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Minilateralism Revisited: MIKTA as Slender Diplomacy in a Multiplex World

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THE INCREASING PREVALENCE OF MINILATERAL DIPLOMACY IN TODAY'S GLOBAL order can be a costly business for governments. Over the past decade, minilateral diplomatic mechanisms—arrangements including only a limited number of countries—have proliferated to handle emerging problems of deepening global interdependencies. New venues have been sought to solve old problems outside traditional multilateral avenues, which have become increasingly deadlock prone and anachronistic.¹ This means that the number of international organizations, partnerships, and initiatives that diplomats can possibly attend has increased in tandem with the fragmentation and layering of global governance.

Few countries are adequately equipped to handle these challenges, as few have invested in the financial and human resources of their diplomatic apparatus sufficiently and in a timely manner.² It is expensive to ensure effective strategic participation and visibility and to pursue normative leadership. Compared to global superpowers, many lesser powers are more likely to struggle to react and respond to—let alone shape—seismic changes in the multilateral sphere. Their foreign ministries tend to be overwhelmed by more immediate, high-stakes, high-politics challenges amidst rapid shifts in their traditional bilateral relationships and regional dynamics.

It is in this context that we approach Mexico, Indonesia, Korea,³ Turkey, and Australia (MIKTA), an informal, voluntary, and flexible partnership of five Group of 20 (G-20) members outside minilateral behemoths such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) and the Group of 7 (G7). Against the backdrop of a multiplex order that has replaced a short period of liberal hegemony,⁴ states are grappling with heightened geopolitical uncertainty and deepening interdependency by exploring alternative diplomatic instruments and new opportunities for influence.⁵ As Amitav Acharya argues, today the “agency in building world order is more dispersed, and lies more with the audience than with the producers (great powers).”⁶

Existing literature on minilateralism has tended to discuss the costs and benefits of this “new, messy multilateralism” in *macro* terms, mainly from the perspective of global governance and related to questions about efficiency, accountability,

or forum-shopping.⁷ We contribute to this literature by turning our investigative focus to the *micro* backstage dynamics of minilaterals, from the perspective of participants. With the case of MIKTA, our analysis provides a close-up look at how members assess the grouping's relevance and what their key motivations have been in keeping it "alive" for the past five years. We base our analysis on over seventy interviews with diplomats and experts from all five MIKTA member countries, conducted between June and November 2017.⁸

The jury is still out on whether—or to what extent—MIKTA will come to be seen as a success or failure in terms of innovation in multilateral diplomacy, member countries' foreign policies, or the provision of global public goods. Our interviewees' experiences of MIKTA ranged from calibrated enthusiasm to an overall judgment of the grouping as "a second-row alliance." Some MIKTA officials expressed frustration about their group's slow progress, less effective coordination, and less impact compared to the BRICS; although, somewhat paradoxically, they also viewed MIKTA's informality and flexibility as the group's comparative advantage and a major attraction for participation.

Our focus here is not to make an evaluation or conjecture about MIKTA diplomacy per se. Instead, we hold that MIKTA's emergence and trajectory to date provide insights into the dynamics of contemporary minilateral diplomacy. In particular, the case of MIKTA demonstrates how foreign ministries of countries beyond the world's superpowers attempt to deal with the increasing complexity of the "multiplex order," an issue of utmost relevance for practitioners and foreign policy analysts alike.⁹

MIKTA's Design and Origins

MIKTA was created in 2013 as an initiative by foreign ministers to create a "cross-regional consultative platform" of "democracies that benefit from open economies ... strategically located and strongly linked to surrounding regions." The group expressed its will and capability to "contribute to protecting public goods and strengthening global governance"¹⁰ by playing a series of strategic bridging roles between developed and developing countries and between global governance and regionalism, and by acting as a catalyst for global governance reform initiatives.¹¹

MIKTA was designed to be nimble, and is sometimes described as a "diplomatic start-up." Without a summit process, foreign ministers are at the apex of MIKTA activities. They meet twice a year on average on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly or G-20 summits, and discuss a wide range of topics of regional and global concern. MIKTA foreign ministers last met in Buenos Aires on the margins of the G-20 foreign ministers meeting in May 2018 and exchanged views about a range of issues, including North Korea, the situation in the Middle East, Rohingya refugees, and postelection Venezuela.¹²

