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THESIS

**EVOLUTION OF MONGOLIAN NATIONAL SECURITY
STRATEGY AND FOREIGN POLICY: OBJECTIVES,
OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL
APPLICABILITY**

by

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March 2022

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FOREIGN POLICY: OBJECTIVES, OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND
POTENTIAL APPLICABILITY**

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ABSTRACT

Mongolia's geographical position imposes certain restrictions on its formulation and implementation of foreign policy. Sharing a state border with two superpowers—Russia and China—Mongolia must consider these states as priority areas of its policy. To understand the trends of Mongolia's present foreign policy, it is important to look at the country's history. This thesis explores the evolution of Mongolian strategy and foreign policy, paying particular attention to the post-1990 period after its democratic revolution. For the first time since the Mongol Empire, historical circumstances provided Mongolia the opportunity to pursue its foreign policy independently. This policy, known as the "Third Neighbor Policy," aims to develop relations with states that do not have a common border with Mongolia to help maintain its independence, national security, and sovereignty.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

EIPC	Enhanced International Peacekeeping Capability
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
GPOI	Global Peace Operations Initiative
GWOT	Global War on Terrorism
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	non-commissioned officer
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
UBD	Ulaanbaatar Dialogue
UN	United Nations
U.S.	United States of America
USD	United States dollar
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH

This thesis examines the evolution of Mongolia's national security and foreign policies since the end of the Cold War. It seeks to identify the main drivers affecting Mongolia's pursuit of a national security strategy. The end of the Cold War brought change to both the nature and complexity of international peace and security. Mongolia, a former satellite state of the USSR, was suddenly freed from its USSR satellite status and had to pursue policies enabling it to maintain its independence, national security, and sovereignty in a new geo-strategic environment.

The post-Cold War era is an important one in the context of Mongolia's history. For the first time since Chinggis Khan's founding, Mongolia has been able to pursue its own independent foreign policy. Mongolians were under the Qing Dynasty's rule from 1691 to 1911, then once they were separated from Qing by the liberation revolution in 1911, they were subject to Russian influence until the end of the Cold War. In August 1990, at a time when Mongolia was embarking on a path to democracy and a market economy, and pursuing an independent and open foreign policy, U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker III visited Mongolia.¹ He stated that Mongolia has two major neighboring nations but emphasized that the United States would not affect Mongolia's relationship with its neighbors and that Mongolia could still preserve these relations while simultaneously developing a partnership with the United States.² Baker's statement spurred the idea and the development of a foreign policy strategy for Mongolia that seeks to strike a balance between its two neighbors while gaining the support of another country. Consequently, resulting from internal and external objectives, came the Concept of Foreign Policy which

¹ "James A. Baker III in Secretaries Travel Abroad" (Department of State, Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs, 2009), <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/trvl/l/13042.htm>.

² Bayarkhuu Dashdorj, "Туравдагч Хөрш Ба Монголын Гадаад Орчил [Third Neighbor and Mongolia's International Circle]," Шилдэг Нийтлэлчдийн Клуб [Top Publishers Club], August 7, 2020, <http://www.baabar.mn/article/gurawdagch-khursh-ba-mongoliin-gadaad-orchil>.

referred to non-bordering strategically important nations as a third neighbor.³ This concept of a “third neighbor” has come to be an important foundational principle of the state and its pursuit of foreign policy and national security.

Since the end of the Cold War, Mongolia is one of the countries that has been successful in transforming its former communist society into a democracy. It is successfully developing a democratic political system and free market economy with the aid of third nations, especially the United States. Mongolia’s commitment to democracy and maintaining bilateral and multilateral relationships are important examples of how Mongolia has overcome serious challenges, achieved great success in a short period of time, and created a favorable environment for its security.

This thesis research will examine how Mongolia’s balanced foreign policy, including its policy in the security field, has contributed to maintaining its national interest and sustaining its sovereignty. Focus will be placed on the evolution of Mongolia’s foreign and security policies following the democratic revolution, identifying the domestic and external drivers that affected it, and addressing the implications these findings will have on future policies.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The significance of the question is to help apply the model of the Mongolian experience to other developing countries, and that these other countries may learn from how Mongolia secured its sovereignty and national security through cooperation with other nations and international organizations. This thesis will demonstrate how Mongolia’s focus on its foreign diplomatic and foreign security policies and its cooperation with other nations has helped maintain its independence, national security, and sovereignty. This cooperation has also strengthened Mongolia’s position on the world stage, enhanced its reputation, and facilitated its gain of recognition from major powers, international organizations, and security institutions. Mongolia is landlocked between two regional powers, the Russian

³ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia, *Concept of Foreign Policy of Mongolia* (Ulaanbaatar, n.d.), <https://legalinfo.mn/mn/detail/6340>.

Federation and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Mongolian foreign policy has always been focused on these two countries and it has tried to keep a balance in its policy regarding these two powers whenever possible. In the recent history of Mongolia, however, in light of loosening Russian influence along with a re-emerging China, the nation has been provided a new chance assert its position and establish lasting relations with the rest of the world.

In theory, this thesis helps to explore the security challenges faced by a small state regarding foreign policy, and it offers possible options and solutions for states in a similar position to follow. In the case of Mongolia, a small country locked between two great powers, security remains a key issue. Furthermore, this thesis will try to identify ways to, at a minimum, maintain and to improve the current level of relations. In addition, it provides valuable information on how other small countries can cooperate with the rest of the world and international organizations to protect their national security, sovereignty, and independence.

The empirical significance of this thesis is that the United States and other democracies advised and guided Mongolia, which had transitioned to a democratic society, on how to develop professional capability to participate in international peacekeeping operations. To maintain the current level of relations, it is necessary to make appropriate proposals on how to work together with foreign nations in the future. These proposals are necessary in order to determine the direction of Mongolia's foreign policy and to make further proposals in this regard. Moreover, this research will assist in making predictions regarding Mongolia's foreign policy, assessing the possibility of changes in its strategic vision and plans, and identifying potential solutions for further development of participation and capacity in international relations.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature and publications on the Third Neighbor foreign policy, particularly in the security field, have been limited due to the small number of real-world cases. Thus, this research seeks to provide scholars and readers a detailed analysis and deeper consideration of Mongolia's experience of being sandwiched between two regional

giants, its accomplishments with other nations in the national security domain, and its commitment to global peace initiatives.

As noted by Insu Choi about Mongolia in his Master's thesis at the Naval Postgraduate School in 1995: "From the perspectives of small states, in the hegemonic system they are often constrained in the pursuit of their foreign policies, while in the balance of power system they often can play a role as a balancer."⁴ As a small developing country, Mongolia's foreign policy has always prioritized relations with its two neighboring nations, and it has maintained balanced relations with them through a wide range of good neighborly cooperative efforts. In order to preserve that balance, Mongolian policy makers established the Third Neighbor Policy.

This thesis will examine Mongolia's foreign policy, specifically regarding third neighbors. Ambassador Baasanjav Ganbold clarified "the idea of a third neighbor refers to countries other than Russia and China that Mongolia has built relationships with."⁵ The challenge was that there was very little economic interest from third neighbors. Thus, the policy makers were required to find a way to attract international attention. The solution was to increase its engagement with international organizations by participating in their activities, to develop bilateral and multilateral relations with other countries, and to contribute to peacekeeping initiatives. Therefore, within that foreign policy frame, Mongolia has developed diplomatic relations with 188 countries and cooperated with over 30 international organizations and institutions.⁶ Recently, Mongolia has provided 900 military and police officers (battalion level) to the UN peacekeeping force every year.⁷

⁴ Insu Choi, "Small States and the Balance of Power" (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1995), <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/31415>.

⁵ "Mongolia's 'Third Neighbor' Foreign Policy," Asia Society, accessed June 16, 2021, <https://asiasociety.org/korea/mongolias-third-neighbor-foreign-policy>.

⁶ "Foreign Policy," Embassy of Mongolia, May 21, 2013, <http://mongolianembassy.us/about-mongolia/foreign-relations-of-mongolia/>.

⁷ "Mongolia," United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed Sep 16, 2021, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mongolia>.

The security policy has never been separate from foreign policy, and the Third Neighbor Policy facilitates the development of relationships with other nations and international organizations while counterbalancing its relationship with its two neighbors for the purpose of maintaining its national security. Mongolia has been an active participant of regional, especially Asia-Pacific, and international security initiatives. Mongolia raised the notion of creating dialogue around security in the Northeast Asian region and the President of Mongolia, Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj, invited its regional partners to the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue (UBD) to engage in and debate region-wide issues of common interest in 2013.⁸ “The UBD ... has met annually five times at the Track 1.5 level, wherein nonstate actors including academics and researchers mix with official decision makers under the Chatham House Rule, so participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker is revealed. The DPRK has participated in the UBD three times, including in 2018.”⁹

Mongolia has been well aware of the global situations and changes in U.S. policy and was able to adapt and use them in a timely manner. For example, “...shift on the part of Western governments towards the use of defense diplomacy for a range of new purposes,”¹⁰ as stated by Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster. According to them, “These include military cooperation with former or potential enemies as part of wider attempts to improve relations with these states; support for multilateral regional military cooperation as a tool of conflict prevention; support for the democratization of civil–military relations and security sector reform more generally; support for countries attempting to rebuild or reform their armed forces after conflict or political transition; and support for the development of regional peacekeeping capabilities.”¹¹ Furthermore, Mongolia is carefully

⁸ “Ulaanbaatar Dialogue,” United Nations, accessed September 18, 2021, <https://www.un.int/mongolia/mongolia/ulaanbaatar-dialogue>.

⁹ “How North Korea-Mongolia Relations Have Jump-Started the Korean Peninsula Peace Process,” East-West Center, February 19, 2019, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/how-north-korea-mongolia-relations-have-jump-started-the-korean-peninsula-peace-process>.

¹⁰ Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, “Conclusion,” *The Adelphi Papers* 44, no. 365 (May 1, 2004): 69–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/05679320412331340247>.

¹¹ Cottey and Forster.

observing the atmosphere of the relationship between the two neighbors and making certain decisions accordingly. “In 2014, Mongolian policymakers decided to recast the relationship with these two powers under a neighbor trilateralism dynamic in order to take advantage of Sino-Russian rapprochement.”¹²

Alicia J. Campi and Jagannath P. Panda defined Mongolia’s importance according to its geographical location for regional security: “Mongolia is now an influential player in Asian regional politics and national security planning, because of its geographical transit corridor position between China and Russia, its unique status as a new democratic and free market economy that emerged from the Cold War era in a troubled region...”¹³ In this thesis I will argue that the evolution of Mongolian foreign and security policies has made Mongolia an important player in the realm of regional security.

Another focus of this research is to determine the level of potential for Mongolia’s experience to be adopted in other developing countries’ foreign and security policies and explore its applicability. This will also aid in the cooperation efforts with other countries’ security sectors to increase these nations’ capabilities and maintain sovereignty and independence.

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

In order to analyze the evolution of Mongolian national security strategy and foreign policy, the following hypotheses are proposed in this thesis.

