

MONGOLIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD NORTH KOREA SINCE 1990: FROM IDEOLOGICAL PARTNERSHIP TO CONSTRAINED CORDIALITY

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Introduction

Mongolia's policy on the Korean peninsula especially towards North Korea is an important component of its foreign policy toward Northeast Asia. Both countries have been successfully developing their relations in all fields since Mongolia established diplomatic relations with North Korea in 1948. Both Mongolia and North Korea are small countries in NEA. Even though these two countries pursue different ways of development they have same problems. Their policies of development and security depends on policies and activities of their giant neighbors.

It is very significant that if we find out the assessment of policies towards North Korea it would enable in determining the means of Mongolia's contribution to the regional cooperation on disputed issues of Northeast Asia. The propose of this paper will address interpretations of Mongolia's policy toward North Korea since 1990s.

The end of the Cold War opened up favourable environment for Mongolia's external security and foreign policy. Mongolia has begun to pursue a multi pillar, open, and balanced foreign policy guided by its national interests since Mongolia did successful transition from communism to democracy. These new trends gave widen opportunity to develop its relations with western and eastern developed countries. Even though Mongolia could develop deep relations with western and eastern developed countries, but in some way, period of stagnation is created when Mongolia developed its relations with previous friendly relation's countries.

Also the paper will address Mongolia's choice of foreign policy option. Mongolia faced to choose options such as old allies as "burden" in new goals of political and economic development and old friends as "complement" to nascent multilateral relations while Mongolia pursues new way of foreign policy.

North Korea's nuclear issues does not directly threaten Mongolia's security but it has some potential to destabilize its security. In order to provide its security through diplomatic ties, Mongolia should develop closer relations with North Korea and reevaluate its policy toward North Korea. On the other hand, Mongolia always seeks to create its participation in regional multilateral mechanism for stabilizing security. Due to last vestige of the Cold War, actors of region have not had any desire to established permanent regional mechanism. In order to solve burning flames in certain situation, these actors have used temporary meetings and dialogues. It has become one reason that Mongolia stays out of meetings and dialogues for determining North Korea's issue.

Shifts in foreign policy: Steps of relations Mongolia-North Korea

Change of a political regime in many countries entails shifts in the guiding principles of foreign policy. Although often represented by the most dramatic tectonic shifts in the late 20th century, the end of the Cold War, this phenomenon is not confined to post-Cold war world only. On many occasions political change results in the deconstruction of hitherto predominant ideological system. This deconstruction causes the dismantling of the foreign policy principles and embarks upon search and foundation of new principles. In this regard, the change in the foreign policy directions Mongolia undertook in the early 1990s can be defined as “post-ideology.”

Explanations on foreign policy are different from each other because of causal factors to define foreign policy. If we analyze Mongolian foreign policy toward North Korea since 1990 we can see following steps. Of course, shifts in the guiding principles of foreign policy are influenced by these steps.

- a. New environment and new way: Changes of existing principles of foreign policy
- b. Termination of existing alliances and stagnation of partnerships: Mongolia and North Korea’s relations from friendship to estrangement
- c. Turning point: Seeking “raison d’etre” for maintaining old relations vs. denunciation of previous relations:
 1. “Amity Shift” pattern: Curtailing ties with former ideological partners; old allies as “burden” in new goals of political and economic development.
 2. “Balanced Cordiality” pattern: Maintaining established partnerships while seeking new opportunities; old friends as “complement” to nascent multilateral relations
- d. Reassessment of choices between “Amity Shift” vs. “Balanced Cordiality” patterns of foreign policy
- e. Stabilization of chosen pattern as long-term principle of foreign policy: engagement policy as Mongolia’s policy option

FIRST STAGE. New Environment and New Way: Changes of Existing Principles of Foreign Policy of Mongolia

There are many factors that can influence policy changes. Goldstein and Keohane argue that policy changes can be influenced by ideas both because new ideas emerge and as a result of changes in underlying conditions affecting the impact of existing ideas¹. At the beginning of 1990s, new wind for creating environment that was favorable for foreign policy of Mongolia started blowing. On the one hand, externally, the collapse of the Soviet Union, disintegration of the world socialist system and the warming of bilateral relations between Russia and China has changed the external situation of Mongolia. On the other hand, domestically, the restructuring and reforming of the politics in all fields provide to Mongolia positive conditions for pursuing a foreign policy that guided by realism and national interests.

