

‘The Middle Power Moment’ Revisited in Global Governance: A Chance for MIKTA’s Legitimacy Crisis in Post-Pandemic World?

Küresel Yönetişimde ‘Orta Ölçekli Güç Dönemi’ni Yeniden Düşünmek: Pandemi Sonrası Dünyada MIKTA’nın Meşruiyet Krizi için Bir Fırsat mı?

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Abstract

MIKTA – Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia – emerged in the context of post – 2008 crisis as an informal political grouping such as G20 and BRICS when the world witnessed the discussions on the declining US hegemony and the rise of ‘middle power’ moment in the changing world order. It is argued that despite the joint declarations, its existence brought no contribution for global governance and after seven years of its emergence, its relevance and resilience has started to be questioned. This article asks whether the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic brings risks or opportunities for MIKTA to overcome this crisis of legitimacy. It is argued that the Covid-19 crisis may be regarded as a chance for MIKTA to strengthen its presence in global governance although it presents economic and political challenges for member countries. In order to do this, firstly the discussions on ‘the middle power moment’ for global governance in the Covid-19 world will be analysed and secondly, MIKTA’s legitimacy crisis will be evaluated within this context.

Keywords: MIKTA, Legitimacy, the Covid-19 Pandemic, Informal Organizations, Minilateralism

Öz

2008 Krizi sonrası değişen dünya düzeninde azalan Amerikan hegemonyası ve orta ölçekli güçlerin yükseliş amı üzerine tartışmaların sürdüğü bir dönemde Meksika, Endonezya, Türkiye, Güney Kore ve Avustralya’nın birlikteliğinden doğan MIKTA, küresel düzlemdeki G-20 ve BRICS gibi informal örgütlerden biridir. Fakat MIKTA’nın kuruluşunun 7. yılında örgütün küresel yönetişime ortak deklarasyonlar yayımlamak ve toplantılar düzenlemek dışında ne kadar katkı sağladığı sorgulanmaya başlanmıştır. Bu makale Covid-19 pandemisinin MIKTA’nın meşruiyet krizini aşmak için ne türden risk ve fırsatlar getirdiğini araştırarak üye ülkeler açısından sosyo-ekonomik meydan okumalar yaratsa da pandeminin MIKTA’nın küresel yönetişimdeki görünürlüğünü artırmak için bir şans yarattığını iddia etmektedir. Bunun için öncelikle pandemi döneminde küresel yönetişimde orta ölçekli güçlerin yükselişi üzerine yapılan tartışmaları ele alacak ve sonrasında MIKTA’nın meşruiyet krizini bu çerçevede değerlendirecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: MIKTA, Meşruiyet, Covid-19 Pandemisi, İnformal Örgütler, Az-Tarafılık

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1. Introduction

As a 'consultative group' of Mexico, Indonesia, Korea¹, Turkey and Australia – MIKTA was launched by foreign ministers in the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly in September 2013 and became an actor as one of the informal organizations in global governance. Declared by its members as 'a new innovative partnership', 'a cross-regional', 'open and informal consultative group', MIKTA aimed to contribute finding solutions to issues challenging global community as 'like-minded' and active contributors (MIKTA Booklet, 2020, p.2). However, despite the enthusiasm of its members in the beginning, MIKTA has progressed slowly compared to BRICS (Kim, Hung and Rimmer, 2018, p.476). Some analysts even asserted that MIKTA is 'a waste of time' (Robertson, 2020a) and 'its only success may be that it still exists' (Robertson, 2018). In other words, after seven years of its emergence, pessimists about MIKTA started to question its legitimacy.

MIKTA emerged in the context of post-2008 crisis on the side lines of other informal political groupings such as G20 and BRICS when the world witnessed the discussions on the declining US hegemony and the rise of 'middle power' moment. In this 'post-American hegemonic world order' there emerged various concepts, as 'post-Western' world order (Stuenkel, 2016), 'rise of the rest' (Zakaria, 2008), 'interdependent hegemonic world' (Xing, 2016), 'Pax Mosaica' (Narlikar and Kumar, 2012), 'decentralized globalism' (Buzan, 2011), 'the multiplex world' (Acharya, 2017), 'the age of anxiety' (Öniş, 2017), 'the age of hybridity' (Öniş and Kutlay, 2020) and 'the age of entropy' (Schweller, 2011) to give meaning to the 'interregnum' period of the world order with Gramscian words. This transition period from 'unipolar moment' of US to multipolar world brought many challenges for global governance which reflect characteristics of 'world disorder', 'world new order' and 'world re-order' simultaneously (Xing and Christensen, 2016, p.4-5).