In the case of Mongolia, it has always had a strong desire to build and maintain positive relations with tertiary developed nations. Circumstances that allowed for this to happen, however, rarely occurred, and it was only during extremely brief periods of national independence and liberation movements that they were able to try and make progress towards these goals.

¹² Alicia J. Campi, *Mongolia’s Foreign Policy: Navigating a Changing World* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2019).

¹³ Alicia J. Campi and Jagannath P. Panda, *Mongolia and Northeast Asian Security, Nuclear Proliferation, Environment, and Civil Confrontations* (Routledge, 2021).

Thus, the foundations for success were set by Mongolia's ability to conduct independent foreign policy, and its development of co-beneficial friendly relations with its two neighbors created stable conditions. From the course of events, I would gather that the main factors influencing the Mongolian national security strategy and foreign policy are, firstly, significant changes in Mongolia's external environment; secondly, government policies and decisions; and thirdly, the country's internal development. Therefore, in order to successfully implement the national security strategy and foreign policy, it is necessary to observe the changes in the external environment of the country in question. It is vital to study the external and internal problems, goals, and perspectives of the two neighbors and the third neighbor countries.

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis provides an important analysis of Mongolia's current policy and examines what needs to be improved, and it explores the possibility of implementing Mongolia's experience in other small and developing countries.

This thesis relies on empirically compiled information on the issues being examined in this thesis. The main sources for this thesis will be Mongolian legislation, official government documents, government and agency policy documents, Mongolian leadership's pronouncements and statements, publications, official views, foreign and domestic research references, journal articles, journal reports, research documents, and official documents of international and non-governmental organizations. Additional sources include the media, newspapers, and Internet sources. In addition, the thesis research will involve reviewing records and reports from the Mongolian Ministry of Defense in order to learn from past and present activities. On a more personal note, I will also apply and reflect on my professional experience working as a specialist in the Foreign Cooperation Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Mongolia from 2010 to 2020. I was involved and specialized in security diplomacy and cooperation planning – an experience that also will inform the research and analysis.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis will be composed of an introduction, two chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter I, the introduction, will present major issues, the research question and its significance, the proposed hypothesis, and the thesis overview.

Chapter II will discuss three main points on Mongolia's foreign and security policy in the timeframe of 1990–2000. This will identify challenges, responses to these challenges, and the key reasons for Mongolia's choice of foreign policy.

Chapter III will review three main points on Mongolia's foreign and security policy in the timeframe of 2000–2021. This chapter will review the three points from the previous chapter in the period of 2000–2021.

Chapter IV will summarize the findings presented by the previous three chapters and offer policy recommendations, ending with a concluding analysis.

II. MONGOLIA’S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE POLITICAL AND SECURITY FIELDS—PERIOD ONE (1990–2000)

A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Mongolia has a special geographical position: it is located between Russia and China and has no outlet to the sea. Mongolia’s national security strategy and foreign policy has been strongly influenced by its location, being, in effect, surrounded by two powerful states.¹⁴

By the beginning of the 20th century, Mongolia was part of the Qing Dynasty, with a certain degree of national identity. The elite of Mongolia in the first decade of the 20th century made an effort to gain independence from China, using the support of Russia. Russia, however, was not interested in altering the existing arrangement in the region and did not take any proactive action towards the independence of Mongolia. In addition, China aimed to convert Mongolia into a Chinese province.

In 1911, amid the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, Mongolians proclaimed independence and created a state entity known as the Bogd Khanate headed by the theocratic ruler. In order to validate its sovereignty internationally, first priority was given to establishing relations with China, a successor of the Qing Dynasty, and Russia, as it neighbored the newly established state. At the same time, the Mongolian government did not miss an opportunity to reach out to the rest of the world, specifically powerful states that could have their interests aligning with Mongolia’s. According to Jamsran, “Mongolia’s government under Bogd Khan submitted a missive to the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and the Netherlands; the dispatch amounted to a bid that Mongolia be recognized as sovereign country and thus in a position to establish

¹⁴ Bayar-Ochir Sukhee, “The Implications of the Rise of China’s Military for Mongolian Security” (Master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2010), 1, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/5340>.

trade relations. This initiative ... marked the first attempt to establish diplomatic relations between Mongolia and a third country.”¹⁵

Based on the Russian position of autonomous status within China for Mongolia, Russia disapproved of Mongolia’s struggle for full political independence from China. Under the Agreement of 1912 between Mongolia and Russia, Russia recognized the autonomy of Mongolia and its right to prevent Chinese military presence within its borders. According to the 1913 Russian-Chinese Declaration, Russia recognized that Mongolia was under the suzerainty of China, China recognized the autonomous status of Mongolia, and Mongolia was given the right to independent trade turnover and industrial policies. The 1915 tripartite agreement of Mongolia, China and Russia, known as “Treaty of Kyakhta,” affirmed the autonomous status of Mongolia within China. This agreement affirmed the right of Mongolia to independently administer its internal affairs except for entering treaties with foreign states concerning territorial and political matters. Thus, by 1915, Mongolia received the status of autonomy and embarked on the path of gaining political independence from China.

As a part of the agreements Russia sent military trainers, weapons, and ammunitions to support the Mongolian military, which was one of the first arrangements in foreign security cooperation. The theme of foreign security cooperation also forms an important strand in the history of the evolution the state’s foreign policy and national security strategy.

While Mongolia collaborated with its neighbors to achieve its independence, China took advantage of Russia’s waning support. In 1919, under the diminished influence of Russia in the region, Chinese troops entered Mongolia, breaking the “Treaty of Kyakhta.” In 1921, the People’s Revolution took place. The People’s Revolution aimed at gaining independence from China and the establishment of an independent Mongolian state. In 1921, an Agreement on the Establishment of Friendly Relations was signed between Soviet

¹⁵ Bayasakh Jamsran, *The Three Cornerstones of Mongolia’s Independence and Foreign Policy* (Berlin: Institut für Strategie- Politik- Sicherheits- und Wirtschaftsberatung ISPSW, 2018), https://www.ispsw.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/579_Bayasakh.pdf.

Russia and the Government of Mongolia. According to Articles 1 and 2, “The Government of the RSFSR recognizes the People’s Government of Mongolia as the only legitimate Government of Mongolia, and the People’s Government of Mongolia recognizes the government of the RSFSR as the only legitimate Government of Russia.” It mutually recognized the state independence of both parties. For Mongolia, it strengthened its external political status. This did not, however, prevent the Soviet Union from signing a bilateral Agreement on General Principles for the Settlement of Issues with China in 1924. According to this document, “The Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics recognizes that Outer Mongolia is an integral part of the Republic of China and respects China’s sovereignty therein.”¹⁶ The Soviet Union was forced to sign this document for two reasons: first, officially China was unwilling to make concessions on the question of its influence in Mongolia; second, the Soviet leadership counted on speedy victory of the Chinese revolution and a possible reconsideration of the document. Mongolia did not accept the content of this agreement but was used to following the Soviet Union’s course of action to achieve its own national interests.¹⁷

Mongolia was identified as the “Bogd Khanate” for two periods (1911-1919 and then again from 1921–24) in response the end of the Qing dynasty and the resulting political instability in China. The Bogd Khanate perhaps represented the first attempt in the 20th century to achieve political independence.¹⁸ Regardless of the unlikelihood of success, Mongolia’s leaders from this era still sought to receive a positive response for diplomacy from foreign nations. Prime Minister Bodoos “call for equal relations with foreign countries and governments” was issued in the form of an official statement. This was another effort towards finding a partner other than China and Russia.¹⁹

¹⁶ Bruce A. Elleman, “Secret Sino-Soviet Negotiations on Outer Mongolia, 1918–1925,” *Pacific Affairs* 66, no. 4 (1993): 539–63, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2760678>.

¹⁷ *History of Mongolia*, Vol. 5 (Mongolian Institute of History, 2003)

¹⁸ Thomas E. Ewing, *Between the Hammer and the Anvil: Chinese and Russian Policies in Outer Mongolia, 1911–1921* (Bloomington IN, Indiana University Press, 1980)

¹⁹ Jargalsaikhan Mendee and Batmunkh Munkhtulga, *What Are Russian Interests in Mongolia?* (Ulaanbaatar: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Mongolia & Mongolian Institute for Innovative Policies, 2021), <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/mongolei/18519.pdf>.

The international legal status of Mongolia was full of uncertainty. On the one hand, de jure, Mongolia remained an integral part of China; on the other hand, de facto, Mongolia developed separately from China, as an independent state, using the support and resources of the Soviet Union. This situation persisted until the end of the World War II.²⁰

In 1924, after the death of the Bogd Khan, the Constitution of Mongolia was adopted, which consolidated the republican system, and the Mongolian People's Republic became the official name of Mongolia.

Prior to the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom agreed to recognize Mongolian independence. At the end of World War II, a symbolic event related to the recognition of Mongolian independence by a third party took place. In 1935, Mongolia, under Russian control, entered into an agreement (that failed later on) to settle the Mongolia-Manchukuo border conflict with Manchukuo, a puppet state established by Japan. This was the first time that Mongolia had discussed the issue with a third party. It resulted in deployment of the Soviet Union's military in the territory of Mongolia under the Protocol on Mutual Assistance.

In 1936, Mongolia and the Soviet Union signed the Protocol on Mutual Assistance. According to the protocol, “in the case of the threat of an attack by a third county,’ the two governments ‘should immediately confer regarding the situation and adopt all measures that may be necessary for the protection and safety of their territories.’”²¹ This agreement was materialized during four-month battle at Khalkhin Gol in 1939, which concluded by cease-fire agreement, and took effect on 15 September between Soviet Union and Japan.

According to the “Yalta Agreement” of 1945, regarding Entry of the Soviet Union into the War against Japan, the United States and Great Britain agreed on the condition that

²⁰ Mendee and Munkhtulga, 3.

²¹ Tsedendambyn Batbayar, “Stalin’s Strategy in Mongolia, 1932–1936,” *Mongolian Studies* 22 (1999): 1–17, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43193282>.

the Soviet Union shall enter into the war in case of preserving the status quo of Mongolia.²² Based on the agreement “The Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance” between China and the Soviet Union in 1945, a plebiscite on independence was held in Mongolia, as a result of which China recognized the independence of the Mongolia in 1946.²³ After Mongolia achieved its independence in 1946, it attempted to join the United Nations (UN). Due to the outbreak of the Cold War, however, Mongolia became a member of the UN only in 1961. At the same time, Mongolia started to establish diplomatic relations, first with Soviet bloc countries, then with democracies including, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Japan, Turkey, and the United States.²⁴

The next surge of Soviet military presence in Mongolian territory, based on “The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance Between the USSR and the Mongolian People’s Republic” of 1966, was due to the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations and fears of the Mongolian leadership.²⁵ It sealed the Mongolian-Chinese border until the democratic revolution in the country and made Mongolia a classic example of “bandwagoning”²⁶ with a powerful neighbor.

Japan, having established diplomatic relations in 1972, extended a grant to Mongolia for the construction of a cashmere factory as a war reparation. It demonstrated a possibility for successful economic cooperation with developed third countries.

