

**Roundtable  
Discussions for  
Middle Power  
Diplomacy  
No. 5**

**Presenter**

H.E. José Luis Bernal  
Rodríguez

**Moderator**

Sook-Jong Lee

**Discussants**

Woon-An Kam  
Bok Hyung Lee  
Young Jo Lee  
Su-Jin Chun

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.

The East Asia Institute  
909 Sampoong B/D  
310-68 Euljiro 4-ga  
Jung-gu  
Seoul 100-786  
Republic of Korea

© EAI 2013

[www.eai.or.kr](http://www.eai.or.kr)

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

November 8, 2013

The East Asia Institute (EAI) is currently conducting research on the possibility of middle power diplomacy as a vision for South Korea's foreign policy. By definition, middle power diplomacy refers to a strategy adopted by middle powers based on their national resources and capabilities. It, however, extends beyond serving only national interests and encompasses universal norms and values while influencing 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.

As part of this study, EAI invited H.E. José Luis Bernal Rodríguez, the Mexican ambassador to South Korea, for the fifth Ambassador Roundtable Discussion for Middle Power Diplomacy on October 31. Ambassador Bernal explained the diverse factors, including geographic and economic conditions, which influence Mexico's foreign policy. The following question-and-answer session centered on proposals concerning a future partnership between South Korea and Mexico and the prospects of the newly-emerging network of middle powers named MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia).

### Factors Influencing Mexico's Foreign Policy

Mexico is the largest Spanish-speaking country in the world with a population of 120 million people, and it has approximately two million square kilometers of territory, making it

the 11<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world - 20 times the size of South Korea. Its economic size ranks it 12<sup>th</sup>, and its financial contributions to the United Nations put it at 10<sup>th</sup> in the world. Mexico was a member country of the UN Security Council from 2009 to 2010, and it currently takes part in the G20, OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), and MIKTA - the group of middle power countries.

There are various factors that influence Mexico's national status and role, but geography is one of its most important due to its long border with the United States and the two countries' inter-connectivity. The economy is another key sector where Mexico seeks to spark growth and reform. In addition, the education and welfare of Mexico's population and the positive political development of its democracy are integral to Mexico's success. In foreign relations, Mexico maintains a proactive approach that seeks friendly relations with countries beyond just its borders, and it hopes to gain leadership in promoting the strength of the international community in the future.

In terms of geography, Mexico is located on the North American continent, bordering the U.S. to the north and Central America to the south. Its border touches both the Atlantic Ocean and Pacific Ocean, which gives it the advantage of being connected to all regions of the world. This geographic characteristic has nourished the complex Mexican identity which has resulted from a mixture of multiple ethnicities and cultures over three thousand years.

Economically, Mexico is continuing to grow at a fast pace. Mexico is one of the 10 largest trading countries in the world and is a member of NAFTA (North America Free Trade Agreement). It has also signed the Preferential Trade Agreement with a total of forty five states, including the EU and Central and South American countries such as Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Colombia, Chile, and Brazil. Mexico is the second-largest trading partner of the United States, operates as the number-one exporter to Latin America, and receives the sixth-largest amount of foreign direct investment among emerging countries. Mexico's economic achievements to date can be attributed to NAFTA, due to the dramatic increase in international trade volume and foreign direct investment since the signing of the agreement. Mexico remained an exporter of natural resources up until the 1990s, but it has made remarkable developments in the manufacturing industry in the 2000s. Not only is Mexico the fourth-largest exporter of cars in the world, but it also has substantial competitiveness in home electronic appliances, textiles, computers, and mobile phones. Moreover, it has shown a rapid advance in the aerospace industry. Although Mexico's economy was hit hard during the 2008 financial crisis, it began its recovery after 2010 through efforts to create jobs, maintain national fiscal health, and improve the banking system.

However, Mexico still requires greater effort in order to sustain its economic development. It should maintain its economic openness, while continuing to make strong initiatives to reform its social infrastructure. Poverty, income inequality, and public safety are especially serious problems that call for substantial attention. Furthermore, concerning the issue of the institutionalization of democratic development, it is necessary to fight for extensive reform by exterminating corruption and upholding the rule of law. Enrique Pena Nieto, the president of Mexico who was inaugurated last December, has embarked on a reform drive to cope with these problems. The country has consistently struggled in reinforcing public safety, building rule of law, eradicating poverty, improving the education system, and creating labor regulations in the past. Due to Mexico's weak political foundation for democratic values resulting from years of dictatorship, President Pena Nieto endeavors to mediate diverse voices within his country in a way that respects the democratic process.

