Future”) by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) and developed into an international discourse and norm upon its official adoption at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio. International diffusion of ‘sustainable development’ has continued thereafter. As evidenced by the agreement reached at the 2012 Rio+20 conference to develop Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), efforts are ongoing to expand the concept beyond the environment to all areas of human security.

Between the two words that comprise it, sustainable development is a norm that focuses more on ‘sustainability’ over ‘development.’ Green growth as a norm, in the meantime, stresses ‘growth’ over ‘green.’ Green growth, like sustainable development, advocates the position that environmental protection need not come at the expense of economic prosperity. Unlike sustainable development, however, green growth clearly highlights the issue of economic development. The fact is that no attempt has been made to reconcile the inherent conflict posed by the two words (‘sustainability’ and ‘development’). Sustainable developments set forth the proposition that development is to be pursued but alongside efforts to protect the environment, but as regards to the specific means of achieving this, it tends to be equivocal, merely stressing the greater importance of the environment. Green growth, on the other hand, is relatively clear on the notion that ‘going green’ is a way to ‘greater growth.’ Green growth is aimed at preserving energy and resources while also using them efficiently to prevent climate change and mitigate environmental damage. It also stipulates the creation of new national growth engines through research and development on clean energy and green technology and through green job creation. Therefore, if sustainable development is the discourse of environmentalists, green growth is that of policymakers. And if the former is the mother, the latter is the former’s offspring with the same genetic makeup but differing traits (Jacobs, 2013: p.199).

By designating green growth as a national strategy of the highest order, the Lee Myung-bak administration secured Korea’s global leadership on norm diffusion pertaining to green



growth. Upon declaring the adoption of the low carbon green growth strategy in 2008, South Korea has been an active diffuser of green growth on the global stage. Consequently, green growth has come to be considered a concept to which Korea has exclusive ownership and control. Korea's efforts at green growth norm diffusion can be summarized as follows:

<Table 6> Korea's Global Diffusion of Green Growth Strategy

Year	Events
2009	Spearheaded adoption of 'Declaration on Green Growth' at the Meeting of the Council at Ministerial Level
2010	Led adoption of 'Seoul Action Plan' ⁹ at the G20 Seoul Summit
	Founded GGGI
2011	GGGI hosted first annual Global Green Growth Summit in Seoul.
2012	President Lee Myung-back proposed the concept and strategy of green growth at UNCSD (Rio+20) ¹⁰

Particularly noteworthy is the founding of GGGI. Korea devised an excellent strategy to disseminate the green growth model. It set up an international organization specializing in green cooperation on Korean soil. GGGI was the first-ever international organization established under Korean leadership to be housed in Korea. GGGI was founded on June 16, 2010 as a non-profit organization with 18 member nations¹¹ under Article 32 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Korea. It was made an international organization on October 18, 2012 (Global Green Growth Institute, "Organization"). GGGI's goal is the global diffusion of the green growth strategy. The Institute's activities, aimed at capacity-building for the domestic implementation of green growth in developing countries, include the establishment of the National Council on Green Growth, development of green growth policies, and provision of funding assistance. GGGI's mission to disseminate the green growth model kicked off in 2010 in Brazil, Ethiopia, and Indonesia. Its work expanded to Kazakhstan, the United Arab Emirates, and Cambodia in 2011 and then to the Amazon Basin, China, India, Jordan, Mongolia, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, Thailand, and Vietnam in 2012 (Global Green Growth Institute, "Programs"). In recognition of these efforts, GGGI, in less than a year of its status change to international organization, was awarded ODA Eligibility Status¹² at the OECD – Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) meeting on June 13, 2013 (Global Green Growth Institute, "GGGI Receives ODA Eligibility Status").



IV. Conclusion

This research looked at the kinds of diplomatic activities South Korea has carried out to attain its unique role as a middle power in the specialized niche of climate change. Early mover, bridge, coalition coordinator, and norm diffuser were identified as the four roles played by middle powers in world politics, and the paper attempted to show how the specific actions and attitudes Korea adopted in its climate change diplomacy exhibited the characteristics of these roles.

Korea had long maintained a passive observer position on the issue of climate change even upon joining the UNFCCC. However, when the global climate change regime entered into a deadlock situation due to the opposing interests and views of the parties to the UNFCCC, this impasse created a special opportunity or niche in which Korea could take on a leading role. Developed countries were insisting that developing countries make binding GHG emissions mitigation commitments, while developing countries were refusing to do so, citing the historical responsibility that developed countries have to bear for triggering climate change. It was between these two opposing sides that Korea could carve out a place to shine on the global stage. With developing country status, Korea was exempt from legally binding emission mitigation commitments. However, Korea was also an OECD member state and the world's seventh largest CO₂ emitter. In short, Korea found itself somewhere between the two opposite blocs, not quite belonging to either. China, India, and other developing countries were in positions similar to that of Korea. However, while these fellow advanced developing countries held fast to the developing country bloc's position, Korea abandoned its passive stance as of 2008 and turned itself into a leading champion of green growth in the global community. The standoff between developed and developing countries centered on the question of the developing countries' meaningful participation in global efforts to address climate change. Against this backdrop, Korea's 'conversion' to more active engagement came as a surprise to both sides and served as a wakeup call, helping to diffuse some of the tension in the global climate change regime. Korea's role as a green growth norm diffuser, in particular, was welcomed by developed countries and developing countries alike as the concept and practice of green growth not only justifies the importance of environmental preservation but also underscores its economic benefits.