²² “Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945 - Office of the Historian,” accessed December 24, 2021, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945Malta/d503?fbclid=IwAR0uqHlItVgs9SZa3r_ahzeGnEkBbSmz9qEnSCXFMWuxcJSn7ouD13Ps93k.

²³ George W. Atkinson, “The Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 23, no. 3 (1947): 357–66, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3017226>.

²⁴ “Дипломат Харилцаатай Орнууд [States with Diplomatic Relations],” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia, accessed January 2, 2022, <http://mfa.gov.mn/mongolian-foreign-policy/дипломат-харилцаа/states-with-diplomatic-relations>.

²⁵ “Mongolia and U.S.S.R.: Friendship Treaty,” *International Legal Materials* 5, no. 2 (1966): 341–43, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20690048>.

²⁶ Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 3–43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>.

Thus, the position of Mongolia in the 20th century in the system of international relations underwent significant changes. By the beginning of the 20th century, Mongolia was autonomous within the Qing Dynasty. Then Mongolia unilaterally declared its independence, which neither Russia nor China recognized. The official year of independence in Mongolia is 1921, the year of the People's Revolution, which served as the beginning of rapprochement with the Soviet Union. From that moment on, the Soviet Union became Mongolia's main ally and donor, helping it build a socialist system until the democratic revolution in Mongolia in 1990.

B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The collapse of the Soviet bloc resulted in Mongolia redefining both its domestic and foreign policy priorities. New principles of the functioning of the state system in general, and foreign policy in particular, are reflected in the fundamental law, national security, and foreign policy strategic policy documents. One primary example of such documents was the Constitution of Mongolia, which was adopted in 1992. The Constitution embodies the principles of a completely new model of social development for the state. According to Article 1, "Mongolia is an independent, sovereign republic. The fundamental purpose of state activity is the ensurance of democracy, justice, freedom, equality, and national unity and respect of law."²⁷ Article 4, Paragraph 3 states "Stationing of foreign troops in the territory of Mongolia or allowing them to cross the state borders for the purpose of passing through the country's territory is prohibited unless permitted by an appropriate law."²⁸ Article 5 establishes in Mongolia "Mongolia's economy is based on different forms of property following both universal trends of world economic development and national specifics."²⁹ Article 10 states that "Mongolia adheres to the universally recognized norms and principles of international law and pursues a peaceful

²⁷ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia, "The Constitution of Mongolia," January 13, 1992, https://www.conscourt.gov.mn/?page_id=842&lang=en&fbclid=IwAR0FcA_p0PXWdliJcg2J6ZPI6RxXfuFuGG2Ltiyhv9vrwdnjAC7_pthwI.

²⁸ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia.

²⁹ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia.

foreign policy.”³⁰ Article 11 states that “It is the duty of the State to secure the country’s independence and ensure national security and public order. Mongolia maintains armed forces for self-defense. The structure and organization of the armed forces and rules of military service are determined by law.”³¹

These articles illustrate the fundamental changes that have taken place in Mongolia. First, the country is embarking on democratic and market-oriented reforms. Second, foreign policy towards all states should be peaceful, and this paragraph refers to policy towards China. Third, the reference in the Constitution to the inadmissibility of the stationing of foreign troops is a reaction to the stationing of Soviet troops in Mongolia from 1966 to 1991 and is aimed at improving Mongolian-Chinese relations.

The next document was the National Security Concept of Mongolia, adopted in the spring of 1994 and renewed in 2010. According to this document, Mongolia’s national security is a situation in which external and internal conditions are guaranteed to ensure genuine national interests, and it states “The vital national interests of Mongolia consist in the existence of the Mongolian people and their civilization, in the country’s independence, sovereignty territorial integrity, inviolability of State frontiers, relative economic independence, sustainable ecological development and national unity. The vital national interests of Mongolia constitute the object of special care and protection on the part of the State and the people.”³² It also establishes external factors that may adversely affect the national security of the country. The most important of the factors listed in the concept are armed aggression by another state; the forcible elimination of the state independence of Mongolia; the imposition by another state of its political, economic, and ideological control over Mongolia; the use of the territory of Mongolia by one state to wage hostilities against another; and a massive influx of migrants from neighboring states. The ways and means of ensuring national security relate mainly to the reliance on international law, as well as to

³⁰ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia.

³¹ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia.

³² The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia.

the establishment of a security system in Central and North-East Asia. If all peaceful means have been exhausted, the Armed Forces should be involved.³³

The economic factor is a very important factor of national security in the National Security Concept. Economic security is referred to in the concept as the cornerstone of Mongolia's independence and sovereignty. The most important of the external factors that can have a negative impact on economic security are becoming a raw materials appendage for other countries and becoming directly dependent on a particular country in strategic economic sectors. To avoid such a scenario, the National Security Concept proposes ways and means of ensuring security, including the implementation of coherent and balanced government policies in various economic sectors, identification of strategic sectors of the economy, and not allowing one country to dominate foreign trade.³⁴

It can be concluded from the "National Security Concept that the Mongolian" leadership intended to prevent a repetition of past situations when Mongolia was part of another state (i.e., the Qing Dynasty) or was under the direct influence of a foreign state (i.e., the Soviet Union). Moreover, the threat to national security was not only direct military aggression but also massive flows of migrants. Given Mongolia's location, however, there is a high probability of Mongolia's economic dependence on neighboring states.

The third document, which reflects the principles and directions of Mongolia's foreign policy, is the "Concept of Foreign Policy of Mongolia," adopted in the summer of 1994 and renewed in 2010.³⁵ In its preamble, the document notes that two neighboring states, Russia and China, have a great influence on Mongolia's foreign policy. The concept identifies six directions of foreign policy:

- a) Maintaining friendly relations with the Russian Federation, People's Republic of China shall be priority directions of Mongolia's foreign policy activity. It shall not adopt the line of either country but shall maintain in

³³ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia, *National Security Concept of Mongolia*, 2010, <https://legalinfo.mn/mn/detail/6163/2/208070>.

³⁴ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia.

³⁵ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia.

principle a balanced relationship with both of them and shall promote all-round neighborly cooperation. In doing so, the traditional relations as well as the specific nature of our economic cooperation will these two countries will be taken into account.

b) The second direction of Mongolia 's foreign policy activity shall be developing friendly relations with highly developed countries of the West and East such as the United States of America, Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany. At the same time it will also pursue a policy aimed at promoting friendly relations with such countries as India, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Singapore, Turkey, Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland and at creating and bringing to an appropriate level their economic and other interests in Mongolia.

c) The third direction of Mongolia 's foreign policy activity shall be strengthening its position in Asia and securing a constructive participation in the political and economic integration process in the region. Within the framework of this objective, greater attention shall be given to Asia and the Pacific region, in particular to North-East and Central Asia. Mongolia shall take an active part in the process of initiating dialogues and negotiations on the issues of strengthening regional security and creating a collective security mechanism. It will strive to become a member of the Asia, Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC). Prerequisites for participating in regional integration shall be created primarily through expanding and promoting bilateral relations with the countries of the region.

d) The fourth direction of Mongolia 's foreign policy, activity shall be promoting cooperation with the United Nations Organization and its specialized agencies, and with international financial and economic organizations, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

e) The fifth direction of Mongolia 's foreign policy activity will be developing friendly relations with countries of the former socialist community, as well as the newly independent states. When developing relations with these countries, a flexible approach will be adopted, reinforcing the positive legacy of our past relations while at the same time taking into account the potential of promoting relations in conformity with the new circumstances. Particular attention will be given to promoting relations with Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in Eastern Europe as well as with Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

f) The sixth direction of Mongolia 's foreign policy activity shall be developing friendly relations with developing countries and cooperating with them, as much as possible, in the solution of common objectives.

Beyond the framework of bilateral relations with these countries, this task will be realized mainly through cooperation within the framework of international organizations and movements, such as the United Nations, the Group of 77 and the Non-Aligned Movement.³⁶

The directions of foreign economic relations are generally described in the same way as in the “National Security Concept” and imply an even distribution of trade among several states. Thus, the “Concept of Foreign Policy of Mongolia” stipulates the multi-vector principle. The concept recognized that the influence of its neighbors was enormous, that relations with Russia and China should be friendly, but that Mongolia should not depend on one of those states. Cooperation with other states, especially with developed states, and participation in international organizations should be a counterweight to Russia and China, helping Mongolia to avoid becoming dependent.

C. MONGOLIA-RUSSIAN FEDERATION RELATIONS

In the early 1990s, with the collapse of the communist bloc, Mongolian-Russian relations deteriorated with a degree of intensity because both countries were consumed by the transition to democratization and a free market economy. From 1990 to the present, a timeline of Mongolia-Russia relations can be divided into two main phases. The first stage is 1990–2000, characterized as a period of decline and reduction in trade turnover.

The crisis of the Russian economy in the early 1990s, caused by the transition from a command economy to a market economy, led to a sharp decline in economic cooperation between Mongolia and Russia. Mongolia, losing its main partner and donor, had to seek new partners and diversify its international contacts.

During the negotiations between Soviet leader Michael Gorbachev and Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in the late 1980s, the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw its troops from Mongolia. Between 1989 and 1992, Russian troops withdrew from Mongolia. At this time, Mongolian leaders saw the chance of security independence from Russia. Therefore, to make sure the withdrawal of Russian troops was complete, the Mongolian government rejected a Russian request of keeping their nuclear test monitoring site in Mongolia.

³⁶ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia, *Concept of Foreign Policy of Mongolia*.

During this period, the level of political relations outpaced the level of economic cooperation. In February 1991, Mongolia and Russia signed the “Declaration on Friendship and Good-Neighborly Cooperation,” which proclaimed mutual rejection of ideological approaches to bilateral relations and agreed realism and mutual benefit are the main principles of cooperation.³⁷

During the period of 1991–1993, several intergovernmental agreements were signed, including an agreement on trade and economic cooperation and the establishment of the “Mongolian-Russian Intergovernmental Commission on Economic, Commercial and Scientific and Technical Cooperation.” All treaties and agreements concluded since 1921 have been audited.³⁸

The first bilateral agreement since the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the “Treaty on Friendly Relations and Cooperation between Mongolia and Russia” of January 20, 1993.³⁹ This document was signed during the official visit of the first President of Mongolia, Ochirbat Punsalmaa, to Moscow. The treaty took into account all the changes that had taken place over the past few years, stressing the desire of the parties to continue traditional cooperation in all spheres and to promote good-neighborly relations in Northeast Asia. The treaty became the basis for all subsequent agreements.

In the following years, a number of intergovernmental agreements were concluded, including established border crossing points for simplified traffic across the Mongolian-Russian border, the protection and use of transboundary waters, cultural and scientific cooperation agreements, efforts towards avoidance of double taxation in respect of taxes on income and property, conditions for mutual travel of citizens, and cooperation in the field of geological exploration and mineral exploitation.⁴⁰

³⁷ Tsedendamba Batbayar, “Mongolian-Russian Relations In The Past Decade,” *Asian Survey* 43, no. 6 (2003): 951–70, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2003.43.6.951>.

