NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

CAPSTONE APPLIED PROJECT REPORT

THE MONGOLIAN SPORTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO COMPREHENSIVE DEFENSE

December 2023

By: **Adam C. Steinwachs**

Advisor: **Shannon C. Houck**
Second Reader: **Douglas A. Borer**

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC, 20503.

1. AGENCY USE ONLY *(Leave blank)*	2. REPORT DATE December 2023	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Capstone Applied Project Report

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE THE MONGOLIAN SPORTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO COMPREHENSIVE DEFENSE	5. FUNDING NUMBERS
6. AUTHOR(S) Adam C. Steinwachs	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A	10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. This report has supplemental(s).

12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.	12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A

13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

Mongolia's democracy is at a critical juncture as the government seeks to balance the influence of Russia and China. Maintaining its sovereignty in the face of increasing pressures from its neighbors requires a resilient population. This capstone examined the role of physical education in Mongolia as a way to strengthen individual and collective resiliency. This led to the development of The Mongolian Sports and Education Program. The program draws from expertise acquired through a 10-year collegiate coaching career. Further, the program was informed by experience gained through multiple deployments to Mongolia, where it was revealed that suicide is a widespread problem. The program was created to bolster individual resilience by encouraging active lifestyles to reduce depression, anxiety, and suicide. The program was piloted in Ulaanbaatar in June and September 2023. Following the success of each pilot engagement, two public schools, the MAF, and a nongovernmental organization decided to utilize the program. Currently, the program is projected to reach approximately 7,300 students in Mongolia. This unique program provides Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC) and Special Operations Command (SOCOM) a scalable resource for special operations forces to expand engagement with partners in Mongolia and allies across the enterprise.

14. SUBJECT TERMS Mongolia, sports, education, physical fitness, resilience	15. NUMBER OF PAGES 63
	16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT
Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	UU

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. 239-18

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THE MONGOLIAN SPORTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO COMPREHENSIVE DEFENSE

Adam C. Steinwachs, Major, United States Army

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS
(IRREGULAR WARFARE)

from the

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
December 2023

Approved by: Shannon C. Houck
Advisor

Douglas A. Borer
Second Reader

Carter Malkasian
Chair
Department of Defense Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Mongolia's democracy is at a critical juncture as the government seeks to balance the influence of Russia and China. Maintaining its sovereignty in the face of increasing pressures from its neighbors requires a resilient population. This capstone examined the role of physical education in Mongolia as a way to strengthen individual and collective resiliency. This led to the development of The Mongolian Sports and Education Program. The program draws from expertise acquired through a 10-year collegiate coaching career. Further, the program was informed by experience gained through multiple deployments to Mongolia, where it was revealed that suicide is a widespread problem. The program was created to bolster individual resilience by encouraging active lifestyles to reduce depression, anxiety, and suicide. The program was piloted in Ulaanbaatar in June and September 2023. Following the success of each pilot engagement, two public schools, the MAF, and a nongovernmental organization decided to utilize the program. Currently, the program is projected to reach approximately 7,300 students in Mongolia. This unique program provides Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC) and Special Operations Command (SOCOM) a scalable resource for special operations forces to expand engagement with partners in Mongolia and allies across the enterprise.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CDWG	Comprehensive Defense Working Group
CIMIC	Civil Military Cooperation
CMSE	Civil Military Support Element
DOS	Department of State
JCC	Joint Concept for Competing
MAF	Mongolian Armed Forces
MFPT	Mongolian Physical Fitness Test
MOE	Ministry of Education
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NSS	National Security Strategy
OAI	Operations, Activities, and Investments
PRC	People's Republic of China
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
SOCPAC	Special Operations Command Pacific
SOF	Special Operations Forces

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mongolia's democracy is at a critical juncture as the government seeks to balance the influence of Russia and China. For Mongolia to preserve its sovereignty, it must have a resilient population. This capstone examined the role of physical education in Mongolia as a way strengthen individual and collective resiliency. The Mongolian Sports and Education Program was created as a soft power tool to support Mongolian institutions in reducing depression, anxiety, and suicide to bolster individual resilience. The program draws from expertise acquired through a 10-year collegiate coaching career. Further, the program was informed by experience gained through multiple deployments to Mongolia where it was revealed that suicide is a widespread problem. During two separate pilot events, a Mongolian nongovernmental organization, two public schools, and members of the MAF were introduced to the program. The program consists of activities that are fun and easy to use yet effective in improving physical fitness while encouraging communication and cooperation among participants. This combination yielded immediate buy-in and following the pilots, both schools, the Bilguunzul Foundation, and a MAF key leader stated they would utilize the program. To increase its reach in Mongolia, it is recommended to integrate use of The Mongolian Sports and Education Program into Civil Military Support Element (CMSE) operations, activities, and investments (OAI) and U.S. Embassy-Ulaanbaatar 'American Corner' events.

One of the current threats to Mongolian resiliency is poor mental health and suicide among young Mongolians. Today, Mongolia's education system remains unevenly developed. There is a lack of qualified teachers, and the infrastructure is grossly outdated leaving children to suffer.[1] In Ulaanbaatar, rapid urbanization and too few schools mean that classrooms are also enormously overcrowded. Compounding the problem further is a lack of emphasis on physical fitness and education in Mongolian schools. The Mongolian Ministry of Education curricula only allows for two 45-minute physical education classes per week. This is far short of recommended guidelines in the United States that call for at

[1] Menard, Aubrey, *Young Mongols: Forging Democracy in the Wild, Wild East* (Penguin Random House, 2020), 209.

least 60 minutes of daily physical activity for children 6 to 17 years old.[2] As a result, children miss out on the benefits associated with regular physical activity that contribute to improved health and resiliency. Collectively, these challenges are exacerbating mental health problems and Mongolia has a higher suicide rate than other regions of Asia.[3]

The Mongolian Sports and Education Program was created on the premise that mental and physical health is a precursor to the individual resilience that is needed for Mongolia to collectively maintain its sovereignty. In June and September 2023, The Mongolian Sports and Education Program was piloted at School #1 and #130 in Ulaanbaatar. During the one-day June pilot, 32 children, their parents, and teachers from School #130 and the Bilguunzul Foundation participated in program activities. In the September pilot, a 6th and 10th grade physical education class from School #130 and #1, respectively participated in program activities. The program was also introduced to key leaders within the MAF and utilized during an engagement at the Bilguunzul Foundation. Throughout both pilots, participant feedback was incredibly positive in nature. As a result, School #1, School #130, and the Bilguunzul Foundation decided to use the program. Additionally, a portion of the Mongolian Armed Forces (MAF) now plans to integrate program activities into the 2024 MAF Summer Camp initiative. In total, the program is projected to reach approximately 7,300 students during the 2023-2024 academic year.

To expand access in Ulaanbaatar and across Mongolia, there are three recommended courses of action to follow. First, through the CMSE. CMSE OAI's provide a platform for promotion of The Mongolian Sports and Education Program as a means to support Mongolian and U.S. Country Team initiatives with key institutions such as the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Ministry of Health (MOH), the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), and the MAF. Next, there is opportunity for the CMSE to partner with the U.S. Country Team through the 'American Corner' initiative. American

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[2] American Academy of Pediatrics, "Bright Futures Physical Activity Tipsheet," *Bright Futures*, accessed July 11, 2023, https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/BF_PhysicalActivity_Tipsheet.pdf?_ga=2.268403982.1080854537.1659371176-2133873135.1656347917.

[3] Javzan Badarch et al., "Suicide Attempts among School-Attending Adolescents in Mongolia: Associated Factors and Gender Differences," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 5 (March 2022): 1, https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19052991.