By world disorder it is meant the damage that the competition between existing and emerging powers have on the international regimes and the established structure. By world new order, it is claimed that the disorder will force the existing and emerging powers to negotiate on a new order based on new values and norms. By world re-order, it is believed that the existing world order is in the *transformismo* process taking new rising powers into the existing structure. In this world order displaying these characteristics, 'the crises of the hegemony of the existing world order', 'the rise of China and other emerging powers' and 'adaptations to the changing world order' are happening at the same time (Xing and Christensen, 2016, p.5). This view of the world presenting different features at the same time is also a reflection of what Öniş and Kutlay describe with the concept of 'age of hybridity', in which there are competing paradigms to give a shape global governance. Hence, there are many opportunities and challenges creating instability, uncertainty and anxiety in international politics (Öniş and Kutlay, 2020). The uncertainty and anxiety in the current order has been accelerated by the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in the beginning of 2020.

1 Throughout the article, 'Korea' and 'South Korea' will be used interchangeably for Republic of Korea.

The crisis opened the discussions that how the new pandemic in human history will change the world order. It is mostly agreed that ‘the Covid-19 crisis has not made any winner, just many losers’ (Guehenno, 2020). In economic sphere the damage of the pandemic on world economy is bigger than the Great Depression of 1929 (IMF Report, 2020). The declining hegemony of US in post-2008 era has been accelerated by unsuccessful examples of management of the pandemic of the US and China compared to middle powers. This showed that in post-Covid-19 world there appears another ‘middle power moment’ for middle powers to play more roles in global governance and to strengthen depreciating multilateralism (Jones, 2020; Pant, 2020; Nagy,2020; West, 2020).

Within this ‘middle power moment’ debate the article asks whether the Covid-19 pandemic is an opportunity or a threat to MIKTA which is already in crisis of legitimacy. In order to do this, it will analyse firstly the debates on the ‘middle power moment’ in global governance and assess MIKTA’s place in this debate. Then it will be argued that the Covid-19 crisis may present threats but also opportunities for MIKTA to strengthen its presence in global governance and restore its legitimacy both in the eyes of its members and the international community.

2. ‘The Middle Power Moment’ for Global Governance: Illusion or A New Revival?

Although there is ongoing debate on how to define concepts ‘traditional middle power’, “established middle power” and “emerging middle power”, most scholars agree on (1) material (positional), (2) behavioural (3) ideational factors as three defining feature of middle power role (Chapnick, 1999; Carr, 2014; Robertson, 2017; Dal and Kurşun, 2016 in Gök and Karadeniz, 2018, p.137). The idea of middle power as potentially significant actor in international affairs came into usage in both politics and academic literature since the end of World War I however became more noticeable with Canada’s actions in the aftermath of 1945. It is underlined that for global governance the importance of middle powers is not only their material capabilities but what they do with them such as ‘their tendency to pursue multilateral solutions to international problems’ and to ‘embrace notions of good international citizenship to guide their diplomacy’ (Evans, 2011).

Therefore, for Evans (2011), rather than to focus on how to define ‘middle power’, analysing middle power diplomacy is more useful for global governance. He describes middle power diplomacy as:

‘Middle power diplomacy, is, in short, the kind of diplomacy which can, and should, be practised by states which are not big or strong enough, either in their own region or the wider world, to impose their policy preferences on anyone else; but who do recognize that there are international policy tasks which need to be accomplished if the world around them is to be safer, saner, more just and more prosperous (with all the potential this has, in turn, to affect their own interests); and who have sufficient capacity and credibility to be able to advance those tasks.’²

2 This is an excerpt from his speech delivered at Chile Pacific Foundation. Gareth Evans, ‘Middle Power Diplomacy’. Lecture in Chile Pacific Foundation, Santiago, 29 June, 2011. Available at: <http://www.gevans.org/speeches/speech441.html>

According to this view, the characteristic method of middle power diplomacy is “niche diplomacy”, which means concentrating state capacities in specific areas. This diplomacy style has also been witnessed in regional and constructive powers. Middle power, regional power and constructive power in common share two features: ‘influencing the international arena, by building coalitions, fostering multilateral institutions, and serving as bridges between groups of countries and regions and secondly, assuming a wide range of responsibilities in the global order and making good use of diplomatic instruments to fulfil their commitments’ (Shiavon and Dominguez, 2016, p.498).

