



The Three Cornerstones of Mongolia's Independence and Foreign Policy

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Abstract

It has been 106 years since the Mongol nation declared its independence from the Qing Dynasty on December 29, 1911, and restored its sovereign statehood. The twentieth century, 1911, 1921 and 1990 were the historic turning points in Mongolia's independent, prosperous and prosperous development. The life, faith and enthusiasm of the Mongolian people have consolidated the independence of Mongolia. In addition, history has proved that Russia and China's two neighboring countries and other third powers have a decisive influence on the independence of Mongolia. The "three cornerstones" of Mongolia's foreign policy are the balanced foreign policies that safeguard the interests of the people of Mongolia and maintain the independence of the country. This article mainly focuses on the history, current situation and future development of the "three cornerstones" of Mongolia's foreign policy as well as its impact on the independence of Mongolia.

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Analysis

December 29, 2017 marks the 106th anniversary of Mongolia's cessation from the Qing Dynasty and thus the restoration of its sovereign statehood. The years 1911, 1921 and 1990 constitute historic turning points both in the country's independence and development of its prosperity, the driving force behind which was the life, self-confidence and inspiration of its people. Indeed, history has proven that Russia and China, its two neighbouring countries, together with other, third powers have exerted a decisive impact on its independence. The "Three Cornerstones" of Mongolia's foreign policy are to be found in the balanced foreign policies that safeguard the interests of its people, and thus secure the country's independence. The present article focuses primarily on the past, present and future development of these "Three Cornerstones" that constitute Mongolia's foreign policy, and the ramifications thereof with respect to independence.

1. The Historical Background of Mongolian Foreign Policy in the 20th Century

The 20th century bore witness to Mongolia's great struggle to restore and consolidate independence as a nation-state. National interests frequently clashed, though were at times congruous with the geopolitical interests of the great powers. Tracing the interplay of such interests reveals the ways in which these impacted upon the historical shaping and direction of Mongolia's independence. And, as history has borne out, Mongolia's national security has depended, and continues to depend, primarily on the ebb and flow of its international relations with its two neighbours, Russia and China.

In the 20th century, both Russia and China exercised decisive influence on Mongolia's independence: while it followed and was profoundly influenced by the Soviet Union, it invariably sought to establish diplomatic ties with other countries. The ideological orientation encapsulated in the sentence "sovereignty and national security in Mongolia depend not only on the two neighbouring countries, but also on the rest of the world" has constituted the guiding principle accompanying the country throughout its history. This is not owing to a certain theory, but to the unique history and geographic location of Mongolia. Although Mongolia's foreign policy has been subject to amendments, the initial formal incorporation of the Third Neighbour in 2011, is by no means a novel idea.

In 1911, 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 trade relations. This initiative, taken 106 years ago, marked the first attempt to establish diplomatic relations between Mongolia and a third country.

From 1920 to 1930, Mongolia secured relations in trade and education and encouraged foreign investments with several eastern and western countries, such as the United States, Germany and Japan. Numerous factories and enterprises were established on the strength of such foreign investments, while Mongolian students began studying in Europe. Owing to domestic and foreign pressures, however, such bilateral cooperation proved short-lived.

Due to its socialist convictions and political alignment with the Soviet Union in the sixty-odd years between 1928 and 1990, Mongolia had neither the need nor opportunity to implement the Third Neighbour Policy. Since the democratic reforms of the 1990s, however, Mongolia began implementing its own independent and open "multi-pillar" foreign policy.



Political emphasis was placed both on developing cordial relations and cooperation with its two neighbouring countries, Russia and China, thereby bolstering its policy of “equal distance” diplomacy; in other words, in balancing the “three cornerstones” principle in foreign policy. Thus, Mongolia restored the historical search for a third neighbour initiated in the early 20th century. The concept of the third neighbour in foreign policy was officially put in motion following ratification of the 1992 amendment to constitutional democracy.

Mongolia has a rich tradition and long history of relations with its two neighbouring countries. It began developing its own concept of independent foreign policy with respect to third countries as a consequence of the history of international relations and its experience during the 20th century, which had led to the effective suppression of its national interests.

