

ULAANBAATAR DIALOGUE INITIATIVE ON NORTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY: MONGOLIA'S PERCEPTION OF NORTHEAST ASIA

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Abstract: This article deal with the origin, development and assessment of the Mongolian Initiative-Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian security. The article explores the effects of the region's unresolved issues, conflicts within Northeast Asia, and the scope has limited to the security situation.

The Ulaanbaatar Dialogue is an international conference at Track-1.5 gathering, together with both government officials and academia security forum engaged annually by the Mongolian Government's Institute for Strategic Studies (ISS).

Keywords: Northeast Asia, security issue, Ulaanbaatar Dialogue, confidence-building, multilateral cooperation.

I. Mongolia's perception of Northeast Asia

Ikenberry, .J. and Mastanduno, M. pictured Northeast Asia as "A mosaic of divergent cultures and political regime types, historical estrangements, shifting power balances, and rapid economic change", also considered it "Plausible to imagine security dilemmas, prestige contests, territorial disputes, national resentments, and economic conflicts swelling up and enveloping the region."¹

The term Northeast Asia was first used in the 1930s by a professor at the University of California, historian of Berkeley Institute of Slavic Studies and political scientist Robert J. Kerner (1887-1956). Robert J. Kerner taught Slavic history at the University of California, Berkeley, for almost 30 years, from over 1920 until to die, during which time scholar founded Berkeley's Institute of Slavic Studies.² He focused on Russian position in Asia and relations with China, Japan, first used the term given at a presentation entitled "*Russian Sources for the Study of Northeastern Asia*" in 1931. Under Robert J.Kerner definition, the geographical location of Northeast Asia includes the Mongolian Plateau, which stretches from the Lena River in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east, the lowlands of northeastern China, the Korean Peninsula and the mountainous regions of the Far East.

Map 1. Northeast Asian geographical position

¹ G.J. Ikenberry and Mastanduno, M. (2003) *International Relations and the Asia Pacific*, New York: Columbia University Press

² Kotkin. S. (1997) "Robert Kerner and the Northeast Asia Seminar," *The Slavic Research Center*, accessed June 14, 2020, <https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/publicn/acta/15/kotokin/kotokin.html>



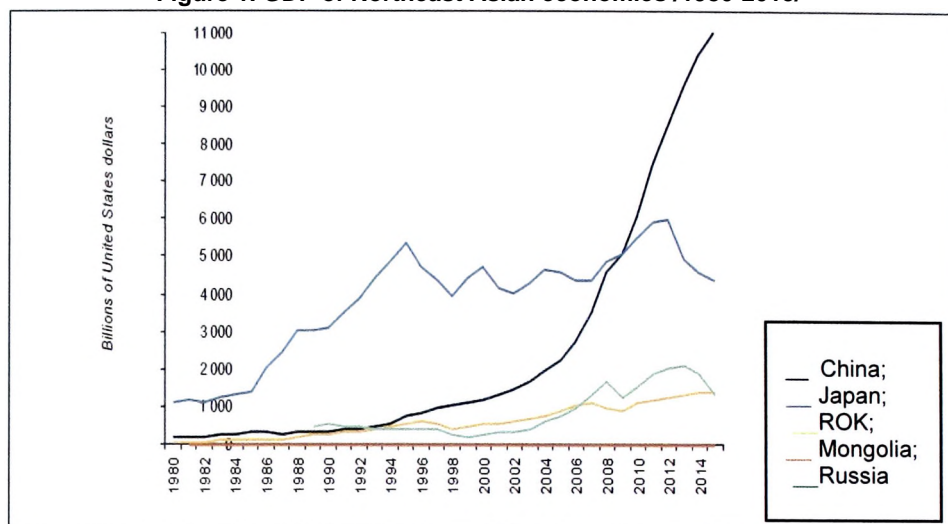
/Source from google map, <https://www.google.com/>

Most geographical group of Northeast Asian countries would be that includes Japan, The Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea), the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea), Mongolia, the People's Republic of China (PRC or China), and the Far Eastern Federal District (Russia) under the term of his definition.

Russia's involvement is significant in the subregion, but how to include the sub-regional activities, one of the challenges, yet it participates only as a region of great power. This challenge also applies to China, but China's orientation towards Northeast Asia is much more than Russia's position in the Pacific. The issue is how to include China, also raises the question, whether this would comprise Hong Kong and Republic of China (ROC or Taiwan). Although the pretense of looking separately at Hong Kong is disappearing, regional integration involving China and Taiwan would seem impossible. Taiwan has generally oriented in different directions in its foreign policy.

