

Mongolian Futures: Scenarios for a Landlocked State

Robert E. Bedeski

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Parameters of the Mongolian State

Robert E. Bedeski¹

During the decades of the USSR, the Mongolian People's Republic was a somnolent client of Moscow with only token relations with the West. After the break with the Soviet Union in 1990, and democratization under the 1992 constitution, Mongolia has sought to become a Modern Sovereign Nation-State (MSNS) within the global community, and has pursued policies and built institutions which are not coordinated with either Moscow or Beijing. At the time, this could be characterized as a daring and even risky behavior, given the geopolitical isolation, although it echoed the stirrings in the western rim of the Soviet empire. Today, Mongolia must navigate its destiny in a region where Communism has been abandoned, while political and economic realities seem to shift like dunes in the Gobi.

In the following pages, we will examine some possible scenarios for Mongolia, ranging from best to worst outcomes in terms of national survival. The purpose of this exercise is not prediction, but is a form of analysis to highlight the importance of external events, policy choices, and international supports for Mongolia's future development and security. It is also an exercise to identify current realities and how these may provide new opportunities as well as hidden dangers.

Background – Mongolia Emerges as a Modern Sovereign Nation-State

Mongolia became the first Soviet satellite country. In 1924, Red Army troops joined with Mongolian units to capture the capital at Urga – renamed Ulaanbaatar, “Red Hero”, and became the national capital. B. Shumyatskii, a Mongolian revolutionary, wrote to the Soviet Foreign Minister, Georgy Chicherin, stressing that Mongolia was an ally “who will defend the most vulnerable stretch of Soviet Russia's thousand-kilometer border with

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China.”² In subsequent decades, Mongolia’s Communist government faithfully followed the twists and turns of Moscow’s leadership. Fearing Japanese ambitions in Siberia, Stalin required a loyal Mongolia to defend the vulnerable eastern border regions. Decades later, when Gorbachev loosened controls, Mongolia was among the first to declare an end to subservience to the USSR. The Soviet republics of Central Asia were more subdued in their response, and subsequently joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The different reaction to Soviet dissolution between Mongolia and the five “stans” (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) was no doubt due to the latter integration into the old Soviet Union, while the former had status as a fully sovereign republic. That sovereign status was nominal in large part, and the trajectory of the Mongolian People’s Republic through the post-World War II period indicated increasing integration into the USSR, with the end-game of becoming a Soviet Republic. One straw in the wind was the introduction of Cyrillic orthography into written Mongolian, replacing the traditional script. The Mongolian economy was also fully integrated into the COMECON family of Socialist nations, and other institutions – including education, police, the military, and persecution of religion – were generally imitations of the Soviet big brothers, with local variation. Similar to the Baltic nations which had been politically, culturally, and economically linked to Western Europe more intimately than to Russia, Mongolia’s propinquity to China and historical interaction made its Soviet connection tenuous and recent. Moreover, the global empire state (global for that period) of Chinggis Khan and the earlier formation of a Mongolian nation formed and preserved a subjective national identity rivalled only by Poland and a few other captive nations.

Nonetheless, Mongolians did not view China as liberator. During the seven decades of Soviet semi-colonialism, Mongolia was spared the chaos of Chinese politics. The 1920s was a period of warlords and revolution, while the 1930s and early 1940s saw encroachment and invasion by Japan. Post-1945 China witnessed the brutal Communist revolution and repression of any expression of ethnic nationalism. Inner Mongolia was reorganized as a

² Tsedendambyn Batbayar and Sharad K. Soni, *Modern Mongolia: A Concise History* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2002), p. 25.

province-level Autonomous Region, received millions of ethnic Han immigrants, and pastures were turned into agricultural fields – often with disastrous ecological results and increased desertification.³ Ethnic Mongolians became a 17 per cent minority (with nearly 80 per cent ethnic Han)⁴ in their own region – which comprises 12 per cent of Chinese territory today.

Mongolia (often referred to as “Outer Mongolia” or *waimenggu*) on the other hand, though also subject to Soviet repression and wiping out the memory of Chinggis Khan, had a relatively peaceful time, with expansion of literacy, health, and education, as well as subsidized industrialization. Except for a repulsed Japanese invasion from Manchukuo in 1939 (the Khalkhyn-Gol battle, or Nomonhon), Mongolia was not threatened by any outside power, in large part due to the Soviet shield. The shift in Sino-Soviet relations from treaty-expressed friendship in the 1950s to mutual hostility in the 1960s increased the security significance of Mongolia. The Soviets built military bases and missile launching sites against China, as Mongolia became the key buffer along the border. After Mao Zedong died in 1976, and Deng Xiaoping initiated the hugely successful economic reforms in 1978, the Soviet model lost much of its appeal to Mongolian Communists and citizens. The Socialist bloc exercised near complete control over all information, and maintained an iron grip on ideological orthodoxy, but could not prevent widespread recognition within its own ranks that Communism had failed. U.S. allies in East Asia – Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan – had mutated from war-ravaged societies into modern industrial dynamos. The U.S. security umbrella and Asian capitalism had provided locomotion for the transformation. Communist agriculture was failing in all its manifestations, industry was inefficient and characterized by low productivity, and except

³ Ethnic Hui from Ningxia Autonomous Region are blamed for 95 per cent of desertification, as gangs annually move in to strip the pastures of the local grass, *facai*, which is a homonym for “to become wealthy” in Chinese. They poison wells of local herders to move them out of their target area. “PRC Desertification: Inner Mongolian Range Wars and the Ningxia Population Boom,” <http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/sandt/desmngca.htm> (accessed 6/27/2008 8:56 AM)

⁴ Figures according to the 2000 census. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inner_Mongolia#Demography (accessed 6/27/2008 9:12 AM)

for space and weapons technology, science was years behind and often dependent on industrial espionage and Western innovation.

The message of Deng's reforms was that Communism had to be abandoned, or at least restricted to a theory and practice of government based on permanent dictatorship. Marxist economics, Lysenko biology, and Stalinist linguistics were symptoms of a warped and failed system that had presumed to conquer and rule the world. When Gorbachev came to power, and started his political reforms as the inappropriate (in retrospect) response to economic problems, agitation for more thorough reforms broke out in various parts of the Soviet empire. Similar to the Poles, Mongolians had seen their national identity proscribed and their religion persecuted. With Moscow's weakening will to maintain control, local sentiment agitated for autonomy and pursuit of national goals outside the Soviet bloc.

Theme and Scenarios

Mongolia's survival and destiny as a Modern Sovereign Nation-State depends on decisions taken by the Mongolians themselves. But equally critical will be the roles of the U.S., China, and Russia. This paper will examine several scenarios, not so much to speculate on the future, but more to identify dynamic variables as Mongolia seeks to maximize its independence and become a normal nation-state, based on what appears to be the most successful form – market-oriented and democratic. The assumption is that Mongolia's future is largely influenced by outside forces – particularly the actions and events of the major dominant powers: the People's Republic of China, Russia, and the U.S. At the same time, Mongolians will also play a major part in determining the future of their country, and the nuclear-weapon-free zone concept is one example of an initiative to embed their state in the international community. Smaller states, including Sweden, Canada, and South Korea can also reinforce Mongolia's independence through assistance and support. In other words, geography is not an iron-clad future, but a challenge to be met.

Of the four scenarios, two are evolutionary and two are event-driven. *Scenario One* examines continuation of the status quo maintaining the current equilibrium of major states. While providing Mongolia with political space to develop as a MSNS, the 1992 gamble to create a state beholden to neither

China nor Russia has certain costs which must be calculated and paid – especially resentment over Mongolia reaching out to “third neighbours” who have different, or even antagonistic, interests from China or Russia.

Scenario Two is also evolutionary, and takes the most optimistic viewpoint from Mongolia’s perspective. It posits that Mongolia’s chosen path and policy initiatives will not be misread by the two neighbours, and that these initiatives will be successful in achieving national goals. The success of this scenario also requires development of what can be termed “cooperative sovereignty”, a concept that refers to the modification of traditional and exclusive sovereignty of a MSNS, and allows other states to participate in the formation and operation of certain state institutions on a long-term basis. While Mongolia experienced seven decades of limited sovereignty under Soviet tutelage, the notion of cooperative sovereignty is designed to serve the interests of the practicing country, i.e. Mongolia, and not the outside powers. For Mongolia to survive and flourish as an outpost of democracy there will have to be continuing, consistent, and positive involvement of foreign friends.

Scenario Three considers China’s reunification with Taiwan to be a key event which strengthens the Chinese state, reduces her military and economic distractions in the Taiwan Straits region, and infuses confidence to settle other *irredenta* issues. Part of the scenario assumes that the reunification occurs peacefully, and that the U.S. and Japan make no overt responses to provoke China. One central assumption of this scenario is that China will be tempted to complete its integration of Inner Mongolia, and then regard Mongolia as a buffer to be brought more closely into China’s sphere of influence – especially as Russia resumes its reconsolidation of Siberia and Central Asia.

Scenario Four examines the decline or collapse of the U.S. as the major power in the Asia Pacific region. This could come about in a variety of ways – election of a pacifist President with an enabling Congress, severe and prolonged economic crisis, a terrorist strike against the electronic, economic and military infrastructure of the U.S., or major war in another region. Any of these would cause a serious distraction of American strategic attention to the Pacific region. While it is impossible to predict the consequences of such

a development, a lessening of American presence in the Northeast Asia region would signal a return to pre-1941 circumstances in the sense of a severe reduction of U.S. participation in the region.

The fundamental theme of this exercise is the reality that Mongolia is a political entity depending on the convergence of major outside forces, and also on the actions of Mongolians as well as “third neighbours”. Maintaining Mongolia’s independence as a people and as a nation-state is of primary importance to the global community of democratic nations. The actions and policies of the Mongolian government and people will have a profound effect in moderating events and scenarios. Countries outside the Big Three (China, Russia, and the U.S.) can also play a major role in supporting the first two scenarios and in mitigating extreme effects of the second two.

Geography – The Independent Invariable

Geography forms the key invariable in Mongolia’s history and politics, although it is hardly a prison restricting all movement. The fundamental characteristic of any state is its territory, and territory has borders as well as naturally-endowed surface and resources. What a nation does with its territory determines its history and future course. The same territory imposes relative limits on what the nation – its people and government – can accomplish.

A glance at a map shows Mongolian territory sandwiched between China and Russia – around three million people on vast territory between two of the greatest empires to have ruled large portions of the Eurasian land mass. Geopolitical realities are that the country has a total border length of 8,220 km, and of this, 4,677 km is adjacent to China and the remaining 3,543 km adjoin Russia. That the Mongolians have maintained their survival between two giant empires is no small achievement – comparable to the Koreans who have survived and prospered although surrounded, and frequently controlled or fought over, by three empires – Chinese, Russian and Japanese.