The organization of MIKTA is kept lean. It operates on a rotating chair system, without a secretariat. Mexico took over as the first chair of the group in 2014, followed by Korea, Australia, and Turkey in subsequent years. Indonesia assumed the chair role in 2018 to complete the first cycle.¹³

Over the past five years, MIKTA countries have employed a flexible and issue-oriented approach and have issued forty-two joint statements on a wide variety of topics (see Table 1). Various other initiatives have been set up at both senior and junior official levels, in MIKTA capitals and elsewhere. Multilateral missions have organized joint policy consultations and workshops at UN headquarters and offices in New York, Geneva, and Vienna, and at the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). At the bilateral level, embassies have also organized and participated in MIKTA initiatives. Representatives from MIKTA embassies regularly meet to discuss common interests. Some make joint contributions to local media as part of public outreach (e.g., in Indonesia, Portugal, Poland), and they collaborate to organize policy seminars (e.g., in Senegal, South Africa, Malaysia) and cultural events (e.g., in Iran, Kenya, Australia, Azerbaijan).¹⁴ In addition, governments encourage MIKTA collaboration outside foreign ministry structures. Defense and trade ministers have convened in side meetings of major global forums, and the speakers of MIKTA parliaments have met for consultations.

Table 1 MIKTA Joint Statements

No.	Date	Subject
1	14 April 2014	North Korean missile and nuclear provocations*
2	26 July 2014	Concerning downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17*
3	25 September 2014	Ebola outbreak and global health*
4	9 March 2015	Gender equality and women's rights
5	24 June 2015	Reform of UN committee for administrative efficiency
6	14 July 2015	Financing for Development*
7	26 September 2015	Climate change*
8	12 October 2015	Terrorist attack in Turkey*
9	9 December 2015	International response to disasters
10	10 January 2016	North Korea's fourth nuclear test*
11	18 February 2016	Prevention of violent extremism*
12	11 March 2016	Human rights (access to information, freedom of expression)
13	17 March 2016	Prevention of violent extremism
14	10–11 May 2016	Peacekeeping and security
15	23 May 2016	Reduction of disaster risks, promotion of gender equality
16	12–14 June 2016	Protection of disabled people's human rights
17	30 June 2016	Terrorist attack on Istanbul's Ataturk Airport*
18	22 September 2016	North Korea's fifth nuclear test*
19	22 September 2016	Addressing the challenges of humanitarian crises*
20	17 December 2016	Migration

continues

continued

No.	Date	Subject
21	5 April 2017	Infrastructure development and innovative partnership
22	19 April 2017	Interfaith dialogue for peace
23	10 May 2017	Measures to end poverty
24	23 May 2017	Financing for Development
25	13 June 2017	Women's rights
26	15 June 2017	Counterterrorism
27	15 June 2017	Rights of persons with disabilities
28	21 June 2017	Humanitarian aid and gender equality
29	28 June 2017	Education
30	6 September 2017	North Korea's sixth nuclear test*
31	25 September 2017	Recent earthquakes in Mexico*
32	27 October 2017	Women, Peace and Security
33	31 October 2017	UN peacebuilding
34	26 February 2018	Human rights mainstreaming
35	28 February 2018	Human rights
36	7 March 2018	Rights of persons with disabilities
37	15 March 2018	Human rights
38	18 March 2018	2018 Pyeongchang Olympic Games, efforts for peace in Korea*
39	25 April 2018	Promoting women innovators
40	26 April 2018	Sustaining peace
41	30 April 2018	2018 Inter-Korean Summit*
42	14 May 2018	Terrorist attacks in Surabaya*

Note: Current as of May 2018, Foreign Ministers' Joint Statements are marked with an asterisk.

When setting up MIKTA, member countries did not frame it as a problem-solving mechanism to address a specific challenge. MIKTA was rather conceived as broadly “solutions oriented” and as a platform for the “force for good” in a wide range of issue areas; there were no pressing expectations attached to it.¹⁵ As individual members of the G-20, MIKTA governments had a major stake in making the G-20 work in the aftermath of the 2007–2008 global financial crisis.¹⁶ MIKTA's formal inception in 2013, however, happened when the sense of imminent crisis had already faded and the G-20 had become an increasingly embedded—although still contested—process, with somewhat deflated political interest.¹⁷ As a Turkish diplomat puts it, there was “no compelling need for MIKTA to appear when it did. MIKTA does not aim to replace or compete with existing international institutions either. MIKTA was not created in the context of hostility or an urgent problem.”