However, the diplomatic approach of balancing the three cornerstones aimed at safeguarding national interests, ultimately depends on the way in which Mongolia will manage to maintain and develop cordial relations with Russia and China. Clearly, the key to maintaining such relations with its two neighbours depends on how successfully Mongolia manages to balance the vital interests of its two neighbours. In short, the success of its foreign policy as a complex of “neighbouring countries in which Mongolia is the third neighbour”.

Indeed, the analysis of the historical impact, the factors and scope of influence exerted by neighbouring and third countries on Mongolian independence invariably constitutes an integral element in Mongolian historical scholarship. Now, on the occasion of the 106th anniversary marking the Qing proclamation of Mongolia's independence, it is impossible to implement accurate foreign policy, concepts and actions without understanding historical context and experience.

Scholarly research on Mongolia's independence in 1911, initiated by the such distinguished historians as L. Dende, Magsar Khurts, Khereid L. Jamsran, Ts. Puntsagnorov, Sh. Sandag, was later taken up and pursued in several in-depth studies by modern researchers, such as O. Batsaikhan, J. Urangua, Ts. Batbayar, T. Tumurhuleg, R.Bold.

The fact that during the socialist era constraints were placed on comprehensive historical research in Mongolia, and thus even failed to present the core issues to a general public is no moot point – a fate it shares, indeed, with many other socialist countries. In the years between 1960 and early 1970s, some Mongolian historians began focussing on international studies, which led to the establishment of professional state research institutes, such as the Institute of International Studies. The Institute of International Affairs of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences is scheduled to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2018.

Mongolia has been carrying out democratic reforms and market economic practices since the 1990s. The country's new constitution was promulgated in 1992, and the development of its foreign policy has been subsequently pursuing an effective, open and balanced multi-pillar diplomacy. Since the national revolutions of 1911 and 1921, Mongolia has been confronted with various historical challenges and obstacles. The ushering in of democratic reforms of the 1990s opened the door for a full realization of its national interests.

Studies in foreign policy and the outcomes of multilateral relations have raised the level of historical research on the country and its international relations. Thus, we are now able to draw on the full scope of multilateral theories of diplomacy, and initiate new research theories and methods for implementing and evaluating projects. Similarly, doors are now open for initiating extensive scientific international collaboration.



2. Mongolia's Contemporary Foreign Policy: The Three Cornerstones

Mongolia shares a common border in the north with Russia, the largest geopolitical area in the world with nuclear weapons; it shares its southern border with China, the most populated, fastest growing economy and heavily, nuclear-armed country in the world. Both neighbours pursue their own, unique foreign policies and political structures. Mongolia is thus considered the only country in the world in such an exceptional geopolitical situation. The primary focus of the present paper is on the ways in which both the two neighbouring countries, together with the third country, impact on current foreign policy and development within Mongolia.

2.1. Mongolia's and Russia's Strategic Partnership

Mongolia and Russia signed a bilateral cooperation agreement on cordial and cooperative relations on 20 January 1993. The Ulaanbaatar Declaration of 14 November 2000, and the Moscow Declaration of 8 December 2006 thus constituted the basis for the modern development of bilateral relations between the two countries.

Both countries initiated a strategic partnership based both on their historical relations and the new bilateral agreements, hence making Russia the first country to establish a strategic partnership with Mongolia. Recently, relations between the two partners have been intensifying, not only by way of frequent high-level visits, but also through close collaboration with intergovernmental agencies, non-governmental organizations and social exchange programmes. However, economic and trade cooperation still lags behind political cooperation: trade volume and structures have yet to be fully optimized, indicating no significant increase with respect to the former.

Hence, both parties need to work hard at creating favourable conditions for increasing the volume of Mongolian exports to Russia, above all with respect to agricultural products to the border areas.

Following his third election as President of Russia in March 2012, Putin paid his first state visit to China in June of the same year. During the meeting, Russia and China signed the Beijing Declaration, marking a new level of comprehensive strategic partnership (Россия и Китай выходят на новый уровень отношений-уровень всеобъемлющего стратегического партнерства); the declaration was equal in significance to the Joint Statement signed by Russia and Mongolia. Thus, in view of this comprehensive strategic partnership between its two neighbours and to ensure full implementation of its bilateral cooperation with Russia, Mongolia must not remain idle but rather actively pursue the criteria set out in the cooperation agreement. Mongolia must resume and actively pursue the dialogue with Russia and expand the scope of its cooperation by building expressways linking Russia with China and the establishment of a cross-border, free-trade zone.

During Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's visit in April 2016, Mongolia signed the Medium-term Plan for the Partnership of the Development of Mongolia and Russia, a treaty of great material significance for the strengthening of economic and trade relations between the two countries. Mongolia is currently evaluating the above-mentioned comprehensive strategic partnership with respect to differences and similarities. During his visit to Russia in September 2017 and to the Oriental Economic Forum held in Vladivostok, President Patti Legu met with Russian President Putin, underlining that intensifying economic and trade cooperation between the two countries will augment the detail of specific cooperation. They initiated joint ventures with Russia, for example, and Japan used the Russian Far East ports to deliver high-quality coking coal to the world market at the Tavan Tolgoi mine.



2.2 Mongolia's Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with the People's Republic of China

On the basis of the China-Mongolia strategic partnership established by the Beijing Joint Statement in June 2011, the Prime Ministers of Mongolia and China signed the Outline for the Medium- and Long-term Development of the Mongolia-China Strategic Partnership in Ulaanbaatar, in 2013. This was also to become the blueprint for the current Mongolia-China partnership.¹ In August 2014, the heads of state of the two countries held dialogues and signed the joint declaration between the People's Republic of China and Mongolia on the Establishment and Development of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Thanks to the high degree of trust in relations that currently exists between the two countries, together with the common desire to further endorse the strategic partnership, their leaders resolved to "make permanent contributions to establishing solid relations based on mutual trust and responsibility". For Mongolia, this extended the comprehensive strategic partnership. Both countries resolved that high-level contact is to be upheld, whereby, among other things, the tradition of regular meetings at international occasions was to be continued, along with the use of various channels and methods for furthering and consolidating mutual strategic ties. In the meantime, both parties will step-up multilateral cooperation within the UN, ASEM, Asian meetings, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Greater Tumen Initiative, along with institutional and cooperative mechanisms within the general framework of contact and coordination.²

Since 2016, cooperation between Mongolia and China has focused for the most part on the mining, infrastructure, agriculture and construction industries. In 2017, Mongolia announced that China and Mongolia are willing to undertake joint construction of the economic corridor between China and Mongolia within the framework of China's 21st Century Silk Road initiative – the so-called "One Belt One Road".

2.3. Partnership between Mongolia and the Third Neighbour

Third neighbour foreign policy is not uncommon for a landlocked country sandwiched between two or more neighbouring countries. A cursory glance at Mongolian history reveals that the nation has sought a third neighbour since the early 20th century. The search, and the ideology that has driven it, has been more or less prominent relative to the course of world politics, international relations and various other domestic and foreign factors.

The Third Neighbour foreign policy refers to the establishment of cooperative relations with highly developed democratic countries in the spheres of politics, economics and culture and human sciences. Important national documents on matters of national security, foreign policy, comprehensive national development strategy and the outline of foreign economic development reflect today's Third Neighbour foreign policy.

The present article stresses, in particular, that Mongolia seeks the third neighbouring country congruent with its cordial relations with the two neighbouring countries. In other words, the Third Neighbour policy embraces comprehensive diplomatic issues relating to Russia and China. Such special geopolitical conditions are such that Mongolia has secured the legal foundation with which to seek third neighbours in addition to those it has established with its two immediate neighbours. Mongolia successively ratified All-round Partnership and

¹ Монгол Улс, БНХАУ-ын хооронд Иж бүрэн стратегийн түншлэлийн харилцаа хөгжүүлэх тухай хамтарсан Тунхаглал, Улаанбаатар, 2014.08.21.

² *Монгол Улсын гадаад бодлогын Хөх ном-2016*, Монгол Улсын Гадаад харилцааны яам, Улаанбаатар, 2017, 13 дугаар тал.



