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Mongolia Capitulates to China

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On December 20, 2016, the Chinese News Agency Xinhua released a statement by Munkh-Orgil Tsend, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia, according to which the 14th Dalai Lama is prohibited from entering the country ever again even “with religious missions“.

In the modern history of China’s international relations this event can be without exaggeration called unprecedented and construed as Mongolia’s capitulation. The country had to employ this measure to make up for a blunder it had committed a month earlier. Not only Mongolia had hit

its great neighbor's sore spot, but also triggered a conflict. The situation has been discussed in several NEO's articles.

Readers should be reminded that in the recent years the two countries have managed to build amicable relations (though not completely void of some misunderstandings and a certain degree of mistrust). However, they deteriorated almost overnight after the spiritual leader of Buddhism (whom Beijing unfailingly calls "the head of the Tibetan separatist clique") had visited Mongol at the end of November. The fact that back in 2011 the current Dalai Lama confirmed his intention to stay away from politics and focus on religious affairs was largely ignored by China because de fact Dalai Lama continues playing an important role on the global stage, and some China's global political opponents use him intermittently (and, in some cases, not without his implicit consent) to aggravate the Celestial Empire.

That is why Beijing is closely monitoring Dalai Lama's "cultural, educational or theological" trips to other countries and freely expresses its dissatisfaction to the countries willing to welcome him.

As for the Mongolian leadership, it received an advance warning. Moreover, China, which assesses any country's willingness to welcome Dalai Lama as a demonstration of "support for separatist activities of Dalai Lama's clique", explicitly demanded that the visit be canceled altogether. China also hinted that Mongolia's disregard of Beijing's warning would entail adverse consequences affecting "the development of the entire scope of the bilateral relations".

And if some "heavyweights," particularly, Japan and India, can afford to ignore China's "timid" hints, Mongolia certainly not one of them, as 90% of its exports end up in China and majority of Mongolia's shipment routes connecting it to external markets run through China.

Though such large economies as Russia, USA, Japan, Germany, India and South Korea have been "turning heads" toward Mongolia in the last 10-15 years, hardly anybody would deny that the Mongolian economy (at least today) heavily depends on China.

In view of the foregoing, Mongolia's pretense that it "missed the hint," or its excuse that Dalai Lama was invited by Mongolian Buddhist monks wishing to meet with their spiritual leader sounds rather lame. The scope of Beijing's retaliatory measures against Ulan-Bator announced by an official representative of the Chinese Foreign Ministry on November 23, i.e., on the day of Dalai Lama's departure from Mongolia, reflects China's negative assessment of Mongolia's excuses. If to resort to legal terms, China ultimately "sentenced the Mongolian economy to death". Apparently, Mongolian economy's days were numbered, especially since the global economic system (which significantly affects Mongolia's standing) is still struggling to get back on track.

Thus, Ulan-Bator's appeal to India for an emergency aid issued at the beginning of December was nothing more than death throes in the tight Chinese Dragon's clasp. Considering shortfalls of the Mongolian geography and relative modesty of Indian economic potential (it is 3-4 times lower than Chinese), Mongolia's attempts do not stand a chance despite Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi included Mongolia among the key destinations of his May 2015 Asian tour.

Then, India promised to lend \$1bn to Ulan-Bator. At the beginning of December, Mongolian Ambassador to New Delhi stepped up his efforts, which were apparently aimed at the escalation of transfer of the promised funds.

Commenting on these maneuvers, the Chinese Global Times advised the Mongolian leadership to better “critically assess the incident with the admission of separatists to the country“. The statement released by the Mongolian Foreign Ministry on 20 December this year, was, apparently, a response to this advice.

Beijing will, most likely, be satisfied with the “public lashing” (at the diplomatic level) of its unsavvy neighbor and will not push for a tougher punishment, but the chain of events that occurred within the last month should teach China’s neighbor a lesson.