

### SESSION A3

#### “Middle Power Diplomacy: How Middle Powers of the World are Becoming Game Changers in International Affairs”

Citizen Diplomacy Hall – Conference on Indonesian Foreign Policy 2024

#### Speakers:

1. **Prof. The Hon. Gareth Evans**, Distinguished Honorary Professor at the Australian National University (ANU); Foreign Minister of Australia (1988-1996)
2. **H.E Melba Pría**, Ambassador of Mexico to Japan; Ambassador of Mexico to India (2015-2019); Ambassador of Mexico to Indonesia (2007-2015)
3. **Prof. Gordon Flake**, Founding CEO of the Perth USAsia Centre
4. **Kornelius Purba**, Senior Editor at the Jakarta Post

#### Moderator:

**Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**, Researcher at The Habibie Center; Women in Foreign Policy (WFP) Fellow at the Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia (FPCI)

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#### Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq

Good afternoon, everyone. Today, we're going to discuss a very interesting and timely topic. My name is Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq, and I will be moderating today's session. I am a researcher at The Habibie Center and a Woman in Foreign Policy (WFP) fellow at FPCI. It is a pleasure for me to moderate this session with the distinguished panelists. This session will discuss middle power diplomacy and address the question of how the middle powers of the world are becoming game changers in international affairs. The session is held in collaboration with Universitas Bakrie, which serves as the knowledge partner for this session.

So, to discuss this topic, we have four distinguished panelists here with us today. First, we have **Professor The Honorable Gareth Evans**, who served as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia from 1988 to 1996 and is currently a Distinguished Honorary Professor at the Australian National University. A round of applause for Professor Evans! Second, we have **Her Excellency Melba Pría**, the Ambassador of Mexico to Japan. She previously served as Ambassador of Mexico to India from 2015 to 2019 and Ambassador of Mexico to Indonesia from 2017 to 2015. A round of applause for Ambassador Pría! We also have **Professor Gordon Flake**, the founding CEO of the Perth USAsia Centre at the University of Western Australia. He has extensive experience working with the U.S. and Australian foreign policy communities on various issues in the Indo-Pacific, particularly on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. A round of applause for Professor Flake! And last but not least, we have **Pak Kornelius Purba**. Pak Kornel is the Senior Managing Editor at *The Jakarta Post* and has extensively covered Indonesian foreign policy and its role in the region. A round of applause for Pak Kornel!

All right, so as the topic suggests, we're going to discuss a very interesting, timely, and relevant issue for Indonesia. As everyone knows, middle powers have increasingly become a force to be

reckoned with in bringing about changes in the international system. They are no longer viewed as passive actors, increasingly able to demonstrate their agency in addressing global issues and, at times, navigating through geopolitical rivalry. And Pak Dino Patti Djalal himself defines middle powers as states who possess substantial size – so those with adequate population and territorial sizes – and weight. So, it's defined in terms of economic, diplomatic, and military strength and ambition. So, agenda-setting power and preeminence in international affairs. So, the panelists invited today will be able to speak about what having substantial size and weight and having the will to employ this feat to demonstrate ambition means from different perspectives—namely Australia, Mexico, the Republic of Korea or South Korea, and Indonesia, of course. And this discussion will especially be timely for the audience here in Indonesia and also audiences from the respective countries invited here today as well because last week, amid his foreign visits, President Prabowo informally met with other MIKTA leaders for the second MIKTA Leaders' Gathering on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Brazil, where they agreed on the importance of MIKTA as a channel to promote inclusive cooperation in response to global challenges. So, through this session, as the geopolitical and geoeconomic competitions grow increasingly complex to navigate, we will be able to understand how middle powers can serve as an important force to address global challenges, enhance prosperity within the respective regions, and, of course, recover trust and confidence in multilateralism. So, the session is going to be divided into two sessions. We will begin with a moderated discussion with the panelists, and then there will be a short Q&A session at the end.

So, as an introduction and to set the scene, I'm going to ask each of the panelists to deliver their introductory remarks. Please keep it short—up to two minutes—and I'm going to stick to the time because we have countdown timers here on the stage.

I'm going to start with Professor Evans, **how do you define middle powers? What makes them unique, and how important are they in addressing global challenges?** Professor Evans, two minutes.

**Prof. The Hon. Gareth Evans**

Well, thank you, Mabda, and thank you for the opportunity to talk to you all. I guess before we can determine how good middle powers are capable of being in fixing the world, it's not a bad idea to get some agreement about what middle powers actually are. And the truth of the matter is, there's a lot of disagreement. There's no agreed list of middle powers. There's no agreed definition of middle powers. Dino has made clear his view that middle powers are those with the combination of size, weight, and ambition that add up to about two dozen countries around the world. But other people take a different view. I take a different view.

I don't think size as such—physical size as such—helps us very much in determining who are likely to be effective middle power players. Whether you're talking about GDP, whether you're talking about population or land mass, or size of military expenditure, the truth of the matter is that the language of middle powers really is not conditional on having a certain size. Most of the

world thinks of countries like Norway, thinks of countries like Singapore, as effective middle powers, even though their populations are quite small—under six million and 120th in the world’s list of populations, 150th the size of Indonesia. All of us on this platform would think of ourselves as middle powers, but I think a better way of approaching it is not to try and get some notion of size but to focus on three things: **what we are not, what we are, and what kind of mindset we bring as middle powers to the conduct of international relations.**

**What we are not** are countries with so much military and economic power that we can bend others to our policy preferences. We can basically force them into following us. None of us are in that capacity. Some of us have a little bit of capacity in a regional context, but not much more than that.

