

Summary

Regional Architecture in East Asia and Middle Power Diplomacy

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Session I

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Session II: Part 1

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Session II: Part 2

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This product presents a policy-oriented summary of the Trilateral Dialogue on Regional Architecture and Middle Power Diplomacy.

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In recent years there has been much interest in so-called middle power diplomacy among emerging countries in East Asia. These countries are beginning to match their international role with their economic power, yet in the region they remained constrained by larger powers such as the United States and China. Seeking a role, middle power diplomacy has been keenly embraced as a way to define their position in the region and the world.

In spite of this interest, the concept of a middle power and middle power diplomacy has not been clearly determined. For example, Japan may exhibit the characteristics of middle power diplomacy yet would not be recognized as a middle power by some of its neighbors due its large economic power. Furthermore, the roles that middle powers play is increasingly complex, not just mediating between the major powers in the region, but also globally between developing and advanced economies. In general, the issues that these middle powers have embraced range from humanitarian aid to regional security threats. The challenge though remains that these middle powers have yet to establish strong cooperation among them on these issues, particularly on the global stage.

The EAI organized this Trilateral Dialogue on “Regional Architecture and Middle Power Diplomacy” to not only identify the issues confronting middle powers of the region,

but also to seek ways in which they can further cooperation. The following is a summary of the main points and policy recommendations from the discussions in each of the sessions.

Session 1: How to Design Middle Power Architecture in East Asia

1) South Korea’s Perspective

The promotion of norms in the region is an important task for middle powers like South Korea.

As great powers tend to be competitive, middle powers in East Asia can play an important role in framing the regional architecture. South Korea, as a strong proponent of middle power diplomacy, can strengthen coordination among other middle powers by promoting a consensus among them based on international norms. Such international norms can be enhanced in the region by emphasizing value-orientated activities, such as education, the arts, and religion. These areas tend to induce greater cooperation than the more difficult areas related to security issues.

South Korea should facilitate middle power cooperation with ASEAN countries.

When considering regional middle power cooperation in East Asia, little thought is given to countries of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) despite many common interests. Both Northeast Asian countries and ASEAN are concerned about how to effectively

engage the major powers like China and the United States. The fear for middle powers in the region is that they may be pushed aside by great power diplomacy as in the past. However, by linking together with ASEAN countries, the middle powers of Northeast Asia can strengthen the influence of middle power diplomacy.

2) Japan's Perspective

Middle power diplomacy still needs to be carefully defined.

Despite the discussions on middle power diplomacy, there is still a lack of a clear definition on what its characteristics are. While the definition of a middle power will always be difficult, it might be more prudent to focus on middle power as a style of diplomacy. That is middle power diplomacy follows certain characteristics that countries pursue for whatever reason, rather than the actions of countries defined as middle powers.

Middle power diplomacy can help Japan to be more active in the region.

Japan faces both domestic and international constraints in playing a more active role in the region. In particular, it is difficult for Japan to advance any new initiatives in the region as this usually brings about opposition from China. In pursuing middle power diplomacy, Tokyo could overcome these limitations and play a more active role.

3) Taiwan's Perspective

Despite its limitations, Taiwan should pursue middle power diplomacy.

Taiwan views itself as marginalized in the framing of regional architecture despite its strong economic role. Middle power diplomacy would naturally be attractive for Taiwan and is worth pursuing as a way to enhance its international role that it is now trying to build. Although China opposes any international role for Taiwan, over the years it has not blocked efforts to internationalize Taiwan's economy. By utilizing economic ties as common ground with other countries, Taiwan can help to elevate its international role.

Taiwan's engagement with China can help other countries.

Over the last few years, Taiwan has been engaging China which has produced positive results such as the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA). Taiwan certainly has a very unique experience in dealing with China and can share such knowledge with other countries in the region as they cope with China's rise.

Session 2: Specific Issue Areas for Cooperation among Middle Powers

1) Economic Cooperation

Middle powers should seek to harmonize conflicting and overlapping institutions such as FTA networks and the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Economic ties tend to be a form of optimistic cooperation that helps to alleviate tensions in the region. However, the emergence of overlapping economic institutions has raised competition between the United States and China over regional leadership. In recent years, the United States has been advocating its Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) while China has been emphasizing FTA networks centered on its growing economy and huge domestic market. Middle powers should work to assure the great powers that these overlapping institutions can be harmonized. As the TPP and the FTA networks have different requirements and aims, they do not have to be in competition with one another.

