MIDDLE POWER THEORY, CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

by

ANTON BEZGLASNYY

B.A. Simon Fraser University, 2010

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Political Science)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

April 2013

©Anton Bezglasnyy, 2013
Abstract

This paper recalibrates the definition of ‘middle power’ and applies it to a comparative case study of Canadian and Australian foreign policies in the most dynamic region in the world, the Asia-Pacific. It is argued that the middle power concept remains a useful analytical tool in understanding the foreign policy behavior of states with a particular subset of material, institutional and ideational characteristics. According to the refocused definition developed here, middle powers are states that possess all three of the following attributes: (i) medium sized material capabilities; (ii) perceive multilateralism and soft power as the optimal ways to maximize their foreign policy interests; and (iii) self identify as middle powers to domestic and international audiences. The particular value of the middle power concept advanced here, is the explanatory power it provides in the case of Canada and Australia in the contemporary Asia-Pacific: two states formerly classified as middle powers, possessing similar material capabilities, yet behaving in fundamentally different ways. This foreign policy divergence is accounted for by differences in ideational factors between the two states. Canada, it is argued, has socially deconstructed its own status as a middle power in the Asia-Pacific region, while Australia has bolstered its middle power identity.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................... iii
List of Figures ....................................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................ v
Dedication ........................................................................................................................................... vi
1. Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 1
2. Systemic Changes in the Asia-Pacific Region ............................................................................... 4
   2.1 Global Rebalancing and the Emergence of a ‘Super-region’ ................................................... 4
   2.2 Relative American Decline ........................................................................................................ 6
   2.3 China’s Rise: Relative and Absolute ........................................................................................ 8
   2.4 Emergence of Additional Players .............................................................................................. 12
3 Middle Power Theory and Practice ............................................................................................. 17
   3.1 Traditional Understandings of Middle Powers ......................................................................... 17
   3.2 Recalibrating the Middle Power Concept .................................................................................. 22
      3.2.1 Capability ............................................................................................................................. 22
      3.2.2 Behavior .............................................................................................................................. 25
      3.2.3 Identity ............................................................................................................................... 28
4. Testing the Approach: Canada-Australia Case Study .................................................................. 33
5. Conclusions ..................................................................................................................................... 46
Bibliography ......................................................................................................................................... 48
List of Figures

Figure I: GDP at PPP in the Asia-Pacific.................................................................7
Figure II: Proportions of Regional Defence Spending in 1990 and 2011.......................10
Figure III: Asia-Pacific Power Ranking Based on GDP at PPP in 2011..........................24
Figure IV: Middle Powers in the Asia-Pacific..........................................................30
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the faculty, staff and fellow students at the University of British Columbia, for creating a true community of scholarship.

I owe particular thanks to Dr. Brian L. Job for his analytic rigour, the adroitness of his guidance and the tenacity of his patience.

I thank Dr. Arjun Chowdhurry for his forthright advice and his zeal for teaching.

Special thanks to my family for their never-ending support.
Dedication

To my parents.
1. Introduction

After 60 years of American preeminence in the Asia-Pacific, Chinese economic growth and military modernization are changing the regional balance of power and altering the San Francisco System in fundamental ways.¹ This regional transformation is complemented by, what Joseph Nye refers to as a global power shift from West to East, whereby Asia’s share of influence in international economic, security and institutional affairs, is on the rise.²

It is no surprise then, that much of the recent IR scholarship has centered around the Asia-Pacific and that most of the Asia-Pacific literature itself, has concentrated on the major power dynamics within the region.³ Only a select few have written on the medium-sized states in the region, largely focusing on how states – traditionally classified as ‘middle powers’ – like Canada and Australia, are adapting to the shifting strategic environment in the Asia-Pacific.⁴

---

David Cooper highlights that the more conceptual debate on how the power transition occurring globally and in Asia might impact middle power theory, tends to also be ‘perpetually overlooked’ by the academe.\(^5\) Cooper further posits that contemporary middle power theory itself is, ‘mired and without a clear path forward.’

This paper recalibrates the definition of ‘middle power’ and applies it to a comparative case study of Canadian and Australian foreign policies in the most dynamic region in the world, the Asia-Pacific. It is argued that the middle power concept remains a useful analytical tool in understanding the foreign policy behavior of states with a particular subset of material, institutional and identify characteristics.

According to the refocused definition developed here, middle powers are states that possess all three of the following attributes: (i) medium sized material capabilities; (ii) perceive multilateralism and soft power as the optimal ways to maximize their foreign policy interests; and (iii) self identify as middle powers to domestic and international audiences, and are recognized as such by the international community. The particular value of the middle power concept advanced here, is the explanatory power it provides in the case of Canada and Australia in the contemporary Asia-Pacific: two states formerly classified as middle powers, possessing similar material capabilities, yet now behaving in fundamentally different ways. This current foreign policy divergence is accounted for by differences in ideational factors between the two power transitions,’ *International Journal* 66, 2 (2011); James Manicom and Andrew O’Neil, ‘China’s rise and middle power democracies: Canada and Australia compared,’ *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 12 (2012): 199-228; Brian L. Job, ‘Ottawa Pivots to Asia: Priorities Prospects and Problems,’ Remarks for delivery to the 10\(^{th}\) Canada-Japan Peace and Security Symposium, Tokyo, 2012.

Canada, it is argued, has socially deconstructed its own status as a middle power in the Asia-Pacific region, while Australia has bolstered its middle power identity.

This analysis is divided into three parts. The first section examines the strategic drivers and trends, which are reshaping the Asia-Pacific security architecture at its core, as well as their impact on the region’s medium sized powers. The second section analyzes the implications of systemic change on middle power theory and practice. The final section applies the recalibrated middle power concept to explain change and continuity in Canadian and Australian foreign policies. Official statistics, observable behavior, the historical record, as well as statements from heads of state and national foreign policy documents, are employed as empirical evidence.
2. Systemic Changes in the Asia-Pacific Region

Four distinct but interrelated trends are transforming the Asia-Pacific region. First, the global distribution of power is shifting from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific, creating a hub of interaction from Vancouver to Shanghai to Sydney. Second, American influence in this geographical space is, and more importantly, is being perceived to be, in relative decline. Third, rapid Chinese economic growth, accompanied by military modernization, is expanding Beijing’s radius of influence, in both absolute and relative terms. Fourth, the regional environment is being transformed by the increased participation of additional players, including a more prominent ASEAN, a normalizing Japan, an eastward-oriented India and an invigorated set of medium-sized powers.

2.1 Global Rebalancing and the Emergence of a ‘Super-region’

Buzan and Weaver observed nearly a decade ago that the ‘patterns of amity and enmity’ within various distinct East Asian Regional Security Complexes (RSCs) were increasingly spilling over, allowing for the possibility of an Asian ‘supercomplex’ formation, if intense interaction was sustained. Interaction was, in fact, accelerated, and Buzan’s latest work not only highlights the merger of northeast and southeast Asian RSCs into a single ‘Asian supercomplex,’ but also portrays the emergence of an ‘Asian super-region.’ The Asia-Pacific region, used in

6 Buzan and Weaver, Regions and Powers, 60 and 172.
this paper as a single unit of analysis, is a modified version of Buzan’s Regional Security Complex.\(^8\)

The international context in which the Asia-Pacific has emerged as a region, can be characterized as a restoration of the global equilibrium of power\(^9\) that existed for a millennia before power became highly concentrated in the West.\(^10\) The trajectory towards greater diffusion of power among states, implies that the post-Cold War unipolar system, is transitioning to a kind of unbalanced multipolarity, the precise mechanics of which are yet to be determined.\(^11\) As the US National Intelligence Council posits, by 2030, the international system is not likely to have a single dominant hegemonic power.\(^12\)

Such a momentous ‘paradigm shift’ in global and regional distributions of power has profound implications for the Asia-Pacific security order, argue Job and Wilkins.\(^13\) For the region’s medium sized powers, an environment of unbalanced multipolarity – where China, and perhaps India or Japan, join the United States as unequal poles in the regional order – results in

\(^{8}\) This paper, however, parts with the fundamental premises of Buzan and Weaver’s work since middle powers’ institutional and soft power preferences have little room in RSCT, as Job notes. See Brian L. Job, ‘Grappling with an Elusive Concept,’ in Security Politics of the Asia-Pacific: A Regional-GLOBAL Nexus? Ed. William T. Tow, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 37.