The second, **what we are**, are countries that each of us, in our different ways, have sufficient capability, sufficient credibility, and sufficient motivation to really make a difference in international affairs. And the **mindset** that I think is common to the countries that I think of as middle powers is a mindset which gives real weight and utility to the concept of middle power diplomacy.

Middle power diplomacy, in turn, is something I think that has a characteristic motivation and a characteristic method. The motivation of middle power diplomacy is a really strong belief in the utility and the necessity of a cooperative approach to problem-solving, in particular those big public goods problems that are too big for any country, however big or powerful, to solve by itself. And the characteristic method of middle power diplomacy is coalition-building. Coalition-building with like-minded countries—not necessarily sharing the same value systems but like-minded in our determination to get things done. So, we can make a difference as middle powers. And I won’t take time now to give you further examples, we’ll come to those—but I think the ways in which middle powers, as I’ve described them, can make a difference is, first of all, in agenda-setting: coming up with ways of thinking about things that the big guys are just not really focused on or not sufficiently or carrying too much baggage to be able to move on. We can play a role in bridge-building. And we can play a very significant role in building a critical mass of support—a critical mass of support for international commitment, in particular to public goods problems. And Canada and Mexico and Indonesia and Australia and South Korea have all played a role in various ways in the past in building that support. But we’ll no doubt explore more of those opportunities as we get the discussion moving.

**Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

Excellent. Thank you, professor. Ambassador Pría, so, what do you think? **How do you define middle powers and what makes them unique?**

**H.E. Melba Pría**

Well, first of all, good afternoon to everybody. Thank you for taking your time to listen to us. One of the things about the theme of this talk is that Mexico—and me—we don’t agree about the

concept of middle powers. Mexico has not adhered itself as a middle power—not in the Cold War, not after. We are not a middle power. Middle power is putting a cap on everybody that considers itself a middle power. We are middle powers in some things; we are upper powers in other things. So, the idea of Mexico as a middle power, and that's where you stay, is not one we adhere to.

However, you know, all of those elements that we have talked about—on size, and economy, and population—well, we are all of that. But we are a sovereign nation that has an autonomous foreign policy, a well-established presence in the world, and international diplomacy is what we do. If we have assessed that, I will use "middle power" just for the sake of this discussion—not because we think that we are middle powers.

So, Mexico has historically, for reasons that are to do with our geography and many other things, had a constitutional foreign policy. Our foreign policy is part of our constitution. We have principles of foreign policy in our constitution. We believe in non-intervention, in self-determination of the states, on pacific settlement of disputes, and all of those forces of international relations that give countries legal equality as states. So, a middle power is not better than a smaller power or less than a bigger power. So, we have to think about those things. Now, taking into consideration where we are today, I think these middle powers—or these countries—what they are very important in is that they are relevant actors in the international arena, because we earn recognition. And we have the basis of everybody around this table, which is cooperation, not cohesion.

### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

So cooperation is key there. Professor Flake, please.

### **Prof. Gordon Flake**

Well, thank you. I very much agree with almost everything that's been said by Ambassador Pría and by Minister Evans. I spent 25 years in Washington, DC, but most of that was spent focusing on Korea, Japan, the region more broadly. And now, I've lived in Australia for 11 years and have been an Australian citizen for about five years now. So, my view on this topic of middle powers is not a Washington, DC perspective; It's very much informed by Seoul and Western Australia.

Now, having said that, I tend to also, along with Pak Marty from his panel this morning and other panels, challenge the concept of a middle power. You know, because Australia, Mexico, Korea, Indonesia—we're all in the G20. In fact, we're all in the top 15 economies in the world, right? We're not middling by any way, we're **consequential powers**, right?

The term actually is something we can blame Korea for. In Korea, a lot of academics go back and forth into government, and so "middle power" is a way that academics describe the behavior of nation-states. It's not a way a diplomat comes out and says, "We're number two; we have a cap or a ceiling, right? We're not consequential." That's not how we talk, right?

Governments don't either, right? It's just an academic term. But I think it might be helpful for today for us to understand how other countries talk about this.

So, in Australia, we use the term **rules-based order**. "Rules-based order" is a mantra in Australian foreign policy. And what that implies is, we don't want to live in a world where might makes right. We don't want to live in a G-2 world. We want a world of institutions and standards and norms and organizations and laws and cooperation that, you know, you build through the mechanisms that we just described here. In, probably, Turkey, maybe in Mexico, they might talk about the **liberal international system** rather than middle powers in terms of that. And what that implies is that, depending on the issue, every country is going to have different strengths or weaknesses.

In some sectors, Australia is a global leader. If you're talking about **critical minerals, energy transition, rare earth supply chains**, or the **technology around resource extraction, Australia is the best in the world**. The world comes to Australia to learn. We're not a middle power in that regard. In other areas, Mexico is a leader. In other areas still, Indonesia is a leader. And so, I think if you're framing this much more about, "We don't want to live in a world where it is just determined by power and power alone," Middle powers—if you use that frame—are those countries who want to live in a **rules-based order and a system where our voices are not only guaranteed but enhanced**.

#### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

So rules based order is the key term here. Pak Kornel, please, particularly your perspective as Indonesian. What do you think is a middle power?

#### **Kornelius Purba**

Because there are three speakers that have talked before about middle power, I just want to greet anak-anak muda yang hadir disini. You are the future leaders of this country. You will be the successor of Pak Marty Natalegawa who is sitting over there. But be careful. One thing I want to say, especially my respect to those who read the Jakarta post and subscribe. Not just read but subscribe. It's a matter of my own salary.