Cooper and Dal (2017) analyse middle power diplomacy in three periods. The first one witnessed in global governance in the post-1945 era through multilateral efforts in the UN. Second wave was in ad hoc activism of middle powers such as Canada or Australia in specific issue areas such as disarmament and peacekeeping. The third period of middle power diplomacy came with the rise of informal institutional diplomacy associated with G20 (p.520-521).

In this third way middle powers use informal forums in and around the G20 not the UN. In post global financial crisis of 2008 with the decline of US hegemony, not its power as Acharya differentiates (Kuo, 2016), middle powers had opportunities of ‘rooms of manoeuvre’ at regional and global levels ‘to sit the same high table with great powers’ (Cooper and Dal, 2017, p.523). In this context, emerging middle powers established ‘minilateral’ (Naim, 2009) informal governmental organizations to play active roles in niche areas of their interest in 2010s. This period is later called as ‘renaissance’ of middle power diplomacy (Carr, 2020, p.9).

2.1. Minilateralism, Informality and the ‘Middle Power Moment’

Informal governmental organizations (IGO) are useful tools for states when power transitions are uncertain at global level in order to allow them to achieve some level of cooperation. States also choose to work with these institutions when they want to maintain flexibility in contrast to making a binding commitment. Flexibility provides states room for manoeuvre in safe waters where they do not want to make strong commitments due to high uncertainty about future structure of the world (Vabulas and Snidal, 2013, p.209-210). Yet as with the establishment of informal international organizations beside formal organizations started to create ‘messy multilateralism’ Haas (2010) in which there is the difficulty of finding common ways of seen as in the failure of multilateral talks and international collective action in the early 1990s (Naim, 2009). In response to the problems associated to multilateralism, minilateralism became a viable option bringing to the table the smallest number of states which will be active and effective on solving a particular problem. Both its numerical dimension and relative exclusivity make minilateralism more ‘attractive, flexible, and functional’ (Singh and Teo, 2020, p.6).

Within this atmosphere, the middle power diplomacy initiatives such as BRICS and MIKTA emerged within the G-20 as examples of minilateral informal organizations as manifestations

of third wave of middle power diplomacy. They became venues for middle powers to increase their voices higher on the need to reform the UN and multilateral institutions. In the case of MIKTA, it took the role of acting as a bridge between developed and developing countries in G-20 meetings. The creation of BRICS Development Bank, China and Brazil's demand for 'responsibility while protecting' against the Western version of 'Responsibility to Protect' after the experience of Libya in 2011, China's 'One Belt, One Road Initiative', the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank were indicative of the results of rising powers moment in global governance (Hurrel, 2019, p.11-12). Hence in this post-hegemonic multilateralism, the rise of informals and appearance of global summitry increased the variety of actors and arrangements pushing for collective action in international governance (Alexandroff and Brean, 2015, p.9). 'The rise of informals' also symbolized a turn in global politics 'opening representation beyond old western establishment' (Cooper, 2015, p.96).

On the other hand, some analysts have doubts about 'the rise of middle power moment' in global governance due to both changes at global and state level started at the end of 2010s. The systemic changes with the return of geopolitics such as the rise of ethnic and military conflicts seen in many parts of the world such as Iraq, Libya and Syria, displayed the importance of military capacities. In addition, the election of Donald J. Trump as US President in November 2016 and his policy of 'America First' anti-free trade rhetoric (Hammold,2017), together with stalemates in multilateral trade negotiations as seen in the Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the rise of tensions between US and China in global politics created systemic threats to the capacities of middle powers to influence the global agenda. At state level, many emerging economies have witnessed slow economic growth or recession, corruption cases and political crises as seen in Brazil and South Africa. Moreover, political divisions increased within the BRICS (Hurrel, 2019, p.16,21). Domestic shifts in MIKTA and BRICS countries also challenged their motivations to start international normative initiatives since they provide no benefit in taking electoral support at home. Thus, from the perspective of Carr 'middle power moment was an illusion' (Carr, 2020, p.9-10).

To sum up, at the end of 2010s, although there were some middle power initiatives, both domestic structural and systemic limitations affecting middle powers' capacity to influence global governance were rising. In this atmosphere, for Robertson it is expected that middle powers niche diplomacy areas will be more self-interested rather than focusing on trade liberalisation, non-proliferation or humanitarian development. Hence it was thought 'contemporary understanding of middle-power diplomacy is tied to a bygone era' (Robertson,2020b).