Corner spaces are located throughout Mongolia and provide a place to exchange ideas, strengthen ties, and promote the U.S.-Mongolian strategic partnership. The Mongolian Sports and Education Program could be included in American Corner cultural events because it offers a unique resource to help improve the fitness, health, and resiliency of young Mongolians. Lastly, by ensuring the program is included in the 2024 MAF Summer Camp schedule of events. Following the September pilot, The Mongolian Sports and Education Program activities are planned to be included in the 2024 MAF Summer Camp curriculum. This presents U.S. interlocutors with an opportunity to coordinate planning efforts with MAF Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) unit partners and to participate in Summer Camp events alongside them.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Sarah. Our shared faith and your love and support mean more to me than my words are able to express. Thank you for believing in me. ILU. To our children, Wyatt, Jack, John, Matthew, and Millie. You motivate and inspire me, and I love you all.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my capstone advisors, Dr. Shannon C. Houck and Dr. Douglas A. Borer. Their expertise, support, guidance, and positive feedback was exceptional. Thank you for your time and investment into me and into this project. I would also like to thank Mr. Michael Stevens for your support and valuable insight throughout this process.

Next, I wish to thank the Regional Defense Fellowship Program. Without the programs backing, travel to Mongolia to conduct two pilot events would not have been possible. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Enkhee Chuluunbat–I'm grateful for your friendship and support. Additionally, I want to express my appreciation to Michelle Morneau from the Graduate Writing Center. Your contributions are greatly appreciated. Lastly, I would like to thank the Defense Analysis department. This experience has been an incredible journey, and it was an honor to be a part of the program.

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I. BACKGROUND

Individuals and teams that overcome adversity or overwhelming odds to achieve their goals are celebrated and endearingly referred to as underdogs because they accomplished something extraordinary. Underdogs accentuate the power of hard work, a strong sense of purpose, and strength of will that enable such outcomes. Enkhbat Badar-Uugan was one of Mongolia's great underdogs. He became a national hero after he won an Olympic gold in boxing during the 2008 Beijing Games[1] defeating Cuba's powerhouse boxer Yankiel Leon Alarcon.[2] His accomplishment was a significant breakthrough because he became the first Olympic boxing champion from Mongolia and is only one of two Mongolians to ever win an Olympic gold medal.[3]

Growing up in Ulaanbaatar's Ger district, Enkhbat did not lead a privileged life. The Ger district is located on the outskirts of Mongolia's capital city and is known for high levels of poverty and pollution with limited access to sports equipment, coaches, and facilities.[4] Badar-Uugan attended Ger district's school number 79, yet despite the challenges he faced growing up, was able to remain focused on his goals and overcome incredible odds.[5] The culmination of Badar-Uugan's perseverance within his athletic career was becoming an Olympic champion. In doing so, Badar-Uugan inspired students from his hometown and across Mongolia to believe they can succeed in life despite coming from an underprivileged background.[6]

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[1] Pantheon, "Enkhbatyn Badar-Uugan Biography – Mongolian Boxer," Pantheon, accessed March 18, 2023, https://pantheon.world/profile/person/Enkhbatyn_Badar-Uugan/.

[2] New York Times, "Chinese Hold off Cubans to Steal the Show (Published 2008)," *New York Times*, August 24, 2008, sec. Sports, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/24/sports/24iht-OLYBOXING.1.15580652.html.

[3] The UB Post, "History of Mongolia at the Olympic Games," *The UB Post*, accessed March 22, 2023, http://theubposts.com/post/3543/.

[4] Enkhjin, "The Ger District of Ulaanbaatar – Mongol Products," Silk Road Mongolia, June 15, 2021, https://silkroadmongolia.com/the-ger-district-of-ulaanbaatar/.

[5] BBC Sport, "Badar Uugan Enkhbatyn's School – No 79, Ulan Bator, Mongolia," *BBC Sport*, September 10, 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/olympic_games/world_olympic_dreams/8932091.stm.

[6] BBC Sport.

In Mongolia today, the Bilguunzul Foundation is a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that supports vulnerable children from Ulaanbaatar's Ger district. Founded in 2020, Bilguunzul offers a space for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to heal from physical and psychological trauma. Bilguunzul is led by a small group of dedicated social workers and a child psychologist committed to protecting the youth of Mongolia and ensuring they have a bright future. Every day, over 60 kids from 11th Khoroo subdistrict of Ulaanbaatar receive a much-needed hot meal along with the care and support of a small community dedicated to their health and wellbeing. Since 2020, Bilguunzul has provided the Ger districts youth with instruction in classes such as music and art while providing a safe space to play and socialize with peers. New to Bilguunzul in 2023-2024, will be the addition of a structured curriculum of physical activities through the foundation's adoption of The Mongolian Sports and Education Program.

Regular participation in sports, games, and play coupled with instruction in the arts increases the likelihood Bilguunzul's children will be equipped to overcome their humble beginnings and become the resilient leaders that Mongolia will need in the future. As these children mature into adulthood and become more physically and mentally resilient, similar to Enkhbat Badar-Uugan, they too could someday write their own incredible chapter in Mongolia's proud history.

II. INTRODUCTION

Since becoming a democracy in 1990, Mongolia has creatively sought to establish its own sphere of influence within the international community. In 2019, Mongolia broadened its "third neighbor" portfolio as it entered a strategic partnership with the United States to help strengthen its position as a democratic partner in the Indo-Pacific.[7] The U.S. relationship with Mongolia is based on shared values and principles that are rooted in a mutual desire for Mongolia to maintain its sovereignty within the current international order. However, the current threat from the People's Republic of China (PRC), in particular, is consequential, and our National Security Strategy (NSS) describes them as a nation increasingly capable of changing the present order to fit its autocratic intentions.[8] Located between Russia and China, Mongolia faces a unique geopolitical challenge. See Figure 1. The influence from Mongolia's neighbors is substantial, and a resilient Mongolian population is needed if Mongolia is to maintain its sovereignty and continue enjoying the benefits of a democratic system of governance. However, a significant threat to Mongolian resiliency is poor mental health and suicide among young Mongolians. Given this, how could a physical education program expand engagement opportunities with Mongolian partners while simultaneously strengthening individual and collective resiliency among Mongolia's youth?

[7] U.S. Department of State, "Integrated Country Strategy Mongolia," March 18, 2022, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/ICS_EAP_Mongolia_Public-1.pdf.

[8] Joseph Biden, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America" (Washington, DC: The White House, 2022), https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf.

Source: The World Factbook, "Mongolia," October 17, 2023, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mongolia/.

Figure 1. Map of Mongolia

To address this question, this capstone developed and piloted The Mongolian Sports and Education Program to offer Mongolia's education institutions a resource to encourage regular participation in games, sports, and team building activities. Aiming to increase exposure to physical activities that improve the fitness and sense of community and camaraderie in classrooms, the program also seeks to help Mongolia decrease the number of children experiencing issues related to mental health. Moreover, the program is designed to leverage the universally understood benefits that are derived from an active lifestyle, such as the prevention of life-threatening diseases to feeling better about oneself, or simply enjoying the excitement of competition[9] to increase individual resiliency. Sports and games transcend social barriers, providing opportunities to strengthen a sense of community in classrooms and schools. The Mongolian Sports and Education Program

[9] Harish Kumar et al., "Sport Participation: From Policy, through Facilities, to Users' Health, Well-Being, and Social Capital," *Sport Management Review* 21, no. 5 (November 2018): 549–62, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2018.01.002.

seeks to put these forces to use by using sports and games to improve the mental and physical health of Mongolian children while also expanding engagement opportunities and strengthening partnerships with Mongolian stakeholders. Grounded in a soft power approach to furthering U.S. strategic objectives, The Mongolian Sports and Education Program was created to be a resource that enables expanded access to Mongolian stakeholders and supports Mongolian institutions in addressing a public health problem that stands to undermine Mongolia's long-term societal resiliency. This capstone project supports U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) objectives to "build the strongest possible coalitions"[10] with our allies and partners. Further, it is founded in the JCC notion that "succeeding in strategic competition requires the joint force to expand its competitive mindset and its competitive approaches."[11]

Since Mongolia's 1990 democratic revolution, the nation and its citizenry have fought hard to build a representative country that provides equal opportunities for all its people. In May 2020, the Parliament of Mongolia took concrete steps to outline how the country would continue to do so through the Vision 2050 long-term development plan. Importantly, one of the first things this piece of legislation describes is the goal of educating the entire population through language, history, and heritage, as well as developing shared values to help strengthen society and ensure Mongolia is a resilient nation state.[12] For Mongolia to succeed in this endeavor, it must fully empower its education institutions to contribute to the development of healthy, educated, and resilient young citizens.

