

Roundtable  
Discussions for  
Middle Power  
Diplomacy  
No. 4

**Presenter**

William Paterson

**Moderator**

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**Discussants**

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East Asia Institute invites distinguished presenters from Middle Powers and prominent discussants to share meaningful insights on prospects of Korea's Middle Power diplomacy in the midst of U.S.-China relations.

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## Middle Power Diplomatic Strategy of Australia and Policy Recommendations for South Korea's Middle Power

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Ever since Australian troops held the line against attacking Chinese forces in Kapyong Valley in 1951 to provide cover for retreating American and South Korean forces to escape the onslaught, Australia and South Korea have remained partners under the U.S. alliance system. Sixty years after the end of the war, the two nations have realized their shared national interests extend beyond security commitments, which has led to the recent introduction of an informal network of middle powers who intend to use their unique position to promote shared international norms.

On September 26, the East Asia Institute (EAI) invited Mr. William Paterson, the Australian ambassador to South Korea, to share Australia's experience as a well-known middle power and analyze the issues and challenges that confront today's growing set of middle power nations. The Roundtable Discussion for Middle Power Diplomacy series is a key part of EAI's research on the potential for middle power diplomacy to serve as a vision for South Korea's foreign policy, featuring discussions with the ambassadors to South Korea of the world's middle powers. EAI seeks to better understand the benefits and drawbacks for South Korea of adopting an emerging style of diplomacy in which middle powers strive to move beyond a strategy that embraces not only national interests but also emphasizes the promotion of universal norms and values across the globe.

To that end, the fourth roundtable in the series discussed Australia's hopes for MIKTA, made up of Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey, and Australia, which it believes can positively impact the international community on a

number of vexing transnational issues. The debate focused on the challenges specific to South Korea's entrance into the ranks of the middle powers, while insight taken from Australia's experiences was provided in order to aid South Korea in navigating through uncertain new waters.

### Australia's View of Middle Powers

○ In the pursuit of defining what constitutes a "middle power," the Australian ambassador considers economic weight as an important factor that contributes to overall power. A nation with a strong economy has more funding with which to forge a more powerful military, and it has the resources to conduct wider-ranging diplomatic initiatives that can lead to greater clout in the international community. The initiatives can include providing foreign aid, conducting humanitarian and disaster relief, and championing multilateral institutions, among other objectives. While a nation's economic ability factors into its global standing, it is difficult to more specifically detail the parameters that define the world's middle powers. Therefore, Australia looks to the nations that participate in the G20 but fall economically short of the G8.

○ Australia views mutual interests and the willingness to battle shared challenges as key indicators of states that are ready to enter the ranks of middle power nations. These linkages are being forged as nations like Australia and South Korea have to navigate between the esta-

blished powers and a new set of growing powers. These nations find common goals in battling environmental problems, improving energy security, and safeguarding themselves from cyber attacks.

- The practices and principles that have formed the basis of the international order are being challenged in unprecedented ways. Australia sees one such challenge in the reduced effectiveness of multilateral organizations, which was recently exposed during the UN Security Council's difficulty in creating a resolution against Syria's use of chemical weapons. Small and middle power states have traditionally relied on multilateral structures to voice their opinion on international matters. Therefore, Australia fears a decline in their effectiveness and is beginning to seek ways to network with other middle powers to ensure the strength of multilateral organizations. Australia believes this architecture is the best opportunity for established and growing nations to resolve differences in constructive ways, and middle powers have a role in buttressing and expanding the scope and strength of multilateral organizations.

### **Australia's Vision for an Informal Middle Power Network**

On September 25, the foreign ministers of Australia, South Korea, Indonesia, Turkey, and Mexico met for an informal meeting at the United Nations to discuss middle power initiatives with the hopes of establishing an informal network to deal with global challenges. Australia believes that, through sharing ideas, middle powers can identify innovative solutions to existing challenges that each nation supports. Therefore, it took the initiative to gather together a group of like-minded nations, which resulted in MIKTA.

- Australia sought nations that have strong and growing economies but lack the power to change global politics on their own. It was important for Australia to select middle powers that are committed to democracy, maintain open economies with liberalized trade and capital flows, pursue a pragmatic approach to international relations with a history of finding innovative solutions to global problems, and have a reputation as honest brokers in international organizations.

- The informal group consists of five member states at the present, but Australia is open to including other countries that share similar approaches and goals as future global problems arise. Australia does not view all member states as identical, but, rather, nations who share a common approach. The network is intended to be a coalition of convenience to accelerate international attention on issues that are of a wider significance to the world.

- Australia envisions a group that can tackle a broad range of issues – one that is not prescriptive in issue selection. It, however, has identified several initial areas in which it hopes middle powers can advocate for a greater global good. Australia would like to explore the ability for middle powers to promote multilateralism by helping to embed the G20 more concretely into the existing international architecture. While Australia views the G20 as positive and worthwhile, it feels that the G20 has yet to prove that it is capable of becoming a critical and durable addition to the international order. The network should also seek to support regional stability and prosperity. Finally, it should work with other nations to address non-traditional security problems, such as transnational crimes, energy security, cyber security, and access to food.

