

Roundtable  
Discussions for  
Middle Power  
Diplomacy  
No. 2

**Presenter**

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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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## Strategic Partnerships between India and East Asia with Advent of Asian Century

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The East Asia Institute (EAI) is conducting research on the possibility of middle power diplomacy as a vision for Korea's foreign policy. By definition, middle power diplomacy refers to a strategy adopted by middle powers categorized as such based on national resources. The definition of middle power diplomacy in fact extends beyond a strategy that serves only national interests; middle power diplomacy encompasses universal norms and values, and influences regional and global strategic environments. Middle power diplomacy is being considered as a viable policy option for South Korea to effectively respond to growing uncertainty resulting from power transition-triggered conflicts between the U.S. and China.

On July 15, 2013, EAI invited Vishnu Prakash, Ambassador of India to Korea, to discuss India's foreign policy built on its rich historical experiences and suggest recommendations for South Korea. Following are main points from the roundtable discussion.

### Experience of India

Although India is geographically located in West Asia, it can be considered as an East Asian nation from the historical and strategic perspective. India borders Myanmar and China, and is only 90 nautical miles away from Indonesia. Close geographical proximity to the East Asian region has allowed India to maintain a high level of political, economic, and cultural exchanges with Southeast and East Asian nations for thousands of years. Indian culture, religion, languages, and cuisine

also have had an enduring impact on East Asian nations. For example, exceptional historical bond between Korea and India is demonstrated by a tale of a marriage between an Indian Princess Suriratna from Ayodhya and King Kim Suro from the ancient Korean Kingdom of Gaya as narrated in *Samguk Yusa* and *Diary of a Journey to the Five Kingdoms of India*, the record of a Korean Buddhist monk Hye-cho's pilgrimage to India.

India's close relationships with a diverse and heterogeneous group of countries have made its national identity very complex in terms of the socio-cultural aspects. According to a survey conducted in 1950, only 17 percent of the population identified themselves as Indian, which demonstrates that a majority of Indians in 1950 based their identities on religion, ethnicity, and regionalism instead of on nationality. In 2010, however, the same survey showed that 41 percent of the respondents considered themselves as Indian. This rise in the percentage of Indians who consider themselves as Indian clearly indicates that a high level of societal synthesis is occurring in India.

India is also the world's largest democracy, with the second largest population of 1.2 billion in the world. As a member of the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), India is the tenth largest economy in the world, with its annual growth rate of 6 to 8 percent in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). From the perspective of diplomatic relations, India is the leading power in Southwest Asia and an influential middle power that has pioneered the Non-Aligned Movement in the midst of United Nation led-multilateral diplomacy. Despite the positive societal and ec-

onomic signs, however, India is still a developing country in terms of the per capita income and percentage of population living in poverty. It has yet to resolve a dilemma of huge disparity between the size of the economy and quality of life.

Historically, India was constantly under the foreign invasion and colonization by countries such as Macedonia, Persia, Portugal, France, and the British Empire over 2,500 years. India, contrasted with its glorious past, also experienced serious economic stagnation when it made a transition to a modern state. According to economic historian Angus Maddison, India's GDP which accounted for 23 percent of the world's GDP in 1820 downgraded to mere 1 percent when India became independent in 1947. This historical background explains why India has prioritized sustainable and equitable economic development as the most important national agenda. As economic development became a primary goal, since the 1990s India has pursued Look East Policy to focus on economic miracles of East Asian nations. As a result, India became an East Asia Summit member country, expanding its role in the East Asian region by signing Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPA) with Korea and Japan.

### **India's Foreign Policy Strategy**

India sees its foreign policy as an extension of domestic policy. In order to create enough employment for its youths, sustainable economic growth remains at the center of India's national interests. Thus, India zeroes in on creating an international environment conducive to its economic developmental aspirations. Despite the fact that for the last 20 years, India has maintained its annual GDP growth rate of 6 percent and its GDP at purchasing power parity per capita increased six-fold, its GDP per capita has not yet reached \$1,500. In order to sustain continuous economic growth, it is necessary that India focus its role in the global economy while maintaining friendly relations with its neighbors. In such political and economic endeavor, India has been spending approximately 2 million dollars as foreign aid to neighboring countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. India has been focusing on forging close cooperative ties with immediate and neighboring countries by

sharing asymmetric burden even in the situation where it has been difficult to establish reciprocity relations.

