In 2014 Mongolia initiated an international conference in Ulaanbaatar, to discuss security problems in North-East Asia, particularly on the Korean peninsula. The significance of this initiative was all the greater, since at that time almost all the channels for discussion of problems and negotiations between the two Koreas had been closed, and the six-party talks on Korean issues had been discontinued.

The Conference was unlike other such events: the parties discussed the results of research by analytical organizations on security issues in North-East Asia, as well as expert opinions, and the joint statements drawn up in the plenary sessions were sent to government bodies, to be referred to in the creation of official policies. These meetings have been held on an annual basis since 2014, and the number of participants has grown steadily.

The 5th such meeting, held on 14-15 July 2018, was organised by the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in conjunction with the National Security Council’s Institute for Strategic Studies, and was attended by more than 150 representatives of research bodies from Mongolia, Russia, the USA, China, India, South Korea, North Korea, France, Germany and Japan.

This international meeting differed from all previous ones in a number of respects. Firstly, it was held only a few days after the historic meeting between Donald Trump, the US President, and Kim Jong-un, the leader of North Korea, and as a result the situation on the Korean peninsula was very much on participants’ minds. Secondly, it was the first time a delegation from the DPRK had taken part. The North Korean delegates emphasised Kim Jong-un’s
great achievement in ensuring peace, and that the North Koreans would conscientiously comply with the terms of
the Panmunjom Declaration, signed by both North and South Korea, and the declarations issued following the
meeting between Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump.

And, most importantly, the representative of the North Korean Foreign Ministry confirmed once more that the
process of denuclearising the Korean Peninsula would begin. As was noted in the Mongolian press, his speech made
it clear that the DPRK wants the rest of the world to view the steps it has taken with respect.

Thirdly, the 2018 Ulaanbaatar Dialogue was special because, for the second year running, it was attended not only
by experts and researchers from the participating nations, but also by representatives of international organisations:
the OSCE, the APEC, and the International Red Cross. As a result, the conference served as an important platform
for the discussion of complex issues, and the honest sharing of opinions, recommendations and proposals on
cooperation between countries in North-East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region in order to strengthen peace and trust
and ensure security.

The participants unanimously supported the extension of the dialogue and the talks on developing and advancing the
current relations on the Korean peninsula, which also help to promote the strengthening of cooperation in the
cultural, social and humanitarian spheres.

One event that demonstrated the political significance of the 5th round of the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue was the informal
meeting between representatives of Japan and North Korea that took place on the sidelines of the conference. According to reports in the Japanese press, after that meeting Taro Kono, the Japanese Foreign Minister, announced
in a press conference in Tokyo that Japan would seek opportunities to set up direct contacts with North Korea, so
that the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe could hold meetings with the leader of the DPRK, Kim Jong-un.

There are also reports that discussions are under way concerning the possibility of holding one such meeting this
September, on the sidelines of the Eastern Economic Forum in Russia. Interestingly, Fomiko Shimadu Ukgerd, a
high-ranking Japanese diplomat and adviser to the Japanese Foreign Ministry’s Asia Department, took part in the
talks.

In summary, it is very satisfying to note that Mongolia is aiming to play a very active, and important, role in North-
East Asian affairs.

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