Non-traditional Security Leadership and Cooperation in the Face of Great Power Conflict: The Rise of New Actors

Brendan Howe

East Asia has been dominated in theory and practice by state-centric policy considerations heavily influenced by the great powers. This perspective is threatened by the rise of non-traditional security (NTS) challenges and undermined by great power irresponsibility. These challenges can also, however, represent avenues of opportunity for other actors. The central research question addressed by this article, therefore, is what role can and should be played by newly empowered or recognized actors in addressing NTS challenges, according to policy prescription from more reflectivist approaches to international relations theory? This article utilizes social constructivism and related perspectives to identify how regional middle powers and civil societies can be empowered as agents with a responsibility to innovate in the construction of institutions responsive to NTS challenges.

Keywords non-traditional security, middle powers, disruptive innovation, international commissions, East Asia

Introduction

East Asia (defined here as including both Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia) is a region that has been dominated in theory and in practice by state-centric domestic and international policy considerations heavily influenced by the great powers. This focus by statesmen and academics was previously justified by the absence of interstate war in the "long peace of East Asia" (Kivimäki 2014), the East Asian economic development "miracle" (World Bank 1993), and an "Eastphalian peace" (Uesugi and Richmond 2021) stimulated by a peacefully rising China or another regional leader (Coleman and Maogoto 2013; Ginsburg 2010). Such reasoning has contributed greatly to the concept of an Asia-Pacific Century (Lowther 2013) driven by the great powers of the region and in the region.

This view of the region is, however, increasingly anachronistic. It is threatened

by the rise of non-traditional security (NTS) challenges, including climate change and environmental degradation, as well as COVID-19 and other pandemics, which are not amenable to the rationalist machinations of the great powers, or the policy prescription of traditional state-centric security paradigms. It is undermined by the abdication of responsible leadership by great powers, and by the negative effects of conflict between them, threatening the prospects for an ongoing Eastphalian peace. Finally, NTS challenges, if not properly addressed, can spill over into challenges for the East Asian long peace and miracle of economic development.

These changes in regional security governance certainly present challenges to the dominant theoretical paradigms, and to practical policymaking. They also, however, present opportunities (and responsibilities) for new actors, and require a scholarly reimaging to explain, predict, and prescribe engagement with the new phenomena. The central research question addressed by this paper, therefore, is what role can and should be played by newly empowered or recognized actors in addressing NTS challenges, according to policy prescription from more reflectivist approaches to international relations theory?

New challenges open avenues for activism by powers of middling capacity, beyond the reach of great power hegemony. The rapidly shifting nature of security cooperation and sustainable peacebuilding in the 21st Century presents so-called middle powers with an opportunity to have a far greater impact on international affairs than would be allowed according to traditional, unitary, rational actor model (RAM) perspectives. Furthermore, NTS issues and comprehensive peacebuilding perspectives give both middle powers and non-state-centric civil society organizations (CSOs) the chance to shine and to provide leadership and assistance.

This article will first, therefore, address the theoretical and practical short-comings of traditional peace and security conceptualizations and great power actors in the face of contemporary issues in East Asia. It will consider the inter-dependencies and spillovers between different levels of analysis and suggest new approaches to peace and security that are better able to explain the phenomena and offer alternative policy prescription. The article will introduce the logic of social constructivism and the role of institutions as responses to the new challenges. It will then turn to assess the extent to which new (or newly empowered) actors can, and should, play significantly enhanced roles as norm entrepreneurs in the generation of sustainable peace and comprehensive security. Finally, it will introduce the concept of "disruptive innovation" to the peacebuilding discourse and suggest not only that middle powers and networks of CSOs have a responsibility to disrupt, but also that regional international commissions might be a vehicle for addressing NTS considerations in practice.

Out with the Old

Debates about the prospects for peace and security in East Asia have revolved primarily around two dominant perspectives: a realist "back to the future" vision whereby the end of the Cold War has released previously suppressed indigenous conflicts, and a liberal view whereby complex interdependence has curtailed military rivalry between industrialized states (Buzan and Segal 1994, 3). The continued regional dominance of the neorealist-neoliberal duopoly in theory and practice, despite the rise of competing theoretical perspectives, has been a function of the ongoing primacy of the state in both domestic and international governance in East Asia. Related to this has been the ongoing hegemony of great state powers (both global and regional) despite their abdication of constructive leadership and the systemic security threats posed by their competition.

East Asia has been considered the most Westphalian region in the world (Acharya 2003, 9). That is to say, the region most wedded to traditional, state-centric conceptualizations of security, threat, and peacebuilding. Not only are states considered the main referent object of security, but also security threats have been generally identified from the perspective of the state (Nishikawa 2009). There is no collective security apparatus (beyond the moribund Six Party Talks in Northeast Asia and the ineffectual Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN] Regional Forum), and much of the security architecture is a product of the San Francisco hub-and-spokes system of bilateral security alliances with the US (Calder 2004, 138-9). As such, regional peace and security are more dependent upon great power leadership and cooperation than perhaps anywhere else.

Yet such leadership and cooperation has hitherto been in short supply. Hence, "conventional wisdom on East Asia's prospects carries more pessimism than optimism" (Mahhubani 1995, 102). Richard Betts (1995, 40) called the region "an ample pool of festering grievances, with more potential for generating conflict than during the Cold War, when bipolarity helped stifle the escalation of paro-chial disputes." Aaron Friedberg (1993-94, 107) considered Asia likely to become a "cockpit of great power conflict," and Victor Cha (2012) contends the region remains "ripe for rivalry." East Asia in particular has been considered among the most dangerous and insecure regions, containing colonial and Cold War legacies and several potential flashpoints (Calder and Ye 2010).

Under such conditions, it is perhaps not surprising that great power rivalry between the US and China has intensified, almost to the extent of the struggle for global supremacy between the US and the USSR, albeit with more of a regional focus. Hence, David Shambaugh (2018, 85) has pointed out that despite their deep interdependence and elements of cooperation, the world's two major powers are increasingly locked in a "comprehensive competitive relationship,"

made explicit by the labeling of China and Russia as "strategic competitors" and "revisionist powers." Nuclear weapons can be seen as the ultimate expression of power politics, and regional actors are prominent proponents. Russia and the US have the largest nuclear arsenals in the world, China's complement ranks third, and North Korea has become only the ninth nuclear deterrent-enabled state in the world (Arms Control Association 2021). Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan could go nuclear virtually overnight, only refraining from doing so because of the shelter of the US nuclear umbrella.

