

# New Approach of South Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy: Focusing on Global Agenda Setting

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**ABSTRACT:** In an altering global power architecture, South Korea has the national capacity to contribute to resolving transnational issues and has the potential to support a global common good. But in the discourse of South Korea's role, the pivotal question has always been "how" to be a responsible middle power. Until now, South Korea has implemented its middle power in four different aspects: (1) Balancing Act in Northeast Asia; (2) ODA policy; (3) UN PKO; and (4) Global agenda setting. However, among the four, South Korea's focus on balancing in Northeast Asia and ODA policy has been disproportionately concentrated in Asia due to national interests. This paper argues that in order to be a responsible middle power, South Korea should avert from a myopic Asian standpoint and concentrate more on global agenda setting through international institutions and the G20 platform. South Korea's inherent structural constraints hamper a more proactive engagement in UN PKO. Therefore, global agenda setting is a more appropriate sphere to contribute to the world as a responsible middle power.

**Keywords:** South Korea, middle power diplomacy, global agenda setting, ODA policy, peacekeeping, international institutions.

## Introduction

In the contemporary era, global power architecture is gradually altering. The most powerful global power, the U.S., has been losing its preponderant hegemonic position in the early twenty-first century. After wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the global economic crisis in 2008, the U.S. has experienced substantial capacity loss in national economy and military. In contrast, China has become a striking regional power in Asia and has emerged as a formidable global power threatening the U.S. The reshaping of global power architecture has not only resulted from China, but also from the ascent of Brazil in Latin America and India in South Asia which has propelled, the crafting of a new global order.<sup>1</sup>

The economic growth of BIC (Brazil, India, and China) in the twenty-first century is one of the most seminal factors leading the alteration of global power architecture. After

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew F. Cooper and Jongryn Mo, "Middle Power Leadership and the Evolution of the G20," *Global Summitry Journal* 1, no. 1 (2013): 1.

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the emergence of Deng Xiaoping, who led China's economic reforms called "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," China has maintained stunning double-digit economic growth and has gradually altered the holistic backdrop of global politics. In 2010, China became the second-largest economy and many pundits predict that China's economy will surpass that of the U.S. by 2030. India and Brazil's economic growths are also outstanding. According to the World Bank, India has maintained almost eight percent annual economic growth from 2000 to 2015 and Brazil has developed as a top-10 global economy. Even more notable is BIC's global GDP share in the twenty-first century. In 2015, the three countries' GDP accounted for one-fifth of the global economy which is almost the same proportion of the U.S. In addition, the U.S.-led global institutions have been challenged by China-led institutions. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the One Belt One Road Initiative are expanding their influence not only to Asian countries but also to European countries. The conventional U.S. allies such as England, Germany, France, and Australia, among others, have decided to join these institutions that are part of the new China-led economic order.

The U.S.-led unipolar global order since the collapse of the Soviet Union has been gradually moving to a multipolar system. Acharya argues that the American world order has ended and the globe is altering to a multiplex world. He depicts the multiplex world as "a world of diversity and complexity, a decentered architecture of order management, featuring old and new powers, with a greater role for regional governance."<sup>2</sup> Goh also mentions the decline of the U.S. hegemony and that the global and regional order have become more convoluted and layered.<sup>3</sup> In addition, in the twenty-first century, a variety of transnational issues have challenged the U.S.-led global order. Transnational terrorism, environmental issues, refugee problems, and energy security issues have required more collective action among diverse nation-states. It has become more axiomatic that one global hegemon cannot effectively handle these transnational issues.

In this vein, this paper investigates the role of middle powers - especially South Korea's middle power - in the multiplex world that Acharya describes. With a certain extent of economic capacity and military might, as well as diplomatic influence on the international community, the roles of middle powers have become more seminal in the multiplex world. Cooper argues that the middle powers are pivotal in terms of proffering alternative sources in order to fully capture the evolving complexity in global affairs.<sup>4</sup> Structural leadership by global powers is no longer the most crucial vehicle for coping with transnational global issues. The collaborations among global powers and middle

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<sup>2</sup> Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Evelyn Goh, *The struggle for order: Hegemony, Hierarchy and Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2013), 212.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew F. Cooper, *Niche Diplomacy: Middle Powers After the Cold War* (New York: St. Martin's Press: 1997), 1.

powers have been addressed gradually.<sup>5</sup> Chun maintains that “middle powers in particular can help to transform the current balance of power style relations to that of collaboration among great powers, which promotes a collective mechanism of dispute settlement and multilateralism.”<sup>6</sup> In line with the requirement of a new type of global governance, the South Korean government established a grouping called MIKTA - an association of the five major middle powers Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia - in order to strengthen their roles as middle powers in the future. Based on the collaborations of these middle powers, the South Korean government has attempted to play a more responsible role in the multiplex global order. Through MIKTA, South Korea will implement a “Glue Diplomacy” and contribute to the international community in terms of enhancing a common good. Nonetheless, how South Korea can or should exert a more striking and significant role as a middle power are contested questions.