Geographical subregions vary to some extent depending on the situation of the subregion, the context in the scenario under consideration here, the Northeast Asian region would thus consist of Japan, South Korea, North Korea, China, Russia, and Mongolia. Therefore, Northeast Asia is our home, countries of the region should be effort peacekeeping together. Despite frequently being labelled as one of the very complex places in the World, Northeast Asia holds a great deal of potential. The Northeast Asia sub-region is one of the most dynamic parts of the world, with countries and areas that have achieved significant economic growth since the 1980s (see figure 1 and table 1). Northeast Asia has emerged as the center of gravity in contemporary international relations, partly owing to China's rise over the past two decades.

Figure 1. GDP of Northeast Asian economies /1980-2015/



/Source from World Bank, World Bank Development Indicators: Available from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/>

Table 1. Statistics of selected countries in Northeast Asia

	China	Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Japan	Mongolia	Republic of Korea	Russian Federation
Population	1 371 220 000	25 155 320	126 958 470	2 959 130	50 617 040	144 096 810
GDP (millions of current United	10 866 444		4 123 258	11 758	1 377 873	1 326 015
GDP per capita, PPP	14 238.7		37 321.6	12 188.6	34 549.2	24 451.4
Foreign reserves (millions of	3 606 788		1 289 634		368 023	390 565
Trade volume Merchandise	2 274 949	3 810	624 939	526 755	4 670	340 349
current United Merchandise	1 681 951	4 790	648 494	436 499	3 797	194 087
Total	3 956 900	8 600	1 273 433	963 254	8 467	534 436
Outward official development assistance (ODA) (2014)	4 900 ^a		9 320		1 911	1 161

/Source from World Bank, World Bank Development Indicators; IMF, International Financial Statistics databases., 2015/

Three major nations of the subregion, namely China, Japan, and South Korea, accounted for 18.9 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP), 23.6 per cent of the world's population, 15.7 percent of the world's exports, 13.4 percent of the world's imports, and 38.1 per cent of the world's foreign exchange reserves, as of 2006.³ When comparing the 2006 statistics with 2014 statistics, these countries in the subregion still after decade maintain this economic success according to the following reports at the World Bank. Furthermore, together, Northeast Asian countries account for 26.0 per cent

³ Anderson, K. and Martin, W. (2009) "Distortions to Agricultural Incentives in Asia," World Bank Report: 35-82, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2611>

of global GDP purchasing power parity (PPP), thus forming the largest economic bloc in terms of combined PPP-adjusted GDP; 23.6 per cent of the world's population; and approximately 20.3 per cent of global trade. The subregion also holds excess amounts of foreign reserves worth more than \$5 trillion.⁴ And the statistic in 2019, China, Japan, and South Korea, accounted for 22.81 per cent of the world's GDP.⁵

Some scholars, such as Yuan Chong, director of Japanese studies at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), have concluded that Northeast Asia is home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies. He emphasized that *"Economic growth in the region is growing in terms of GDP growth, total volume, trade and foreign direct investment. For example, the region accounts for one-fifth of world GDP. Besides, the subregion's foreign trade turnover accounts for one-fifth of the world's foreign trade."*⁶ Also, two-thirds of Asian countries are experiencing positive economic growth, making the subregion the largest player contributing to global economic growth, according to Asian Development Bank report in 2017.

As Asia becomes the engine of world economic development; with the complementarity of abundant natural and financial resources and enlarging markets, Northeast Asia will be potential prosperity. A number of significant steps towards strengthening regional and sub-regional cooperation in energy, trade and transport, the Free Trade Agreements such as China-Japan-South Korea (2015) trilateral summit and Japan and Mongolia, came into effect in 2017; have taken place, in order to withstand global economic and financial turbulence. Although the success of these economic cooperation can be mentioned, it should be emphasized that the China-Japan-South Korea Free Trade Agreement has not yet been ratified.

China, with a vast potential market of over 1.4 billion people, is rapidly becoming one of the world's largest manufacturers, while Japan maintains competitiveness with its cutting-edge technology and capital holdings. South Korea has risen to the global stage through its vitality, and innovative capabilities.

Russia and Mongolia have enormous economic potential because of its resources in the Far East and Mongolian Plateau. Besides, the top world energy users are in the Northeast Asian region, and there is an enormous potential for promoting mutually beneficial energy cooperation in Northeast Asia. The only exception is North Korea whose economy has been faltering. But, the sub-region as a whole includes nations whose economies continue to exhibit some of the world's highest growth rates and whose potential for expansion is considered among the greatest.