In addition, so dramatic have been the impacts of controversies surrounding the administration of US President Donald Trump and its aftermath, that the American democratic polity can be viewed as being in crisis rather than a shining city on the hill, and therefore American soft power contributes less in terms of leadership resources in the region. President Trump's attacks on international organizations (IOs), institutions, and multilateral treaties, revealed their limitations, raising the specter of the US walking away from any treaty, agreement, or institution that it considers not to be in the interests of US citizens. This turning away by the US has been particularly acute in the East Asian region, where only bilateral diplomacy could hold the attention of the previous president, and even then, only sporadically.

Even with the incoming administration of President Joe Biden there is no guarantee of a return of US leadership and contributions to peace and security in the region. At least initially, the Biden administration has signaled an intent to continue the tough line with China, while returning to something akin to the strategic patience of effectively doing nothing about North Korea. Furthermore, despite the much-vaunted "pivot to Asia" under President Barack Obama, the US neglected engagement with the region (beyond hedging over China). A revitalization of such policies, therefore, also bodes ill for regional leadership, especially given that President Biden has inherited so many other diplomatic challenges. In what may only be a one term presidency (even if he is succeeded by another Democrat), it is likely that, with the exception of the need to address China, Asia will once again be put on the back burner.

Neorealist-inspired coercive tactics have been prevalent in the international relations between the great powers and among other states as they attempt to structure the decision-making of the other, whether it be saber-rattling, name-calling, overt threats, or political and economic sanctions. Facing diverse challenges, successive governments in regional states have adopted state-centric national security policies with an emphasis on national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity. The most extreme manifestation of this state-centricity can be found on the Korean Peninsula where the two regimes, North and South, view each other as existential threats; across the Taiwan Strait, between the similarly mutually exclusive regimes of Beijing and Taipei; and in the state-centric security tensions very much in evidence in the East China Sea

and South China Sea (Taylor 2018). Yet even between democratic allies of the US, such as South Korea and Japan, diplomatic relations can be strained at best, and take on power-political overtones.

Meanwhile, from a neoliberal perspective, throughout East Asia a premium has been placed on economic development, with rapid success in this field combined with high levels of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization across the region. Regional developmentalism has been labeled "econophoria," whereby the solution to all governance challenges, whether domestic or international, is sought through the prioritization of economic growth (Buzan and Segal 1998, 107). In East Asia, state-centric macroeconomic development has been described as assuming "cult-like status" (Christie and Roy 2001, 5).

Economic development itself, however, does not automatically lead to an interdependence induced peace between states. Competition for limited pools of resources necessary for development raises the perspective of resource wars. Already tensions are high in the Mekong region of Southeast Asia due to hydro-electric dam construction along the river dramatically impacting the security of those living downstream. Tensions in the South China Sea are as much about marine resources and trade routes as they are about geopolitics. Recent tensions between Japan and South Korea, between the great powers China and the US, and between Russia and the European Union have been amplified by resource competition, trade wars, and economic sanctions.

Competition for markets among the export-orientated economies of East Asia can severely undermine incentives for cooperation between them. It can also impact on strategic policymaking, with lesser powers being caught between a dependence on the US-led Washington economic consensus and San Francisco hub-and-spokes security system, and a dependence on the Chinese market (Kim and Cha 2016). Finally, in the competitive rush to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) to rise up the development status ladder, countries in the region have mortgaged their autonomy, and thus a significant element of their traditional national security, first to the US, then after the 1997 Asian financial crisis, to the International Monetary Fund, and most recently, to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative as manifested in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). There are concerns that AIIB activities could lead to as much insecurity as security promotion within the region (Uhlin 2019, 1).

Thus, even at the traditional state-centric level of analysis championed by the dominant discourses of neorealism and neoliberalism, policymaking by regional governments and leadership by great powers in the region fall well short of guaranteeing national or systemic security. At the NTS level of analysis, however, such policymaking can serve to undermine security at all referent levels, whether global, international, national, or the human security of vulnerable individuals and groups.

The negative consequences of conflictual operating environments and

relationships can spill over both downwards from international and national insecurities to human vulnerabilities, and in the opposite direction. National insecurity (wherein those acting in its name perceive there to be existential threats to the state) may lead to human insecurity (existential threats to the lives of individuals) along various paths. It can divert resources from human development (UNDP 2015). It can create a permissive political circumstance where national security is privileged at all costs (Unger 2012). Furthermore, it is likely to produce and perpetuate an operating environment within which the exceptional use of internal as well as external violence by the state becomes a permanent feature of the state (Suh 2013). The human costs of modern conflicts are of course borne, primarily, by the most vulnerable sections of society (Tirman 2015). Finally, conflict and its consequences can serve as poverty multipliers.

At the same time, the danger of developmentalism and econophoria is that it becomes too easy to get lost in the aggregate numbers game. If, on balance, a country can be demonstrated to be doing better in terms of aggregate measurements of development such as gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, gross national income (GNI) per capita, membership of international clubs of countries, or movement from low income to lower middle income, to upper middle income, to high-income, it is considered more secure, despite the potential impact of related policies on vulnerable individuals and classes lower down the socio-economic scale. With a focus on mega-projects and massive infrastructure development programs reliant on FDI, there is a danger that not only will the people of East Asian countries be sacrificed on the altar of developmentalism, but also that this will negatively impact national security.

In particular, the two greatest contemporary security and governance challenges referred to in the introduction of this article, climate change and environmental security, and the COVID-19 pandemic, have been exacerbated by states following the dictates of national interest as outlined by the dominant regional discourse, and by the abdication of leadership by the great powers. Even though these challenges threaten all classes of actor, and do not respect national power, political sovereignty, territorial integrity, or the borders that are so jealously defended.