\(^{9}\) I adopt Nye’s definition of power: ‘The ability to get others to do what you want.’ See Nye, ‘The Twenty-First Century will not be a ‘Post-American’ World,’ 215.

\(^{10}\) Buzan, ‘Reconsidering Regions and Powers Ten Years On,’ 16.


greater bargaining power. More attractive as allies than the smaller states, countries with middle-range capabilities have the ability to gravitate among competing centers of power, potentially even altering the regional balance of power through their shifting alliance patterns. What medium sized powers do with this newfound influence, would depend on whether the unbalanced multipolar arrangement is a cooperative or competitive one, and on where their national interests are perceived to lie.

Not all the consequences of unbalanced multipolarity are positive for middle powers in the Asia-Pacific, however. The emergence of additional centers of powers implies that these states will have to face a more competitive regional environment, within which difficult choices must be made about alliance commitments.

2.2 Relative American Decline

America’s share of hard and soft power in the Asia-Pacific is shrinking. Two distinct forces can be observed here. First, as Asian states invest economic growth into military and diplomatic capabilities, Washington’s relative influence in the region will contract. Figure I demonstrates the shrinking economic weight of the United States over the past two decades, having dwindled from constituting 127 to 53 percent of the sum of the other consequential economies in the region.
The United States continues to maintain a heavy forward deployed presence stretching from Australia to Japan, and recently reiterated its commitment through the January 2012 *Defense Strategic Guidance* document: ‘we will of necessity, rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific region.’

Accompanying the document, are statements by senior US officials, for example President Obama’s November 2011 address to the Australian Parliament, or Defense Secretary Panetta’s comments at the 2012 Shangri-La Dialogue, emphasizing a continued American presence in the Asia-Pacific.

Despite Washington’s efforts to comfort allies fearing abandonment however, persisting domestic economic problems put into question America’s willingness and ability to maintain the extended security footprint that would be necessary for continued regional hegemony, if hegemony is possible at all. In order to curb the possibility that relative decline leads to

---

14 Data available at National Bureau of Asian Research, *Strategic Asia Database*, Accessed 1 March 2013, data.nbr.org. ‘Total Others’ includes China, India, Japan, South Korea, Canada, Indonesia, Australia, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, New Zealand, Cambodia. Reliable GDP data for Russia in 1990 was not available, therefore Russia is excluded in 2000 and 2011 as well.


Washington’s eventual disengagement from the region, medium sized powers in the Asia-Pacific are resorting to alliance tightening with the United States. Australia’s 2011 agreement to host a rotational presence of 2,500 US Marines in Darwin, for example, intensifies Canberra’s security ties with Washington by lowering the costs of American power projection near the strategically significant South China Sea and Malacca Strait.¹⁹

The perceived decline of US influence in the Asia-Pacific, is perhaps even more consequential than the deterioration of American hard power. As Nye argues, ‘hegemony is often illusory, and cycles of belief in decline talk are more about psychology than real shifts in power resources.’²⁰ For decades, the ‘hub-and-spoke’ system of alliances was based not only on American military dominance, but also on economic and ideological leadership. As the United States declines in relative terms, Buzan posits, it is losing, in absolute terms, the legitimacy aspect of superpower status.²¹

2.3 China’s Rise: Relative and Absolute

China’s share of hard and soft power in the Asia-Pacific is rising, due primarily to its burgeoning economy. The People’s Republic of China has managed to sustain an impressive 9.91 percent annual GDP growth rate between 1990 and 2011.²² In both relative and absolute terms, China has prospered more than any other nation in the region, presently ranking as the

²¹ Buzan, ‘Reconsidering Regions and Powers Ten Years On,’ 16.
second largest economy both in the Asia-Pacific, and the world, at $11.3 trillion. These sustained growth rates have facilitated consistent increases in Chinese defence spending, to the extent that Beijing now spends 7 times less than Washington on defence, compared with 26 times less in 1990.

In absolute terms however, China’s share of defence spending in the Asia-Pacific has grown more than threefold in the past two decades, from 2.91 to 9.77 percent. The People’s Liberation Army, Navy and Air Force have all benefitted from an ongoing and extensive modernization program of both symmetric, as well as asymmetric warfare capabilities.

---

23 In providing a sense of scale to the significance of the Asia-Pacific to global affairs, it is important to note that the top four Asia-Pacific economies represent the four largest global economies as well, at Purchasing Power Parity. Figure I and World Bank, ‘Gross domestic product 2011, PPP, Accessed 1 March 2013, http://databank.worldbank.org/databank/download/GDP_PPP.pdf.

24 Author’s calculations based on defence expenditures data from data.nbr.org, graphed out in Figure II on the following page.

The PLA’s increasingly sophisticated anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) capacity has been tailored to limit US power projection in the region. Additional force-multiplying capabilities such as cyber, space and electronic warfare, are intended to offset American superiority by targeting the heart of US advantages in network-centric and high-technology warfare.

China is a ‘great power,’ Nathan and Scobell posit, when GDP and defence expenditure gains are considered alongside the country’s territory, population, share of global trade,

---

26 Defence expenditures data from data.nbr.org, graphed out in MS Excel.
participation in international organizations and the extent to which other nations consider Chinese interests in their own foreign policies. These developments have also led to an observable change in Chinese behavior. Beijing has taken a more assertive stance towards territorial disputes, to the effect that analysts from both sides of the Atlantic – at the Council on Foreign Relations and Chatham House – forecast the South China Sea to be one of the top global ‘flashpoints’ for 2013.

The combination of a growing economy, greater military capabilities and more confident foreign policy behavior, are inflating the threat perceptions stemming from China’s rise. As Gilley argues, China’s perceived rise, is understood by Asian analysts as a ‘fait accompli’ and they are, ‘rapidly reconfiguring diplomatic and ideational frames to accommodate it.’

The impact of China’s rise on medium sized powers in the region cannot be overstated, particularly when viewed alongside relative US decline. Given Chinese and American trajectories, states with middle-range capabilities have responded through a combination of hedging, balancing or bandwagoning. Acutely aware of growing Chinese military potential and perceiving the possibility of US abandonment, states including Australia and Indonesia have been balancing China’s rise externally – through the proliferation of more robust regional security institutions and closer ties with United States – as well as internally, via militarization.

Concurrent with internal and external balancing, states such as South Korea have been hedging the possibility of American withdrawal from the region, through constructive engagement with China. As Gilley argues, the ways in which the region’s medium sized powers respond to a rising China, will depend on how revisionist Beijing’s policies are: a minimally disruptive China will ‘create more openings for agile middle power diplomacy,’ while a highly revisionist China will strengthen ties with Washington.

2.4 Emergence of Additional Players

Much of what has been said about China’s rise, applies to India as well. Current trends suggest that India may be just a few decades away from being a distinct center of power, in a multipolar system with several players of consequential, yet unequal influence. New Delhi has managed to commandeer an average growth rate of 6.60 percent over the past two decades, and the Indian economy is now third largest in the Asia-Pacific, after the United States and China. Albeit at a slower pace, India too has been converting economic might into foreign policy capital and military influence. In response to Beijing’s expanding security and economic footprint in South Asia, India has looked to engaging states in East Asia, in order to externally balance


Gilley, ‘Middle powers during great power transitions,’ 248.

Author’s calculations based on World Bank data available at http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG/countries?display=default. Also see Figure I above.
China’s rise. For example, New Delhi is playing a larger role in the South China Sea, while the Indian Navy has increased port visits to South Korea and Japan.

For its part, Japan continues to be a major regional power in a state of relative decline, as demonstrates by a shrinking share of regional defence expenditure and economic weight, since the early 1990s. Nevertheless, Japan remains the world’s fourth largest economy, with both Tokyo and Washington working towards a renewal of their alliance, in light of China’s rise.