And for you, before talking about diplomacy, maybe your dream will be a foreign minister, will be ambassador. But be careful with a little girl here. She's just seven years old. Her name is Kimora. Her dream is to be the president of the Republic of Indonesia. Maybe one day you must apply to her to be her minister or ambassador. So, about young people, not all of you will become ambassadors or diplomats, but by attending such a forum, you will enlarge, widen your vision. If all of you become diplomats, the foreign foreign ministry should be expanded four times.

I'm a journalist. I do not understand anything about diplomacy, but I cover foreign ministers since 1985. So for almost forty years, still I have little knowledge and still have no chance to

become even a junior diplomat because of my age. Later, I will talk about the Indonesian perspective about middle power. Tapi anak-anak muda disini middle power semua, you don't have enough income. Right? Okay, thank you.

### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

A very encouraging talk there. So of course, I think if we're discussing about middle power diplomacy despite the elusiveness of the definition itself, I think we also have to talk about their role in the region, especially now that we're in an issue. Of course, we have to talk about the different middle powers' role in the Indo-Pacific, especially, with respect to their roles vis-à-vis ASEAN.

So I would like to turn to Professor Evans. Australia has demonstrated consistent leadership in regional forums like, for example, the ARF (Asean Regional Forum), especially during your tenure as foreign minister. So, how can Australia's experience in fostering collaboration within the Indo-Pacific guide middle powers in addressing regional challenges, such as institutional reforms and geopolitical instability. **So, what do you think, can other middle powers in the region learn from Australia's experience?**

### **Prof. The Hon. Gareth Evans**

I was lucky enough to be foreign minister at a golden period for international relations. The end of the Cold War, an environment of real optimism when there was consensus on the UN Security Council, and there was a real willingness around our region to be adventurous in finding new mechanisms of dialogue and cooperation, and working together in a way that we hadn't done before. But that said, you've still got to make things happen. And when you're a country Australia's size, you don't have the military clout. You don't have the economic clout to force anybody to take any notice of you. You have to operate through persuasion and through building confidence in the quality of the ideas that you're putting into circulation.

So when I think back on what worked in getting stuff done during my period, and we did get a lot of stuff done, **it was a combination of things. It was, first of all, the resources available to my country, the diplomatic resources**, the number of posts that we had around the region, the professional quality of our diplomats, and the staffing in my own government. Resources are very important. Without that, you can't move the dial very easily at all. **Second thing is to bring a sense of creativity to the problems of the region.** I worked brilliantly, as Dino said this morning, with Ali Alatas in resolving the Cambodian, terrible genocide and civil war. Because between us, we came up with this wholly new approach to solving that problem, namely giving an unprecedentedly major role to the United Nations during a transition period to give China a face saving way of stepping back from supporting the Khmer Rouge. That was the creative idea from which that whole peace process developed. So creativity is tremendously important. Coming up with new ways of solving old problems. **The third thing that's important if you want to be successful in middle power diplomacy is to have credibility.** And that means not behaving in a different way domestically than what you're preaching to others. And credibility is very important. Credibility is a bit of a problem with countries like Australia because we're so

obviously an ally of the United States that people are inclined to think that we must always be speaking, you know, with the voice of the United States. And you absolutely have to be very, very careful about getting yourself into that position of being seen to be one-sided and bringing to bear a sort of a predetermined approach to problem solving. That's not gonna help. You've got to have credibility.

And the **final thing you've got to have is simply opportunity**. The opportunity that the times give or that your energy gives to do new things. And if we look at opportunities now in the Indo-Pacific for middle power diplomacy, a couple of the things that I think of are agenda setting for the East Asian Summit. Not just leaving it to the big guys, United States and China and others, to determine how they want that dialogue mechanism to go, but banding together as creative, energetic middle powers and forcing a much more activist agenda on that very important body. Maybe also doing some work with my final point on the nuclear issue about which Mexico has long been a leader. Australia has tried to be a leader. And Indonesia has certainly been a leader within the non-aligned movement. Middle powers do have an opportunity for influence in moving towards a nuclear weapon free world. We blew that opportunity with the Biden administration and the Obama administration. They wanted to move to no first use, but allies in the region and in Europe, middle power allies said, oh, no. We don't want you to go down that particular path.

**If middle powers do have an ethical, sensible, cooperative approach to problem solving and they get together and use that collective weight to do it, then in our own region and worldwide, I think we can make a difference.** Whether we can calm all the storms and fix all the world's problems is another issue. That's probably being a bit romantic. But we can certainly make a difference in a lot of different areas, and we have in the past, and we can do it again.

#### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

So key here is diplomatic resources, creativity, credibility, and opportunity.

Professor Flake, I understand that you've been working for quite a long time in Australia, and you have a very extensive experience working on issues surrounding Korea as well. And, of course, as we discussed before, Korea is also a key, acute actor in the region and is, as you mentioned, is guilty of coining the term middle power. So, in terms of Korea's engagement, in the Pacific, **how can middle powers like them effectively collaborate with other middle powers in the region to achieve stability, ensure stability, and, of course, ensure that regional integration can continue to go on?** Professor Flake, please.

#### **Prof. Gordon Flake**

Well, thank you. Like Australia, the Republic of Korea is a treaty ally of the United States. And that implies in some respects, the choice has already been made. Right? It is a core part of Australia's national security strategy to rely on an alliance relationship. Same part it is for South Korea, and they're under kind of very direct foot. So that impacts, you know, how truly balanced

one can be because you can't say we're balanced when you've made the choice. This is a core part of your strategy. Now that's only on some issues. There's a broad range of other issues where I think as Gareth mentioned, you've got a lot of latitude.