The environmental security paradigm has substantially been challenged by the unilateral policy prescriptions and rejection of obligations by the dominant states in the system, with the US, China, Russia, as well as second-tier great powers India and Brazil, all ranking as major contributors to climate change. Furthermore, the world hegemonic leader, the US, has actively obstructed the evolution of the governance paradigm by either refusing to ratify or withdrawing from some of the major international above-mentioned international instruments. Despite the Biden administration performing a late policy U-turn on the issue, American perfidy has not inspired confidence.

Within the region, the econophoric drive for modernization and development

through dominating nature has limited access to clean air, drinkable water, and contaminant-free nutritious food. This insecurity due to reckless development strikes not only at the domestic level in the region, but also at the international, as manifested in the yellow dust in Northeast Asia, the haze in Southeast Asia, and contamination released by the Fukushima nuclear disaster. In addition, weapons production, testing, and storage, as well as the construction of military and naval bases have not only destabilized traditional security in the region through the mechanics of the security dilemma, but they have also significantly impacted the environment.

This selfishness on the part of the major players is not only normatively unjustifiable but is also self-defeating. Ultimately, of course, given that climate change poses an existential threat to the whole of mankind, culminating in an extinction level event wherein the Earth has been made uninhabitable, the national security and interest of all states is impacted. But even before we reach such a catastrophe, climate change has the capacity to dramatically harm the national interest of any state in the system through costs associated with extreme weather events (such as the 2021 heatwaves engulfing much of the Northern Hemisphere), through the increased severity and frequency of natural disasters (storms, flooding, tornadoes, etc.), as well as nature-induced disasters which are precipitated and further exacerbated by the impact of human beings (such as wildfires, droughts, desertification, and deforestation). Rising sea-levels around the world not only threaten the existence of some low-lying island nations, but also pose an increasing threat to some of the world's most prime real estate.

Meanwhile, in trying to coordinate a global response to COVID-19 (and other pandemics), the World Health Organization (WHO) has found itself at the center of the dualistic paradox of international organization, whereby in trying to help the sovereign interstate system function better, the organization poses a challenge to sovereignty. The responses of the three great powers (US, China, and Russia) to the COVID-19 crisis, as well as those of some second-tier powers such as the United Kingdom (UK), Brazil, and India, have left much to be desired in terms of both international and domestic leadership. Indeed, policies in these countries contribute to the overall challenges faced by the WHO, rather than providing adequate support for the organization to carry out its global governance and systemic health security mission (Howe 2020, 18).

Lack of transparency and freedom of information and speech in China allowed pandemics to spread, and critically endangered vulnerable individuals and groups in the country, the region, and across the globe. When the Chinese government has acted, it has been unilaterally, in an authoritarian manner rather than with openness, and it has imposed comprehensive lockdowns that exacerbated socio-economic vulnerabilities. By contrast, agents of governance in the US during the current COVID-19 pandemic were slow to respond to the pandemic out of concern for the impact restrictions would have upon civil

liberties and individual freedoms, and due to anxieties about the economic impact. These concerns have also provided pressure for premature lifting of restrictions. As a result, the US is now the most severely impacted country in the world.

Internationally, China and the US have focused their blame on each other for the impact of COVID-19, resorting to national interest security promotion rather than collective action, and showing inconsistent support and even outright hostility for the mission of the WHO. President Trump threatened to withdraw the US from the WHO, "an unprecedented move that could undermine the global coronavirus response and make it more difficult to stamp out other disease threats" (Ehley and Ollstein 2020). Again, the Biden administration has rejected this policy, but the lack of consistent support for the mechanisms of the liberal world order from its very architect and former chief champion, does little to engender confidence in its future, especially in a region where its hold was already tenuous.

Rich developed countries have overall engaged in vaccine nationalism, whereby governments sign agreements with pharmaceutical manufacturers to supply their own populations with vaccines ahead of them becoming available for other countries. Even though the central banks of the world's major economies mobilized roughly US\$9 trillion to respond to the economic shock of COVID-19, acting swiftly and decisively to protect the interests of their investors, these countries have failed to find the US\$23 billion, or 0.25% of this monetary response needed for global vaccination (Mayta, Shailaja, and Nyong'o 2021). Not only does this seem normatively wrong, but it is also, ultimately, self-defeating. The virus is thriving in regions with low vaccination rates, leading to mutant strains that strike the selfish countries who were only concerned with vaccinating their own people. At present rates of vaccination, the pandemic will continue to rage until at least 2024, and the longer the virus travels, the more often it mutates, and the more viciously it may rebound on the rich countries undermining their vaccination programs (ibid.). Bruce Aylward, Senior Advisor to the Director-General of the WHO has recently claimed that because of vaccine nationalism, the pandemic will "go on for a year longer than it needs to" (BBC 2021).

Hence, both the actions and inactions of states in East Asia have had major negative repercussions. New thinking and courses of action are thus required.

In with the New: Social Constructivism and International Institutions

In contemporary discourse and increasingly in practice, peace and security are contested concepts in terms of the referent object, the scope of issues covered (the degree of securitization), and indeed within specific issues. New thinking on

security has come to the fore, with input from academics and from practitioners in IOs and middle-power states. NTS perspectives and new security challenges have seen the broadening of the scope of enquiry along the x-axis of issues from a strict focus on national survival in a hostile operating environment and questions related to war and peace, to include some or all of the following: a focus on non-military rather than military threats, transnational rather than national threats, and multilateral or collective rather than self-help security solutions (Acharya 2002). Within both security and peacebuilding discourses, there have also been increasing emphases on individual human beings and the planet or global biosphere, corresponding to a bi-directional expansion along the y-axis of referent objects.

Many contemporary threats to national and international systemic security do not lend themselves to the machinations of state-centric rational payoffs espoused by the neo-neo duopoly, revolving as they do around trans-state or sub-state issues such as climate change, environmental degradation, pandemics (including COVID-19), refugee flows and forced migration, poverty, distributive injustices, and natural and, given the role of human agency, nature-induced disasters. These new security challenges and NTS issues threaten national and international/systemic security, but they also threaten the security of vulnerable human beings and groups, individually and collectively (Freedman and Murphy 2018, 1-5). Hence, it is important to go beyond simple security analysis when looking at not only global governance challenges, but also international governance responses.

