

INTERNATIONAL POSITION OF MONGOLIA: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Buyantyn Dashtseren

Mongolia's geographical location and geopolitical situation have always been a significant factor throughout its history and attracted the attention not only of its immediate neighbors but also other major powers.

The international position of Mongolia has been the subject of studies and evaluation from different aspects.

In dealing with this subject I would like to divide the foreign policy developments of the country into four periods: First, the foreign policy of the period of the Mongolian Empire; second, struggle for independence and its recognition; third, foreign policy of socialist Mongolia; fourth, foreign policy of the new democratic Mongolia.

With the emergence of the United Mongolian state and especially during the Mongolian Empire built by Chinggis Khan in the thirteenth century, the external environment of the country has drastically changed. The Mongolian Empire stretching from the Pacific to Asia Minor, from Siberia to the Indian sub-continent, established extensive cultural, economic and political relations with the then known countries of the world. The country did not depend on others' policy and mercy any longer; on the contrary, it dictated its own policy to others. None of the problems characteristic of the later periods existed at that time, in other words, during the period of the Mongolian Empire the Mongols enjoyed the best external environment and the advantage of a big power.

The second period has been characterized by the collapse of the Empire, the subsequent conquest by the Manchus and loss of independence. The main foreign policy objective of this period was the restoration of the national independence and attainment of its recognition by the world community, by the neighbors in particular. As a result of the national liberation struggle in 1911 Mongols overthrew the two hundred-year old Manchu rule and proclaimed independence, but failed to attain its recognition by the two immediate neighbors—Russia and China. China claimed the whole of the country, still considering it as a part of China. Russia did not want to lose its control and dominant position in Mongolia. Russia and China were categorically against the recognition of Outer Mongolia and its demand for the unification of the Mongols in Inner Mongolia and other adjacent areas.

Sino-Russian relations, their rivalry have been always the key factors that influenced Mongolia's international position and internal development. Landlocked Mongolia, entirely surrounded by Russia and China, has 7378 km boundaries of which 4373 km are with China and 3005 km with Russia. Both Russia and China had the same political, economic and strategic interests in Mongolia.

Mongolia being a buffer state between them removed their direct confrontation, and in case of a conflict Mongolian alliance would play an important role. The Mongols in the phase of Chinese aggression always sought the assistance of Russia that has been often used by the latter in their selfish interests. The following statement of the Tsarist Russian government was very characteristics of the Russian attitude toward Mongolian issue. The special committee dealing with Mongolian affairs in 1911 stated: "The Mongolian question is for us of great importance and support of the Mongols in their desire to counteract the military activities of the Chinese government would fully correspond with our interest." However, a little later pointed out that it was not in Russia interest to assist the Mongols to separate from China owing to the prevailing political situation.

Mongolia's efforts for the attainment of the recognition of its independence by other states remained futile. The Russian government not only rejected Mongolia's appeal for the recognition of its independence but also in all possible ways prevented Mongolia from entering into contacts with other foreign powers.

Visit by the Prime Minister to European countries and dispatch of a special delegation to Japan could not take place (beyond St. Petersburg and Beijing) because of the obstacles on the part of Russia and China. The notes sent to all the diplomatic representatives in Petersburg in which the Mongolian government proposed to establish diplomatic relations, were left without answer. Japan had a secret treaty with Russia signed in 1907 by which it had recognized the special interests of Russia in Mongolia and undertook to refrain from any interference that might prejudice those interests. In return the Japanese received from Russia the assurance that it would not interfere with Japanese interests in Korea. France was bound with Russia with reality of alliance, and supported all "legitimate" Russian rights and interests in Northern China, Mongolia and Manchuria. Great Britain upheld a policy, if it recognized Mongolia as a Russian sphere of influence; Russia would renounce all its claims in Tibet. Besides, the British were aware that after young husband's expeditionary force entered Tibet the Dalai Lama found refuge in Outer Mongolia and were much concerned over the conclusion of a treaty of alliance between Mongolia and Tibet 1913. Though

Germany and USA were not bound by any agreements with Russia, they were reluctant to respond to the appeal of Mongolia, which they considered as a part of China.