I thought it might be useful to frame this in a slightly different way. Everyone on this panel with the exception of our great moderator grew up during the cold war. You know, I don't know if the college students here can understand this, but all through my high school and most of my university days, I believed that the world was gonna end in a nuclear holocaust. Everybody believed that. And then all of a sudden we had in 1989 the fall of the Berlin Wall, and we had the start of a period that, you know, doctor Evans just described very well as the post cold war era. What are the best times in our lives? Right? Twenty Twenty five years. We didn't know it was gonna end. You know, from 1990 arguably until around 2015, the exact date is debatable when you look at it, where it seemed like the world was gonna become more global, easier to travel, more integrated, and just better and better and better. We're eventually moving towards science fiction, Star Trek. And even things like 9/11, even terrorism were bumps in the road. They didn't fundamentally challenge the order. But today, **I think most people fear that we have reentered into an era of great power competition.** And so in that context, the rules based order that we built so fervently during that post cold war era is challenged.

It's a challenging thing. And so I wanna leave you, if I just got one minute, with one way to frame this discussion. I read an op ed from David Brooks who's a Republican, New York Times reporter in the middle of the first Trump administration. And he argued that the fundamental divide of our era is not China-US. It is not rich versus poor. It is not South versus North, communist versus capitalist. The fundamental divide of our era, he argued, was high trust versus low trust. High trust societies are complicated. Again, they involve institutions and standards and norms and organizations, all of which require expertise to manage. So diplomats, like we've heard from today, have had to spend their career developing real expertise to deal with that collaboration as opposed to coercion that ambassador Pría just mentioned in the process. Right? Unfortunately, there are some individuals in this world who do not want to live in a high trust society or who cannot thrive in a high trust society. And back in 2018, David Brooks mentioned them. He listed them. Diplomats can't do this. I can. He said it was Putin. It was Duterte in the Philippines at the time. It was Orban in Hungary. It was Erdogan in Turkey. Interestingly enough, he then enlisted Donald Trump. Because these individuals want to tear down your faith in the media, in the Jakarta Post. They don't want you to read newspapers. They don't want you to believe in judges, and courts, and governments, and systems. They want a world where you can't believe anything because then only a strong man can say, I alone can fix it.

I alone can fix it. That is not a world that is conducive to middle power diplomacy. Right? And even though some demagogues, some populist in middle powers like Turkey or Hungary have pursued those things, I think that's negative. Right? It's a negative. And so one of the previous panels, this one wrestled with the implications of the reelection of Donald Trump. And my



argument is that **we are in an environment now where middle powers are going to be not just rebuilding the rules based order that Gareth and his colleagues built, but trying to defend it in an era when it is being attacked.**

**So to make it very clear, the space for middle power diplomacy is shrinking. It is under attack.** And so Indonesia and Korea and Mexico and Australia and many other countries in Europe have a responsibility to defend that order, and that is the I think the challenge of middle powers in this era.

### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

So defending a rules based order is key here in terms of maintaining collaboration between the middle powers in the region.

Pak Kornel, of course, as an Indonesian, Indonesia is often recognized as the de facto leader of ASEAN and being among the most active in promoting, for example, ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific. **So, in your view, how successful has Indonesia been in establishing itself as a middle power, especially with regards to regional diplomacy and multilateral engagement? So, to sum it up, how successful has Indonesia been?**

### **Kornelius Purba**

First of all, on Wednesday, we just, voters, just elected 37 governors, 93 mayors, 415 regions nationwide. It was just complete in one day regardless of the shortcomings.

Before I answer it, why is Indonesia a middle power? I want to argue. Maybe it's like when you buy a shirt. There is "L", there is "double L", maybe "triple L". So there is a middle power. So remember, only six years after the nation forced President Soeharto to end his 32 year dictatorship in May 1998, Indonesia held its first direct election and first direct presidential election just six years after. I think we are more democratic than Australia. Australian voters only have the right to vote for parliament, not the prime minister. In 2024 and twenty in 2005, we had the first regional head direct elections. **Indonesia is the de facto leader of ASEAN. We are the largest member of ASEAN and Indonesia lands very well from the India experience.** When you read how The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) doesn't work very well because India as a major big country tends to knock the head of the smaller member. But **Indonesia chose to be "let's grow together" especially under Soeharto.** Now Indonesia tends to think we are bigger than Singapore, Malaysia, or Brunei. We should have more recognition. And also remember, we are after the third largest democracy after India and the US.

We are also the world's most populous Muslim nation who are known for moderate intolerance. I'm sorry. I'm a Catholic, but I do know Muslim-Islam in Indonesia is very moderate. I don't want to please you. It came from my heart. **In the last ten years, Jokowi has tended to ignore ASEAN.** But only eight, eight seconds left. **Indonesia needs ASEAN also, not just ASEAN**

**needs. We are also stronger because of ASEAN. That's the meaning of leadership.** Already, I'm told to shut up. Thank you.

### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

Thank you very much, Pak. So keys there is, Indonesia is successful in making ASEAN work and Indonesia also, of course, needs ASEAN. Not Not only ASEAN needs Indonesia, but also Indonesia needs ASEAN.

So I would like to turn to ambassador Pría because, of course, Mexico is an empowered middle power, but from a distant region from Southeast Asia. So to set the scene here, of course, I think, a lot of the audiences might have read a lot of news about Mexico, but to sort of set the scene here, could you please maybe provide a little bit of a background on **how is Mexico's foreign policy, especially within its immediate region looks like?** Ambassador, please.

### **H.E. Melba Pría**

First, let me tell you that **Mexico is your neighbor**, and middle powers have many regional belongings, if you want to call us middle powers. We don't agree with that sense, but never mind. So we have many different belongings.