According to the literature on multilateralism, one defining characteristic of today's minilateral arrangements is that they are “informal, non-binding, purpose-built partnerships and coalitions of the interested, willing, and capable” set up to address challenges in specific issue areas.¹⁸ In line with this, minilateralism is understood as a targeted approach, where a “magic number” of countries can tackle problems with greater efficacy, avoiding gridlock typical in large multi-

laterals.¹⁹ MIKTA, by contrast, has no straightforward specific purpose if that means attending to a clearly identified functional need. MIKTA also differs from other minilateral arrangements that were created as an identity-building mechanism (e.g., with a shared sentiment toward demands for global power redistribution such as the BRICS), and it has not been a particularly visible caucus group within the G-20 either.²⁰

Compared to prevalent modes of minilateralism, MIKTA has—according to representatives from member governments—operated more as a capacity-building and diplomatic exchange mechanism. MIKTA diplomats say that the partnership has helped to enhance bilateral relationships and has provided opportunities for cross-regional policy learning and resource sharing for foreign ministry officials (more below).

For MIKTA advocates, the unusual combination of members is seen as its strength. MIKTA does not attempt to articulate a group identity other than “bridge builder and agenda setter.” Recently, the elephant in the room among diplomats has been Turkey’s growing authoritarian tendencies, which have tarnished MIKTA’s initial self-definition as a group of “liberal democracies.”²¹ Descriptions of the group as a “middle power” partnership also do not seem to adequately reflect all of its members’ development trajectories and ideological traditions. While Australia and Korea sometimes self-identify as “middle powers,” Indonesia, for instance, has been reluctant to embrace the term for its traditional activism in the Non-Aligned Movement since the 1950s.²²

Instead of bringing to the fore those apparent differences, MIKTA seems to rely on the general assumption that, by and large, member countries are like-minded and share similar viewpoints on world affairs. According to a Turkish diplomat, “It happens only very rarely that anyone of us is opposed to what another [MIKTA] member country suggests.” And a Mexican diplomat highlights that, at the G-20,

other MIKTA countries told us that whatever we [Mexico] would be able to negotiate with the US on migration the other four would agree with; we [Mexico] would not engage too much with climate change or terrorism—others would take on the battle over these issues—but focus instead all our energy on migration; and whatever would come out of our battle with the US, all other MIKTA member countries would accept.

It is also notable that MIKTA is a noncompetitive platform. It does not try to replace or take over functions from existing organizations, but offers a space of exchange and coordination for a variety of purposes. As an Indonesian diplomat argues, “The great advantage of MIKTA is that there are no [countries with major] geopolitical ambitions like India, China, Russia—[this is] a good attribute. We can seek to represent the rest but not dominate the rest.”

MIKTA's Rationale: Value-for-Money Diplomacy in Search for a Global Mandate

What, then, have been the specific motivations behind MIKTA's creation and continued existence, given that the literature usually points toward coalitions created to solve particular issues? Our interview data suggest that MIKTA foreign ministries have used the group as a capacity-building and network-sharing scheme; and as a toolkit to diversify their traditional diplomatic channels and increase global visibility in various multilateral forums. The attraction of MIKTA seems to rely on the fact that members get these benefits without incurring a major additional burden to stretched ministerial budgets by keeping it low maintenance and flexible.

Capacity-building and Network-sharing

First, member diplomats say MIKTA has been a mechanism to build diplomatic capacities and share regional networks in a cost-effective manner. For instance, all five MIKTA countries perceive their G-20 membership as an international call to act as "responsible global players." But engagement with the G-20 has also led to the need to invest to handle resource-heavy processes. The Indonesian foreign ministry, in particular, has faced capacity issues. The ministry has been burdened by more than 100 meetings every year in preparation for the G-20 summit. Against this backdrop, MIKTA offers the possibility to rely on "like-minded" partners to represent collective positions in various multilateral spaces—at least for certain nondivisive issues that do not immediately impact sensitive national interests.

