MONGOLIA'S FEMINIST DIPLOMACY: THE NEED FOR A STRATEGY

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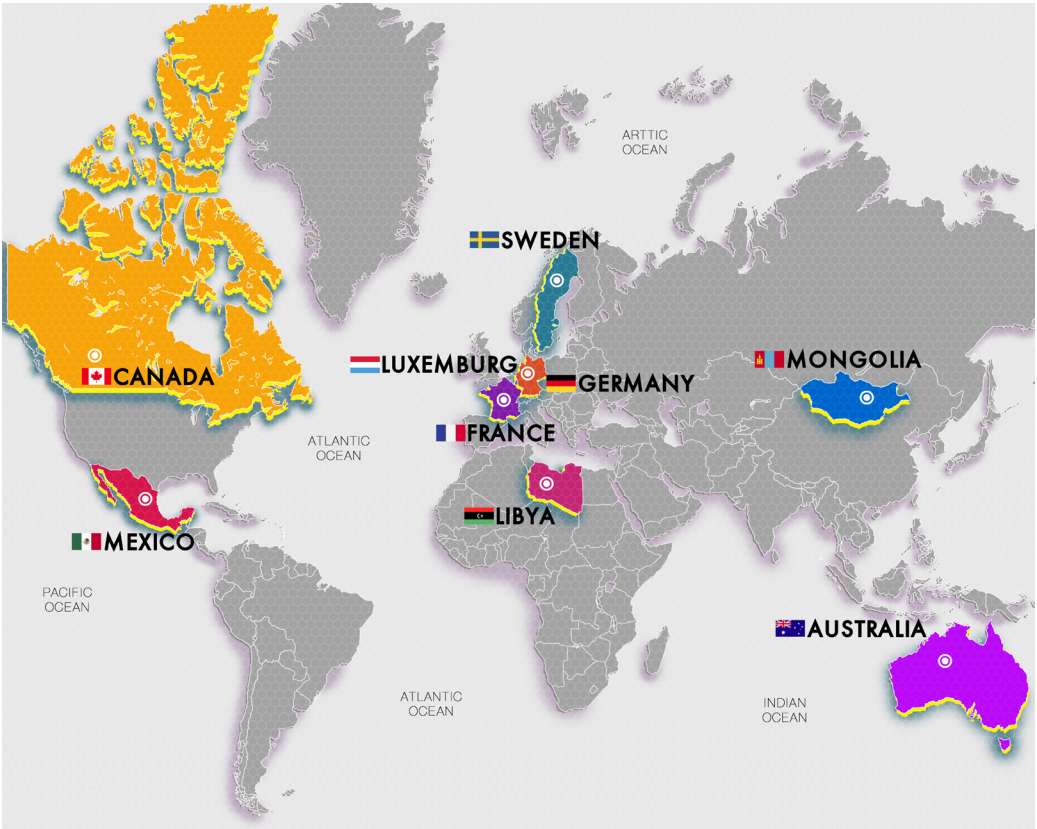

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Introduction

As the year starts, the Mongolian Parliament confirmed the appointment of six female ambassadors nominated by the President. According to Foreign Minister Battsetseg Batmunkh, also a woman, this was the largest number of female ambassadors ever appointed in a single year.[1] In June, Mongolia will host an international conference in support of the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security and titled "Strengthening the Role of Women in Peacekeeping". The Mongolian military has deployed more than 900 female peacekeepers to United Nations and other coalition peacekeeping missions and now ranks as the top female troop contributor from the region.[2]

In this paper, we argue that Mongolia has had a long tradition of pursuing feminist diplomacy. Since the country's admittance to the United Nations, Mongolia has voted favourably on resolutions concerning women and children. The strong presence of female diplomats in multilateral diplomacy has been key in shaping the country's pro-women foreign policy stance. During the socialist period, Mongolia initiated and co-sponsored United Nations resolutions for the improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas. Following its democratic transition in 1990, Mongolia joined with other like-minded nations at the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on the protection of women and children.