The December 2012 election of Shinzo Abe’s conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), may contribute to easing the limits of Japan’s pacifist constitution on the military, to let Tokyo play a greater regional security role. In his first speech as Prime Minister, Abe referred to Japan’s security as being in a state of, ‘crisis that exists here and now,’ and created a Minister in Charge of Reinforcing National Security, as well as a National Security Council. Abe further signaled Japanese normalization by launching a re-examination of the 2008 Report of the Advisory Panel On Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security, which considers changes in the interpretation of Chapter 9 of the Constitution, to allow, ‘the exercise of the right to

38 See Figures I and II above.
collective self-defense." If this normalization trend continues, even a declining Japan has the potential to play a larger role in the regional dynamics of the Asia-Pacific.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), is growing in prominence through less tangible means than the material factors allotting India and Japan greater regional influence. ASEAN is positioned at the epicenter of the emerging regional security community in the Asia-Pacific, in two ways. First, the organization is the ‘backbone’ of a regional security architecture that includes the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Plus Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM+), the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the Shangri-La Dialogue. Second, ASEAN norms of consensus and non-interference have had such a significant impact in shaping ‘regional multilateral institutionalization,’ that Job and Williams argue, the entire process has been ‘ASEANized.’ Although its own concrete action is, at times, gridlocked due to internal tensions, ASEAN has emerged as the primary supporter fora of regional dialogue and a stabilizing force in a dynamic and volatile region.

India’s rise, potential Japanese normalization and ASEAN’s growing significance, create additional options in an environment of unbalanced multipolarity, for the region’s medium sized states. Although none are, or will be, regional players of greater significance than either China or the United States, the emergence of additional consequential actors endows the Asia-Pacific’s medium sized powers with more potential collaborators and greater maneuverability.

Out of the trends suggesting power diffusion away from the United States, an invigorated set of medium-sized powers such as Korea, Indonesia and Australia have (re)emerged since the

\[\text{References}\]

41 Ibid.
44 Australia, *Australia in the Asian Century*, 225.
end of the Cold War. As Wilkins posits, the central stratum of global affairs is currently expanding and allowing for a thicker layer of engagement by medium sized states.\textsuperscript{45}

While some may seek their place in the China-US ‘G2’ by bandwagoning, an unbalanced multipolar environment will also drive others to collaborate, turning towards foreign policies leveraging multilateral institutions, soft power, and innovating solutions to regional problems. As a result, these states may play a bridging role by acting as the conduit for more stable Sino-American relations. In fact, the dilemma facing states such as Australia and South Korea, suggests that stability between Washington and Beijing is overwhelmingly in their own national interest. Positioned between the two poles of power in the Asia-Pacific, Canberra and Seoul rely on China as their largest trade and investment partner, while having the United States as the primary security ally. As a result, both have been investing heavily into Track I and II diplomacy, in order to peacefully bring China into the regional order.

Several medium-sized states have not only started increasing engagement in order to leverage their capabilities for greater overall impact, but at times, to outright shape international policy-making in niche areas. Indonesia, for example, had its ‘debut’ to the international arena in 2011, as it hosted the EAS, ASEAN and the World Economic Forum on East Asia.\textsuperscript{46} South Korea, having pursued a policy of ‘global engagement’ since 2008, hosted the G20 in 2010, the Nuclear Security Summit in 2012 and will sit on the United Nations Security Council during the 2013-14 term. Australia is joining Korea on the Security Council for 2013-14, and is hosting the G20 in 2014.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} Wilkins, ‘Middle Power Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific Region.’
\textsuperscript{47} Australia, \textit{Australia in the Asian Century}, 223.
This section has provided an analysis of the four major systemic changes currently underway in the Asia-Pacific. These are: (i) a rebalancing of the global balance of power from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific, (ii) relative American decline, (iii) growing Chinese influence and (iv) the emergence of additional actors of consequence, including ASEAN, India, Japan and medium-sized powers. A subset of Asian states, the so-called middle powers, continue to serve a unique function in the Asia-Pacific, endowing regional security organizations with legitimacy, encouraging norms and rules of behavior, and stabilizing intra-regional relations through an emphasis on multilateralism, soft power and policy innovation. The next section develops a recalibrated definition of what constitutes a middle power.
3 Middle Power Theory and Practice

It is time to reclaim the middle power as an analytic tool for the examination of foreign policy. First, the argument is positioned in existing approaches to middle power theory, by examining the prominent academic literature on the subject. Second, the middle power concept is recalibrated, by establishing an empirical basis for the core elements of middle power status. Both material and ideational factors warrant (re)consideration, because when employed holistically, they provide a more accurate demarcation and explanation of middle powers in the Asia-Pacific, than existing approaches.

3.1 Traditional Understandings of Middle Powers

Middle power theorists can be divided into the classical and the revisionist schools of thought. Classical school scholars, writing throughout the Cold War, argue that a state’s material position in the international system determines its status as a middle power. This approach derives a state’s hierarchical rank based on structural factors including resources such as population, territory and economy, as well as power capabilities such as power projection or nuclear weapons.48

48 Job and Wilkins, ‘Middle Power Engagement in the Asia-Pacific Security Order: Australia-Canada Comparative Analysis,’ 7. As Gecelovsky highlights, this positional approach has other variants as well. A state’s ‘ideological location’ in the international system, for example, places middle powers between the extreme views of Cold War power blocs. Alternatively, as Nossal posits in regards to Canada in particular, geographic location further reinforced the positional ranking of a middle power and to some extent, translated it into an ideological as well as political middle ground. See Paul Gecelovsky, ‘Constructing a middle power: Ideas and Canadian foreign policy,’ Canadian Foreign Policy 15, 1 (2009): 78; Kim Richard Nossal, ‘Middlepowerhood’ and ‘Middlepowermanship’ in Canadian Foreign Policy,’ in Canada’s foreign and security policy: soft and hard strategies of a middle power, ed. David Bosold and Nik Hynek, (Ontario: Don Mills, 2010), 22.
Some of the early authoritative work of the classical school was published by Carsten Holbraad in the 1970s and 1980s. Holbraad positions middle powers at the intermediate level of the state system hierarchy – based on material power – whereby a middle power was, ‘a country much stronger than the small nations though considerably weaker than the principal members of the states system.’ Holbraad’s hierarchy was akin to a social one, with Britain and Japan ranked ‘upper-middle class powers’ while Canada and Australia were of the ‘lower-middle class.’ He reaffirmed the structuralist approach to defining middle power in his 1984 book, maintaining that the concept applies to, ‘states that are weaker than the great powers in the system but significantly stronger than the minor powers and small states.’ The vagueness of this definition is considered the paramount shortcoming of the classical school.

Despite the analytical ambiguity of his approach, Holbraad did make a valuable contribution to middle power theory through his observation that the middle power’s propensity to act as mediators, is contingent upon the structure of the international system. Competitive balance of power situations, for example, allow a larger scope of action for middle powers, while a unipolar order stifles their foreign policy freedom. The likelihood of middle powers to balance or bandwagon, Holbraad argues, ‘depends on a number of factors, such as [their] geographical position, political tradition, the nature of the issue, and norms of the states system.’

John W. Holmes is among the most prominent of Holbraad’s contemporaries who studied middle powers from a distinctly Canadian perspective. In his classic 1984 essay, ‘Most safely in

\[\text{References:}\]
\[50\] Ibid., 83.
\[52\] Holbraad, ‘The Role of Middle Powers,’ 88.
\[53\] Holbraad, *Middle Powers in international Politics*, 121.
the middle,’ Holmes argued that the motivation for middle power foreign policies are rooted in a, ‘very hardheaded calculation of the national interest,’ which, for a country like Canada, included, ‘the preservation of a world in which Canadians could survive and prosper,’ as well as ‘collective defence and collective law.’