2.2. The Covid-19 Challenge in Global Governance and Rethinking the 'Middle Power Moment'

The Covid-19 pandemic emerged within the context of the diminishing influence of middle power diplomacy in global governance and the new crisis brought a discussion whether it might open a new chapter for another 'middle power moment' (Pant, 2020). The response of the US

and China to the Covid-19 pandemic showed their unwillingness to cooperate and revealed how multilateralism is at risk in today's world. High death tolls, 'politization of the virus' and Trump Administration disrespect for key institutions of Western led world order during the pandemic such as the decision of withdrawal from World Health Organization (WHO) accelerated the decline of US hegemony and opened the way for discussions on the importance of multilateralism for global governance (Nagy, 2020).

West discusses that in this global leadership vacuum it is time middle powers to punch above their weights to 'seize the moment' (West, 2020). It is asserted that middle power leadership is needed in global governance to reform the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the WHO and coordinate efforts for developing Covid-19 vaccine and medicine. Nagy also underlines that in order to manage climate change, regional conflicts and possible next global health crisis middle power's role is highly important. In the strategic competition between China and the US, middle powers acting collectively can fill the power vacuum in multilateralism in trade and security, 'put diplomatic pressure on great powers and increase interoperability with each other in search and rescue, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, anti-piracy, and capacity enhancement in fishing' (Nagy,2020). Pant (2020) also underlines that some middle powers were more successful in humanitarian response projection during the pandemic. For instance, East Asian countries such as South Korea becoming a model case to combat the Covid-19 pandemic as supplier of testing kits and personal protective equipment with 150 countries including the US. In addition, New Zealand and Australia provided fund support for WHO coronavirus pandemic plan and their Pacific neighbours with medical supplies.

Oğuzlu (2020) also underlines the need for middle powers' collective action in world politics to 'domesticate' international politics through common interests such as multilateralism, international organizations, international law, diplomacy and other mechanisms of global governance. He says that 'the time is ripe for middle powers and the world to unite'. In the absence of great power leadership in combating the crisis middle powers have the potential to coordinate health governance, developing vaccine and mitigate economic aftershocks of the pandemic. Yet in order to fulfil their potentials, Jones (2020) underlines as Pant (2020), the importance of making multilateral diplomacy sustainable to lead the world out of crisis and to overcome the limitations of not including the world's leading greatest powers. Unless regional and emerging powers gather their attempts through sustainable multilateral interactions, dangers in the system will be dispersed and responsibilities will be undefined which in turn will lead to disorder (Pant,2020). Therefore, initiatives such as 'the alliance for multilateralism' led by France and Germany including 25 states established in September, 2019 (Alliance for Multilateralism, 2019) and minilateral informal institutions supporting collective action in global governance become vital.

The next section will discuss whether MIKTA has the potential to contribute for collective action in global governance in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and hence to overcome its legitimacy crisis in 'the new middle power moment'.

3. MIKTA and the Debate on Its Role in Global Governance

In the ‘middle power moment’ of post-2008 era, MIKTA has been emerged as ‘new innovative partnership’ in 2013. The member countries represent a population of some 500 million people and their economies represent 5.8 percent of global gross domestic product. As a platform of countries from different regions and cultures, what made them come together is not only their material capabilities within the G20 but also their ‘like-mindedness’ on global governance issues which presents an example of middle power diplomacy (MIKTA Booklet, 2020). In 2015 with the declaration of ‘Vision Statement’, member countries clearly showed how they perceive MIKTA (MIKTA Vision Statement, 2015).

In Vision Statement, member countries emphasized their common views on the importance of changing nature of global issues which needs cooperation and underlined the will and capability of them to contribute for protecting public goods and strengthening global governance by playing a constructive role in international agenda. These roles are stated as: i) bridging between developed and developing countries to promote global governance and efforts of regionalism, ii) catalysing or facilitating in launching initiatives to implement global governance reform and iii) helping each other to better communicate with regional bodies and networks (MIKTA Vision Statement, 2015). In 2017 ‘Guidelines on the works and activities of MIKTA’ was announced to realize the vision. It is often emphasized that MIKTA was seen as a cross-regional ‘consultative’ body. This means that member states use the platform as an opportunity to strengthen their bilateral ties, and to increase cooperation with each other (MIKTA, 2017). In MIKTA Guidelines (2017, p. 4) seven enduring priorities are listed as reform of international energy governance and the promotion of energy access counter-terrorism and security; peacekeeping; trade and the economy; gender equality; good governance, human rights and democracy; and sustainable development. These priorities are the areas where the members’ niche diplomacy practices focus on in global governance. What makes MIKTA different from BRICS and other informal groupings, is its more reform-oriented approach towards international order and supportive of current global governance as taking the UN main pillar, with another words, ‘they seek to represent the rest but not dominate the rest’ (Kim, Hung and Rimmer, 2018, p.479). It was not created as an identity building institution based on demands for global redistribution of power in global governance.