After long protracted talks, machinations and threats on the part of Russia and China, the so-called Tripartite Agreement (China, Russia, Mongolia) was signed hi 1915 hi the frontier town Kiahta, by which Russia and China imposed on Mongolia an autonomy instead of recognizing its independence. Thus Mongolia was given a colonial status—Chinese sovereignty and Russian protectorate.

With the emergence of the People's Republic in Mongolia as a result of the People's Revolution of 1921 and the liberation of the country from the occupation by the Chinese militarists and White Russian invaders, the directions of internal development and foreign policy radically changed.

Soviet Russia was the first to recognize the independence of the country and establish diplomatic relations, having declared all the Tsarist treaties imposed upon Mongolia void and null. We cannot help but recognize Soviet aid in the building of a new society hi Mongolia, especially hi the social, cultural and economic fields.

We are also aware that the aid and support of Soviet Russia were chiefly motivated by its own interests. It was important for them to demonstrate to the whole world the advantages of the socialist order hi their attempts to export revolution and, first and foremost, to have a comparatively strong ally whose strategic position was most important.

The American Professor Owen Lather, the best authority on Mongolia matters, wrote: "There is a definite continuity between the policy hi Tsarist times and hi Soviet times. The Tsarist policy was not to annex or absorb Mongolia. There were interests hi Tsarist Russia which would have liked to exploit Mongolia but on the whole the Tsarist policy was to maintain Mongolia as a buffer hi the most old-fashioned sense of the word. The clearest indications that we have of Soviet policy also point to the use of Mongolia as a buffer."

Despite the official recognition and the establishment of "fraternal" relations with Mongolia the very same Soviet Russia recognized Chinese sovereignty over the Mongolian People's Republic considered Mongolia as a part of China by the agreement signed between the Chinese Republic and the USSR in 1924.

After Japan's occupation of Manchuria in 1931 and the creation of the Japanese-controlled "Manchukuo" in the immediate neighborhood of Mongolia, border incidents became frequent which were regarded by the Soviets not only as a threat to the security of the Mongolian People's Republic but also to their

own security.

In this connection the so-called Tanaka Memorandum has been often referred to. The Japanese Prime Minister, General Gichi Tanaka, was said to have submitted to the emperor in 1927 a memorandum in which he, among other things, had proposed to seize Manchuria, then Mongolia in order to invade Russia. The Japanese have rejected this allegation as a “forgery from beginning to end”. The authenticity of this document remains questionable until now.

Actually, the Russians were more worried by a possible rapprochement between Mongolia and Japan than the minor border incidents. There were indeed some attempts of entering into official relations on both sides.

In view of the repeated border incidents and provocations from Manchaca, a protocol of mutual assistance was signed between the MPR and USSR in 1936. On the basis of this agreement under pressure from Soviet leaders the Mongolian government asked for military assistance from the Soviet Union.

The Soviet-Mongolian protocol of mutual assistance was first implemented by the Russians during the battle in the Mongolian Manchurian border area of Khalkhyn Golf in 1939, which ended with the defeat of the Japanese army by the joint Soviet-Mongolian forces under the command of Brigadier General Zhukov, who later became the famous Marshal and World War hero.

This was actually a War waged on Mongolian soil by two rival powers to secure their strategic positions. In 1945 Mongolia true to its obligations undertaken by the renewed treaty of friendship and Mutual assistance with the USSR, Mongolia entered the war against Japan.

Marshal Choibalsan, the then Prime Minister of Mongolia, took this opportunity to set forth the long cherished task to liberate Inner Mongolia not only from the Japanese but also from Chinese rule and unite it with the Mongolian People’s Republic. But this centuries-old desire for unification was not destined to become true. The leaders of the great powers, Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt and Josef Stalin, in the spring of 1945 at Yalta in the Crimea had agreed to preserve the status go of Mongolia. According to this agreement Mongolia’s international status remained the same as before.