Holmes further posits that Canada’s positional ranking – and therefore our influence and status as a middle power in the international system – is issue specific. Canada is a major power, he asserts, on the law of the sea, economic, as well as natural resource issues, while we are a medium-sized power in military matters, and an inconsequential one on subjects such as the, ‘Soviet-Chinese border dispute.’ Holmes’ argument highlights an underlying ambiguity stemming from efforts to classify middle powers through purely positional methods based on material qualities, which has become one of the major critiques of the classical school and of middle power theory itself.

An alternative has been presented by Cooper, Higgott and Nossal, who reject the structuralist approach of the classical school and instead present a model where the behavior of states, rather than their position in an international hierarchy, determines middle power standing. They offer a typology of middle power behavior, which became the basis for future revisionist work. Cooper et al. portray middle powers as, (i) catalysts and policy entrepreneurs; (ii) facilitators, building coalitions and setting agendas; and (iii) managers, building institutions, confidence and credibility. Middle powers they argue, are most appropriately defined by, ‘a

55 Holmes, ‘Most safely in the middle,’ 383 and 385.
57 Ibid., 24-25.
particular style of behavior in international politics,’ whereby they tend to pursue multilateralism, compromise and notions of ‘good international citizenship.’

According to the revisionist framework, states with a range of relative material capabilities may qualify for middle power status, as long as their foreign policies demonstrate elements of middle power behavior, as outlined by the Cooper et al., typology. The major criticisms directed towards the revisionist school, are grounded in the ambiguity associated with using behavior as a measure of middle power status. Employing the Cooper et al. typology, smaller, medium sized and major powers – from Norway to Australia to Japan – may qualify for middle power status, as long as they demonstrate themselves to be catalysts, facilitators and managers.

Tautology is a further criticism of the revisionists. While replacing the structuralist definition of middle power with a behavioral one, the revisionists base their own model on factors which are inherently structural in nature. A state’s capacity for policy entrepreneurship, agenda setting and institution-building, Baker suggests, ‘depends heavily on an essentially structural attribute: the possession of a large, skilled national bureaucracy.’ The revisionist approach therefore, depicts middle powers as states that behave in ways unique to middle powers, essentially engaging in circular reasoning.

Building on the work of Cooper et al., and others, in order to endow the concept with greater analytical clarity, John Ravenhill posits that, ‘middle power status can be encapsulated in five ‘Cs’: capacity, concentration, creativity, coalition-building and credibility.’ He further

58 Ibid., 19.
contributes to the revisionist school, by proposing that variations in the foreign policy activism of middle powers like Canada and Australia, manifests itself in cycles, which are better explained by domestic politics than systemic factors.\textsuperscript{61} Nossal validates the argument for Canada’s case, by highlighting the oscillating surges of Canadian internationalism under Pearson in the 1950s, Trudeau in the 1980s and Chrétien in the 1990s, against the foreign policies of Canadian governments throughout the 1960s, 1970s and late 1980s.\textsuperscript{62}

In examining the major analytical flaws of both the classical and revisionist schools, several scholars have highlighted the ambiguity of middle power theory as a source of weakness, as well as strength. Job and Wilkins observe that middle power, ‘acts as a ‘cluster concept’; a prism through which multiple and interlocking IR debates are engaged.’\textsuperscript{63} Hynek suggests that the middle power notion is an ‘\textit{empty form} which needs to be – and has been – refilled again and again.’\textsuperscript{64} Gecelovsky notes that Holmes himself portrayed the term as an ‘expression of convenience,’’ and argued for the acceptance of some ‘ambiguity’ in the concept.\textsuperscript{65}

Taking into consideration the analytical shortcomings of the middle power concept, the following recalibrates the framework with greater clarity, with the aim of invigorating the middle power discourse. By adding theoretical insights from the constructivist school, the refocused approach addresses both the vagueness issue of the classical scholars and the tautology of the revisionists.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 324.
\textsuperscript{62} Nossal, ‘Middlepowerhood’ and ‘Middlepowermanship’ in Canadian Foreign Policy,’ 20-21.
\textsuperscript{63} Job and Wilkins, ‘Middle Power Engagement in the Asia-Pacific Security Order: Australia-Canada Comparative Analysis,’ 7.
\textsuperscript{65} John Holmes, ‘Is there a future for middlepowermanship?’ in \textit{Canada’s role as a middle power}, ed. J. King Gordon, (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1966), 16.
3.2 Recalibrating the Middle Power Concept

Middle powers are best understood through an approach that combines material, behavioral and ideational factors. The refined middle power concept developed here considers middle powers to be states that, (i) have mid-range capabilities and are medium sized; (ii) perceive multilateralism and soft power as the optimal way to maximize their foreign policy interests; and (iii) self-identify as middle powers to domestic and international audiences. All three components must be present for a state to qualify for the recalibrated definition of a middle power. This threefold approach to middle power status overcomes the circular reasoning/tautology criticism evoked by Nossal, Cooper and others.66

3.2.1 Capability

Scholars and defence analysts have developed various metrics to provide a comparative measurement of state power. The US National Intelligence Council, for example, works with a ‘global power index,’ while the Indian National Security Council has produced an ‘integrated power index,’ and Chinese authors have devised a ‘comprehensive national power index.’67

This paper, will utilize an economic index based on gross domestic product (GDP) at purchasing power parity (PPP) to establish the relative capabilities of nation-states,68 with the objective of identifying medium-ranked countries that may qualify for middle power status. As

Cox argues, ‘possessing middle-range capabilities is a necessary condition of the ability to play
the [middle power] role, but it is not an adequate predictor of the disposition to play it.’ 69

To the extent that a state’s economic performance is a reflection of its military-industrial-
scientific complex, a GDP metric provides a simple, universal and less politicized way to
quantify the relative power of nation-states. Furthermore, to recall John Holmes’ argument that a
state’s relative influence in the international system depends on the issue at hand, an economic
ranking offers an appropriate aggregate measurement, since economic performance can be
converted into various types of power, including military, diplomatic or institutional. In this
light, economic performance underwrites influence in global affairs.

The purely economic approach produces nearly identical results for the ten most powerful
states, as the American, Indian and Chinese methodologies. 70 The UN Security Council P5, as
well as India, Japan, Germany and Brazil are generally found among the world’s major powers.
Variances within the order of top ten, which exist across the economic and other rankings, do not
influence the purpose of this analysis, which is to separate the major and super powers, from
states with medium sized capabilities. On a global scale, candidates for middle power status lie
in the 11 to 30 range of GDP by PPP. Returning now to the Asia-Pacific, state rankings are
depicted in Figure III below.

69 Robert W. Cox, ‘Middlepowermanship, Japan and the future world order,’ International
70 Data for the economic ranking is available at
While the divisions between super/great, major, and medium powers are quite evident, the distinction between medium and small states appears, at first, quite arbitrary. Why are Australia and Taiwan in separate groupings, despite a variance in economic size of less than 4 percent? The answer lies in the dispute over Taiwan’s international status. Recognized by just 23 other states, without UN membership and with rising China’s ‘one China’ policy, Taiwan’s ability to function as a fully sovereign nation-state is compromised, as it candidacy for middle power status. The small power status of states including Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, becomes less debatable, as the difference in economic size grows from 50 to 140 percent, as compared with Australia.

---

71 Data available at data.nbr.org.
72 Even though the economic ranking methodology has been chosen for its ability to depoliticize relative state power, the question of Taiwan is unavoidable, in both political and functionalist terms.
Diverging from Holbraad’s 1971 definition that middle powers are, ‘countries much stronger than the small nations though considerably weaker than the principal members of the state system,’ it is argued that while South Korea, Canada, Indonesia and Australia, are medium-sized in terms of material capabilities, they do not necessarily qualify as middle powers. These distinctions matter because the middle power definition constructed here, contains two more components, behavior and identity. The following examines the foreign policy strategies associated with middle powers, and how these vary from those of medium-sized states.

