

# Classifying Middle Powers based on their Regional and Multilateral Roles

## Differentiating Middle Power Enforcers, Assemblers and Advocators

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**Abstract**—This article tends to examine the roles of middle powers in regional and multilateral affairs, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the currently debatable ‘middle power’ concept in international relations. Middle powers are states with moderate influence and strategic importance as a part of the international system, as they are able to implement policies to distinguish their identity without relying on decisions made by great powers. The writer argues that based on their most prominent power resource and foreign policy practices, middle powers could be classified into three categories, i.e. Enforcers, Assemblers, and Advocators. Firstly based on Realism, middle power Enforcers possess adequate hard power resources, high economic development, and are capable of deploying their forces to ascertain regional geostrategic domination; for instance China and Russia. Secondly in line with Neo-Liberalism, middle power Assemblers implement diplomatic behavior to establish regional institution, engage in long term mutual consultation to enhance regional trust and initiate peaceful dispute settlement between regional member states; such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey. Finally relevant to Constructivism, middle power Advocators have prominent soft power capabilities, launch branded foreign policies on low-political issues, and play leadership role on *ad hoc* coalitions in multilateral forums; for example Australia, Canada and South Korea. This article concludes that ‘middle power’ is not merely an academic concept, but by understanding their middle power resources, states would be able to develop practical foreign policies in regional and multilateral affairs.

**Keywords**—middle power, enforcer, assembler, advocator

### I. INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to examine how middle power states’ power resources and foreign policy practices influence their regional and multilateral roles. Presently, the academic world hasn’t established a universally accepted definition of the ‘middle power’ concept [1]. Originally in 1589, Botero had coined the idea of ‘medium power’ to describe states capable of fulfilling their necessities to survive without relying on other states [2]. Afterwards in 1757, Malby came up with the term ‘secondary power’ referring to states which became territorial barricades against stronger states during the balance of power era [2]. Nevertheless since the end of the Cold War, a state’s power is no longer solely measured by hard power resources such as military and economic capabilities [3].

Besides that, there is also soft power which derived from culture, contribution to the establishment of attractive political values and morally legitimate policies which are generally accepted by other parties [4].

Currently, there are at least three different approaches which tend to identify whether or not a state is a middle power. Primarily from traditional perspective, the term ‘middle power’ refers to states with economic and military capabilities which are lower than great powers, but more advanced compared to smaller states [5]. Even so, there are no clear limits of variables and indicators which could specifically determine whether a middle power is more or less powerful than others. Holbraad [2] tried to rank middle powers based on their gross national product (GNP) and population size, yet those two indicators keep on changing [6]. For example, Soviet Union was previously a great power, but today Russia might be considered as a middle power as a part of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

In contrast, Cooper, Higgot and Nossal explained that middle powers undergo progressive stages starting from being a Catalyst, Facilitator and finally Manager [7]. Primarily, a Catalyst initiated other states to gather through diplomacy. Secondly, Facilitator organized coalition building on certain issues which resulted in declarations, although not necessarily through a formal institutional structure [7]. Finally, Manager develops an institution and norms for confidence building, dispute settlement, and implementing proposed programs with a check-and-balance mechanism [7]. However, this approach did not include the availability of middle powers’ hard and soft power resources which in reality could determine whether a state prefers to act as a Catalyst, Facilitator, Manager, or even other possible roles.

Finally, the behavioral perspective identifies middle powers by their diplomacy which attempt to initiate coalition building in multilateral cooperation [8]. This means, middle powers tend to exercise diplomacy on international low-political issues to distinguish their identity and avoid dependency to great powers’ foreign policies [9]. For instance, Scandinavian states were known for their active effort in initiating multilateral coalition on human security issues [10], but might not be considered as middle powers today [11]. Besides that, this approach was based Glazebrook’s 1945 observation on Canada as the earliest middle power, which

needs to be developed with clearer variables and indicators to examine middle powers today [12].