At the same time, India's security policy prioritizes strategic autonomy in a response to its long history of colonial rule and foreign invasion. India's nuclear development can be understood in this context. India shares over 4,000 kilometers-long border with China, with whom it has been embroiled in territorial disputes since the 1965 Sino-Indian War. As a response to the nuclear development of Pakistan, with whom India has had bitter historical and religious conflicts, India inevitably developed its own nuclear weapons in need of credible deterrent and defensive capabilities. Nevertheless, India strictly abides by the "No First Use" of nuclear weapons pledge and a principle of no nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states.

As a traditional status quo power in the region, India has been reluctant to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states. According to a global survey conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, just 3 percent of respondents viewed India as the biggest threat to peace in Asia, placing India as the third most non-threatening country in the region after South Korea (0.5 percent) and Japan (2 percent). Since India has endured painful history of colonization and is a functioning democracy unlike China, it is not interested in wielding influence on neighboring countries with its economic power. Democratic system strongly upheld in India will serve as a structural factor in devising its foreign policy based on its commitment to regional peace and stability.

### **Implications for South Korea**

**1. In the Era of Co-op-tetion (cooperation + competition), it is important to adopt flexible diplomacy that narrows differences among neighboring states and expands common ground based on national interests.**

Even during the Cold War, India maintained strategic flexibility by not allying with either the United States or the Soviet Union. This tradition of India's Non-Aligned Movement has continued post-Cold War; Indian diplomacy is not aimed at containing or blockading a country and instead focuses on building partnership rather than alliance. Today's international environment is intricately intertwined

between cooperation and competition. Therefore, diplomatic strategy of relying on an alliance to balance a country is rather anachronistic. By nature, foreign policy should take into account national interests before any other value. In order to serve Korean national interests, it is essential to devise middle power diplomacy so that Korea can reduce the disparity between its national interests and those of neighboring countries while expanding the common ground shared with the neighbors. Perhaps a lesson is to be learned from the example set by multilateral diplomacy of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, which showcases a successful model for middle power diplomacy.

**2. Institutionalization of regional security cooperation requires step-by-step approach that starts with issues that can easily stimulate regional cooperation and gradually expands the scope of cooperation.**

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a clear indication of close economic cooperation among East Asian countries. In order to maintain the current high level of economic cooperation within the region, there needs to be a multilateral institution that can facilitate discussion on common regional challenges such as terrorism, piracy, climate change, and natural disasters beyond just economic issues. Especially the effort to institutionalize security cooperation within East Asia, which has been the weakest point in the East Asian regional relations, is essential. In this regard, East Asian countries should first work to cooperate on low-level issues that can easily drive collaborative efforts, such as cultural exchanges, and gradually move toward high-level issues. In implementing this step-by-step approach to slowly instill a strong sense of regional cooperation, South Korea and India should take initiatives.

**3. In terms of national identity, economy, and security, it is necessary for South Korea to further develop strategic partnership with India.**

As strategic partners with shared economic and security interests, South Korea and India should further develop the relationship between the two. Because the two countries as functioning democracies value the rule of law, South Korea

and India share a number of similarities from the perspective of national identities. From the economic standpoint, India is an attractive partner for South Korea; India boasts high saving rate and stable market economy with strong private sector. It also has the slowest aging population among developing countries in the region, which will potentially contribute to sustaining India's current economic growth. Therefore, South Korea and India should transform South Korea-India CEPA signed in 2009 into a high-level Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to further strengthen the inter-state economic cooperation. Additionally, two countries share similarities in their national security agendas. Both South Korea and India need to maintain close relations with the United States, the important national security partner, while cooperating with China, the predominant economic power in the region. Thus, it is in South Korean and Indian national interests to maintain favorable relations with the United States and China simultaneously, rather than taking a side between the two great powers. China's recent attempt to expand its influence over South Korea through North Korea as it has done to India through Pakistan should serve as an important driving factor in enhancing comprehensive partnership between South Korea and India. ■

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