

Talking points of Amb. J. Enkhsaikhan on “Conflict Prevention and Mongolian Policy” at opening Ceremony of the EPU Summer Program 2009

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Introductory words

It is a great pleasure to have been invited to this opening ceremony of EPU summer program to spend an evening with you all in this beautiful and historic part of Austria.

EPU is a well-known international non-governmental organization with a status at UNESCO. I still remember the Schlaining Manifesto of 9 international NGOs in support of peace and nuclear disarmament adopted on 15 June 1997 here at Schlaining. That was an important message from Europe. These organizations included IALANA, INESAP, IPPNW, IPB, PENN and others. They focused on NATO’s nuclear future, the need for US to withdraw their nuclear weapons from Europe, the need for establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZ) in the OSCE region, especially in North and Central Europe as well as in Central Asia. In connection with the latter it called for negotiations with Mongolia to allow it to join future Central Asian NWFZ.

This evening I have been asked to speak briefly about conflict prevention and Mongolian policy.

Notion of prevention

What is prevention ? In simple words prevention means an action or actions taken to stop somebody from doing something or to stop something from happening. In terms of international relations, preventive diplomacy can save lives and avoid destruction and misery. According to a Carnegie Commission study, out of over 200 conflicts in 1990s the international community spent around \$ 200 billion for humanitarian assistance rendered to the seven major interventions.¹ That is only one side of the financial cost of failure of prevention. One can imagine how this sum could have been productively spent to bring an end to hunger, malnutrition, reduce poverty and illiteracy, provide decent education and medical service.

According to United Nations Charter, conflict prevention is one of the primary obligations of its member States. The role of the United Nations and its relevant bodies is to support the nations in their efforts and policies of prevention.

The basic rules of prevention are:

¹ Bosnia & Herzegovina, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, the Persian Gulf, Cambodia and El Salvador (i.e. not including Kosovo or East Timor).

- Address the deep root-causes that lead to conflicts. Conflicts do not necessarily have to be international. In many cases they are rooted in history or the prevailing order or policy in a given country;
- In order to be most effective, preventive action need to be initiated at the earliest possible stage of a conflict cycle. The earlier the root-causes of potential conflict are identified and effectively addressed, the more likely it is that the parties to a potential conflict will be ready to engage in a constructive dialogue and to negotiate;
- The costs of prevention have to be paid in the present, while its benefits lie in the distant future.

Preventive diplomacy is an action to avert disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter if or when they occur.

Compared to other regions of the world, Europe is quite ahead in conflict prevention. I consider the Helsinki process was a quite successful regional measure of conflict prevention. The policies of medium size countries such as Switzerland, Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and some other counties could be considered as successful measures of conflict prevention. They played an important and active role in the Helsinki process, in its successful outcome.

As I have pointed out, conflict prevention is one of the primary obligations of all States, big and small alike. Now after having spoken in general terms about conflict prevention, I would like to highlight the important role that small States can play in conflict prevention, since it is usually these small States that become victims of conflicts.

Mongolia's past experience

Mongolia is a small country in terms of population, economy and influence in international relations. It has a population of 2.6 mln. and a territory of 1.5 mln sq. kms. It has an economy of \$ 2.5 bln. It is even a smaller country if compared to its only two neighbors : Russia and China.

The XIX and XX century history of Mongolia has been a history of struggle of Mongolia to reassert its independence and to survive as a sovereign, independent nation-State. Throughout the first half of the XX century it struggled to regain its lost independence and establish normal relations with its neighbors and other countries. In the second half of the XX century it suffered under two cold wars: East West and Sino-Soviet. By 1969 the Sino-Soviet dispute brought them on the verge of a hot war, when border skirmishes led to death and loss of hundreds of people, with both sides preparing for worse.

The Soviet Union, which had military bases in Mongolia, was contemplating a preventive strike against nuclear installations of China in the fear that at a later stage it might get too strong to deal with. It turned to the U.S. for its possible reaction to such preemptive strike. At that time U.S. was thinking of establishing diplomatic relations with China and

therefore did not support such a Soviet adventure. Thus Mongolia, being sandwiched between Soviet Union and China, and hosting Soviet bases on its territory, was spared the tragedy of becoming direct participant and thus victim of the conflict, which could have as well been a nuclear one.