The Chinese policy toward Mongolia did not differ much from the period of the Manchu rule. Be it democrat, revolutionary Dr. Sun Yat-sen, or dictator Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, or Communist leader Mao Zedong, all of them claimed Mongolia as a part of China. Mao Zedong even before his taking power in 1936 told the American journalist Edgar Snow that “after the victorious people’s revolution Outer Mongolia would automatically become a part of China” and after seizing power, though recognizing Mongolia and establishing friendly re-

lations he made several attempts to take Mongolia back and for that purpose to obtain Soviet concurrence. But the Soviet Union needed an independent Mongolia and each time the Chinese approach was rejected.

The strategic importance of Mongolia as a buffer state was nose again clearly demonstrated during Mao's so-called Cultural Revolution and the worst time of hostility between Russia and China. The Soviets stationed their troops in Mongolia. Thus the armies of the two biggest powers faced each other at the Mongolian borders. The external environment of the MPR became explosive. This attracted worldwide attention.

The Western powers, one by one, recognized the MPR and established diplomatic relations. However, due to Soviet obstruction the USA was the last to establish diplomatic relations with Mongolia, even though it long before had wised to have its official representative in this strategically important place as a monitoring point between the two rivaling giants.

It is gratifying to note that India was the first among the non-socialist countries to establish diplomatic relations with the Mongolian People's Republic and strongly advocated the admission of the Mongolian People's Republic to the United Nations, whose membership had been denied for more than sixteen. Jawaharlal Nehru in the strong act terms demanded from the UNGA rostrum the admission of Mongolia to that world organization. At that time the voice of India, leader of the emerging powerful non-aliened movement, had been duly reckoned with.

Mongolia's status as a close ally of the Soviet Union and a satellite state began to change in the 1980s as a result of the Glasnost and Perestroika policies brought about by Gorbachev. The subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union fundamentally changed Mongolia's international position.

Besides, the democratization of society and the transition to a market economy, the pursuit of open foreign and domestic policies have created a better external environment and further expanded relations with new partners. The question of recognition and discrimination no longer existed. The two giant neighbor's preoccupation with there owns problems have provided a unique opportunity for Mongolia to shape its independent future. As a result of the later rapprochement between China and Russia the strategic role of Mongolia as a buffer state has significantly diminished, and has turned Mongolia into an equal partner.

However, the disintegration of the USSR had at the same time a serious negative impact on Mongolia's economy in general, and in its external environment in particular. With the collapse of the Soviet Union Mongolia has faced

security challenges. Now that the Soviet umbrella is gone, the traditional Mongolian fear of being absorbed by China has come to the surface.

Under this circumstance Mongolia is turned to a third partner as a counterweight in dealings with its two neighbors. This third partner is the United States, Japan, South Korea, Germany and other Western countries collectively, as well as international financial and economic institutions, like the World Bank, IMF, and The Asian Development Bank.

Despite rapidly developing relations with the above-mentioned countries which sincerely support Mongolia's efforts toward democracy as an example for other Asian countries, which are shall socialist both Russia and China and their interaction continue to remain the major factors in the further development of the country.

Therefore, it is stated in the concept of Mongolia's foreign policy that "maintaining friendly relations with the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China shall be a priority direction of Mongolia's foreign policy activity. It shall not adopt the line of either country but shall maintain in principle a balanced relationship with both of them and shall promote all-round good neighborly cooperation.

In accordance with this policy Mongolia has signed bilateral treaties of friendly relations and cooperating with Russia and China. In both cases the parties pledged not to participate in any military-political alliances directed against the other party, not to conclude with third states any treaties and agreements that would infringe on the sovereignty and independence of the other party, and that they would not allow the use of their territory by third states for hostile actions against the other party. Moreover, in the treaty with the Russian Federation, the Russian side pledged to respect neither Mongolia's policy of not allowing firing troops nor nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction to be stationed on or to transit its Territory.

In September 1992 Mongolia declared itself a nuclear-free zone. Both Russia and China pledged to respect the Nuclear Weapon-free zone of Mongolia. In 1993 USA offering Mongolia security guarantees stated that if Mongolia ever faced a threat and decided to refer the matter to the UN Security Council, the United States would consider appropriate steps to be taken. Soon thereafter Great Britain and France offered similar security assurances. These statements represent the basis of international guarantees of Mongolia's external security.

The international position of Mongolia is now better than ever. The country has more chances for free, independent development having become the master of its own destiny.