Land, People, and History

Less than one per cent of the land is arable, although prospects for exploitation of minerals are promising. Deposits of oil, coal, copper, molybdenum, tungsten, phosphates, tin, nickels, zinc, fluorspar, gold, silver,

and iron are already developed. At most, the land might support a few million more people, without further environmental deterioration.

Mongolians have traditionally been pastoralists, and animal husbandry remains a defining lifestyle characteristic. The capital Ulaanbaatar contains around one third of the Mongolia population, with about 40 per cent of the entire population living outside urban areas. Khalkhs comprise 86 per cent of the Mongolian people, with the remainder divided among the other 28 ethnic groups, most of whom differ in relatively minor characteristics.⁵

How this society was able to remain intact requires more than analysis of geopolitics. After the Mongolian empire of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the heartland of Chinggis Khan became a backwater, even as fragments of the old empire became foundations of new states. While the cruelty of conquest has been stressed by the victims who wrote the histories, the Mongolians probably laid the basis for post-medieval Eurasia. Undoing their empire was in large part the work of the Black Plague, according to author Jack Weatherford.⁶ In the sixteenth century, European maritime empires emerged, and industrialization in the nineteenth century projected Europe and European power to the periphery and interior of all the continents.⁷ The Mongolian homeland is a pale shadow of her one-time greatness, and the casual visitor is mystified to see any connection between the hospitable and cheerful nomads today and the fierce warriors of the past. Karakorum, the one-time glorious capital of Kublai Khan, is today a sleepy and non-descript town with only a monastery built from palace and temple fragments to hint at its imperial past. The Mongol empire was an epoch that united Eurasia, and passed on centuries before, with Russia and the Soviet Union inheriting or conquering Central Asia. As the tsarist empire expanded in Central Asia in the 17th and 18th centuries, it challenged the Qing empire. Mongolia and its two neighbours are heirs to those empires' territory; they did not choose their mutual proximity, and so all have no choice but to accept

⁵ "The Best of Mongolia" http://www.e-mongol.com/mongolia_population.htm. (accessed 6/21/2008 11:30 AM)

⁶ Jack Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2003).

⁷ See John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

the given spatial and territorial circumstances. There may be resentment over historical loss of large areas, and the incorporation of Inner Mongolia into China, but Mongolians have no option beyond acceptance of their current historical fate.

The key genesis event in Mongolian history was the formation of a state, and its expansion into empire in the 13th century. The key difference between empire and MSNS is that an empire has frontiers, with no set territorial boundaries except those that mark the temporary extent of current conquest. The MSNS, on the other hand, has borders which mark its territory, and these are regarded as more or less permanent. Modern states may dispute borders or territories, and these disputes may erupt into conflict, but there is the expectation of mutual respect for borders within the context of international law.

One of the unforeseen outcomes of the Mongol empire was the foundation of the modern state, in an early manifestation that refined royal dynasties, national armies and territorial administration. The successors of Chinggis Khan's empire sought to maintain the original patterns of conquest, but local kingdoms responded with consolidation of power as Mongol dominance waned. In China, the Ming dynasty succeeded the Yuan and subordinated the Mongol princes to China for the next half millennium. In Russia, Ivan the Terrible declared independence from the Mongols and expanded from Muscovy to broader territory. After the decline and end of the Mongolian empire, the home territory became controlled by the Chinese under the Ming and Manchu dynasties, and in the twentieth century by the Soviet Union. By the late 1930s, Mongolia appeared to be well on its way to absorption into the Soviet system of republics, but the tables turned in 1990, and Mongolia declared itself a fully independent republic. Whither Mongolia today is a question best answered by considering four possible scenarios.

Rationale for a Scenario Approach

The past three decades have seen major historical changes in the East Asian region. Deng's economic reforms have turned away from revolutionary Maoism to market capitalism. The Soviet Union has collapsed and a new Russian nation is emerging, with increasing determination to restore imperial and Soviet prestige and power. The U.S. has declared war on global

terrorism, and has become a direct participant in politics and wars of the “Crescent of Crisis”, centering on Afghanistan and Iraq. These factors have bearing on Mongolia’s present and future.

The study of history permits us to understand patterns of the past and how men and nations have responded to challenges to their survival. A study of politics provides tools to analyze trajectories and forces at work in society and polity, to gain better insight into policy-making and its effect on the state. A scenario approach combines history and politics to imagine (in the best sense of the word) possible futures, within past parameters and contemporary constellations official state inputs/outputs. Scenario-building thus requires grounding in history and politics to produce optimum results. At the same time, the formulation of future scenarios requires realistic and broad investigation and consideration of history and politics to ensure feasible and potential outcomes. But as the past has demonstrated, a further factor has been the acceleration of technological innovation and dissemination through state, corporate and consumer channels. Disease is another unpredictable factor in human development, and will have unforeseen consequences. Climate change – either warming or cooling – will also have serious impact on Mongolia, a country with desert and a continental climate. Years of drought and bitterly cold winters (*zuumod*) have been experienced in the period of independence and demonstrate the vulnerability of its people.

For decision-makers, a scenario approach can provide a flow chart or spreadsheet of different options, asking the question of “What if..?” As circumstances change, a policy will have different outcomes. In the present exercise, the relative influences of China, Russia and the U.S. are posited as the key variables for Mongolia. Historical precedents are useful in understanding, but are neither decisive nor determining. Inputs by Mongolia and supporters/allies will also affect outcomes. Certain assumptions are built into our four scenarios:

Assumption 1: State as Actor

Our first assumption is that nation-states are the primary actors in international relations. Governments act in the name of the state, which

includes territory, people and organs of the state. The main organ of the state is the executive, usually sharing power with a legislative branch in democratic systems, or having a consultation and legitimating role in non-democratic states. Two specialized agencies of government most detailed to deal with other states are a ministry of foreign relations and defence establishment, usually consisting of the military forces and a ministry of defence. Other non-state actors, such as NGOs or interest groups or media may influence governments or take on semi-governmental roles, but remain outside the formal apparatus of the state.

Assumption 2: Scenario Perspectives

The second assumption is that an event or crisis will be seen in terms of:

- each government's perception of its national interests,
- possible scenarios that may unfold, and
- assumptions based on intelligence estimates on how other governments may react or respond.

The state is an initiator and amplifier of events, so the focus of scenarios is state actions. However, interest groups, various associations, and corporations will also affect political events. They may cause triggering events which cause or require governments to act, but most often do not reach the level of international political visibility. For each government, maximum knowledge about other states in the form of current information and intelligence is required for effective action. Hypothetical scenarios provide opportunities to test the various consequences of actions based on available knowledge, and to highlight areas where greater information is required.

Assumption 3: Equilibrium

A central working assumption is that the *status quo* is acceptable and even desirable for most of the parties concerned. Mongolia is at peace with her neighbours, independent, and on the road to economic recovery. China is rapidly improving her economy and has become a world power. The Russians have recovered from the shock of de-Sovietization, and are moving

to prosperity, even if democracy lags behind.⁸ The U.S. has global influence in places where it had none before – including Central Asia and Mongolia, providing informal safeguards for Mongolia sovereignty. The scenarios do not ignore second level actors, including Japan, Australia, Canada and South Korea which have become increasingly involved in Mongolia through aid, trade and investment. While they do not rise to the level of important variables in considering state-changing scenarios, they do provide reinforcement and support for Mongolian sovereignty.

Assumption 4: Importance of Mongolia in Northeast Asia region

Mongolia has historically provided a buffer between China and Russia, while maintaining an ethnic identity that produced the modern Mongolian nation-state in the nineties. Both Russia and China have exercised control over the peoples inhabiting greater Mongolia (including the area up to and including Lake Baikal ethnic Buryats, and Inner Mongolia in China) in the past and present; and now find themselves challenged by the emergence of long-repressed Mongolian nationalism. Buddhism is shared with Tibet, and independent Mongolia will be an example of a separate cultural entity exercising full sovereignty. In essence, the political and cultural separateness of Taiwan and Mongolia are political threats to Chinese ambitions of a centralized state based on maximum imperial territory of the past.

The U.S. has recognized the importance of sovereign Mongolia, and has extended its concerns for maintaining Mongolian democracy and its market system. Not only is Mongolia a model of democratic transformation, along lines experienced in South Korea, but market freedom, despite initial

⁸ In the 2008 election of Prime Minister Medvedev, the constitution and laws were violated almost routinely: “the equality of rights of candidates has been violated throughout the election campaign, mainly by the extensive media coverage of Medvedev, who received 76 per cent of TV coverage, and the misuse of administrative resources. The latter mainly took place in the form of public officials agitating for specific candidates. The presidential election, as the Duma election in December 2007, is characterized by the Russian government’s violation of the principle of neutrality, meaning that the state apparatus must always remain neutral in an election process and hence treat all the candidates equally.” Anna Jonsson, “The Nature of Power in Russia and its Impact on the International Community,” in Anna Jonsson et al, *Russia after Putin: Implications for Russia’s Politics and Neighbors*, Stockholm: Institute for Security and Development Policy, Policy Paper (March 2008), p. 7.

setbacks, has taken hold. Constitutional government and multi-party elections, a free press and media and freedom of religion have also marked Mongolia's emergence as an open society of the type the U.S. and its friends wish to see in more areas of the world.

Scenario One – Equilibrium and Status Quo

Mongolia today is at a crossroads. Her democratic revolution appears irreversible since separating from the Soviet Union's embrace in 1990. The 1992 constitution marked a radical departure not only from the past, but from her two neighbours. China remains a Communist, single-party dictatorship, and although Russia has undergone democratic reforms, there was a marked return to autocratic rule under Putin. Moreover, in the context of Central Asia, where Islam has made a return in often militant form, and where corrupt dictators have emerged in new states of the CIS, Mongolia stands out even more as an isolated island of democracy. To maintain its gains will require major efforts. Domestically, the country has pushed through economic and political reforms to align itself – at least in form and also in content of institutions – with the advanced democratic countries of the world. What external steps has Mongolia taken to consolidate its position in the international community? One of the earliest and most important initiatives has been in the area of nuclear weapons.

