

MONGOLIA'S POSITION BETWEEN TWO GLOBAL POWERS: RUSSIA AND CHINA

UOT 327; 930.22

<https://doi.org/10.30546/3006-0346.2024.6.84.024>

MAJNUN HASANOV

*University of Economics and**Human Sciences in Warsaw**Master's student in International Relations and Security**E-mail: majnun.hasanov@mail.ru*

Introduction

When we say Mongolia, Genghis Khan (Temuchin) comes to mind first. The Mongol Empire, which once spread over $\frac{1}{4}$ of the world, covered 24 million sq. Km. Which is the second largest historical state in terms of area after the British Empire (35.5 million sq. Km), which once had the largest territory in world history, and was called the “empire on which the sun never sets”. The territory of the state at various times covered the territory of the present-day states of Mongolia, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

In our modern era, the only heir to this entire empire, present-day Mongolia, is approximately 15 times smaller than its predecessor and is currently the 18th largest state in the world by area.

If we look at today's world, we easily discover that it is a world made up of small states,” that is what Daniel Thurer points out while emphasising on the myth and reality of small states. But in terms of defining such states basically three key factors are taken into consideration, i.e., a country's geographical size, population size and its degree of influence on international affairs [6, p. 27].

If we look at the political map of the world, we can clearly see that Mongolia, located in northeastern Asia, is sandwiched between two potential modern great powers of the world, the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation.

This article will systematically analyze the historical and political reasons for Mongolia's isolation from world politics and examine the main factors that played a role in the emergence of this phenomenon.

Main part

Mongolia's current geopolitical political position is indeed an outlier. Physically sandwiched between the two great powers of Russia and China, it struggles to define its own geopolitical position on the world

stage, as one Mongolian official describes their country as “a hybrid of Central and East Asia” [3, p. 77].

Mongolia, with an area of approximately 16 million square kilometers and a population of 3 million, is often thought of as a buffer zone between the two largest countries of the Eurasian continent (Russia and China) for geographical, historical and political reasons. Mongolia cooperates only with Russia and China in many areas. However, when many people look at the political map of the world, they think that Mongolia has a small border with Kazakhstan. Everyone is interested in why Mongolia does not cooperate with Kazakhstan, one of the largest countries in Central Asia? If we look carefully at the map, we will see that due to the natural border factor, China has a northwestern border with Kazakhstan, and this 37 km land area located between Kazakhstan and Mongolia has prevented these two countries from being neighbors with each other. At the same time, since Mongolia is geographically landlocked, it has based its main foreign policy in the region on a balanced approach towards Russia and China. Having a weak economy and population compared to its neighbors has led it to accept its fate. Another factor to consider is history of the trilateral relationship.

Historically, Mongolia's ties with China have been closer than those with Russia. Russia appears on the Mongol horizon in the early and later medieval period and of course it has been very prominently there from the beginning of this century. However, direct contact and interaction with sedentary China go back to ancient times. The relationship with Russia started from the seventeenth century. Mongolia was re-established, when the Qing dynasty disintegrated and was overthrown in 1911. In the same year “Independent Mongolia” was instituted under the leadership of Bogdo Jebzundamba Khutugtu, the Living Buddha. Later the government of Mongolia announced its independence and establishment of Mongolian state to the nine big powers of that time, namely, the UK, France, Germany, USA, Japan, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and Austria. For various reasons they did

not extend recognition to Mongolia. Only Tibet established bilateral relationship and signed a treaty with “state of Mongolia” in 1913 [9].

But Mongolia’s two neighbors, the Tsarist Russia and the newly formed Republic of China, did not willingly give up their claims on Mongolia. From this time on, both neighbors had different positions on the Mongolian independence issue. Russian interest in Mongolia was to create a buffer zone between China and themselves [9]. In the first quarter of the 20th century, with the October Revolution of 1917, the overthrow of the Tsarist government, the new government that came to power already made changes in Russian policy. This was because Russia, which had been defeated in the First World War and had lost territories, decided to support Mongolia, which was trying to officially declare its independence in the region.