³⁸ “Хоёр Талын Харилцаа [Bilateral Relations],” Монгол Улсаас Эрхүү Хотод Суугаа Ерөнхий Консулын Газар [Consulate General of Mongolia in Irkutsk, Russia], accessed December 25, 2021, <https://irkutsk.consul.mn/index.php?moduls=12>.

³⁹ “Хоёр Талын Харилцаа [Bilateral Relations].”

⁴⁰ “Хоёр Талын Харилцаа [Bilateral Relations].”

Thus, on a legal basis, laid down in the 1993 “Treaty on Friendly Relations and Cooperation,” more narrowly focused treaties were concluded with a view to promoting cross-border economic cooperation, and also aimed at restoring cultural and scientific ties.

Bilateral relations in the security field resumed by signing military and technical cooperation agreements in 1993. It was furthered through reciprocal visits of the Minister of Defense of Mongolia, Dorligjav Dambii, in 1997 and the Russian Chief of Defense, army general A.V. Kvashnin, in 2000.

From 1990 to 1999, a general political agreement and more than one hundred intergovernmental and interagency agreements were concluded, providing a solid legal and treaty-based relationship that has brought bilateral relations to a new level.

As the economic environment in both countries has improved, conditions for greater interaction have developed. The Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Mongolia in November 2000 and signed the “Ulaanbaatar Declaration.”⁴¹ This declaration set forth the broadest range of issues on which Mongolia and Russia agree to pursue mutually beneficial cooperation, including trade, economic, military, and cultural cooperation. Russia, as a nuclear power, has reaffirmed the security assurances of Mongolia, which has declared its territory a nuclear-weapon-free zone. This document was the second overall political document concluded between Mongolia and Russia after the “Treaty on Friendly Relations and Cooperation.”⁴²

The next step in strengthening relations between both states was the resolution of Mongolia’s Soviet era debt to Russia, the so-called Big Debt, which amounted to \$10 billion.⁴³ The Russian side forgave 98% of the debt and Mongolia paid \$250 million to Russia.

⁴¹ Batbayar, “Mongolian-Russian Relations In The Past Decade.”

⁴² “Хоёр Талын Харилцаа [Bilateral Relations].”

⁴³ Ankit Panda. “Why Did Russia Just Write Off 97% of Mongolian Debt?” *The Diplomat*, February 3, 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/02/why-did-russia-just-write-off-97-of-mongolian-debt/>

A number of intergovernmental agreements have been concluded that have further enhanced cooperation between both countries, for example, on cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy; on the principles of cooperation between the executive authorities of the federal subjects of Russia and the local administrations of Mongolia; on cooperation in the field of tourism; on the provision of military equipment aid to Mongolia; and mutual recognition of diplomas, academic degrees, and scientific titles. This expansion included military cooperation. Thus, by the beginning of 2000s, Russia began to regain its position in Mongolia.

Although Mongolian-Russian relations in the political sphere developed quite dynamically even in the 1990s, with visits by heads of state and heads of ministries of foreign affairs, as well as meetings on a more mundane working level, other aspects of the bilateral relationship were in a state of crisis.

D. MONGOLIA-PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA RELATIONS

In the 20th century, Sino-Mongolian relations were complicated in their nature. Mongolia became de facto independent from China in 1921, but China de jure recognized this fact only in 1949. Engagements between Mongolia and China nearly ceased when Soviet-Chinese relations deteriorated. The deployment of Soviet troops in Mongolia further complicated relations. The resumption of relations took place in 1986–1987 during the visit of Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Liu Shuqing and the restart of parliamentary relations.⁴⁴

Since the 1990s, Mongolia and the People's Republic of China have conducted exchanges of high-level visits. Mongolian high level officials have visited China, such as, Vice-President Gonchigdorj Radnaasumberel in 1991, Prime Minister Byambasuren Dash in 1992, Prime Minister Jasrai Puntsag in 1996, the President Bagabandi Natsag in 1998, and Prime Minister Amarjargal Rinchinnyam in 1999. Reciprocally, Mongolia has been visited by the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Qiao

⁴⁴ Elizabeth E. Green, "China and Mongolia: Recurring Trends and Prospects for Change," *Asian Survey* 26, no. 12 (1986): 1337–63, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644551>.

Shi in 1994, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen in 1997, and Secretary-General of the Communist Party of the People’s Republic of China Jiang Zemin in 1999.⁴⁵

A number of treaties and agreements were signed during the exchange. One of the basic Sino-Mongolian treaties is the “Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of 1994,” under which Mongolia and China commit themselves “to respect each other’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, to abide by the principles of mutual non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and to develop bilateral relations in the spirit of good-neighborliness, friendship and cooperation.”⁴⁶

In the defense sector, the resumption of bilateral relations began in September 1990 with the official visit of Major General Fu Ziaping, Director General of the Foreign Affairs Department of the Ministry of Defense of the People’s Republic of China, at the invitation of the Ministry of Defense of Mongolia. “The Protocol of Cooperation and Exchange between the Ministry of Defense of Mongolia and the Ministry of National Defense of People’s Republic of China” (1997) was followed.⁴⁷ Minister, Chief of Defense, Heads of agencies and departments, Regional Commander level officials visited from both sides between 1990 and 1999. At a time, other types of cooperation included language and specialized training, as well as construction material aid to a certain extent. It indicates the successful reestablishment of bilateral security engagement after 30 years of hostility.

E. “THIRD NEIGHBOR” POLICY

Mongolia’s geographical position imposes certain restrictions on its foreign policy. Possessing a state border with only two countries—Russia and China—forces Mongolia to treat these states as priority areas of its policy. The difficult history of Mongolia’s relations with its neighbors, however, and the fear of being in the sphere of influence of one of them,

⁴⁵ “Хоёр Талын Харилцаа [Bilateral Relations],” Embassy of Mongolia to the People’s Republic of China, accessed December 26, 2021, <http://www.beijing.embassy.mn/index.php?moduls=13>.

⁴⁶ “Гэрээ Хэлэлцээрийн Жагсаалт [List of Agreements],” Embassy of Mongolia to the People’s Republic of China, accessed December 26, 2021, <http://www.beijing.embassy.mn/index.php?moduls=9>.

⁴⁷ Ministry of Defense of Mongolia, *Батлан Хамгаалах Гадаад Харилцаа, Хамтын Ажиллагаа, Энхийг Сахиулахын Цагаан Ном [White Book of Defense Foreign Cooperation and Peacekeeping]* (Ulaanbaatar, 2015).

pushed Mongolia to seek a force capable of balancing the influence of Russia and China. At the moment, Mongolia does not give a clear preference to either Russia or China in political bilateral relations. In the last three decades, the opinion has been firmly entrenched that for the country's successful development it is necessary to refrain from entering into an alliance with one of its neighbors and to maintain balanced relations with both nations.

After the collapse of Soviet Russia and the almost complete cessation of economic aid from its side, Mongolia was forced to reorient itself in its foreign policy. Initially, China became Mongolia's main partner. There are a number of unresolved issues in Sino-Mongolian relations, however, that impede the development of an equal dialogue. Moreover, with the build-up of trade and economic relations between China and Mongolia, and the sharp decline in the role of Russia among the Mongolian public, the idea of the Chinese threat became more relevant. The combination of these reasons pushed Mongolia to seek a third force that could counterbalance China's influence.

Attempts to establish relations with other states were made by Mongolia at the beginning of the 20th century. For example, in 1911, a letter was sent to the Japanese emperor; however, it was returned unanswered. In 1913, Prime Minister Namnansuren in St. Petersburg handed notes to the Foreign Ministers of England, France, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Holland, Japan, Belgium, and the United States, in which "treaties of friendship and trade" were proposed. In the communist era, Mongolia maintained political and economic relations with the countries of the communist bloc, but the Soviet Union was the main external partner. Therefore, the concept of a third neighbor in the modern sense can only be talked about beginning in the late 1980s.

Since the early 1990s, Mongolia, having gained the opportunity to independently pursue its foreign policy, has intensified its efforts to develop relations with states that do not have a common border with Mongolia. These states are the so-called third neighbor of Mongolia.

The concept of the third neighbor emerged in August 1990 during the visit of U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker, who in his speech supported Mongolia's first free

elections and proposed the United States as Mongolia's third neighbor.⁴⁸ This concept was immediately taken up by the leaders and senior officials of Mongolia, and soon the third neighbor began to be viewed not as a specific state, but as a group of states. The policy of the third neighbor allowed Mongolia to demonstrate the multi-vector, comprehensive nature, and openness of its foreign policy, which attracted the attention of the outside world and improved the international image of Mongolia.

Mongolia's third neighbor policy resembles the foreign policy of other landlocked states that border a small number of countries. The goal of this policy is to develop close political ties with powerful states to gain their support and recognition in international and regional politics.⁴⁹ This policy ensures not only economic cooperation, but also diversification of foreign trade and investment.⁵⁰

The Foreign Policy Concept of Mongolia says that the second most important direction after relations with Russia and China is "developing friendly relations with highly developed countries of the West and East, such as the United States of America, Japan, and the Federal Republic of Germany."⁵¹ Concurrently, Mongolia seeks to implement "a policy aimed at promoting friendly relations with such countries as India, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Singapore, Turkey, Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, Austria, and Switzerland."⁵² Thus, the concept of the third neighbor involves building up cooperation with the United States, South Korea, Japan and the European Union.⁵³ Such an arrangement of priorities is apparently connected with the already well-established relations with these states and the ability to count on receiving assistance from highly developed democratic states. The National Security Concept says, in accordance with the

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, "James A. Baker III in Secretaries Travel Abroad."

⁴⁹ Jargalsaikhan Mendee, "Mongolia's Quest for Third Neighbours. Why the European Union?," *EUCAM*, July 4, 2012, <https://eucentralasia.eu/mongolias-quest-for-third-neighbours-why-the-european-union/>.

⁵⁰ Mendee.

⁵¹ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia, *Concept of Foreign Policy of Mongolia*.

⁵² The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia.

⁵³ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia.

strategy of the third neighbor, cooperation with highly developed democracies should be carried out in the political, economic, cultural, and humanitarian spheres.⁵⁴

Adherence to democratic values, the opportunity to receive assistance from a partner country for the development of democratic and market institutions in Mongolia, and potential investment in the Mongolian economy are essential factors in choosing partners for Mongolia, therefore, Canada and Australia can also be classified as the third neighbor.⁵⁵

At the same time, the concept of a third neighbor based solely on the name implies that China and Russia remain the top priority areas. Edgar A. Porter put it this way: “The concept of a third neighbor has intriguing strategic implications. It sends the message to all, including the U.S., that Russia and China are still neighbors’ number one and two. It tells the U.S. that despite the new close relationship, nothing can come before the relations with these two powerful and historic neighbors.”⁵⁶

The concept of Mongolia’s third neighbor is the basis of the modern Mongolian foreign policy doctrine, which aims to implement an independent foreign policy based on cooperation with a number of developed and democratic states that can counterbalance Mongolia’s two geographical neighbors, Russia and China, in the most diverse spheres of public life: political, economic, and cultural. The concept by no means, however, refers to an attempt to completely get away from cooperation with its neighbors.

