

“Mongolia's Role in Regional Security”

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Mr. Chairman,

It gives me a great honor to participate in this conference that is focusing on the present and future security environment in two dynamically developing regions: Central Asia and East Asia. As Ambassador of Mongolia who is representing its country as Asian Partner of OSCE, I am happy to representatives of OSCE states that either were at the inception of the CSCE process or are now working to strengthen the OSCE and its role in European affairs in the three dimensions, namely in political-military, economic and environmental and human dimensions.

Introduction

The program of this conference allows the participants to focus on the experience of CSCE as a process, the role of neutral and non-aligned states of Europe (the so-called 9 N+N states) in that process, the challenges of security and confidence-building both in Central and East Asia, security cooperation in Asia through dialogue and a possible role of Mongolia or other smaller states in promoting regional security cooperation. This conference also coincides with the search for a security dialogue mechanism in North-East Asia, with the Six Party talks being perceived as one of the possible initial formats of such a regional mechanism.

Though the Central Asian countries are members of the OSCE, they are also working to further develop mutually beneficial regional and international cooperation as witnessed by the Organization of Central Asian Cooperation (OCAC), Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CA-NWFZ) and some other international processes.

Historical setting

Mongolia generally is both a Central Asian and Northeast Asian country. By its geographical location between two great powers (Russia and China), land-locked Mongolia's foreign policy has been closely linked to the their foreign policies as well as their relationship. The second half of the XX century is a vivid example thereof. Thus in 1950 Mongolia, a Soviet satellite state, found itself surrounded by a full-fledged security alliance between the Soviet Union and China. This alliance was based on convergence of

strategic interests of that time and ideological affinity on world communist movement and East-West “inherently antagonistic” relations. Isolated by geography and ideology from the rest of the world, Mongolia had no choice but to follow their line. A decade later ideological rift, followed by a territorial dispute between the two neighbors, forced it to side with one of them (with the stronger one, naturally) and to allow the latter to set up military bases in the heart of the country and near the border with the other neighbor. The 1966 treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union brought Mongolia under full Soviet “security umbrella”. Joint military exercises with the Soviet army at the peak of Sino-Soviet tension has shown the role that Mongolia was expected to play in possible Sino-Soviet confrontation.

Basic policy changes

Full normalization of Sino-Soviet relations at the end of 1980’s, the disintegration of the Soviet block and then later of the Soviet Union itself changed radically not only Mongolia’s immediate environment, but also international setting and politics. This, together with the democratic changes in the country itself, allowed Mongolia to review its external environment and define anew its security and foreign policies. A search for an alternative to ideologically based on military-political alliance resulted in the adoption in early 1990s of three seminal and inter-related documents: Concept of National Security of Mongolia, Concept of Mongolia’s Foreign Policy and the Basis of the State Military Policy of Mongolia. The country took a comprehensive approach to security. It recognized that ultimately the main guarantor of the national security are the Mongolian people itself and the State, and that security needed to be pursued primarily by political and legal means. The basis and *raison d’être* of security and foreign policies were to defend and promote the country’s clearly defined vital national interests.¹ Foreign policy was to be based on realism, the Charter of the United Nations and other principles and norms of international law.

Relations with the immediate neighbors

The realistic approach to foreign policy, naturally, meant that its top priority should be relations with its two immediate neighbors. Hence Mongolia declared that henceforth it would adhere to the principle of a balanced relationship with them, and that maintaining balance did not mean keeping equidistance between them or taking identical positions on all issues, but rather strengthening trust and developing all-round good-neighborly relations and cooperation with both of them. It also declared that when cooperating with them it would be mindful of their policies in regard to Mongolia’s interests, especially its vital interests. As to a possible dispute between the immediate neighbors, it was underlined that if such a dispute were to arise which did not affect its vital interests, Mongolia would pursue a policy of non-involvement and neutrality.

