

Middle Power Diplomacy in World Politics – A Case of Korea

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The term “middle power” connotes a consensus about a state’s relative ranking in the hierarchy of world politics by virtue of its status between ‘great power’ and ‘minor power’. While the attributes of the middle power comprise a diverse range of characteristics, throughout history, they have possessed comparative wealth, at least some hard-power assets, significant diplomatic capacity and reputation, and uptake on larger responsibility in promoting global common goods. The changing architectures, processes and variable outcomes in global system have affected different identity-positioning and agencies as countries operationalize middle power diplomacy as we can see in the cases of Canada, Sweden and Brazil. South Korea’s middle power diplomacy, too, has operated in the transformations in world politics as well as shifts in regional geopolitics which provide new opportunities and constraints. By conducting a deeper-dive analysis into South Korea’s middle power diplomacy and its evolution over the past years, this webinar aims to understand its implications to other countries with similar aspirations and strategic complexities in the international system.

Ji-in (Magdalena) Seol is currently a Visiting Scholar at Seoul National University Asia Center. She has extensive experience in multilateral institutions, having worked with various DFIs and IOs, where she collaborated in major policy-makings such as the G20 Inclusive Business Framework and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Most recently, she led a major renewable energy initiative in Africa that will provide 10GW of solar energy across 11 countries; she was also involved in the Group-wide digital and disruptive technology initiative spearheaded by the Office of the President of the World Bank Group. She served as an Assistant Secretary to the President for Climate and Environment in the Office of the President of South Korea, managing key globalization agendas related to climate change and low-carbon green growth. She later led a strategy advisory consultancy dedicated to creating innovation cases in global development and elevating South Korea’s global engagements. She was involved in the Geopolitics of Renewable Energy Project at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and the Government Innovation Program at Harvard's Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation. She has an MPA from Harvard Kennedy School with her first graduate work in International Development Studies at University of Oxford after her B.A. in International Politics at Seoul National University.

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