Mongolia Playing Stabilizing Role in Situation on Korean Peninsula

First, a short history lesson. According to records, the relationship between Mongolia and Korea spans 800 years. Mongolian annals from the 13th to 14th centuries mention Korea’s (at the time known as Solongos) role in Genghis Khan’s conquest of China.

In the years preceding 1990, the Mongolian People’s Republic (MPR) and the DPRK cooperated on equal terms as members of an alliance of communist countries and states. Mongolia became the second nation after Hungary to recognize North Korea’s sovereignty in 1989. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1948, and last year the two sides marked their 70th anniversary with a grand celebration.

Since 1996, the MPR has continued to provide food aid to the DPRK as per trade agreements, and up until 2017 the nation had willingly welcomed a fairly large number of North Korean migrant workers. Due to the sanctions imposed by the United Nations, their numbers have dwindled to 500 people.

However, the relationship between the two nations remains friendly and stable.
In 2000, the President and the Prime Minister of Mongolia visited North Korea.

In recent years, the MPR has increasingly taken on the role of a mediator in the process of resolving the issues plaguing the Korean Peninsula and of improving communication between the leader of the DPRK and those of the United States, Russia and China.

Its involvement is not surprising considering the fact that a hundred thousand Mongols already speak Korean, as it is the second most popular language to learn after English in the MPR.

It is worth noting that Mongolia has been viewed as a mediator in the process of stabilizing the situation on the Korean Peninsula in media reports by political observers and researchers for quite some time. And the capital of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, has, on numerous occasions, been included in the list of potential venues for staging historic summits between the leaders of the United States and the DPRK. And only due to unfavorable weather conditions in Mongolia, i.e. a harsh 2019 winter, was Vietnam chosen to host the meeting between North Korea’s and U.S. leaders.

Since DPRK leader Kim Jong-un officially expressed his willingness to take part in a third Summit with the U.S. President during this year’s session of the Supreme People’s Assembly on 12 April, it is highly likely that the meeting will take place in Ulaanbaatar this time around. At least, Mongolia’s media outlets have been reporting that such a possibility is strong indeed.

The aforementioned topic was discussed during a face-to-face meeting between Davaasuren Damdinsuren, the State Secretary of Mongolia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ri Yong-ho, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Korea, as well as Ri Su-yong, the Vice Chairman of DPRK’s Workers’ Party, which was held on 18 April of this year during Damdinsuren’s visit.

In December 2018, North Korea’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Ri Yong-ho paid a visit to Ulaanbaatar, where Khaltmaagiin Battulga, the President of Mongolia, extended an official invitation to DPRK’s leader Kim Jong-un to visit the MPR.

In its role as mediator, Mongolia is supportive of efforts to ensure that Kim Jong-un meets with PRC’s head Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, before any potential third summit, as without the involvement of these two leaders it will be impossible to resolve the security issues in the region. And it would be reasonable to assume that the historical meeting between Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un, held on the Far Eastern Federal University campus on the Russky Island on 25 April 2019, was facilitated by Mongolia in its mediator role.

Recently, Japan’s public broadcaster NHK reported that Damdin Tsogtbaatar, the Foreign Minister of Mongolia, urged the DPRK to stop any provocative actions involving testing new tactical weaponry, as this could have a negative impact on the situation in East Asia. He also appealed to observers and commentators to not be discouraged by the failed negotiations between the United States and the DPRK in Hanoi, since such talks were only a part of the processes of stabilizing the situation on the Korean Peninsula and of DPRK’s nuclear disarmament. MPR’s Foreign Minister added that Mongolia supported such initiatives and would continue to facilitate any negotiations between the USA and North Korea in the future.

Damin Tsogtbaatar also highlighted that Mongolia and the DPRK, with their 70-year history of diplomatic relations, are continuing to strengthen their friendship.

It is worth highlighting that Mongolia’s mediator role in the Korean conflict, and its efforts to stabilize the situation on the Korean Peninsula and put an end to DPRK’s nuclear programme are all highly appreciated by the U.N. Security Council and the United States, who have urged the MPR to continue supporting initiatives of the international community in the future.

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