¹ The National Security Concept of Mongolia defined the vital national interests of Mongolia as consisting “in the existence of the Mongolia people and their civilization, in the country’s independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of State frontiers, relative economic independence, sustainable ecological development and national unity” (para. 3 of the Concept of National Security of Mongolia. Ulaanbaatar, 1995)

The normalization and improvement of Sino-Russian relations, and their agreement not to use territories of their third neighboring states to the detriment to each other's interests created a sound basis for a more stable relations in the region. On its part, when Mongolia concluded treaties of friendly relations and cooperation with Russia and China in early 1990s, it pledged not to allow other countries to use Mongolia's territory or airspace against the interests of its immediate neighbors. These commitments form the legal basis of Mongolia's policy of neutrality. As a concrete measure to promote further its policy of good-neighborliness, in 1992 Mongolia declared its territory a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ).

Needed counterweight to its neighbors

The realistic approach also meant that Mongolia needed to pursue an open foreign policy and acquire, as a counterweight to the overwhelming influence of Russia and China, as many friends and partners as possible. This cannot be limited to establishing only formal relations with other countries, or having formal membership in regional or international organizations which is the case. This policy meant creating realistic economic and political interests of other countries and international organizations in Mongolia, especially of major economic powers and blocks.

Pursuit of an active and constructive policy

In order to play a more constructive international role, Mongolia declared in early 1990s that it would refrain from joining any military alliance or grouping, allowing the use of its territory or air space against any other country, and would prohibit the stationing on its territory of foreign troops or weapons, including nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction or even parts of such systems.

Bearing in mind the imbalance in power compared to its neighbors Mongolia, naturally, is interested in joining regional cooperation fora and mechanisms. Thus since early 1990s it joined ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), World Trade Organization (WTO), Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and other regional and international fora. It has observer status with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and has expressed interest in joining the Northeast Asian Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD), the East Asian Community, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC). With respect to APEC, it is participating in some of its working groups, and with respect to PECC it has set up Mongolian National Committee for PECC (MONPECC) that is working with the national committees of PECC member states. Mongolia believes that regional fora provide the basis for mutually beneficial cooperation in addressing common issues and challenges of the globalizing world, and for smaller states, they dilute if not neutralize the overwhelming influence of greater powers.

On its part, to contribute to regional cooperation, Mongolia has also been making specific proposals. Thus in 2000 it called for a track-I security dialogue mechanism to discuss Northeast Asian issues. In 2006, bearing in mind the challenges of the land-locked developing countries, Mongolia proposed to establish an international think-tank that would help facilitate this group of countries to practically address their challenges as well as raise awareness of their inherent difficulties. Recently it has called for a Northeast Asian summit on climate change and is currently working to organize the summit this fall. Though it is not a party to the Six Party talks, it has hosted one of the bilateral meetings between DPRK and Japan, and expressed readiness to host the meeting of the working group on peace and security in Northeast Asia.

Nuclear-weapon-free policy

As mentioned above, in 1992 Mongolia declared its territory a NWFZ and announced that it would work for having that status internationally guaranteed.² Mongolia does not have nuclear-weapons capability, nor the intention to develop such weapons nor to be under a “nuclear umbrella” or allow the stationing of nuclear weapons or parts of a system of such weapons on its territory. This policy is both a manifestation of Mongolia’s commitment to nuclear non-proliferation as well as of its desire for neutrality and non-involvement in nuclear rivalries of not only Russia and China, but of all nuclear-weapon States. Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-free status policy enjoys the support of the international community and an item regarding this issue has since 1998 been inscribed on the agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations and is considered every second year.

The gist of the General Assembly resolution is to welcome Mongolia’s policy and invite member states to cooperate with Mongolia in strengthening its nuclear-weapon-free status (NWFS)³. At the same time the Assembly has since 1998 been endorsing Mongolia’s good-neighborly and balanced relations with its neighbors⁴ qualifying it as an important element of strengthening regional peace, security and stability.

In order to institutionalize its NWFS at the national level, in February 2000 the Mongolian parliament adopted a law defining the status and criminalizing any acts that violate that status⁵. In October of that year the five nuclear-weapon States made a joint statement providing political security assurances to Mongolia in connection with that status⁶. Mongolia welcomed that joint statement as an important step towards institutionalizing that status at the international level and declared that it would continue

² Statement of President P. Ochirbat in the general debate of the 47th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on 25 September 1992.