Mongolia as a Nuclear Free Zone

Mongolia did not wait for the world to recognize its value, but has moved ahead with diplomacy to raise its profile, and to transform itself from erstwhile subject of the USSR into an outpost of peace and democracy. Mongolian strategy can be summed up as follows:

Mongolia's geopolitical location makes it, using chess expression, not only a pawn among the "major pieces" but also a lone one. However, unlike in the game of chess, in the post-Cold War world nations are not divided into two opposing sides. In this multi-polar world Mongolia is trying to devise a structure that would safeguard it from being used by "major

pieces” or making it “expendable” in the chess game of geopolitics.⁹

In 1992, Mongolia declared itself a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ), and four of the nuclear powers stated their intentions to honor this status. Russia’s attitude was contained in the 1993 treaty of Friendly Relations and Cooperation with Mongolia: “The Russian Federation will respect Mongolia’s policy of not admitting the deployment on the transit through its territory of foreign troops, nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.” (Article 4)

On 12 January 1999, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution welcoming Mongolia’s decision to declare its territory a nuclear-weapon-free zone and reiterating that this status is one of the means of ensuring the national security of states. The same resolution invited member states to cooperate with Mongolia in “taking necessary measures to consolidate and strengthen Mongolia’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, the inviolability of its borders, its economic security, its ecological balance and its nuclear weapon free status, as well as its independent foreign policy.”¹⁰ While in retrospect this step by Mongolia to declare a nuclear-weapon-free zone was logical in the circumstances of isolation between nuclear powers, it was also a significant coup by a small country to raise its stature in the world body. Enforcement and cooperation with other states is undoubtedly necessary, and a committee of experts concluded that “Mongolia did not currently have internationally recognized nuclear-weapon-free status and that they should focus their efforts on identifying options through which it could achieve such status.”¹¹ While such a conclusion could have been a setback, it detracted little from what Mongolia had accomplished by pursuing the initiative. For one thing, it embedded Mongolian independence and sovereignty firmly in the United Nations’ collective consciousness through a series of General Assembly resolutions. Through its unilateral declaration of single state nuclear-weapon-free zone, Mongolia had made itself into an icon of disarmament or at least of what a

⁹ “Blue Banner, “Single State NWFZ: Progress and Prospects” (Ulaanbaatar, 2007), p.

4.

¹⁰ UN General Assembly, Fifty-fifth session, Agenda item 71, in *ibid.*, p. 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

small state could accomplish under its own efforts. The initiative, plus the positive response of the UN, should make it more difficult for China or Russia to coerce Mongolia into compliance with either power's nuclear bullying – as had been the case in the past, with Soviet deployment of nuclear missiles in Mongolian territory.

Those countries which oppose expansion of nuclear weapons welcome the Mongolia declaration. Several other nuclear-weapon-free zones have been proposed, including one from Taiwan. China no doubt fears this not only because it would involve deeper discussions between the UN and its so-called secessionist province, but also because it would tie Beijing's hands in dealing with Taiwan should that status be recognized. At a more general level, the reality of current nuclear deployment and testing would be highly complicated by the entry of single-nuclear-weapon-free-zone declarations. Not surprisingly, the U.S. has not been favorable to a South Pacific nuclear-weapon-free zone, since “the U.S. would be legitimizing an anti-Western political movement calling, in effect, for unilateral disarmament, which already has captured New Zealand's Labor government, resulting in the destruction of the ANZUS Alliance, and could threaten the NATO Alliance in Britain, Germany, and Canada.”¹²

In a rapidly changing world, it is most difficult for any nation – especially one as small as Mongolia – to maintain a status quo of sovereignty and equilibrium. Long dominated by either of her neighbours, and regarded with suspicion because of close relations with Russian and Chinese antagonists, Mongolia must develop her economy rapidly and globalize her polity in the shortest time possible. This is accomplished through openness and commitment to the values and institutions of her third neighbours. This scenario of equilibrium requires several favorable conditions and constant efforts by Mongolia and her friends:

- Relatively equal power and interests of Russia and China for Mongolia maintain her independence. Chinese fragmentation and weakness through much of the twentieth century enabled the Soviet Union to

¹² Richard D. Fischer, Jr, “Why the U.S. Must Oppose the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone” Asian Studies Backgrounder #55, <http://www.heritage.org/research/asiaandthepacific/asb55.cfm> (accessed 6/7/2008 12:20 PM)

exercise dominance. Now that Russia is undergoing resurgence, a balance favorable to Mongolia appears to be restored.

- Continued interest on the part of Mongolia's democratic supporters, especially Western Europe, the U.S., Japan, India and South Korea. This is expressed through aid, investment, NGO participation, advice, diplomatic support and cooperation, and even tourism. Mongolia must not be ignored back into isolation.
- Vigilance and reform within Mongolia is required, with building of civil society, freedom under the democratic constitution, a vibrant multi-party system, nurturing local democracy, economic development, and minimizing corruption. Building democracy is a long-term project. South Korea, for example, experienced 35 years of authoritarianism from the end of the Korean War through the introduction of its fully democratic constitution of the Sixth Republic.¹³

Mongolians have already demonstrated a will to modernize and democratize, and to maintain their new-found independence. Isolation from what was once termed the "free world" – the industrial and democratic countries of the world – would be fatal to Mongolia's accomplishments. To modernization and democratization perhaps should be added a third national goal – a goal that at first glance appears to contradict national independence. For convenience, we can call this goal "internationalization", by which I mean the modification of national structures to accommodate international participation. The diplomacy of the NWFZ initiative already demonstrates the usefulness of internationalization, but also shows the limits of depending on the United Nations for protection. One institutional expression for materializing internationalization could be a "Council of Stakeholders", to provide support, advice and aid to Mongolia, but with Mongolia holding veto power. In other words, preservation and improvement of Mongolia's international status through an innovation I term "cooperative sovereignty". This would not be a form of re-colonization, nor would it be a mandate similar to France's over Lebanon and Syria in the interwar years. Rather it

¹³ See Robert E. Bedeski, *The Transformation of South Korea: Reform and reconstitution in the Sixth Republic under Roh Tae Woo, 1987-1992* (London: Routledge, 1994), *passim*.

would be a permanent condition of Mongolian power-sharing with a set of states long advanced towards the goals of democracy and prosperity to which Mongolians have committed themselves.

Scenario Two – In an Ideal World

Our first scenario builds on existing trends and possibilities in order to reinforce the positive accomplishments of Mongolia. To preserve the equilibrium, some modification of the MSNS is required – cooperative sovereignty. Our working assumption is that the nation-state remains a viable and effective vehicle of human progress. For Mongolia to choose the MSNS as its vehicle of enhancing survival, a few words are necessary to establish the *bona fides* of the MSNS. In an ideal world, or at least one with an optimum mix of justice, equality and liberty, each nation-state would maximize economic growth, reduce inequities among citizens through poverty-reduction, and protect the liberties of all individuals. But for the foreseeable future, the nation-state will have to be the major vehicle for pursuing these changes.

The corollary of independence of the nation-state is freedom of the individual. After centuries of evolution, nation-states today operate under a higher international law, cooperate on a wide range of human issues, and have developed knowledge, technology and institutions to improve human security. Nation-states have historically competed against each other, and often their rivalries erupted in war, but the advanced states – i.e. those with longest experience as MSNS – have refined democratic institutions and cooperation to greatly reduce the chances of war against each other. The greatest threats to peace in the present epoch are incomplete or failing states.

In the absence of a supreme world government, hegemonic power has been necessary to maintain peace, even though establishment of that power often entails a high cost in human lives and resources. The Roman and Mongolian empires established peace at high cost, and their decline was followed by centuries of invasions and wars. A hundred years of peace followed the defeat of Napoleon, accompanied by the world empires of Britain and France. After two World Wars, an uneasy peace stabilized during the Cold War, and

today, the costs of wars remain relatively low under the world quasi-empire of the “American Colossus.”¹⁴

Perhaps one day in the future, when nation-states have all achieved justice, equality, and liberty, regional and global governments may absorb the functions of sovereign governments, and exercise more uniform laws, and continue to reduce inequalities within their borders. Territorial exclusiveness may also be reduced. But for the present, while the MSNS has obvious major defects, it may be the most effective vehicle of human progress devised so far. Mongolia has embarked on a task of using the state and its available instruments to achieve a more perfect community. In this scenario, we will examine the optimal outcome of state-building in the Mongolian context.

The Ideal State

Both the anarchist and the globalist deny that the nation-state can deliver justice or equality. The anarchist sees society and state as based on property, and as Proudhon wrote, all property is theft. The globalist sees the inevitable outcome of successful state-building as war¹⁵ – the state is built for war, and we should not be surprised if wars occur out of the competition of states for territory and resources. The anarchist is partly correct in that property is unfairly distributed at any given time, but democracy and capitalism help to mediate this through stressing achievement and merit and reduction of limitations on property transfer and acquisition, while confirming property rights. And the globalist is also partially correct – but we have now assembled an arsenal, so to speak, against war. This “arsenal” of institutions includes international law, international and non-governmental organizations, peacekeeping forces, and multiple channels of bilateral and regional communication and cooperation. None of these institutions, however, has the same force and support as the MSNS for mobilizing,

¹⁴ See Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

¹⁵ John Darwin sees state-building as one of the roots of twentieth century violence: “State-builders found that they could harness the fear of the foreign to strengthen their claim to patriotic obedience.” With the collapse of global order in World War I, “In the coming struggle for power, and perhaps survival all that really mattered was the strength and cohesion of the nation-state and the size and scale of expansion.” Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, pp. 422-23.

defending and sustaining national populations. State-building remains a fundamental goal of modern politics, with its attendant national interests resisting formation of a global will to reduce conflict and even genocide. Even reducing nationalisms in the advanced societies of Western Europe has been a daunting task for the European Union.

Voltaire's Pangloss caricatured the philosophy of theodicy – that we live in the best of all possible worlds. That we live in a world dominated by nation-states cannot be accepted as the best arrangement, but it is a situation that has evolved, is irreversible, and seems to provide a pragmatic platform for further elevation of the human condition. Mongolia's decision to choose the sovereign nation-state as its political template is thus entirely rational at the present stage of history, and democracy appears to be its most advanced form.

What are the Characteristics of the Successful Nation-State?

When we speak of an optimum nation-state, we are not referring to Communist North Korea, for example, where a handful of men control a totalitarian regime that rattles nuclear sabres while maintaining concentration camps with hundreds of thousands of political prisoners and mass starvations of citizens. Nor even China, with its economic moderation and political harshness and permanent dictatorship, should be a model for developing countries.

Successful nation-states share the following common characteristics:

1. A degree of democracy, sometimes preceded by authoritarian, non-totalitarian dictatorship that produced a modicum of political order.
2. A relatively educated citizenry, capable of making autonomous economic and political decisions.
3. A high degree of economic autonomy, but having access to global markets, especially the advanced capitalist economies.
4. A professional and civilian-dominated military establishment, capable of providing national security and defending national territory.
5. A competent police force to ensure domestic order.

6. A sense of nationhood, based on a degree of exclusiveness – history, language, and religion are the most common in reinforcing a set of shared values. (A forgetfulness of the conflicts that brought about nationhood is also helpful.)
7. Competition for power and multiple political parties which enhance accountability and prevent permanent corruption of power through circulation of elites.
8. A high level of scientific and educational institutions, capable of developing, integrating, and disseminating knowledge and technology needed for a modern state.

This ideal nation-state usually balances local and national power, with mechanisms of accountability – formal elections, or internal procedures to dismiss corrupt officials.

