REPUBLIC OF KOREA - INDONESIA RELATIONS:
MIDDLE POWER DIPLOMACY IN EAST ASIA

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This article analyzes how middle powers can contribute to regional peace and stability by examining the Republic of Korea – Indonesia relations in East Asia. The article suggests that there are potential contributions of like-minded middle power relations in regional governance amidst regional challenges. This is reflected by the extent to which these middle powers maneuver major problems in East Asia through various forms of regional institutions. By engaging with ASEAN, while trying to maintain good relations with the United States and China, the Republic of Korea and Indonesia are able to influence as well as promote regional peace and stability.

Keywords: middle power, regional governance, Korea - Indonesia relations, East Asian region, ASEAN, New Southern Policy

Introduction

In the 1990s, the term ‘middle power’ began to be debated in international relations discourse by scholars and foreign policymakers, in particular from Canada and Australia. This was done in relation to filling the power vacuum left following the end of the Cold War which resulted in the formation of a multipolar international system.1 Together with great powers (which are associated to Western powers), non-Western powers in the international system increasingly began playing a greater role in international affairs. These countries began to be considered as ‘middle powers.’ Moreover, the economic and strategic difficulties experienced by the United States (US) and China internally constrained their ability to fully shape the international system which provided opportunities for non-great powers to make their mark in global affairs.2

Indeed, there is a growing academic literature that focuses on the role of middle powers that are neither great powers nor failing, but which are seeking to play a more pronounced role in the international system.3 The literature on middle power is normally focused on individual countries in enhancing their middle power status. Karim worked on how the ROK and Indonesia seek status as middle powers in East Asia by analyzing their regional contributions.4 Kusumaningsprang explains the roots and evolution of Indonesia’s middle power activism as a reason to define the country’s