Despite its history in the international arena, Mongolia needs a comprehensive national strategy to increase the public awareness of its international efforts, such as the Women, Peace and Security conference, to increase female participation in future United Nations peacekeeping missions, includ-

ing the civilian police, and to empower women diplomats in decision-making processes. This type of national strategy will strengthen the country's democracy, distinguish Mongolia from patriarchal societies in Asia and empower its multilateral diplomacy during times of heightened geopolitical tensions. Indeed, Mongolia could take a leading position in this regard and influence other States in the greater neighbourhood of Asia.

What is feminist foreign policy?

Feminist foreign policy is a relatively new phenomenon in foreign policy studies. It has emerged in several ways, mostly to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls internationally.

First of all, international organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, the international financial institutions and OSCE have taken the pursuit of gender equality seriously and have promoted gender mainstreaming to ensure equal representation of women and men and their equal participation in global governance. This certainly encourages Member States to actively promote feminist foreign policy through their participation in these organizations.

Another push has been United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which acknowledges the disproportionate impact of war on women and mandates Member States to increase their "representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict".[3] As a result, many States have made real commitment internationally and domestically to promote the role of women at all stages and levels of security policymaking.

In addition to these multilateral approaches, States have introduced different types of feminist foreign policies, presumably for multiple objectives (for a purely normative cause, as pragmatic policy objective and/or as parochial political interest). Australia, Canada, Germany, France, Libya, Luxemburg, Mexico, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom have become leading States on feminist foreign policy.

Of them, Canada, France and Sweden have pledged to make more substantive changes than the other Sates. Sweden's feminist foreign policy is regarded as the most comprehensive.[4] It is explained as a three-R approach: for "rights", meaning to protect women's rights internationally, as entitled in the United Nations Human Rights Declaration, in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, in the Geneva Conventions and in the Treaties of the European Union; for "representation" and thus to provide participation of women at all levels and stages of decision-making processes; and for "resources" and thus to devote financial and human resources for the cause of feminist foreign policy. In response to criticism regarding its feminist policy, the Swedish government took on a fourth R—research—to increase the research capacity in support of feminist foreign policy.

In contrast, Canada's feminist foreign policy, as embodied in the Feminist International Assistance Policy, is narrowly defined and only promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as an important approach to eradicating poverty.[5] Although it is advocated as feminist foreign policy, the Canadian approach has not embraced gender inequality as the Swedish approach has done. Rather, it has put women and girls in the focus of its poverty eradication (or developmental) assistance. The French feminist foreign policy, as embodied in the International Strategy

on Gender Equality, also focuses on its foreign assistance programme and highlights support for women's rights and feminist civil society.

All three States rank high in the international gender equality indices and are more open than most States to gender parity (through their women ministries, senior appointments, economic participation, educational attainment and health care access). It is no surprise that these States are willing to project feminist foreign policy initiatives. But they are also criticized for advocating feminist universalism while trading with non-democratic countries, where women and girls are typically maltreated and often denied their human rights. These States, particularly France, and Canada, were all colonial powers, and some even maltreated their Indigenous populations.

Despite the criticisms, feminist foreign policy has generally gained substantial ground as a civil society movement and public fight against the systemic, institutionalized male-dominated power structure and culture.

Mongolia's feminist diplomacy

The Mongolian feminist foreign policy has three features: (i) a solid supportive stance for international initiatives for women; (ii) an expanding role of women in the foreign service; and (iii) Mongolian women are actively participating in peace-support operations.

Since 1961 when it gained membership into the United Nations, Mongolia has been a strong supporter of international initiatives for women. In 1965, Mongolia hosted an international seminar on the role of women in society as one of its first United Nations events. In 1976, the United

Nations General Assembly adopted a Mongolia-sponsored resolution on Improving the Situation of Women, which became one of the signature initiatives of Mongolia at the United Nations.[6] The resolution has since broadened its scope and has been retitled as Improvement of the Situation of Women and Girls in Rural Areas. In 1981, a Mongolian female diplomat was elected as the first Chairperson of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. These efforts were reinforced as the country made its democratic transition in 1989–1990, and Mongolia's proactive policy on gender equality and women empowerment became a de rigueur feature of its diplomacy positions.

Mongolia's female diplomats served in important elected positions in the General Assembly's Second and Third Committees—both dealing with socioeconomic development and human rights.[7] Mongolia has made notable contribution to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women through its inclusion as a member in three periods. In 2016–2018, Mongolia served as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, where it demonstrated its strong stance on gender equality and women's empowerment. In other international organizations where Mongolia holds membership status, such as the OSCE, the country pursues similar diplomacy regarding women's rights and empowerment and gender mainstreaming.