The Scenario: Mongolia Approaches the Ideal of Nation-State

In reality, no society ever achieves its ideal, since each generation has its own resentments and perceptions of unfairness, and the visions of ideal remain largely inchoate, often awaiting expression by a philosopher or leader. One generation's values and norms become the next's targets for change. Any division within society also generates new demands and critiques. Neighbouring or distant states serve as scapegoats for crisis, so international peace is often fragile in a world of nation-states. Nonetheless, an ideal status for Mongolia would include the following: *First*, it would have permanent peace and security with China and Russia, as well as unqualified support for its sovereignty. Russian oil and gas pipelines would transit through the country, and Mongolia would have access to petro-energy necessary for development. With wide-open spaces, exploitation of wind and sun for renewable energy sources will also be developed. Russia will construct a parallel railway line from Ulan Ude to the Mongolia-China border with standard gauge tracks to facilitate transportation of goods and people. Alternate port access will also be developed to the Eastern Sea at the Tumen River estuary.

Second, international investment will develop the resource potential of the country, with coal and other valued minerals. International tourism will stress minimum environmental footprint, create new jobs, and provide capital for industrial development under Mongolian control. Declining unemployment should reduce the incentive for Mongolian workers to go abroad.

Third, Mongolia and its two neighbours will negotiate a broad range of CBMs to enhance trust in military matters, and China and Russia will abide by Mongolia's concept of a nuclear-weapon-free zone. Mongolia will be able to reduce its defense budget and allocate more funds to its infrastructure.

Fourth, Mongolia will secure transportation corridors to seaports giving it direct access to world maritime trade. The geographical barrier may be overcome through political means, but it requires cooperation with, and even indulgence by, its major neighbours. A transportation corridor could provide a leased line from Ulaanbaatar to the Yellow Sea or Eastern Sea, allowing construction of a Mongolian railway, motor road and pipelines. Several routes could be explored:

- Directly from Ulaanbaatar to Tianjin is the shortest distance.
- From eastern Mongolia to Tumen, will require permission from both China and North Korea.
- A corridor along the Sino-Russian border – longest in distance, but politically advantageous to all three parties, providing a buffer between China and Russia.

A strong political will and economic resources are needed to pursue this neutralization of Mongolian geography, not present in contemporary affairs. Moreover, under current circumstances, Russia and China prefer to keep Mongolia wrapped in Asia than to facilitate further links with Japan and the West.

Mongolian Neutrality

The highest priority of Mongolia's foreign policy is to preserve its freedom and sovereignty, and it has been seeking to escape its legacy of pawn between Russia and China. Breaking isolation through economic development

facilitated by foreign investment, diplomacy and engagement has paid off in a short time, but requires constant attention and commitment by non-contiguous neighbours. More than sympathy from the West and Japan, Mongolia needs solid commitment from distant neighbours. And they in turn, will calculate the utility of an independent Mongolia to their own national interests. Economic resources are one source of utility, and since 1990, foreign companies and consortia have engaged in exploration and exploitation of minerals. Mongolia suffers a serious deficit in energy, and depends on Russia for hydrocarbons. As Inner Mongolia is demonstrating, the high desert can be transformed into wind turbine farms, generating a portion of the electricity needed in Mongolia.¹⁶

A fully neutral and sovereign Mongolia in the center of Asia is a desirable goal, and would benefit all the major and minor powers by removing a potential area of contention. Mongolia already claims non-alignment, and its full neutrality could be a permanent factor if guaranteed by international treaty. The Treaty of Paris in 1815, for example, established the neutrality of Switzerland, and a few years later, Belgium was recognized as neutral. The former's neutrality was honored in two world wars, while the latter's was breached in both, based on geopolitical realities that Belgium was a buffer between Germany and France, flat, and a "pistol pointed at the heart of Britain," while Switzerland was none of the above with the natural barrier of the Alps. So the question for Mongolia is whether its neutrality will more closely resemble Switzerland or Belgium. Like the latter, it is flat and a buffer – between China and Russia. So the challenge is to become more Swiss. Like Sweden, Mongolia has a distant imperial past and a strong sense of identity. But its warrior ethos was reduced by loss of independence and adoption of a passive strain of Buddhism. Today, an attempt to revive the nomadic warrior spirit is visible in pageants and sport, and the return of the Chinggis Khan icon, especially in commerce and naming of babies.

An important step to Mongolian neutrality requires international recognition and a treaty stipulating this status. The declaration of nuclear-weapon-free-

¹⁶ The estimated economically viable capacity for wind energy in Inner Mongolia is 101GW, accounting for 40 per cent in China. <http://www.hanwindenergy.com/inner-mongolia-autonomous-region.php> (accessed 7/1/2008 9:03 AM)

zone status was a positive step. A next move involves tightening the state apparatus, including better protection of its borders and insuring that Mongolia remains ethnically Mongolian. With such a small population (estimated at nearly three million, or equal to one medium-size Chinese city, or a one percent increase of Chinese population in less than three months) its citizenry could be quickly diluted by massive immigration from a near neighbour. Mongolia requires one year of military service for all citizens between the ages of 18 through 25. Unity of government and people is prerequisite to pursuing a national security based on neutrality and external non-interference. Finally, a neutral Mongolia could be reinforced by escalating its international utility. At present there is no Asian counterpart to Switzerland – no international city like Geneva, although Tokyo has had that ambition. Proposals have been made for an Asian peacekeeping school to be established in Mongolia, and Ulaanbaatar could be natural headquarters for the UNDP and a number of financial and regional organizations. As an Asian Switzerland, Mongolia could have much stronger guarantees of sovereignty than possible in the past.

Today Mongolia is at a point where vital choices are made for the future. One strain of Mongolian nationalism favors siding with the stronger power in the region as the least damaging form of adaptive survival. However, China has historical motives for regarding Mongolia as a variation of Tibet or Inner Mongolia – territorial *irredentum* with sparse and unassimilated populations. At the same time, China's relations with Mongolia have been conducted with formality and respect for mutual sovereignty, and there is little reason to expect any change in state-to-state relations. The best outcome Mongolia can expect is that the two adjacent powers continue to maintain correct and helpful relations, and restrain those of their citizens who may see Mongolia as a society vulnerable to illegal exploitation or migration.

Russia – Petrodollars, and Economic, Political, and Demographic Challenges

Mongolia is currently restoring relations in the Russian orbit, largely for economic reasons. Mongolian President Nambaryn Enkhbayar met with

newly inaugurated Prime Minister Medvedev in the Kremlin on May 16, 2008, the Russian leader's first state meeting with a foreign head of state.

Russia's Rosneft, which supplies 90 percent of Mongolia's petroleum and fuel, raised prices from \$62 to \$89 a ton this month alone, but offered price rollbacks in return for gasoline station concessions (*Oloo*, May 16). For a country totally dependent on its railway network for exports, Moscow's penetration of the Mongolian economy is highlighted by the fact that Russia already owns 49 percent of the Ulaanbaatar Railway.¹⁷

Inflation is also weakening Mongolia's independence (15.1 per cent in 2007), and threatens to reverse fiscal gains. In February 2008, Mongolia was forced to buy 200,000 tons of wheat from Russia at subsidized prices due to domestic food shortages.¹⁸

What is the Russian view of Mongolia? Throughout the Soviet period, Mongolia retained formal sovereignty though tightly controlled by Moscow – not unlike Hungary or Romania. Despotic rulers – the mini-Stalins Choibalsan and Tsedenbal – ensured that there was little deviation from the Soviet line. Strategically, Mongolia was the first line of defense against Japan in World War II and against China in the sixties. It was also a source of war materiel for Soviet Russia in World War II. Unlike areas of Siberia and Central Asia, there was relatively little Russian migration to Mongolia.

Naturally, the new rulers of Russia desire closer alignment between Mongolia and their country. Energy supplies provide the main leverage over Mongolia today. In an ideal world, Russia would provide access to its energy wealth with Mongolia and build a pipeline connection to China that passes through Mongolia. This would provide access to energy, as well as generate hundreds of millions of dollars in passage fees for Mongolia. Also, Russia would assist in the modernization of the Mongolian military without binding

¹⁷ "RUSSIA DOMINATES MONGOLIA IN THE NEW 'GREAT GAME'" By John C. K. Daly http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2373088 (accessed , 6/22/2008 9:44 AM).

¹⁸ Ibid.

it to a pro-Russian alignment or treaty, and there are ample signs that military cooperation is increasing.¹⁹ Education scholarships to Russia would help to maintain friendly and non-threatening relationships on a people-to-people basis. Many Mongolians were educated in the Soviet Union, and the cultural connection remains. Many ethnic Buryat – close relatives to Mongolians – live in southern Siberia.

In the longer term, we are witnessing the development of new corridors of transportation and communication which will change the relationship of nations in the future. If long-term global warming occurs and the polar ice pack melts to extend the Arctic shipping season, Canada, Alaska and Russia will reap considerable benefits. In the middle of Eurasia, the ancient Silk Road corridor is seeing considerable interest in laying pipelines and building railways. Once North Korea overcomes its xenophobia, or undergoes reunification with the south, it may not only be part of regional power and pipeline and railway grids, but will serve as a vital link between South Korea/Japan and the Asian mainland. One can envision a tunnel connecting South Korea and Japan, with fully loaded trains from Japan rolling to Western Europe across Asia. So far, Mongolia has been sidelined in this development – neither Russia nor China wish to reward Mongolia for its independent behavior. Nonetheless, the UNDP and other agencies should expedite Mongolian participation in Northeast Asian economic projects.

The U.S. Connection

In the interim, a weak Mongolia requires an external protector. While the United Nations has been “first responder” to international crises, it can only provide moral support and carefully worded resolutions if member nations

¹⁹ Russia’s interest in Mongolia extends to the military sphere. On May 21, 2008 Ulaanbaatar’s Chingghis Khaan International Airport was a busy place, as Russian Defense Minister Anatolii Serdiukov paid an official visit to Mongolia accompanied by Army General N. E. Makarov, Chief of Armaments and Deputy Minister of Defense; Lieutenant General V. B. Feodorov, Chief of the Ministry's Department of International Military Collaboration and Major-General V. N. Chernov, Chief of the Ministry's Foreign Relations. Mongolia’s Defense Minister Jamyandorj Batkhuyag received the delegation (*Interfax*, May 21). According to Serdiukov’s press secretary, Col. Aleksei Kuznetsov, “The Russian Defense Minister noted that at present there are all the objective preconditions for expanding cooperation between our countries in military matters and the military-technical field. To this end, the sides have outlined ways to intensify bilateral cooperation.”

are unable or unwilling to assist. The Mongolian situation is complicated by the fact that Russia and China are charter members of the Security Council, and can exercise veto power over any UN initiative regarding Mongolia. This dilemma was demonstrated in the U.S. invasion/liberation of Iraq. Saddam Hussein had violated seventeen UN resolutions with few repercussions, and President Bush intervened ostensibly to enforce those UN measures. Would the U.S. do the same for Mongolia if her sovereignty was at risk? It is unlikely that the next U.S. administrations will engage in similar pre-emptive action, especially without some form of treaty or alliance. Even if the U.S. were to guarantee defence of Mongolia through treaty, actual implementation in a crisis will be most difficult.²⁰

The next best protection is for active engagement of America in Mongolia through investment, trade, aid, and advice, as well as diplomatic support and cultural relations. Perhaps the safest course is to encourage international recognition of neutral Mongolia, rather than any form of alliance which would inevitably be considered a provocation in the region. Could the Scenario One scheme of cooperative sovereignty survive without some degree of alliance-type guarantee for Mongolia? That would depend upon Stakeholders' interests and perceptions.