F. MONGOLIA-UNITED STATES OF AMERICA RELATIONS

The United States recognized Mongolia de jure in 1987. Until that moment, the United States did not recognize Mongolia because of ideological differences with Soviet

⁵⁴ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia, *National Security Concept of Mongolia*.

⁵⁵ Tsedendamba Batbayar, “The Third Neighbour Policy and Australia. Mongolian Journal of International Affairs, 19, 3–12.” 2015, <https://doi.org/10.5564/mjia.v19i0.401>.

⁵⁶ Edgar A Porter, “Mongolia, Northeast Asia and the United States: Seeking the Right Balance,” n.d., 13, https://en.apu.ac.jp/rcaps/uploads/fckeditor/publications/journal/RJAPS_V26_PorterE_df.pdf.

Russia and even blocked the accession of Mongolia to the United Nations in 1946.⁵⁷ In 1988, the United States opened its Embassy in Ulaanbaatar (i.e., the beginning of cooperation was born during the period of improvement in Soviet-American relations). The initial agreements on bilateral relations were reached during the first ever visit of Mongolian President Ochirbat Punsalmaa to the United States in January 1991, where negotiations with U.S. President George W. Bush were conducted.⁵⁸ In the same year, the Prime Minister of Mongolia visited the United States, and the U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker, visited Mongolia.⁵⁹ Since the early 1990s, high-level visits have become regular. In 1991, both chambers of the U.S. Congress adopted a resolution on the country's policy towards Mongolia, in which it was noted that "Mongolia presents the world with an admirable example of the peaceful conversion to free world values and democratic principles"⁶⁰ and "urges the United States Government to continue to grant all appropriate economic and technical assistance to Mongolia and its people."⁶¹

Since 1990, a large number of treaties and agreements have been concluded between Mongolia and the United States, including the "Investment Incentive Agreement" in 1990, "Agreement on Cooperation through the United States Peace Corps in Mongolia" in 1990, "Consular Agreement" in 1990, "Trade Relations Agreement" in 1991, "Economic and Technical Assistance Agreement" in 1992, "Agreement on the Encouragement and Reciprocal Protection of Investments" in 1994, "Agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in the Customs Sphere" in 1996, "Agreement on Military Exchanges and Visits" in 1996, as well as many narrowly focused

⁵⁷ "Монгол Улс НҮБ-д Элссэн Нь: Эхний Хоёр Өргөдөл [Mongolia's Accession to the United Nations: The First Two Applications]/1946-1948/," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia, June 14, 2021, <http://mfa.gov.mn/60799>.

⁵⁸ "History of the U.S. and Mongolia," U.S. Embassy in Mongolia, accessed December 26, 2021, <https://mn.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/io/>.

⁵⁹ "History of the U.S. and Mongolia."

⁶⁰ "Mongolia-Democratic Elections" (1991), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-105/pdf/STATUTE-105-Pg2439.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0HrzvQgtmQCEb8ihUYKsKeogX5nDD5ZSKxIIaMt0yWCfGLQkckKRUhZEo>.

⁶¹ Mongolia-Democratic Elections.

interdepartmental contracts and agreements related to civil aviation, donor assistance, and energy banking cooperation.⁶²

In addition to the legal recognition of Mongolia by America and the conclusion of a number of bilateral treaties, the United States helped Mongolia to join international financial organizations, and also provided material support to Mongolia. In 1999, by decision of the U.S. Congress, Mongolia was included in the Trade Preferential System.

Defense cooperation plays a significant role in Mongolia-U.S. relations. In 1996, Mongolia and the United States signed the “Agreement on Military Exchanges and Visits between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Mongolia.”⁶³ According to this agreement, cooperation will be carried out through joint exercises, exchange of personnel, education and training, further exchanges and visits, and access and use of military facilities.

Because of Mongolia’s concern over possible adverse responses from both China and Russia, as well as the U.S. giving less priority to Mongolia than Central Asian and Eastern European countries, Mongolia did not see significant positive development with the United States in the near future until the two countries militaries found a common course of action—peacekeeping capacity building.

Coincidentally, the launchpad to initiate this project was already in place in both countries, namely, the “U.S. Enhanced International Peacekeeping Capability Program” (EIPC) in 1996⁶⁴ (now known as the Global Peace Operations Initiative Program), and

⁶² “Bilateral Documents,” Embassy of Mongolia to the United States of America, accessed December 20, 2021, http://mongolianembassy.us/bilateral-documents/?fbclid=IwAR0F4YdfjoBMMDtTfjRl5bx5OLyBojKRUZ0eV4KFYtCodB_0QLbXsCHn34#.YcBDip1Khyz.

⁶³ Agreement, “Agreement on Military Exchanges and Visits between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Mongolia” (Ulaanbaatar, 1996), https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/105696.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0_Hu-2CDR6GJGFspS2qw0DtdgnTTb_m3slxvpkvdRhPApdY1PJgio6vE.

⁶⁴ Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, “GPOI History” (Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs., December 20, 2006), <https://2001-2009.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/gpoi/c20197.htm>.

MAF peacetime mission—to participate in peace support operations under the “The Basis of the State Military Policy of Mongolia.”⁶⁵

Within the EIPC program, a small Mongolian military contingent participated in a peacekeeping field exercise (CENTERAZBAT-2000) in Kazakhstan. It was first time since the Second World War that a Mongolian military unit was sent overseas to attend a military event as a part of a foreign security cooperation effort with a third nation. In addition, it was a litmus test for both neighbors’ reactions against this type of engagement, advance trip overflight clearance by Russia and subsequent Chinese silence allowed Mongolia to assume that it could freely continue activities in this area with the United States.

For Mongolia, the desire to build a relationship with the United States stems from three factors: the desire for political independence, regional and global security, and economic growth.⁶⁶ The most important factor is the desire for political independence from Russia and China. In this case, U.S.-Mongolian relations are a way of implementing the third neighbor policy and a counterbalance to Russian and Chinese domination in the region. First, the ever-growing U.S.-Mongolian relations serve as a confirmation of Mongolia’s equal status as an actor in international relations. Secondly, the development of U.S.-Mongolian relations is approved by the Mongolian people thanks to America’s potential, which compensates for the geopolitical and economic influence of Russia and China on Mongolia’s security.⁶⁷ In addition, the involvement of the United States in the affairs of the North Asia region can ensure Mongolia’s independent and equal participation in building a regional security system.

The United States, after Mongolia entered the democratic path of development, became its important external partner, serves to balance Mongolia’s relations with its geographic neighbors. The United States has partially filled the political and military

⁶⁵ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia, “The Basis of the State Military Policy of Mongolia,” 1998.

⁶⁶ Ron A. Porter, “Realpolitik in Mongolia-US Relations,” *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, Vol. 26, 2009.

⁶⁷ Porter, 56.

vacuum that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Each side pursues its own goals. For the United States, it is important to strengthen itself in such a geopolitically advantageous region, it may use the Mongolian military contingent in peacekeeping operations, and it may also exert influence through the development of democratic institutions in Mongolia. The Mongolian side is interested in receiving gratuitous financial assistance, diversification of trade, and economic and political independence from Russia and China.

G. CONCLUSION

While losing its political, security, and economic sponsorship from the Soviet Union, Mongolia gained its genuine independence for the first time since its declaration of independence in 1911, and successfully re-established foreign relations on a friendly, equal, and mutually beneficial basis with Russia.

On the Chinese side, Mongolia has worked towards normalizing bilateral relations, left behind 30 years of cessation, and has developed and materialized its foreign policy concept of balancing between two neighbors.

Under its newly introduced Third Neighbor Policy, Mongolia has sought out a new partner in international relations, with the aim of preventing domination by either China or Russia over Mongolia. Mongolia has chosen the United States as a leading country in this group of potential partner nations. Mongolia has managed to create and maintain a certain degree of U.S. interest towards Mongolia through adopting democracy, free market economy, and engagement in international security systems.

In this period of time, Mongolia succeeded in creating its own foreign policy in a totally new environment and became full member of the international community in the political field. Mongolia's third neighbors, led by the United States, have played an important role here.

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III. MONGOLIA’S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE POLITICAL AND SECURITY FIELDS – PERIOD TWO (2000–2021)

A. MONGOLIA-RUSSIAN FEDERATION RELATIONS

After the initial democratization in the early 1990s, Mongolia had to end its chapter as a satellite relation of the Soviet Union and reestablish new relations with its northern neighbor, the Russian Federation, from a totally new standpoint as an independent nation. An intensification of bilateral relations and an advancement of strategic policy documents has occurred since 2000, and diplomatic and security relations between the two states are based upon several of these agreements. They are:

- In December 2006, the President of Mongolia, Enkhbayar Nambar, paid an official visit to Russia and signed the “Moscow Declaration,” which reaffirmed basic principles of bilateral relations outlined in the 2000 Ulaanbaatar Declaration.⁶⁸
- A declaration was issued on the development of a strategic partnership between Mongolia and Russia.⁶⁹ The document was adopted in August 2009 during the visit of Russian President Dmitri Medvedev to Mongolia. The parties expressed their readiness to cooperate more closely in such strategically important areas as the legal and contractual framework for bilateral relations, transport infrastructure, all types of energy resources, agriculture, and border area trade.
- In September 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin paid an official visit to Mongolia to attend the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Battle of Khalkhin Gol.⁷⁰ During the visit, Mongolian-Russian relations took

⁶⁸ “Хоёр Талын Харилцаа [Bilateral Relations].”

⁶⁹ “Хоёр Талын Харилцаа [Bilateral Relations].”

⁷⁰ “Mongolia: Russia’s Best Friend in Asia?,” *The Asan Forum* (blog), October 15, 2021, <https://theasanforum.org/mongolia-russias-best-friend-in-asia/>.

another step forward and an agreement on friendly relations and a comprehensive strategic partnership was signed between Mongolia and Russia.

Mongolia and Russia have four general political and basic treaties, which not only set out the general principles of political and security relations, but also set out their development paths, plans, and objectives. Each treaty is a new milestone in Mongolian-Russian relations, and under these documents one can see the dynamics of their development. With each agreement the goals become more ambitious, and more effective projects are being established.

Thus, from 2000 to the present, significant changes have taken place in Mongolian-Russian relations and the level of relations has risen to a comprehensive strategic partnership. The reciprocal visits of heads of state demonstrated the important role that both countries assigned to the bilateral cooperation. The chill of the 1990s had been overcome. In the relations between Mongolia and Russia, the ideological component has disappeared. State interaction is no longer based on Russian domination. Relations at this stage can be characterized as mutually beneficial cooperation based on an equal footing.