## **Mexico's Diplomacy**

In its foreign policy, Mexico maintains the principles of national self-determination, equality of countries, and opposition to foreign intervention, as regulated by its constitutional law. In the middle of the 19th century, Mexico experienced the loss of nearly half its national territory after losing a war with the United States. Therefore, it does not consider military force as a solution to any problem in international politics, preferring to emphasize problem solving through peaceful methods. In addition, because Mexico has put a great deal of effort toward solving its poverty problem, it cares deeply about international development cooperation as well.

Mexico's diplomacy can be summarized into four distinct points. First, Mexico is concerned with protecting its national security, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity through the peaceful implementation of international law and international organizations. Second, in order to contribute to economic growth, Mexico pursues the extension of trade and investments, tourist allurements, and protection of Mexican business interests in the global market. Third, Mexico aims for international cooperation in the fields of poverty, science and technology, and human security in order to gain international assistance for Mexico's domestic social issues. Fourth, it tries to reinforce cooperation among "like-minded" countries within the OECD, MIKTA, APEC, and NAFTA to further shared goals.

Currently, Mexico is setting the stage to perform a more active role in the international community. It strives to contribute to international society by utilizing lessons it learns in resolving its domestic social problems. For the meantime, however, Mexico's capabilities are focused solely on domestic issues, and it can only adopt a selective approach to international cooperation, such as prioritizing efforts toward countries that Mexico targets for FTA negotiations. In this regard, the lack of Mexican experts who can deal with international issues is also problematic.

## **Implications for the Future of Mexico-South Korea Middle Power Diplomacy**

**1. The middle power cooperative group MIKTA is still at the embryonic stage, thus it is too early to discuss its specific roles. It is prudent to examine in which issue areas solidarity is possible.**

MIKTA is new enough that it has not yet even been decided whether it will be necessary to maintain a secretariat. Although Australia opposes the building of any official structure around MIKTA and wishes it to remain unofficial and flexible, it seems pertinent to establish at least a structure that supports a minimum level of operations. At the first meeting last October, Turkey and Indonesia exhibited passive responses to the many issues discussed, such as development cooperation, cyber security, the environment, climate change, refugee and disaster relief, health care, and democracy development. Therefore, for now, it is a priority to strengthen solidarity by concentrating on issues that all members of MIKTA can reach an agreement upon before seeking additional participants. When NAFTA first began to be formed, they had a heated debate over which issues to remove from the agenda. Likewise, MIKTA's early development stage begs for the consideration of the diverse positions of all members and relevant experts in order to craft a future direction that leads to constructive progress.

**2. MIKTA, as a third party, can contribute to improving communication between South and North Korea and enhance international cooperation toward resolving the North Korea problem.**

The MIKTA countries, excluding South Korea, are not directly involved in the issue of the Korean peninsula. Hence, MIKTA can use its solidarity to serve as a messenger to assist in mutual communication between South and North Korea. Moreover, since MIKTA is a cooperative group of diverse countries from different regions, it can also be a catalyst that proposes a variety of policy options to the North Korean regime for the settlement of peninsular issues and promoting North Korea's economic development.

**3. Strategic independence should be attained in order to actively pursue middle power diplomacy.**

Although the U.S. is Mexico's most significant trade partner, Mexico has neither established a strategic alliance with the U.S. nor has it consistently followed U.S. policy lines. Mexico was the first country in the world to acknowledge the

Cuban Revolution and still maintains a stable relationship with Cuba. Mexico has amicable diplomatic relations with a diverse range of countries, based on its complex national identity and geographical advantage that connects it to all regions of the world. In order to actively realize middle power diplomacy, constructing diverse networks based on strategic independence is necessary. ■

— H.E José Luis Bernal Rodríguez, Mexico's ambassador to Korea, has extensively served in key positions such as director general for Multilateral Economic Relations and Economic Relations with North America, minister in charge of coordinating relations with the U.S. Congress during North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations, and a counselor and first secretary for Economic Affairs. He previously served as Mexico's ambassador to Sweden and the Czech Republic. In July 2013, he was appointed Mexican ambassador to Korea. He graduated from the National Autonomous University of Mexico and acquired his Master's degree from the Center for Research and Teaching Economics, Mexico: CIDE.

#### **Speaker**

H.E José Luis Bernal Rodríguez, Ambassador of Mexico to the Republic of Korea.

#### **Moderator**

Sook-Jong Lee, President of East Asia Institute

#### **Discussants**

Woon-An Kam, Director for Policy Planning & Coordination, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Bok Hyung Lee, Founder-Director of Latin American Cultural Center & Museum.

Young Jo Lee, Professor of Graduate School of Pan-Pacific International Studies, Kyung Hee University.

Su-jin Chun, Reporter at the JoongAng Daily.