However, a governance challenge for Mongolia' young democracy is delivering equal education opportunities and resources across society. This is due in large part to its population density and distribution across the vast steppe. A nation of approximately 3.3 million citizens, nearly half of Mongolia's population continue to follow a rural nomadic

[10] Joseph Biden, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America."

[11] Cordesman, "The U.S. Joint Chiefs New Strategy Paper on Joint Concept for Competing."

[12] Mongolian Parliament, "Vision-2050," Mongolian Parliament, May 2020, 28, https://cabinet.gov.mn/wp-content/uploads/Alsiin-Kharaa-English-printed-Hos-1020.pdf.

lifestyle while over 1.6 million Mongolians remain concentrated in Ulaanbaatar.[13] Further, according to the World Population Review website, Mongolia is "the least densely populated nation on the planet with just 5 people per square mile."[14] Figure 2 depicts the size of Mongolia relative to the United States and figure 3 displays the desolate nature of the Mongolian landscape. Due to these unique challenges, Mongolia's education system remains unevenly developed and, in some areas, there is either not enough space in existing schools or the infrastructure is grossly outdated, leaving children in rural or poorer urban areas without full access to the opportunities its democracy promises.[15] Rural and nomadic families and the poor suffer most. To provide their children with an education in rural Mongolia, kids must be dropped off to live in outdated dormitories in their local township.[16] As Menard points out, "children live in the dormitories from as young as age six, a crucial point in childhood development when they are certainly unequipped to thrive on their own".[17] Further, according to UNICEF, "One in every 4-5 children do not access early childhood education services. Seven out of 10 children from the poorest families do not even go to kindergarten."[18] Moreover, of the nearly 800 schools spread throughout the country, almost 70 percent are located in rural townships.[19] The remaining 30 percent of schools are located in the capital city, where approximately half of Mongolia's citizens live. Here, rapid urbanization and too few schools mean that classrooms throughout Ulaanbaatar are enormously overcrowded, leaving teachers overextended and children lacking the attention they need and deserve.

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[13] World Population Review, "Ulaanbaatar Population 2023," World Population Review, accessed October 4, 2023, https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/ulaanbaatar-population.

[14] World Population Review.

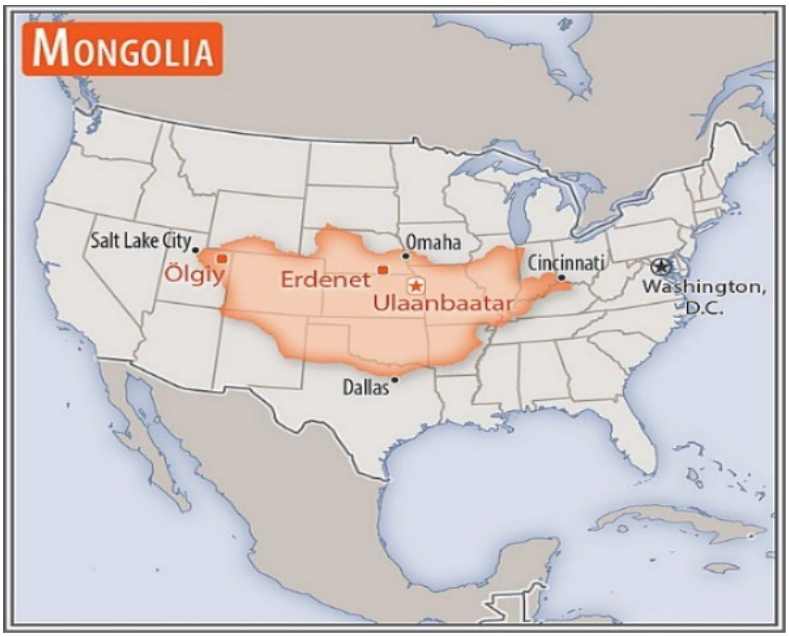
[15] Menard, Aubrey, *Young Mongols*, 209.

[16] Menard, Aubrey, 208.

[17] Menard, Aubrey, 208.

[18] UNICEF, "Early Childhood Development," UNICEF, accessed March 5, 2023, https://www.unicef.org/mongolia/early-childhood-development.

[19] Tsolmon Enkhbat and Undrakh Banzragch, "Child Rights Situation in Mongolia 2018" (Save the Children, 2018), https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/child-rights-situation-mongolia-2018/.



Source: The World Factbook, "Mongolia," October 17, 2023, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mongolia/.

Figure 2. Area Map of Mongolia

Source: Caitlin Dwyer, Matt Bozigar, "Circling the Mongolian Steppe," Wanderlust and Lipstick, October 20, 2023, https://wanderlustandlipstick.com/wander-tales/asia/circling-the-mongolian-steppe/.

Figure 3. Rural Mongolia

Collectively, these challenges exacerbate mental health problems among Mongolia's youth and today, Mongolia has a higher suicide rate than other regions of Asia.[20] Between 2012 and 2016, 2,055 Mongolians committed suicide, and 30 percent of those deaths were of young people between the ages of 10 and 29.[21] The impact is devastating to families and communities, and the strain simultaneously erodes the legitimacy of Mongolian institutions that are perceived as failing to adequately address mental health issues. This has taken a toll across Mongolian society and mental health has become one of the most pressing challenges for Mongolian children to overcome.[22] Further, according to Dagvadorj et al., "in Mongolia, specialized services in child mental health and early detection are lacking."[23] Compounding the problem further is a lack of emphasis on physical education and fitness in Mongolian schools. Today, the Mongolian Ministry of Education (MOE) curricula only allows for two 45-minute physical education classes per week. This lack of attention to the physical needs of Mongolian children encourages inactive lifestyles, intensifying existing mental and physical health problems. Moreover, the MOE physical education standards fall short of recommended guidelines in the United States that call for at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity for children 6 to 17 years old.[24] As a result, children miss out on the benefits associated with regular physical activity that could contribute to improved mental health and intrapersonal resiliency.

This paper argues that integration of the Sports and Education Program into the Mongolian school system, CMSE OAI's, American Corner events, and MAF Summer camps could lessen the impact of the aforementioned mental health issues while strengthening resiliency and reinforcing shared values at the individual and collective level.

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[20] Badarch et al., "Suicide Attempts among School-Attending Adolescents in Mongolia," 1.

[21] Dulguun Bayarsaikhan, "Hanging by a Thread," *The UB Post*, February 28, 2018, http://theubposts.com/post/10968/.

[22] Badarch et al., "Suicide Attempts among School-Attending Adolescents in Mongolia," 1.

[23] Amarjargal Dagvadorj, Daniel J. Corsi, Narantuya Sumya, Katherine Muldoon, Shi Wu Wen, Kenji Takehara, Rintaro Mori, Mark C.Walker, "Prevalence and Determinants of Mental Health Problems among Children in Mongolia: A Population-Based Birth Cohort," *Global Epidemiology* 1 (November 1, 2019): 100011, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloepi.2019.100011.

[24] American Academy of Pediatrics, "Bright Futures Physical Activity Tipsheet."

Furthermore, this program could also be utilized by Mongolian governmental and non-governmental organizations as part of a whole-of-nation approach to achieving its Vision 2050 policy objectives. As the Comprehensive Defense manual points out, resilience occurs "through integrated whole-of-society preparedness."[25] Through regular use of the program, teachers, administrators, parents, social workers, and communities at large could contribute to the development of healthier minds and bodies among Mongolia's youth. The benefits and intangible forces derived from an emphasis on increased physical activity is essential to strengthening an individual's ability to cope with or withstand any of the personal or professional stressors and challenges they might face in the future.[26]

[25] NATO Special Operations Headquarters, *NATO Comprehensive Defense Handbook*, vol. 1 (Shape, Belgium Quartier General: NATO, 2020), 19.

[26] Otto Fiala, "Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)" (Joint Special Operations University (U.S.), April 2020), 8, https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=838149.