Most scholars have accepted a definition of MIKTA countries as emerging middle powers based not only on their material (positional) power, but also on behavioural and ideational aspects (Cooper, 2015, Dal and Kurşun, 2016, Gök and Karadeniz, 2018). As seen from the table below they are the second top ten countries in terms of material capabilities in G20.

Table 1: MIKTA Members' Material Capabilities

MIKTA Members	Gross domestic product (GDP), current prices Millions of US Dollars	World Ranking (GDP terms)	Population based on last census of MIKTA countries
TURKEY	754.412	19	83.430
MEXICO	1.258.287	15	127.576
SOUTH KOREA	1.642.383	12	25.666
AUSTRALIA	1.392,681	14	25.364
INDONESIA	1.119.191	16	270.626

Source: World Bank Data for 2019. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>

Yet, rather than only material capabilities, Gök and Karadeniz showed that in ideational and behavioural aspects of middle power features they have similarities making them getting closer and creating MIKTA. They pointed that MIKTA members underlined related niche areas in global governance to pull their efforts together seen in Table 2 (Gök and Karadeniz, 2018; Gök and Karadeniz, 2020).

Table 2: MIKTA Members' Niche Diplomacy Preferences Inferred from UN Speeches

MIKTA Country	Australia	Mexico	Turkey	Indonesia	South Korea
Niche areas in global governance underlined in the Speeches	Human Rights Environmental Governance Non-proliferation Development	Mediation UN Peacekeeping Development Cooperation	Mediation Humanitarian Assistance Development Cooperation Peacekeeping	Sustainable Development Disarmament Climate Change Poverty Peacekeeping Financial Assistance to Less Developed Countries	Humanitarian and Financial Assistance Development Cooperation Green Growth Peacekeeping

Source: Developed by the author on various statements of Representatives of MIKTA members before the UN General Assembly between 2000 and 2017 period stated in Gök and Karadeniz (2018) work.

Dal and Kurşun rightly predicted that MIKTA's functioning as an efficient middle power platform would depend on the construction of a common social identity as well as its acceptance as a legitimate grouping by external actors (Dal and Kurşun, 2016, p.626). Despite more than forty joint declarations and continuation of the meetings of foreign ministers (17th was held in July, 2020), it is discussed that MIKTA has lost its energy as an institution with the fading of 'middle power' moment in global level and domestic political concerns of its members for instance, Australia has changed six prime minister since 2010, Turkey had to struggle with the impacts of coup attempt in 2016, South Korea witnessed its president jailed in 2018, Indonesia and Mexico had presidency elections. Within this context it can be argued that legitimacy of MIKTA in the global governance is started to be questioned.

3.1. Critiques on Effectiveness: A Legitimacy Crisis for MIKTA?

Legitimacy for international institutions (IO) is an important component for their life spans. The literature on institutional legitimacy analyses it into three grounds as legal legitimacy, procedural and performance legitimacy. It is underlined that the consent of the states to the creation of the institution, the quality of its decision-making procedures and its ability to enhance the welfare of its members and effective way of producing collective solutions are important for them to gain and preserve legitimacy (Binder and Haupel, 2015, p.240-241). It is asserted that usually due to the lack of fair procedures in the IOs good performance is the most important source of international organizations legitimacy (Binder and Heupel, 2015, p.241). Buchanan and Keohane underline that 'it is important not only that global governance institutions be legitimate, but that they are perceived to be legitimate' (2016, p.407). Hence an institution's legitimacy depends on whether it 'effectively performs the functions invoked to justify its existence' (Buchanan and Keohane, 2016, p.422). In other words, 'performance is the path to legitimacy' (Gutner and Thompson, 2010, p.228). For performance approaches, the legitimacy of an IO derives from its impacts, irrespective of how the institution formulated and executed relevant policy. Output-based legitimacy is where an institution gains its legitimacy from audience satisfaction with its outcome. In other words, legitimacy is based on the instrumental importance of the institution (Dellmuth, Scholte and Tallberg, 2019, p.631). When we analyse MIKTA from this perspective, arguments against MIKTA's relevance for global governance point to its lack of output legitimacy.