Strategic Partnership with Japan in 1997 and again in 2010; the Partnership for Mutual Benefit and Cooperation for Development with South Korea in 1999, 2006 and 2011, as well as the Cordial and Cooperative Relations and All-Round Partnership. In 2004 and 2005, the two countries established Strategic Partnership with the United States. In 2004, the latter also established an Extensive Partnership with Canada; a Comprehensive Partnership with Australia in 2007, preamble to the Extensive Partnership in 2007; an Extensive Partnership with Kazakhstan in 2008; a Comprehensive Partnership with Germany in 2009; an All-round Partnership with India, and the Multilateral Partnership with The Ukraine in 2011; and, finally, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU in 2013.

Partnership is based on the principle of the mutual acknowledgement of sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality and mutual benefit, non-interference in internal affairs and mutual respect for native culture, customs and consensus, as are not based on ideological premises. Partnership encompasses All-round Partnership, Strategic Partnership, Multilateral Partnership, Broad Partnership and Spiritual Partnership within the framework of Third Neighbouring Country diplomacy. With respect to the Third Neighbouring Country foreign policy, Mongolia and countries in the East and West still face several challenges in the field of economic cooperation. Should Mongolia be able to gradually develop its cooperation with partners in the East and West, then its Third Neighbouring Country foreign policy will proceed smoothly.

The key to the success of such a policy depends, furthermore, on the degree of success the country has in balancing the Three Cornerstones of foreign policy with respect to the two neighbouring countries and the Third Neighbouring Country. As indicated, the development of economic and trade cooperation with the Third Neighbouring Country constitutes one of the key factors in ensuring national security in Mongolia. At present, Mongolia's small population, together with its relatively small-scale market and low-level industrialization, in fact represent shortcuts to implementing the Third Neighbouring Country foreign policy, since the Third Neighbour has been unable to identify specific areas of cooperation with Mongolia. In recent years, Mongolia has been carrying out ongoing exploration of natural resources, such as minerals and energy; thus, the two neighbouring countries and its Third Neighbour have been paying more attention to the country's mining industry. The diversification of the economic structure is hence the foundation of Mongolia's economic policy. Consequently, Mongolia ought to carry out multilateral and mutually beneficial cooperation with the Third Neighbouring Country rather than restricting itself exclusively to one country.

Although the two neighbouring countries, Russia and China, have not opposed Mongolia's Third Neighbour foreign policy neither did they support it. Indeed, some Russian and Chinese experts have responded negatively.

Mongolia's economic security relies, to a large extent, on Russia and China – an apparent impasse which the Third Neighbour is unable to obviate. This is chiefly owing to such factors as domestic political instability, erratic policies, unsound legal structures, low economic output and over-dependence on the mining industry, all of which have little to do with the Third Neighbour. Today, Mongolia still needs the latter policy to ensure its economy, security and development. Since the policy is not aimed at its two immediate neighbouring countries, Mongolia will continue to seek the Third Neighbour: the active participation in regional affairs, enhancement of Mongolia's international reputation, and promotion of cooperation in regional democracy, peace and the economic integration of partner policy.



Conclusion

In summarizing Mongolia's foreign policy, it need not be said that over the course of the 20th century Russia and China have exerted substantial historic impact on the country's sovereignty. While Russia and China both face challenges to their national sovereignty, Mongolia provides them with spiritual support. When the Soviet Union was experiencing a severe threat to its independence, the Mongolian people did their utmost to support the Russian people in the spirit of "hard times always reveal true friends".

In the 1945 war of liberation, 80,000 soldiers of the People's Republic of Mongolia fought side by side with the people of Inner Mongolia and China, an alignment which led to the eventual defeat the Japanese aggressors. When considered in this light, the great powers not only effected Mongolia's sovereignty in the past century: Mongolia also contributed to the consolidation of the sovereignty and national security of its two neighbour's. Contemporary historiography, however, fails to do full justice to Mongolia's history during the 20th century. After the Republic of China recognized the People's Republic of Mongolia, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of Mongolia signed the Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement for the first time, moving the representative office in Ulaanbaatar to the Soviet Embassy. However, this event has received no mention in histories of Mongolia in the Soviet era.

