

MIKTA and Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy: Opportunities and Challenges

April 19, 2016

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Changes in Global Governance and Middle Power

The rapidly shifting nature of the global economy and politics in the twenty-first century presents middle powers with a noble opportunity as the need for systematic linkages among the existing global governance structures is on the rise. However, major players have yet to find a way as to how to establish such linkages. Going beyond narrowly defined national interests, middle powers should be able to accommodate other players' interests to reorganize global governance. That is, changing contexts, not changes in material conditions, are crucial for middle powers to enhance their influence in global politics (Ravenhill 1998). Aware of their material constraints, middle powers are likely to seek niche diplomacy where middle powers concentrate resources on specific issue areas (Evans and Grant 1991).

The sheer fact that various players involved in global issues reveal potentially conflicting interests gives middle powers potential roles to play. Assuming that today's global politics are organized in a networked fashion rather than hierarchically (Kahler 2009), middle powers will be able to increase their visibility and influence, even if they do not possess hard power that can dictate the world order.

Furthermore, middle powers are often better positioned between various players. Middle powers can potentially have such positions in development cooperation, a promising candidate for middle power di-

plomacy, as they can sit between developed and developing countries, traditional and emerging donors, state and non-state actors. Taking advantage of their position within these complex networks, middle powers will be able to execute positional power (Kim 2009).

Of course, the possession of favourable positions within the network does not automatically guarantee middle powers influence and prestige. In order to realize the tangible benefits that accrue from such positions, middle powers should be able to become "entrepreneurial leaders" in global politics (Young 1991). In contrast to traditional middle powers that were largely content with "first followership" (Cooper et al. 1993), middle powers in the twenty-first century tend to seek a more activist role. The role of middle powers is extremely important under the current architecture of global governance.

Because middle powers, by definition, are hardly capable of transforming global politics by themselves,

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"MIKTA and Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy: Opportunities and Challenges" ISBN 979-11-86226-84-1 95340

Edit and Typeset: Benjamin A. Engel, Hyejung Suh

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they can produce systemic changes in global politics either by forming a small group or international institutions. Middle powers, unlike great powers that are likely to pose security threat to other states, are in a better position to facilitate international cooperation. Great powers tend to incorporate strategic interests in seeking cooperation with small powers that in turn make small states skeptical about great powers' intentions. By contrast, middle powers can play a leadership role without causing other states' trouble because they seek international cooperation primarily based on communication, trust, and reputations. In this regard, middle powers can make the most of their potential as natural partners for international cooperation.

MIKTA: Approaches and Achievements

As is well known, MIKTA initially started out as a “residual group” of countries within the G20 that neither belonged to the G7 nor BRICS. In reality, MIKTA countries have keen interests in the G20. Mexico, Korea, Turkey, and Australia have hosted a G20 summit. During the 2010 G20 summit in Pittsburgh, president Lee Myung-bak and prime minister Kevin Rudd called for a basic framework that can coordinate economic policies among the G20 members. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis, Korea and Australia also took the initiative in creating a framework for sustainable and balanced growth. Over the course of these initiatives, MIKTA countries emerged as a new group within the G20 in addition to the G7 and BRICS.

Based on this, in September 2013, Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey, and Australia ambitiously launched the inaugural meeting of MIKTA Foreign Ministers in New York on the sidelines of the 68th United Nations General Assembly. Entering into the uncharted waters of middle power diplomacy in the twenty-first century, the five countries designed MIKTA as a platform to explore ways and means to make contributions to addressing global issues. Since

then, they have actively promoted MIKTA diplomacy at various levels. Thus far, MIKTA has held six Foreign Ministers' Meetings along with the first Senior Officials' Meeting in February 2015 and the first Speakers' Meeting in July 2015.

The launch of MIKTA is a meaningful move in the sense that it is likely to nurture a network among middle powers. In reality, MIKTA countries have successfully developed a coordination mechanism. First, the chair, selected by consensus, serves a one-year term to facilitate consultations on multiple issues. Thus far, Mexico (September 2013 – August 2014), Korea (September 2014 – August 2015) and Australia (September 2015 to December 2016) have effectively rotated the chairmanship. Second, MIKTA has also developed multilayered consultation mechanisms such as the Senior Officials' Meeting, Parliamentary Speakers' Meeting, meetings among MIKTA G20 sherpas, and the MIKTA Academic Network so that they can solidify cooperation among themselves as well as take on leadership roles in tackling global issues. Third, MIKTA has made meaningful strides in identifying core agendas of cooperation: health security, gender equality, sustainable development, climate change, terrorism, international civil aviation safety, and regional issues.

As robust market economies and democratic systems, MIKTA countries formed a coalition and network with countries that share common interests and visions to bring about necessary changes in the twenty-first century world order rather than acting individually. With a shared interest in making contributions to global issues, MIKTA is fully committed to lending support to the development of good governance, democracy, and human rights. Ranging from the twelfth to eighteenth largest economies in terms of GDP, MIKTA countries are making concerted efforts to strengthen multilateralism, promote global efforts for a more stable and prosperous world, accelerate creative and pragmatic solutions to global issues, and to be intellectual leaders in reforming global govern-



ance. Whereas MIKTA countries are essentially interested in maintaining the current international order founded by traditional great powers, they attempt to gradually reflect structural changes to shape the new global order. By taking a constructive initiative, MIKTA countries were expected to fill a crucial gap in the current global governance.

Aware of the changing nature of global governance, MIKTA countries share a common view that neither the complete breakdown nor continuation of the existing global governance is desirable. Carrying the banner of the “rise of the rest: cross-regional networks,” Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey, and Australia ambitiously launched MIKTA. The launch of MIKTA was made possible because there are multiple cleavages in current global governance. It is largely believed that there are at least 7 cleavages in the G20 (Cooper 2013). These cleavages are not fixed but fluid, prompting the G20 members to build coalitions on an issue-by-issue basis.

Under these circumstances, a mediator is necessary to coordinate conflicting interests, either between developed and developing countries or between state and non-state actors. As middle powers, MIKTA countries are properly positioned to coordinate diversified interests between developed and developing countries. Taking advantage of their unique position, MIKTA countries aim to mediate potentially conflicting interests among various players and stakeholders. In particular, MIKTA’s approach is quite distinctive in that it does not seek a partnership driven by any single superpower. MIKTA is attempting to be co-architects in restructuring the global governance. As a flexible and informal platform, MIKTA could swiftly respond to imminent issues such as the Ebola crisis and global health. This indicates that MIKTA has forged a strong consensus on contributing to extra-regional or international issues.

MIKTA has also been quite successful in improving international visibility and cultivating common stances on some global issues. In contrast to previous

middle power groups, MIKTA’s approach is unique and innovative in three ways. First, MIKTA is seeking to make incremental but innovative changes in global governance. While seeking an incremental approach to the restructuring global governance, MIKTA countries cooperate in finding innovative solutions to pending global issues. They have already succeeded in identifying the areas of cooperation: climate change, disaster relief, poverty reduction, nuclear safety, and cyber security.

Second, MIKTA pursues network-based cooperation rather than creating another formal organization. The current global governance is not under pressure due to the lack of international organizations and is rather plagued with a plethora of international organizations. Given that it is not a panacea to create one more international organization to deal with the existing problems, network-based cooperation is more practical and effective.

Third, MIKTA is a cross-regional consultative platform that pursues common interests, rejecting individual country interests. A MIKTA statement claims that “demonstrating its utility, versatility, and visibility as a new model for cross-regional and value-added partnership, MIKTA will serve as a bridgehead for fostering various forms of cooperation” (MIKTA Vision Statement 2015). As middle powers, MIKTA countries have the potential to play active roles at the regional level, thereby advancing the common interests of the international community. MIKTA should be able to demonstrate its utility and versatility as a new model for cross-regional cooperation.

Fourth, MIKTA countries have creatively found a way to combine the commonalities and differences among them. Recognizing the potential constraints that they are not a natural-born like-minded group that share common culture and values, MIKTA countries made various efforts to find and nurture the commonalities, hoping that such efforts would solidify the internal cohesion and unity among them. In fact, MIKTA countries do have a great deal in common. These efforts,



of course, will pave the way for MIKTA's successful development. Based on these commonalities, MIKTA could produce the two joint statements on the North Korean nuclear threat and the shooting down of the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17.

Meanwhile, MIKTA countries have thus far sought a differentiation strategy profoundly distinctive from the strategies of traditional middle powers. Traditional middle powers, Canada and Australia were mainly interested in functional issues such as trade and human rights. While they successfully increased their influence in the early days of the post-cold war period, they were essentially status-quo oriented and therefore unable to restructure global governance. By contrast, the second generation of middle powers, represented by the BRICS, attempted to play the role of revisionist powers by offering an alternative vision of the world order. Whereas they were somewhat successful in arousing discussion on the structural problems of global governance led by the advanced countries, they ended up increasing the degree of conflict rather than providing a fundamental answer to the problem.

However, it was revealed that MIKTA has a very weak potential as a coalition. Other than the fact that they possess similar size of economic power and democratic political system, MIKTA countries do not have enough in common to construct a basis for cooperation, creating skepticism about the future of MIKTA. Realizing this constraint, MIKTA took an informal, flexible, and issue-oriented approach to cultivating collaboration. Identifying themselves as "an informal platform of countries which are like-minded on many issues," MIKTA countries quickly moved to find areas of cooperation. Lacking experiences of robust cooperation, MIKTA countries reached a consensus to put higher priorities on global issues rather than national or regional issues in order to establish its *raison d'état*.

Thus far, MIKTA has announced a total of 8 joint statements, mainly on global issues such as the downing of the Malaysian airlines Flight MH17 (July 2014),

the Ebola outbreak and global health (September 2014), financing for development (July 2015), climate change (September 2015), the terrorist attack in Turkey (October 2015), and the North Korean nuclear test (January 2016). Most recently, in February 2016, MIKTA countries publicized the eighth joint statement on the United Nations Secretary-General's plan of action to prevent violent extremism which called for the international community's concerted efforts and reaffirmed the rationale for UN General Assembly's resolution (A/RES/70/254). Through this statement, the MIKTA countries made it clear that it is crucial for international society to unite in addressing violent extremism.

Being an informal mechanism, MIKTA is attempting to tackle global issues to coordinate various players and stakeholders in global politics. Global challenges facing the international community today are ever increasing: natural disasters, terrorism and transnational organized crime, climate change, maritime security, growing movements of displaced people and asylum seekers, irregular flows of migrants, global poverty, and nuclear proliferation are increasingly complex. All of these issues are interconnected, multi-dimensional, and multilayered, suggesting that the solutions are complex, while a number of players, both state and non-state, do get involved in these issues. MIKTA countries think that because these challenges can take place at the global, regional, and national level, it is of utmost importance to tackle them through concerted actions.

What Is Ahead? MIKTA and South Korea

The current global governance landscape needs middle powers to take more initiative and embrace an expanded role. This change coincides with South Korea's ambitious launch of the middle power diplomacy strategy. Under the banner of "contributive diplomacy," the Lee Myung-bak government urged South



Korea to find a way to elevate its diplomacy to the next level. The Lee government claimed that it is time for South Korea to join international efforts to address global issues. Upon its inauguration, the subsequent Park Geun-hye government ambitiously launched the “middle power diplomacy” in conjunction with the Peace Process of the Korean Peninsula and the North-east Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative as its diplomatic goals. It is against this backdrop that MIKTA emerged as one of the promising areas for middle power diplomacy. It signifies that South Korea, for the first time in its diplomatic history, would pursue a coalition-driven diplomatic strategy, and enter into a new phase of Korean diplomacy. MIKTA diplomacy in this regard has the potential to broaden the scope of Korea’s diplomacy. While it is absolutely worthwhile to form such a coalition to elevate South Korea’s international presence, the Korean government should be able to find a way to turn it into a like-minded group in the longer term.