This paper claims that South Korea's middle power diplomacy ought to concentrate more on global agenda setting through international institutions and G20 platforms. So far, South Korea has mainly implemented its middle power diplomacy in the Asian region. In order to become a responsible middle power at the global level, South Korea should avert from the myopic Asian standpoint and extend its influence to the global level through global agenda setting. Using realism and institutionalism as a theoretical lens, this paper investigates how global agenda setting in the international arena will help and support South Korea's middle power diplomacy.

### **Theoretical Tools**

This paper will utilize realism and institutionalism for explicating how middle powers can implement their national capacities in international arenas. First, using the realist standpoint to explain middle powers diplomacy, this paper focuses on middle powers' diplomacy as a pipeline for maximizing their national interests. Offensive realists maintain that states maximize their national interests in terms of security and economy. In the traditional realist viewpoint, national interests have been mainly related to security. Mearsheimer claims that states can seek their security and national interests based on military might;<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Waltz also contends that states seek interest primarily by their own military power.<sup>8</sup> In terms of pursuing economic interests, realists consider economic interests as byproducts from dominant military might. Thucydides viewed war as a place for increasing economic wealth.<sup>9</sup> Also, Keohane describes in his hegemonic stability

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5 Sook-Jong Lee, Chaesung Chun, HyeekJung Suh, and Patrick Thomsen, “Middle Power in Action: The Evolving Nature of Diplomacy in the Age of Multilateralism,” *East Asia Institute* (April 2015): 6.

6 Chaesung Chun, Middle Power Diplomacy Forum. 10/18/2014, Seoul. Korea

7 John J. Mearsheimer, *The tragedy of Great power politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001)

8 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001)

9 Mazhid Kat, “A conceptual Analysis of Realism in International Political Economy.” *E-International Relations Students* (2015)

theory that states pursue economic interests through the dominant hegemonic economic order.<sup>10</sup>

This paper, however, defines the national interest of middle powers as a soft power in the international arena, which does not have a direct connection to national security or economic interest. In this vein, the concept of soft power created by Nye gives an important insight. Nye describes soft power as “the ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible assets such as attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority.”<sup>11</sup> Nye also depicts soft power as the second face of power, as well as an attractive power, which leads countries to follow. But he distinguishes soft power from influences, because influences can be exerted through hard power like military threats or economic payment.<sup>12</sup> What is noteworthy is that Nye addresses the role of international institutions in projecting soft power. Nye argues that international institutions can increase a country’s soft power and the resources of soft powers come largely from the values of international organizations.<sup>13</sup> “If a country can shape international rules that are consistent with its interests and values, its action will more likely appear legitimate in the eyes of others.”<sup>14</sup>

Another important school of thought is from Keohane who lays a robust foundation in terms of a synthesis of realism and institutionalism. Keohane utilizes the term “international regimes” in which states can project their national interests to maximize their self-interest. He depicts “international regimes as decentralized institutions.” Here, decentralization means that individual members enact any sanctions for violations of regime principles and rules.<sup>15</sup> Keohane argues that “[i]nternational regimes should be comprehended chiefly as arrangements motivated by self-interest: International regimes will be shaped largely by their most powerful members, pursuing their own interests.”<sup>16</sup>

According to Mearsheimer, who explores international institutions primarily based on the realist standpoint, international institutions or international regimes are a space where nation-states project their powers. He maintains that international rules which are incorporated into a formal international organization are the tools to compel other states to obey such rules.<sup>17</sup> Mearsheimer also argues that “States in the international system aim to maximize their relative power positions over other states.”<sup>18</sup> Some realists claim that the

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10 Robert O. Keohane, *After hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: University Press, 1984)

11 Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 6.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 5.

14 Ibid., 10-11.

15 Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1984), 98.

16 Ibid., 62.

17 John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994/1995), 9.

18 Ibid., 11.

norms and rules of international institutions mirror the state calculations of self-interests and also reflect the international distribution of power. They regard the international institutions as an “arena for acting out power relationship.”<sup>19</sup> Young also agrees that states employ international institutions and international regimes for maximizing net benefit for themselves.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, considering the viewpoints of scholars, this paper applies realism and institutionalism as theoretical instruments for exploring South Korea’s middle power diplomacy in the international arena.