Finally, Mongolia has on occasion referred to "genetic security" in the sense that it is an ethnic identity threatened with decline. Mongolia can be a Mongolian homeland, attracting the Mongolian diaspora back to the ancestral steppes and mountains. This need not be a threat to China or Russia, but would reverse the outward migration experienced since independence. The homeland identity of Mongolia would be reinforced by a clear statement, perhaps in the constitution, that Mongolia recognizes the permanence of existing borders, and has no claims on neighbouring countries nor does it support any secessionist sentiment in China or Russia.

²⁰ Not unlike the inability of Great Britain and France to respond to the German and Soviet takeover of Poland in 1939, despite treaties that protected Polish sovereignty. The result was the Phony War, and division of Poland between Germans and Soviets.

Scenario Three – China Absorbs Taiwan

While Scenario Two portrays Mongolia as a permanently neutral nation-state in the middle of Asia,²¹ Scenario Three examines how a more pessimistic future might come about. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, emerging China has become a major phenomenon on the horizon. Risking hyperbole, we can say she is the super-nova of the international scene, and the consequences of her growing “brilliance” are both spectacular and intimidating. Spectacular in that China has demonstrated the power of a market system in service to an ambitious state. Abandoning much of central planning, and unleashing the market intuition and skills of hundreds of millions of Chinese, at home and abroad, China has demonstrated that economic freedom is superior to socialism in liberating human intelligence and labor to innovate, enterprise, and accumulate. (The novelty of the Chinese way is that *political* freedom is largely absent, which rather confounds liberal thought that liberty must be a whole cloth.) But the Chinese super-nova is frightening too in the sheer mass of the created capital, product and human energy that is penetrating every corner of the globe. More sobering to her neighbours is the consolidation of the Chinese Modern Sovereign Nation-State – fed both from resentments dating from the Opium Wars in the 1840s through a century of Western interventions and Japanese invasion, to betrayal by the Soviet Union, and the drive to restore the glory of past Chinese empires – including integration of Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, and possibly Mongolia.

China – A “Three-Legged Dog”?

China may be likened to a three-legged dog. Its head is in Beijing, and three legs are Tibet, Xinjiang, and Mongolia/Dongbei. The fourth, missing leg is Taiwan. Without that leg, a dog is crippled and not a complete canine.

²¹ Kyzyl, the capital city of Mongolia’s neighbour, Tuva, is the geographical center of Asia.

Beijing wants its “leg” returned and re-attached, so it can fulfill its destiny as a complete and noble animal. Some would argue that restoration of the fourth leg will transform China into a placid and friendly panda. Or we may find that restoration of its quadrapedism produces a predatory wolf. Those who fear the latter outcome will thus urge continued separation of Taiwan from the mainland. A dwarf “dog” cloned from the fourth leg on Taiwan is preferred to a China with all its powers enhanced by full access to the talent, capital and energy of the dynamic island quasi-state.

In the event of Chinese reunification, and assuming continuation of the current dictatorship without major democratization, Beijing will face the delicate challenge of integrating Taiwan without killing the goose that lays golden eggs. We already have the precedent of Hong Kong, where democracy has been restrained without adversely affecting economic growth. China will be strengthened by adding Taiwan for the following reasons:

1. Direct access to the modern industrial and communication infrastructure, including education and highly skilled personnel. Taiwan has been one of the four rapid growth dragons of East Asia (Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Hong Kong), and its entrepreneurs have been a major catalyst in China’s high growth. Many Chinese mainlanders wish to visit and even live in Taiwan, to take advantage of higher salaries and living standards. Many Taiwanese men have married mainland women and brought them back to Taiwan. Removal of political barriers would facilitate a much greater volume of human movement across the Straits.
2. Removal of Taiwan from the American and Japanese sphere of influence. Taiwan’s de facto independence has been reinforced by Japanese economic investment, and American military assistance. When the U.S. recognized China in 1979, Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), providing continued American military aid vital to defending the island. If Taiwan were to voluntarily join the PRC, the TRA would have to be amended or annulled, and the U.S. would lose a major ally in East Asia. More importantly, with Chinese naval power extending to the east coast of Taiwan, Japanese sea lanes of communication could be threatened.

3. A significant portion of Chinese military modernization has been justified as aimed at Taiwan. In theory, the huge military expense and distraction of preparing for invasion of, or defense against, Taiwan would be removed, so military resources could be reduced, or deployed elsewhere. Resolution of the Taiwan question should decrease tensions in the region, and improve Sino-American relations.

These advantages beg the question why this simple reunification solution to peacemaking should be so difficult to implement. Two observations should suffice:

- Taiwan's separation is a legacy of the unfinished civil war between the Guomindang and Chinese Communist Party. Two very different world-views need to be reconciled, and numerous issues resolved. Taiwan is a full liberal democracy, with two major political and competing parties, and alternation of parties in power through regular elections. The People's Republic of China is a Communist dictatorship, with only local and limited elections and no opposition parties. To force Taiwan to surrender its democracy to a single party anti-democracy would be betrayal of international human rights as well as principles of liberalism which have guided western policy since at least World War I.
- The U.S. will lose its major trump card against China, and permit China to claim a major victory and to pose as an irresistible juggernaut. This cannot but have a negative impact on American credibility in the Pacific region and elsewhere. It would also send signals to Japan and South Korea that the U.S. is a less reliable ally, and both would have to consider the region as dominated by hegemonic China. For South Korea, this would probably entail greater synchronization with China and agitation for removal of U.S. forces. Japan would have no choice but to look to its own defenses, including the nuclear option.

Thus, absorption of Taiwan may be a zero-sum game. China wins, the U.S. and its allies lose, and Taiwan gains a few temporary advantages which will vanish when the island system is completely absorbed into the PRC. Further consequences of this expansion of China are twofold. First, it will be an

event which will transform China into a more confident and modern state, and one less likely to feel threatened by either its neighbours or the U.S. Second, there are not only implications for Taiwan in this scenario, but a number of parallels between Taiwan's situation and Mongolia's that should be explored.

Sino-Mongolia Relations

Fortunately for Mongolia, it has less strategic importance to China than Taiwan at the moment, and continued distraction in the southeast frontier means much less attention than might be the case otherwise on the northern border. Should Taiwan be reunited with the mainland, however, we can expect that China will turn its strategic calculations to the further consolidation of Mongolia, whose choices of liberal democracy, West/Japan linkages, and even a degree of dependence on Russia are certain to cause concerns in Beijing. However, given the intractability of the Taiwan question, this anticipated refocus of Beijing attention on Mongolia should not be a strategic concern for years or even decades to come.

Mongolia's emergence as a MSNS is not yet two decades old. While the status quo and optimistic scenarios posit that this situation will remain permanent, with all the benefits that sovereignty and democracy have brought to other small countries, the legacy of the past cannot be ignored. A warrior empire of eight centuries ago indelibly stamped the consciousness of Europe and Asia with its power at the time, and created the identity of the Mongolian people. However, the recent past hundred years have been of much greater significance to Mongolia's state emergence. From the Mongolian perspective, the relationship with the Soviet Union and China has been one of semi-colonialism, and there is no guarantee that the exigencies of power politics would not again betray Mongolia's sovereignty and national interests. The rejoining of Taiwan and the mainland will provide a major addition of power to the PRC, and allow it to address other historical grievances and territorial issues.

When the Manchu dynasty was overthrown in 1911, Mongolia declared its independence and the desire to normalize relations with neighbours near and far. However, geopolitics vetoed these intentions, and in 1915 Mongolia had

to settle for a form of autonomy, losing some of its territories in the process. The compromise was to be an autonomous part of China under Russian influence, setting the pattern of subordination to Sino-Russian relations. With the Bolshevik revolution, Russia sponsored Mongolian nationalists who wanted an end to Chinese influence, but stopped short of favoring complete independence. Evidence of this long-term policy was that the Soviet Union recognized Mongolia's full independence only after World War II. Moreover, in 1925, Russia signed a secret treaty with Republican China recognizing Outer Mongolia as part of China. By doing so Russia in fact was trying to impose a condominium over the sovietised Mongolian state, with the dominating role to be played by the Soviet Union.²²

Threatened by Hitler's Germany in the west, Stalin feared attack in Siberia by the Japanese, who had already occupied adjacent Chinese northeast provinces, which they renamed Manchukuo under a puppet emperor. He concluded an agreement with Mongolia to introduce Russian troops to defend against Japanese invasion, and the Chinese nationalists protested this as a violation of the 1925 agreement. A Japanese attack against Mongolia in 1939 was repulsed by a joint Mongolia-Russia force, led by General Zhukov. At Yalta, the Allied Powers acceded to Stalin's demand for independence (under Soviet domination), and on January 6, 1946, the Republic of China officially recognized the Mongolian People's Republic. Because of the Republic of China's opposition, Mongolia's application to join the UN was rejected until 1961. In 1954 the Chinese Communist leaders requested that the Soviet Union return Mongolia to China. The subsequent Sino-Soviet dispute and continued Soviet dominance and assistance kept Mongolia in its camp. Another consequence was the introduction of up to 120,000 Soviet troops into Mongolia, and the doubling of Mongolian military forces. If the Soviets under Khrushchev had actually attacked China with nuclear weapons, Mongolia would have become a nuclear battlefield suffering vast devastation.²³

On the main avenues of Beijing visitors can see uncompleted rainbow arches. The visible rainbow represents those territories already returned to the

²² Dr. J. Enkhsaikhan, "Mongolia's non-nuclear status – an important element of Northeast Asia security", in *Blue Banner*, p. 61.

²³ Enkhsaikhan, pp. 60-62

motherland – Hong Kong and Macao. The missing one-third is Taiwan, and one foresees great celebrations when those rainbows are completed. Should this rainbow completion demonstrate the fulfillment and satisfaction of China's historical destiny? Demonstrations of Tibetan anger at China in 2008 indicate that consolidation of buffer territory will always contain troubles. And there is often a tendency to blame outside agitators – especially leaders in exile or ethnic members of the agitating group on the other side of Chinese borders. Chinese remain uneasy about several of the minority areas, with the exception of Guangxi where the Zhuang have been largely sinicized. The sensitivity is heightened where an ethnic group occupies a frontier border area, and has ethnic brethren on the other side of the border. Mongolia and Inner Mongolia fit this description. Inner Mongolia has been reasonably placid, and the local Mongolian population overwhelmed by Han immigration. One cannot rule out completely an explosion of resentment in the future, and subsequent blaming Ulaanbaatar for anti-Chinese expression.