¹ Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework, in Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (ed.), Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change, Cornell University Press, 1993, p-30

Because of wind pressures in external and internal environment, existing principles of foreign policy of Mongolia could be transformed fastly.

Within short time, Mongolian government made a decision which could bring new direction of its foreign policy in the following years. According to its new Constitution which was adopted by Great Hural in 1992, "Mongolia shall adhere to the universally recognized norms and principles of international law and pursue a peaceful foreign policy"². Furthermore, the basic documents of foreign policy such as the Concept on National Security and the Concept on Foreign Policy were adopted by Parliament. In these documents, Mongolia has declared its foreign policy would be free from ideological factors and it would be guided by its vital national interests³. In other words, independent, multi pillar, open, and balanced foreign policy has begun principles of Mongolia's foreign policy. For examples, in that time, Mongolian government was seeking the way for establishing diplomatic relations with eastern and western countries that were ideological enemy in bipolar era. Of course, at the first time, the making of appropriate decision for national interests was not easy. Assessment on the Post-Cold War environment was the most important factor to overcome the facing challenges. Even Mongolian former ideological partner, North Korea blamed action of Mongolia to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea. But, by the result of new foreign policy strategy, Mongolia became first Asian socialist country which could establish diplomatic relations with South Korea.

SECOND STAGE. Termination of existing alliances and stagnation of partnership: Mongolia and North Korea's relations from Friendship to Estrangement

Mongolia tried to change its guiding principles of foreign policy in order to adjust its policy with international changes. But it faced some problem with former ideological partnership. After changing political regime in the 1990s, some former ideological partner of Mongolia did not gratefully accept its choosing for new way of the development policy. One of ideological partners of Mongolia, North Korea persuaded Mongolia to prevent establishing its relations with North Korean enemies. North Korean side expressed its opinion on establishing diplomatic relation between Mongolia and South Korea during the press conference that was held at Embassy of North Korea in Mongolia in January, 1990. When they expressed their opinion they tried to condemn that in order to overcome current economic barriers, some socialist countries have established diplomatic relations with South Korea. Also North Korean side was wondered how they reject their friends for small profits⁴.

After Mongolia established diplomatic relations with South Korea, authorities of the North Korea frankly denied steps of Mongolia's policy⁵. Of course, in order to provide new policy of development, decisions in foreign policy was not easy to Mongolia's government. In his book *Mongolia's Foreign Policy in the 1990's: New Identity and New Challenges*, Tsedendamba Batbayar mentioned that the rethinking of policies was one of the most pressing political and intellectual challenges facing the post-Communist government⁶. Even, challenges facing to government's decisions, Mongolia could stay implementing independent

² "Mongol Ulsyn Undsen Huuli," (The Constitution of Mongolia) Ardyn Erh, January 14, 1992

³ The concept of Foreign Policy, at

http://www.embassyofmongolia.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=59&Itemid=76&lang=en, (accessed August 10, 2012)

⁴ Ulambayar.D, Mongol Uls Ikh Khan ulstai diplomat khariltsaa togtooson ni, " *Journal of Tusgaar togtuol*" No3(13), 2010, U'ndesnii tagnuulyn akademyn sudalgaa erdem shinjilgeenii tu'v, ISSN 2218-0354, p-67

⁵ Ibid p-74

⁶ Batbayar, Tsedendamba; *Mongolia's Foreign Policy in the 1990's: New Identity and New Challenges*, " *Regional Security Issues and Mongolia*", No17, Ulaanbaatar, 2002

and balanced foreign policy which was based on its vital interests. In other words, Mongolia has tried to keep its friendly relations with North Korea, and develop its relations with new partner.