### **South Korea as a Responsible Middle Power: Background**

Compared to traditional middle powers such as Australia, Canada, Norway and Sweden, South Korea has recently developed its status as a middle power. South Korea had initiated its middle power diplomacy from the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003-2008) entitled “South Korea as a balancer in Northeast Asia.” During the Lee Myung-bak administration (2008-2013), the slogan was ‘Global Korea’ and during the current Park Geun-hye administration (2013-Present), South Korea set up the slogan “responsible middle power contributing to world peace and prosperity.” Established in 2013, MIKTA is one of the fruits borne from the Park Geun-hye administration intending to implement more responsible middle power diplomacy. Nevertheless, how South Korea should exert a more striking and significant role as a middle power is still a contested issue.

The implementation of South Korea’s middle power diplomacy can be categorized mainly in two different dimensions. The first dimension of South Korea’s middle power diplomacy was suggested by the Roh administration as a balancing role in Northeast Asia. Considering the geopolitics in Northeast Asia, South Korea’s initial middle power diplomacy has focused on managing great powers for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia. Therefore, in its balancing role, South Korea attempted to bridge great powers in Northeast Asia. The other dimension is through Official Development Assistance (ODA), which is the means through which South Korea supports underdeveloped countries. By disseminating South Korea’s successful experiences in economic development to the third world, South Korea has become the first country to shift its status from a recipient country to a donor country. Therefore, South Korea has sufficient experience and national capacity in terms of ODA.

However, when taking a broader perspective, it is noteworthy that South Korea’s middle power diplomacy has tended to be lopsided, as it has been bound to Asia thus far. In the initial stages of middle power diplomacy, South Korea’s balancing act had only targeted Northeast Asia. In addition, most of the recipient countries in South Korea’s ODA have been also disproportionately concentrated on Asian countries. Like President

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19 Tony Evans and Peter Wilson. “Regime Theory and the English School of International Relations: A Comparison,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21, no. 3 (1992) : 330.

20 Oran R. Young, “International Regimes: Toward a New Theory of Institutions,” *World Politics* 39, no. 1 (1986), 119.

Park said, if South Korea is to become a responsible middle power contributing to world peace and prosperity, South Korea has to implement its middle power diplomacy more at the global level, averting from a subordinated Asian standpoint. Therefore, this chapter deals with South Korea's myopic Asian viewpoint and suggests that South Korea should focus more on agenda setting at the global level.

### *Conventional Middle Power Diplomacy: Bound to Asia*

#### **Middle Power Diplomacy: Balancing Act in Northeast Asia**

First and foremost, the main focal point of South Korea's middle power diplomacy has been Northeast Asia. North Korea's security issues and unification policies have always been the top priorities of the South Korean government. Thus, to manage and bridge countries involved with Northeast Asian issues, South Korea has primarily focused its efforts on China, Japan, Russia, and the U.S. The geopolitical position of South Korea has been reflected through South Korean middle power diplomacy during the Roh administration. Based on the geopolitical environment, the Roh administration labeled the middle power policy as "South Korea as a balancer in Northeast Asia." A variety of opinions have been set forth to evaluate the Roh administration's middle power diplomacy,<sup>21</sup> and the general assessments of South Korea's balancing act were a failure.<sup>22</sup>

In this vein, several fundamental questions must be posed again. Should South Korea still concentrate on being a responsible middle power in Northeast Asia despite having been assessed as a failure? What factors have been limiting South Korea from expanding beyond Northeast Asia as a middle power? To answer these questions, looking at Indonesia's case as an emerging middle power in Southeast Asia will help for probing this question. Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa addressed "dynamic equilibrium" as Indonesia's middle power diplomacy in 2011. "Dynamic equilibrium" connotes that Indonesia attempts to build a regional structure where a win for one great power does not necessarily mean a defeat of another great power and Indonesia will play a role as balancer of powers.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Acharya argues that "Indonesia seeks to influence the relationship among the major global powers of the twenty-first century through its role in

21 See Brad Glosserman and Scott Snyder, "Confidence and Confusion: National Identity and Security Alliance in Northeast Asia." *Pacific Forum CSIS Issues & Insights* 8, no. 16 (2008): 1-42; Hyeong Jung Park, "Looking Back and Looking Forward: North Korea, Northeast Asia, and the ROK-U.S. Alliance." *The Brookings Institution for Northeast Asian Policy Studies* (2007): 1-64.; Choong Nam Kim, "The Roh Moo Hyun Government's Policy towards North Korea." *East-West Center Working Papers* 11 (2005): 1-28.; Zhiqun Zhu, "Small Power, Big Ambition: South Korea's Role in Northeast Asia Security under President Roh Moo-hyun." *Asian Affairs* 34, no. 2 (2007): 67-86.