**For us, Asia is not the Far East. It's the next door neighbor West.** We are your neighbors. Of course, we are not next, next door, but if you could swim and your **founding president used to say that we were washed by the same ocean, and we still are washed by the same ocean.** So middle powers have a lot of geographical belongings, but one of the reasons that Mexico has always had a significant voice is that we believe that every country has an equal footing and we believe in global governance. We live next door to the only country that has used nuclear power. So Mexico is a country of many belongings. MIKTA, APEC, G-20, of course, CELAC, of course, OAS, of course, USMCA.

**We are a sort of hinge country.** Openness in the middle, we are in the middle of Europe and Asia, and we are in the middle of North America and Latin America, and we belong to all of those regions. So although middle powers are powers in the region, and I don't like the word power, but are influential in the regions, don't forget that, of course, Indonesia is ASEAN, and there you have an incredible strength that you should not lose. You belong to many other associations. It's not only geography. That's why the idea of the global north and the global south, we love labels. North and south are geography. So Mexico is a northern, the global north. Australia is the global south, and Indonesia is the global middle because you are on the equator. So don't go there, don't go there. As I said, **one of the things is that you have to detect shared concerns and coordinate common constructive positions if you want to be able to adhere to a global governance.**

### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

So, thank you very much, ambassador. We will return to your point on global governance, but, of course, I think discussing about global governance in this day and age, I think it's inseparable

from one very crucial factor, which is global, great power rivalries, geopolitical competition, etc. Pak Kornel now, this is especially timely because President Prabowo has just returned from his foreign visit, and he has visited both China and the US during his foreign visit, which stresses the importance of both countries for Indonesia and the region. Yet China was the first country that Pak Prabowo visited after his victory was declared. And in his series of foreign visits, China was also the first country that he visited. So we also have to understand that on the side, there is still a lot of unease when it comes to our engagement with China.

So, in your view, **what are the most significant challenges that Indonesia is facing in maintaining its role as a middle power status, particularly in balancing and, or navigating the geopolitical tensions in this day and age?** Pak, please.

### **Kornelius Purba**

Journalists are trained to ask questions, not to answer. But the moderator forced me to answer questions.

First, actually, a bit different from the moderator's question. Pak Marty Natalegawa already raised about the joint statement of President Prabowo and President Xi Jinping in Beijing, especially point nine about joint development of the Natuna waters. But I will talk about it later.

About China, **Indonesia historically, traditionally are hostile to China**, especially the army hostile to China because Indonesia regard itself as the sub-regional superpower. Remember, I think only Indonesia has the guts to cut diplomatic ties with China from 1967 until 1990. Twenty three years before we cut diplomatic ties. Only when Premier Li Peng came to Jakarta on August 8th, 1990, President Soeharto agreed to reopen diplomatic ties. So when Prabowo went to China, it was a very pragmatic and rational choice. But traditionally, we are not so hostile to China.

About Indonesia's role with ASEAN as a middle power, ASEAN actually knows the situation in the Pacific. Actually, the definition of Indo Pacific is not clear. Where is the Indo Pacific? We don't care about the Indo Pacific in Africa. **But for Indonesia, ASEAN, quietly actually ASEAN agrees with the rising presence of the US military, Western countries, Japan, Australia, even India.** We just halfheartedly denounce. Oh, no, no, no. Actually, Actually, welcome. Welcome. Welcome. Welcome. **We are too afraid of China.** But remember, not a single country, even the US or Australia has the guts to say to China, let's fight one by one. And these western countries want to see ASEAN. We don't want to be trapped in between. So quietly, Indonesia, **ASEAN agree with the presence of more Western countries. The merrier, the better.** Thank you.

### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

Thank you very much, Pak. I would like to return to Professor Flake, which, of course, you've mentioned about your extensive experience working on issues surrounding Korea as well as having perspectives from the US as well as Australia.

And returning to discussions on Korea here, as an immediate neighbor of China and given its historical relations with the US, discussions about strategic autonomy has always been complicated by dilemma. So in your views, **how can South Korea's middle power status address the sort of dilemma in balancing its relations between the US and China in maintaining its strategic autonomy?**

**Prof. Gordon Flake**

Okay. I think it's important to state that whether it's Indonesia or South Korea or Mexico is probably the exception here. Australia or almost any other country at least in the region. **We have a situation where we depend on the United States for, to some degree, security either through an alliance or through the global norms. And at the same time, we have an increasing dependence on China economically.** People are surprised to realize that even though South Korea is right next door to China, Australia actually has a greater percentage of its trade with China than South Korea does. Right? It's very important, especially where I come from, Western Australia, where our iron ore or our gas and most of our agriculture products all go to a single market. So there's a high degree of independence. So there's always this tension between our security, diplomatic needs, and our economic needs. And the interesting thing is it's important to realize that those are shared tensions. And that by working and looking at how other countries deal with it, that we learn from that process. Now Mexico is probably gonna go through some economic coercion with its closest neighbor, not China, but with the United States, right, which is its leading trade partner.

But I would tell you the interesting thing in this is, just about four years ago, for a variety of reasons, Australia was on the receiving end of some very overt economic coercion from China, our largest trade partner. Bans on our coal, bans on barley from Western Australia, bans on beef, bans on crayfish, on wine, a whole wrath of sectors. South Korea experienced the same thing. When South Korea decided in response to North Korean missile tests to deploy Theater High Altitude Aerial Defense batteries (THAAD batteries), China then used economic coercion to punish South Korea, for political and security reasons. And so there was a lesson learned for Australia from South Korea that the Philippines did as well. And interestingly enough, if you look at the last three or four years, Australia and China relations have stabilized compared to where they were three years ago. Australia really did not give up on even its core principles. They did not knuckle under to any of the fourteen point demands that the Chinese had kinda leaked into the Australian press. And at the same time, we haven't been as provocative either. We haven't gotten an apology. We haven't gotten compensation. We dropped our WGA courses. But underpinning everything **I just talked about are those same desires to work together with other countries who have shared experiences from us.**

**Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

Thank you, professor.