For Robertson, 'MIKTA has achieved less than optimists envisioned but longer than pessimists imagined' (Robertson, 2020 a). The confusion about what MIKTA achieves derives from 'its lack of subject specificity'. This also makes it difficult to define MIKTA's purpose. Çolakoglu (2018) underlined that 'it is difficult to say with certainty the extent to which MIKTA has contributed to addressing any given global issue'. He stresses the importance of issue prioritization of member countries for MIKTA since many regional and global issues from Ebola outbreak to peace in Korean peninsula, are on its agenda. Robertson (2018) criticized MIKTA from the same perspective that 'it doesn't highlight a clear link between aim and initiative'. In chairmanship of each members, there had been attempts to thrive the initiative, however it is argued that after its establishment it lost its dynamic and activeness within the fading 'middle power moment' in global politics and domestic turmoil in member countries (Carr, 2020, p.10). Robertson claims that in changing international environment MIKTA has lost its relevance and became a 'waste of time' (Robertson, 2020 a).

The answers to these critics from MIKTA side could be found in the work of Kim, Hung and Rimmer (2018). Based on interviews from member countries' diplomats their study showed that since its establishment in 2013, MIKTA's 'flexible' and 'issue-oriented approach' on a variety of topics arises from members countries' perception of the group as a 'solutions oriented and force for good' platform rather than as 'a problem-solving mechanism' from the beginning. It is highlighted that MIKTA was not created 'in the context of an urgent problem and no compelling need for it to appear'. Hence MIKTA has been utilized as capacity-building

and diplomatic exchange platform to increase network. This network is thought to increase member countries' visibility in global governance platforms (Kim, Hung and Rimmer, 2018, p.478-479).

In addition to this study, it is visible from MIKTA documents, they emphasize the group's being 'consultative platform' as a diplomatic exchange mechanism and hence its difference from other minilateral arrangements as BRICS. In post-2008 world, member countries in order to mitigate the bad effects of uncertainty in the world order use this informal organization as a tool to increase their voices to be heard. States in order to 'maintain autonomy, closer control of information, lower short-term transaction costs and speed, minimal bureaucracy and manage high uncertainty about other states' preferences or about the state of the world to coordinate their positions without strong commitment within a centralized international organization' tend to use informal organization (Vabulas and Snidal, 2013:209). Hence from this perspective, the flexibility and advantages of information sharing and coordination of policies with like-minded countries at minimum costs is what members make of MIKTA.

However, MIKTA members' diplomats interviewed in Kim's study also accept that 'in multilateral spaces MIKTA remains a concept in the making and coordination among the members is still in its infancy' (Kim, Hung and Rimmer, 2018:483). While the debate on MIKTA's relevance and resilience for global governance has been ongoing, the Covid-19 crisis emerged as a test case of MIKTA's effectiveness both in the eyes of members and international community. In other words, might the Covid-19 crisis take MIKTA at a mature stage as an organization?

3.2. The Covid-19 Pandemic: Threat or Opportunity for MIKTA?

The Covid-19 pandemic has various economic, political and social impacts on MIKTA members like other political groupings and states. For instance, Narlikar (2020) has analysed how the pandemic affected BRICS and concluded that within the BRICS members' cooperation intensive relationship became more visible between pairs of Russia and China on the one hand and on the other, India and Brazil (p.30). In addition, she stated that the pandemic revealed the existing divisions within the grouping and there appeared a line dividing Brazil and India pair from Russia and China. She predicts that with the pandemic's new challenges to BRICS 'its limited impact will weaken further' (Narlikar,2020, p.29,31). Within this framework how the current Covid-19 pandemic affects MIKTA as a political grouping and to what extent it serves as a forum for collective action during the pandemic?

As seen in the table below all MIKTA members have been affected by the pandemic in different ways. They experienced problems both in managing the pandemic and recovering from its economic effects. In statistical terms, at the time of writing, case and death numbers in MIKTA countries since the first case was announced in Wuhan, China are listed in the table 3 below.