Mongolian-Russian defense cooperation has been restored since 2000, in the form of regular high-level reciprocal visits and the training of Mongolian Armed Forces personnel at Russian military schools, with Russia providing equipment aid as well as joint exercises.⁷¹

A joint Mongolian-Russian working group was established to provide military-technical aids to Mongolia, and an annual consultation mechanism was established. Equipment such as T-72 tanks, BTR-80 armored vehicles, MiG-29 fighter jets, Mi-8 and Mi-171 helicopters, and S-125 air defense complexes were provided by the Russian Ministry of Defense for armament and technical modernization of the Mongolian Armed

⁷¹ Ministry of Defense of Mongolia, *Батлан Хамгаалах Гадаад Харилцаа, Хамтын Ажиллагаа, Энхийг Сахиулахын Цагаан Ном [White Book of Defense Foreign Cooperation and Peacekeeping]*.

Forces.⁷² The aid to Mongolia is provided on the basis of “The agreement between the Government of Mongolia and the Government of the Russian Federation on providing military and technical assistance to Mongolia” and “The agreement between the Ministry of Defense of Mongolia and the Ministry of Defense of Russia on the supply of arms and equipment to Mongolia.” In addition, during the Russian Defense Minister S.K. Shoigu’s official visit to Mongolia in October 2018, the Russian government handed over airport ground support equipment, which costs about 13.4 mil USD.⁷³

In accordance with “The agreement between the Ministry of Defense of Mongolia and the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation on the training of Mongolian servicemen in the military schools of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation” in 2006, Mongolia has sent more than 100 of its military personnel to Russian military academies every year since 2007.

Between 2008 and 2010, Mongolian and Russian Armed Forces jointly conducted a field exercise called “Darkhan” in Mongolia to jointly repair the equipment of the Mongolian Armed Forces. Since 2011, Mongolia and Russia have been organizing the “Selenge” Joint Field Exercise with 300–400 military personnel from each side for the purpose of fighting against terrorists and illegal armed groups.⁷⁴

B. MONGOLIA-PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA RELATIONS

When Mongolia restored bilateral relations with China at the end of the Cold War, it focused on seeking assurance from the latter that China would not try to exert domination over Mongolia due to its former status as an autonomous region, and that it would not replace the formerly dominant relationship the Soviet Union occupied. Instead, the two nations would work to find common ground by treating each other on a friendly, equal, and

⁷² Ministry of Defense of Mongolia.

⁷³ S.Suvd, “С.Шойгу Монгол Улсад Цэргийн Зориулалттай Техник Хүлээлгэн Өглөө [S.Shoigu Handed over Military Equipment to Mongolia],” eagle.mn, accessed September 13, 2021, <http://eagle.mn/r/51328>.

⁷⁴ Ministry of Defense of Mongolia, *Батлан Хамгаалах Гадаад Харилцаа, Хамтын Ажиллагаа, Энхийг Сахиулахын Цагаан Ном [White Book of Defense Foreign Cooperation and Peacekeeping]*.

mutually beneficial basis as sovereign states. In the beginning of the 2000s, in order to balance the two neighbors' influences, Mongolia determined that it was time to start trying to bring bilateral relations with China up to level of Mongolia-Russia cooperation. Significant developments since 2000 include:

- In 2003, during negotiations between the President of Mongolia, Bagabandi Natsag, and the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Jintao, Chinese-Mongolian relations were elevated to a new level—a level of good-neighborliness and partnership based on mutual trust, exchanges of high-level visits, mutually advantageous economic trade cooperation, and cooperation within the framework of international and regional organizations.⁷⁵
- In June 2011, the “Beijing Joint Declaration” was adopted, which decided to further develop the relationship between Mongolia and China through a strategic partnership.⁷⁶
- During Xi Jinping’s visit to Mongolia, a Joint Statement was signed on the establishment and development of a comprehensive strategic partnership between Mongolia and China in 2014.⁷⁷ According to this statement, the parties agreed to continue cooperation between legislative, financial, defense, and law enforcement institutions.

Thus, over the past 30 years, relations between Mongolia and China have undergone significant changes, replacing the absence of ties with the re-establishment of cooperation, which gradually evolved into good-neighborly cooperation and then comprehensive strategic partnership.

⁷⁵ “Хоёр Талын Харилцаа [Bilateral Relations].”

⁷⁶ “Гэрээ Хэлэлцээрийн Жагсаалт [List of Agreements].”

⁷⁷ “Хятад Монголын Харилцаа [China Mongolia Relations],” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Mongolia, accessed February 9, 2022, <http://mn.china-embassy.org/mn/zmgx/>.

As a part of re-establishment of Mongolian-Chinese relations, high-level reciprocal visits, Mongolian military personnel’s training and education in China, material assistance, and joint exercises take place on a regular basis in the defense field.

As a basis of defense cooperation, the two countries signed “The agreement between the Government of Mongolia and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on Grants from China to Mongolia” in 2000, “The agreement on Cooperation between the Ministry of Defense of Mongolia and Ministry of Defense of People’s Republic of China” in 2005, and “The agreement on Military-Technical Cooperation between the Government of Mongolia and the Government of the People’s Republic of China” in 2013.⁷⁸

In 2014, during a visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Mongolia, both sides agreed to send 500 Mongolian servicemen to study at a PLA’s academy between 2015–2020.

Bilateral military exercises include “Peace Messenger” on peacekeeping in China in 2009, “Steppe Leader” on disaster management in Mongolia in 2013, and “Hunter Eagle” counterterrorism in Mongolia in 2015.⁷⁹

C. MONGOLIA–UNITED STATES OF AMERICA RELATIONS

Based on the hardship experienced under the dominance of both China and Russia in the past, Mongolia sought a sponsor state to replace the communist-era Soviet Union for a democratic Mongolia. After Mongolia established relations with the United States in early 1990, the two sides have been successfully cooperating since 2000 in areas of mutual benefit, including the domestication of democratic institutions, the transition to a free market economy, and participation in international security efforts.

In 2004 Mongolian President Bagabandi Natsag and the U.S. President George W. Bush in their Joint Statements in Washington, D.C., declared “a new era of cooperation

⁷⁸ Ministry of Defense of Mongolia, *Батлан Хамгаалах Гадаад Харилцаа, Хамтын Ажиллагаа, Энхийг Сахиулахын Цагаан Ном [White Book of Defense Foreign Cooperation and Peacekeeping]*.

⁷⁹ Ministry of Defense of Mongolia.

and comprehensive partnership between their two democratic countries based on shared values and common strategic interests.”⁸⁰

At the invitation of Mongolian President Enkhbayar Nambar, the U.S. President George W. Bush officially visited Mongolia on November 21, 2005.⁸¹ It was first ever visit to Mongolia made by a serving U.S. President. According to Slutz and Goldbeck, “Mongolia’s sovereignty, transformation from communism to democracy and a free market economy, and status as a regional and global player of consequence were re-affirmed by a major ‘third neighbor.’ Mongolia’s contributions to international peacekeeping and its commitment to spread democracy and combat terrorism were recognized and rewarded.”⁸²

During the visit of Mongolian President to the United States in 2007, both sides reconfirmed the two nations’ commitments to the consent achieved in previous Mongolia-U.S. Joint Statements of 2004 and 2005. Also, the Presidents Enkhbayar Nambar and George W. Bush signed the first “Millennium Challenge Compact.”⁸³

Mongolian President Eldegdorj Tsakhia’s 2011 meeting with the U.S. President Barak Obama at the White House followed. The U.S. President’s Office of the Press Secretary stated “They emphasized their two countries’ common interest in protecting and promoting freedom, democracy and human rights worldwide, and confirmed their intention to strengthen trade, investment and people-to-people ties so as to support economic growth and deepen the bonds of friendship between their two peoples.”⁸⁴

⁸⁰ “Joint Statement Between Mongolia and the United States of America,” Embassy of Mongolia to the United States of America, 2004, <http://mongolianembassy.us/2004-joint-statement-between-mongolia-and-the-united-states-of-america/>.

⁸¹ Pamela J. Slutz and Brian L. Goldbeck, “President Bush’s 2005 Mongolia Visit,” accessed January 7, 2022, <https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2020/08/president-bushs-2005-mongolia-visit/>.

⁸² Slutz and Goldbeck.

⁸³ “Millennium Challenge Account,” U.S. Embassy in Mongolia, accessed February 9, 2022, <https://mn.usembassy.gov/embassy/ulaanbaatar/sections-offices/millennium-challenge-account/>.

⁸⁴ The White House, *U.S.-Mongolia Joint Statement* (Washington, DC, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/16/us-mongolia-joint-statement>.

During Mongolian Prime Minister Khurelsukh Ukhnaa’s official visit to the United States on September 20, 2018, the United States and Mongolia signed a second five-year “Millennium Challenge Compact,” mutually determined on a “Roadmap for an Expanded Economic Partnership,” and “declared that their bilateral relationship had reached a new level of expanded comprehensive partnership.”⁸⁵

After the July 31, 2019, meeting that took place in Washington, D.C., Mongolian President Battulga Khaltmaa and the U.S. President Donald J. Trump issued a formal statement, in which “The governments of the United States of America and Mongolia hereby declare their relationship to be a Strategic Partnership.”⁸⁶

The United States has become an important partner of Mongolia since its choice to develop down the democratic path and has balanced Mongolia’s relations with its geographical neighbors. The United States has partially filled the political, economic, and security vacuum created by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Each party has its own interests, for the United States it includes, but is not limited to, Mongolia’s geographic location, potential to contribute to international security cooperation efforts, and the development of democratic institutions. The Mongolian side is mainly interested in relative political independence from Russia and China, receiving financial aid, diversification of trade and investment, and the modernization of Mongolia’s Armed Forces.

During the period of 1990–2000, Mongolia and the United States successfully established relations in the defense field and determined the main directions of limited cooperation at the time. It has been changed after the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States because the U.S. security policy has adapted, with more focus on the Asia-Pacific region. Mongolia has benefitted from being located in the geographic region of interest, and the Mongolian government’s declaration to support the United States’

⁸⁵ “Joint Statement on the Expanded Comprehensive Partnership Between the United States and Mongolia,” U.S. Embassy in Mongolia, September 21, 2018, <https://mn.usembassy.gov/2018-joint-statement-pm-khurelsukh-sec-pompeo/>.

⁸⁶ Slutz and Goldbeck, “President Bush’s 2005 Mongolia Visit.”

commitment to fight terrorism, even offering overflight clearances for the U.S. forces, has aided international cooperation.

Mongolia's relatively quick and positive response in this instance was based on the assumption that it would not provoke a negative reaction from either of its two neighbors. Because both China and Russia are permanent members of the Security Council, the main body in the UN responsible for maintaining international peace and security, and both nations have terrorist threats domestically, in particular Uighur and Caucasus regions, Mongolia felt confident that further involvement in counterterrorism efforts would not meet negative approval.

Countries that supported the U.S. Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) conducted operations against domestic terrorism and participated in the U.S.-led overseas operations. Because of the absence of a direct terrorism threat in the country, Mongolia was left with only the second option.

Although Mongolia has made some preparations with the U.S. assistance to participate in United Nations peacekeeping operations, the United States has sought support from other countries in counterterrorism efforts on the ground. The actual contribution requires a lot more engagement than just the statement of support. Thus, before responding positively to the U.S. request, Mongolia had to take into account internal factors, including Russian and Chinese concerns.