³ Thus operative para. 5 of UNGA resolution A/RES/61/87 entitled “Mongolia’s international security and nuclear-weapon-free status” reads as follows: “...5. Invites Member States to continue to cooperate with Mongolia in taking the necessary measures to consolidate and strengthen Mongolia’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, the inviolability of its borders, its independent foreign policy, its economic security and its ecological balance, as well as its nuclear-weapon-free status.”

⁴ Ibid. para. 3 of the resolution.

⁵ See document A/55/56-S/2000/160

⁶ See document A/55/530-S/2000/1052, annex

to work to properly institutionalize the status, including obtaining a legally-binding security assurances.⁷

To consider Mongolia's proposal to properly institutionalize the status, United Nations organized in Sapporo in 2001 an informal meeting of the representatives of the P5, Mongolia and the UN. Having considered Mongolia's arguments for institutionalization of the status, the meeting agreed that in order to do that Mongolia needed to conclude either a trilateral treaty with its two immediate neighbors or a "5 + 1 treaty" with all the P5. Content-wise it was suggested that the treaty could be either a rather simple one defining the status and providing security assurances or a comprehensive one that would cover a wide range of Mongolia-specific security threats, and contain extensive provisions in such areas as security assurances, testing of nuclear explosive devices, dumping of nuclear waste, ...and even non-military threats.⁸

Mongolia opted for the simplest approach and in 2002 presented to its immediate neighbors draft elements of a possible trilateral treaty, and in 2007 a draft treaty bearing in mind the comments of its neighbors provided to the draft elements. In March of this year the three parties held their first meeting in Geneva to discuss the draft treaty, namely to exchange views on the main provisions of the draft and on the possible format of the agreement so that it would not affect the existing commitments of Russia and China. The Geneva meeting proved useful for better understanding the views and position of each party on the issue.

Effect of institutionalization of the status

Institutionalization of Mongolia's special status in the form of a multilateral agreement with legally binding security assurances would tantamount to recognition by the international community, especially by its neighbors and other major powers, of its neutrality policy pursued since early 1990s. This neutrality policy, together with the support of its internationally recognized NWFS, when institutionalized, can be extended to other possible Russian and Chinese disputes as well as to their possible disputes with other great powers. It would be an example of conflict prevention and confidence-building. With its neutrality status internationally recognized, especially by its immediate neighbors, Mongolia would be in a position to play a more active role in regional cooperation. It could also set an example for some other smaller land-locked developing countries of Asia, such as Afghanistan or Nepal which have as immediate neighbors nuclear-weapon or nuclear-aspirant States, to pursue policies of non-alignment and neutrality that could benefit them, their neighbors, as well as predictability and stability in the region.

Asia has a tradition of supporting non-alignment and neutrality, as witnessed by the 1955 Bandung conference, by the co-founding of the Non-align movement or by the 1971 ASEAN declaration on turning the region into a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality (ZOPFAN). However, these policy statements need not only be recognized, but also

⁷ See document A/55/491-S/2000/994

⁸ See document A/57/59 of 20 March 2002

practically applied. Mongolia is trying to play such a role through its policy of non-involvement in great power disputes and its nuclear-weapon-free policy.

Some concluding thoughts

Compared to the CSCE process of the 1970s, Asia is only now trying to see if the experience and lessons of that successful process could somehow be useful for Asia. It is too early to say whether a neutral and non-aligned group would emerge to allow it to play an active and positive role in regional cooperation as the group of 9 N+N states did in 1970s in Europe. Formal recognition of Mongolia's neutrality policy could prove useful for regional cooperation, such as the CICA or the Six Party talks. Thus in the case of CICA, which includes members of OSCE and of various Asian fora and processes, could lead to the formation of a group consisting of both formally recognized and de facto neutral and non-aligned countries, as it was the case with the 9 N+N states in 1970s that proved very useful. This conference, I am sure, would be useful for its participants to learn more about the CSCE experience, exchange views on whether or how that experience could be useful for promoting security cooperation on the vast Asian continent, and how the present and emerging regional mechanisms could be used for that purpose.