

Review - MIKTA, Middle Powers, and New Dynamics of Global Governance

Written by Hakan Mehmetcik

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HAKAN MEHMETCIK, DEC 9 2015

MIKTA, Middle Powers, and New Dynamics of Global Governance: The G20's Evolving Agenda

Edited by Mo Jongryn,

New York: Palgrave, 2014

Since the 2008 financial crisis, the G20, a self-declared “premier forum for global governance”, has emerged as one of the most important aspects of changing world order. In today’s globalized world where crises quickly spread across borders, it is clear that effective global governance depends on the participation of middle powers (MPs). The G20 was itself born out of the necessity to include these “systemically important countries” in global governance decision making. Indeed, it is now fair to claim that the future of the G20 will depend more on MPs initiatives than great power rivalries. Yet, it is important to note that the role of MPs depends largely on conditions for collective action prevailing, since they have limited capacity individually. Only through collective diplomacy can MPs play a greater role in determining the G20’s role in global governance. In this sense, this book tries to explain the motivations behind MPs participation in global governance, as well as analyzing the conditions for MPs collective action within global governance mechanisms. The focus of the analyses contained in this volume is on the countries known as MIKTA within the G20 (Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia) and the main question is whether these countries can converge their diplomatic efforts within the G20.

MIKTA is primarily a South Korean initiative. In the beginning, it emerged as an informal consultation grouping within the G20 as a result of innovative Korean diplomacy. It held its 1st Foreign Ministers’ Meeting on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York, on September 25, 2013. Since then MIKTA has gathered five more times on the sidelines of G20 summits and they are expected to meet on a summity level in the near future. According to the MIKTA vision statement, which was adopted at the last MIKTA meeting held in Seoul, South Korea, the five countries of MIKTA come from diverse cultures and regions, yet they share core values and similarities. What brings these geographically and culturally divergent nations together is a necessity to coordinate their efforts within G20 and beyond. As Mo Jongryn notes “The MIKTA shares the sense that strong political leadership is required to address major global challenges in the years ahead, and that they as economically dynamic middle powers are uniquely positioned to facilitate international cooperation and negotiation and offer fresh perspective and solutions.”

Therefore, the main aim of the book is to make specific policy recommendations for leaders of the new MIKTA group. To this end, Jongryn suggests that MIKTA’s potential can be achieved through three stages: i) International economic cooperation; ii) Economic-security linkages; iii) Traditional international security. According to him, and as the theory of functionalism suggest also, incremental cooperation at these three stages would result in substantial cooperation in the form of wider institutionalization among members. Cooperation at every stage would bring about new cooperation on new issues, which boosts overall cooperation at other stages. Thus, he suggests that, at stage one, there is already incentives to cooperate on international economic issues via G20 channels. Caught between the G7 and the BRICS, the MIKTA countries cooperation on economic issues turns out to be crucial for them. At this point, Mo Jongryn identifies four priorities for the MIKTA: i) The core mandate of the G20 concerning the organizational effectiveness of international financial institutions; ii) Regional safety nets; iii) South-South development; iv) The implementation of G20 commitments. At the second stage, MIKTA can go beyond economic

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cooperation by addressing issues at the nexus of economics and security such as cybersecurity, food security, human security, green growth and climate change, maritime security etc. From the second stage of cooperation, MIKTA can initiate further and deeper cooperation by focusing on global security issues such as nonproliferation, arms control, conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. Indeed, incrementalism and functionalism could pave way for deeper cooperation within MIKTA, yet in the present and immediate future what Jongryn defines as three stage cooperation path is nothing more than “wishful thinking.”

In the second chapter, Thomas Wright’s point of departure is that the current international order is inadequate for meeting current challenges and there is a need for greater multilateralism and transformation. He starts by assessing the challenges of our current international order. Here, he points out that current order doesn’t reflect current global realities, yet despite this it is getting harder and harder to reform. There is a substantial divide between what the order is meant to do and what it has to do. Thus, we need to work within structural limitations to improve multilateral architecture by pivoting to new issues that are not adequately addressed by existing structures – what White calls a “multilateral pivot”. Here lies his second objective: to understand MPs role in this multilateral pivot. In his well-structured chapter, he provides an analysis of each MIKTA country to this end. He suggests that each of these countries shares a powerful interest in strengthening the international (liberal) order, since it provides them with a predictable rule based environment in which they can survive and become prosperous. Thus, even though they are not acting in concert, their actions are consistent with each other. I find White’s chapter very thoughtful and analytically well designed, although MPs role in a “multilateral pivot” remains somewhat under theorized.