3.2.2 Behavior

In addition to possessing material capabilities necessary for medium power status, middle powers demonstrate a preference for multilateralism, soft power and policy innovation, as a means of maximizing their foreign policy interests. For the sake of brevity, these behavioral attributes will be referred to as ‘middlepowermanship’. Cooper, Higgott and Nossal’s classification of middle powers as states which act as, ‘catalysts, managers and facilitators,’ is also relevant here, but for motivations which are not accounted for by ‘good international citizenship.’ In a departure from the revisionist school, it is argued that a foreign policy of multilateralism, soft power and innovation, is in the self-interest of certain medium sized states. This type of foreign policy, therefore, is one of two distinguishing factors between medium, and middle powers.

The altruism ostensibly inherent in middle power foreign policies, is a ‘myth,’ as Chapnick would say, which has led to flawed analyses of middle power theory. The intrinsic

74 Holbraad, ‘The Role of Middle Powers,’ 78.
75 Cooper et. al, Relocating middle powers: Australia and Canada in a changing world order, 24-25.
76 The second factor is self identifying as a middle power, and will be addressed in the following sub-section.
impulse to act as ‘model citizens,’ so central a normative tenant to revisionist scholars’ account of middle power behavior, is misguided. Survival and prosperity, rather than their benign nature, motivates medium sized states to pursue coalition building and the like, which we have branded middlepowermanship, above. To this extent, middle powers are no better – and no worse – than the other tiers of states in the international system. Nor are they immune to the laws which govern it. Holmes highlighted this in 1984, and was largely ignored, as statesmen wrestled the concept from him and turned it into a tool of statecraft. It is time to reclaim the middle power as an analytic tool for the examination of foreign policy.

Multilateral decision-making forums are a logical choice for the non-major powers, as they allow for the ability to dilute and perhaps even challenge larger powers’ influence, by acting in concert with other like-minded states. Furthermore, building norms of collective dispute-resolution has the positive feedback effect of entangling the great powers in a web of accepted rules of behavior and endowing the institutions with ever-increasing legitimacy, proportional to the quantity and durability of decisions that take place within their walls. To this extent, international organizations, (IOs) serve as ‘force multipliers’ for middle powers’ ability to pursue their foreign policy interests. Prominent contemporary examples of IOs within which middle powers have been able to thrive, include ASEAN, the ADMM+, the ARF and APEC at the regional level, as well as the UN Security Council and G20 at the global level. Here, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The novelty of middle power foreign policies, and the reason they are often misconstrued with altruism, is that while these states engage in interest-maximizing activities, they often produce positive externalities. In pursuing what Cooper refers to as ‘power leveraging

77 Holmes highlights survival and prosperity as the overarching national interests. Holmes, ‘Most safely in the middle,’ 369.
functions,’ that include soft power, norm building, multilateralism and functional niches, middle powers often create global ‘public goods,’ with widespread benefits.\textsuperscript{78} In selecting functional niches for policy innovation, middle powers are able to concentrate their limited material resources and finite global political capital on an area of national interest, with a higher likelihood of exerting the desired influence. Examples of global public goods produced through this positive externality effect, include the Ottawa Treaty, the Cairns Group, the Kimberly Process, the R2P Norm and perhaps even the success of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

Some medium sized states, on the other hand, choose not to pursue middle power foreign policies. Countries including Canada, Spain and Saudi Arabia, rank as medium sized powers based on GDP at PPP, but are not currently active in multilateral institutions, prefer bandwagoning with a major power; to follow, rather than lead; and to consume, rather than produce global public policy goods. The ‘price taking’ position of these nations can be contrasted with the ‘price shaping’ approach of middle powers and the ‘price making’ of major powers. In disagreeing with scholars such as Nossal, who contend that middlepowerhood and middlepowership are ‘fraught as theoretical concepts,’ it is argued that middle power theory is valuable, precisely because it helps explain the nuanced distinctions between states possessing similar, middle range material characteristics, but behaving in fundamentally different ways.

The following demonstrates how further analytical clarity can be achieved by adding an identity element to the criteria for middle power status. The foundation of these theoretical insights reflects the constructivist school of political science, which have been largely absent from middle power theory.

\textsuperscript{78} Cooper, ‘Challenging Contemporary Notions of Middle Power Influence,’ 321.
3.2.3 Identity

In addition to possessing medium sized material capabilities and demonstrating a foreign policy emphasizing multilateralism, soft power and policy innovation, a third factor can add analytical clarity to the middle power theoretical framework. States must self-identify as middle powers, and be recognized as such by the international community.

The extent to which a country perceives itself as a middle power, could be measured by the ‘speech acts’ of heads of state and foreign ministers, as well as through official documents such as foreign policy white papers. In this third, normative component of middle power status, a medium-sized state creates its own middle power identity through the process of social interaction, which is outlined by Wendt: ‘state identities and interests are an important part constructed by these social structures, rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature or domestic politics.’ The socially constructed identity of a middle power, is markedly different from those of its medium-sized peers, despite the two possessing similar material characteristics.

By building norms of peaceful behavior and encouraging dispute settlement through international law and institutions, rather than the use of force, middle powers act to stabilize the global order. In turn, by seeing themselves as forces that stabilize and legitimize certain aspects of the international system, middle powers convince others to see them in this way through speech acts, thereby socially constructing this component of their own soft power.

Normative factors matter even further. The mutual recognition of a state as a middle power, by other actors in the international system (states, IOs, NGOs), further reinforces its identity as such. In a manner similar to international legal concepts such as sovereignty, the

international community can endow a state with middle power status further reinforcing the state’s soft power, its ability to act as a norm entrepreneur, and to endow institutions with legitimacy, by virtue of its own participation. The ability of some medium-sized states to socially construct their own identity, interests and influence as middle powers, is the third criteria for this elusive status.

The refined middle power concept can now be applied, temporally and regionally. Just what is, and is not, a middle power in the contemporary Asia-Pacific? Following an examination of the material, behavioral and ideational factors surrounding each medium sized state in the Asia-Pacific, figure IV below summarizes the results of applying a comprehensive approach to middle power status.

**Figure IV: Middle Powers in the Asia-Pacific**

---

80 Provided the material and behavioral conditions are present, the international community ‘allows’ a state to become a full fledge middle power, by recognizing their role as a norm entrepreneur and by acknowledging the value of the legitimacy capital that they bring to multilateral institutions.

81 The most debatable aspect of Figure V is Indonesia’s ideational characteristics as a middle power. My research found evidence that while not quite yet embracing a middle power identity through official speech acts, Indonesia is closer to self-identifying as a middle power than it is to not doing so. This, in combination with the current trajectory for Indonesia, as well as some recognition by other actors of Indonesia as a middle power, led me to conclude that on balance, Indonesia should be included in the ideational criteria. See for example, a member of the Indonesian foreign service speaking in an unofficial capacity, classifying his country as a middle power, and other scholars recognizing Indonesia as such. Furthermore, while foreign policy statements do not overtly state ‘middle power,’ the references to key attributes of middlepowerhood, such as multilateral institutions, are overwhelming. Santo Darmosumarto, ‘Indonesia: A new ‘middle power,’” *The Jakarta Post*, Accessed 25 March 2013, [http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/10/30/indonesia-a-new-middle-power039.html](http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/10/30/indonesia-a-new-middle-power039.html); Bruce Gilley, ‘The Rise of the Middle Powers,’ *The New York Times*, Accessed 25 March 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/11/opinion/the-rise-of-the-middle-powers.html?_r=2&](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/11/opinion/the-rise-of-the-middle-powers.html?_r=2&). Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia to Washington, DC, ‘Indonesia’s Foreign Policy/The Principles of the Foreign Policy,’ Accessed 25 March 2013, [http://www.embassyofindonesia.org/foreign/foreignpolicy.htm](http://www.embassyofindonesia.org/foreign/foreignpolicy.htm); Dr. R.M. Marty M. Natalegawa, ‘Annual Press Statement of the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Indonesia,’ Accessed 25 March 2013,
This recalibrated approach provides greater analytical clarity to middle power theory.