Ambassador Pría, I believe that I think there is also a lot to discuss here about particularly Mexico's, efforts in maintaining a strategic autonomy here because, of course, you mentioned that you don't necessarily agree with the idea of middle power being some sort of like confined or limitations with regards to state's actions. What I would like to ask here is, **given the fact that now China has increased its investment in Mexico quite substantially as well as with Mexico and US historical relations as bordering countries, how has Mexico maintained or pursued strategic autonomy in this sort of complex situation?**

**H.E. Melba Pría**

China has not increased its investment in Mexico. Let me tell you a little bit about what it is to be Mexico. We, as I say, we live next door to the only country that has used nuclear power against another country. When that happened and not even your fathers and mothers maybe were born, Russia and Cuba had a missile crisis with the US. What was the answer of Mexico in the sixties about that issue? Mexico created, talking about cooperation with other middle powers, nobody called us like that many years ago. **What we did was the first nuclear free zone in the world, and we signed something that is called the Tlatelolco agreement. So nobody in Latin America and the Caribbean has nuclear power. Today, we talk again about nuclear power because of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.**

**But when we were growing up, nuclear power was a real thing. It was a real threat, and you have to be able to do all sorts of alliances to reach your autonomy.** Alliances to reach your autonomy. It might sound funny, but it's not.

In 2013, Mexico was instrumental in adopting the armed treaty. Why? Why were we interested in an armed treaty? **Because our country is flooded by American arms. It is illegal to have a weapon in Mexico.** In 2018, we were active supporters of something that is very important for everybody, which is called the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration. I live in Japan, and there is not one week where I don't speak Indonesian, because I meet an Indonesian on the street of Japan. **So if we don't have a regular and safe migration, the world will be a much more complicated state.** At the same time, we have FTA's with fifty countries, And by the way, the first free trade agreement that Indonesia ever signed, it signed with Mexico in 1962. Nobody was talking about capitalism then. Nobody was talking about anything else. But why Indonesia and Mexico decided to write a free trade agreement is still a mystery to many of us. But here we are, 1888, Mexico is the country that signed the treaty of amnesty with Japan, and for the first time, Japan signed an equal treaty with one nation. And the Mexico treaty is used again and again and again for any country that wanted to have relations with Japan after the Meiji period. **So you have to forge alliances to exercise autonomy.**

**Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

Thank you so much, ambassador.

And professor Evans, maybe drawing from your experience working as a foreign minister, and speaking from your experience observing Australia, following now, **what do you think, should, what sort of lessons can we learn in terms of maintaining strategic autonomy from Australia as a middle power?**

**Prof. The Hon. Gareth Evans**

Well, from my experience, if middle powers like Australia are going to be effective, they, **first of all, have to have a very clear sense of their own national interests.** And that's in the context of China versus the US. That means, in our case, not being sucked into either side's camp, notwithstanding all the history of the US alliance and everything that goes with it. I'm a little bit more spooked by the United States these days than I am by China. And I think that's a common view in Australia. And it's very important to be very, very clear on what your economic interests are and what your security interests are, and not to lose sight of the necessary balance.

I think it's also very important for every country to have another dimension to its sense of its national interests. And this is every country's interest, and particularly middle powers' countries' interests, in being and being seen to be decent countries, good international citizens, countries that are not solely consumed with their own security, with their own prosperity, but do worry about the problems of a wider humanity, that do care about development, that do care about averting and responding to war and to atrocity crimes, and to addressing the great climate and pandemic and weapons control issues of our time. And countries that do take those issues seriously, even when there's no quick or immediate economic return or no quick or immediate security return are countries that really advantage themselves internationally, reputationally, in terms of getting reciprocal agreements with other countries, and also just getting stuff done, getting good cooperative action on those big collective action problems where very often, in order to get a solution like climate, you have to be acting against your own national interests in the short term.

**So first lesson, I think, to be an effective middle power, and I think this was true of my period in government, you have to have a very clear sense of national interest,** which is not just a selfish national interest, but to some extent has that extra dimension as well. The interest in being and being seen to be a good international citizen. **The second thing is to be effective is you have to look for opportunities and take advantage of them as they arrive.** If you were just reactive, reactive, reactive to things that are going on, you're not necessarily going to be a very helpful or a very useful partner to other countries in the region or the wider world, or not necessarily do all that much to advance your own country's interest. You've got to grab those opportunities and look for them. **And the final thing I would say is it's apt and I'd say particularly to this audience of young people who are looking to the future. Stay optimistic. Stay optimistic.** However gloomy things appear, however much of a mess the world appears, however much we're unhappy about the state of conflict and atrocious crime, remember that things can and do change. And that self pessimism is self defeating. Pessimism

is self reinforcing. Optimism is self reinforcing. You don't get out of bed in the morning to do stuff unless you believe the change is possible.

So my final message to you is **whatever the state of the world and whatever you think might be the difficulties of making an impact on the world as a power that doesn't have the military might or the economic might of others, there's just a middle power, stay optimistic about the possibility, the necessity of making the world a safer and saner and better place.**

#### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

So optimism is an important driving force.