To further enhance diplomatic capability, MIKTA foreign ministers have agreed to support each other's diplomatic missions through exchange programs. MIKTA members can also send diplomats to the missions of other members in countries where they have no diplomatic representatives of their own. This has been particularly relevant for Indonesia since the Indonesian foreign ministry faces serious capacity constraints, perhaps the most serious among MIKTA countries. As Indonesian foreign minister Retno Marsudi highlighted in a press statement: "With this cooperation, Indonesia could send its diplomats for internship programs to MIKTA members' representatives, such as in the Pacific countries, Africa or Central and South American countries, where Indonesia has no diplomatic representatives."²³

Increasing diplomatic capacity has been an incentive for other MIKTA members as well. When Australia was preparing for the Commonwealth Games in April 2018, MIKTA provided outreach networks overseas in regions that are only lightly covered by Australian missions: "If you undertook a mapping of diplomatic representation, MIKTA embassies would show great global reach which no single country can achieve alone" (Australian diplomat).

Diplomatic Diversification and Global Visibility

Second, MIKTA officials are interested in using the partnership as an alternative avenue to diversify traditional diplomatic channels. It functions as a global engagement platform for countries that have often had to act alone to exercise international influence. For Korea, MIKTA engagement is interpreted as an investment to expand Korean diplomacy beyond the security imperatives involving nuclear weapons in North Korea and great-power politics in Northeast Asia. As a Korean expert puts it, "I am not an avid supporter of MIKTA diplomacy, but I can agree that Korea needs to prepare for the future, and a developing-country mindset of the past does not work anymore. I think it is a good idea to keep MIKTA as a low-maintenance diplomatic instrument and a necessary investment for the future."

Indonesia sees MIKTA as an additional diplomatic tool to leverage its global positioning beyond the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and to express views that are difficult to put forward as a member of the Group of 77 bloc at the UN. For Turkey, MIKTA has presented an opportunity to explore a more realistic engagement with global governance. In a context where Turkey's own "exaggerated" (Turkish expert) vision of its position in the world often has not lived up to reality, MIKTA presents an alternative platform untainted with "complex relations" (Turkish diplomat), in contrast to its links with countries in Europe and the Middle East as well as the United States. Australia welcomes MIKTA not only as a general space for diplomatic innovation and experiments, but also as a venue where its intricate relations with Indonesia may be reframed constructively. For Mexico, MIKTA has offered an alternative space beyond Latin American alliances and, more recently, an additional—if minor—mechanism for diversifying political and economic relations in the context of its increasingly problematic ties with the United States.

Officials also hold that MIKTA can serve as a platform for jointly stating what member countries do not want or are not able to say individually, and that the MIKTA backing ensures that these statements come with more weight internationally. Many diplomats highlight that Turkey and Australia have no "natural regional fit" and usually have to work harder to be part of multilateral alliances. Korea also sits in a region where regional mechanisms are underdeveloped due to historical disputes and contested interests. Seoul diplomats underline that MIKTA provides the country with a much-needed group platform for discussions in New York and Geneva. An Australian diplomat argues that MIKTA is a way to escape the "gang warfare" of the multilateral world and work on constructive sensible solutions.

Particularly in light of G-20 dynamics between the G-7 and the BRICS, some diplomats hold that MIKTA has a potential to become a "ginger group." Some expect that MIKTA can be "a new mechanism that goes beyond the slow traditional multilateral spaces," challenging "the one-dimensionality of international politics where the US and its allies have always called the shots" (Turkish

diplomat). MIKTA's cross-regional consultative discussions also function as an "experimental space" (Australian diplomat) and a "test-bed" (Korean diplomat) to estimate the potential global reception of policy ideas against the realities of other regional perspectives. Most diplomats agree that exchanges in the MIKTA framework have been frank, speedy, and stimulating. According to a Korean expert, "Since the apex of MIKTA diplomacy is the foreign ministers' meeting, MIKTA needs to ensure a space of insight, spontaneity, manoeuvre and flexibility for those top officials navigating fast-changing world affairs." An Australian diplomat also remarks that "a great advantage of MIKTA is the speed with which ministers can agree. There can be free-flowing conversation around contentious issues. Each foreign minister has been able to explain regional issues and be forward-leaning."

MIKTA has also helped enhance bilateral relations among members thanks to increased opportunities of engagement across different ranks of ministry officials: "MIKTA membership also often functions as a bonding opportunity among member diplomats, facilitating more open, frequent exchange of ideas and creating opportunities of friendship" (Korean diplomat). A Mexican diplomat underlines that "before MIKTA it was almost irrelevant whom we would send as Ambassador to Turkey; but now this has become an important decision."