Three key implications can be discerned. First, states possessing medium sized capabilities do not automatically qualify for middle power status. Second, states employing middle power tactics (as Poland and Singapore did on the PSI) do not necessarily qualify for middle power status. Third, states with the capacity for middlepowerhood, who have embraced this foreign policy in the past (ie: Canada), do not necessarily qualify for middle power status today. The only states that qualify for the recalibrated middle power definition are those medium-sized countries who employ elements of middlepowerhood in their foreign policies, in addition to self identifying and being recognized by others as middle powers. In the Asia-Pacific, only three states, including Australia, Indonesia and the Republic of Korea, could fit this criteria.

Part of the confusion as to which states are middle powers, resides in the fact that countries change their foreign policies with time, while analysts studying middle powers appear to see this status as absolute: a nation is a middle power always, or never. The approach advanced here recognizes the fluidity of global affairs and suggests that middle power status is to be regularly re-evaluated, based on the three criteria in Figure V. This will allow middle power theory to be applied in an adaptive manner, to an evolving international order.

The recalibrated approach to middle power status can be successfully applied to difficult cases, such as Japan, which exceeds the material capabilities benchmark set by our economic ranking. Lately, Tokyo has leveraged the advantages of multilateralism and other middle power

http://www.deplu.go.id/Pages/SpeechTranscriptionDisplay.aspx?Name1=Pidato&Name2=Mente ri&IDP=698&l=en.
strategies to maximize influence. Even the ideational criteria, seems to fit, with Japanese
scholars like Yoshihide Soeya writing book chapters on Japan as a ‘Normal Middle Power,’ and Japan-affiliated academics embracing the notion of a middle power Japanese foreign policy, to the extent that think-tanks have held conferences on the subject.

The critical normative element of recognition, is missing, however, negating any notions of a middle power Japan. Japanese political leaders and other actors in the international system, particularly states, continue to regard Japan as a major power, due to a myriad of historical, economic, military, demographic and scientific-industrial factors. For example, Japan remains the world’s fourth largest economy, with the sixth largest defence budget and the tenth largest population. Arguments by Yoshihide Soeya and others, who contend that Japan is not a major power due to the constraints on its armed forces in Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, reveal little more than a narrow, military-centric notion of power in global affairs.

Japan declaring itself a middle power constitutes only half of the dynamic necessary in socially constructed identity. The more important component – recognition by most other actors in the international system – is missing. Despite efforts to do so therefore, Japan cannot construct itself an identity that is not socially acceptable by other actors in the international system.

Tokyo’s attempts at doing so, speak to a decades-long identity crisis of the Japanese nation and are beyond the scope of this paper.

The logical possibility of a medium sized state which self-identifies as a middle power, but pursues a largely bilateral foreign policy, needs to be addressed. Such a country would not be considered a middle power under the recalibrated approach. No evidence of such behavior was found in the Asia-Pacific. It is not enough for a state to proclaim they are a middle power. Like the Japan case discussed above, the identity component of middle power status involves both self-identity, as well as the social recognition of middle power status by the international community.

Another empirical puzzle remains, however. If the emergence of unbalanced multipolarity in the Asia-Pacific does in fact facilitate in an upward cycle of middle power activism, why has Canada all but disappeared from the region, while Australian engagement has surged? This questions is answered in the following section.

---

86 A new upward cycle of middle power activism lies ahead due to the diffusion of power away from the United States and a likely future regional arrangement of unbalanced multipolarity, giving middle powers greater room to maneuver between various centers of power.
4. Testing the Approach: Canada-Australia Case Study

This section applies the recalibrated middle power concept to explain change and continuity among Canadian and Australian foreign policies towards the Asia-Pacific. Traditional notions of middle power theory have not been able to explain the variance in Canadian and Australian foreign policies throughout the 2000s. Based on the refocused approach developed in Section 2, it is demonstrated that Canada no longer qualifies as a middle power in the Asia-Pacific region.

While material (realist) and behavioral (liberal) analytical frameworks position both countries as middle powers, they do not consider the deviation between strategies chosen by Ottawa and Canberra. In this regards, applying the constructivist approach offers considerable explanatory potential. It is argued in this section, that domestic political culture and the reconstruction of their own identities has led Canada and Australia on radically different foreign policy trajectories. It is further posited that inconsistencies in the behavior of two states, once recognized as the archetypal middle powers, are better explained by the refined middle power theoretical framework developed in Section 2.

Canada and Australia share similar material capabilities, a history of common foreign policy objectives, as well as strategies to attain them. These countries pursued multilateralism, soft power and policy innovation, long before the 1980s, when the term ‘soft power’ was coined by Joseph Nye. While Canada ‘punched above its weight’ throughout the 1970s, ‘80s and ‘90s, with active participation in the ASEAN Plus dialogues, the founding of the ASEAN Regional

87 Cooper et. al, Relocating middle powers: Australia and Canada in a changing world order, 172.
Forum (ARF) as well as the founding of APEC, engagement in Asia stalled after hosting the 1997 APEC Summit in Vancouver.

Traditional notions of middle power theory however, have not been able to account for the drastic deviation between Ottawa and Canberra’s foreign policies that began to occur in the early 2000s, as the two states, ‘started to diverge in their fortitude and effectiveness, especially with regard to the crucial Asia-Pacific region.’

Previously a respected regional player, Canada had all but disengaged in the 2000s. What remains, Manicom notes, is but a legacy of good offices exemplified by Canadian contributions to the management of the South China Sea disputes throughout the 1990s.

Australia has consistently conducted itself as a middle power at both the global and regional levels, through a foreign policy involving multilateralism, soft power and policy innovation. At the global level, Australia has invested considerable resources to supporting multilateral institutions, by sitting on the UN Security Council throughout 2013-14 and by hosting the G20 in 2014. Regionally, Canberra has publicly voiced its commitment to developing the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, as well as various comprehensive, national, collective and human security initiatives. Australian involvement in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) is but one example of an active foreign policy supporting informal multilateral networks. Canberra’s contribution was so extensive, that it

89 Asia Pacific Foundation, Securing Canada’s Place in Asia, 10-11. In the late 2000s, Canada began to tepidly expand Asian engagement. The qualitative and quantitative elements of this realignment, however, are inadequate, as will be discussed further below.
90 Manicom, A Policy Mismatch: Canada and the United States in the Asia-Pacific Region, 5.
91 Australia, Government of, Australia in the Asian Century, 234.
92 Ibid., 230, 233, 240.
ranked first, ahead of Japan, Germany and South Korea, as being the most important PSI participant other than the United States.\textsuperscript{93}

Engagement also extends beyond traditional diplomacy, to robust Australian support of key Track 2 initiatives such as the Shangri-la Dialogue and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific.\textsuperscript{94} Such activities bring together scholars, policy makers, civil society and other intellectuals, and allow for a more informal, constructive dialogue which shapes the development of international norms and global policy. As Defence Minister Stephen Smith noted during his 2012 speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue, Australian defence ministers have a perfect attendance record of eleven consecutive years at the forum.\textsuperscript{95} Australian support of Track 2 activities can be interpreted as an effort to foster innovative solutions to regional and global policy challenges, while exercising softer iterations of state power.

Furthermore, Canberra has been clearly communicating its position as a middle power, in regional and global affairs. Australia’s October 2012 foreign policy White Paper, \textit{Australia in the Asian Century}, highlights Canberra’s ‘longstanding commitment to active middle-power diplomacy, with its focus on practical problem solving, effective implementation and building coalitions with others.’\textsuperscript{96} The document also emphasizes building, ‘trust, norms and rules,’ and

\begin{flushright} 
\textsuperscript{93} Cooper interviewed diplomats involved with the PSI with the following question: ‘Taking into account all possible factors, including for instance diplomatic support, national-level capacity building, hosting conferences, training exercises, or other multilateral activities, leadership regionally or on functional issues, or involvement in actual interdiction operations, which would you identify as the most important PSI participant other than the United States?’ Cooper, ‘Challenging Contemporary Notions of Middle Power Influence,’ 327. 
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 239. 
\textsuperscript{96} Australia, Government of, \textit{Australia in the Asian Century}, 227. 
\end{flushright}
promoting, ‘cooperative arrangements,’ fully consolidating Australia as a leading regional and global middle power.\(^97\)

Canada, on the other hand, falls short of a coherent approach that is perceived to be more than a series of independent, disconnected initiatives. As Job observes, Canada ‘effectively disappeared’ from Asian multilateral forums at both official and Track 2 levels, meaning that it will take time, and a concerted effort, to re-establish a presence in the region.\(^98\) This is if, in the current environment of budgetary austerity, sufficient resources are allocated to Canadian institutions engaged in defence, diplomacy and development initiatives in the region.