As newly emerging economies, middle powers can play a broker role between advanced and developing countries.

Taking on the role of a broker is an important part of being a middle power. As many middle powers in East Asia have emerged from a background as developing economies they are well suited for this role. In fact, a few countries such as South Korea have been actively trying to pursue a broker role in international organizations. It is important though to recognize that this role is not for one single country alone, but rather for many countries to collaborate and work together on.

2) Regional Security/Strategic Cooperation

Middle powers can shape the environment to facilitate China's rise as a status quo power.

Considering China's long-term goals that look at reaching developmental targets, such as increased income levels, by 2021 and 2049, it is expected that China will more likely be a status quo power. However, China will still display some degree of assertiveness in the region. Middle powers should shape the regional and global environment that China will emerge in to ensure it will become a status quo power.

Competition in the region will derive from who takes the lead.

While China may not challenge the United States as a global power, there may develop competition between the two countries over regional leadership. The pursuit of different regional economic architecture is indicative of such competition between Beijing and Washington over the region. The security architecture of the region is also an area for competition where the United States is strengthening its alliances while China advocates a more multilateral security framework. This will be one of the main challenges for middle powers to contend with and mediate between the great powers.

3) Official Development Aid

It is important to link national interests with international norms

Although there has been much interest in Official Development Aid (ODA) among emerging countries such as South Korea, the interest has generally been limited only to extending national interests. The challenge will be then to merge national interests with international norms so that these countries can take on a stronger role in international development.

Different actors and models add to the complexity of ODA.

With emerging donors now becoming major players in providing ODA, they also bring different developmental models and different interests. Along with these countries,

non-state actors and individuals are also taking on a major role in providing aid. The impact of this is a more complex picture of ODA that will require mediation among the different donors, something that middle powers can provide.

4) Changing Cross-Strait Relations and Peace and Security in East Asia

Common norms across the Taiwan Strait can strengthen relations.

China and Taiwan have managed to overcome zero-sum perceptions on relations and strengthen economic ties. While there is a consensus on developing economic ties and agreements can be reached on this, such ties will be greatly enhanced by the sharing of common norms. This can be the basis for restoring trust between the two sides over more difficult areas such as security issues.

Taiwan must also be involved in the regional process.

With the signing of the ECFA, Taiwan now has an opportunity to become more involved in the regional architecture. In this respect, Taiwan will need the support of other countries to support its participation in regionalism. Such support can come through increased bilateral economic ties with countries in the region.

5) Disaster Relief

Disaster Relief will become a major task for military forces in the region.

While national security is the main concern for middle powers in East Asia, humanitarian operations such as disaster relief are becoming increasingly important. As these middle powers expand their roles internationally, they have to meet the challenges faced by disasters occurring in other countries. This will be a task for the military forces of these middle powers as they undergone modernization requiring new levels of training and preparation.

In the wake of a disaster, sharing information is crucial to manage properly the situation.

The recent Fukushima accident revealed the importance of governments' sharing information on the nature of and scale of the accident. Such information should also include warnings to neighboring states about the fallout effects, such as when Japan dumped contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea. This should not be restricted to the state-level, but should also include the public which is important to avoid further mitigating damage and creating general panic. ■

Biographies of Participants

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Kang Choi (Ph.D., the Ohio State University) is a professor and Director-General for American Studies at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. From 1992 to 1998, and from 2002 to 2005, Professor Choi worked in the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses (KIDA). When at KIDA, Professor Choi assumed various positions such as Chief Executive Officer, Task Force for Current Defense Issues, Director of International Arms Control Studies, and one of the editors of Korean Journal of Defense Analysis (KJDA). He has done researches on arms control, crisis/consequence management, North Korean military affairs, multilateral security cooperation, and the ROK-US security alliance. From 1998 to 2002, he served in National Security Council Secretariat as Senior Director for Policy Planning and Coordination. He was one of South Korean delegates to the Four-Party Talks. Professor Choi has published many articles including "An Approach toward a Common Form of Defense White Paper," "International Arms Control and Inter-Korean Arms Control," "Inter-Korean Arms Control and Implications for the USFK," "Future ROK-US Security Alliance," "North Korea's Intentions and Strategies on Nuclear Games," and "A Prospect for US-North Korean Relations: beyond the BDA issue." Professor Choi holds several advisory board membership including Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Unification of National Assembly, Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Unification, and the National Unification Advisory Council.

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