In 1921, as a result of the national democratic revolution, national independence restored the initial independence of Mongolia, after which it implemented radical revolutions transforming its society and bringing it under significant influence of the Comintern and Soviet Russia, effectively becoming a “satellite” of the USSR. Thus, a small nomadic country came to be dependent on its two giant neighbours [5, p. 10]. An interesting case combining elements of these two models of socialist transformation is that of Mongolia, formerly the Mongolian People’s Republic. For 70 years a client state of the Soviet Union, Mongolia was sometimes known as the unofficial “sixteenth republic” of the USSR [7, p. 459]. A year after the establishment of the Marxist-Soviet regime in Urga, embassies were opened in Ulaanbaatar and Moscow respectively.

In May 1924 the Soviet Union recognized China’s “full sovereignty” over outer Mongolia. However, a month later, following the death of the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu, Mongolia declared its independence as the Mongolian People’s Republic (MPR) [2, p. 176].

Despite these foreign policy successes, these were treacherous times when political and religious ideologies clashed, carrying out repressions, as was the case in other socialist states that the USSR had subordinated in the 1930s and 1940s. Even during the rocky period of the 1930s and ’40s, Mongolia and Russia — to be precise, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic — cooperated in a number of

historical watershed moments. One of the most recognized examples is the Battle of the Khalkhiin Gol, where the MPR and USSR armies fought the Imperial Army of Japan and the Japanese puppet-state of Manchukuo from May to September 1939. This series of Battle was a prelude to World War II, coming just before Germany’s invasion of Poland [10].

After the Second World War, new realities emerged for Mongolia in the context of international relations. Thus, the state voted for independence in a referendum held in 1945. With the recognition of this referendum in China, territorial claims and hostility against Mongolia disappeared, and the ice between Mongolia and China began to melt. However, this independence did not last long, and Mongolia continued to remain under Soviet influence based on the agreements signed with the USSR. As a result, every field, from the military to the economy, is exposed to soviet influence and ideology.

In February 1946, the two states signed an agreement “On Friendship and Mutual Assistance”. According to the agreement, the parties committed themselves that if one of them is attacked, the other will “provide all kinds of assistance, including military assistance.” In fact, it was nothing more than a legal justification of the transformation of the MNR into a military base of the Soviets. In the following periods, a number of contracts and agreements were signed. Among them, the trade agreement of 1957, the agreement on scientific and technical cooperation of 1966 and the agreement “On friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance” can be mentioned. Those agreements completed the establishment of Soviet control over all spheres of the life of the MNR became completely dependent on the Soviet Union [4, p. 116-117]. After World War II, Mongolia began new relations with the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. After China, based on Soviet ideology, abandoned its territorial claims against Mongolia in 1945, Mongolian-Chinese relations developed on an increasing basis. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, it established diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China. In 1952, they signed an agreement on economic and cultural cooperation. In 1960, the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation was signed. The last document covered wider areas of relations between the two states [4, p. 117]. Mongolia, maintaining its presence in such a sensitive

region, became a member of the United Nations in 1961, thereby gaining an important political and diplomatic advantage. Thus, Mongolia sought to establish diplomatic relations with capitalist countries in this way, and even if it had the power to influence international political processes in the region, it was trying to assert its presence in the field of international relations. After that, the process of recognition of the MNR by major countries began. From the recognition of Great Britain in 1963 to 1983, the number of countries that established diplomatic relations with it increased significantly. In that year, MNR already had diplomatic relations with 92 countries, about 20 of which were developed countries. Finally, in 1987, the United States also established diplomatic relations with Mongolia.

The weakening of Russian positions in Mongolia began with the Mongolian democratic revolution of the winter of 1989/1990. It continued until December 1992, when the last detachment of Soviet soldiers crossed the Russian-Mongolian border [8].