Table 3. Health Security Index Ranking and the Covid-19 Cases of MIKTA Members

MIKTA Members	Cases of Infections	Death Numbers	Global Health Security Index Ranking (out of 195 countries)
Mexico	579.914	62.594	28
Indonesia	165.887	7.169	30
Korea	19.077	316	9
Turkey	263.949	6.209	40
Australia	25.448	583	4

Source: For Covid-19 Cases : Worldometer Info, Coronavirus Update. August 28,2020 <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/> For Global Health Security Index: <https://www.ghsindex.org/report-model/>

As the table depicts Mexico and Turkey are the countries where high numbers of cases have been detected and according to death numbers, Mexico and Indonesia are leading the other members. Statistical data shows South Korea is the one which has been least affected and Australia follows it. According to MIKTA members' place in 2019 Global Health Security Index³, this result might be expected since Korea and Australia rank in the top ten countries in the world.

During the pandemic South Korea, Australia and Turkey have intensive aid diplomacy in their neighbourhood. Like in BRICS grouping, we witness dyadic cooperation between South Korea-Australia, Indonesia-South Korea, Turkey – Mexico and Turkey – Indonesia in the area of exchange of medical supplies such as PCR Test Kits and date collection, institutional communication. South Korea has been more successful in managing the pandemic since its death toll is relatively low with its extensive trace, test and treat program. Indonesia was relatively slow than other countries to respond the pandemic and large-scale social restrictions were put into efficiency late. Seoul provided US\$500.000 to Indonesia to form its own test kits and rechargeable power sprayers for sanitation. In addition, they concluded South Korea and Indonesia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement to revive their economies in the new normal (Septiari, 2020). In addition to the cooperation to deal with the pandemic, pharmaceutical firms from Indonesia, South Korea and Turkey are working together to develop a vaccine for the virus (Chang-won, 2020). Turkey and Indonesia also exchanged cooperation in Indonesian mission's helping Indonesians living in Turkey. In addition, they had talks for making cooperation in the field of infrastructure in the aftermath of Covid-19 to recover their economies (Mariska, 2020). In Turkey-Mexico dyad, we see Turkish aid agency TIKA's donation to medical supplies to Mexico City such as mobile clinic (Canik ,2020).

At the group level what MIKTA has done during the pandemic is a source of contention. As the virus spread all over the world and WHO declaration of pandemic, MIKTA members issued a joint statement as a response on April 9, 2020. In the statement both countries underlined their commitment to cooperate within both the international and informal organizations such as WHO, the UN Secretary General's initiation of the Global Human Response Plan for Covid-19

3 Global Health Security Index assesses the global health security capabilities in 195 countries in terms of six categories, 34 indicators and 85 sub-indicators. The six categories are : prevention, detection and reporting, rapid response, health system, compliance with international norms and risk environment. For more information: <https://www.ghsindex.org/report-model/>

and Group of 20. In addition, 'cooperation including information-sharing, capacity-building, and technical assistance among members and with other countries' and 'promoting global health, protecting public goods, and strengthening global governance' were underlined (MIKTA Joint Statement, April 2020). Yet, Robertson predicts that at its seven years, in the wake of the Covid-19, MIKTA will face the risk of being neglected (Robertson, 2020a). He asserts that the pandemic brings unexpected risk to MIKTA. Because of its economic impact on the members, the foreign ministries' budgets will be limited and this makes MIKTA receive less attention by respective member governments.

The Covid-19 pandemic impact on global economy inflicted damages on MIKTA members seriously. Lockdowns in managing to contain the virus have damaged emerging countries such as Indonesia and Mexico more than developed countries. They had to leave the lockdowns earlier to overcome high economic consequences such as high unemployment rates (Financial Times, 2020). Despite the success in combating virus, South Korea and Australia economies are also badly damaged. South Korea has entered into recession for the first time since 2003. All members' economic growth rates are expected to decrease at the end of 2020.⁴ It is possible that in the post-Covid-19 world there may arise difficulties for member states governments to give attention for MIKTA due to the economic crisis and social unrest within their societies. In informal international organizations 'sustainability depends on the commitment and interest of its participating governments' (Singh and Teo, 2020, p.5). Therefore, in order MIKTA to survive the pandemic the governments should commit themselves to its endurance. In this regard, cooperation in trade in post-Covid 19 period may empower MIKTA's position in the eyes of members' governments to overcome the economic difficulties.

Pant and Jones underlines that South Korea was more successful than the great powers in organizing the testing and contact tracing efforts to contain the virus. In the niche area of 'health governance', with the leadership of South Korea, MIKTA may become more visible in the global arena. Hence despite the pessimistic perspectives, the Covid-19 may bring opportunities to revive the group solidarity.