Reflectivist approaches have, however, rejected the centrality and artificial moral legitimacy of the state in security governance, as well as the war-peace dichotomy, or the consideration of peace being merely the absence of war. Indeed, contemporary theoretical and policy analysis is as much, if not more, concerned with the transformation of conflictual relations within states and societies than between them, especially as intra-state conflicts now vastly outnumber those between states. These understandings have entered mainstream practices, including, among others, at the United Nations (UN), and thus form the true basis of peacebuilding as it is understood in the contemporary discourse.

Social constructivism has assumed prominence in international governance discourse since the 1990s, but its impact in East Asia has been limited by Cold War legacies in the region and the hegemony of the neo-neo duopoly. The new challenges, however, are of such a magnitude, and the failures of traditional paradigms in the face of them so overwhelming, that there is now an opportunity to utilize some of the insights from this and related approaches. Fundamental to constructivism is the proposition that social relations make or construct people into the kind of beings that we are. Conversely, we make the world what it is, from the raw materials that nature provides (Onuf 1998, 59). There is a mutually constructive process whereby people make society and vice versa. Those

empowered to act, the agents, do so within a framework of institutions. Hence, as "recognizable patterns of rules and related practices, institutions make people into agents *and* constitute an environment within which agents conduct themselves rationally" (ibid., 61).

The conduct of international relations, therefore, is not objectively determined by the "brute facts" or "timeless truths" concerning life in a world without an overarching governmental structure—national sovereignty, anarchy, self-help, the security dilemma, etc.—but rather is socially invented or constructed by the actors (Houghton 2007, 28). A subjectivist view of the world in which "anarchy is what states make of it" (Wendt 1992). The constraints of structures, inter-subjectivity, and vested interests may make change unlikely, but at the same time, empowered agents can impact significantly on these institutions. Yet although all those who self-identify or have been identified by others as social constructivists share the assumption that agents and patterns of rules (institutions) are mutually constitutive, in practice, individual scholars often prioritize one over the other (Houghton 2007, 30).

A focus on the impact of institutions, means that living in an international society shapes what we want and, in some ways, who we are through the social norms, rules, understandings, and relationships we have with others. "These social realities are as influential as material realities in determining behavior. Indeed, they are what endow material realities with meaning and purpose" (Finnemore 1996, 128). Constructivists focus on distinctive processes (socialization, education, persuasion, discourse, and norm inculcation) to understand the ways in which international governance develops, and "typically these are complex procedures involving multiple interacting actors that accrue over time and contribute to transformational shifts in perceptions of national identity, international agendas and the presumptive ways by which national interests are to be attained" (Haas 2002, 74). The primary emphasis, therefore, is on how the structure impacts upon the agent.

The nature of the agents is constructed by the rules of the institutions to which they belong, potentially resulting in the civilizing influence of international society (although social constructivists acknowledge that different types of international society can have different impacts on identity and behavior, not all of them positive). Thus, "[i]n the constructivist view, states acknowledge the expectations of appropriate behavior formulated by international organizations as standards of appropriate behavior if they regard themselves as part of the value community of the member states and seek recognition as an equal member by the other member states." (Boekl, Rittberger, and Wagner 1999, 9). Furthermore, "[i]t is through reciprocal interaction that we create and instantiate the relatively enduring social structures in terms of which we define our identities and interests" (Wendt 1992, 406). Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, 904) have pointed out how "state leaders conform to norms in order to avoid the disapproval

aroused by norm violation and thus to enhance national esteem (and, as a result, their own self- esteem)." Thus, social norms, which can be defined as "intersubjectively shared, value-based expectations of appropriate behavior," may serve as independent variables for explanations of foreign policy behavior (Boekl, Rittberger, and Wagner 1999, 4).

NTS agendas have grown in impact and popularity to the extent that they amount to an international security norm, at least from the perspectives of good governance, both domestic and international. Many of these initiatives have been promoted at, through, and by the UN, in the form of international commissions. International commissions are *ad hoc* transnational investigative mechanisms, which can be constituted as either a temporary IO or a non-governmental organization (NGO), aimed at transforming "the assumptions and staid thinking that plague long-standing problems in international relations" (Robertson 2020). They have featured prominently in consideration of NTS issues of global governance and are important manifestations of the type of non-state-centric institution the influence of which has been highlighted by social constructivists in the post-Cold War operating environment.

The Brandt Report focused on development issues and was produced in 1980 by the Independent Commission for International Developmental Issues, first chaired by Willy Brandt (former German Chancellor). It argues for a comprehensive conceptualization of security combining social, economic, and political threats with the more traditional military ones. Likewise, in 1982 the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues (commonly known as the Palme Commission) published its final report, *Common Security*, by which was meant "States can no longer seek security at each other's expense; it can be obtained only through cooperative undertakings." Meanwhile, the 1987 *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*: *Our Common Future*, otherwise known as the *Brundtland Report*, linked aspects of security, development, and the environment in an important international precursor not only to global governance initiatives on human security and human development (addressed later), but also to current considerations of the "Anthropocene," an epoch defined by the influence of humanity upon Earth's geology and ecosystems (Carrington 2016).

In 1992, the Commission on Global Governance was established with support of UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and was co-chaired by Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson, and former Commonwealth Secretary-General Shridath Ramphal. In 1995, it produced the report *Our Global Neighbourhood*, which not only pointed to the potential limitations of state sovereignty, but also provided governance benchmarks and a standardized definition:

> Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which

conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest.

The Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons was initiated by Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating in November 1995 to deliberate on issues of nuclear proliferation and how to rid the world of nuclear weapons. The result of the commission was published in August 1996. The report was presented to the UN by Alexander Downer, Australia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, on September 30, 1996, and a few months later at the Conference on Disarmament in January, 1997.

In 1999, and again in 2000, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appealed to the General Assembly to develop a new consensus on how to approach the issues of governance failure and practices that shock the conscience of humankind, to "forge unity" around the basic questions of principle and process involved. In response to the humanitarian crises and governance failures of the 1990s, the Government of Canada and a group of major foundations announced at the 2000 UN General Assembly session the establishment of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) to discuss obligations of those who govern, and to deal with questions of when to intervene, under whose authority, and how to intervene when these obligations are not met. The 2001 final report of ICISS introduced the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) paradigm, expressing a willingness to take timely and decisive collective military action for the protection of human security, through the UN Security Council, when peaceful means prove inadequate.