During the cold war period Soviet penetration in Mongolia represented the first instance of extension of Soviet indirect control over a neighbouring non-Russian area. China, on the other hand, failed to make its Soviet like presence in Mongolia and the Mongolian leadership remained obedient to Soviet dictum. Mongolia willingly or unwillingly always stood firmly on the side of the Russians during the years of the Sino-Soviet confrontation. That is to say, for almost 70 years Mongolia remained dependent on the former Soviet Union in its internal and external affairs, thus affecting its sovereign and independence status. This, in turn, also affected its cultural, political and regional identity [6, p. 30].

Mongolia, which has faced the challenges of history, has passed and is still passing a number of challenges in the 21st century. One of these is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was formed in 2001 as a challenge to new changes occurring on vast Eurasian space after collapse of the socialist system and the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War, the emergence of the new international order, the normalization of Chinese-Russian relations, the rise of terrorism, and other circumstances created the need for search of mutual understanding between the states of the Eurasian continent, creation of new structures for dialogue on issues of re-

gional cooperation, global challenges of world politics and international relations [1, p. 321].

Mongolia is not an official member of the SCO, but has observer status in the organization. Mongolia has been participating in the SCO's activities as an observer since 2004 and has certain cooperative relations with the organization. Mongolia prefers to pursue a neutral policy in the international arena. It seeks to maintain a balance, especially between its large neighbors, Russia and China. Although Mongolia wants to participate in regional security and economic integration, full membership could place it under greater strategic obligations. Becoming a member of the SCO means that Mongolia will have to take a more active role in the organization's security issues, military cooperation, and regional policies. Moving to full membership may seem more risky for Mongolia than its benefits. By remaining an observer, Mongolia both participates in the SCO's activities and maintains the ability to cooperate independently with other international and regional organizations. This makes its foreign policy more flexible.

In 2017, the SCO accepted as full members 2 observer-states-India and Pakistan. Many experts believe that Mongolia is a real candidate for full membership in the SCO. It must be said that there are both external and internal circumstances. Mongolian society has not yet reached a consensus on this issue. Among the Mongolian politicians, scholars, experts, there are differing approaches to this issue. Some believe it's time for Mongolia to become a full member of the SCO. Others expressed a view that we need to wait; it's not yet the time or that we need to wait for the right moment to address this issue [1, p. 323].

REFERENCES:

1. A. Dulbaa. *Interconnectivity in the Region of Eurasia: Mongolia's Presence in the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), International Relations and Diplomacy, June 2018. Vol. 6, No. 6, 319-324 p.*
2. E. Hyer. *The "Great Game": Mongolia Between Russia and China, Altaic Affinities Proceedings of the 40th meeting of the permanent International Altaistic Conference (PIAC) PROVO, UTAH (1997), 172-182 p.*
3. J. Irgengioro. *Mongolia-Central Asia relations*

and the implications of the rise of China on its future evolution, 2022, 76-106 p.

4. R. İsmayil, N. Axundova. *Asiya və Afrika ölkələrinin çağdaş tarixi (1945-2000-ci illər) (Uzaq, Cənub-şərqi, Cənubi və Mərkəzi Asiya ölkələri)*. Bakı: Çəşmə, 2001.-400s.

5. S. Yigit. *Mongolia's Historic Relations with its Largest Neighbour: Russia, Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies Volume 2/Special Issue IV, August 2021, 9-31 p.*

6. Shard K. Soni. *The Geopolitical Dilemma of Small States in External Relations: Mongolia's Tryst with 'Immediate' and 'Third' Neighbours*, 27-44 p.