Far from proactive initiatives or a forward leaning approach towards the region, Canada appears to be without a comprehensive Asia-Pacific policy altogether. As Dobson contends, ‘a generational and multidimensional’ strategy is imperative to restore a Canadian presence in the region’s political, security and economic spheres of activity.\(^99\)

In response to this criticism, a senior Canadian diplomat working on the Asia-Pacific, cited John Baird’s September 2012 speech to the Canadian Council of Chief Executives in Toronto.\(^100\) Although the Foreign Minister’s remarks stress the imperatives of ‘making the Asia-Pacific region a foreign policy priority,’ they leave much to be desired.\(^101\)

Ottawa’s Ministerial-level participation in the 2012 Shangri-la Dialogue, a membership bid for the ADMM+ and increased participation in the 2012 RIMPAC military exercise –

\(^97\) Ibid., 223.
\(^98\) Job, ‘Ottawa Pivots to Asia: Priorities, Prospects and Problems,’ 6.
\(^100\) Discussion at the event, ‘Northeast Asia in Transition: Challenges and Opportunities,’ hosted by the Institute of Asian Research and the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Vancouver on 2 November 2012.
highlighted by Baird as examples of Canada’s Asia strategy – do demonstrate commendable steps in the right direction, but are far from representing an overarching, whole of country, strategy. 2012 was the first time in a decade that a Canadian defence minister attended the Shangri-la Dialogue, meaning that Canada has effectively ‘missed the boat’ on the Asia-Pacific’s network of budding regional security organizations (RSOs), and now finds itself not invited to neither the ASEAN Defence Ministers Plus forum or the East Asia Summit.

Ottawa’s contribution to international peace and security at the global level, has also been lacklustre. With dramatically slashed budgets to the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Defence, as well as the Canadian International Development Agency, Ottawa’s attempts at global engagement, through defence, diplomacy or development, are minimally resourced, in addition to lacking direction and articulation. The country’s first failure to win a seat on the UN Security Council in 2010 – a post Canada has been elected to every decade since the 1940s – may be an indicator of the declining value of Canadian reputational capital globally.

Australia’s increased engagement in the Asia-Pacific, as well as Canada’s lack thereof, can be explained by several analytical approaches. A geostrategic account attributes the differences in multilateral engagement with the region, to the countries’ geographic positions. Canada is ‘America locked,’ in addition to being stretched out between Europe and Asia, Wilkins suggests, and therefore has no specific region within which to play a middle power role. Australia on the other hand, can only be physically attacked through Southeast Asia, thereby having a vested interest in contributing to regional stability and confidence building measures. The geopolitical lens does address Canberra’s active participation in the ASEAN-

102 Ibid.
centric regional security institutions. What this framework does not account for however, is the variance in Canada’s engagement between the 1990s and 2000s, since Canada’s geographic position did not change during this period.

A neoliberal framework of analysis points to shifting trade patterns over the past two decades as the primary causal factor for foreign policy divergence. Asia’s share of global GDP has grown from 20 percent in 1980 to 35 percent in 2010, as both Europe and North America’s have fallen, to 21 and 22 percent respectively.\(^{105}\) Australian trade policy has focused on proactively building ties with Asian economies; its largest import and export partner today is China.\(^{106}\) Canada’s dominant import and export partner, by an overwhelming margin, remains the United States.\(^{107}\) According to this approach, Canberra’s engagement in the region dwarfs Ottawa’s, because Australia is more economically dependant on regional stability. Since Ottawa had less interests in the region during both the 1990s and 2000s, the neoliberal framework does not explain why Canada maintained an active Asia-Pacific policy in the former decade, and largely disengaged in the latter.

An analytic lens rooted in the ideational elements of the constructivist school ascribes the variance in foreign policy trajectories of two states formerly classified as traditional middle powers, to non-material factors such as self-identity and political culture. Canada does not self-identity as a middle power in the Asia-Pacific, is not recognized as a middle power by the regional community, and is therefore not a regional middle power, according to the synthesized approach developed in Section 2, which combines material, behavioral and ideational factors.

\(^{105}\) Asia Pacific Foundation, *Securing Canada’s Place in Asia*, 15.
\(^{107}\) Ibid.
In examining how the Canadian state officially perceives itself, the statements of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, once elected to form a majority government, offer a logical starting point. During an interview with Macleans Magazine, the Prime Minister revealed that his Canada, is not a middle power at all, but rather a ‘courageous warrior,’ ready to take a stand on the ‘right side…of great threats to the world and to our civilization.’ Over the past 6 years, Stephen Harper has also repeatedly declared that Canada is an ‘energy superpower,’ to domestic and international audiences in Guangzhou, New York, London, Santiago, Sydney and Ottawa – creatively applying a term generally reserved for the United States, the former USSR and now China.

Equally significant are the phrases that have been left out. Without a Canadian white paper on foreign policy since the 2005 *International Policy Statement*, or one on defence since the 2009 *Canada First Defence Strategy*, analysts are left with few major governmental statements to discern Canadian foreign policy trajectories. Defence Minister MacKay made no mention of middle power diplomacy, soft power or a policy entrepreneurial role for Canada, in a ‘please, can I play?’ speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2012. Minister MacKay’s two


speeches at the Halifax International Security Forum in November 2012 also remained absent of middle power-speak or soft power notions, but did include undertones of multilateralism.  

Foreign Minister Baird, in a September 2012 speech that ostensibly outlines Canada’s Asia-Pacific strategy, did not once refer to multilateralism, middle power diplomacy, or any iterations of soft power. While Ottawa’s commitment to re-engage Asia remains to be seen in the long-run, it is evident that Canada will not be doing so as a middle power.

The above analysis of various ‘speech acts’ demonstrates that Canada does not self identify as a middle power in the Asia-Pacific. Mutual recognition of Canada as a relevant middle power by other actors in the international system, is also history, as evidenced by Ottawa’s failed bid for the UNSC, the lack of EAS or ADMM+ invitations and a highly qualified offer to join the Trans Pacific Partnership. States no longer regard Canada as a value-added regional player, whose participation would be crucial for regional multilateral initiatives.


114 While Canada has lost its middle power status in the Asia-Pacific, the question of whether Ottawa’s engagement through the G8 and G20 constitutes middlepowermanship, is open for debate. It is possible that Stephen Harper is concentrating Canada’s efforts towards economic and financial issues at the global level, as a result of Canada’s deteriorating status in the Asia-Pacific. Applying the recalibrated middle power concept to Canada’s activities in the G8/20 yields the following results: Canada possesses medium sized capabilities, demonstrates a preference for multilateralism, soft power and policy innovation within the G8/20 institutions, and is indeed recognized as a value-added player by other actors. Whether Canada self-identifies as a middle power in this respect, and whether other actors recognize Canada as such, is a puzzle to be explored in another research project.
Australia, on the other hand, has re-invigorated its social interaction as, ‘a middle power with global and regional interests.’\textsuperscript{115} Canberra’s participation in the Asia-Pacific institutional framework is perceived to be essential to benefit from Australia’s legitimacy capital, good offices and role as a bridging nation. Prime Minister Julia Gillard has been promoting her country’s role as a, ‘creative middle power’ with a ‘key role to play in building patterns of cooperation and trust, in the Asia-Pacific and in the wider world.’\textsuperscript{116} Gillard has further contributed to the social construction of an Australian middle power identity, through joint statements with other middle powers such as the Republic of Korea.\textsuperscript{117}

In a strategic regional environment characterized by unbalanced multipolarity between the United States and China, (as well as eventually India and Japan), Canberra has pursued an ‘omni-enmeshment’ strategy\textsuperscript{118}, thereby avoiding having to choose between either center of power. As outlined in the 2012 \textit{Australia in the Asian Century} document, Australia aims to prevent Sino-American strategic rivalry by promoting, ‘deep constructive relations,’ and dialogue in forums such as the East Asia Summit, between Washington and Beijing.\textsuperscript{119} Defence Minister Smith further reinforced Canberra’s middle power strategy during his June 2012 Shangri-La speech, by emphasizing the importance of, and Australian involvement in, regional

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{115} Australia, \textit{Australia in the Asian Century}, 234.  
\textsuperscript{119} Australia, \textit{Australia in the Asian Century}, 228-9.}
institutions such as the ARF, EAS, ADMM-plus, and through emphasis on ‘international legal frameworks’ as well as ‘dialogue within regional architecture.’