There are two explanations for Mongolia's proactive feminist diplomacy: One reflects its commitment for improving the status of women and girls, which dates to when the country gained United Nations membership in 1961 and adopted socialist policies for women (such as provision of universal education for women and downplaying the patriarchal traditions while promoting the political, economic and social roles of women in soci-

ety). The other relates to the country's attempt to pursue a unique foreign policy that provides escape from its geopolitical realities, serves its peaceful, constructive multilateral engagement ambitions and strengthens its democratic identity.

The role of women in Mongolia's foreign policy has been steadily, but slowly, growing. Mongolian women started joining the diplomatic service as of the early 1950s. However, they were not welcomed into policymaking posts in those early days.

To strengthen its diplomatic service, Mongolia began in 1951 to send its diplomats (all men at first) to the Moscow Institute for International Relations. It took four years for the first cohort of women to be sent to Moscow for training as professional diplomats. But as a result, there were about 15 female diplomats working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the period of 1960–1970.[8] In 1956 and for the first time, two women were granted the diplomatic rank of Third Secretary.[9] It wasn't until 1986 when a woman diplomat was appointed to head a diplomatic mission—as the Permanent Representative to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Since then, several female diplomats have led the Mongolian Missions at the United Nations headquarters and regional headquarters.

The 1990s was a boom period for women in the diplomatic service, for two major reasons: one was the democratic transition, which opened up the diplomatic service, and the other was the training of diplomats locally. This shift contributed to the number of women serving in the diplomatic service and the increased role of women in the policymaking process for foreign policy. For the first time, in 1998, a woman was appointed as

Minister of Foreign Affairs. Mongolia has since had three women Foreign Ministers, including the current incumbent. Mongolia appointed its first woman ambassador in 2001—she was posted to Belgium, which is an important hub for Mongolia's multilateral diplomacy in Europe. And as noted, Mongolian political leaders recently appointed six women within the 31 ambassadorships, a record number in its foreign service history.

The expanding presence of women in these roles is likely attributed first of all to how the political leaders are basically responding to the call for the increased inclusion of women in political affairs, including foreign policymaking. This is connected with the objective to increase their popularity within and beyond a political party. But it is also the result of the increase in women diplomats in the foreign service. As of 2019, 34.5 per cent of the country's diplomats had been women, many of them in a mid-level management position.[10] And this is due to the growth of female staff. As well, it also could be due to a well-intended foreign policy decision, albeit not clearly explained, to present an image comparable with other developed democracies. While it is not possible to firmly single out any factor or determine the confounding factors relating to cause and effect, clearly the role of women diplomats is increasing, albeit slowly, in the Mongolian foreign service.

The inclusion of female Mongolian personnel in military peacekeeping missions began in 2006 with the deployment of the first female military observer to the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara. Then, in 2008–2010, 44 female personnel were deployed to the United Nations Mission in Liberia. More than half of the 243 military medical personnel deployed over seven rotations to Mongolia's Level II Field Medical Hospital in Darfur from 2010 until 2017 were women (likely due

to the nature of medical deployment). Since 2011, Mongolia's female deployment has increased dramatically with its peacekeeping battalion (850 personnel) to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. A total of 513 women have served in South Sudan, and 7 per cent of the current battalion personnel in South Sudan is female.[11]

The Mongolian military has deployed female personnel to the coalition operations in Afghanistan, including with the German military contingent. In the coming years, the deployment of female peacekeepers has the potential to become a visible feature of Mongolian feminist diplomacy.

In 2019, the United Nations initiated a goal to increase the percentage of women serving in security roles: by 15 per cent in military contingents; by 25 per cent among military observers and staff officers; by 20 per cent among women serving in police units; and by 30 per cent among individual police officers.[12]

The Mongolian political and military leaders are committed to increasing the overall number of peacekeeping deployments, according to such policy documents as the Basis of the State Defence Policy of Mongolia (equivalent to the military doctrine)[13] and the action plans of the President, who is the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and action plans of the Prime Minister.