Possible Russian Response to Chinese Integration of Taiwan

Russia has historically suffered from perpetual insecurity. In the west, it has variously fought wars, won and lost territory and peoples to Poland, Sweden, Germany, Finland and France. In the east, Russia was conquered by Mongol hordes in the thirteenth century, and as the Mongols retreated, tsarist empires absorbed Turkic peoples of Central Asia, and expanded against China. The emergence of the modern Japanese state halted Russian expansion into the Korean peninsula in 1904, and in 1918-1922 Japanese forces occupied parts of eastern Siberia. Following defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and through much of the Soviet period, Russia focused its attention on Europe and the west. The Japanese setback at Khalkhyn-Gol and their preoccupation with the American advance in the Pacific spared the Russian Far East from Japanese attack. Nonetheless, Stalin entered the war against Japan in the last week of the war, and occupied North Korea, further consolidated the Soviet hold on Mongolia, and took over the Kuriles.

The 1950s was a period when, as Mao paraphrased the global situation in mahjong terms, “East wind prevails over west wind.” Despite resentful undercurrents, the first decade of the Sino-Soviet alliance set the terms of the

Cold War for the following three decades. Khrushchev's de-Stalinization marked the beginning of the alliance's decline, and Mao decided that Stalin's heirs had embarked on ruinous heresy – revolutionary China would rescue Communism from the Kremlin compromisers. Overt Sino-Soviet hostilities broke out, and Khrushchev even considered a pre-emptive nuclear attack against China – for which he was removed by his Politburo colleagues for “hare-brained” schemes.

The remaining decades of the Soviet period were eventful and dangerous, with President Nixon fishing in troubled waters, developing the “China Card” against the Soviet Union. His triumphal visit to Shanghai in 1972 stimulated the Soviets to be more accommodating on missile talks and a number of other issues. In retrospect, perhaps had the American media not savaged Nixon on Watergate so effectively (not to say he was innocent), his (and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's) successes in winding down the Vietnam war and normalization with China would likely have opened a period of Sino-American amity five or six years earlier, and an honorable peace in Vietnam might have been settled.

The Soviet Goliath stumbled through the eighties, and Gorbachev attempted to resuscitate the patient through political reforms – in contrast to Deng's far more successful economic restructuring. China's hunger for political change was reflected in the outpouring of adulation for the Soviet leader when he visited China in 1989, and the tragic pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen a couple of months later. Within two years, the Soviet Union had collapsed (one telling symptom was the decline in life expectancy during the latter decades – the first time this had occurred in an industrialized society), and China was on its way to becoming an economic superpower in terms of population and growth rates.

After nearly three decades, China's economic expansion has proceeded unabated, while post-Soviet Russia still wrestles with an economy increasingly dependent on petro-dollars and politics often populated by oligarchs and ex-KGB officials. It is likely that adding Taiwan to the list of China's triumphs will evolve indirectly into a condition of more tenuous sovereignty for Mongolia, and as such, a security concern for Russia. We have noted how Mongolia has been unique in Sino-Soviet relations. It never became a Soviet republic, and despite its location in central Asia, is not a full

member of the Shanghai Cooperative Organization. After resolution of the Taiwan issue, we can anticipate Chinese pressure on what can be termed the “Outer Mongolia issue.” This consists of China’s historical claims to the country, despite recognition of its independence. As we have seen, Mongolia has taken advantage of the post-Soviet years to expound its claims to sovereignty by acting as a responsible state, and by embedding the international stake in Mongolia’s permanence through its shrewd single-state declaration of a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Sino-Russian relations have been cooperative – a marriage of convenience. At least one Russian scholar sees growing perception of the relative weakness of Russia and the strength of China: “as China becomes the pre-eminent power in the region, Ulaanbaatar will have to navigate carefully between Moscow and the much closer Beijing.”²⁴ Khirghis writes that:

it is more likely that Central Asian states are receiving the buffer role that Mongolia used to play during the Cold War. Hence, Mongolia’s policy is no longer expected to be that of a buffer state; instead, it will try to find other niches in the international scene and other patterns of engagement with its two neighbors based on its own national interest.²⁵

Possible Chinese Pressure on Mongolia

The fundamental fact is that China is a large nation, both in area and in population, while Mongolia is a small nation, with only 16.2 per cent of China’s area and about 2.3 per cent of China’s population.²⁶ This asymmetry, plus the fact that there are no natural frontiers between the two nations,

²⁴ Dmitri Trenin, quoted in Munkh-Ochir D. Khirghis, *A Constructivist View on Identity and Interest in Foreign Policy: Implications for Mongolia*, Regional Security Issues and Mongolia Series, Number 19 (Ulaanbaatar: The Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006), p. 61.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Based on figures from the *CIA World Factbook*.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>, and <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mg.html> (accessed 6/29/2008, 9:28 AM)

creates a security imbalance and huge vulnerability for Mongolia. On the other hand, unlike Taiwan, Mongolia has few assets that China does not already possess – except for empty space. The best option for Mongolia is to be ignored and left alone, at least within the scope of Chinese foreign policy.

Nonetheless, should China wish to transform Outer Mongolia into “North Mongolia” and Inner Mongolia into “South Mongolia”, a number of possibilities exist to facilitate this. One option would be to encourage ethnic Mongolians from Inner Mongolia to migrate into Outer Mongolia, mix with the local population, and create an underground infrastructure to accommodate a second wave of Han influx. Should the Ulaanbaatar government respond to the illegal immigration with deportation and enforcement of its laws, an incident could be staged to trigger a Chinese government warning to Mongolia.

A second process could be to stage Chinese military exercises on the Mongolian border to intimidate the Mongolian government. “Accidental” violation of the Mongolian border would bring Chinese apologies, but also demonstrate that the Mongolian military has little power to stop the PLA incursions even if they penetrate deeper into Mongolian territory. A third thrust could come in the form of Chinese sponsorship of Mongolian full membership in the Shanghai Cooperative Organization. The parallels with the Russian relationship to the Central Asia republics would be unmistakable, with China the “elder brother” and Mongolia the junior partner. Even for Mongolia to seek membership independently would have the effect of placing her in an organization linked to the Sino-Soviet past based on membership, and at odds with Mongolia’s “third neighbours”.

A fourth method for reducing Mongolian sovereignty is through economic pressure. China is increasingly important to Mongolia as trading partner.²⁷ Also, her outlet to the sea is via Tianjin. Because of landlocked geography,

²⁷ Sino-Mongolian trade grew by 43.2 per cent in 2007, to US\$2.08 billion. The main imports from China include Chinese rice, vegetables and garments, and account for about 90 per cent of Mongolia’s total import of these items. China is also the biggest investor, for eight years in a row, with over 700 Chinese-owned enterprises operating, and employing more than 50,000 workers. Large Chinese state-owned enterprises have started to invest in Mongolian mining and oil sectors. “Steady growth in China-Mongolia trade, economic co-op,” Xinhua, 6 June 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-06/19/content_8399506.htm (accessed 7/2/2008 9:54 AM).

Mongolia must depend on this internationally-guaranteed port. It is not hard to envision “technical difficulties” that would hold up railway connections and port facilities to impede Mongolia’s foreign trade. To avoid this bottleneck, Mongolia has been a supporter of the Tumen project – an international development project at the mouth of the Tumen River, where the borders of North Korea, Russia and China converge.²⁸ A rail line from eastern Mongolia to Tumen would provide an alternative outlet for resources and products. Unfortunately for Mongolia, however, the Tumen project has moved slowly. Also, the envisioned rail connection, although shorter in distance than to Tianjin, would run through Chinese territory. Obstacles remain, including the reality that North Korea is ruled by a regime dedicated to maintaining power through isolation, and that Russia is reluctant to see the emergence of rival ports to Nakhodka and Vladivostok. A narrow strip of Chinese territory follows the left bank of the highly polluted Tumen river, and ends 5 km from the Sea of Japan (Japanese name)/Eastern Sea (Korean name). This means that any cargo originating from or passing through Tumen free trade zone cannot be shipped abroad through the Tumen river estuary into the sea without Russian and/or North Korean permission.

China and Russia have been the only horizons of the Mongolian state for centuries, and since the Cold War, China has taken prominence. For Mongolia, this presents a daunting challenge. It also represents a challenge to democratic theory, which in the western tradition of discourse, has been mainly about freedom of individuals. The essence of Mongolia’s claims to national sovereignty is the freedom of a small nation, which has every right to pursue its own destiny. We can argue that China could absorb Taiwan or Mongolia without violation of human rights. It could retain elections in these two democratic polities by making elections meaningless – anointed candidates and controlled polling, with bogus opposition parties. It could flood Mongolia with ethnic Han migrants and officials who would not necessarily coerce the local population to assimilate, but would leave them little choice except to adapt to the new majority. Thus absorption of

²⁸ David Arase, “Economic Cooperation in the Region Where China, Russia, and North Korea Meet,” JPRI Working Paper , No. 53: January 1999, <http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp53.html>. (accessed 6/29/2008 9:36 AM).

Mongolia would be peaceful, and any reactions hidden from view until the process was a *fait accompli*.

One would expect the initial Russian reaction to be subdued, and with the current array of problems facing Moscow, the anticipated slow-motion Chinese assimilation of Mongolia would not be noticed immediately. Russia has the opportunity to strengthen Mongolia today and could do more to reinforce its economic viability – particularly through assisting its energy deficiency, though this will mean greater Mongolian accommodation of Russia's national interests. The commitment of the U.S. has been positive, although delivery on this commitment is geographically problematic. In November 2005, President and Mrs. George W. Bush made a state visit to Mongolia, which was reciprocated with a visit to Washington by President Enkhbayar in October 2007. On that occasion, a Declaration of Principles to guide bilateral relations, and the Proliferation Security Initiative were signed by both sides.²⁹

Despite a Taiwan-Mongolia separation of over 2800 km, there exists a link between Taiwan's autonomy and Mongolian sovereignty, and China remains the key to both. Mainland coercion and appeals and Taiwan's responses could offer a clue to similar pressures and reactions which might be expected in Mongolia if the People's Republic of China decides that it must be brought back into its orbit. A further clue to this linkage can be found in Taiwan's attitude to the Mongolia question. Prior to his election as President of Taiwan, Chen Shuibian visited Mongolia. His administration subsequently sought to reduce or eliminate the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission.³⁰ Both developments hinted that advocates of Taiwan autonomy had a goal of detaching both Mongolia and Taiwan from either the PRC or ROC and establishing them as independent entities. A visit by former President Ochirbat to Taipei in January 2007 to participate in a

²⁹ "Remarks at U.S.-Mongolian Signing Ceremony," John D. Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State, Washington, DC, October 24, 2007, <http://www.state.gov/s/d/2007/94092.htm>. (accessed 6/29/2008 10:02 AM).