Growing Australian middle power activism can be attributed to Canberra’s attempt to preserve peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific, specifically in the context of an erosion of American hegemony in the region. Australia, Hugh White argues, is interested in the strongest possible economic relationship with China – its largest trading partner, as well as the strongest possible strategic relationship with the United States – its chief security ally.

Whether the two are possible simultaneously, or are mutually exclusive, remains to be seen. On the one hand, Australia continues to be a staunch American ally and therefore appears to have chosen to prioritize security over economy. For Beijing however, the recent agreement to host a rotational presence of up to 2,500 US Marines in Darwin, sends a message quite contrary to the Australian White Paper.

On the other hand, the globalization of commerce and the accompanying separation between nation-states and the private firms they host, suggests that the business sector in Australia and China may wish to pursue mutual gains from trade, irrespective of the inter-state political/security relationship between those countries. Thus, it may be possible for the Australian government to maintain close security ties with the United States, while private enterprise in Australia pursues increasingly intimate commercial relations with the private enterprise in China.


An emerging critique of the *Australia in the Asian Century* document, on the other hand, revolves around Canberra’s heavy investment in a multilateral foreign policy. Sussex suggests that prioritizing multilateralism risks constraining the creativity of Australian foreign policy by ‘undermining promising bilateral and minilateral ventures,’ on environmental, trade and security fronts.\textsuperscript{123} White agrees with the notion that inclusive multilateralism is not the optimal way to build a secure Asia-Pacific order. He contends that Australia’s diplomatic capital is best spent working to lobby China and the United States bilaterally, towards a ‘Concert of Asia.’\textsuperscript{124} Such an arrangement, if based on the norms of the United Nations Charter, he posits, is the most stable outcome between Asia’s great powers – the United States, China, India and Japan.\textsuperscript{125} The critique of White’s prescription, is the paradox that it would reduce Australian influence, as middle, medium and small powers would be excluded from the major decisions taken by the ‘Asian quartet.’ White meets this critique with a ‘lesser of two evils’ argument: ‘Would we rather be in the room when the great powers fail to agree on how best to manage their relationships, or out of the room when they succeed in agreeing?’\textsuperscript{126}

While Australia has worked to entrench its status as a middle power, its standing as an *Asian* middle power is far from consolidated. Canberra’s immigration policies drive Asia away, as the 2012 White Paper calls for more Australian students to learn Mandarin or Hindi\textsuperscript{127} in an

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{124} White, ‘Rethinking Australia’s Place in the Asian Century,’ 86.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{127} Australia, *Australia in the Asian Century*, 16.
\end{footnotes}
attempt to ‘Asianize’ its national identity. Since Europeans first settled on the continent, Australia has been protected by a Western ally, White notes, and as the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific is restored, fundamental questions emerge about ‘the very idea of Australia’ and the future of its national identity.

While Canada’s status as an Asia-Pacific middle power has been refuted, Australia does not fully qualify for the title either, due to its status as a Western state attempting – at times unsuccessfully – to ‘Asianize.’ The unanswered question outside the scope of this paper, then, is does Australia have to assume an Asian identity to be recognized by Asia-Pacific states as a regional middle power?

The middle power theoretical approach, recalibrated earlier in this paper, fully accommodates the foreign policy variances between Ottawa and Canberra. Possessing the material, behavioral and ideational components of middle power status, Australia is in fact a middle power in the Asia-Pacific – though not necessarily an ‘Asian middle power,’ per se – with a foreign policy focused on multilateralism, soft power and policy innovation. Canada, on the other hand, no longer self-identifies as a middle power, to either domestic or international audiences, nor is it recognized as such by other actors in the Asia-Pacific. The socially constructed middle power identity which Ottawa once maintained for itself, has been socially deconstructed. This fact demonstrates the need to regularly re-evaluate middle power status, to reflect the dynamism of global affairs.

This section has demonstrated that an analytic approach incorporating the ideational elements of the constructivist school, offers the most comprehensive explanation for the foreign

128 On the matter of immigration policy, Canada possesses a distinct advantage over Australia, with a significant part of the population already well-versed in Mandarin and Hindi, particularly in large urban centers like Vancouver and Toronto.
129 White, ‘Rethinking Australia’s Place in the Asian Century,’ 90.
policy variances of Canada and Australia – two states formally considered archetypal middle powers.
5. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to recalibrate the definition of ‘middle power’ and apply it to a comparative case study of Canadian and Australian foreign policies in the Asia-Pacific, thereby contributing to the resurgence of debate on middle power theory.

The first section examined the strategic drivers and trends, that are reshaping the Asia-Pacific security architecture at its core, namely, the rebalancing of global power from West to East, relative American decline, China’s rise and the emergence of additional actors.

In order to recalibrate the middle power theoretical approach, the material, behavioral and ideational elements of middle power status were synthesized, and analytical clarity was provided for each. Middle power foreign policies can be distilled to a preference for multilateralism, soft power and policy innovation and can be understood as a power conversion strategy for certain medium sized states to maximize influence in foreign affairs.

The value of the middle power theoretical framework is its ability to account for the foreign policy behavior of states that, (i) possess medium-range capabilities; (ii) perceive multilateralism and soft power to be the optimal way to maximize their foreign policy interests; and (iii) self-identify as middle powers. Introduction of the third, ideational component of middle power status, provides the holistic approach with more explanatory potential, as it accounts for the social construction of middle power identities.

The final section applied the recalibrated middle power concept to explain change and continuity among the foreign policies of the Asia-Pacific’s middle powers, focusing on a Canada – Australia comparative analysis. The domestic political culture and the reconstruction of their own identities has led Canada and Australia on radically different foreign policy trajectories. An
approach incorporating these ideational factors offers a more comprehensive account of foreign policy variation, than frameworks citing shifting geostrategic or economic circumstances.

Stephen Harper’s foreign policy, which so far has concentrated almost exclusively on bilateral ties, may not yield sufficient results in the Asia-Pacific, as the region’s multilateral institutional frameworks consolidate, leaving Canada on the outside. In a project to socially reconstruct Canada’s national identity and to distinguish his foreign policy from predecessors, Prime Minister Harper has stripped Canada of its middle power status, and subsequently, of one of its most significant force multipliers in global affairs – middlepowermanship. In light of Canada’s longstanding past success as a middle power, it is doubtful whether Harper’s approach will prove advantageous for the national interests of Canada and its people, in an environment of global rebalancing.

Australia on the other hand, has adapted to global rebalancing by investing considerable resources into positioning itself as both a global and regional middle power. While the social construction of an Australian middle power identity, is a fait accompli, Canberra’s strategy of ‘omni-enmeshment’ carries other challenges. Particularly, the stresses associated with being positioned between two poles of power in an increasingly competitive, unbalanced multipolar regional order. Whether Australia can withstand these straining dynamics and still maintain a middle power foreign policy, remains to be seen.
Bibliography


Holmes, John. ‘Is there a future for middlepowermanship?’ In *Canada’s role as a middle power.* Edited by J. King Gordon. Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1966.


Katzenstein, Peter. *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium.* Cornell:


