THE MIKTA WAY FORWARD

The Potential, Risk, and Future of MIKTA Diplomacy

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Policy recommendations

1. After the initial brainstorming phase, MIKTA needs to generate concrete initiatives with appropriate visibility.

2. MIKTA's initiatives should be broad enough to ensure support (or at least no opposition) from all members and be focused enough to have practical relevance and impact.

3. MIKTA should use its flexible organisational structure to move quickly in areas of international concern and focus. In addition to the five key areas identified by MIKTA's

permanent missions in Geneva, MIKTA should consider areas of growing concern, such as cybersecurity.

4. In order to generate broad visibility, MIKTA countries need to cooperate in the MIKTA framework at key events, including G20 summits and important conferences in MIKTA's key focus areas.

5. MIKTA's small size has the potential for great efficiency. Nevertheless, in order to avoid losing out on inclusivity, MIKTA members could provide mechanisms that allow regional actors to provide input to MIKTA's proposals.

Potential

MIKTA – a cooperation scheme comprised of Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Turkey and Australia – was officially launched in September 2013, when MIKTA's foreign ministers had their first meeting on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly. After Mexico's coordinatorship, which involved the early creation and set-up of the collaboration, it is now the turn of the Republic of Korea, which needs to pick up the pace and crystallise MIKTA's potential in concrete actions. With the upcoming Ministerial Meeting in Seoul in May, it is time to revisit MIKTA's potentials, to outline its main challenges, and to suggest possible ways forward. This

paper explores the lessons that MIKTA can learn from other examples of groupings, such as the BRICS – the cooperation scheme of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

MIKTA, as a new initiative with high organisational flexibility, has the potential to provide effective and fast response to international challenges. It consists of important regional actors who, when combining their efforts, are able to generate solutions with enhanced legitimacy. This legitimacy derives from the diversity of the MIKTA countries, who can contribute a wealth of experiences from their own

regions. However, MIKTA's greatest potential might well be that despite their different regional origins, member states have many common interests in various different areas. As such, they are able to construct cultural, geographical, and economic bridges that may be able to move multilateral debates forward.

Still, there needs to be some caution when celebrating diversity. As some BRICS activities have shown, greater diversity can also lead to deadlock and inaction. Many authors point towards the lack of cohesion as the main challenge facing BRICS, or even its greatest failure.[1] However, MIKTA can avoid certain pitfalls entailed in the organisational structure of BRICS. For example, China's economic growth, which is incomparable to that of other BRICS members, may have caused the country to dominate the platform and the other members to be 'wary that a more effective BRICS will become little more than an instrument for Chinese influence'.[2] Furthermore, China and Russia's seats on the UN Security Council makes them inclined to protect the status quo, whereas India, Brazil, and South Africa would rather seek reforms within the United Nations.[3]

When looking at MIKTA, where none of the members economically dominate the group, at least not to the degree of the economic powerhouse China in BRICS, and none holds a seat on the Security Council, such problems could to a certain extent be avoided. MIKTA countries do not posses nuclear weapons, which is an important aspect of global power politics. As such, MIKTA is a minilateral initiative with great coalition potential as it can expect broad support from its many allies. It has no overshadowing major actor in global power politics, and none of its countries possess nuclear weapons.

MIKTA has also been realistic and careful in managing expectations. During the last MIKTA foreign ministers'
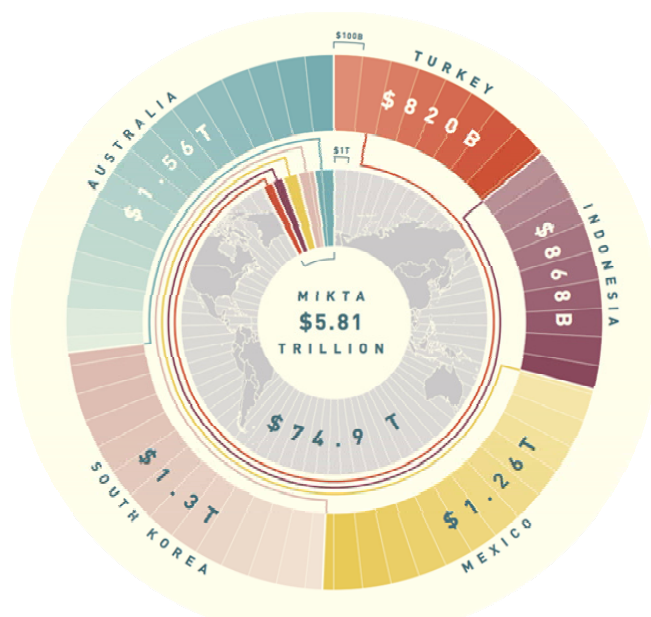

Figure 1. Gross MIKTA Product. The ring is composed of the GDP's of the different MIKTA countries.[4]

meeting, which took place on November 2014 in the wake of the G20 summit in Brisbane, a series of bottom-up activities was agreed. Besides diplomatic consultations, the first bottom-up activities will include simplification of student exchange programmes within MIKTA states; academic seminars and joint projects including think-tanks and other cultural exchange programmes were raised. Recently, MIKTA's permanent missions in Geneva have identified the topics on which they want to focus their efforts: UN governance, global health, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian affairs, and gender.