³⁰ The Commission is headed by a Minister who sits in the government cabinet – the Executive Yuan. Its home page is at <http://www.mtac.gov.tw/main.php?lang=5> and describes its role as humanitarian and cultural, functioning as a sort of friendship association. Yet historically and constitutionally, the Commission was set up to exercise supervision over Tibetans and Mongolians – leaving details to historical circumstances.

conference on new democracies remained below the level of official visits, and thus signaled no change in Taiwan's, as the Republic of China, relations with Mongolia. With the return of the Guomindang to power in Taiwan, the Commission is back in business, with the vague and symbolic subordination of Mongolia and Tibet to the ROC. The intricacies of this relationship will unfold if reunification between mainland China and Taiwan makes progress. Would the U.S. stand up to China forcing reunification with Taiwan? Signs of American hesitation if confronted by Chinese belligerence are not yet evident, but new respect for Chinese foreign policy is emerging in Washington:

As China's power and influence expand, its economic clout and new military might induce the United States to shy away from being too active in the Asia-Pacific region. Distracted by Iraq, Afghanistan, and a host of other crises, Washington avers—with not enough demonstrable proof—that China is very important to U.S. global foreign policy goals.³¹

Chinese leaders describe their country's emergence on the world scene as benign, a "peaceful rise" (*heping jueqi*), and no threat to any neighbour. The view is seconded by David Kang, in his book, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia*. (New York, Columbia University Press, 2007.) He describes how China's near neighbours have recognized the new power, and decline to balance it with alliances, as was the experience in European balance of power politics. But one can also argue that China's ultimate aim is to build an Asia for Asians based on partnerships rather than alliances – a multinational version of the American Monroe Doctrine, to keep non-Asian powers from interfering in Asian affairs.

³¹ "Over the past six years, American diplomats and national security officials have lost sight of Taiwan's unsettled status and have focused instead on assuaging China's angry outbursts regarding Taiwan." John J. Tkacik, Jr., "Taiwan's 'Unsettled' International Status: Preserving U.S. Options in the Pacific," Heritage Foundation, Background #2146 (June 19, 2008), <http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/bg2146.cfm> (accessed 6/20/2008 6:09 AM).

Scenario Four – Receding America

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. became the sole global superpower by default. The 9/11 event interrupted and ended post-Cold War peace and progress towards greater global stability and progress, and what had seemed inevitable global democratization. Norman Podhoretz, editor-at-large of *Commentary*, characterized the global war on terrorism (GWOT) as a fourth World War – after World War III of the Cold War.³² Newly democratic countries – including Poland and Mongolia – joined the U.S. in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. Mongolia has had a 130 man contingent in Iraq as part of a Polish-led multinational Division and two teams of military trainers in Afghanistan. Cooperation with the U.S. and other nations in peacekeeping operations has been a pillar of the armed forces' mission to defend Mongolian sovereignty.

This commitment also included developing the Tavan Tolgoi (Five Hills) Training Center into a fully functional training facility for both national and regional armed forces. ...By upgrading the regional peacekeeping training center, Mongolia can train its own military personnel for international peace and stability operations, conduct bi-lateral and multilateral training, and co-host international peacekeeping training events.³³

Americans rendered support for Mongolia soon after its de-Communization. A Peace Corps presence and establishment of satellite connections for the Mongolian worldwide web were early expressions of U.S. support for

³² Norman Podhoretz, "World War IV: How It Started, What It Means, and Why We Have to Win." *Commentary*, September 2004, available online: <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewarticle.cfm/world-war-iv--how-it-started--what-it-means---and-why-we-have-to-win-9785>. (Accessed 6/30/2008 6:38 AM)

³³ Byambasuren Bayarmagnai, *Peace Operations Engagement of the Mongolian Armed Forces*, Regional Security Issues and Mongolia Series, Number 30 (Ulaanbaatar: The Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006), p. 23.

democratic Mongolia. As the Soviet state unraveled, and China's regional role expanded, the American presence in Mongolia was based on sound strategy. With the development of democracy and economic access, Mongolia grew in importance as a potential American client in Northeast Asia. Unlike the four Stans which remained affiliated with Russia as members of the new CIS, Mongolia proceeded to become an outpost of liberal democracy.

So far that orientation has been reciprocated by the U.S. and other democracies. Abandonment of Mongolia to the vagaries of Sino-Russian political and economic gravity would be betrayal, and must be ruled out as an honorable option. However, the 2008 election in the U.S. may be a weathervane of difficulties yet to come. While the issues in the election are global in nature – climate change, world oil prices, and military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan – a significant segment of the American electorate is focused on local and national issues. Calling this segment isolationist is premature, but many see overseas commitments as a distraction from domestic issues, and may have been lulled into a sense of security with no domestic repeat of 9/11 or other acts of terrorism inside the U.S. Presidential candidate Barack Hussein Obama lacks foreign policy and military experience, although has demonstrated eloquence and intelligence in addressing his inadequacies. Some observers express concern that his electoral success, and the election of a new Congress anxious to reduce overseas commitments, could lead to a tendency towards disengagement abroad, at least in military affairs.

In the context of examining scenarios, let us pursue the implications of America scaling down her involvement abroad, and hypothesize a reversal of interest in Mongolia. Certainly, from a *realpolitik* perspective, the U.S. has few national interests in Mongolia, and in a crisis, would have few military – and far fewer naval – options to come to the aid of the isolated democracy in the heart of Asia. Nonetheless, the U.S. and its friends have invested heavily in assisting Mongolian development and democracy. One expression of this investment has been the American Peace Corps, whose Mongolia program began with an English education project in 1991 and has expanded to other sectors in national development. In 2005, the Mongolian government

declared English the “Second Official Language of Mongolia” and identified learning English language as a top priority. Peace Corps volunteers focus on teaching English to students and teachers. The program also assists “Mongolia’s transition to a free-market economy. Through capacity-building of NGOs and Mongolian citizens, volunteers increase the management and strategic planning skills of business owners. Volunteers transfer knowledge of accounting, bookkeeping, customer service, business English, and how to incorporate information and communication technologies into a successful business.³⁴ The U.S. aid program has targeted assisting the shift to a market economy, and especially to reduce poverty, which stands at a rate of 33 per cent:

USAID targets disadvantaged Mongolians by providing business training to those who have migrated to the capital and other urban areas and to herders and businesses still located in rural parts of the country. During the past year alone, USAID helped create or strengthen over 1,250 small businesses and helped almost 2,500 people, including almost 1500 women, find jobs.³⁵

With an annual per capita income of \$690, Mongolia is one of the world’s highest per capita recipients of foreign assistance.³⁶

Japan also provides assistance through JICA (Japanese International Cooperation Agency). South Koreans came to invest in the newly opened economy and provided public buses (many still posting their Seoul local routes and destinations) for Ulaanbaatar city, while Canada and several European nations provided smaller and targeted aid projects. A faltering economy caused in part by the Soviet withdrawal required rapid infusion of aid. As a nation that had recently opted for a democratic constitution, Mongolia could not be abandoned by the West to be plucked up by resurgent China. Later, high level visits from the U.S., including George Bush, the first

³⁴ Peace Corps, “About the Peace Corps”, <http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.wherepc.asia.mongolia> (accessed , 6/14/2008 8:47 AM)

³⁵ US AID, “Asia and the Near East,” http://www.usaid.gov/locations/asia_near_east/countries/mongolia/. (Accessed 7/29/2008 9:32 AM).

³⁶ US AID, “Mongolia,” <http://www.usaid.gov/pubs/cbj2003/ane/mn/> (Accessed 7/29/2008 9:35 AM).

U.S. President to visit the country, reinforced the American commitment to Mongolia. American Christian missionaries opened churches in the new open environment of Buddhist Mongolia, and television channels from the U.S., Western Europe, Inner Mongolia, China and Russia became available through satellite and cable connections. For a few years, the pull of the democratic West seemed to establish a new orbit for Mongolia – out of the Sino-Russian inertia. That orbit is still active, but may be losing momentum as China and Russia reassert their predominance in Central Asia.

U.S. Interests in Central Asia and Mongolia

Events in the early nineties converged to reinforce Mongolian democracy. Soviet collapse provided an opportunity for the U.S. and its allies to roll back the twentieth century Russian empire and ensure that it did not re-emerge. In the West, NATO was expanded to include former Soviet satellites. In 1999, the organization admitted Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, and in 2004 Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and the former Soviet republics of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. The Warsaw Pact and COMECON had been earlier dissolved, and Moscow was helpless to maintain its once iron grip on clients. Subsequently, with the invasion of Afghanistan, the U.S. established bases and liaison groups in several CIS republics. While Mongolia was of less importance to the GWOT, it did represent a geopolitical wedge between Russia and China – a geographical expression of continuing Nixon’s strategy to keep America’s one-time arch-enemies apart.

Thus, Mongolia in 1990 represented an opportunity to close the Cold War for good. At the time, the Gorbachev-Yeltsin drama of dissolving the Soviet Union was too fluid to foresee its permanence, and any weak point of access required action. In this perspective, Mongolia was a gift to the West – Mongolians themselves longed for freedom, but perhaps had not thought through the consequences of disengaging so completely from Russia and of rejecting China. Fortunately, American and Mongolian priorities converged. Once the relationship was in good working order, the potential U.S.-Mongolia “axis” opened new promises of further cooperation. Mongolians are pragmatic enough to realize that their survival cannot depend on American goodwill alone, and have worked to involve not only American

allies, but international organizations – the United Nations in particular – as well. But the U.S. will have to remain the key patron for a free and democratic Mongolia.

During my first visit to Mongolia (1994) I met a young American agricultural expert from the state of Missouri. He was in his third year working as advisor in a distant *aimag*, and I asked him what had attracted him to this country. He said his passions were horses, archery and wrestling, and he had arrived in a private heaven here! No doubt many Americans have envisioned Mongolia as an unspoiled Shangri-La, and were disabused of the notion once they arrived. A few others, having read the geopolitical theories of Mackinder and Haushofer, see Mongolia as the heartland of the Eurasian landmass, and “he who controls the heartland, controls the world.” This may have had some truth in the 13th century, but little validity today. Nonetheless, there has been a romantic pull of Mongolia on outsiders since the days of Marco Polo.

Does the U.S. have any actual interests in Mongolia beyond its novelty?