There is also growing interest among female military personnel to participate in peacekeeping missions for reasons ranging from professional development goals to personal interests. Female personnel in other security and law enforcement organizations, including border troops, emergency troops, internal troops, the marshal service and the police, are also inter-

ested to serve in peacekeeping missions.

The increasing international demand, political will and the availability of interested personnel are creating favourable conditions for Mongolian women to contribute a greater role within the feminist foreign policy. Having deployed more than 900 women peacekeepers, Mongolia is the leading contributor of women personnel from Central and Northeast Asia. This deployment is regarded as a timely contribution to implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, which aims to increase women's participation in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.

Need for a national strategy

Although most foreign policy and security experts downplay the potential strength of the feminist diplomacy of small, vulnerable States like Mongolia in these heightened geopolitically tense times, the sustained pursuit of such diplomacy will have positive impact for Mongolia internationally and domestically. But to succeed, the country needs a measurable and achievable strategy—a national action plan.

Such an action plan can address many shortcomings. It will connect Mongolia's international pledges with the domestic audience and help mainstream policies for gender equality. At the international stage, Mongolia appears to be wholeheartedly endorsing all major initiatives to protect women's rights and gender equality. The extensive list includes the Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the International Conference on Population and Development. But these documents are mostly known to a small circle of experts, such as diplomats, human rights

and gender specialists and a few military officers who have served in United Nations headquarters posts. They are unknown to the general Mongolian public, who should be made aware of these international initiatives because they have strong domestic implications for protecting women's rights and promoting gender equality.

An action plan would promote ways to address the challenges for women diplomats and peacekeepers, who are important agents for the feminist foreign policy. There is neither a plan nor policy research on how to increase women's roles and participation at all levels of the policymaking processes in the foreign and security services. In the absence of a plan or strategy and regulations concerning gender parity, many female diplomats and military personnel have experienced all types of challenges throughout their career.[14] As a result, both the foreign service and military have lost many talented personnel who otherwise would have helped strengthen the country's image internationally and domestically.

An action plan also would make Mongolia's feminist foreign policy stance as clear as possible for the international audience, starting with the United Nations and the OSCE. A clear action plan would welcome all types of cooperation with the European Union and like-minded States multilaterally as well as bilaterally. And this would allow Mongolia to shine differently from the traditional patriarchal societies of Central and Northeast Asia. Promoting equality and inclusiveness, which are hallmarks of most modern democratic societies, through a national action plan would also strengthen the country's distinctive democratic identity.

This national action plan should be based on good research and inclusive discussion rather than a one-time public relations agenda of politicians,

factions or parties. The research needs to assess current feminist diplomacy within the larger setting of gender equality to identify primary and secondary challenges that will then lead to a national action plan (strategy) that deeply strengthens Mongolia's feminist diplomacy. Instead of advocating a one-sided feminist agenda, the action plan should focus on multiple ways to promote gender parity and equality. And the national action plan must be measurable, achievable and accountable. This will require a legal mandate for the annual independent evaluation of implementation.

Conclusion

Feminist foreign policy is not new in Mongolia's diplomacy. In the area of multilateral cooperation, women diplomats have had an important role in advancing the country's foreign policy stances and shouldering many new initiatives within international organizations where Mongolia is a member, observer or partner.

Adding to this tradition, Mongolian military women are becoming visible contributors for United Nations' initiatives to increase female participation in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts. In response to the United Nations' call for more women personnel, other security and law enforcement forces are willing to deploy their female personnel to support peace operations.

Mongolia seems at a critical crossroad in which political leaders are in support of gender parity at all levels and stages of policymaking. However, Mongolia needs to develop a national strategy or action plan to capitalize

on this momentum. Otherwise, the political will and support will wane, and the feminist diplomacy could be politicized or abandoned until the next election cycle.

Mongolia has the advantage of employing feminist foreign policy because it is endogenous and has strong roots in the country's history and culture. Unlike some other countries, Mongolia does not have past baggage (such as a colonial history or maltreatment of Indigenous Peoples), and Mongolia does not pursue contradictory actions (such as trading arms with authoritarian dictators).

If Mongolia makes a steadfast strategy, its feminist foreign policy will strengthen the country's democracy and its embrace of equality as well as its international profile as a responsible member State with all its international legal obligations.

Endnotes

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