Risks

Besides its potential in shaping topical debates, MIKTA possibly faces a number of challenges that need to be considered when charting its way forward. First, MIKTA needs to gain visibility to be taken seriously and have a real impact in the debates it wishes to influence. In this respect, there might be a possible trade-off between visibility and focus. A narrow focus on one particular issue might attract high visibility from a small group of experts. When widening the scope of issues to be addressed by MIKTA, a greater audience can be reached. However, by distributing its resources over many different topics, MIKTA might not be able to be actively involved in all these areas, which would result in low overall visibility. It is therefore not only important that MIKTA increases visibility, but more importantly, that it strategically chooses the topics it wishes to address.

The main criterion concerning the choice of thematic focus needs to be whether the topic can preserve internal coherence in the MIKTA framework. As the BRICS example clarifies, internal coherence is paramount for the implementation of concrete ideas and for the prevention of deadlock and invisibility. Even though MIKTA powers might economically be less imbalanced compared to BRICS, it has to deal with harmonising competing national interests. Prioritising issues where national interests converge among all members should therefore be paramount.

A similar trade-off exists when looking at decisions on inclusivity and exclusivity. MIKTA can quickly be seen by other states as an exclusive group of member states, which might generate negative connotations and even has the possibility of alienating regional partners. For example, by

presenting themselves as regional leaders, BRICS members might have alienated their neighbours, which is detrimental to their potential of playing the role of spokesperson for the region. At the same time, MIKTA cannot be too inclusive if it wishes to maintain efficiency and cohesion.

Finally, after a full year of discussions, MIKTA needs to take concrete actions to make itself known. Discussions seem to be stuck at the brainstorming stage; the ideas need to crystallise into visible steps. This problem seems to have emerged in the BRICS context as well, which has not yet been able to create meaningful institutions to consolidate its importance.[5] To not encounter the same pitfalls as BRICS, it is therefore vital for MIKTA's existence to address the potential deadlock and to find ways to translate rhetoric into real action.

Recommendations

To increase visibility effectively, MIKTA proposals could be raised during specific key events, which would attract higher visibility from a larger public than usual. An obvious example would be to focus on MIKTA's involvement in G20 summits. Furthermore, MIKTA could choose to have a large presence in key international conferences that are related to its areas of focus. As such, MIKTA would be able to focus on specific issues without losing visibility from the larger public, strategically choosing when to make its appearances.

MIKTA also needs to evaluate whether the five focus areas identified in Geneva have true potential for cooperation. Each topic has reportedly been brought forward by one MIKTA country that is interested in promoting it; however, these topics need to be supported by a common MIKTA view without internal disagreement among its member states.

Aside from the five topics that were chosen by MIKTA members as key areas, MIKTA could consider other areas of potential impact. Although all five thematic areas of MIKTA's current focus feature important topical developments, they also already generate a large degree of attention from a range of different actors. It might therefore be difficult for MIKTA to make a visible difference. Choosing newly emerging debates can make MIKTA stand out. One of these topics could be cybersecurity, a topic that is rapidly gaining momentum and importance, primarily because of the world's increasing dependence on Internet structures on the one hand, and the enhanced sophistication to attack these structures on the other. By cooperating in the creation of a global governance structure to fight cyber attacks, MIKTA could gain clout by filling an important gap in international security.

The trade-off between inclusivity and exclusivity can be managed by creating an informal system, in which other member states could contribute to the formulation of MIKTA's proposals. Since MIKTA's member states are all important players in their own regions, they could generate input from their regional partners, making MIKTA seem more open and willing to take regional concerns into account. This will not only limit the risk of alienation; it will also enhance the legitimacy of the MIKTA collaboration, and it might have the added benefit of increasing MIKTA's visibility as well.

In sum, MIKTA has to face two trade-offs: one concerning focus and visibility, the other dealing with inclusiveness and exclusivity. This policy brief has suggested ways to find a balance in these trade-offs. Further discussion is needed to see whether these suggestions can be crystallised into concrete actions.

If you are interested in further exploring the topic of MIKTA diplomacy, DiploFoundation and the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea are jointly organising a seminar MIKTA Diplomacy – Current Developments and Visions for the Future, in cooperation with the Permanent Missions of Mexico, Indonesia, Turkey, and Australia. The event will generate further input for the Ministerial MIKTA meeting in Seoul.

Endnotes

1 Beri R (2012) BRICS: In search of unity? IDSA Comment, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. Available at http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/BRICSInSearchofUnity_rberi_030412; Chauduri PP (2013) BRICS countries following different agendas. World Review. Available at http://www.worldreview.info/content/brics-countries-following-different-agendas; Pant HV (2013) The BRICS Fallacy. The Washington Quarterly, 36(3), pp. 91–105.
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2 Chauduri PP (2013) BRICS countries following different agendas. World Review. Available at http://www.worldreview.info/content/brics-countries-following-different-agendas

3 Pant HV (2013) The BRICS Fallacy. The Washington Quarterly, 36(3), pp. 91–105.

4 Douglas E (2014). MIKTA Narratives: Prosperity, Persuasion and Projection. Smart Power, Data Stories, Vol. 2.

5 Pant HV (2013) The BRICS Fallacy. The Washington Quarterly, 36(3), p. 102.

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