

Roundtable  
Discussions for  
Middle Power  
Diplomacy  
No. 1

**Presenter**

David Chatterson

**Moderator**

Sook-Jong Lee

**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 Diplomacy of Canada and Its Implications for South Korea's Foreign Policy

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### Why did Canada Become a "Middle Power" and How?

In the aftermath of the World War II, which marked the end of the "Great Power Era," Canada began to review its approach to the international politics. As competition between the Western allies and the Eastern bloc emerged, Canada concentrated its efforts on building international institutions in order to secure its diplomatic autonomy and maneuverability. Throughout the history, Canada has emphasized the value of peace, order, and good government. It is quite natural for Canada to pursue an active role in establishing international institutions.

Canada invested its time and resources in constructing international institutions. By sending delegates with exceptional expertise to the discussion on international institutions, Canada assumed the critical role in drafting rules and norms of various institutions. Canada's idea and input were crucial factors in the process of building major institutions such as United Nations (UN), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), World Trade Organization (WTO), Group of Seven (G7), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Canada also pursued "constructive diplomacy" to maintain its independence, exert influence, and advance its interests and vision for the world. Canada worked to understand the interests and motivations of other countries, to be constructive, to build coalitions, and to achieve win-win solutions. Canada's

Following the global economic crisis in 2008, consensus-building among the states with diverse interests is becoming more crucial as rising powers are now actively engaging in the process of reconstructing global governance architecture. The "Middle Power Diplomacy" is increasingly more relevant in this regard. Since South Korea made a successful debut as an emerging middle power through G20 Seoul Summit in 2010, Seoul has been facing heightened expectations from the international community to become a bridge between developed and developing states.

East Asia Institute (EAI) focuses on the middle power diplomacy as a viable option for South Korea to meet the challenges of regional uncertainty caused by shifting balance of power between the United States and China. With enhanced reputation based on active and positive role as an "honest broker," Seoul can contribute to developing regional arrangements that mitigate the impact of power shift in East Asia.

In this regard, EAI holds roundtable series with ambassadors from middle power countries to discuss the future direction of South Korea's middle power diplomacy. On April 3, 2013, EAI invited David Chatterson, Ambassador of Canada to Korea, to discuss the Canadian experience in multilateral diplomacy and suggest policy recommendations for the South Korean government in pursuing middle power diplomacy. The following are some of the main points from the presentation and the subsequent discussion with South Korean assemblyman, experts, and journalist.

role as an “honest broker” or “consensus builder,” however, should not be overstated. Based on its own national interest, Canada has always prioritized cooperation with Western allies or “like-minded” countries as its history clearly shows during the Suez Crisis (1956), First Gulf War (1990), Kosovo War (1998), War in Afghanistan (2001), and Libyan civil war (2011). In this regard, “constructive diplomacy,” rather than “middle power diplomacy,” is a more suitable term to describe Canada’s experience in foreign policy.

## **Lessons from the Past 70 Years and Recommendations for Korea**

### **1. South Korea should identify issues, opportunities, and tasks where it can maximize its influence.**

Only the great powers such as the United States can exert considerable clout over the issues in general. Middle powers should specify the issue areas where it can concentrate its efforts. That is, South Korea should take on some global responsibilities based on not only the estimation of its resources and capabilities, but also the assessment of where it can maximize its impact. For middle powers, influence is not given but needs to be created. The middle “power” concept is misleading in this regard as it could have connotations that becoming a middle power itself automatically brings a certain level of influence. It would be more desirable for South Korea to pursue the concept of “constructive diplomacy,” instead of “middle power diplomacy.”

### **2. Enhancing credibility of South Korea in international community through value-consistent actions is crucial.**

Only with the substantial powers such as knowledge, technology, and economic capabilities, middle power countries would be able to shape the agendas in international forums to meet their national interests. In addition to those powers, reputation can be the important source of leverage for middle powers. In building reputation, positioning strategy of performing value-consistent actions plays a significant role. For example, criticizing human rights problems in North Korea while disregarding the human rights issues in Iran would never help South Korea to build good reputation in the international community. The level of reputation or

status of South Korea in the international community can be measured by how many countries seek opinions and try to read future policy recommendations from Seoul; how many working groups Seoul is participating in; and how often it is invited as a chair for international conferences.

### **3. Key is to understand how to collaborate with whom on what.**

World is much more complex today than 20 years ago. National interests extend far beyond the border and each country faces many transnational issues and problems. This complexity induces middle powers in the twenty-first century to construct flexible networks of cooperation. It is impossible to collaborate with one specific country for all kinds of challenges that South Korea is facing. Maintaining various types of coalition according to specific issues is critical. Future cooperation in international politics should focus on “issues,” rather than “actors.”

### **4. Leadership transcending domestic politics based on strategic thinking matters.**

Multilateral diplomacy requires a high level of expertise. As it is said that “All politics is local,” however, domestic political discourses have usually been dominated in terms of narrowly-defined national interests. It is important to remember that efforts to mobilize comprehensive support and understanding from the domestic political circle and the public on middle power multilateralism will face clear limitations.

### **5. Increasing overall capacity of Korean society through opening up the market is necessary.**

In order to actively engage in the process of drafting international norms and rules, it is crucial for Seoul to foster and develop capable work force. Training competent people, however, is not just the problem of individual endeavors, but rather closely related to the general capacity of the society. Opening up the Korean market to the international community by concluding various kinds of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) would help South Korea to be better equipped with institutions and capabilities that successfully meet the international standard.

### **6. It is difficult for South Korea to play the role of a mediator between the United States and China.**

It is undeniable that the future direction of the U.S.-China

relations is the greatest challenge for South Korea's foreign policy. Unfortunately, it would be a very difficult task for Seoul to be a mediator between the two super powers. What South Korea should pursue instead is to improve the strategic transparency between the two countries by helping to establish multiple levels of communication channels. ■

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