

Take Me To Your Leader: Searching for Leadership in a Time of Crisis

Panel: Plenary Session 4 (Grand Ballroom)

Date/Time: April 27, 2012 / 11:00-12:15

Organizing Institution: The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Speakers: Hugo Restall, The Wall Street Journal (moderator)
James Steinberg, Syracuse University
Funabashi Yoichi, Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation (RJIF)
Bark Taeho, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ROK

Panel Short Summary

Erik French, Syracuse University
Hana Lee, Ewha Woman's University GSIS

Hugo Restall (The Wall Street Journal) introduced the speakers and discussed the current leadership crisis in the democratic world. There is a great deal of frustration in many democracies due to a lack of active leadership. Inaction in America is rooted in our system of government which is designed to constrain leaders and limit governmental power. This has led some in the US to envy authoritarian states like China where leaders face fewer constraints and can accomplish their agendas relatively easily. Modern democracies, particularly the US, must determine how best to rebalance their governmental systems to encourage more energetic and active executive leadership.

Bark Taeho (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ROK) reviewed leadership in South Korea involving free trade agreements (FTAs). Both President Roh and President Lee worked to develop FTAs with several other states and had to overcome significant domestic political obstacles to do so. Both presidents understood that FTAs were vital for South Korea's economic competitiveness, and both were willing to act in the national interest instead of pursuing more politically expedient policies. Strong and effective leadership is also necessary at the international level, particularly in the WTO and the G-20.

Funabashi Yoichi relayed the Japanese existential crisis following the 3/11 earthquake and Fukushima nuclear incident. Japanese politics emphasizes fairness and compliance and tends to discourage strong leadership. However in times of crisis, with no legal framework or

government agency for crisis management, a different set of values such as flexibility and top-down decision making must be adopted. To redefine Japan's future goals and visions post crisis, it is first necessary to determine what kind of leadership Japan prefers- a strong leader, or leadership based on national consensus? Both are difficult given Japanese political tendencies, cultural entrenchment, and traditional value systems.

James Steinberg contrasted leadership crises between the U.S. and the international community. Great periods in U.S. history were made possible by the leader's ability to mobilize the public and create bipartisan consensus using informal tools. The biggest challenge remains the same today- cultivating leaders who can articulate visions and solutions that compel the public to action. Similarly the ineffective international governing system fails to resolve longstanding issues such as climate change and trade. To achieve progress through mobilization of the international community, new tools must be developed. Adherence to formal models of legitimacy may not result in comprehensive participation, but moving forward is the priority.

Overall, the speakers agreed that developing powers must be given more of a leading voice in international governance and leadership. With the rise of BRICS nations for example, core nations may change but the expected role as international leaders remains constant. Traditional international institutions may not be the key to leadership; instead smaller coalitions of like-minded states or groups pursuing a "minimalist" approach to global governance issues may better incentivize international cooperation in sensitive issues such as free trade. Effective mobilization of the public, clear communication of goals and visions, and minimizing protectionist nationalism are essential for future progress.

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