In the early 1990s successful transition from communism to democracy in Mongolia, especially reforms on domestic politics, and foreign policy changes on warming closely relations with South Korea had influenced in bilateral relations with North Korea. At that time relations between Mongolia and North Korea entered into a period of stagnation. According to newly adopted Concept on Foreign policy, Mongolia has given specific importance to some east and west high developed countries in order to create and bring their economic interests in Mongolia. One of them was South Korea. On the other hand, North Korea was not mentioned in Mongolia's foreign policy list but it was included only direction in Asian region. The period of stagnation between two countries had two kinds of causes. On the one hand, Mongolia has pursued different way of development which was based on democratic principles including strengthen national values and respect human rights. On the other hand, after losing its ideological friends in communist family North Korea has pursued isolated policy based on Juche.

THIRD STAGE. Turning point: Seeking "raison d'être" for maintaining old relations vs. denunciation of previous relations:

At a stage Mongolia faced a certain "turning point" – choice between completely abandoning the vestiges of old ideological partnerships or revitalizing them without making strong commitments to political systems or ideology. Mainly, this kind of choice might be driven both by necessity to maintain strong economic ties and/or by mere willingness to preserve the positive baggage of historical ties. Consequently, this step will be divided into two parts.

1. "Amity Shift" pattern: Curtailing ties with former ideological partners; old allies as "burden" in new goals of political and economic development.
2. "Balanced Cordiality" pattern: Maintaining established partnerships while seeking new opportunities; old friends as "complement" to nascent multilateral relations

1. "Amity Shift" pattern: Curtailing ties with former ideological partners; old allies as "burden" in new goals of political and economic development.

After changing its regime, post-communist government of Mongolia faced some challenges to implement its policy for reform. Mongolian politicians are divided into two parts. Some of them saw that North Korea as "burden" in new goals of political and economic development. Others saw that North Korea would be "complement" to nascent multilateral relations. Even though, they had different idea from each other to develop and keep its relations with Korea Mongolia could stayed direction in rational foreign policy. Because interest group influence on foreign policy is slight⁷.

Pyongyang Declaration which entitled "Let Us Defend and Advance the Socialist cause was a declaration signed by on the occasion of the 80th birthday of Kim Il Sung in April 1992. Delegation of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party signed this declaration.

⁷ Milbrath, Lester W, 'Interest Groups and Foreign Policy', in *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy*, Rosenau (Ed.), Toronto, The MacMillan Company, 1967 p-251

Of course, the Declaration on defending and advancing the socialist society was not supported by other parties. They severely criticized this action of revolutionary party.

Compare to previous system period, political and economical cooperation between two countries is decreased by some factors such as economic crisis in domestic and reform to strengthen politics. Different way of development was pursued by two countries. But Mongolia tried to maintain warmly relations with North Korea. Because policy on old allies as “burden” in new goals of political and economic development was not direction and objectives of Mongolia’s foreign policy. Its foreign policy always exists equal, respectful, and balanced that based on national interests. Consequently, Mongolia’s foreign policy toward North Korea focused on within this framework.

On the other hand, Mongolia is perceived by Pyongyang as Northeast Asia’s only non-treatening nation. North Koreans proclaimed the Mongolians their “only true friends” in Northeast Asia⁸. Positive perceptions on maintaining their relations of both sides gave favorable condition to see each other old friends as “not burden” in goals of political and economic development.

2. “Balanced Cordiality” pattern: Maintaining established partnerships while seeking new opportunities; old friends as “complement” to nascent multilateral relations

Due to its distinctive geopolitical location, Mongolia has not yet become full member of regional multilateral mechanism. Mongolia has been supporting and promoting any policy and mechanism aimed at strengthening peace and stability in these region since Mongolia pursued multi-pillar foreign policy. Mongolia sees that multilateral cooperation on regional security and economic development is important tool for maintaining and strengthening peaceful region. Unfortunately, because of misunderstanding all parties of region, multilateral permanent mechanism for regional stability and development has not yet built. Some initiatives and proposals were taken by some countries of region. Their initiatives were not achieved.

While seeking new opportunities for development Mongolia’s policy is laid down old friends as “complement” to nascent multilateral relations. Mongolia is one of the few countries that has diplomatic ties with both Koreas and does not have any problem and disputed issues with NEA countries. So, in order to engage North Korea in nascent multilateral relations Mongolia has expressed its possible role. Tsahiagyn Elbegdorj, then Prime Minister, mentioned his interview “he believes that Mongolia’s experience is very much transferable to North Korea, and we can become a kind of transition consultant to them”. North Koreans listen to us because we’re not Western people trying to teach them “the Western” way of life⁹. Mongolia seeks to continue its cooperation based on positive historical ties with North Korea.