22 Yul Sohn, "The Evaluation and Assignment of the Park Guen-hye administration's Middle Power Diplomacy." *The Korean Journal of International Studies* (2014): 67. Sohn, especially, contends that the middle power diplomacy during the Roh administration did not reflect the substance of the altering global order in twenty-first century. He argues that the Roh administration misapplied the 19th century European balancing policy to South Korea

23 Gregory B Poling, "Dynamic Equilibrium: Indonesia's Blueprint for a 21st Century Asia Pacific." *Center for Strategic and International Studies* 4, no. 5 (2013) : 1-16.

the Asia-Pacific region.”<sup>24</sup> Indonesia’s middle power diplomacy as balancing great powers has been assessed so far as less skeptical and more feasible compared to the middle power policy of South Korea’s balancing act. Such difference is because Indonesia is not trapped in the power games of great powers and has maintained its independent position and non-alignment policy. As Acharya contends, “after gaining independence from the Dutch, Indonesian leaders characterized their foreign policy as independent and active.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, Indonesia did not rely on global powers to resolve the various international predicaments and had attempted to maintain its non-alignment policy. This historical background had provided the backdrop for Indonesia to form a more neutral and independent position in the present day and had granted more legitimacy in balancing in Southeast Asia.

South Korea, however, experienced a completely different pathway after the Second World War which inherently constrains South Korea’s balancing act in Northeast Asia. Conventionally, the strong security alliance with the U.S. is the key component which has bolstered South Korea’s foreign policy. After the U.S. and South Korea reached a mutual defense agreement in 1953, the U.S. has been South Korea’s strongest military ally, and the U.S. has also been the most influential country to South Korea’s foreign policy for more than half a century. Even at the present time, the U.S.-South Korea alliance is the most significant condition for the South Korean government in terms of implementing its foreign policy. However, recently on the economic front, with the rise of China in the twenty-first century, South Korea has gradually developed a warm relationship with China. In 2003, China became South Korea’s largest receiver of exports, surpassing economic ties between the U.S. and South Korea. In addition, due to shared bitter historical memories with Japan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, South Korea and China have developed their relationship in a more constructive manner. Therefore, South Korea’s balancing act in Northeast Asia has been gradually addressed. The balancing act in Northeast Asia has been combined with South Korea’s middle power diplomacy and has consistently been suggested as a manner to be a responsible middle power.

However, this paper maintains that the issue of North Korea and Northeast Asian security extremely limits the sphere in which South Korea’s balancing act in Northeast Asia can operate. As Mearsheimer mentions, national security is an uncompromising issue. To protect the national security threat from North Korea, South Korea should reinforce its relationship with the U.S., despite the warm relationship with China. Therefore, South Korea is highly unlikely to achieve its desire as a neutral and independent middle power in Northeast Asia. In addition, the current U.S. policy “pivot to Asia” cuts South Korea’s sphere as a neutral middle power. The U.S. has attempted to reinforce its alliances with South Korea and Japan and thus balancing the rise of China. From the U.S. perspective,

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<sup>24</sup> Amitav Acharya, *Indonesia Matters: Asia's Emerging Democratic Power* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2014), 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

the two major blocs in the Northeast can be summed up as South Korea-U.S.-Japan and North Korea-China-Russia. An axiomatic point is that the power confrontation between the U.S. and China in Northeast Asia constrains South Korea's role as a middle power.

Here, the concept of Cooper and Henrikson in terms of middle power puts forth an important insight for the future of South Korea's middle power diplomacy. Cooper depicts the notion of middle power as "linchpins" or "bridges" between blocs,<sup>26</sup> and Henrikson describes "middle powers, being geographically scattered and heterogeneous, never developed a group or bloc of their own."<sup>27</sup> Considering Cooper and Henrikson's explanations of middle powers, South Korea cannot contribute to Northeast Asia as a neutral middle power and enhance a common good in this region before unification of the Korean peninsula. South Korea has to protect its own population from North Korea's threat, and thus, South Korea ought to select its own bloc in terms of security. Therefore, to become a responsible middle power contributing to global peace and prosperity, South Korea should avert from the Northeast Asian standpoint and seek a more autonomous sphere at the global level.

### **Middle Power Diplomacy: Official Development Assistance (ODA)**

Secondly, ODA is one of the main pillars, which has blustered South Korean middle power diplomacy. After the destruction of the Korean War until the 1970s, foreign aid from the international community was a significant economic pipeline for South Korea's economic development. Having relied on foreign aid, South Korea become one of the Asian Tigers and accomplished revolutionary economic success. In 2014, South Korea's total GDP was the 13<sup>th</sup> largest<sup>28</sup> and international trade 6<sup>th</sup> largest in the world.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, South Korea had the tenth highest GDP per capita among the G20 members.<sup>30</sup> This tremendous economic success has led South Korea to become the first country in the world to shift its national status from a recipient country to a donor country. ODA has been regarded as a pipeline for contributing to global peace and prosperity, as well as a tool for interacting with the international community.