Meanwhile, the Commission on Human Security was established in January 2001 under the chairmanship of Sadako Ogata (former UN High Commissioner for Refugees) and Amartya Sen (Nobel Laureate in Economics) in response to the UN Secretary-General's call at the 2000 Millennium Summit for a world "free from want" and "free from fear." The final report of the Commission, *Human Security Now*, defines human security as protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations, and creating political, social, environmental, economic, military, and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood, and dignity. The report was, therefore, an attempt to respond to both old (traditional) and new (NTS) worries and to the underlying reasons for concern.

These international commissions have helped overcome and transform outdated thinking on international security, development, disarmament, environmental protection, global governance, nuclear non-proliferation, and humanitarian intervention. The reports produced by the commissions are still guiding documents for academics and policymakers in the search of viable

solutions to complex problems. There are three important take-aways from these initiatives. First, they all attempt to employ a holistic approach to the challenges of international governance, encompassing traditional and NTS agendas, building broadly along the x-axis of issues. Second, they challenge the artificial legitimacy and centrality of the state, building along the y-axis of a referent object. Third, they reject the dominance of great powers, demonstrating the considerable initiating and agenda-setting potential of middle powers (Germany, Sweden, Norway, Australia, Canada) and prominent members of international civil society.

Hence, those entities considered to meet the requirements of agency (actors empowered by institutions) have expanded in number and influence in the post-Cold War operating environment. The next section deals with agency from a theoretical (socially constructed) perspective, and the practical policy input of some of the newly empowered agents in the East Asian region.

In with the New: Agents as Norm Entrepreneurs

In 2016, the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council adopted twin resolutions laying out a vision for sustaining peace and described the peace agenda in the most comprehensive and encompassing way to date. These resolutions noted that sustaining peace should be broadly understood as both a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account, which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict. Building on these resolutions, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a UN humanitarian assistance forum, has highlighted that, crises, whether they manifest as conflicts, disasters, or socio-economic shocks often cannot be solved by one set of actions (or actors) alone, and that in addressing them humanitarian, development, and peace initiatives all have an important role to play (IASC 2020, 1).

Actor-focused social constructivism focuses on agency, considering the role of agents, how agents are drawn together through inter-subjective beliefs and understandings, and the nature of human agency itself. As pointed out by Nicholas Onuf (1989, 1), "[P]eople always construct, or constitute, social reality, even as their being, which can only be social, is constructed for them." This implies a different understanding of the process of socialization, but also references concepts related to ideas, identity, and acculturalization. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998, 895-98) have also, therefore, pointed out the importance of the role of "norm entrepreneurs," illustrating how "many international norms began as domestic norms and become international through the efforts of entrepreneurs of various kinds," thereby undermining the traditional rationalist billiard ball image of international interaction.

Finnemore and Sikkink's examples of human agency and the social construction of inter-subjective meanings are primarily (at least subjectively) positive, relating as they do to the propagation of human rights regimes. As such they, and other "conventional constructivists" may be seen as espousing ideas which are compatible with cosmopolitanism (Hopf 1998, 171). The social constructivists of the Copenhagen School, however, warn us of a potentially negative process of socialization they term "securitization," whereby an issue is first politicized (requiring state action within the standard framework of the political system), and then securitized (requiring emergency action outside the boundaries of the established norms), which in turn frames the issue as one of an existential threat to a referent object (Emmers 2007, 110-13). It could be argued that securitization is also a self-fulfilling prophecy in that an issue labeled and framed as a security problem becomes such, warranting critical action as recognized by both the actor and the audience (Buzan and Waever 2004).

Here, then, we reach a telling contribution to the peacebuilding discourse from the perspective of social constructivism. Ideas matter, because they construct and constitute both identities and interests (Houghton 2007, 29). For Finnemore and Sikkink (2001, 393), "the most important ideational factors are widely shared or 'intersubjective' beliefs, which are not reducible to individuals." From the top down, peace can be socially constructed through the socialization of states, or their elites, or through a norm "cascade" or "spiral" model, whereby they permeate down through conflictual levels of society (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999). On the other hand, peace can be threatened by unscrupulous norm entrepreneurs or "securitizers" harnessing discontent among a disaffected or disadvantaged in-group and directing it against the "others."

This is particularly the case regarding a third great contemporary NTS challenge, the refugee and forced migration humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian crises have become more protracted, with an average length of displacement of 17 years (IASC 2016, 1). They have also become intractable, involving complex interactions among social, economic, environmental, climatological, geographical, human rights, political, and security drivers, and the consequences of these interactions. Most of the 125 million people currently requiring humanitarian assistance have been affected by violent conflict, and displacement has reached the highest level since World War II at 65 million, with 86% of resources requested through UN humanitarian appeals destined to humanitarian action in conflict situations (ibid.). Yet an ongoing focus on national security, especially in the East Asian region, has seen the existence of these vulnerable individuals and groups as a threat to be countered, or politicized, rather than as human beings in need of help posing demands on our shared humanity. Hence, although NTS issues represent opportunities for positive activism by new agents, it must also be borne in mind that they can also lead to the construction of additional security threats through negative activism.

To reiterate, however, the negative consequences of conflictual operating environments and relationships can spill over both downwards from international and national insecurities to human vulnerabilities, and in the opposite direction. Desperate conditions among the disaffected youth of refugee camps or inner cities have the potential to produce fertile breeding grounds for violent crime, religious extremism, or terrorism. Indeed, the root of many conflicts in the contemporary international operating environment can be found in the sub-state level of domestic societal tensions, whether relating to the frustration of basic human needs, lack of distributive justice, structural violence, or expectancy gaps (Howe 2020, 16). Poverty serves as a health insecurity multiplier, and the poor are also the most vulnerable to the consequences of environmental degradation. Furthermore, poverty often precludes sustainable development practices, and natural disasters are exacerbated by environmental degradation (Howe 2018). Thus, a vicious cycle of insecurity exists beyond the reach of state-centric security models and policymaking, and it is not only morally reprehensible to prioritize the rights and interests of artificial political creations (states) over those of individual human beings, but also potentially self-defeating.