- First, it is a convert to liberal, constitutional, and multiparty democracy. It is incumbent on the U.S. to do everything it can to nurture this nascent democracy and prove that this form of government can work in the non-Western setting. At this early stage, moreover, pro-democracy also translates into pro-U.S., and the U.S. needs friends in Asia.
- Second, a prospering and free market Mongolia also reinforces the dominant American thesis that capitalism is superior to socialism, even if substantial financial assistance is required at early stages to prime the proverbial pump. While the economy has elements of state interference, including regulation and windfall taxes, it is far freer than before 1990, when private property was virtually non-existent.
- Third, aside from the value of Mongolia as a demonstration of the superiority of the democratic way, there are valid geopolitical reasons for American involvement. Having a pro-America outpost in Central Asia is extremely valuable as a listening post to better understand Chinese and Russia activity in the Eurasian heartland. Some electronic eavesdropping is best done at close range, and having boots on the

ground provides visual evidence of commitment by the U.S. to Mongolia. The U.S. is a global power, and should the need arise, direct access to Mongolian bases is an asset, bearing in mind that nuclear weapons are prohibited.

- Fourth, Mongolia has had ongoing relations with North Korea, and this connection could be used as a valuable communication and diplomatic link to reduce Pyongyang's isolation. In August 2002, the Deputy Foreign Minister of North Korea, Kim Young-Il, visited Ulaanbaatar, reviving DPRK-Mongolia relations after a lapse of 14 years. This was followed by a Treaty of Friendly Relations and Cooperation, and a visit by Mongolian Prime Minister Enkhbayar to Pyongyang in November 2003. Perhaps of greatest importance was the North Korean offer to allow Mongolia to use its Rajin-Songbon port to facilitate sea access for foreign trade.³⁷ Cooperation and exchanges in a growing number of areas have been increasing since 2002, although the North Korean refugee issue may be the most sensitive, and the South Korean National Assembly thanked Mongolia for its handling of the issue. North Korea expressed interest in sending workers to Mongolia, and about 300 were engaged in various construction projects in 2006.³⁸

Mongolia's policy towards North Korea is best described as "engagement", in contrast to containment or isolation. While the declaration of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Mongolia was aimed at carving out survival space between China and Russia, it has become more important as North Korea develops its nuclear capability and threatens to destabilize the region. Mongolia is also a model for North Korea's development, and has been mentioned positively for its potential role in influencing North Korean behavior. As Migeedorj Batchimeg has written:

Seemingly, all these countries – the U.S., Japan, South Korea, China, and Russia – somehow recognize that Mongolia can

³⁷ Migeedorj Batchimeg, *Engaging North Korea: Mongolia's DPRK Policy*. Regional Security Issues and Mongolia Series, Number 28 (Ulaanbaatar: The Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006), p. 17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

make a contribution to the peaceful solution of the North Korea issues in neutral ways. These may include a possible modeling and mediating role, rather than Mongolia's simply following the policies of other countries. This is an important factor that would allow Mongolia to maintain its neutrality and independence in dealing with North Korea.³⁹

With signs of gradual economic reform in North Korea, engagement with Mongolia has improved. At the same time, Mongolia is vulnerable to pressure from its near neighbours, and could be a hostage that drags the U.S. into confrontation with either or both Russia and China.

A Hypothetical U.S. Crisis

Some of the dangers to Mongolia from U.S. disengagement can be clarified by postulating a hypothetical scenario in which American global influence or commitment is diminished. Similar to past world empires, the American global empire will not last indefinitely. (Note: I use the word 'empire' in a very loose sense, referring to global interests, not to far-flung territories as was the case with the old British empire. In this sense, American military bases may be the functional equivalent of colonies, insofar as they are subject to American law under Status of Forces Agreements.⁴⁰)

The dissolution of the British Empire required two World Wars, the rise of Third World nationalism, an exhausted economy, a socialist Labour Party, and the emergence of a successor world power, the U.S. Will the American empire pass more easily? For the sake of argument, let us envision an America beset by severe economic recession, energy crisis, and massive domestic debt. A President and Congress are elected to pull back the U.S. to its continental homeland. American military bases close abroad, and the navy declines. The U.S. Air Force finds its operations curtailed with limits on fuel and maintenance. Domestic opposition forces American withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, and a revival of the Taliban follows. Iran and its agents fill the power vacuum left by the U.S. In several Europe countries, *sharia* takes its place alongside western law, and as the proportion of Muslims

³⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁰ See Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000)

increases, Christians and secularists become a minority.⁴¹ Islamic political parties increase their shares of the electorate and become a coalition member in several states.

Taking advantage of American distraction, China appoints a governor for Taiwan, and forces the island province to accept him or face severe curtailment of economic privileges enjoyed by Taiwan businessmen on the mainland. At the same time, China experiences economic downturn due to decline in trade with America. The population continues to increase, and illegal immigration to Mongolia raises the Han proportion to over 15 per cent. Both Beijing and Ulaanbaatar seek to stem the flow of economic refugees, many of whom buy property through compliant and cooperating Mongolian citizens, and establish businesses. In return for Chinese economic cooperation, Mongolia applies for full membership in the Shanghai Cooperative Organization for the sake of trade privileges and reduced economic pressures, and is accepted by the group. Once a symbolic organization, the SCO has become a regional association beginning to cooperate in military affairs.

Mongolia's economy also suffers, with increasing indebtedness to China. Still reliant on Russian energy, Mongolia is torn between its two neighbours. A large influx of Chinese workers, farmers and entrepreneurs into Siberia fills the vacuum left by the depleting Russian population, many of whom had migrated back to European Russia or abroad. Global warming has pushed the tree line further north, and opened vast tracts of land to agriculture. Unable to control its eastern lands, Siberia becomes part of the Chinese economic complex, with the Tumen estuary the new center of the Siberian-Dongbei-Mongolian-North Korea linked economies.

The U.S. inability to sustain its presence in East Asia also affects Japan. Credibility of the American nuclear umbrella and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty becomes a dead letter, and Japanese leaders are forced to pursue a nuclear option in light of a declining population and the small recruitment

⁴¹ A number of writers have explored these themes. See Bat Ye'or, *Eurabia* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), Oriana Fallaci, *The Force of Reason* (New York: Rizzoli, 2006), Irshad Manji, *The Trouble with Islam* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).

pool for its Self Defense Forces. Fear of revived militarism in Japan affects South Korea, which leans closer to China, and finds greater economic opportunity in the huge mainland market. Many Asians blame America for the downturn in the Asia Pacific economy, and shift assets to China. With a lowering American presence in Mongolia, Japan and Korea become more important to the Ulaanbaatar government. However, closer South Korean and Chinese cooperation reduce the value of the Korean connection as an alternate outlet for Mongolia. Mongolia is forced to reduce its “third neighbour” approach and accept a growing Chinese presence and dominance.

With growing apprehension in Moscow over Mongolia’s China tilt, Russia becomes more active in promoting separatism in northern Mongolia. A Russian-trained civilian corps of Buryats in Ulan-Ude is sent into northern towns as entrepreneurs, and whip up anti-Chinese sentiments. Nostalgia for the good old Soviet days is stimulated through Buryat radio and TV programs. Kazakhs in the west lay claim to border areas. In this grim scenario, America recedes as a protector of Mongolian sovereignty, while Sino-Russian rivalry is tempered by past lessons. Instead of competing for a winner-take-all outcome, they establish an informal condominium, with Russia in control of the north, and China in control of the south. In both cases, compliant Mongolian officials take their orders from the respective neighbour governments. Ulaanbaatar remains an international city, governed by Mongolians within the framework established by Russia and China, but having little real jurisdiction beyond the city limits.

Conclusions

Tsedendambyn Batbayar characterizes Mongolian foreign policy as pursuing fundamental national interests as “pragmatic realism.”⁴² The country’s leaders have sought to create favorable external conditions for existence, and strengthen relations with influential countries within a context of non-aligned policy “so long as it does not threaten the country’s vital interests.” Although having no recent militarist tradition to overcome, Mongolia comes close to sharing the spirit of the Japanese constitution’s Article Nine. Adopted by the State Hural in 1998, “The Basis of the State Military Policy of Mongolia” stated that “Under no circumstances will it (i.e. Mongolia) resort to the first use of military force against another country, it shall not pose any military danger or threat, and it shall not take part in any war or armed conflict unless it itself becomes a target of armed aggression from outside.” Furthermore, “It shall not join any military alliance or bloc unless the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Mongolia comes (*sic*) under military threat or danger, or if such a danger and threat become imminent.” The constitution bars “entry into, stationing of and passing through its territory foreign military force in the event of the absence of such a Mongolian law.”⁴³

From this four scenario study, we can draw several principles:

- Mongolia’s existence as a nation is an unalterable fact, based on culture and history.
- The Mongolian state is subject to the exigencies of geography, and the triangular relationship including China and Russia.

⁴² Batbayar and Soni, *Modern Mongolia*, p. 119.

⁴³ Article 4, Chapter One “Sovereignty of the State,” *Constitution of Mongolia* (Adopted on: 13 Jan 1992), http://www.servat.unibe.ch/law/icl/mg00000_.html (accessed 7/6/2008 10:01 AM).

- The prosperity and survival of Mongolia as a MSNS is enhanced by Mongolia's actions and policies, including diplomacy, economic development, legislation, and military preparedness.
- Continuation of Mongolian positive trends relies heavily on commitment and involvement of the U.S. and friends.

Other nations – especially in Europe and the developed regions of Asia – must contribute to the political and economic development of Mongolia with targeted assistance. Denmark, for example, has made a small but important contribution in financing an English language newspaper. Mongolia will do what is necessary to defend its existence as a nation-state, although it prefers to remain neutral. It does not renounce the use of military force to defend itself. Democracy also has its dangers for Mongolia. Voters impatient with results may shift support to demagogues who provide easy answers. Political infighting within and between political parties will be based on policy issues, and some politicians already have reputations as pro-Chinese or pro-Russian. Hural infighting can cause government stalemate, and corruption is becoming a serious problem, according to some observers.

In 1992, Mongolia took a leap of faith – that alignment with the West, market economies, and liberal democracy would provide the most effective guarantee of its sovereignty and survival. Unlike the former Soviet Republics which have maintained commonwealth links to Russia, Mongolia stands apart and must also face an uncertain future *vis-à-vis* China. In this sense, neither the U.S. nor the West – and here we must include Japan – has primary strategic or material national interests in the country. Perhaps without realizing it, Mongolia has introduced a new concept in international relations – what I have called “cooperative sovereignty.” By this, I mean that Mongolia is eager to enjoy the independence that all Modern Sovereign Nation-States claim as part of their constitution, but at the same time, is cognizant of the necessary reliance on distant sponsors for that sovereignty. For this to remain available, other democracies must provide external substance to Mongolian democracy – including development assistance, investment, and international support. Mongolia is also the canary in the coalmine with regard to global democracy. It is an outpost in a region where democracy has had little history, and where prospects are not guaranteed, should Russia and China perceive major democratic states as strategic antagonists to their ambitions.

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