South Korea's ODA activism has emerged as crucial middle power diplomacy under the banner of "contribution diplomacy" during the Lee administration. This ODA activism has continued to the current Park administration's middle power diplomacy as well.<sup>31</sup> During

<sup>26</sup> Cooper, *Niche Diplomacy*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Henrikson, Alan K. "Middle Powers as Managers: International Mediation within, across, and outside Institutions." in *Niche Diplomacy: Middle Powers after the Cold War*, edited by Andrew F. Cooper, 46-72 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 66.

<sup>28</sup> "World Development Indicators," The World Bank, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&country=&series=NY.GDP.MKTP.CD&period=#>

<sup>29</sup> "Korea Statistics," Korea International Trade Association, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://stat.kita.net/stat/world/major/KoreaStats01.screen>.

<sup>30</sup> "GDP per capita," The World Bank, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>.

<sup>31</sup> Brendan Howe, "Development Effectiveness: Charting South Korea's Role and Contributions." in *Middle-Power Korea: Contributions to the Global Agenda*, edited by Scott A. Snyder et al., 21-43. (New



the two administrations, South Korea has put a significant amount of national capacity to ODA. As a result, on November 25, 2009, South Korea became the 24<sup>th</sup> member of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC). Moreover, South Korea has consistently increased its budget even after the global financial crisis. Howe points out that South Korea increased the budget of ODA among the DAC at 17 percent in 2012 under conditions of financial crisis, far ahead of Australia's 9.2 percent, the next largest increase. Most DAC members decreased their ODA that year.<sup>32</sup> In fact, in 2014, South Korea provided \$1.9 billion in net ODA, which represented 0.13 percent of gross national income (GNI) and a 0.8 percent increase in real terms from 2013. South Korea is the 23<sup>rd</sup> largest Development Committee donor in terms of its ODA by percentage of GNI, and the 16<sup>th</sup> largest donor by volume. The South Korean government is firmly committed to achieving its national ODA and GNI target of 0.25 percent in 2015.<sup>33</sup>

However, South Korea's ODA project as a tool for responsible middle power has a fatal drawback which is that it has predominantly been focused mainly on Asian countries. According to the OECD statistics and South Korea's Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) statistics database, during the last decade on average 65.5 percent of South Korea's total ODA budget has been invested in Asia. Africa and Latin America were the next regions for investment at 13 percent and 8.1 percent, respectively.<sup>34</sup> Howe mentions that "South Korea has closer ties to Asian countries due to geographical proximity and cultural familiarity."<sup>35</sup> Therefore, South Korea's top fifteen ODA recipient countries are mainly located in Asia except for Angola in Africa.<sup>36</sup>

As a responsible middle power, South Korea ought to diversify its ODA regions. In reality, however, diversifying South Korea's ODA budget from Asia to other regions is not an easy task because South Korea's ODA project to Asia is closely linked to the economic cooperation with Asian countries. According to the Korea International Trade Association, South Asian countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia and India have become the top ten South trading partners of South Korea since 2008. In 2014, Vietnam was the 6<sup>th</sup> largest, India was the 8<sup>th</sup> largest, and Indonesia was the 9<sup>th</sup> largest trading partner.<sup>37</sup> Since 2010, the trading volume has been steadily increasing, and in 2014, the trading volume with the main three recipient countries accounted for 8.1 percent of the total trading

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York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2015), 25.

32 Ibid., 26.

33 OECD, *Development Co-operation Report 2015: Marking Partnerships Effective Coalitions for Action* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2015), 235.

34 "Statistics," Korea Official Development Assistance, accessed September 2, 2016, [http://www.odakorea.go.kr/ODAPage\\_2012/T02/L03\\_S01\\_03.jsp](http://www.odakorea.go.kr/ODAPage_2012/T02/L03_S01_03.jsp).

35 Howe, "Development Effectiveness."

36 Howe (2015), op. cit., 35.

37 "Korea Statistics," Korea International Trade Association, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://stat.kita.net/stat/world/major/KoreaStats06.screen>.

volume of South Korea. In 2008, the trading volume accounted for less than 4 percent.<sup>38</sup>

A noteworthy fact is that these countries are also the main recipient countries of South Korea's ODA project. In 2012 and 2013, Vietnam, India, and Indonesia ranked among the top five countries in which South Korea invested ODA budget based on bilateral aid.<sup>39</sup> Hyuk-Sang Sohn, advisor of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), argues that the fact that South Korea's ODA has been implemented relied upon economic cooperation. South Korea's ODA has been disproportionate to Asian countries, in particular to Vietnam, Indonesia, India, and Thailand in which South Korea's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been increasing. Therefore, Sohn also maintains that South Korea's ODA has emphasized more economic cooperation rather than development cooperation.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, South Korea's ODA type, which is mainly based on bilateralism, depicts how South Korea has used the ODA project more for its own national interest rather than enhancing a common good in recipient countries. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action recommend building inclusive partnerships for development. Partnerships based upon "bilateral and multilateral donor, global funds, CSOs, and the private sector."<sup>41</sup> The OECD's Development Cooperation Report 2015, however, points out "in 2013, 76 percent of South Korea's ODA was provided bilaterally. South Korea allocated 24 percent of its total ODA as a core contribution to multilateral organizations. It channeled an additional 11 percent of its bilateral ODA for specific projects implemented by multilateral organizations."<sup>42</sup>