Despite such positive developments, we must also bear in mind that the situation of our home sub-region is still desperately delicate. The Cold War ended in other regions of the world, but bilateral alliances and bipolar policy's conflict remain in Northeast Asia.

⁴ World Bank, *World Development Indicators*. Available from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>; IMF, International Financial Statistics databases. Available from <http://elibrary-data.imf.org>

⁵ ***Ranking the Richest Countries in the World, accessed January 23, 2021, <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/>***

⁶ Yuan Chong. (2017) The Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian security: International conference book-IV, Ulaanbaatar: ISS (Institute for Strategic Studies)

This political situation in Northeast Asia has escalated reviving old and unkind historical memoirs, and sometimes it creates a security issues that could lead to military conflict. In other words, the crucial issue is the political relationship between the region's nations. In Northeast Asia, there are many historical unresolved issues, territorial disputes and potential conflicts. For instance, the complex political and social misunderstandings and hostility on the Korean Peninsula play a major predicament in regional integration and long-term stability, along with the still-unsolved conflicts between nations.

Six-Party Talks (SPT), the existing mechanism for regional dialogue, is yet to resume, while demand for more active engagement within the region, mutual understanding and cooperation grow. Therefore, the security situation on the Korean Peninsula is still considerable. Mongolia has never been interested in nuclear weapons. Notwithstanding, in 1992, at the rostrum of the UN General Assembly, it declared itself as a nuclear-weapon-free status (NWFS). The country believes that the NWFS of Mongolia will lead other countries to resolve security issues in the Northeast Asian region and the nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula through their negotiation. Mongolia has an interest to actively participate in Northeast Asia's affairs, moreover to contribute to the regional peacebuilding process.

The subregion needs a more comprehensive system that promotes mutual understanding and peace confidence-building. Therefore, Mongolia has made some successful actions as a host in some regional political issues. Mongolia has hosted the successful negotiations between DPRK and Japan official-level meetings in Ulaanbaatar on abducted Japanese citizens, have hosted in the framework of Six-Party Talks in 2007 and 2012. Mongolia has played an active role as a neutral moderator.

North Korea and Japan have never agreed on basic facts such as how many abductees there were, also during which the North Korean side promised to take the issue of abducted people seriously. That is just an example of mistrust, without which in the least main issue between the two top players of the region could have resolved.

Territorial disputes between the subregion countries and China, Japan and events such as expanding the air control zone have been dramatically increasing tension in Northeast Asia. Of course, each national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security are invariably primary concerns for all nations and their citizens. Thus, for an independent nation, failure to protect its territory is equal to a failure to protect its national security.

All political conflicts and territorial disputes in Northeast Asia have inherited mainly from the history of World War II and Cold War legacies. In particular, a number have tension between territorial and political issues, Northeast Asian territorial disputes are islands ownership issues, thus bring together four powerful regional countries Japan, South Korea, China and Russia (see Map 2). Territory disputes constitute one of the repercussions for the security environment main origins of diplomatic relations misunderstanding in Northeast Asia.

Map 2. Disputes Islands in the Northeast Asia



Source: from google EU Institute for Security Studies, Reports

So, maybe we have the question; why *the territorial disputes have been the conflict's subject of a region between Japan and other Northeast Asian countries for more than a few decades?*

Would answer this question, it is appropriate to look at the history of the past, the geopolitical situation. Of which has a strong influence on the geopolitical, economic and diplomatic relations of the region, it is the dispute over ownership of the Kuril Islands. Some aspects related to the current shifts not only in the region also in the global power dynamics are relevant to the Russia-Japan dispute. Particularly it has changed the geostrategic importance of the islands to Russia due to the opening of the Arctic Northern Sea Route, the China factor in Russo-Japanese relations and Russia's deteriorating relations with the West.

These territorial disputes have been a fact of regional conflicts for a variety of historical, geopolitical, political, and economic reasons. For example, Japan portrays its position as that of an aggrieved side. This is their asking for the return of the islands to the legitimate owner. It also wants looks at itself as a rational actor seeking to solve the issue peacefully.

Japan looks at itself as an aggrieved party who is nonetheless willing to solve the dispute through talks and negotiations for the Southern Kurils/ Northern Territories. Tokyo portrays Russia as an occupying force that illegally took over the Southern Kurils/ Northern Territories in the aftermath of World War II, expelling over seventeen thousand Japanese inhabitants from the islands in the process. Meanwhile, the Japanese government share the resolution of this issue to the signature of a peace treaty with Russia. In contrast, identity politics do not seem to be central to Russia's position regarding the Southern Kurils/Northern Territories. In other words, Russia portrays itself as the rational actor in this dispute. It accuses Tokyo of jeopardizing bilateral relations for the sake of a group of islands that rightfully belong to Russia. In particular, Russia points out what it considers to be Japan's irrational behavior in refusing to negotiate a World War II peace treaty because of the territorial issue. However, the Russian government seeks to improve relations with its Japanese counterpart and overall tries to downplay the dispute.