For John Paul Lederach (1998, 20, 94), peace is a dynamic social construct that requires continuous maintenance, and as the greatest prospects for sustaining peace in the longterm are rooted in the local people and their cultures, they should be seen as resources, not recipients. Oliver Richmond (2007) emphasizes the importance of emancipation and local ownership of peacebuilding projects. The IASC has also emphasized that peace is not only about the absence of violence but also about sustaining peaceful societies, and that positive peace comprises the attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. "It implies creating social relationships that contribute to mutual well-being, creating an optimum environment in which human potential can flourish," including thriving economies, inclusive development, low levels of inequality, and higher levels of resilience (IASC 2020, 1, 6).

As mentioned above, the major global institutions of international commissions, especially those related to climate change and environmental security have often come about as the result of activism by states not counted in the numbers of the great powers, or through the functioning of agencies of international civil society. In addition, many of the world's emergency relief and post-conflict reconstruction operations such as demining and clearance of other explosive remnants of war, are spearheaded by civil society non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Oxfam, Save the Children, Medicine San Frontiers, the Hazardous Area Life-Support Organization Trust, and the Mines Advisory Group.

Furthermore, the major global human security programs have been initiated by the medium-ranked powers, including Canada, Japan, and Norway, in collaboration with the UN as the manifestation of global society. Human security as a governance paradigm focuses on understanding global vulnerabilities at

the level of individual human beings, incorporating methodologies and analysis from several research fields including strategic and security studies, public administration, development studies, human rights, international relations, and the study of international organizations. It exists at the point where these disciplines converge on the concept of protection. Hence, the international community has begun to see security threats not only *between* but also *within* states and focus on people in addition to states (WHO 2002, 218).

The UN Development Programme's (UNDP) *1994 Human Development Report* has been viewed as the seminal text for this governance paradigm. This report stressed the need for a broad interpretation of human security, defining it as "freedom from fear" *and* "freedom from want," and further characterized human security as "safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life—whether in homes, in jobs or in communities" (UNDP 1994, 23). According to this conceptualization, human security governance is multidimensional, preventive, and people-centered (ibid., 22-23).

At the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, Kofi Annan, then Secretary-General of the UN, took up the call of freedom from fear and freedom from want and placed these concepts center stage for the global governance mission. He stated that the concept of human security was much broader than just "the absence of violent conflict" and embraced human rights, good governance, access to education, and health care. He argued that the freedom of future generations was another necessary and interrelated building block for human security, thereby further tying the concept to climate change considerations (Annan 2000). Thus, human security, and a human-centered governance perspective are closely related to NTS considerations. The key distinction, however, is that human security refers to the changing primacy of the referent object from state to individual, whereas NTS refers to threats to all levels of the referent object posed by phenomena other than states that also disregard national boundaries.

In the field of pandemic response, and at the WHO, the roles of middle powers and CSOs are also prominent. While the US may be the largest donor, the top ten is rounded out by three middle-ranked powers (UK, Germany, and Japan), four CSOs (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, GAVI Alliance, Rotary International, and National Philanthropic Trust), and two IOs (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and European Commission) (WHO 2020). In terms of core voluntary contributions, which are fully unconditional (flexible), meaning the WHO has full discretion on how these funds should be used to fund the programmatic work of the Organization, the dominance of small and medium-ranked powers, as well as CSOs, is even more stark. In order of support, we find the UK, Sweden, Norway, Australia, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, Luxembourg, France, the Estate of Mrs. Edith Christina Ferguson, Spain, the Estate of the Late Marjory Miller

Thompson, Monaco, and Miscellaneous (ibid.).

Given the inadequate responses of the great powers (US, China, and Russia), the COVID-19 crisis has thrust the responses of middle powers, such as South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand, Greece, and Israel, into the spotlight. Four of the most successful responses to the COVID-19 crisis have come from East Asian middle powers and their civil societies, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Vietnam. It has been argued that Vietnam, while a middle power that has demonstrated extraordinary success in this field, does not represent a good NTS model as its achievements have been built on repression (Hayton and Ngheo 2020). Similar charges (albeit to a lesser extent) could be leveled at Singapore. Taiwan is a democracy, and so is well-suited to such a role, but unfortunately, the traditional power leverage of the People's Republic of China has so far proven sufficient to keep the Republic of China out of global governance institutions, regardless of the NTS contributions Taiwan could make. South Korea, however, is not faced with the same sort of limitations, and indeed, on other NTS issues, middle power activism even represents an opportunity for rapprochement with Japan.

East Asian middle powers operate under different strategic constraints than those of the Western middle powers which have hitherto dominated the global agenda-setting of international commissions. To gain more recognition, and thereby more diplomatic bang for their bucks (or Won or Yen), they should look to play a more independent regional leadership role in NTS affairs. Indeed, such avenues present East Asian middle powers with a noble opportunity to do something that is not only normatively right and beneficial to others, but also in their national strategic and security interests (Lee 2014).

The next section assesses the contributions of two of the leading non-great power norm entrepreneurs in East Asia in contemporary and future terms. It also discusses why these actors are of particular importance, and the role played by regional civil society actors. Finally, it offers policy prescription for norm entrepreneurs in the East Asia to address the rise of NTS and even traditional security challenges in the region.

New Actors, New Preachers, and NTS

Notions of what it is to be a middle power are essentially contested, as indeed are conceptualizations of measurements of power and their aggregation. Thus, a middle power can be described as one that has somewhat middling access to resources, pursues strategies appropriate to middlepowerism, and/or has a modest ability to impact on the external operating environment (Howe 2017). Middle powers lack "compulsory power," the military resources to dominate others or the economic resources to bribe countries into adopting policies that

they would not otherwise pursue. Yet they differ from the small or "system ineffectual" states which have little or no influence. They are, potentially, "system affecting states" which can have a significant impact within a narrower policy area, or in conjunction with others (Vom Hau, Scott, and Hulme 2012). This also differentiates them from another class of understudied agents, what has become known as the "rising powers," which may ultimately have the capacity to act as great powers or have already newly arrived at this level (Hameiri, Jones, and Heathershaw 2019). This conceptualization belongs more appropriately to the traditional, hierarchical power-based measurement of international actors rather than that belonging to the social constructivism cannon.