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III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Continued Mongolian national sovereignty and democratic development throughout the twenty-first century will require a deliberate approach and long-term commitment by the Government of Mongolia and its allies and partners throughout the world. Mongolia's geography creates natural tension in maintenance of its territorial borders, national sovereignty, and assurances toward a prosperous democratic society. Existing Mongolian institutions must lead the way in preparing its society for continued challenges to its democratic values and system of governance. To do so, the government of Mongolia could endorse a whole-of-society approach to building resilience throughout its population. A key prerequisite to fully leveraging the benefits of this type of approach is having a physically and mentally resilient populace. This starts at the individual level. However, within Mongolia there is a rural-urban divide that creates unequal access to resources and opportunity. Despite the many different socio-economic starting points from which young Mongolians begin their lives, Mongolia's institutions hold tremendous potential to close these gaps and simultaneously foster resiliency within its society. The MOE and MAF are key stakeholders toward this end. To enable its full potential and fulfill the stated policy objectives of the Government of Mongolia, key leaders, administrators, and teachers must be equipped with the vision and resources to do so. Doing so could help lead more of today's children to becoming tomorrow's citizens, leaders, and diaspora that are united in the effort to maintain Mongolia's democratic values, cultural heritage, and national identity.

A. A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF THE STATE OF MONGOLIAN EDUCATION

The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) provides information related to a countries development status and progress in key areas such as governance and political processes. In Mongolia, the 2022 BTI Country Report candidly points out that access to

education across the rural and urban divide "is a major challenge".[27] Within parts of rural Mongolia, poverty rates can exceed 40% and the "ger" districts of Ulaanbaatar share similarly poor results.[28] The COVID-19 pandemic further compounded problems related to poverty and equal access to education. In February 2020, Mongolia declared a state of emergency and closed all of its education institutions. For Mongolian children living in rural areas, closures related to COVID-19 increased their isolation from society. World Mind's Issue 7.4 recently published an article examining the state of Mongolian education before and after the pandemic and found "it is evident that the pre-pandemic challenges faced by rural students have been exacerbated by COVID-19. These challenges are an extension of the poverty faced disproportionately by rural Mongolians."[29] Although data show the pandemic's effects on number of hours lost due to in-person learning and the economic cost to Mongolia, our understanding of the effects on children's mental health remains limited. What is known, however, is that pre-pandemic, Mongolia's youth had already been significantly affected by issues related to mental health.

B. MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH – A PRECURSOR TO RESILIENCE

Standing in the way of Mongolia's long-term individual and cultural resilience is a preponderance of mental health issues afflicting the youth of the nation. As previously mentioned, the problem is vast, covering every province and affecting communities across the country. The journal article, "Prevalence and Determinants of Mental Health Problems among Children in Mongolia: A Population-Based Birth Cohort," highlights the scope of the problem and found that storytelling within a nomadic society might be a valuable method for combating these mental health problems.[30] One of most damaging is suicide.

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[27] Bertelsmann Transformation Index, "BTI 2022 Mongolia Country Report," 2022, https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/MNG.

[28] Bertelsmann Transformation Index.

[29] Chloe Baldauf, "The Pandemic's Effects on Educational Disparities Between Mongolia's Rural and Urban Students," *The World Mind*, May 5, 2022, https://www.theworldmind.org/home/2022/5/5/covid-and-educational-disparities-between-rural-and-urban-students-in-mongolia.

[30] Amarjargal Dagvadorj, Daniel J. Corsi, Narantuya Sumya, Katherine Muldoon, Shi Wu Wen, Kenji Takehara, Rintaro Mori, Mark C.Walker, "Prevalence and Determinants of Mental Health Problems among Children in Mongolia."

As the prevalence of suicides within Mongolia is primarily males with over 30% of suicides being conducted by young people.[31] Furthermore, research shows that nearly three quarters of suicides were committed by people who were lonely and led solitary lives.[32] The journal article, "Suicide Attempts among School-Attending Adolescents in Mongolia: Associated Factors and Gender Differences," describes the mental health issues among Mongolia's youth and seeks to understand the differences in suicide susceptibility between males and females.[33] Findings underscored a need for strong communities, a sense of belonging, and shared experiences among children. For Mongolia to change the tide, every member of its society needs to be committed and able to contribute but these persistent mental health problems could stimy such efforts. This emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to ensure future generations of Mongolians will be resistant to mental health issues.

It is within this backdrop The Mongolian Sports and Education Program could help Mongolia advance its human development goals. The program focuses on physical education because the advantages associated with regular physical activity are abundant, universally recognized, and once utilized, the benefits could immediately begin to support Mongolia's youth. A recent study depicts how sports and games are commonly understood to carry invaluable benefits such as helping prevent disease or simply improving people's mood.[34] A program that intentionally harnesses the benefits that sports, games, and play provide could help generate stronger communities throughout Mongolia that will be needed to support the development of a more resilient society. Fortunately, the publication of Vision 2050 offers a framework for Mongolia's education institutions to better understand and contribute to the strengthening of shared identity and resiliency. In addition to providing a blueprint for institutions to leverage, Vision 2050 creates the space necessary

[31] Dulguun Bayarsaikhan, "Hanging by a Thread."

[32] Dulguun Bayarsaikhan.

[33] Badarch et al., "Suicide Attempts among School-Attending Adolescents in Mongolia," 2.

[34] Kumar et al., "Sport Participation," 552–553.

to further advance legal frameworks that are needed to develop whole of society approaches that foster resiliency within Mongolia.[35]

C. VISION 2050 LONG TERM DEVELOPMENT POLICY

In 2020, the Vision 2050 policy document was approved by the Parliament of Mongolia. It sets foundational priorities and goals for what long-term democratic prosperity in Mongolia should look like. Vision 2050 highlights areas such as shared national values, human development, healthy and active lifestyles, and governance.[36] Importantly, the healthy and active lifestyles section of Vision 2050 features multiple objectives that the Sports and Education Program could help Mongolia achieve. This policy document seeks to put Mongolia on a path to long term economic and social development that the democratization process underwrites. Supported by the Vision 2050 framework, Mongolia has created a blueprint for the attainment of these goals. However, social and economic development alone will not ensure success. Fortunately, the Vision 2050 policy document also recognizes the need to "develop shared values that will be the pillar to build a nation-state with a deep sense of similarities and differences and resilience."[37] The document furthers describes the need for Mongolia to foster cultural resilience through modernization and its national values and traditions.[38] This type of resilience is vital to ensure future generations will carry on and enjoy the rich traditions instilled throughout Mongolian culture and envisioning its future is a critical first step. Yet, the prerequisite to cultural resilience is individual resilience. Without it, any society will be left weaker and increasingly susceptible to appropriation and coercion. The gap between individual resilience and cultural resilience is what The Mongolian Sports and Education Program seeks to bridge. Moreover, adoption of the program in Mongolia could encourage unity within classrooms that over time transcends society–also a key pillar highlighted within

[35] NATO Special Operations Headquarters, *NATO Comprehensive Defense Handbook* Vol. 1. (Shape, Belgium: Quartier General, 2020)," 103."

[36] Mongolian Parliament, "Vision-2050," 28.

[37] Mongolian Parliament, 28.

[38] Mongolian Parliament 49.

Vision 2050.[39] The Vision 2050 document outlines goals that, if achieved, will lead to a more prosperous, resilient, and secure nation. Review the next few pages before you start working in this template. Chapter II contains more detailed instructions for formatting.

D. MINISTRY OF EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN

In October of 2020, Mongolia's MOE and Science published its "Education Sector Mid-Term Development Plan, 2021-2030." According to the Minister of Education, the purpose of the document is "to ensure the holistic development of Mongolian citizens with competencies to thrive in the digital technology era as active participants in a knowledge-based society which enables life-long learning through quality, open, inclusive and flexible education services."[40] Moreover, it is nested within Vision 2050 and emphasizes the key component of human development and its relationship to education. In chapter 1.1 the mid-term development plan states, "the strategic objective of developing socially active and healthy citizens is by affording them access to quality education. This objective is key to the security of family life and the development of the country in a manner that ensures the well-being of all Mongolians."[41] The primary and secondary education periods are highlighted as opportunities to modify and improve "the curriculum content and methodology to reflect Mongolian language, history, culture and tradition, patriotic thinking, individual development, character formation, bilingual education and common values of humanity."[42] Lastly, the plan states that there is a need for the public to have access to education programs and materials online. Under the lifelong education heading it states, "An integrated platform for online training shall be created; and lifelong learning opportunities for all citizens shall be afforded regardless of time and location."[43] It is

[39] Mongolian Parliament, 46.