What is next for MIKTA from the Korean perspective? First, MIKTA has been successful in cultivating common grounds for cooperation. However, MIKTA should not be obsessed with commonalities as overemphasis on this issue is likely to reveal MIKTA’s weakness. Keeping in mind that they are different in terms of cultures, regions, and networks, Korea should take the lead in finding a way to turn the MIKTA countries’ differences into strengths.

Korea needs to develop smart strategies based on the differences among MIKTA countries. The diversity of MIKTA can be an asset not a burden that can facilitate collaboration as MIKTA countries are able to take advantage of their differences in a complementary way. This very diversity will likely bestow on MIKTA a unique role as a bridge-builder and agenda-setter. For example, while MIKTA countries are profoundly different in terms of unit-level properties and capabilities, they possess similar positions within the international system. The social network theory suggests that actors in similar positions tend to seek col-

laboration to complement their individual differences (Sailer 1973). From this perspective, MIKTA countries are likely to face similar challenges and tasks originating from international system, and this can facilitate cooperation among them since they are pivotal middle powers with structurally equivalent position in the international system (Hafner-Burton 2006).

Second, Korea needs to take advantage of MIKTA as a body to implement transregional cooperation, as MIKTA is composed of countries with regional representation or regional ownership. Indonesia, Australia, and Turkey are active in facilitating regional cooperation. Korea and Mexico have gradually increased their interests in regional issues, although they traditionally placed a high priority on strengthening the bilateral relations with the U.S. MIKTA countries possess experiences and expertise in cooperating in their own region. By sharing their knowledge about regional cooperation, each MIKTA can serve as a hub linking other MIKTA countries to that region’s issues. This way, MIKTA countries with common goals of contributing to global challenges can transform the differences and diversity into a crucial asset for global cooperation, while maintaining diversity.

Development cooperation is an area where Korea can seek transregional cooperation based on this strategy. With the emergence of new players such as emerging donors (China and India) and NGOs, the global governance of development cooperation has rapidly diversified over the last decade. As a result, the dynamics of cooperation and competition has become quite complex. For example, the main cleavages are not one dimensional but multi-dimensional: donors vs. recipients, traditional donors vs. emerging donors, big donors vs. small donors, government actors vs. non-government actors, global players vs. regional players, and so on. The increased complexity revealed the limits of the existing global governance of development cooperation as the increase in players made the nature of bargaining more difficult than in the past. Under these circumstances, Korea should collaborate with



MIKTA countries to implement trilateral cooperation. Trilateral cooperation has become important because it is likely to complement existing bilateral cooperation between advanced and developing countries.

Korea can use other MIKTA countries' deep and extensive understanding of their own region to expand the horizon of its development cooperation policy. Until recently, Korea has concentrated about half of its ODA budget in Asia, while rapidly increasing the overall size of its ODA budget since joining the OECD DAC in 2010. This signifies that the Korean government is under increasing pressure to diversify its development cooperation policy beyond Asia. However, as a relatively new member of the OECD DAC, Korea has not yet accumulated enough experience and knowledge to implement development cooperation in other regions.

Trilateral cooperation is an attractive alternative that may help Korea address this challenge. For example, in a case where Korea plans a development cooperation project in Central or Latin America, trilateral cooperation with Mexico can help Korea implement the project more effectively. In this regard, Turkey and Australia are the natural candidates for trilateral cooperation when Korea attempts to expand into Central Asia and the Southern Pacific. With this type of cooperation, Korea will be able to greatly enhance the effectiveness of its ODA, while facilitating transregional cooperation on the basis of MIKTA.

Based on the experiences of previous cooperation at various levels, MIKTA countries will be able to utilize each country's comparative advantage as a foundation for expanded and deepened collaboration. In the long run, MIKTA countries plan to build on the experiences of cooperation for global issues to gradually expand the scope of cooperation that requires a higher level of solidarity among them. ■

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