Bilateralism is likely to reflect more the donor country's interest in lieu of the recipient country's need. Moreover, bilateralism can be implemented on the basis of relative lack of understanding of the recipient country which reduces the substantial effectiveness of aid. With regards to South Korea's ODA policy, South Korea has to ponder how it can further contribute to the global level instead of clinging to a specific region. To develop into a responsible middle power, South Korea must contemplate how to implement middle power diplomacy which is not directly linked to its national interest. However, restructuring the sweeping nature of South Korea's ODA policy concentrated on Asia cannot be achieved in a short period. South Korea's ODA project has undoubtedly played a significant role to support underdeveloped countries. The predicament still lies, however, that South Korea's ODA policy has been excessively focused on the Asian region. Gradually diversifying the recipient countries at the global scope, South Korea ought to avert from the Asian standpoint and contemplate an additional new dimension

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38 Ibid

39 "Statistics," Korea Official Development Assistance.

40 Hyuk-Sang Sohn and Jengho Choi. "South Korea's ODA Policies toward ASEAN: A Duet of Economic and Development Cooperation." *The Southeast Asian Review* 18, no. 2 (2008): 158.

41 OECD, *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2005), 17.

42 OECD, *Development Co-operation Report 2015*, 235.

for contributing to the international community as a responsible middle power.

*New Middle Power Diplomacy, Averting from a Myopic Asian Standpoint:  
Concentrating on Global Agenda Setting*

As Patience points out, concrete understanding or definition in terms of middle power is still a contested issue.<sup>43</sup> However, the role of middle powers is axiomatic in the way that the middle powers should play a role in the international arena not to increase their self-interests but to contribute worldwide through enhancing a common good. With a reshaping of global power architecture as well as emerging transnational issues, additional close cooperation and collaboration among great powers and middle powers have become necessary. With such changes and trends, South Korea should become a responsible middle power.

Therefore, this paper maintains that to be a more responsible middle power in the contemporary era, South Korea ought to focus on global agenda setting through international institutions and the G20 platform. Higgott argues that “international institutions function as pipelines for agenda-setting for facilitating rationalization of the technical and political dimensions of a given problem and provide the location for inter-governmental negotiation on a given agenda.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, using international institutions for global agenda setting is more effective for middle powers, which have relatively less national capacities compared to the great powers.<sup>45</sup> Great powers based upon preponderant economic capability and military might are able to implement their foreign policy agendas more directly to the individual countries or in the international community. However, countries like South Korea which have limited national resources should effectively distribute their national capabilities.

In this sense, global agenda setting through international institutions can tacitly distribute the national resources because the rules or norms in international institutions are not organized *per se*, but can reflect the nation-states’ intentions and policies.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, the most significant point in terms of agenda setting is that South Korea must suggest and create entrepreneurial agendas, which can contribute to the international community. Young utilized the term “entrepreneurial leader and intellectual leader.”<sup>47</sup> He mentions that the entrepreneurial leader and intellectual leader “relies on negotiating skills to frame issues in ways that foster integrative bargaining and to put together deals

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43 Allian Patience, “Imagining Middle Powers.” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 68, no. 2 (2014) : 210–224.

44 Richard Higgott, “Issues, institutions and middle-power diplomacy: action and agendas in the post-Cold War era.” in *Niche Diplomacy: Middle Powers after the Cold War*, edited by Andrew F. Cooper, 46-72. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 32.

45 John Ravenhill, “Cycles of Middle Power Activism: Constraint and Choice in Australian and Canadian Foreign Policies.” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 52, no. 3 (1998) : 311.