[40] L. Tsedevsuren, *Ministry of Education and Science; Education Sector Mid Term Development Plan, 2021–2030* (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Ministry of Education and Science, 2020), 9, https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/education-sector-medium-mid-term-development-plan-2021-2030-mongolia#:~:text=Mongolia's%20Education%20sector%20medium%2Dterm,acquire%20these%20competences%20through%20quality%2C.

[41] Tsedevsuren, 16.

[42] Tsedevsuren, 16.

[43] Tsedevsuren, 16.

important that this is mandated as access to education related materials in rural Mongolia is far less accessible and young children living in provinces outside of Ulaanbaatar are often affected most as they are separated from families to live in dilapidated school dormitories. The Ministries recognition that curricula need to be available digitally while accentuating and promoting cultural heritage and national pride is movement in the right direction. However, development and integration of such programs either do not exist or are at best in a nascent phase of use. Within this void, there is an opportunity for The Mongolian Sports and Education Program to help fill this critical gap toward a whole-of-society approach to resiliency.

E. INDIVIDUAL RESILIENCE IS FOUNDATIONAL TO COMPREHENSIVE DEFENSE

Within the last five years, multiple documents have been published that frame and help define what, how, and why a small nation like Mongolia needs to bolster its comprehensive defense to ensure its right to remain a sovereign democratic nation. The first document is the "NATO Comprehensive Defense Handbook (N-CDH)." The handbook is designed to be a guide for any nation interested in utilizing a whole of society approach to pursue its interests and offers Mongolia a framework to utilize in pursuit of its Vision 2050 goals.[44] The handbook points out that a vital component for developing comprehensive defense is a nations education system and the N-CDH states the first education objective is to "enhance individual resilience."[45] Within Mongolia, the education system lacks consistency across the rural-urban divide with many of the 331 soums coping with limited human, capital, and physical resources. Despite such limitations, Mongolia could begin to bolster resiliency and combat mental health problems within its population through The Mongolian Sports and Education Program. Daily use of the program would improve individual physical well-being while reinforcing shared identity and a sense of community. The program is in alignment with the N-CDH in its

[44] NATO Special Operations Headquarters, *NATO Comprehensive Defense Handbook*, vol. 1. (Shape, Belgium: Quartier General, 2020), 13.

[45] NATO Special Operations Headquarters, 26.

focus on physical health as a means to enhance psychological resilience.[46] The program is not meant to replace existing methods but to provide a supplemental physical education resource to utilize activities that are critical to an adolescents development. The persistent problem, however, is low investment in child development, leaving classrooms overcrowded, teachers underpaid and without the materials needed to meet children's needs.[47] Effective utilization of N-CDH education principles are based on the presumption that a population is mentally and physically healthy, stable, and well cared for. If this premise is accurate, a population that lacks resources is more susceptible to mental health issues and could be more easily manipulated due to lack of will. The N-CDH rightly advocates the significance of the education domain. The N-CDH is a key document to support attainment of Vision 2050's goals by continually encouraging members of Mongolia's "society to directly contribute to their own safety, security, and natural right to self-determination."[48]

F. TOTAL DEFENSE: ONE INDIVIDUAL AT A TIME

The "Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)" supports the premise that education is a vital component in the development of resilient individuals. The ROC was published by the Swedish Defense University in 2020 and is an important document that highlights the need for a Total Defense approach to deter potential adversaries.[49] This concept is based on the active participation of the population in maintenance of independence and national sovereignty.[50] In this context, it could be seen as a key complimentary document that could enable Mongolia to achieve its Vision 2050 objectives. Similar to the N-CDH, the ROC highlights the need for a population to utilize its education system to reinforce patriotism and good citizenship to help develop protection against misinformation or propaganda.[51]

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[46] NATO Special Operations Headquarters, 26.

[47] Save the Children Mongolia, "Child Rights Situation in Mongolia 2018" 55.

[48] NATO Special Operations Headquarters, *NATO Comprehensive Defense Handbook* Vol. 1. (Shape, Belgium: Quartier General, 2020), 15."

[49] Fiala, "Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)," 2.

[50] Fiala, 2.

[51] Fiala, 18.

A key component to be promoted within the school system is national identity. As the ROC points out, a strong national identity is a prerequisite for a resilient society and can be cultivated within a nations education system.[52] As Mongolia currently enjoys the status quo, it should not waste time in empowering its MOE to promote national unity and develop resiliency in its children. Within this "Pre-crisis/deterrence" phase, the MOE should be leveraging projects such as the Sports and Education Program to promote physical education and fitness as a means to maximizing individual resiliency, which is foundational to achieving a strong national culture.[53]

The sense of national identity the ROC espouses mirrors the N-CDH's focus on education as a pillar to national resilience. Both documents provide valuable insight and information for Mongolia to leverage in pursuit of a resilient society that lives up to its Vision 2050 ideals. The Mongolian Sports and Education Program follows the outline these documents provide to deliver a program able to enhance physical and psychological health and well-being. If resiliency is improved at the individual level and extrapolated across multiple generations, the conditions within Mongolia's society will be in place to build a stronger national identity that further supports the full adoption and implementation of the principles laid out in Vision 2050.

[52] Fiala, 8.

[53] Fiala, 78.

IV. THE APPROACH

This project focused on three lines of effort to promote the Sports and Education Program within Mongolia. Line of Effort 1 focused on socializing the program concept with U.S. and Mongolian stakeholders and developing The Mongolian Sports and Education Program curriculum. Vital to this line of effort was successful coordination with the U.S. Embassy in Mongolia. Without Embassy support, the program would never have materialized. In addition to receiving Country Team assistance, the program benefitted significantly from ongoing engagement in Mongolia through the Naval Postgraduate School and the Regional Defense Fellowship Program.

Line of Effort 2 focused on the planning and execution of a June 2023 pilot and engagement with the MOE. In the Spring of 2023, U.S. Embassy personnel recommended partnering with School #130 in Ulaanbaatar to host the pilot event. Embassy contacts within the capital city enabled coordination with School #130 administrators to pursue this objective. Although the school year had ended and students were on summer break, School #130 arranged for 17 children, plus parents and teachers, to participate in the pilot. The non-profit Bilguunzul Foundation also supported the pilot with an additional 15 children. During the one-day event, the program was introduced, and children participated in games and team-building activities. At the conclusion of the pilot, a questionnaire was administered to receive feedback from participants.

The second component of the June pilot event was engagement with the MOE. To help toward this end, the U.S. Embassy coordinated a meeting with the Head of the General Education Department. The engagement provided an opportunity to introduce The Mongolian Sports and Education Program to Ministry stakeholders. Importantly, Ministry personnel shared that current curricula only allows for physical education classes twice per week. However, the MOE did not commit to adoption of The Mongolian Sports and Education Program. The dichotomy of extremely positive feedback from School #130 compared to the non-committal posture from the MOE led to modifying the approach. Instead of focusing on a top-down approach wherein the MOE acted as the primary stakeholder and gatekeeper to Mongolian schools, the new approach seeks to work from

the bottom up, specifically by continuing to work with School #130 and the Bilguunzul Foundation.

Line of Effort 3 focused on promoting the Sports and Education Program with additional civilian stakeholders as well as the Mongolian Armed Forces (MAF). During a second trip to Mongolia in September of 2023, there were opportunities to re-engage with School #130 and the Bilguunzul Foundation as well as School #1, and the MAF. There was a follow-on engagement at School #130 along with an initial engagement at School #1, also located in Mongolia's capital city. Additionally, continued communication with the Bilguunzul Foundation led to an opportunity to meet with the staff and children at their Ger district facility. Finally, the September trip overlapped with the NPS-led Comprehensive Defense Working Group (CDWG) event in Ulaanbaatar. This provided an opportunity to present a synopsis of the Sports and Education Program to the mostly military audience. Following the presentation, the Commander of the MAF Special Forces stated his desire to integrate the Sports and Education program into the newly developed MAF Civil Military Cooperation Unit (CIMIC) Summer Camp project.