In the third chapter, Andrew F. Cooper focuses on the leadership potential of the MIKTA within the G20 on development issues. According to Cooper, MPs the have potential to lead G20 global governance efforts in issue-specific niche areas and he suggests that development issues are the best area of interest to focus on. It is also notable that Cooper makes a distinction between traditional MPs (Canada, Australia) and non-traditional MPs (Korea, Turkey, Mexico, and Indonesia) and asks the question of whether MIKTA countries will be able to seize the opportunity for leadership within G20 through specific functional initiatives. Cooper also raises the question of whether these countries are willing to embrace the G20 as their main diplomatic platform rather than hedging their bets on numerous other regional and international organizations. His answer to both of these questions is yes, albeit he notes that these countries are likely to have a selective approach towards the G20, whereby they opt towards the G20 in some issue-specific areas where they have potential to lead. Cooper’s chapter is also highly informative in terms of the concept of MPs, but it fails to detail specifically what common grounds exist that would allow for deeper cooperation.

Park Siwon, in the fourth chapter, argues that there is space for the MIKTA to facilitate a new deal on climate change that is applicable to all parties by playing a bridging role between developed and developing countries. Siwon’s chapter is well designed and informative on the nature and development of climate change and green growth. As Simon notes, apart from Turkey all MIKTA members are major greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters, and South Korea, Australia and Canada in particular are very active in cooperating on climate change. Yet, Siwon’s suggestion that these five countries can play an important role in climate change cooperation by bridging developed and developing worlds doesn’t sound too convincing. Even for issues such as green growth and climate change, a deal between China and the US makes much more sense than an initiative among MPs. The rationale for this is that MPs usually have either balancing or bandwagoning attitudes towards great power initiatives at the systemic level, while they usually hedge against or contribute to regional level occurrences. As Spero underlines “Middle powers exist in a great power imposed self-help world, where great powers all too frequently try to ignore, manipulate, or dominate middle powers”(Spero 2009).

In continuity with the themes of the other chapters, Choi Heenam also focuses on MPs role in the G20 context. According to Heenam, MPs initiatives can lead the G20 in the area of financial regulations and related institutional design and reform (IMF, WB, FSB, etc). One of the most important questions Heenam asks in his chapter is whether creating another bloc within the G20 by having a formal cooperation mechanism among MPs is a good idea. On the one hand, creating a bloc of MPs potentially turns the G20 into a mere battleground for different blocs with different agendas. As Heenam suggest this would greatly weaken the effectiveness of the G20 as a whole. On the other hand, MPs formal cooperation will enhance their voice within G20. Furthermore, it is naïve to think that other countries

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decision making depends solely on the decision of MPs over formal cooperation. The last problem with MPs cooperation within G20 is the question of who exactly qualifies as an MP. It is both conceptually and practically difficult to establish a single cooperative body among all possible candidates. Yet, as Heenam notes, these problems are not insurmountable and an incremental functionalist approach towards cooperation among MPs could be effective in G20. The MPs could realistically play leading roles in the crucial areas of macroeconomic cooperation, strengthening global/national safety nets, and reforming international financial institutions.

Richard Gowan in a follow-up chapter explores the possibility of further strengthening the G20 with active cooperation among MPs. He wittingly points out that MPs have a stake in making the G20 a relevant forum of multilateral discussion. That is, they prefer that world problems are discussed and solved at the G20 rather than they are addressed through the G7-8 or the BRICS. In this sense, MPs are the G20's natural friends. Gowan also suggests some applicable form of cooperation for MIKTA within the G20 such as a contact group on G20 issues through which MPs can coordinate their efforts. Gowan notes that even though G20 is a useful platform for MPs diplomacy, they should not try to expand the G20's agenda into unfeasible areas. He also suggests that MPs need to coordinate their diplomacy in other multilateral platforms and join up their efforts in order to get better result from their coordinated policies at the G20. In this sense, he points out, MPs are indeed well-positioned to make use of many multilateral forums.

This book is the single most informative book, to the best of my knowledge, on the MIKTA in global governance literature. There are some articles, op-eds, blog-entries at most (Snyder 2013; Sukma 2013; Yildiz 2014), yet not a single scholarly work on this issue. In this sense, it is a substantial contribution to the literature of global governance. Given this fact, although I have raised various reservations above, it is neither easy nor right to criticize this book.

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