During the era of ideological confrontation, the Cold War, the Mongolian people were unable to fully realize the political independence and economic freedoms to which they had aspired in the 1911 and 1921 revolutions. However, given the current economic and social development in Mongolia, it should not be overlooked that the accuracy of the above characterization is wanting. Rectifying this deficit is the historical responsibility of the Mongolian people as a whole. While retrospective criticism of the past is easy, the significance of the historical phases during the 106 years since 1911 has received too little attention.

The older generation, who gave their lives, their faith, their soul and their passion to the People's Republic of Mongolia, never called their country a "buffer country", "satellite country", or "foregone conclusion". It is unfortunate that young generations are deeply influenced by foreign theories – that they have never themselves experienced this period of history and are unable to fully grasp the historical significance of the period. When considering Mongolia's contemporary foreign policy, it has been stated in the revised Foreign Policy concept of February 2011 that "Maintaining cordial relations with the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China is to be one of the primary orientations in Mongolia's foreign policy activity". This was also reiterated in Mongolia's foreign policy concept of 1994. In recent years, Mongolia has emphasised tripartite cooperation with Russia and China, especially in the areas of business, education and culture.

On September 11, 2014, Mongolia, Russia and China held their first summit in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, to discuss the implementation of the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue. In 2015, the second trilateral summit, sponsored by Mongolian President Ts. Elbegdorj took place in Ufa, Russia. In June 2016, the third trilateral summit meeting was successfully held in Tashkent. The Ulaanbaatar Dialogue, a triparty summit initiated and concluded by Mongolia, has become the new paradigm of Mongolia's foreign policy.

It was on this basis that the three parties went on to formulate the Outline of Economic Corridor Construction and the Agreement on the Customs Inspection of Mutual Recognition of Certain Goods. The three parties signed the Agreement on the International Transport Road Network through Asia in Moscow, on 8 December 2016. Within the framework of the above-mentioned trilateral meeting between heads of state, Mongolia, Russia and China formulated a program of building economic corridors linking the three countries. Mongolia meanwhile proposed the project Road to Development to open up the rail and highway corridors, natural gas



pipelines, oil pipelines, electric power and fibre-optic cable corridors to connect the two neighbouring countries, Russia and China. With respect to railway construction, Mongolia and Russia are cooperating to increase the transport capacity of the Ulaanbaatar Railway and construct a transit hub to connect the two major east-west corridors.

Construction of the first road through Mongolia was completed in 2014, as well as the road linking Russia and China. The north-east axis road connecting Russia and China through the Bayan-Ulgii province, and western Mongolia's Khovd province was put into operation in 2016. The same should be done in the eastern part of Mongolia.

Furthermore, the three countries should not only strengthen cooperation in transnational infrastructures, construction, transit transport, industry and trade sectors, but likewise strengthen cooperation in energy, tourism, environment, education, culture, science, technology, the human sciences and health. Cooperation projects must also be actively implemented. The heads of state of the three countries have reached a consensus on building cross-border economic corridors. This shows that Mongolia, Russia and China are currently focusing their attention on intensifying cooperation in the economic field. Mongolia is thus an active participant in trilateral cooperation and should become an intermediate "hub" in the construction of the economic corridor between the three states.

In addition to establishing strategic cooperative partnerships with its two neighbouring countries, Mongolia is also implementing the Third Neighbour foreign policy. However, in Mongolia the constraints that will impact the future foreign policy of Third Neighbours, not only cover environmental factors in other countries, but also the domestic ecological crisis, social and economic degradation, poverty, corruption and scientific and technological backwardness. Should Mongolia seek solutions to domestic social problems and the elimination of various other deficiencies, it will require the full support of third-party partners. That said, the two neighbouring countries are considerably more important for Mongolia than the Third Neighbouring Country. Hence, in view of Mongolia's historical experience, the success of Third Neighbouring Country diplomacy, as formulated to balance the range of interests, depends for the most part, on the way in which Mongolia will continue to develop friendly relations with Russia and China. This, in turn, depends on the extent to which Mongolia is able to successfully balance the vital interests of its two neighbours. As the above discussion has made clear, Mongolia's foreign policy has always been based on the Three Cornerstones Policy: its neighbours to the South and North, and its Third Neighbour.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

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