Furthermore, behavioral studies of "middlepowermanship," wherein status as a middle power is conferred in accordance with behavior rather than size have focused on policy initiation and advocacy in the areas of peace and multilateralism (Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal 1993; Rudderham 2008). This behavioral definition not only, as described above, excludes authoritarian or hybrid regimes in the region which could otherwise be considered, such as Vietnam, Singapore, and Thailand, but also democratic Indonesia which operates much more in accordance with the traditional power hierarchical models of foreign policy, and geopolitically hamstrung Taiwan. In terms of norm entrepreneurship, therefore, regional actors of middling capacity but humanitarian policy aspirations come down to Japan and South Korea, if Australia is excluded on geographic and cultural grounds.

While historically it has been seen as more of a great power, Soeya (2012) explicitly categorizes Japan as a middle power, due to its unidimensional influence on world affairs. Kent Calder (1988, 518-28), the originator of the "reactive state" hypothesis, downgrades Japan even further than middle power status, seeing the country as occupying the unique position of having the power potential of a mid-range European state, yet the political leverage of much smaller and weaker reactive states. But, as has been demonstrated elsewhere (Howe 2010), Japan is much more proactive in NTS areas. Japan has been a major advocate of human security promotion through development assistance, and indeed is the largest contributor to UN efforts in this field.

Given internal and external structural constraints on the use of force, Japan has consistently tried to pursue its foreign policy through economic means, such as ODA and foreign direct investment and loans, rather than by military means. Indeed, these anti-military, pro-economic norms have become characteristic of Japanese foreign and security policy (Berger 1993, 119-50). Human security was introduced to the mainstream of Japanese foreign policy by Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi in 1998, after the Asian financial crisis. The crisis had a devastating impact on Asia's economy, increasing poverty and political instability and underscoring the crucial need for social safety nets for the poor and for a new understanding of security, focusing on Asian peoples rather than states.

Hence, Obuchi committed to help Asian countries overcome crises and to

assist socially vulnerable people (Obuchi 1998). He emphasized his perception of human security as being people- rather than state-centric, and that his understanding of human security was analogous to that of the UNDP, comprising "a comprehensive view of all threats to human survival, life and dignity" and as one of the three areas on which Asia should focus for a "century of peace and prosperity" (ibid.). The speeches in which Prime Minister Obuchi made these statements laid the foundation for human security as the main pillar of Japan's foreign policy agenda. Japan's developmental assistance has been characterized as a needs-based approach which differs significantly from the rights-based approach that typically characterizes the Western approach to assistance. And this is one of the reasons that Japanese aid is perceived as being politically more neutral in East Asia and consequently more acceptable.

Meanwhile, on the thirtieth anniversary of the accession of South Korea to membership status at the UN, it is appropriate first to recognize that the country has grown from being the host of the largest UN enforcement operation to date, to being a major contributor to international peacekeeping operations (PKOs). Seoul's support for UN PKOs "conveys the message of reciprocating international assistance it received after 1945," as well as a commitment to the maintenance of peace in the international community as a middle power (Chung 2010, 101; Ko 2012, 296). The Korean military has contributed substantially to humanitarian operations. South Korea has been part of the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams since 2003 and the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group since 1999. Since Korea specializes in search and rescue efforts, it has participated in the OCHA-administered Asia Pacific Humanitarian Partnership since its establishment in 2004. South Korea has also been at the forefront of "green growth" initiatives. President Lee Myung-bak founded the Global Green Growth Institute in 2010, and this was later converted into an international treaty-based organization in 2012 at the Rio+20 Summit.

Although the South Korean government rarely uses the term "human security" in official documents, it has embraced the concept's implications for ethical foreign and domestic policymaking. One recent explicit use of the term came in President Moon Jae-in's remarks on his third anniversary in office (Moon 2020). The current Moon Jae-in Administration has embraced the normative governance themes of "responsibility," "multilateralism," and "values," promising to promote them at both the international and domestic levels. The 2017 Five-year Plan for the Administration of State Affairs unveiled a vision of "A Nation of the People, a Just Republic of Korea." Five policy goals were set related to this vision, which included both domestic and foreign policy elements: "[A] Government of the People, an Economy Pursuing Mutual Prosperity, a Nation Taking Responsibility for Each Individual, Well-balanced Development across Every Region, and a Peaceful and Prosperous Korean Peninsula." To achieve these goals, South Korea has established twenty policy strategies and one hundred

policy tasks, including the aspirational "Northeast Asia Plus Community" of responsibility project (Government of the ROK 2017). Free from neo-imperial baggage, Korean assistance is also often more welcome than that from Western donors.

New, non-state actors, NGOs, CSOs, and pressure and protest groups, are increasingly influential, not only in the implementation of good governance on the ground, but also, empowered by the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution, in influencing those who govern at both the domestic and international levels. Hence, Brian Hocking (2005, 29) points to a new "network" model of diplomacy, in which publics are "direct participants in the shaping of international policy and, through an emergent global civil society, may operate through or independently of national governments."

Even in Westphalian East Asia, which is also the most connected region of the world, governance may be viewed increasingly as a two-level game (Shambaugh 2008). What Nyan Chanda (2008, 307) refers to as the "New Preachers," NGOs and CSOs, as well as community activists, have sprouted in many countries in the region to uphold humanitarian causes and issues, and to pressure governments and corporations. These activists have also linked with international bodies and fellow activists in other countries for coordination and support, thus the authoritarian state's efforts to maintain its power are challenged by the mutually reinforcing trends of the constant diffusion of information and the rise of civil society activism (Chanda 2008, 311). Even in East Asia, therefore, the re-configuration of administrative sovereignty has decentralized and delegated policy and its administration to multiple governance actors, some domestic, some transnational, some regional, and some global (Maloney and Stone 2019, 105).

The reason that many countries in East Asia outperformed those in the West on virtually all metrics in terms of dealing with COVID-19 was primarily because of societal rather than government reactions. Due to previous pandemic scares, preparations were already in place to ramp up dramatically the production of tests, masks, and personal protective equipment, but populations were already aware of the dangers such pandemics pose, and willing to accept limitations on their freedoms. People in the region are already used to wearing masks due to the pollution and are willing to accept a degree of invasiveness in their lives due to national security considerations. The successful measures, such as contact-tracing, mass-testing, and targeted lockdowns, could perhaps only have been implemented swiftly to such a degree in this region, due to the shared social value-system, across a broad geographical area, and taking in a wide range of governance models.