Partnership and cooperation between the Mongolian Ministry of Defense, Public Schools, Non-Governmental Organizations, and the U.S. Embassy are key to advancing program objectives to create the conditions for the successful implementation and use of the program. A whole of nation approach is needed in Mongolia to develop a resilient society and as Bayasgalan states, "a critical first step of this approach is to bolster social and psychological resilience."[54] To infuse this type of wholistic resilience into Mongolia's citizenry, a long-term approach is required as well as a strong commitment from government and civilian officials to achieve the Vision 2050 goals. Additionally, and for this project particularly, the support of teachers, parents, social workers, and Mongolian communities will be vital to ensure the Sports and Education Program is widely recognized and utilized as a tool that supports Mongolia's greatest resource, it's youth.

[54] Bayasgalan Lkhagvasuren, "Comprehensive Defense: Psychological Resilience in Mongolia" (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2022), https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/69673.

V. THE MONGOLIAN SPORTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM

The development of The Mongolian Sports and Education Program derived from an awareness of a grievance within Mongolian society. Mental illness and suicide are known issues that are not receiving adequate attention in Mongolia. According to Badarch et al., suicide and suicidal ideations among Mongolia's youth "remains a major public health problem."[55] If left unaddressed, this problem will continuously fester, undermining families and communities across Mongolia. The Mongolian Sports and Education Program addresses this issue through the use of physical activities such as games and sports. Further, The Mongolian Sports and Education Program is designed to strengthen the mental and physical resiliency of end-users while proving a platform for expanded engagement with Mongolian partners that is in line with U.S. strategic guidance.

A. PHASE I ORIGIN OF THE PROGRAM

In February 2005, I was part of a collegiate track & field coaching team that led an unknown NAIA student-athlete to becoming the U.S. national pole-vault champion. Beating a field of professional athletes was the culmination of a year of demanding training, extensive mental and physical preparation, and an exhibition of total trust in the system. Subsequently, I gained invaluable experience that further shaped my approach toward coaching, training, and preparing for competition. The lessons learned were instrumental and further tested at the NCAA Division I level where I was able to take a perennially subpar track and field program from the Atlantic 10 and transform it into a unified team that won back-to-back conference championships.

These experiences highlighted to me that the "strongest and best equipped" competitors are not always guaranteed success. This knowledge directly translates to The Mongolian Sports and Education Program, where I applied lessons learned from coaching into a practical approach to impart Mongolia's next generation with the same benefits derived from physical fitness as well as the powerful forces of teamwork, shared identity,

[55] Badarch et al., "Suicide Attempts among School-Attending Adolescents in Mongolia," 7.

purpose, and unity of effort. In doing so, the virtues that The Mongolian Sports and Education Program promotes could contribute to the development of strong minds and bodies that will help Mongolia ensure its youth are healthier, more resilient, and better able to contribute to their nation's future.

B. PHASE II – DEVELOPING THE MONGOLIAN SPORTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM

The program and its content were informed by educational experience in the field of exercise science and over a decade's worth of collegiate coaching expertise and utilizes practical, effective activities designed to improve physical fitness, cooperation, and confidence all while having fun. Further, the program is also intended to strengthen mental toughness via physical activity to support children becoming more resilient. Coupled with this professional knowledge and experience, the program was born from a familiarity with Mongolia gained through multiple deployments between 2018 and 2019. During the CMSE rotation in particular, the issue of mental health and suicide was raised during multiple engagements which led to the idea for the Sports and Education Program as a means for countering depression, anxiety, and suicide while increasing the resiliency among Mongolia's youth.

Each activity has written instructions for use, which were translated into the Mongolian language to facilitate acceptance, understanding, and implementation. The program is broken down into five sections that includes step-by-step warm-up and cool-down routines, core and body-weight exercises, team-building activities, games, Olympic Sports workouts, Mongolian-themed sports and health trivia, and an age based Mongolian Physical Fitness Test. Each of the program's activities were designed to support the goals of the "Active and Healthy Lifestyle" section of Vision 2050 and is intended to help bridge the gap between Mongolia today and Mongolia in 2050.[56]

[56] Mongolian Parliament, "Vision-2050."

Furthermore, the program was created with the following objectives:

1. To provide Mongolian students, family members, teachers, and social workers with beneficial activities that improve physical fitness.
2. To encourage the development of psychological and physical resilience through sports, games, play, and team building activities.
3. To promote shared values and build a sense of community in classrooms and schools.
4. To strengthen a sense of pride and patriotism in young Mongolians.
5. To decrease the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and suicide among Mongolia's youth.

C. PHASE III – PILOTING THE MONGOLIAN SPORTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM IN MONGOLIA

Coordination with the U.S. Embassy was vital before, during, and after the pilot to ensure concurrence with the program and U.S. Embassy support. Further, the Country Team recommended School #130 in Ulaanbaatar as a host for the June pilot and provided point of contact information. The Regional Development Fellowship Program (RDFP) also played a critical role in furthering the program by funding each trip to Mongolia in June and September of 2023.

The Mongolian Sports and Education Program was piloted in Ulaanbaatar in June 2023 to great success. The program pilot received vital support, to include promotion within the community, from the U.S. Embassy in Ulaanbaatar, and Rebel Grappling Gym, and the pilot included children from both School #130 and the Bilguunzul Foundation. Figure 4 displays the June pilot promotional flyer. The one-day pilot provided 32 children, their parents, and teachers from School #130 and the Bilguunzul Foundation an opportunity to preview games designed to improve physical fitness and simultaneously foster trust through cooperation and communication. Following execution of the pilot, feedback was elicited from participants through a questionnaire to ensure that Mongolian viewpoints were informing the program's development. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Participants stated the most important perceived program benefits were improvements in mood, wellbeing, and sense of community in the classroom. They perceived the biggest challenges to the program's adoption would be access to facilities and sustaining levels of student interest, family buy-in, and community support. The School #130 pilot was an important first step to begin socializing the program with Mongolian stakeholders and it provided important feedback that informed the final version of the program.

Figure 4. June Pilot Promotional Flyer. Translation: *Engage in exercise routines, sports, games, and physical fitness assessments by a U.S. Army Major. Children ages 7-12, parents, schoolteachers, social workers, and psychologists are invited. The location is Capital School #130, on the east side of rapid Apartment block. June 21, 2023, Wednesday, 0900-1200.*

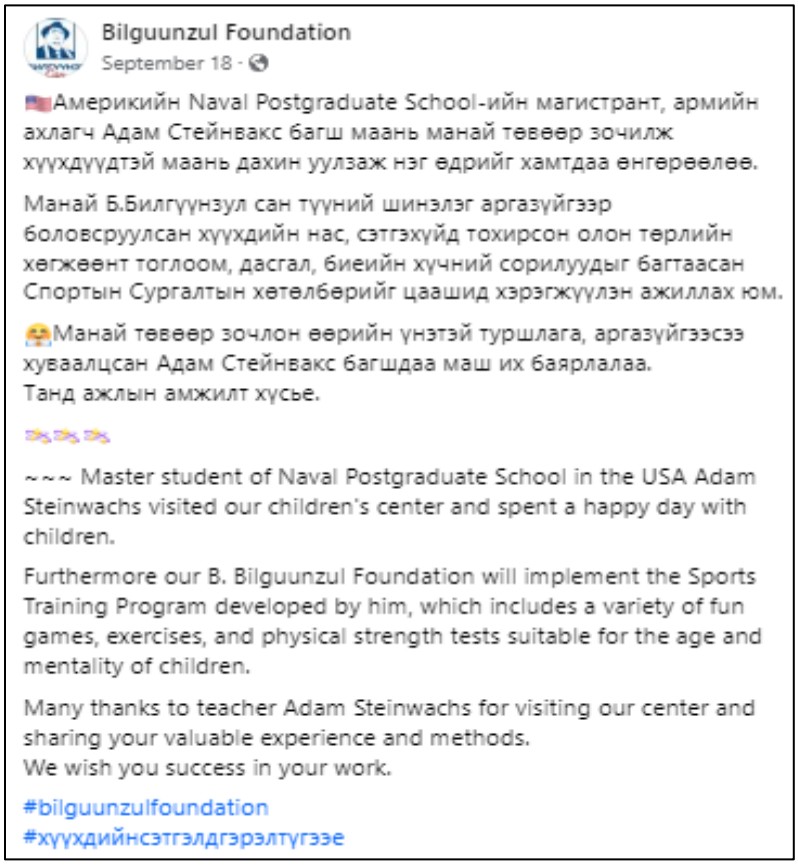
D. PHASE IV – SECOND PILOT AND INTEGRATION OF THE MONGOLIAN SPORTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM WITH MAF CIMIC SUMMER CAMP PROJECT