Irrefutably, the current academic approaches tend to examine a state's status as either constantly a middle power or not a middle power at all, despite the fact that their foreign policies keep on changing [6]. Consequently, the middle power concept cannot accurately explain the correlation between a state's middle power status and how it contributes towards foreign policy making [13]. Distinctively, this article argues that middle powers have three separated regional and multilateral roles of Enforcer, Assembler and Advocate which are chosen as their area of foreign policy expertise based on their most prominent power resource.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

This article is a descriptive-quantitative type of research which applies deductive logic, by using the theory to guide research analysis and points out several arguments from the case [14]. Furthermore, this article applies non-random sampling method or quasi-experiment by purposely selecting specific samples from a population [15]. In this context, this research selects eleven middle power states, i.e. Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey [5], [16]; which represent all possible middle powers in the world today, which are unknown by number and debatable by character.

Those middle powers are selected based on their membership on coalitions such as BRICS, MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia), and Group of Twenty (G-20) major economies. Meanwhile, Canada is selected due to being the first state to adopt the middle power status [17]. The next step is to classify those states' most prominent middle power resources into Realist, Neo-Liberalist and Constructivist categories to find their variables and indicators.

Primarily, this article argues that it's more suitable to use Realism instead of Neo-Realism to examine middle power's role. Realism believes that the international system runs based on distribution of power without absolute authority in an anarchic condition [18]. Consequently, states need to utilize hard power resources to fulfill national interest and ensure their survival [19]. This idea is relevant to middle power's tendency to conduct unique foreign policies, due to not being the strongest state in the international system [9]. In contrast, Neo-Realism is more suitable to examine great powers' role, which emphasizes the importance of having structural power to shape the frameworks of interstate relations for obtaining absolute gain [20].

Additionally, this article prefers using Neo-Liberalism rather than Liberalism. On one hand, Liberalism believes that establishing institutions would sustain cooperation and prevent interstate conflicts. Meanwhile, Neo-Liberalism believes that institutions might support cooperation, but does not guarantee its sustainability unless there is mutual benefit for each member state [19]. Conclusively besides building an

institution for cooperation, a middle power also needs to promote agreeable norms to be followed among its member states [18].

Finally, this article argues that Constructivism is also suitable to examine middle power's role, which views power as influence of action [18]. According to Nye [21], soft power is an ability to reach certain goals by influencing the choices of other parties using agenda setting, persuasion and attraction [1]. Therefore, middle powers could conduct their role in regional or international institutions effectively when there is a set of norms accepted by its member states [6]. By having international credibility, the middle power will also take actions on behalf of its regional interests in global forums [22].

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This article argues that 'middle power' is not merely a categorical concept, but consists of variables and indicators which enable states to practically determine their foreign policy strategies based on their prominent power resources; whether hard power, diplomatic behavior or soft power. In brief, middle powers are states with self-sufficient hard power resources, attractive soft power and important regional role. Accordingly, this article differentiates middle powers' various regional and multilateral roles as Enforcers, Assemblers and Advocators:

TABLE I. MIDDLE POWER ROLES BASED ON THEIR RESOURCES

| Approach (middle power resources)    | Regional or Multilateral Role  | Middle Power's Nature in relation to other states in its region   |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Realism (hard power)                 | Enforcer <sup>a</sup> (China & Russia)   | Fear, able to enforce policy, lack of trust, smaller powers dependent to middle power   |
| Neo-Liberalism (diplomatic behavior) | Assembler <sup>b</sup> (Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa & Turkey) | Trust, long term mutual consultation, institutionalized cooperation, no veto, lack of force, non-interference   |
| Constructivism (soft power)          | Advocator <sup>c</sup> (Australia, Canada & South Korea)                         | Issue-based coalition, <i>ad hoc</i> , beyond regional diplomacy, short term influence, needs to be frequently renewed through agreements and protocols |

<sup>a</sup>. Enforcer's variables (Pant 2012, 239 & Mankoff 2009, 26-27)