Maybe before we proceed with the Q&A, I do have one last question. We've discussed the importance of cooperation, and the importance of multilateralism. And so, of course, I think it's important to also discuss how we recover trust in multilateralism and global cooperation. So I would like to ask each of the panelists, maybe, **in one to two minutes to prepare and deliver their closing statement, by answering what do you think can Middle Powers do to recover trust and multilateralism and global cooperation?**

#### **Kornelius Purba**

Now Indonesia even, **I think considering multilateralism is no longer needed. It's not so popular among powerful countries. Indonesia will choose unilateralism.** ASEAN, we don't need to have a summit with all ASEAN, just with five ASEAN members. But because your moderator asked about trust, I want to, again, touch on the meeting between president Xi Jinping and president Prabowo, which is about the confidence of our neighbors. President Prabowo, I think, he should visit all ASEAN capitals, meet with ASEAN leaders to explain what is actually going on in his conversation with president Xi Jinping. Because joint statements politically are binding. You cannot just say "no no, I don't mean like that, no, no, no, no, no."

In my view, I'm a journalist. I'm not a government leader. It's a blunder. We need damage control to regain the trust of our neighbors. Can you imagine what Vietnam reaction, the Philippines reaction, Brunei, Malaysia reaction? So I think President Prabowo should explain. This morning, Foreign Minister Sugiono, I think, avoided explaining because it's very sensitive. But from a media perspective, it is a blunder. But it doesn't mean it's the end of the world. A very bad start. Multilateralism is popular, but now **Indonesia is more of a simple multilateralism. We cannot talk about democracy with Laos, Cambodia. Why don't we talk to Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Brunei, the original founding fathers of ASEAN?** But again, young people, kalian jadi pemimpin bangsa ini. Bangsa ini bangsa besar, kalian pimpinlah bagaimana sebaik-baiknya. Jangan belajar dari kami orang-orang tua ini, hal-hal yang buruk. Terima kasih.

#### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

So be a leader. Thank you very much, Pak Kornel for your inspiring remark there. Professor Flake?

### **Prof. Gordon Flake**

I think we've already said a lot of the answer. I mean, Gareth's final plea for us to remain optimistic. **What that means is that we have to even though the world situation is uncertain, even though politics seems kind of messed up, even though we can no longer talk about post war Europe, and basic issues like national sovereignty in Ukraine have been challenged, that there's still a lot of good that can be done by working together, as institutions.** I've personally been a big fan of MIKTA, Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey, Australia. It is functionally a middle power grouping within the G-20. It doesn't have the baggage of the G-7 and politics.

And generally, these five countries are acceptable. People don't dislike them. In the past, we emphasized like minded, but with issues in Turkey, candidly, with some of the decisions around BRICS with Indonesia, that might be a debate with the we're like minded on some of these issues, but still, there's an opportunity to build. **So for me, it is being optimistic and building. The more you collaborate and build and cooperate, the better the world will be.**

### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

Thank you, Professor Flake.

### **H.E. Melba Pría**

**I would add one thing to optimism and that is trust. Trust the future.** I mean, Evans and I were talking about age a little time ago. You have much more time than we have, but trust the future. **And you have to become activists. You cannot only be optimists because it's an optimistic time. You have to be an activist for optimism.** Yes, national interest is important, but climate change is for everybody. Yes. National interest is important, but women issues are important because it's the women that forge the next generation. Yes. National interests are important, but migration and economy and cybersecurity and human rights, they are all important. So what we are trying to say here is we are giving you a world in which we trust it. It didn't always go the way we thought it was going to go, **but you are the activist of your future. You have to be an activist if you want to be, trusting and if you want to be optimist.** Thank you very much.

### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

And, professor Evans, nothing to add? Okay, great. Thank you very much to all of the speakers. So now we will turn to the Q&A session.

Due to the limited time, I think we only have ten minutes for the Q&A. So we have two, we can have two questions from the audience. So if there's anyone who would like to ask a question, please show a hand. A gentleman over here, another one, and gentleman right there on the front. So, here and there.



I think you can approach the microphone if it's good. I think we can start with a gentleman over there and then you can please approach the microphone if it's okay. Yeah. It's on your right. Yes, please.

### **Question 1**

Distinguished panelists, thank you very much for the presentations. I would like to ask questions and **assess the concept of middle power in terms of international conflict resolution.**

Between the nineties and early 2000s, we saw a lot of middle power countries such as, for example, partnership between Australia and Indonesia in the Cambodia peace process, Indonesia's role in the Philippines peace process with the MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front), and then Switzerland, Finland, Sweden. There are a lot of examples of middle power countries engaging in international conflict resolutions. However, as the concept of middle power expands in academics and now in foreign policy, we no longer see real empirical cases where middle power countries actually successfully engaged in conflict resolution. We saw the Indonesia role or ASEAN role in the Myanmar civil war right now, which has been fruitless so far, and many other cases. **So what do you think about the advantages that a lot of academicians propose that the middle power has, certain leverages, do they exist or do they only exist in certain kinds of conditions?** Thank you.

### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

Thank you very much. And the second question, please keep it concise and brief. Thank you very much.

### **Question 2**

I just have one sentence question. **Do you think AUKUS, the defense cooperation agreement, will have an impact on the political and security dynamics in Southeast Asia?**

### **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

So the impact of AUKUS in Southeast Asia. Thank you very much for the question.

I would like to start with professor Evans. First question on middle power in achieving peace and then the influence of AUKUS in Southeast Asia. Professor, please.

### **Prof. The Hon. Gareth Evans**

Potential role of middle powers in conflict resolution. There are quite a number of situations which do lend themselves regional responses, like Nigeria led for so often in West Africa. Regional responses, if ASEAN can get its collective middle power act together in Myanmar, can be very effective. And we can just hope that with Malaysia taking over the chairmanship of ASEAN next year, maybe we can take some new energetic initiatives in that place.