An Inexpensive, Flexible, Multipurpose Tool

Finally, the modus operandi of MIKTA seems suited to members' cost-saving needs. So far, the budget allocated to MIKTA in member governments has been minimal and MIKTA has not required much investment in terms of resources and follow-up. MIKTA has no secretariat, few people in member country capitals are involved with MIKTA processes on a daily basis, and those in charge at the working level have opted for rather informal and direct communication—mainly via e-mail—for speedy coordination. With relatively low-level activity, MIKTA as a minilateral tool is on standby, ready to be used if need be. This reflects MIKTA officials' preference for looser formats that avoid binding commitments: "Sometimes you invest a lot of political capital in an initiative or institution, and at the end of the day all efforts lead to nothing. This is why, for now, MIKTA's low-key engagement is alright" (Mexican diplomat). A Korean diplomat warns that "we need to be cautious about committing resources to diplomatic institutions. Within the UN system and elsewhere, we have seen numerous multilateral organizations that consume lots of resources for almost nothing."

Diplomats seem generally concerned that institutionalization—such as setting up a secretariat and increasing investment in terms of financial and human resources—would transform MIKTA into a resource-intensive bureaucratic exercise and, thus, undermine much of MIKTA's comparative advantage.

Issue-wise, MIKTA governments have taken a broad and flexible approach with virtually no limitations regarding the range of topics addressed. As part of a strategy to funnel MIKTA's efforts toward selected issues and raise visibility,

officials agreed in 2016 on seven priority areas to guide MIKTA activities: energy governance, counterterrorism, economic and trade cooperation, governance and democracy, sustainable development, gender equality, and UN peacekeeping. But government officials and experts both prefer to keep MIKTA's agenda broad and open-ended while the seven issue areas can provide a general framework: "No matter how minor an issue appears, it should be listened to and integrated, because we do not know which issue will become relevant in the future" (Turkish diplomat).

The MIKTA network has also been versatile across diverse multilateral spaces. Over the years, MIKTA's main focus seems to have shifted away from the G-20, its birthplace. Diplomats say that at the OECD, where country blocs do not play a major role, MIKTA action could be geared to concentrate on specific technical initiatives. In the UN arena, where traditional regional and ideological blocs still matter, they argue that MIKTA's engagement should focus on concrete initiatives that bridge divides, such as the peace and security agenda, in cooperation with the UN Secretary-General's office.

MIKTA's Challenges: A Tepid Embrace

MIKTA's main dilemma is that a too systemized and stringent approach can backfire to the detriment of the group's creativity and agility while flexible ad hoc engagements have led to a loss of focus and an increased risk of becoming obsolete. While there is general agreement that MIKTA is an interesting idea that has led to some initial achievements, most officials echo the words of their colleague that MIKTA is "neither a major success nor an outright failure" (Mexican diplomat). It is this tepid embrace that arguably best captures the overall mood among the interviewed diplomats. Nongovernmental experts are more pessimistic about MIKTA's possible future and highlight the need for MIKTA to produce concrete outcomes.

Coordination Challenges and Competitive Pressure from the BRICS

Lacking an explicit issue-specific functional purpose and formal institutional setup, MIKTA faces harsh competition from other foreign policy mechanisms in terms of political attention and funding. MIKTA activities are widespread, often ad hoc, and sometimes only loosely coordinated. For some critics, MIKTA's work on multiple global governance issues seems "too idealistic with little evidence of tangible achievements" (Korean expert). Others dismiss MIKTA as a loose arrangement that lacks real impact,²⁴ or a mere "contact group" without a coherent vision.²⁵ A range of stakeholders perceive a substantive gap between MIKTA's official rhetoric (e.g., "a force for good," facilitator) and the reality of its actions. In multilateral spaces, MIKTA remains "a concept in the making" (Korean diplomat), and coordination among MIKTA countries is "still in its infancy" (Mexican diplomat).

While foreign policy processes never exist independently from domestic dynamics, its weak institutionalization makes MIKTA particularly susceptible to the changing political climate and factional interests in member country capitals. As an Australian expert highlights, “The challenge of MIKTA is that it is too personalized to foreign ministers [which presents a] big structural weakness; MIKTA is not yet fused into foreign policy agenda and priorities and therefore could be seen as a hobbyhorse instead.”