<sup>b</sup>. Assembler's variables (Burgess 2013, 291; Wanger 2010, 334 & Westhuizen 1998, 437)

<sup>c</sup>. Advocate's variables (John 2014, 325-326; Lee 2014, 4-5; Li & Hong 2012, 45 & Scott 2013, 114)

### A. Middle Power Enforcers

Initially based on Realism, this article argues that middle powers with proficient hard power resources tend to act as Enforcers [23]. Enforcers are capable of enforcing policies towards smaller powers within their regional outreach, especially when smaller powers are dependent to the middle power for resources. This is indicated by having the highest military budget and spending compared to other states in their region, the latest military technology and skilled military force in armed operations as well as utilizing defense technology [2].

Moreover, Enforcers have attained significant economic development based on their GNP and market size which are higher than small powers, but lower than great powers [5]. They also own marketable natural resources or manufactured products sold through export oriented economy and investment, in addition to secured financial condition. Thus, an Enforcer doesn't necessarily need to represent the regional interest of its neighboring states.

Finally, Enforcers would establish regional geostrategic domination. This strategy enables them to politically influence security policies of neighboring states, prevent foreign intervention towards the region and conduct monitoring operations on territories beyond their region [24]. Accordingly, Enforcers conduct assertive diplomacy to ensure their national interests are fulfilled, such as having anti-Western foreign policy stance and working with other states with the same goal.

For example, China and Russia are middle power Enforcers in their respective regions, i.e. Central Asia and Eastern Europe [25]. The decline of United State's (US) influence in Asia Pacific since the global financial crisis in 2008 signaled China's readiness to establish regional leadership and challenge the Western political domination once capable [26]. China's military development has also been successful in stopping US arms trade to Taiwan, thus limiting US's maneuver in the Western Pacific area [27]. Additionally, China's regional enforcement has been evident in the acquisition of South China Sea [28].

Meanwhile, Russia has also readjusted its foreign policy approach since the fall of Soviet Union. Currently, Russia possesses 13 percent of the world's oil reserve and 34 percent of gas reserve, with Europe as its main energy market [29]. Consequently, Russia is capable of influencing domestic policies made by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) i.e. Belarus, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Ukraine due to their dependency to Russia for energy supply [25].

### *B. Middle Power Assemblers*

In line with Neo-Liberalism, middle power Assemblers apply diplomatic behavior in order to establish regional institution for cooperation, engage in multilateral cooperation on behalf of regional interest, and develop institutional measures for regional dispute settlement [30]. Before building a regional institution, an Assembler develops trust between its neighboring states by pioneering long term mutual consultation [12]. Next, an Assembler promotes cooperation to reach common goals among regional member states [31]. For instance, a regional institution would regulate free trade which benefits member states through economic interdependence [32]. However, an Assembler cannot force to apply its national values as regional values, depending on the level of trust among regional member states towards the middle power [33].

Additionally, an Assembler is expected to be involved in multilateral cooperation beyond its region along with other middle and major powers [31]. By participating in global forums, an Assembler has the opportunity to modify common

rules through agenda setting and support international agreements which are more suitable to regional interest; not necessarily limited by great powers' standards [11], [18]. Finally, an Assembler is also capable of developing institutional measures for regional dispute settlement by promoting equal membership status and non-interference principle [7], [33], [34].

For example, Brazil, India and South Africa are concerned towards building institutions to support regional interests such as Mercosur and African Union (AU); as well as multilateral institutions in the form of IBSA, BASIC, and BRICS [35]. Both Brazil and India propose to become permanent members of United Nations (UN) Security Council, as well as reforming rules of World Trade Organization (WTO) as representatives of Southern states [36]. Even so, an Assembler cannot force to apply its national values as regional values, as there are equal veto rights for all members of Mercosur in Brazil's case [33]; or India's reluctance in imposing territorial regulations towards Pakistan and China [34]; and South Africa's determination to uphold regional consensus among its neighboring states, despite being the most economically developed state in Africa [37], [38].