Rather, China looks at itself as a great yet also aggrieved power in its relationship with Japan. It cannot be denied that the Chinese economic rise, political and military modernization in recent years has made Beijing more willing to show off its power. This 'great revival of the Chinese nation' policy, which aims to restore China to its perceived rightful place at the apex of global affairs. At the same time, China seems an aggrieved power insofar as it is incomplete, with some of its territories missing. The most obvious is Taiwan. Hong Kong and Macau have already returned to China. Also, according to the Chinese government, Senkaku/Diaoyu should join them and also be returned. Beijing's expansion of its East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in 2013, which was de facto based on the idea that the islands belong to China forms part of this identity politics game. For its part, Japan tries to portray itself as equal to China in its bilateral relationship.

Most notably, many experts consider that China has been becoming more aggressive in its foreign policy. Japan would thus need to become more assertive to counter Beijing's aggressiveness and to prevent China from gaining the upper hand in the dispute. It would in look demonstrate that Japan becomes a 'normal state'. On the other hands, Tokyo argues that Seoul has been using force to assert itself in Dokdo/Takeshima since it took over the management of the islands in 1952. As for South Korea, its stance regarding the Dokdo/Takeshima issue has primarily based on the idea that Korea was and is an independent country that suffered under Japanese colonization.

It mentioned above on Northeast Asia has a poor old historic between most countries. Also, Pyongyang and Seoul relationship is very complicated. All this makes focus on the existence of great potential for a conflict in the region. To take full advantage of its great potential and development, Northeast Asia needs to reduce misunderstandings, strengthen peace and cooperation in the sub-region. Moreover, the need for an active foreign policy of any country in Northeast Asia is growing. As an integral part of Northeast Asia, these issues have a profound influence on Mongolia. As a part of the international community, Mongolia also endeavors to contribute to regional cooperation and development.

II. Ulaanbaatar Dialogue Initiative on Northeast Asian security

With the situation in mind, Mongolia initiated the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue so that Mongolia, with its friendly relations and impartial stance, can contribute to the security and stability of Northeast Asia. Inspired by the Helsinki Process, Mongolia launched the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue and have held the international conference on Northeast Asian security since 2014.

The Helsinki Process had created the foundation of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Europe is an example of the peaceful coexistence of countries. The Helsinki process, series of events that followed the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe⁷ (CSCE; now called the OSCE) in 1972,

⁷ A, Wenger., Mastny, V. and Nuenlist, C. "Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965-1975," accessed March 10, 2021, <https://www.routledge.com/Origins-of-the-European-Security-System-The-Helsinki-Process-Revisited/Wenger-Mastny-Nuenlist/p/book/9780415570213>

culminated in the signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975. At the time, seeking to reduce tension between the Soviet and Western blocs, the Helsinki process-initiated discussions of human rights and fundamental freedoms and fostered economic, scientific, and humanitarian cooperation between East and West. The conference has initiated by Soviet leaders in the era of détente (relaxation of tensions between East and West).⁸

The initiative was initially met by skepticism in the West and by opposition from dissidents in socialist states in central and Eastern Europe, as it has expected to formalize the division of Europe that had resulted from the Cold War. However, the process stimulated rapid development in the opposite direction provided the formerly powerless oppositional voices within the communist bloc with a politically and morally-though, not a legally-binding international instrument.

The Helsinki Process, which decided on disarmament in the middle of the 1970s, Mongolia has aimed to make the Northeast Asian security mechanism by determining the Korean peninsula issue. It took more than ten years to start the Helsinki Process at that time.⁹ Also, it may take more time than it has because Northeast Asia has its regional features. A multilateral dialogue mechanism is the most vital tool of cooperation in Northeast Asia. To create such, it is crucial to building an open international platform that addresses a range of security issues. Mongolia is well aware that the multilateral dialogue mechanism that encouraged the building will require our long-term endeavor.