This episode demonstrated that Mongolia needed to have a policy that would preclude recurrence of such a dangerous situation. It showed the need for preventive diplomacy and effective follow-up action.

Mongolia's policy of conflict prevention

In 1989 the cold war ended. First the Soviet block and then the Soviet Union itself disintegrated. In 1992 Russia withdrew all its troops from Mongolia and closed its the military bases there.

Mongolia has no territorial nor border claims or problems with its neighbors. Therefore it has not reason to quarrel with anyone of them. However, there is a risk that they might at some stage be tempted to use Mongolia's territory for their own military or some other geo-political purposes, not necessarily connected with Mongolia.

In order to prevent repetition of the dangerous situation in which Mongolia found itself at the end of 1960s and in 1970s, it proclaimed a policy of balanced relations with Russia and China, and that it would not allow any country to use Mongolian territory against the interests of others, including of China and Russia. This policy of Mongolia found understanding and support in both of its neighbors since in 1989 they have committed not to use the territories of their neighboring third countries against the interests of each other.

Based on this convergence of interests, in September 1992 President of Mongolia went to the United Nations General Assembly and proclaimed Mongolia a nuclear-weapon-free zone, saying that it did not have nuclear weapons or parts of such weapons on its territory and would not allow to base such weapons or parts of such systems (i.e. missiles, radars and other equipment) on its territory. In 1994 this policy formed the basis of its broader national security policy.

As we all know, declaration of intention is an important confidence-building measure. However international relations cannot be based on declarations and good intentions. In order to be effective these declarations need to acquire the force of law, become commitments that can be followed-up and, if need be, verified.

In order to materialize its policy of neutrality in future Sino-Russian disputes and turn its territory into a viable NWFZ, Mongolia has consistently been working to formalize and institutionalize the status. Though the five nuclear-weapon States (the so-called P-5) have welcomed Mongolia's nuclear-weapon-free policy in general, they were reluctant to fully recognize such a policy since that, in their view, could set a precedent for other countries, such as Nepal or even Japan to declare its territory a NWFZ which might complicate their

strategic plans or alliances, including the so-called nuclear umbrellas or extended deterrence.

However, when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted in 1998 a resolution on Mongolia's international security and its nuclear-weapon-free status, and when in 2000 Mongolia itself adopted a national legislation on this issue, the P-5 made a joint statement providing security assurances to Mongolia. Knowing well that declarations and statements are not reliable commitments, Mongolia is now working to institutionalize its status, and get commitments from its two immediate neighbors. After some time of hesitance, our two neighbors have agreed to set down with Mongolia and discuss the issue of institutionalization of Mongolia's status.

We believe that such a status, whereby Mongolia would not allow its territory to be used against interests of other States (unlike the case of placing of missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland), and whereby our two neighbors would also commit not to take any action that would interfere with Mongolian affairs, would be a good example of conflict prevention.

Mongolia's case is already being recognized as a successful case of preventive diplomacy. This shows that every state, even small ones, can make their contributions of preventive diplomacy and avoid being used as an object of or pretext for intervention.

One may ask, is Mongolia's example relevant for others? No one is expected to copy our example. However, if we take the example of Afghanistan, we would see that it might help of Afghanistan start thinking about Afghanistan's future place and role in the region. Like Mongolia, it is a land-locked state whose economic relations to a certain degree depends on the relations with its neighbors. Perhaps Afghanistan could declare and follow a balanced policy of neutrality with regard to its neighbors. Perhaps it could declare that its territory would not be used against legitimate interests of its neighbors. Being surrounded by nuclear and near nuclear or aspiring states, it could declare, like Mongolia, its territory off limits to nuclear weapons or weapons systems. These policies, followed-up by agreement with and among the neighbors could be an important preventive diplomacy that can benefit not only Afghanistan but its neighbors, and the region as a whole.