On the other hand, Indonesia's role as an Assembler includes pioneering the Asian-African Conference (AAC) and promoting the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) [39]. Besides that, Indonesia has also co-established the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as the 'first among equals' [40]. Interestingly, Indonesia has also played the role of middle power Advocate by promoting democracy and moderate Islamic values through Bali Democracy Forum (BDF) and interfaith dialogues [41].

Furthermore, Mexico and Turkey implement their role as Assemblers through regional dispute settlement; which includes Mexico's engagement towards Cuba, Guatemala and Chile [42]; and Turkey's peaceful mediation towards conflicting parties in Sudan, Egypt, Libya and Syria [43]. Even so, Turkey is more successful in creating regional economic interdependence among its neighboring states to prevent regional conflicts [32], as compared to Mexico's massive trade with the US [42]. Finally in terms of multilateral role, both Mexico and Turkey are also a part of MIKTA informal forum [44].

### *C. Middle Power Advocators*

Alternatively according to Constructivism, middle power Advocators are states which possess unique foreign policy identity by choosing certain international issues based on their expertise [45]. For example, states which uphold democratic values are perceived as more credible members of the international community than non-democratic states [23]. Thus, an Advocate is willing to solve international problems when small powers are incapable of addressing them; particularly on low-political issues beyond great powers' interest [8].

Besides that, an Advocate would invite other states to collectively support international causes by carrying out



leadership on *ad hoc* coalition-building to exchange ideas and values [46]. Those values usually derive from the Advocator's foreign policies or regionally accepted norms among the Advocator's neighboring states [6]. In order to establish leadership on multilateral forums, an Advocator needs to promote the importance of discussion on specific issues such as like-minded states' previous successful policies [30], [47], [48]. Since coalition-building among middle powers in multilateral forums are *ad hoc*, the effects of those forums need to be further sustained through signing or ratifying agreements and protocols, as well as organizing annual meetings [6], [49]. Ultimately, the coalition-building's success depends on to what extent the Advocator could assist participant states in supporting the multilateral forum's causes [4], [21].

For example, Australia has launched 'creative middle power diplomacy' in 2008 which signified its role as an Advocator [49]. Previously in 2007, Prime Minister Rudd has ratified the Kyoto Protocol and initiated negotiation on the Bali Roadmap to demonstrate Australia's concern towards environmental issues [50]. During the Bali Climate Summit, Australia had also established an *ad hoc* green house reduction commitment with the conference's participants [50].

Similarly, Canada applied 'niche diplomacy' to promote international stability, mediation, and coalition building [17]. During UN's creation, Canada led a coalition to prevent great powers from getting too much privilege. Thus in 1963, UN Security Council decided to expand its membership by including 10 non-permanent members [51]. Additionally during the Cold War, Canada acted as NATO's diplomat on behalf of the West to communicate and mediate with the Soviet Union [17].

Lastly, South Korea's role as an Advocator began by implementing 'Global Korea' policy since 2008 under President Bak [52]. In 2010, South Korea hosted the G-20 Summit in Seoul and established the Global Green Growth Institute [52]. Afterwards in 2013, President Park continues middle power diplomacy through coalition building by co-establishing the informal forum MIKTA under common values of democracy and free trade [53].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This article concludes that by utilizing their most prominent power resources, middle powers could decide to apply the role of Enforcer, Assembler or Advocator in regional and multilateral affairs as a part of their main foreign policy direction. China and Russia are Enforcers due to their military and economic capacities plus regional geostrategic dominance. Conversely, Brazil, India, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey are Assemblers by establishing institutions to sustain regional interdependence. Meanwhile, Australia, Canada and South Korea are Advocators which promotes coalition building on low-political issues in multilateral forums. Interestingly, Indonesia started off as an Assembler by establishing a regional institution, but has also recently adopted the role of Advocator by promoting democratic

values. Finally, this article has contributed an additional layer to the academic discussion of middle powers by examining their regional and multilateral roles, not limited to definitional debate.

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