7. T. Ginsburg. *Between Russia and China: Political Reform in Mongolia*, Vol XXXV, No. 5, 1995, 459-471 p.

8. <https://regard-est.com/mongolia-russia-china-the-little-horse-between-the-bear-and-the-dragon>

9. https://www.smhric.org/SMW_16.htm

10. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/mongolia-russia-ties-at-100/>

11. <https://youtu.be/ao-ctcSyQtw?si=-PosKRw-WUHXSvzRv>

SUMMARY

“Mongolia's Position Between Two Global Powers: Russia and China” provides an in-depth analysis of Mongolia's geopolitical and historical context as a landlocked nation situated between Russia and China, two of the world's leading powers. The study explores the complex interplay of historical legacies, economic dependencies, and diplomatic strategies that shape Mongolia's position on the global stage. Mongolia serves as a strategic buffer state between Russia and China. Its geopolitical position, limited economic capacity, and small population have necessitated a balanced foreign policy approach. Historically, Mongolia maintained close ties with China, with relations dating back to ancient times, whereas Russian influence emerged prominently in the 17th century. However, during the Soviet era, Mongolia became a satellite state of the USSR, profoundly shaping its political, cultural, and economic frameworks for nearly 70 years. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a turning point, as Mongolia sought to redefine its international relations and achieve greater autonomy. By the late 20th century, it had diversified its diplomatic engagements, estab-

lishing relations with major powers, including the United States. Despite these efforts, Mongolia continues to face challenges stemming from its dependency on its two powerful neighbors. A significant focus of the study is Mongolia's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), where it has maintained observer status since 2004. This status allows Mongolia to engage in regional cooperation while avoiding the strategic obligations that full membership would entail. The country's cautious approach to the SCO exemplifies its broader strategy of neutrality and flexibility in navigating regional and global politics. In conclusion, the paper underscores Mongolia's delicate balancing act as it seeks to maintain sovereignty and foster diplomatic relationships while mitigating the pressures exerted by its geographical and historical realities. Mongolia's strategic neutrality, particularly its position within the SCO, illustrates its nuanced approach to international relations in the 21st century.

Keywords: *Russia and China, Mongolia, great powers, USSR, buffer zone, United Nations (UN), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).*

Məcnun Həsənov

Varşava İqtisadiyyat və Humanitar

Elmlər Universiteti

Beynəlxalq Münasibətlər və Təhlükəsizlik ixtisası üzrə magistrant

XÜLASƏ

“Monqolustanın İki Qlobal Güc Arasındakı Mövqeyi: Rusiya və Çin, dünyanın iki aparıcı gücü olan Rusiya və Çin arasında yerləşən dənizə çıxışı olmayan bir dövlət kimi Monqolustanın geosiyasi və tarixi kontekstinin dərin təhlilini təqdim edir. Tədqiqat Monqolustanın qlobal səhnədəki mövqeyini formalaşdıran tarixi irslərin, iqtisadi asılılıqların və diplomatik strategiyaların mürəkkəb qarşılıqlı təsirini araşdırır. Monqolustan Rusiya və Çin arasında strateji bufer dövlət rolunu oynayır. Onun geosiyasi mövqeyi, məhdud iqtisadi imkanları və kiçik əhalisi balanslaşdırılmış xarici siyasət yanaşmasını zəruri edib. Tarixən Monqolustan Çinlə sıx əlaqələr saxlayırdı, münasibətləri qədim dövrlərə gedib çıxır, halbuki Rusiya təsiri 17-ci əsrdə qabarıq şəkildə ortaya çıxıb. Bununla belə, Sovet dövründə Monqolustan SSRİ-nin peyk dövlətinə çevrilərək, təx-

minən 70 il ərzində siyasi, mədəni və iqtisadi çərçivələrini dərinlən formalaşdırdı. 1991-ci ildə Sovet İttifaqının dağılması Monqolustan beynəlxalq münasibətlərini yenidən müəyyənləşdirməyə və daha böyük muxtariyyət əldə etməyə çalışdığı üçün dönüş nöqtəsi oldu. 20-ci əsrin sonlarında o, ABŞ daxil olmaqla, böyük güclərlə əlaqələr quraraq diplomatik əlaqələrini şaxələndirdi. Bu səylərə baxmayaraq, Monqolustan iki güclü qonşusundan asılılığından irəli gələn problemlərlə üzləşməyə davam edir. Tədqiqatın mühüm diqqət mərkəzində Monqolustanın 2004-cü ildən müşahidəçi statusunu saxladığı Şanxay Əməkdaşlıq Təşkilatında (ŞƏT) iştirakıdır. Bu status Monqolustana regional əməkdaşlığa imkan verir, eyni zamanda tamhüquqlu üzvlüyün gətirəcəyi strateji öhdəliklərdən qaçır. Ölkənin ŞƏT-ə ehtiyatlı yanaşması onun daha geniş neytrallıq strategiyasını və regional və qlobal siyasətdə çevikliyi nümayiş etdirir. Sonda məqalə Monqolustanın coğrafi və tarixi reallıqlarının yaratdığı təzyiqləri yumşaltmaqla yanaşı, suverenliyini qoruyub saxlamağa və diplomatik münasibətləri inkişaf etdirməyə çalışdığı üçün onun incə balanslaşdırma aktını vurğulayır. Monqolustanın strateji neytrallığı, xüsusən də ŞƏT daxilindəki mövqeyi onun 21-ci əsrdə beynəlxalq münasibətlərə nüanslı yanaşmasını nümayiş etdirir.

Açar sözlər: *Rusiya və Çin, Monqolustan, böyük güclər, SSRİ, bufer zona, Birləşmiş Millətlər Təşkilatı (BMT), Şanxay Əməkdaşlıq Təşkilatı (ŞƏT).*

Меджнун Гасанов

Университет Экономики и Гуманитарных Наук в Варшаве.

Студент магистратуры по Международным Отношениям и Безопасности

РЕЗЮМЕ

«Положение Монголии между двумя мировыми державами: Россией и Китаем» дает глубокий анализ геополитического и исторического контекста Монголии как страны, не имеющей выхода к морю, расположенной между Россией и Китаем, двумя ведущими мировыми державами. Исследование исследует сложное взаимодействие исторического наследия, экономической зависимости и дипломатических стратегий, которые формируют положение Монголии на

мировой арене. Монголия служит стратегическим буферным государством между Россией и Китаем. Ее геополитическое положение, ограниченный экономический потенциал и небольшая численность населения потребовали сбалансированного подхода к внешней политике. Исторически Монголия поддерживала тесные связи с Китаем, причем отношения восходят к древним временам, тогда как российское влияние проявилось заметно в 17 веке. Однако в советское время Монголия стала государством-сателлитом СССР, глубоко формируя его политические, культурные и экономические рамки на протяжении почти 70 лет. Распад Советского Союза в 1991 году ознаменовал поворотный момент, поскольку Монголия стремилась пересмотреть свои международные отношения и добиться большей автономии. К концу 20-го века она диверсифицировала свои дипломатические обязательства, установив отношения с крупными державами, включая Соединенные Штаты. Несмотря на эти усилия, Монголия продолжает сталкиваться с проблемами, вытекающими из ее зависимости от двух ее могущественных соседей. Значительное внимание в исследовании уделяется участию Монголии в Шанхайской организации сотрудничества (ШОС), где она сохраняет статус наблюдателя с 2004 года. Этот статус позволяет Монголии участвовать в региональном сотрудничестве, избегая стратегических обязательств, которые повлекло бы за собой полное членство. Осторожный подход страны к ШОС иллюстрирует ее более широкую стратегию нейтралитета и гибкости в навигации по региональной и глобальной политике. В заключение в статье подчеркивается деликатный баланс Монголии, поскольку она стремится сохранить суверенитет и способствовать дипломатическим отношениям, одновременно смягчая давление, оказываемое ее географическими и историческими реалиями. Стратегический нейтралитет Монголии, особенно ее положение в ШОС, иллюстрирует ее тонкий подход к международным отношениям в 21-м веке.

Ключевые слова: *Россия и Китай, Монголия, великие державы, СССР, буферная зона, Организация Объединенных Наций (ООН), Шанхайская Организация Сотрудничества (ШОС).*