Members of global civil society are the most vociferous proponents of climate action, and critics of those who govern when they fail to address the crisis adequately. Since 2018, the strongest voice on climate change has been (then 15-year-old) Greta Thunberg, and the ICT revolution combined with increased

receptiveness to non-state actors at the level of international governance, has given her a global stage. NGOs and CSOs are also the first responders when natural and nature-induced disasters occur, and as such need to be further empowered in terms of governance contributions and input. Finally, civil society actors are key to addressing human vulnerabilities at all stages of the journey for refugees and forced migrants.

At the same time, however, we must recognize the dangers of increased governance input from civil society empowered by the democratization of information through the ICT revolution. Vaccine sceptics, climate change deniers, and those peddling the false narrative of the "threat" posed by refugees, can all have a significant negative effect on public perception and government policy formation. Human insecurity for the most vulnerable individuals and groups can be generated by the words and actions of those campaigning against them. Hence, even those seeking vaccines are sometimes forced to do so surreptitiously to avoid condemnation from neighbors, and shopworkers can face abuse for adhering to policies regarding mask-wearing (Elamroussi 2021). Groups campaign against the supposed threat to jobs posed by green governance initiatives (Jones 2021). Genocide and ethnic cleansing can be triggered through social media, as has been the case with the Rohingya in Myanmar (Milmo 2021).

Furthermore, while East Asian middle powers and their societies are increasingly engaged with consideration of NTS issues, there may still be significant divergence from supposed universal normative understandings. While Asian states have signed up to the relevant international legislation and participate actively in the institutions, and despite rejection of the so-called Asian values discourse by the members of East Asian societies, there remains a difference of interpretation of key norms between East Asia and the West. Essentially, the West adheres to a narrow freedom from fear interpretation of responsibilities under the human security paradigm, but an interventionary interpretation of the R2P, with the two being closely linked. In East Asia, the linkage between the two is rejected, and a broad conceptualization of human security along with a non-interventionary understanding of the R2P dominates (Howe 2019, 184).

What then can and should the regional middle powers and their societies do to promote solutions to NTS challenges? First, rather than lament geostrategic inadequacies and challenges, it would benefit regional actors to divert at least some of their resources to exploring solutions to seemingly intractable challenges through radical NTS thinking. In business theory, the term "disruptive innovation" was coined to describe an innovation that creates a new market and value network and eventually disrupts an existing market and value network (Christensen 1997). Lingfei Wu, Dashun Wang, and James A. Evans (2019) later generalized this term to identify disruptive science and technological advances. Here it is proposed that we adopt the term in a more positive way to apply to the radical out of the box thinking and practices needed to address both traditional security

and NTS challenges in East Asia. These would include but would not be limited to regional, as opposed to global, international commissions.

Such commissions could be launched on such varied issues as NTS challenges like regional pandemic response, transnational pollution (yellow dust in Northeast Asia and haze in Southeast Asia), regional refugee flows (North Korea, Myanmar, and potentially Afghanistan), disaster risk reduction, traditional security issues such as nuclear proliferation, governance failure (Myanmar), the South China Sea dispute, and those issues which bridge two challenges, such as resource and water security. There are numerous advantages to taking this type of institutional approach. First, it would empower new East Asian agents. Second, it would remove the great power tensions from NTS security promotion. Third, it would allow for spillover from NTS problem solving to traditional security de-escalation and confidence building by establishing a non-threatening, non-confrontational cooperative culture of *yes-ability* in the region.

Conclusion

East Asia has been dominated by traditional state-centric security perspectives and policies, as well as conflictual relations between the great powers. Despite what has been called the Eastphalian peace, whereby overt interstate war has been avoided, these policies and powers have failed to construct a truly sustainable peace or comprehensive security regime. Conflicts in the region remain frozen or latent, and relations are vulnerable to deterioration at any time. Great powers impacting the region appear to have dealt particularly badly with NTS issues.

On the other hand, new perspectives have evolved to address NTS issues and intractable conflicts of interests in international affairs. International commissions have been the chief instruments of international governance used to address new challenges, and the driving forces behind them have been middle powers and prominent members of international society. To date, these middle powers and actors have been overwhelmingly Western-centric. Nevertheless, such mechanisms would seem to be a particularly good fit for Asian middle powers trying to get more bang for their diplomatic bucks under conditions of geostrategic constraints.

The processes associated with international commissions already have their regional counterparts and precursors in the Eminent Persons Groups and Track 2 diplomacy of ASEAN. Initially, even the ASEAN Regional Forum, incorporating similar methodologies, also fared well, especially in relation to the creation of a regional arms register. But the effectiveness of this Bangkok-founded organization was subsequently undermined by the introversion of regional states following the fallout from the Asian financial crisis, and Thailand's own lapse back into authoritarian governance. Instead, we could perhaps look toward Singapore's multi-track Shangri La Dialogue as a model, or even a vehicle for regional

commissions.

Likewise, promotion of human-centered NTS initiatives would seem to be the ideal course of action to realize the noble opportunity afforded by the contemporary security and governance operating environment. Finally, such disruptive innovation by East Asian actors not only offers the possibility of overcoming longterm regional security challenges, both traditional and non-traditional, while promoting a route to eventual regional security cooperation, but it also offers a pathway to extra-regional cooperation with other middle powers and their regions.

Acknowledgements

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Brendan Howe is Dean and Professor at Ewha Womans University GSIS. His research focuses on traditional and non-traditional security in East Asia, human security, comprehensive peacebuilding, and middle powers. He has authored, co-authored, or edited more than 90 related publications, including *The Niche Diplomacy of Asian Middle Powers* (2021), *UN Governance: Peace and Human Security in Cambodia and Timor-Leste* (2020), *Regional Cooperation for Peace and Development* (2018), and *The Protection and Promotion of Human Security in East Asia* (2013). Email: bmg.howe@gmail.com