A follow-on trip to Mongolia in September of 2023 allowed an opportunity to preview program activities with additional Mongolian stakeholders. During this trip, the program was presented to members of the MAF Special Forces Command and National Security Council during the annual NPS-led Comprehensive Defense Working Group (CDWG). A key outcome from this engagement was an opportunity to integrate the Sports and Education Program into the newly initiated MAF CIMIC Summer Camp project. The Summer Camp project was piloted in 2023 and is intended for school-aged children to participate in a weeklong camp focused on development of outdoor survival and first aid skills. Training objectives included imparting national pride and patriotism through games and exercises focused on Mongolian culture, history, and heritage. Further, camp project objectives seek to provide children with a break from the digital world while fostering a sense of social responsibility. Specifically, Mongolian boys and girls were taught skills such as how to make fires, build shelters, conduct basic first aid, and prepare food in austere environments while learning about Mongolian history, customs, and traditions. The first iteration of the project in 2023 took place in four separate locations around Ulaanbaatar. There are plans to conduct future camps across Mongolia and beginning in 2024, The Mongolian Sports and Education Program activities are planned to be integrated into the camps schedule of physical training activities. Specifically, the Mongolian Physical Fitness Test (MPFT) from The Mongolian Sports and Education Program was recommended for use as it contains an age-based comprehensive physical fitness test that supports the Vision-2050 objective aimed at creating a physical capabilities test for Mongolians.[57]

Following the CDWG engagement, the Sports and Education program was utilized during a visit to the Bilguunzul Foundation. See figure 5 Facebook Post. The foundation is located in the Ger district of Ulaanbaatar and supports over 60 disadvantaged children from the surrounding area. During the trip, children participated in program games and activities.

[57] Mongolian Parliament, 114.

Following the engagement, the General Manager shared that the Bilguunzul Foundation planned to utilize The Mongolian Sports and Education Program.


Bilguunzul Foundation
September 18 ·

🇺🇸Америкийн Naval Postgraduate School-ийн магистрант, армийн ахлагч Адам Стейнвакс багш маань манай төвөөр зочилж хүүхдүүдтэй маань дахин уулзаж нэг өдрийг хамтдаа өнгөрөөлөө.

Манай Б.Билгүүнзул сан түүний шинэлэг аргазүйгээр боловсруулсан хүүхдийн нас, сэтгэхүйд тохирсон олон төрлийн хөгжөөнт тоглоом, дасгал, биеийн хүчний сорилуудыг багтаасан Спортын Сургалтын хөтөлбөрийг цаашид хэрэгжүүлэн ажиллах юм.