So far, member governments’ engagement with MIKTA has not been particularly systematic. The lack of strategy and the absence of effective coordination among members are becoming more pronounced as both actors and initiatives under the MIKTA umbrella have increased in number. A Mexican diplomat argues that MIKTA Sherpas “should be the leading figures but have lost control over the process.” As a result, MIKTA has become “everything and anything” from student exchange programs to cultural events.

Thus, many are concerned that MIKTA may not survive a potential charm offensive from the BRICS. Diplomats are wary that some MIKTA members might be ready to defect if the BRICS—as the most visible emerging power grouping—decides to expand. Mexico was invited to the BRICS summit in 2017, and there was speculation that Indonesia could be another likely candidate in case the grouping was to be enlarged. MIKTA appears lagging far behind the BRICS’s speedy institutionalization and resourcefulness. MIKTA’s efforts in terms of global positioning and visibility are seen as “a futile attempt to stand up to the BRICS” (Mexican diplomat).

Mexico and Indonesia, once enthusiastic about MIKTA’s economic potential in terms of trade and direct investment, seem especially disappointed. An Indonesian diplomat notes that the combined gross domestic product (GDP) of MIKTA countries is barely 8 percent of global GDP: “There is power in money, and the power is not yet there [in MIKTA].” And an Indonesian expert argues that “within eight years of its foundation, BRICS has held nine summits, and each year more than ten ministerial level meetings. BRICS also successfully established a Contingent Reserve Arrangement and the New Development Bank. In contrast, the outcome of MIKTA’s meetings has been statements and joint communiqués without clear future direction.”

Domestic Priorities and Shrinking Resources

Across the board, national priorities have recently come to play an increasingly dominant role for MIKTA countries. From Turkey’s domestic and regional challenges to Korea’s denuclearization diplomacy and Mexico’s focus on changing relations with the United States, diplomats agree that all MIKTA countries are currently trying to sort out their own issues, leaving little time and energy for joint initiatives. In particular, the advent of the Donald Trump administration has led to abrupt shifts in traditional trade and security relations; and, by and large, MIKTA countries are dealing with these critical challenges individually.

Coordinated action would require a certain level of diplomatic infrastructure and investment as well as an integrated strategy, all of which MIKTA as a group is lacking: “Theoretically there should be more space for creative middle power diplomacy [in times of transition], but more energy is taken up just [by] reacting to extraordinary and unpredictable events in the White House” (Australia expert). A Mexican diplomat agrees that “enormous amounts of time and energy are going into our relationship with the US: our new minister [of foreign affairs] basically never leaves Washington” (Mexican diplomat).

Changes in governments, budget cuts, and institutional reorganizations in foreign ministries have also slowed down members’ engagement with MIKTA. As a result, the most serious challenge to MIKTA’s future concerns issues of members’ uneven and generally weakening commitment, and the ensuing leadership vacuum. Australia, for instance, showed significant enthusiasm for MIKTA during its year as chair, but its approach seems to be changing in light of tightening financial resources. While the Australian government has highlighted its interest in heavy investment in the Indo-Pacific region, MIKTA has been restructured out of existence in the organizational chart of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as updated in late 2017.

Korea—along with Australia, one of the more active MIKTA members so far—has recently been reluctant to position itself as a leader of the group, preferring to settle for the role of a “good follower.” Seoul’s budget earmarked for MIKTA diplomacy has already been on a gradual decline since 2015, its chair year. The change of government in the aftermath of an unprecedented presidential impeachment in 2017 has also meant that existing initiatives from the previous government have been reassessed under a new leadership. As no member country seems currently interested in taking up a leadership role, MIKTA’s internal momentum will largely rely on the annually rotating chair system without sustained investment of money and ideas from particularly committed members.

Minilateralism Revisited: Grappling with a Multiplex World on a Budget

MIKTA’s story to date points to the evolving realities of a minilateral world populated with an increasing variety of what might have previously been qualified as rather improbable groupings. Contrary to minilateral alliances set up as issue-specific arrangements, MIKTA is both driven and beset by the need for countries to engage more cost-effectively with global governance mechanisms. In an increasingly fragmented global space, participation in multilateral politics comes with a substantial burden. Faced with an expanding array of issues, foreign ministries have to invest increasing amounts of time and energy in mapping and understanding complex constellations and processes. MIKTA suggests that constraints on resources, global reach, and expertise can be key factors driving the proliferation of inexpensive minilateral arrangements.