Internal factors:

1. During the decision-making process, those who opposed the operations could easily try to misinterpret this action. Deployment of troops overseas for GWOT operations, may be construed as a violation of articles outlined in "Mongolian National Security Strategy (1998)," which says "In peacetime, Mongolia has committed that it shall not join any military organization, that it shall not use its territory or airspace to combat another state, and that it shall not permit foreign military forces onto its territory,

even for the purpose of transit.”⁸⁷ The decision was reached, however, based on the post-conflict reconstruction and rebuilding nature of the mission, which was in line with ways and means to ensure national security through active support for international community efforts aimed at strengthening peace and security, through active participation in international peacemaking missions.⁸⁸

2. The main concern for both the publicly elected Mongolian President-Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and the Mongolian Parliament, along with the Government appointed by them, was the risk of losing public support due to the negative development associated with the commitment. In particular, it was about gambling the safety of troops deployed to serve in hostile environments in exchange for the future benefit of strengthening bilateral relationship with the United States in general.
3. Before deploying its troops to overseas operations, Mongolian Armed Forces were challenged with logistics issues, including strategic airlifts to and from areas of operation. As a result of the visit of the Chief of General Staff of Mongolian Armed Forces to the United States Central Command, the logistics issues have been settled through agreements.⁸⁹

Mongolia contributed to the U.S.-initiated operations since 2003 within the framework of the Global War on Terrorism more than 4,500 troops, including:

- “Iraqi Freedom” – 10 rotations with 1,192 troops from September 2003 to October 2008.
- “Enduring Freedom” – 13 rotations with 265 troops from 2003 to 2011.

⁸⁷ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia, “The Basis of the State Military Policy of Mongolia.”

⁸⁸ The Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia, *National Security Concept of Mongolia*.

⁸⁹ Ministry of Defense of Mongolia, *Батлан Хамгаалах Гадаад Харилцаа, Хамтын Ажиллагаа, Энхийг Сахиулахын Цагаан Ном [White Book of Defense Foreign Cooperation and Peacekeeping]*.

- “Enduring Freedom” – 10 rotations with 1,252 troops from 2009 to 2015.
- “International Security Assistance Force” – 9 rotations with 42 servicemen and 8 rotations with 439 troops from 2010 to 2015
- “Resolute Support” – 12 rotations with 1,356 troops from January 2015 to June 2021.⁹⁰

Since 2003, the two countries’ militaries have started to conduct a bilateral peace support operations exercise named “Khaan Quest.” In 2006 the training expanded into a multinational exercise and became a major regional event, which began as a joint project of the Indo-Pacific Command of the U.S. Armed Forces and the Mongolian Armed Forces.⁹¹ In 2019, in addition to Mongolia, around 2000 military personnel from more than 40 countries took part in the exercises. In an effort to preserve interaction with the United States in this area within the framework of the Third Neighbor Policy, Mongolia will continue development of bilateral defense cooperation agreements.

The venue that hosts the exercise, Five Hills Regional Peacekeeping Training Center, is one of the accomplishments of GPOI investments along with the Armed Forces of Mongolia.

The high-level officials’ visits state that the two countries’ defense relations are developing successfully with the reciprocal visits of the Minister of Defense and Secretary of Defense, the Chief of General Staff and Chief of the Joint Staff, and Service and Regional Commanders.

In addition to high-level consultations, designated working groups’ interactions have become regular. The support of the U.S. government has expanded the Mongolian Armed Forces’ peacekeeping capability, training, and equipment as a part of the Mongolian

⁹⁰ S. Suvd, “С.Шойгу Монгол Улсад Цэргийн Зориулалттай Техник Хүлээлгэн Өглөө [S.Shoigu Handed over Military Equipment to Mongolia].”

⁹¹ Ministry of Defense of Mongolia, *Батлан Хамгаалах Гадаад Харилцаа, Хамтын Ажиллагаа, Энхийг Сахиулахын Цагаан Ном [White Book of Defense Foreign Cooperation and Peacekeeping]*.

Armed Forces reform. The two countries' militaries implemented joint programs in the following areas: Special Forces, Air Force, Cyber Security, Military Engineering and hospitals, Disaster Relief, and professionalization of NCOs.

The United States Government is providing assistance to the Mongolian Armed Forces through IMET, FMF, GPOI programs in the areas of Strategic Bilateral and Regional Relations, Peacekeeping, Military Professionalization, and Interoperability with U.S. and Coalition Forces. According to a Congressional Research Service report "In recent years, U.S. foreign assistance to Mongolia has consisted largely of security assistance, and Mongolia is one of five 'priority recipients' of International Military Education and Training assistance in the East Asia Pacific region ... In FY2019, Mongolia received nearly \$10.0 mil in total U.S. bilateral assistance."⁹²

A key component of the ties between the two countries in the military sphere is the participation of Mongolian military personnel in UN and NATO operations and exercises. As of this paper, around 20,000 soldiers of the Mongolian Armed Forces were involved in peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the UN in Africa, including South Sudan, as well as in the coalition operations of the United States and NATO in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo.⁹³

In light of the Mongolian Government's consideration of the United States as Mongolia's most important third neighbor, defense relations between Mongolia and the United States have reached a new level and started to serve as a main bridge in both nation's bilateral relations, contributing towards the implementation of the balanced foreign policy.

The gap in resources, due to the national economy's situation, means that Mongolia needs external resources for reforming and establishing professional armed forces for

⁹² Thomas Lum and Ben Dolven, *Mongolia*, CRS Report No. IF10926 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10926?fbclid=IwAR0c2p1johKq4C-o8hqUazYfcCTs7dgkise8RN9tB8CifsqsgHSm_pAbt0g.

⁹³ "Missions," МОНГОЛ УЛСЫН ЗЭВСЭГТ ХҮЧНИЙ ЖАНЖИН ШТАБ [General Staff of the Mongolian Armed Forces], accessed February 9, 2022, <https://gsmaf.gov.mn/gsmaf/mission>.

providing training, equipment, and infrastructure. Currently, Mongolia's military efforts are being compensated to a certain extent by the U.S. security assistance programs.

Bilateral defense cooperation based on peacekeeping capability building is the best course of action because it is mutually beneficial, meets both countries national interests, and it is possible to implement in an open and transparent manner, making it more acceptable by third parties, including China and Russia.

Mongolia-U.S. relations in the defense field are not strictly limited in the form of a one-sided sponsor and recipient engagement. Mongolia is providing extensive contributions, despite its compact armed forces, to both U.S.-led coalition operations and UN peacekeeping missions, partly to meet the expected results of the U.S. government funded programs' goals.

As Mongolia's "Third Neighbor Policy" operates in the security field, defense cooperation with other nations is based on a balanced approach. Currently, it is about balancing between China, Russia, and the United States and understanding the various considerations present in the bilateral relations. Besides the more predictable and likely negative primary effects, less predictable secondary effects, both positive and negative, must be considered and calculated as well.

As stated in the principles of peacekeeping by the UN: "There are three basic principles that continue to set UN peacekeeping operations apart as a tool for maintaining international peace and security, including impartiality."⁹⁴ Therefore, the UN tries to select multinational troops to accomplish its peacekeeping missions and deploys them in the form of a combined structure on the ground. In the case of the Mongolian military, the principles set forward by the UN for peacekeepers are well understood. It is one of the factors that has enabled successful large-scale participation by Mongolian Armed Forces in UN-led efforts for maintaining international peace and security.

⁹⁴ "Principles of Peacekeeping," United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed January 12, 2022, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/principles-of-peacekeeping>.

Mongolia's bilateral defense engagement with the United States has its own domino effect, which is the diversification of partner nations besides the primary one. Because Mongolia has had an opportunity to engage alongside other nations in peacekeeping efforts, joint operations have served as an open invitation letter to work together with Mongolia in the exact same way as the United States. As a result, the Mongolian "Third Neighbor Policy," which is the cultivation of considered and calculated relations with a combination of international organizations and countries other than Russia and China, is being successfully implemented in the security field.

According to Jargalsaikhan Mendee, "The U.S. Department of Defense identifies Mongolia as a 'reliable, capable and natural partner' in the same vein as Singapore, New Zealand and Taiwan."⁹⁵ As stated by Lum and Dolven, "The U.S. government views Mongolia as an 'emerging partner' and as a country with which it may cooperate to achieve a 'shared vision of rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.'"⁹⁶

D. CONCLUSION

Mongolian-Russian relations from 2000 to date have been characterized by the re-establishment of defense ties and a shift towards comprehensive strategic partnership.

The relations with its southern neighbor China over the past 20 years have continued to strengthen the re-established cooperation, including in the defense field, in particular, funding for welfare facilities, military student exchange program and bilateral field training exercise. Gradually the cooperation has evolved into the highest level of foreign relations, making China the first country to reach such a position in regard to Mongolia.

Mongolia and U.S. relations are a way of implementing the "Third Neighbor Policy" and counterbalancing Russian and Chinese dominance for Mongolia.

⁹⁵ Jargalsaikhan Mendee, "Mongolia's Military Diplomacy and Geopolitical Balance," East Asia Forum, March 17, 2021, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/03/18/mongolias-military-diplomacy-and-geopolitical-balance/>.

⁹⁶ Lum and Dolven, *Mongolia*.

In Mongolian-American relations, the importance of security cooperation, specifically regarding peacekeeping capability building due to its mutual benefits, defines their interactions. Enhanced peacekeeping capabilities and involvement provide Mongolia with additional third neighbors, and foreign powers add a balance against both Russian and Chinese factors.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This concluding chapter summarizes the empirically compiled evidence of the previous chapters and draws conclusions about the evolution of Mongolian strategy and foreign policy with particular attention paid to the post-1990 period following independence. To understand the trends of the present, as noted in this thesis, it is important to look back into Mongolia's history. In the 17th century when Mongolia was as a vassal of Qing Dynasty, it started to become a border zone between Russia and China as both countries exploited Siberia and created a buffer zone between them. This period set in motion a trend that continues to this day, in which Mongolia has been the object of rivalry between the two empires (China and Russia). There can be no question that this rivalry has also affected the creation of the new Mongolian state that emerged from domestic political reforms, transformations, and civil wars in Russia and China in the early and mid-20th century.

Based on Russian and Chinese policy towards Mongolia during this period, Mongolian political leaders realized and learned that to decrease either neighbor's dominance inside the borders, it was necessary to seek support from third parties by attracting their interest to Mongolia. This is a consistent pattern of Mongolian strategy and foreign policy that, again, grows out of historical circumstance. Mongolian leaders thus are constantly attempting to establish relations with countries other than Russia and China as an indirect counterweight to both countries that, at various points, have sought to exert undue influence on Mongolia's internal politics. Currently, Mongolia calls its counterbalancing approach the "Third Neighbor Policy." At the beginning of the 20th century, Mongolian leaders were unsurprisingly influenced by their neighbors, which can be observed virtually from the day Mongolia declared independence in 1911. Neither Russia nor China initially recognized the new country. A subsequent tripartite agreement of Mongolia, China, and Russia, known as the "Treaty of Kyakhta of 1915," set the boundaries for the state and set a course for Mongolian national security and foreign policy that, as previously noted, continues to this day.