46 John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” 9.

47 Oran R. Young, Political Leadership and Regime Formation: On the Development of Institutions in International Society. *International Organization* 45, no. 3 (1991) : 293.

that would otherwise elude participants and produces intellectual capital or generative systems of thought that shape the perspectives of those who participate in institutional bargaining.”<sup>48</sup>

Applying this concept of an entrepreneurial leader, South Korea had a valuable experience as the flagship regarding Global Green Growth which it can apply in its process towards becoming a responsible middle power. The Lee administration established the Presidential Committee on Green Growth in 2009 and put forth Green Growth as a centerpiece of his administration’s policy agenda. President Lee proclaimed the Green Growth policy to be the new locomotive of South Korea and gradually disseminated the Green Growth policy into the international arena.<sup>49</sup> According to the South Korean Ministry of Strategy and Finance, the motto for Green Growth was “seeking the means to sustain the environment.” Describing this further, Green Growth agenda is meant to turn the current climate change crisis into an opportunity. Beyond the green economy, the focus is eco-friendliness; Green Growth pursues job creation and technology innovation leading to sustainable growth. With these principles, South Korea was the leading country in terms of Green Growth and in 2012, a new international organization called Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) was founded in Seoul, aiming to support and promote strong, inclusive and sustainable economic growth in developing countries and emerging countries.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, South Korea’s Global Green Growth agenda setting is a striking precedent how South Korea can expand its role to be more responsible as a middle power.

Also, South Korea ought to utilize the new global governance platform G20. Like Acharya and Goh point out, the contemporary era is shifting towards a multiplex world. In line with the reshaping of global power architecture, roles and impacts of the new global system G20 have been replacing the conventional global governance platform. G20 cannot be described as an inclusive association of solid great powers; rather, it is better described as a more flexible international networking regime.<sup>51</sup> After the global financial crisis in 2008, countries have attempted to craft international norms and rules rather than competing outside international regimes.<sup>52</sup> International regimes have thus played as a pipeline for reacting effectively to global issues. Therefore, South Korea should actively utilize this new craft global governance system to reinforce its status as a responsible middle power.

In the G20 framework, each country attempts to reflect its own national interest because

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48 Ibid., 298.

49 See, Lamia Kamal-Chaoui et al. “The Implementation of the Korean Green Growth Strategy in Urban Areas.” *OECD Regional Development Working Papers 2011/02* (2011): 1-88.; Jill Kosch O’Donnell, *The Global Green Growth Institute: On a Mission to Prove Green Growth Green Growth Quarterly Update II-2012*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2012.

50 “Overview,” Global Green Growth Institute, accessed September 3, 2016, <http://gggi.org/about-gggi/background/organizational-overview/>

51 Yul Sohn et al. “Toward a New Global Governance: Korea and the G20.” *EAI Special Report* (2010): 6.  
52 Ibid., 15.

the decided international norms and rules will be the future international standards. In this vein, South Korea should be a rule-setter rather than a rule-taker. A responsible middle power means implementing more contributing roles in the reshaping global order. But in order to become a rule-setter within the G20, South Korea must be an entrepreneurial and creative leader, especially in terms of global agenda setting. Therefore, South Korea should invest its national capacity to analyze and investigate rapidly changing transnational issues and repercussions, as well as explore alternatives for bridging the G20 members and the non-G20 members in special global agendas.

Coalition-building among middle powers is highly pivotal to South Korea for its responsible middle power diplomacy. Ravenhill argues that middle powers have to formulate coalitions of 'like-minded' states because they are relatively less powerful if they impose their agendas individually.<sup>53</sup> Based on such coalitions, middle powers can more effectively suggest and impose their own agendas to the international community, as they can complement the shortcomings of one another. In this vein, the establishment of MIKTA led by South Korea lends more support and legitimacy in agenda setting. Here, a noteworthy claim is that coalition-building can be often conducted within multilateral institutions.<sup>54</sup> Such is the reason why South Korea ought to focus more on global agenda setting and extend its role among international institutions.

### **Alternative Explanation: UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO)**

UN PKO is an alternative explanation as to how South Korea can avert from the Asian standpoint and contribute more at a global level. UN PKO has been assessed as one of the most effective tools for assisting countries in mitigating conflict and sustaining peace. The significance of the UN PKO in understanding South Korea's role as a middle power is that the aims of the UN PKO and middle power activism are geared to the same purpose: enhancing a common good and resolving transnational issues.

In fact, South Korea has a relatively long history participating in the UN PKO. After becoming a member of the UN, South Korea has been engaged in UN PKO for international security and peace. In 1993, South Korea began the first UN PKO in Somalia sending the *Evergreen Unit* for providing humanitarian assistance. Since 1993, South Korea has sent approximately 11,000 peacekeeping personnel to seventeen different countries.<sup>55</sup> According to South Korea's Ministry of National Defense, as of September 2014, South Korea has engaged in eight different UN PKO activities.<sup>56</sup> In Lebanon and South Sudan,

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53 John Ravenhill, "Cycles of Middle Power Activism," 312.

54 *Ibid.*, 311.

55 Terence Roehrig, "South Korea, Foreign Aid, and UN Peacekeeping: Contributing to International Peace and Security as a Middle Power." *Korea Observer* 44, no. 4 (2013): 634.