The dynamics behind MIKTA's trajectory suggest that there is more to today's minilateralism than coalitions of the willing or alliances led by the world's major powers that address specific functional questions. In an increasingly fragmented world order, where clear-cut country blocs are set to become less important, building diplomatic capacity and expanding networks with a growing number of players can provide an important motivation for minilateral engagement. Overall, minilateral arrangements are likely to become increasingly tailored to budgetary and capacity-related needs of governments and their bureaucratic apparatuses.

MIKTA's flexible, but precarious, institutional realities also suggest that minilateral arrangements lacking a solid organizational setup may have much shorter life expectancies than more formal traditional multilaterals. Very much personalized to foreign ministers, MIKTA has been vulnerable to domestic political cycles, budget cuts, and the changing whims of political leaders. Like other minilateral partnerships, MIKTA lacks a dedicated staffed secretariat and a formal international treaty—the two critical lifelines that have traditionally sustained the expansion of international organizations.²⁶ This means that in a world of emerging minilateral diplomacy, we are more likely to witness “zombies” (arrangements that exist on paper, with minimal real activities) and “deaths” (arrangements that disappear altogether) than in the traditional multilateral diplomacy of the past century.²⁷ New minilateral initiatives, including MIKTA, are often designed in a way that they may go extinct or inactive without legal complications or collateral damage such as job losses in secretariats. Against the backdrop of strained financial and human resources, minilateral arrangements à la MIKTA are a reflection of an increasingly pragmatic and selective—and overall more slender—approach to multilateralism.

The case of MIKTA suggests that countries with moderate capabilities tend to create and participate in complementary minilateral arrangements on an informal, inexpensive, and low-key basis while strained diplomatic resources are first spent on key bilateral, regional, and, overall, more traditional relationships. Many minilateral mechanisms that share MIKTA's operational characteristics are likely to be short-lived and suffer from weak member commitment, resource constraints, forum-shopping risks, and a leadership vacuum. Some, however, may survive and become a new species of actor in a multiplex world. Our analysis shows that we need to pay more attention to backstage dynamics and the perspective of diplomats to understand the existence and utility of minilateral governance mechanisms. 🌐

Notes

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1. Matthew D. Stephen, "Emerging Powers and Emerging Trends in Global Governance," *Global Governance* 23, no. 3 (2017): 483–502.

2. See, for example, Daryl Copeland, "'Expectations Proliferate, While Capacities Diminish' New Rabbits, Old Hats: International Policy and Canada's Foreign Service in an Era of Reduced Diplomatic Resources," *International Journal* 60, no. 3 (2005): 743–762, at 747. See, further, Brian Hocking and David Spence, eds., *Foreign Ministries in the European Union: Integrating Diplomats* (London: Palgrave, 2002).

3. "Korea" in this essay refers to the Republic of Korea (South Korea).

4. Amitav Acharya, "After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order," *Ethics and International Affairs* 31, no. 3 (2017): 271–285.

5. Middle powers are said to have the potential to successfully implement "games of skill" as new agenda setters, alliance makers, and creative thinkers, especially at moments of international transition. See Mark Beeson and Richard Higgott, "The Changing Architecture of Politics in the Asia-Pacific: Australia's Middle Power Moment?" *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 14, no. 2 (2014): 215–237, at 215.

6. Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), p. 9.

7. Stewart Patrick, "The New 'New Multilateralism': Minilateral Cooperation, but at What Cost?" *Global Summitry* 1, no. 2 (2015): 115–134.

8. Interviews with MIKTA diplomats and experts took place face-to-face or via email, telephone, or video conferencing. Most interviewees were based in MIKTA capitals, bilateral embassies, or multilateral missions. Interview data breakdowns by country are as follows. For Mexico, sixteen diplomats and three experts participated in the interviews with Sebastian Haug between June and September 2017. For Indonesia, Susan Harris Rimmer interviewed six diplomats and five experts between July and October 2017. For Korea, Sung-Mi Kim interviewed ten diplomats and five experts from July to November 2017. The Turkish data was collected by Sebastian Haug from interviews with twelve diplomats and three experts between June and September 2017. Susan Harris Rimmer conducted Australia interviews with eight diplomats and six experts from June to October 2017. The use of interview data contained in the paper is preconditioned by the request of the funder (the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs) that interviewees would

not be identifiable. Given the relatively small size of ministerial staff engaged in MIKTA diplomacy, and in consideration of anonymity requests by interviewees, the paper refrains from providing more detailed information regarding individual interviews (e.g., interviewee's name, title, or location) and instead only identifies nationality and occupation (e.g., diplomat, expert).