There were four behavioral patterns Korea's middle power diplomacy exhibited in the climate change area, a niche in international politics that Korea homed in on at an opportune moment. First, Korea was an early mover, setting climate change response as the foremost national strategy and setting up a control tower, national plan, and comprehensive law to implement this strategy. Second, Korea played the role of a bridge between developed and de-



veloping countries, siding with neither and proposing measures that would satisfy both sides. The crowning achievement of Korea's bridge diplomacy was the nation's winning bid to host the secretariat of the GCF, the largest green fund that serves as a contact point between funds from developed countries and assistance for developing countries. Third, as a coalition coordinator, Korea served as a hub to rally like-minded states. With other states whose respective national interests did not coincide with the positions set forth by the EU, the Umbrella Group, or the developing country bloc, Korea formed the EIG and has been advancing the unique position of this independent negotiation group. The Green Growth Alliance with Denmark can be regarded as another coalition-building activity. Fourth, Korea succeeded in taking the initiative on the concept of green growth and has undertaken the role of norm diffuser in the global arena. GGGI, the first international organization founded under Korea's leadership, made significant contributions in the diffusion of the green growth model in developing countries. For this, Korea is now recognized as a global green growth leader, and green growth has come to be known in the international society as a distinctive emblem of Korean diplomacy.

In short, Korea's middle power climate change diplomacy can be assessed to have been successful. Korea saw the issue of climate change as a niche where it could spread its diplomatic wings and went for it with full force, leveraging all relevant national capabilities. And the strategy proved to be effective. Korea, which had shown no particular forte in the issue of climate change, used diplomacy to build a national brand image as a green leader and even won the bid to host the GCF secretariat. Korea's case is expected to be the subject of many studies as it is an important example of niche diplomacy.

The question now is whether Korea's climate change diplomacy will be assessed merely as a diplomatic accomplishment of a single administration or come to be representative of Korea as a middle power. For the latter to happen, Korea must be able to demonstrate to the international society its continued and wholehearted commitment to addressing climate change. To this end, domestic-level action is essential. Building international credibility through rigorous internationalization, rather than engaging in diplomatic rhetoric, will be the key to securing middle power leadership in global climate change politics. Furthermore, Korea should present a detailed blueprint regarding its role as a bridge and contribute to creating and expanding a network of like-minded nations from both sides of the current stand-off in order to overcome the current deadlock. These are some of the tasks that lie ahead for Korea's middle power diplomacy. ■



Endnotes

¹ “The OECD asked Yoo to take the chair position for the meeting, highly evaluating Korea’s leadership in green growth,’ a ministry official said. ‘It is the first time for a Korean environment minister to chair the OECD meeting.’”

² Annex B of the Kyoto Protocol includes all UNFCCC Annex I Parties (nations with emission mitigation commitments) except Belarus and Turkey. At the time of COP3, Belarus had not ratified the UNFCCC and Turkey was excluded from Annex I by request.

³ It was during the Lee administration that all the so-called Four Major Laws on Climate Change—Framework Act on Low Carbon Green Growth, Smart Grid Promotion Act, Act on Allocation and Trading of Greenhouse Gas Emissions Allowances, and Green Building Construction Support Act—were enacted.

⁴ Investment in a developing country by a developed counterpart is called ‘bilateral CDM.’ Given that investment in a developing country by another developing country involves only developing nations, it is thus referred to as ‘unilateral CDM.’

⁵ On April 23, 2005, the CDM Executive Board authorized the registration of Cuyamapa hydroelectric project in Honduras as the first unilateral CDM project, thereby giving the official green light to unilateral CDM. As of 2009, unilateral CDM projects accounted for some 70% of all CDM projects.

⁶ The Board was composed of 24 nations, 12 developed and 12 developing. The 12 developed nations were seven EU nations—UK, Sweden, Denmark, France, Germany, Poland and Spain; the US; Australia; Japan; Russia; and Norway. The 12 developing nations were China, Indonesia, and India (3 Asia); Mexico, Belize and Colombia (3 South America); Benin, Egypt, South Africa (3 Africa); Zambia (1 LCDs/Africa); Barbados (1 AOSIS/South America); and Georgia (Other).

⁷ Switzerland and Lichtenstein are non-EU European countries while Mexico, like Korea, is an OECD member state with a developing country status in the UNFCCC.

⁸ UNEP is the only exception, preferring the use of ‘green economy.’

⁹ Article 68 pertains to green growth. “We are committed to support country-led green growth policies that promote environmentally sustainable global growth along with employment creation while ensur-



ing energy access for the poor. We recognize that sustainable green growth, as it is inherently a part of sustainable development, is a strategy of quality development, enabling countries to leapfrog old technologies in many sectors, including through the use of energy efficiency and clean technology. To that end, we will take steps to create, as appropriate, the enabling environments that are conducive to the development and deployment of energy efficiency and clean energy technologies, including policies and practices in our countries and beyond, including technical transfer and capacity building.”

¹⁰ “We need green growth in order to realize sustainable development in response to global challenges, including the economic crisis, the widening gap between the rich and poor and climate change,”

<http://webtv.un.org/search/republic-of-korea-general-debate-1st-plenary-meeting-rio20/1699217315001?term=korea>

¹¹ Australia, Cambodia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ethiopia, Guyana, Indonesia, Kiribati, Mexico, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and Vietnam.

¹² Status of international organizations whose contributions from donor nations are considered ODA.



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