56 ROK Ministry of National Defense 2014, 296: In Lebanon and South Sudan, South Korea has deployed specific units and individuals, but in other regions South Korea has only deployed individuals: 7 individuals in UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP); 2 individuals in UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL); 7 individuals in UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS);

in particular, South Korea has deployed *Donmyeong Unit* (317 combatants) and *Hanbit Unit* (289 combatants) respectively.<sup>57</sup>

However, South Korea cannot become a proactive middle power through UN PKO at the global level. First, as Hwang points out, South Korea's UN PKO has been affected by the South Korea-U.S. military alliance which constrains South Korea's autonomous UN PKO.<sup>58</sup> For example, South Korea's decision to deploy UN PKO combatants in Iraq from 2004 to 2008 had been decided due to American pressure. Even though the public poll in South Korea was antagonistic in terms of deploying UN PKO to Iraq, the South Korean government decided to deploy troops because of the South Korea-U.S. military alliance. The U.S. had been enmeshed in the Iraqi War and needed military support from its military ally.

Second, South Korea's current military confrontation against North Korea is likely to constrain South Korea from taking a more proactive role in UN PKO. Because of the primary threat in the Korean peninsula, South Korea cannot fluidly deploy its combatants outside its territory. Snyder states, "if the situation in North Korea were to become unstable, South Korea leaders might have to refocus their attention on Korean mission only."<sup>59</sup> The two aforementioned rationales are the key factors which constrain South Korea's proactive middle power activism in UN PKO. In contrast, global agenda setting through international institutions, even at a nascent level, can provide more autonomy to South Korea in its independent implementation of 'Glue diplomacy.' Lastly, through global agenda setting, by way of international institutions or the G20, South Korea could simultaneously address a variety of transnational issues and diverse regions.

## Conclusion

The discussion of a responsible role of South Korea as a middle power has always been a contested issue. In the present changing global order, South Korea has the national capacity to contribute to resolving transnational issues and contribute to enhancing a global common good. But the lasting questions return to the means through which South Korea can exhibit such roles as a middle power. This paper has explored four different aspects of South Korea's middle power activism: (1) Balancing act in Northeast Asia; (2) South Korea's focus in ODA policy; (3) whether South Korea should be active in the UN PKO; and (4) the importance of South Korea in global agenda setting.

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2 individuals in UN-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID); 4 individuals in UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL); 2 individuals in UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI); 4 individuals in UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO); 2 individuals in UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Balbina Hwang, "Korea and PKO: Is Korea Contributing to Global Peace." in *Global Korea: South Korea's Contributions to International Security*, edited by Scott A. Snyder et al., 13-27 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2012), 17.

<sup>59</sup> Scott Snyder, "South Korea's Emerging Global Security Role." *World Politics Review* (2010): 1-3.

During the Roh administration, South Korea's middle power diplomacy and South Korea's foreign policy had largely overlapped. The slogan entitled "South Korea as a balancer in Northeast Asia" had aimed at bridging and managing Northeast Asian countries for maintaining peace and prosperity. From the Lee administration to the current Park administration, South Korea has expanded its contributing role worldwide through the ODA policy. However, South Korea's ODA policy has been criticized due to its disproportionate focus on Asian countries. Combined with economic development, South Korea's ODA policy has been lopsided in favor of emerging Asian countries with great economic potency. Exploring the balancing act in Northeast Asia and the ODA policy, South Korea's middle power diplomacy has been tied down with its national interests primarily in the Asian region. Therefore, in order to become a more responsible and leading middle power at the global level, South Korea ought to avert from the myopic Asian standpoint and contribute more to enhance a common good.

Next, in order to contribute to a new global governance platform, South Korea must be an entrepreneurial and creative country in global agenda setting. President Lee's Green Growth agenda is a striking precedent that South Korea must continue to develop. Global Green Growth directly touches upon transnational environment issues and has been implemented through the international institution, GGGI. In lieu of its own self-interest, South Korea has applied this agenda globally and its impact has not been restricted to a certain region. Moreover, South Korea has laid a robust foundation for mounting its influence into the global agenda-setting which exemplified how it could take on the role of an entrepreneurial leader. MIKTA is a remarkable coalition among other middle powers which is intended to suggest and implement other productive global agendas for increasing a common good.

Lastly, after the 2008 global financial crisis, the key global governance's platform has been shifting towards G20. Such shift indicates that South Korea has a larger forum to implement its role as a responsible middle power. Following this reasoning, UN PKO activity is an alternative sphere through which South Korea can expand its middle power diplomacy outside of Asia. Nonetheless, as this paper has explored, numerous constraints hamper South Korea from embracing a more proactive role in UN PKO. Therefore, South Korea should concentrate more on global agenda setting in terms of resolving transnational issues to be a responsible middle power in the changing dynamic of global powers in the modern contemporary era.

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