🤗Манай төвөөр зочлон өөрийн үнэтэй туршлага, аргазүйгээсээ хуваалцсан Адам Стейнвакс багшдаа маш их баярлалаа.
Танд ажлын амжилт хүсье.

~~~ Master student of Naval Postgraduate School in the USA Adam Steinwachs visited our children's center and spent a happy day with children.

Furthermore our B. Bilguunzul Foundation will implement the Sports Training Program developed by him, which includes a variety of fun games, exercises, and physical strength tests suitable for the age and mentality of children.

Many thanks to teacher Adam Steinwachs for visiting our center and sharing your valuable experience and methods.
We wish you success in your work.

#bilguunzulfoundation
#хүүхдийнсэтгэлдгэрэлтүгээе

Source: Bilguunzul Foundation. "Bilguunzul Foundation | Ulaanbaatar." Facebook, September 27, 2023. https://www.facebook.com/bilguunzulfoundation.

Figure 5. September 2023 Bilguunzul Foundation Engagement

Following the Bilguunzul engagement, there were separate opportunities to meet with the principals and staff from School #1 and School #130. During the meeting at School #1, the Sports and Education Program was introduced to the principal and school manager. During the meeting, the principal shared approximately 3,750 students attend School #1. After the engagement, an invitation was extended to observe the schools' morning routine the following day. The next morning, the schools administrators provided an opportunity to lead 10th grade students through their bi-weekly physical education class using activities from the Sports and Education Program. See figure 6.
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Figure 6. School #1 Engagement, September 2023

After the appointments at School #1, a follow-up meeting to the June pilot took place at School #130. During the engagement, the School Principal and Manager provided a tour of the school and facilitated a briefing with the school's physical education teachers. During the briefing, the Sports and Education program was introduced, and discussions and questions focused on how to use it and why it would be beneficial to students. Upon request, I then led a class of 6th graders through their upcoming physical education class, using activities from the Sports and Education Program. See figure 7. Both teachers and students participated. The feedback was especially positive, and throughout the class the teachers asked questions related to helping them implement and utilize the program in the future. The principal also stated that School #130, which enrolls 3,500 students, would utilize the program.

Figure 7. School #130 Engagement, September 2023

Following the September trip to Mongolia, the Sports and Education program is projected to be utilized in two of Ulaanbaatar's public schools and one non-governmental organization. Additionally, there is potential for the program to be used as part of the 2024 MAF Summer Camp project. In total, the program is currently estimated to reach approximately 7,300 students during the upcoming academic year. Although in a nascent phase of use, The Mongolian Sports and Education Program offers a scalable resource to benefit children in Mongolia and a platform for expanded access and engagement with Mongolian stakeholders.

VI. THE MONGOLIAN SPORTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM: CONNECTING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AT THE GROUND LEVEL

Integrating The Mongolian Sports and Education Program into existing U.S. Country Team – Mongolia and MAF initiatives, such as the MAF Summer Camps, is grounded in the principles of soft power as a means for furthering U.S. strategic objectives. Joseph Nye, Jr. described soft power as "the ability to affect what other countries want tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions."[58] Another important element of soft power, and subcomponent of culture, is sports. Sports have a universal appeal, and because of the passion sports invoke, sports diplomacy has become a significant piece of U.S. statecraft. This is nothing new, as nations have utilized sports as an instrument for cooperation and goodwill since the ancient Greek Olympic Games and Truce.[59] Sports and games transcend cultural, social, and ideological barriers and within sports and games there is common ground to develop connections, trust, and friendship. The Mongolian Sports and Education Program seeks to put these forces to use by using sports and games to improve the mental and physical health of Mongolian children while also expanding engagement opportunities and strengthening partnerships with Mongolian stakeholders. Taking the sports diplomacy concept further, Adams-Smith suggests, "it is important to look at sports diplomacy as a type of public diplomacy."[60] Further, Adams-Smith states that, "public diplomacy is designed to foster trust and promote productive relationships while also advancing foreign policy goals."[61] This perspective describes The Mongolian Sports and Education Program. It is a tool to advance public diplomacy in Mongolia because it was created to be a resource that empowers Mongolian

[58] Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, Twentieth Anniversary, no. 80 (1990): 153–71, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1148580.

[59] International Olympic Committee, "Olympic Truce," International Olympic Committee, March 17, 2023, https://olympics.com/ioc/olympic-truce.

[60] Sophie Adams-Smith, "The (Soft) Power of Sports," *Foreign Affairs Review*, March 29, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairsreview.com/home/the-soft-power-of-sports.

[61] Sophie Adams-Smith.

institutions to address a public health problem that stands to undermine the long-term societal resiliency needed to maintain its sovereignty.

The U.S. relationship with Mongolia is based on shared values and principles that are rooted in a mutual desire to preserve democratic systems of governance and the current international order. However, the current risk from the People's Republic of China (PRC), in particular, is consequential, and our National Security Strategy (NSS) describes them as a nation increasingly capable of changing the present order to fit its autocratic intentions.[62] In 2019, the United States and Mongolia entered into a strategic partnership to advance mutual interests and strengthen deterrence as the world returned to a state of competition between great powers. In respect to the U.S.-Mongolia strategic partnership, the Integrated Country Strategy – Mongolia states that, "Mongolians view this partnership as a cornerstone to our relationship as a "third neighbor" to counter the influence of Russia and China."[63] According to a recent White House press statement, the 2019 U.S.-Mongolia strategic partnership "has provided a firm foundation to promote and strengthen bilateral relations"[64] and this relationship undergirds integrated deterrence. Moreover, this partnership represents a significant pillar in the Indo-Pacific area of responsibility that supports U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) objectives to "build the strongest possible coalitions"[65] with our allies and partners.

U.S. allies and partners throughout the Indo-Pacific region play a significant role in maintaining the current international order and Mongolia is an important partner in this effort. The National Defense Strategy (NDS) highlights the integral nature of our alliances and partnerships to the successful implementation of integrated deterrence.[66] The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy strikes a similar tone by stating the United States commitment to the

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[62] Joseph Biden, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America."

[63] U.S. Department of State, "Integrated Country Strategy Mongolia."

[64] The White House, "Joint Statement on the Strategic Third Neighbor Partnership between the United States of America and Mongolia."

[65] Joseph Biden, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America."

[66] United States Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Including the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review and the 2022 Missile Defense Review* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2022).

"connections within and beyond the region"[67] is a staple of our strategic approach. While the imperatives to build connections and coalitions is presented in strategic level documents, much of the work to do so is done at the ground level. It is in this space that relationships with key leaders and partners are established, nurtured, and maintained. The Mongolian Sports and Education Program is a grass roots approach to cultivating new relationships with vital stakeholders and strengthening existing ones. Importantly, it also sets conditions for building connections with future generations of key Mongolian stakeholders.

The Mongolian Sports and Education Program pilot events led to an initial, but limited adoption of the program within civil and military organizations. U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) and the U.S. Country Team in Mongolia have a unique chance to utilize The Mongolian Sports and Education Program as a soft power tool to increase cooperation and strengthen the bond between the U.S. and Mongolia. For example, one such opportunity is through the U.S. Embassy – Mongolia 'American Corner' concept. American corners provide a space for Mongolians to experience anything and everything Americana. The Mongolian Sports and Education Program could easily be integrated into existing American corner activities to establish contact and build rapport with Mongolians across the country.

The Mongolian Sports and Education Program offers U.S. SOF and Department of State (DOS) interlocutors with a platform to strengthen connections and relationships with our Mongolian partners as part of existing security cooperation efforts. Moreover, The Mongolian Sports and Education Program offers a new and innovative way to support U.S. strategic objectives in the Indo-Pacific region. The JCC says it best as it states, "succeeding in strategic competition requires the joint force to expand its competitive mindset and its competitive approaches."[68] The Mongolian Sports and Education Program was created with this mentality in mind. The Mongolian Sports and Education Program's future success depends on the degree to which U.S. and Mongolian stakeholders see value in the program

[67] The White House, "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States," The White House, February 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf.

[68] Cordesman, "The U.S. Joint Chiefs New Strategy Paper on Joint Concept for Competing."

and appreciate its ability to create opportunities for engagement, expanded access, and strengthened relationships that our strategic documents call for.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mongolia's youth will determine if the Vision 2050 goals are met because they are the driving force of the future and will one day become tomorrow's leaders.[69] Bridging the gap between 2023 and Mongolia in 2050 is the purpose for this project. The program leverages knowledge and experience from a 10-year collegiate coaching career and from time spent working in and with Mongolians. Through its own education institutions, Mongolia is now able to begin utilizing the Sports and Education program as a supplemental physical education resource to improve the mental health and strengthen the resiliency of its school-aged population. Moreover, the opportunity to integrate the program into future iterations of the MAF CIMIC Summer Camp project expands the reach of the program outside of school classrooms for Mongolia's youth to become more mentally and physically active, fit, and resilient.

Mongolian governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions offer vital apertures for ensuring Mongolia's youth are healthy and resilient. Although use of the program is in the early phases within Mongolia, the fastest way to leverage the benefits associated with daily physical activity would be for the Mongolian MOE, with U.S. Embassy support, to adopt The Mongolian Sports and Education Program. The Sports and Education program offers a range of activities that are designed to encourage fitness and proven to improve focus, mood, and health. Gains in these areas could lead to better performance in school, counter mental health problems, and simultaneously foster shared values and identity among children that contributes to their resiliency.

If the MOE, the MAF, and education-based nongovernmental organizations fully embrace this program, it could quickly foster widespread use that allows access for schools and other organizations across Mongolia. Expansive access to the program would provide a broad menu of activities to utilize on a daily basis. Importantly, access to the program would provide overtaxed teachers and parents with a resource to help improve their children's physical fitness, focus, and sense of well-being. These benefits are in line with

[69] Lkhagvasuren, "Comprehensive Defense."

Mongolia's Vision 2050 policy aims and the basic rights of children as outlined by the United Nations.[70] This program offers a comprehensive and easy-to-use supplemental resource designed to strengthen the physical and mental health of Mongolia's youngest citizens and contribute to the individual fortitude and resiliency future generations of Mongolians will need to carry their young democracy to and far beyond 2050.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS

To further the Sports and Education Program in Mongolia, it is important to cultivate the partnership with the MOE. The U.S. Embassy CMSE is uniquely positioned to engage with provincial officials throughout Mongolia. Further, the CMSE could integrate The Mongolian Sports and Education Program activities into enduring engagements and resiliency events across the country. Additionally, leaders of this effort must continue engagements with School #1 and School #130, the Bilguunzul Foundation, and MAF CIMIC to ensure the program is utilized and to receive feedback from students, teachers, school staff, and members of the community.

Going forward, systematic program assessment is needed to gauge the benefits and shortcomings of the program that could inform ways to improve it over time. Key indicators could include quantitative and qualitative measures such as 1) yearly suicide rates among adolescent Mongolians since program implementation; 2) markers of well-being among students; 3) students' sense of belonging, shared identity, and community within classrooms; 4) academic performance among users; and 5) physical fitness, as measured through consistent use of The Mongolian Sports and Education Program's Mongolian Physical Fitness Test.

B. AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Future research should consider how to expand the reach of the Sports and Education program into schools and education-based organizations outside of Ulaanbaatar. The regular travel outside of the capital city by the U.S. Embassy CMSE could help to

[70] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Convention on the Rights of the Child," OHCHR, accessed September 14, 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.

facilitate future engagement with schools and key stakeholders throughout rural Mongolia. Concurrently, consistent engagement with the MOE, via the U.S. Embassy and CMSE, will continue to be needed to help strengthen the working relationship between the Country Team and the Ministry. Specifically, engagement directly from the U.S. Ambassador to the Minister of Education would quickly reinforce the Embassy-Ministry relationship and offer increased opportunities for education-based initiatives to reach their full potential.

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SUPPLEMENTALS

To access the supplemental material(s) listed here, contact the Dudley Knox Library or visit the thesis pages in the library's Calhoun database.

A. THE MONGOLIAN SPORTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM – ENGLISH LANGUAGE VERSION (PDF)

The Mongolian Sports and Education Program consists of five sections. Section 1 includes warm-up and cool-down exercises as well as core and body weight exercises. Section 2 consists of games and Olympic sports, specifically running and track and field workouts. Section 3 includes team building exercises, sports and health trivia, and a Mongolian physical fitness test (MPFT). The MPFT includes a scoring table for children between the ages of 5 and 17 to allow teachers and students an opportunity to record changes over time. Section 4 contains activities for children with special needs. Section 5 includes award templates for the MPFT. An English language version is included to promote English language skill development in Mongolia.

B. THE MONGOLIAN SPORTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM – MONGOLIAN LANGUAGE VERSION (PDF)

The Mongolian Sports and Education Program–Mongolian language version consists of the same aforementioned five sections and has been translated into the Mongolian language to support acceptance and use of the program in Mongolia.

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