The Ulaanbaatar Dialogue has not created for any particular country or a group of countries. Mongolia has proposed this initiative for urging the rest of the regional countries to actively participate in the process that builds a regional security platform. Security cooperation among states in the Asia-Pacific has been under developed, while their economic interdependence has been rapidly increasing. However, the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue has no-intention to compete against or substitute for the Six-Party Talks (SPT), not the Northeast Asia Peace Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) should emphasize.^{10 11} About ROK's NAPCI is South Korean President Park termed the discrepancy in the level of cooperation between economy and security as the "Asia Paradox". The Asia Paradox appears to be more distinct to Europe, which achieved a high level of party-political integration and formed multilateral security mechanisms for collective defense.¹¹ The NAPCI calls for countries to build trust first through cooperating in soft or non-traditional security issues such as disaster relief, environment, nuclear safety, anti-terrorism, climate change, disease, transnational crime, cyber terrorism, and so forth.¹²

⁸<https://triumf48.ru/mn/useful/helsinskii-process-zaklvuchitelnvi-akt-soveshchaniya-pobezopasnosti-i.html>

⁹ Ganbat, D. (2014) Speech opening, Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian security, International conference book-I, Ulaanbaatar: ISS (Institute for Strategic Studies), 9-11

¹⁰ Batchimeg, M. (2014) Speech opening, Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian security, International conference book-I, Ulaanbaatar: ISS (Institute for Strategic Studies), 2-4

¹¹ Park, J. J. (2014) "South Korea's Initiative for creating a multilateral security mechanism in NEA: The NAPCI," Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian security, International conference book-I, Ulaanbaatar: ISS (Institute for Strategic Studies), 45-51

¹² Lee, S.H. (2017) "NAPCI and Regional Security in Northeast Asia: A South Korean Perspective," The Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian security: International conference book-IV, Ulaanbaatar: ISS (Institute for Strategic Studies), 79-85

South Korea's national divisions and bitter left-right infighting tend to weaken the government's position in approaches to the North. Seoul's military standoff and competition with the North, its alliance with the United States, and participation in international sanctions regimes all-cause suspicion in Pyongyang.¹³

Then, states may expand cooperation to 'harder' or traditional security issues. To make the NAPCI successful, South Korea has been seeking international support for it. The Republic of Korea has launched a similar initiative, and Mongolia has exchanged views with the South Korean delegation on cooperation in this area.

Instead, it is the product of all the regional countries striving for the well-being, peace and prosperity of the region. Mutual understanding is the brick by which to build confidence. That is why Mongolia always advances dialogue and appeals to non-use of force.

Nowadays, Mongolia established friendly diplomatic relations with more than 190 countries not confining to Northeast Asia. Moreover, Mongolia chose democracy and a market economy as a way of its future development.

Since then, it has been almost three decades, and we have accumulated feasible experience. Mongolia maintains the balance of old and new by advancing new foreign policy that reflects the changing nature of international relations while preserving its tradition of statehood and diplomacy.

Conclusion

Both globalization and national identities issues have spawned debates in many countries about security. Indeed, many experts have highlighted the importance of the policies to strengthen security in the region by maintaining good relations between neighboring countries, creating regional prosperity collected, and developing a successful economic integration.

Northeast Asia is the most dynamically developing region with the countries and resources that have achieved significant economic growth. The potential for further growth is very high.

However, numerous political and other roadblocks hinder it. Among the political obstacles are the unresolved historical issues and territorial disputes between countries until now. There is also a division between Korean nations on the Korean Peninsula, and the colliding interests of the great powers, making it a complicated place. The North Korean nuclear weapons program is exacerbating the region's tension.

Mongolia is trying to contribute to the region prosperity by launching the initiative on Northeast Asian security in a globalized era. Neutral Mongolia has played a role in peace and security in Northeast Asia. It has been seven years since Mongolia had announced its intention of initiating the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian security.

Mongolia is not a great power, but our neutral position creates confidence-building in the region. Mongolia is neither posing a threat to anyone, not involved in any bilateral or multilateral conflicts. Mongolia hopes that these efforts will ultimately lead to

¹³ Park, J.J. (2014) "South Korea's Initiative for creating a multilateral security mechanism in NEA: The NAPCI," Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian security, International conference book-I, Ulaanbaatar: ISS (Institute for Strategic Studies), 45-51

a collective institution of peace and security in Northeast Asia, comparable to the OSCE. From the history of international relations that confidence-building is a protracted and not easy process. Also, the dialogue is a powerful tool if it leads to cooperation.

The Ulaanbaatar Dialogue is an international conference at Track-1.5 gathering together both government officials and academia security forum engaged annually by the Mongolian Government's ISS. The Dialogue has been attending by Japan, South Korea, North Korea, China, Mongolia and Russia of six Northeast Asian countries. Furthermore, the conference is regularly attended by participants of the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and other Asian and westerners.

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