- Australia intends to keep the group informal. It believes that an exclusive group, or a new bloc along the lines of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) nations of rising economies, is not helpful. To that end, Australia seeks to hold regular, informal meetings on the sidelines of major international meetings, such as the G20, that build cooperation between ministers in an incremental and free-ranging manner. The network will not create an organizational structure, because Australia does not have the capability or interest to create a formal secretariat with elections. Also, if the middle power network is formalized, there will be expectations that all member nations have to coordinate their positions on specific issues – an approach Australia wishes to avoid. It prefers for the middle powers to work together on issues in which they share common interests and steer clear from areas in which the powers have differing goals.

## **Policy Recommendations for South Korea as a Middle Power**

### **1. To practice successful middle power diplomacy, South Korea should not be hindered by North Korea security issues when pursuing international initiatives.**

After the Korean War, South Korea's abilities were limited to economic development and maintaining peace on the peninsula. Today, however, South Korea has emerged as a major donor to the world's emerging economies and has become an important actor on the international stage. South Korea should not allow North Korea to impede it in its quest to pursue broader middle power initiatives, because it is a peace-loving nation that has demonstrated its international credentials by participating in peace-keeping operations and providing humanitarian assistance. If South Korea continues to expend significant energy toward enhancing the peace and prosperity of the international order, it can smoothly deal with criticism that North Korea security concerns would negatively impact its role as a global middle power. South Korea is also currently on the United Nations Security Council and has built up a record of international responsibility, while North Korea has no reputation for being an upstanding member of the international community. Therefore, the international community can accept South Korea playing a catalytic role that propels middle power initiatives into becoming global norms.

### **2. South Korea can enhance multilateral middle power diplomacy by continuing to strengthen bilateral relations.**

The third pillar of South Korea's foreign policy has become middle power multilateralism, but it must not neglect its first two pillars: the U.S.-ROK alliance and its strategic economic partnership with China. On certain issues that are crucial to a country's national interests, multilateralism can be inefficient due to the difficulty in achieving a consensus, in which case bilateralism can be implemented for better effect. Effective bilateral diplomacy can also create synergy effects that bolster multilateral middle power diplomacy.

Free trade agreements (FTAs) are one venue in which bilateralism can serve national interests but also improve global multilateralism. Currently, South Korea and Australia are hindering their economic and trade potential due to the lack of an FTA between the two countries. Australia has lost market share in South Korea in olive oil sales after

South Korea and Turkey signed an FTA in May. Likewise, Korean car manufacturers are now at a disadvantage in Australia after that nation signed an FTA with Thailand. Japanese manufacturers, who produce their cars in Thailand, have used the FTA to squeeze out Hyundai and Kia by avoiding Australian tariffs. An agreement for a Korea-Australia FTA would benefit both countries' national interests, while simultaneously demonstrating a commitment to international trade liberalization that can serve as an example for other countries to follow in the pursuit of a greater global good.

### **3. South Korea should learn from Australia's experiences operating between two major world powers.**

Australia has been quite comfortable maintaining its strong alliance with the U.S., while interacting with China as a key trading partner. It believes South Korea can also successfully negotiate the same course between the two major powers that Australia has pursued since China's economic rise. South Korea must strengthen the ROK-U.S. alliance through closer cooperation in training operations and increased dialogue. But it is also important to emphasize and promote the large – and growing – volume of trade that exists between South Korea and China. Australia and South Korea share concerns about this two-pronged approach, but they both feel that it can be fruitful when conducted with pragmatic diplomacy.

### **4. It is necessary to help create multilateral security architecture in East Asia.**

Australia has strong concerns over the lack of a multilateral security institution to mitigate problems that arise in the region. Recently, ASEAN has sought to bring the region's nations together to cooperate on softer issues – such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief – through the ASEAN Regional Forum. Territorial disputes, however, are much thornier problems that have not been addressed via multilateral organizations. Australia strives to use MIKTA to catalyze action toward developing a mechanism that can arbitrate conflicting sea and territorial claims in the region. It, however, does not seek to take leadership on the issue, but, rather, to spur positive dialogue – a stance it advocates for South Korea as well.

## 5. States with steady growth rates outside of the major powers have a unique role to play.

It is among these states that Australia sees a number of nations, including South Korea, that are capable of practicing the middle power diplomacy that has been a hallmark of its foreign relations. The established powers of the U.S., Japan, and the European Union have witnessed extended periods of sluggish economic growth in recent times. Rising states, like China and India, are gaining more power and authority in direct relation to their growing economic status. But regional powers in the vein of Australia and South Korea are witnessing the same phenomenon: their stature in the international system has risen substantially along with strong economic gains. In this time of great change, Australia has adopted a vigorous role. It is eager to step in and be involved in shaping the direction of transnational issues, which it hopes to further with the creation of MIKTA. South Korea now has the opportunity to bolster its new reputation as a fellow middle-power-in-arms and effect positive change in the international order by embracing this unique role. ■

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