FOURTH STAGE. Reassessment of choices between “Amity Shift” vs. “Balanced Cordiality” patterns of foreign policy:

This step can be taken from the standpoint of economic and political effectiveness of the choice of a particular policy pattern. So, in order to maintain its national interests through diplomatic ties, reassessment of choices between “Amity Shift” and “Balanced Cordiality” was important for Mongolia. Because of imbalanced foreign policy Mongolia learnt sufficient

⁸ Stephen Noerper, Mongolia Matters, Brookings Northeast Asia Commentary, Number12, <http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2007/10mongolia.aspx> Accessed August, 18, 2010

⁹ Pressuring North Korea Through... Mongolia?, at <http://www.publiuspundit.com/?p=1217>, (accessed August 1, 2012)

lessons from the historical experience. As a result, Mongolia has followed balanced foreign policy which mentioned its main documents on foreign policy.

Mostly, the process of foreign policy changes reflects the attempts of states to transform system in order to advance their interests. Princeton University professor Robert Gilpin argues that “states make benefit calculations in the determination of foreign policy and that goal of a state’s foreign policy is to change the international system in ways that will enhance the state’s own interests”¹⁰. From here we can see every state pursues foreign policy to make benefits from its relations. If foreign policy is instrument for making benefits old allies would not be “burden” in new goals of political and economic development. In order to strengthen its relations with all states of the world and to increase its role not only in region but also in the international arena, Mongolia has laid the principle based on equal and respectful relations with all states.

Mongolia is landlocked country between the big powers such as Russia and China which have a nuclear power but also permanent members of the UN Security Council. If Mongolia keeps its balanced and warm relations with North Korea it would be possible for Mongolia to use North Korea’s ports which would be gateway for shipping Mongolia’s resources to world market. On the other hand, politically, Mongolia has been supporting and initiating dialogues and meetings to create regional multilateral security mechanism since Mongolia reformed its existing principles of foreign policy. Briefly, engaging North Korea is Mongolia’s policy choice to provide regional security by peaceful way.

Above mentioned issues influenced Mongolia’s reassessment of choices for balanced policy.

FIFTH STAGE. Stabilization of chosen pattern as long-term principle of foreign policy: engagement policy as Mongolia’s policy options

At the end of 1990s, relations between Mongolia and North Korea passed up and down period and stabilized their relations. In order to pursue its foreign policy based on the continuity of a multi-pillar, and open policy Mongolia’s policy strategy strengthening its ties with North Korea has mainly focused on maintaining balanced friendly relation and engaging in the regional multilateral processes of security cooperation and economic integration. Batchimeg illustrates that for Pyongyang, engagement may serve as an instrument for reducing uncertainty through dialogues and exchanges, so that some tensions caused by its security dilemma may be reduced.¹¹ There are many different types of engagement exist. The developing bilateral cooperation is one type of strategy for engagement. In order to build confidence Mongolia has tried to exchange views in high level representatives of North Korea.

Richard Haas and Meghan O’Sullivan describe engagement as ‘a foreign policy strategy that depends to a significant degree on positive incentives to achieve its objectives’¹². Isolated North Korea from rest of world would be harmful for enhancing the stability in the region. As a result, Mongolia has been supporting to engaging North Korea in the regional multilateral processes since it started initiating dialogues and negotiations on the issues of

¹⁰ Gilpin, Robert, *War and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge. University Press, 1981 p-50

¹¹ Batchimeg, Migeedorj, *Engaging North Korea: Mongolia’s DPRK Policy*, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (March/April 2006), p-289; *“Regional Security Issues and Mongolia”*, Volume 28, The Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006, p-28