9. For a discussion of the challenges that foreign ministries—particularly those of countries beyond the world's current great powers—face when trying to deal with increasing global complexities, see Jacqueline Braveboy-Wagner, *Diplomatic Strategies of Nations in the Global South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 436.

10. MIKTA Vision Statement, May 2015, www.mikta.org/about/vision.php?ckattempt=1, accessed 1 June 2018.

11. Ibid.

12. Current as of May 2018. See, further, Selcuk Colakoglu, "Has MIKTA Augmented the Global Governance Role of Middle Powers," *The Global Blog*, 29 May 2018, <https://theglobal.blog/2018/05/29/has-mikta-augmented-the-global-governance-role-of-middle-powers/>, accessed 1 June 2018.

13. See also Siswo Pramono, Febrian A. Ruddyard, Jorge A. Schiavon, Selcuk Colakoglu, Shofwan Al Banna Choiruzzad, Nicholas Farelley, Seungjoo Lee, et al., *MIKTA: Current Situation and the Way Forward* (Jakarta: Policy Analysis and Development Agency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 2018).

14. All these activities took place in 2017. Sources include MIKTA activity logs by the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs; MIKTA's official website, www.mikta.org; MIKTA Australia Twitter, <https://twitter.com/AusMIKTA>, accessed 1 June 2018.

15. Bruce Gilley, "Conclusion: Delusions of Grandeur in the Goldilocks Zone," *International Journal* 71, no. 4 (2016): 651–658.

16. Andrew F. Cooper and Ramesh Thakur, *The Group of Twenty (G20)* (London: Routledge, 2013).

17. Ibid.; Andrew F. Cooper, "The G20 and Rising Powers: An Innovative but Awkward Form of Multilateralism," in Dries Lesage and Thijs Van de Graaf, eds., *Rising Powers and Multilateral Institutions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 280–294.

18. Patrick, "The New 'New Multilateralism,'" p. 115.

19. Moises Naim, "Minilateralism: The Magic Number to Get Real International Action," *Foreign Policy*, 21 June 2009, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/06/21/minilateralism/>, accessed 1 June 2018.

20. We note, however, increased activity defending the World Trade Organization and rules-based trade during Argentina's G-20 presidency. See, further, the MIKTA Ministerial Communiqué from the Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Trade of MIKTA Countries, Buenos Aires (11 December 2017), www.mikta.org/document/joint.php?at=view&idx=301, accessed 1 June 2018.

21. Commentators differ on the significance of tensions between democratic and undemocratic members of the BRICS. Zaki Laïdi argues that state sovereignty trumps all, even for the democratic members. Zaki Laïdi, "BRICS: Sovereignty Power and Weakness," *International Politics* 49, no. 5 (September 2012): 614–632. Matthew D. Stephen finds the differences more significant. See, further, Matthew D. Stephen, "Rising Regional Powers and International Institutions: The Foreign Policy Orientations of India, Brazil and South Africa," *Global Society* 26, no. 3 (2012): 289–309.

22. Awidya Santikajaya, "Walking the Middle Path: The Characteristics of Indonesia's Rise," *International Journal* 71, no. 4 (2016): 563–586, at 574.
23. "Indonesia Wants Closer Cooperation of MIKTA Countries," *Jakarta Post*, 28 November 2016, www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/11/28/indonesia-wants-closer-cooperation-of-mikta-countries.html, accessed 1 June 2018.
24. See Hale Yildiz, "How to Explain MIKTA," 29 September 2014, Australian Institute of International Affairs, www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australian_outlook/how-to-explain-mikta/, accessed 1 June 2018.
25. Scott A. Snyder, "Interview with Scott A. Snyder on 'Korea as a Middle Power,'" 25 January 2016, *The Policy Wire*, <http://thepolicywire.com/scott-a-snyder-korea-as-a-middle-power/>, accessed 1 June 2018.
26. Susan Strange, "Why Do International Organizations Never Die?" in Bob Reinalda and Bertjan Verbeek, eds., *Autonomous Policy Making by International Organizations* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 213–221.
27. Julia Gray, "Life, Death, or Zombie? The Vitality of International Organizations," *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (March 2018): 1–13.