As revealed in this thesis, Mongolia throughout the last century has executed its “Third Neighbor Policy” through different strategic communications with a variety of other states to counterbalance its powerful neighbors. Immediately after declaring independence, and regardless of its initially vague political status, Bogd Khan, began reaching out to countries that might have an interest in Mongolia, beyond its geographical neighbors, by sending official letters to them. These letters constituted the first attempt of Mongolia to contact third nations as a self-governed state in the 20th century. The next effort towards finding a partner nation other than its neighbors came from Prime Minister Bodoos official statement which was a “call for equal relations with foreign countries and governments” issued in 1921, the year of the People’s Revolution; the statement served as the beginning of rapprochement with the Soviet Union.

Another important event early in Mongolia’s history came when it was given an opportunity to participate in bilateral negotiations with a foreign party, Manchukuo, as a fully mandated representative in 1935. Even though the other side was a Japanese puppet state, and the event itself failed, it was the first time that Mongolia sat at a negotiation table with a third entity, making it a symbolically important event.

Mongolia gradually charted a course towards full independence. Under the agreement between China and the Soviet Union, based on the result of a nation-wide plebiscite held in Mongolia on October 20, 1945, China recognized the independence of Mongolia, with which China established diplomatic relations in 1949. Thus, Mongolian independence was recognized by both its neighbors, which opened the door to developing foreign relations with other nations and international organizations. Mongolia’s 1961 UN membership meant the recognition of its independence by the rest of the world, including the U.S.-led Cold War rivalries. Mongolia was then able to start establishing diplomatic relations around the world as a full-fledged member of the UN’s international community.

These steps opened the path for the evolution of Mongolian political and military institutions that, importantly, were bounded by the factors affecting the formation of the state early in the 20th century. The “Constitution of Mongolia of 1992,” “National Security Concept of Mongolia of 1994,” and “Concept of Foreign Policy of Mongolia of 1994”

subsequently defined the foreign policy principles and priorities of a new post-Cold War Mongolia, based on democratic values and with a free market economy.

The “Constitution of Mongolia” established the principle of a foreign policy in which relations towards all states, including its former rival China, should be peaceful. Furthermore, it recognizes the inadmissibility of the stationing of foreign troops in Mongolia—a reference to the stationing of Soviet troops in Mongolia during the Cold War.

The “National Security Concept” of Mongolia indicated that Mongolia intends to prevent a repetition of past situations when Mongolia was part of another state or was under the direct influence of a foreign state. Moreover, it addresses a new form of threat to national security, namely massive flows of migrants. The “Concept of Foreign Policy” of Mongolia stipulates the multi-vector principle. The concept gives priority to the relations with its neighbors and stipulates that relations with Russia and China should be friendly, but that Mongolia should not depend on one of those states. Cooperation with other states, especially with developed states, and participation in international organizations should be a counterweight to Russia and China, helping Mongolia to avoid becoming dependent on those two powers.

The collapse of the communist bloc and the Mongolian people’s choice of democracy made Mongolia truly independent and free from what had been stifling influences from the Soviet Union and China. In other words, it was neither a Chinese autonomous nor a Russian satellite. Thus, Mongolia had to reformulate its foreign policy objectives, principles, and priorities, including its long-awaited “Third Neighbor Policy” of maintaining balanced relations with Russia, China, and a non-bordering third neighbors in all fields.

In the post-Cold War era, Mongolia’s political leadership has successfully implemented revised relationships with its two large neighbors. While still giving a priority to them, Mongolia has managed to re-establish bilateral relations on an equal basis with each country, eliminating Russian dominance and restoring normal relations with China. Today it is fair to say that Mongolia views both states as equal strategic partners.

Mongolian leaders have created a guiding “Third Neighbor Policy” since the 1990s—a Mongolian version of a balanced approach in the relations of a small nation with

more powerful regional powers. Since “third neighbor” does not refer to any specific country, there is less chance to develop relations in all fields with all third neighbors. That is why Mongolia needs to focus on at least one domain in which potential partners may have an interest to achieve this goal. Therefore, countries on Mongolia’s potential third neighbor list will each have different prioritized areas of cooperation. Realistically, however, becoming a third neighbor depends on whether both Russia and China not only “allow” that cooperation to happen but also allow it to continue to exist. Finally, these kinds of relations could be ended either by a neighbor’s or a third neighbor’s own decision regardless of Mongolia’s opinion, due to policy change on their side. Once that happens, it could have the same domino effect for other third neighbors; in addition, it would be extremely difficult to restore third neighbor status with them.

It can be concluded that Mongolia’s level of bilateral relations with the United States, within the framework of the “Third Neighbor Policy,” might serve as a model for other small countries in terms of balancing their foreign engagement with larger countries overall and how to succeed on foreign assistance program implementation, particularly in the security area.

The government of Mongolia saw an opportunity to try to balance its relations with its two neighbors by bringing in a third nation as a counterbalance. This third party took the form of Western democracies led by the United States, which shared Mongolia’s commitment to democracy and regional stability.

In order to make this concept workable, Mongolia and the United States jointly found a path that is mutually beneficial and, at the same time, acceptable to both Russia and China. The concept at the heart of the U.S. relationship is called “Peacekeeping Capacity Building Assistance.”⁹⁷ As a result of the successful security cooperation between the two countries, the Mongolian Armed Forces, which had no knowledge or experience in peacekeeping, soon became one of the top troop contributors to UN

⁹⁷ “U.S. Peacekeeping Capacity Building Assistance,” United States Department of State, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-peacekeeping-capacity-building-assistance/>.

peacekeeping operations.⁹⁸ Although the current security cooperation between the two nations is appreciated by both sides and is the primary field of bilateral relations, its role in an overall comprehensive partnership can neither be overrated nor underrated.

State national strategic documents of Mongolia, namely, the “National Security Concept,” “Concept of Foreign Policy,” and the basis of the “Defense Policy” outline the main ways to ensure the country’s independence and sovereignty through political and diplomatic means. In the current context, this has taken the form of participation in international efforts toward maintaining peace and security, including UN peacekeeping and other international peace support, and reconstruction missions.

While Mongolia has implemented this strategy and participated in UN and other international peace support operations, this approach was shaped by factors within the state as well as the strategic environment in which Mongolia is nested. First of all, both Russia and China were not expected to approve of Mongolia’s engagement in this regard, unless they had any direct conflict of interest in that peace support initiative. Secondly, third neighbors of Mongolia had a mutual interest in the maintenance of global peace and stability with the latter, and thus, were ready to provide the necessary support. On the other hand, due to the improvement in relations with its two powerful neighbors and consequently a low probability of the Armed Forces of Mongolia having to defend the country against external armed aggression, it was possible to allocate some resources to overseas deployments.

At the same time, all sides have seen a cooperation of peacekeeping capability building as an opportunity in the security field with third neighbors. This resulted in a role model case for similar countries, not only in the region, but for other parts of the world.

Furthermore, security cooperation with the United States in building peacekeeping capability helps ensure Mongolia’s own security through political and diplomatic ways within the framework of Mongolia’s multilateral balanced foreign strategy and has contributed to Mongolia’s recognition abroad as a trustworthy member of the international community. Furthermore, this security cooperation with the United States has created

⁹⁸ “Troop and Police Contributors,” United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>.

favorable conditions for Mongolia to develop more extensive relations with Russia, China, and third neighbors.

As in the case of any small nation dealing with more powerful ones by pursuing a balanced approach, whenever Mongolia has tried to keep the balance with its two neighbors, one has typically ended up dominating over Mongolia. Based on this experience, Mongolia introduced the so-called “Third Neighbor Policy,” which included a third party in addition to Russia and China in the nation’s balanced foreign policy. In other words, Mongolia aims to distribute its “bilateral” relations three ways with its neighbors. Mongolia’s entering a comprehensive strategic partnership with both China in 2014 and Russia in 2019, as well as a strategic partnership with the United States in 2019, clearly illustrate a remarkable achievement in a balanced foreign policy.

The success of a multilateral balanced foreign policy depends on a combination of how many of the required conditions are met and the rationality of means for its implementation. With regard to the former, Mongolia needed two neighbors’ acceptance as well as a third party’s interest. That’s why Mongolia gave both Russia and China a high priority in its foreign policy, while keeping relations with a third party a lower priority.

A solution to bringing a third party into its balanced policy as a player is based on that party’s acknowledgment of and readiness to cooperate for strengthening shared values, common interests, and universal economic and social systems. This third neighbor can include a nation state, an international organization, or a combination of both. Also, third neighbor status can be applied only in certain fields of foreign relations. Examples of this policy can be seen from the Mongolian-American relations that are dominated by the military component; in Mongolian-Canadian relations by the economic component, mainly related to mineral exports; in Mongolian-Japanese relations by humanitarian assistance and energy cooperation; and in relations between Mongolia and the EU, by assistance in overcoming the social consequences of market reforms.

In order to maintain these relations, Mongolia and its third neighbors need to take into consideration some possible adjustments, such as expanding established political field results with third parties to other areas, including economic and social sectors. At the same time, it will be important not to overstep the security cooperation limits accepted by all

interested parties—namely, Mongolia’s two powerful neighbors, as well as Mongolia’s and a third neighbor’s domestic players.

Mongolia’s security and foreign policy strategies have long been determined by its history, strategic circumstances, and geographical location. These factors drove an inescapable logic for national political leaders as they executed Mongolia’s search for security and independence. A principal implication of this thesis is that Mongolian political leaders across the decades kept to a consistent approach, always charting a path to maximize the country’s political and international freedom of movement while keeping a close watch on its more powerful neighbors. Stated differently, there were few drastic changes in the approach to national security and foreign policy through the generations amidst changing strategic circumstance. When the chance for more formalized independence arose after 1989, Mongolia’s leaders effectively had spent decades preparing for the moment and knew what to do once the moment arrived.

Over the past 30 years, Mongolian political leaders have built a democratic society and successfully pursued an independent foreign policy, drawing on the lessons of its past. This is reflected in how a small country like Mongolia maintains its independence and sovereignty while nested between the world’s most dangerous autocracies. Mongolia’s active participation in the activities of the United Nations and other international organizations, as well as its contribution to international peacekeeping efforts and security enhances its reputation, which in turn raise the political costs of any outside interference by either Russia or China. Additionally, Mongolia has developed strong relations with the United States and the West through security cooperation and engagement programs through its small security sector institutions, without antagonizing its powerful neighbors. Through these efforts of maintaining its sovereignty and independence, while keeping balanced relations with its two neighbors and other entities, Mongolia is successfully implementing the “Third Neighbor Policy.” Although the efforts of maintaining this policy are ongoing, there are lessons to be learned from Mongolia’s success so far and further study is recommended on this subject, with the possibility of other developing nations using the policy in similar cases.

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