¹² Richard N. Haas and Meghan L. O’Sullivan, *Terms of Engagement: Alternatives to Punitive Policies*, *Survival* 42, No2, Summer 2000, p-113-114

strengthening regional security and creating a collective security mechanism. Because Mongolia views that keeping stability on the Korean Peninsula would create a favourable security condition for regional countries. Mongolian some diplomates views that in order not to allow be more isolated nation, engaging North Korea in all possible bilateral and regional dialogues should be taken¹³. Other diplomat Batbayar views that engaging the North Korea in the regional multilateral processes is an important step for regional stability¹⁴

Within in framework of engagement policy toward North Korea, Mongolia has taken several initiatives to create dialogue mechanism and supported some policy for peaceful reunification. In 2000, L.Erdenechuluun, Foreign Minister of Mongolia made a statement in the general debate of the 55th session of the United Nations General Assembly. In his statement, he noted that in Northeast Asia, the time may have come to start thinking about the possibility of engaging in a dialogue starting from a free exchange of views on the framework of these discussions. Also he views that security issues in region could be discussed collectively at the governmental level¹⁵. Since this time President and Prime Minister of Mongolia have been taking the initiatives to establish dialogue mechanism for regional security and economic cooperation. Tsahiagiin Elbegdorj, President of Mongolia sent his support message to the participants attending Ulaanbaatar Forum of the East Asian countries. In his message, he noted that it will be a major base for developing economic integration and build a mutual understanding among the Nations if multilateral cooperation mechanism are built in this region¹⁶.

Mongolia seeks to act as a mediator to solve disputed issues on the Korean Peninsula when it is necessary. Unfortunately, its goal has not yet to be actualized till now. But Mongolia keeps its position to become a mediator between the opposing parties.

If we summarize Mongolia's engagement policy toward North Korea we can see following basic lines from its policy.

1. Develop deep bilateral relations with North Korea. It helps to strengthen confidence among Nations.
2. Help more open and cooperative nation. Mongolia sees that if engagement policy is continued it would be helpful for North Korea to be cooperative nation.
3. Keep stability in the region. Engaging North Korea in regional multilateral dialogues is main instrument for regional stability.
4. Increase its role in the region. Mongolia gives specific importance to NEA, especially Korean Peninsula. Mongolia's initiatives for the regional security and economic cooperation would be important instrument to increase its role in region.

Conclusion

¹³ Badral Suren, Prospects for Political and Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia, The 5th Symposium on Northeast Asian Security, Regional Security Issues and Mongolia, No15, The Institute for Strategic Studies, Ulaanbaatar, 2002 p-19

¹⁴ Batbayar, Tsedendamba; Mongolia's Foreign Policy in the 1990's: New Identity and New Challenges, "*Regional Security Issues and Mongolia*", No17, Ulaanbaatar, 2002 p-206

¹⁵ Statement by H.E. Mr. L.Erdenechuluun, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia in the General Debate of the 55th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 21 September 2000, <http://www.un.int/mongolia/Archives/2000/gendeb55.htm> , (accessed August 14, 2012)

¹⁶ Зүүн Азийн Улаанбаатарын чуулга уулзалт дээр Монгол Улсын Ерөнхийлөгч Ц.Элбэгдоржийн илгээсэн илгээлт (President Tsahiagiin Elbegdorj of Mongolia sent his message to the participants of Ulaanbaatar Forum of the East Asian countries) <http://www.president.mn/mongolian/node/132>

Changes in external and internal environment of Mongolia influenced to Mongolia to pursue foreign policy based on national interests. These fundamental changes brought to Mongolia to seek new way of the development policy on political and economic reform. In order to provide its new goal of development its existing principles of foreign policy was formulated in balanced and multipillar. According to new principles of foreign policy, Mongolia's policy toward North Korea focuses on maintaining its relations bilateral level in balanced principle, and engaging North Korea in regional multilateral processes.

Without North Korea's participation, regional security issues could not resolved. Engaging North Korea at negotiation table and regional events will be important policy of Mongolian government. Thus, the strengthening bilateral ties of Mongolia and North Korea gives Mongolia some kind of prospects to build its participation in regional meetings and to provide its security through political and diplomatic ties. In this context, Mongolia demonstrates itself as one possible actor to be trustful partner of North Korea and acceptable player to invite North Korea at negotiation table.

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