Middle powers have a significant role to play in the General Assembly in the United Nations. There's a huge amount of frustration with the Security Council at the moment for reasons we all understand, the exercise of the veto power. But there's a growing realization that it is possible to put together significant majorities in the General Assembly on really important issues, like the Middle East conflicts, and to accelerate the momentum for resolution flowing from that. So I think just looking in a regional context, and there are some other bilateral ones as well. I mean, middle and and I referred before to the role that Australia and Indonesia played together in, working out the parameters of the Cambodian situation. The situations like this all around the world, where creative, energetic, well resourced middle powers are capable of changing the parameters, changing the understanding of the art of the possible. So I can just suggest that we hang in there.

The other question was about defense corporations?

**Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

The influence of AUKUS in Southeast Asia.

**Prof. The Hon. Gareth Evans**

Oh, AUKUS. Yes.

Well, I'm not a big fan of AUKUS. I think, (a) the boats are not deliverable by the United States or the United Kingdom anytime within not only my lifetime, but my kids' lifetimes. Secondly, I think they're a lousy choice in terms of cost benefit. And thirdly, I think they're a serious problem for our national sovereignty because there's no way we're going to get this very advanced technology from the United States without the United States believing that these boats will be available at the flick of a presidential finger for use by the United States in any military adventure the US might want to get itself into. Now I'm not necessarily a majority voice necessarily, but I am a significant voice in the Australian community. And I think there's a lot of people having a long, long second thought about that particular defense arrangement.

We've always had a fear in Australia of abandonment, of being this European country in Asia and being out of place and needing a great and powerful protector, whether it's the United Kingdom or the United States. Those days have passed. We are a country of this region. Australia's future is our geography, not our history. Australia's future is the Asian region. It's not the anglosphere of the US and the UK. And Australia's future is not being enmeshed to the extent of losing our sovereignty to a great power as significant as that power has been so often in our past. So it's a lively issue in Australia. It's a lively issue around the region, I know. But be aware that there's a lot of people who are very, very concerned that this was a very bad decision by successive Australian governments. And I think there is a chance that it will completely fall in a hole before too much longer.

**Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

Thank you very much, professor. I believe professor Flake would like to add something on that?

**Prof. Gordon Flake**

So I am much more optimistic about Professor Evans' longevity. I think he'll be around for a long time. And I'm also more optimistic about AUKUS in terms of its role in the region. Now having said that, if you step back and think more importantly to my big picture, the post cold war era period was built on a foundation of security. It was built on those security guarantees throughout the region. And we are in an era right now, candidly, where the increasing collaboration between China and Russia and North Korea and Iran has impacts, I think, globally. Right? That I think are destabilizing, and if you ask the Filipinos, they would probably agree with that. If you ask the Vietnamese, they would probably agree with that. If you ask the South Koreans or certainly if you ask the Ukrainians, they would agree with that. Right?

So I tend to think that things that strengthen the system are good. Now again, I can appreciate some skepticism to that, but I still haven't given up on the rules based order and the security foundation on which that rules based order was based. And I would point out the last thing is that in this era of uncertainty, not concerned about China's rise, but how China exercises its power, and concerned about the reliability of the United States. It's not a coincidence that Australia-Indonesia relations are the best ever. Australia-Japan, Australia-Korea, Australia, you know, Mexico probably, Australia-Europe, Australia-India are all the best ever. And I think the reason is because we all have a shared anxiety about that foundation on which so much of our world was built for the last seventy years.

**Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

Thank you very much, Professor Flake. Maybe to draw a Southeast Asian perspective into this Pak Kornelius, what do you think about the influence of AUKUS in Southeast Asia?

**Kornelius Purba**

AUKUS, for those who forgot it, Australia, United Kingdom, US, military pact. There are also informal military ties between India, Japan, Australia, and the US. For Indonesia, at least for the time being, actually, the target of the opposition perspective, I think, more to China. So Indonesia initially was angry because a state of foreign minister informed Indonesia just a few minutes before the announcement. Though I don't know I don't know about the military, but the military, I think it's okay. Do it properly. Don't announce that your nuclear submarines will pass our waters. Like Nike, just do it. Don't talk too much.

**Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

Thank you very much, Pak Kornel. Lastly, Ambassador Pría, what do you think about the role of middle power in conflict resolution and maybe if you have any take on the role of AUKUS in Southeast Asia?

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**H.E. Melba Pría**

Let me go back to the conflict resolution question.

Middle powers or however you wanna call us, we are not middle powers, are vital for conflict resolutions. Mexico was vital in Central America. I hope as Doctor Evans says, that ASEAN will get its act together and that Rohingyas don't have to be marching everywhere with everything. It's a complicated world, and so conflict resolution is vital. And again, conflict resolution is based on cooperation, on trust, on building blocks to build, and that's what we want.

Now, very quickly on defense cooperation agreements. Defense cooperation agreements are to defend us. So again, it's us against the others. There is always a double sword in defense cooperation agreements. Depends on one side on which of the sides you are, on the ones that are signing or on the ones that think that you are signing because you will attack them or because you are afraid of them. Thank you.

**Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq**

Thank you very much, Ambassador Pría. Round of applause for all the speakers.

This has been a very interesting discussion. Thank you very much to all of the panelists for taking your time to participate in this really interesting forum and also for the audience for your active engagement as well as the Universitas Bakrie as the university partner of this session.

I believe that there are a lot of lessons that can be learned from this session especially for all of the young future leaders here. So thank you everyone.