As seen in the dyadic cooperation within MIKTA, it can be asserted that being a part of cross-continental consultative platform, member countries had the ability to manage aid coordination in times of crises not relying on the support from US-China binary. This is important since both members are close allies of the US in political and security relations and also as Gök and Karadeniz (2020, p.186) showed in terms of trade, other than Mexico which depends on the USA, all members' number one trading partner is China. Despite the dependency on these major actors in the system, their coordination of aid without their help shows their willingness of sustaining the grouping and the importance of minilateral and informal gatherings for global governance in times of crises. In this regard, rather than losing its relevance for changing international

4 For detailed information of the pandemic on MIKTA members' economies see: For Mexico (Campero and Sandin, 2020), for Indonesia (Rajah and Grenville, 2020), for South Korea (Stangarone, 2020), for Turkey (Demiralp, 2020) and for Australia (O'Sullivan, Rahamathulla and Pawar, 2020)

environment, MIKTA with the advantage of its flexibility as an informal institution has the potential to become an example of ‘middle power diplomacy’ in the post-Covid-19 world.

4. Conclusion

The uncertainty and anxiety prevailing in world order after the 2008 financial crisis increased with the Covid-19 pandemic to a high level. The IMF report of June 2020’s title summarizes prevailing feeling in today’s world with its title: A crisis like no other, an uncertain recovery! (IMF, 2020) In this atmosphere the pandemic poses both risks and opportunities for the capabilities and preferences of MIKTA members.

The major obstacle for the members to give attention to the grouping and hence the biggest risk for the MIKTA is related with deteriorating economic situation in member countries. As stated in the article, all MIKTA members have to deal with low growth rates and high unemployment numbers due to the precautions against the spread of the pandemic. It is expected that the political and social turmoil make governments more receptive to deal with domestic politics. Moreover, if the impact of the pandemic on the foreign ministries create budget cuts, MIKTA may gain lesser attention in members’ agenda. Yet, despite the risks it is argued that the pandemic presents opportunities for preferences of MIKTA members to strengthen the grouping presence in global governance.

The reasons why the pandemic may be regarded as a chance for MIKTA are manifold. First of all, in the prevailing uncertainty about the future shape of the world, informal institutions are providing necessary tools for states to cope with the challenges in a more flexible way. Minilateralism as a feature of such institutions also becomes important in effectively dealing with the crisis witnessed in today’s world necessitating specialization in niche areas. As seen in the pandemic, some middle powers managed to deal with the health crisis and its consequences better than the others. In the case of MIKTA, we witnessed a sense of solidarity between its members seen in joint ministerial meetings and declarations and also aid cooperation between dyadic members during the crisis. In the political vacuum left after the US withdrawal from WHO, middle powers will gain more space to shape the future of global health governance.

Secondly, South Korea and Australia’s successful performances during the crisis may increase the energy of the institution to play effective roles in humanitarian response, vaccine development and it may act as a bridge in coordinating dispersal of potential vaccine between developed and developing countries in deepening inequality in the world. In addition, Mexico, Turkey and Indonesia have taken different important roles in the UN as a result of the elections held on 17-18 June, 2020. Turkey’s candidate Mr. Volkan Bozkır has been elected as seventy-fifth President of the General Assembly. Mexico is elected to be non-permanent member of the Security Council for 2021-2022 term. Mexico is also together with Indonesia elected as members of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for three years term between 2021 and 2023 (MIKTA Joint Statement, July, 2020). These roles of MIKTA members in the UN increase the individual capacities as well

as strengthen their collective effort in empowering MIKTA's presence in their common niche areas in global governance.

To conclude, as Richard Falk rightly underlines the most important question for the future of global governance is that how the feeling that 'we are all in this together' during the Covid-19 crisis will be kept in other global issues such as climate change, nuclear weaponry, global migration and extreme poverty (Falk, 2020, p.60). Today most scholars agree that states have no choice but cooperation and the global governance needs more inclusivity of all states – middle, great or small powers to overcome transnational issues. Therefore, multilateralism is the best option to rebuild a stronger world and this opens a new space for middle powers in global governance in a second time after post-2008 crisis period. This gives MIKTA a chance to show it has the potential to contribute multilateralism efforts of middle powers in post-Covid world in providing good management and collective solution as an informal grouping and representative of third wave middle power diplomacy. It is clear that now it's time for MIKTA to seize the moment.

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