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THE NATURE OF MONGOLIA'S EXTERNAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Mongolia's geographical position necessitates the establishment of a third space within its borders that can impact its neighboring countries. This is crucial for addressing issues related to national sovereignty and security, and requires the state to adopt a strategy in line with its black box policy and the prevailing circumstances. The strategic importance of location is highlighted by the saying "the destiny of a nation is determined by its location", emphasizing the need for a strategy that is adaptable to the specific conditions. Flexibility is key in selecting and implementing a strategy that is well-suited to our country's needs.

- Mongolia's unique security characteristics and challenges
- Relations with Russia and China, its two major neighbors
- The strategic importance of the "Third Neighbor" policy framework
- Mongolia's foreign policy goals, principles, and implementation
- Opportunities for involvement in international collective security systems
- Geopolitical implications of Mongolia's landlocked position

This in-depth study delves into the security challenges stemming from Mongolia's geographical location, analyzing the decision-making processes in foreign policy, the dynamics of relations with neighboring countries, and possibilities for regional collaboration. The research investigates how Mongolia can navigate intricate geopolitical landscapes while safeguarding its strategic independence and national interests.

The analysis draws on theoretical perspectives from international relations, exploring how small nations can effectively manage their security environment through diplomatic initiatives, strategic alliances, and collaborative efforts. Special emphasis is placed on striking a balance between fostering positive ties with immediate neighbors and expanding international partnerships.

KEYWORDS

Mongolia's Security, Two Neighbors, "Third Neighbor" Policy, Mongolia's Foreign Policy, International Cooperation, Geopolitical Strategy, Collective Security, Diplomatic Relations

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Introduction

The security of a country is influenced by both external and internal factors, with the external environment being shaped by the relationships with neighboring countries and national interests. Mongolia's national security has historically been tied to the international balance of power and interests, particularly between its neighboring countries. This dynamic remains relevant today.¹

In traditional terms, a state's foreign policy is a reflection of its national interests on the global stage. The goal of foreign policy is to create a favorable international environment for the country.² Maintaining the ability to make independent foreign policy decisions is crucial for ensuring a state's independence and sovereignty.

From this perspective, the Mongolian National Security Concept emphasizes the importance of unity in state foreign policy and the prioritization of national interests in foreign relations as key elements for ensuring national security.³ It also highlights political and diplomatic activities as the primary means to achieve this goal, demonstrating a clear and well-defined approach to external factors.

The section on "Components of National Security and Methods of Ensuring Security" in the Mongolian National Security Concept outlines key provisions related to the external security environment and the country's foreign policy.

The external security environment of Mongolia is significantly influenced by the foreign policies and actions of other major powers, particularly those in Northeast Asia, in addition to our own country's foreign policy.

The realist school of international relations emphasizes that the political and geopolitical strategies of major powers play a significant role in shaping the international security landscape. Mongolia, as a relatively passive player in the region, focuses on adapting to external changes to safeguard its interests rather than actively influencing global dynamics.⁴

In the field of international relations and security theory, sovereign states are often classified based on their varying abilities to ensure their own sovereignty. This classification is widely recognized internationally and is based on the disparities in opportunities that states have to secure their own sovereignty. Essentially, states differ from one another based on their varying levels of capability and resources to guarantee their security. Some states have the capacity not only to secure their own safety but also to safeguard their neighbors, allies, and even the broader region, while others rely on external assistance to ensure their security.⁵

Foreign policy decision-making

To create a favorable external security environment, Mongolia can mitigate the negative impact of external factors on security by implementing a rational and fundamental foreign policy and enhancing legal regulations in this area.

There are four models of foreign policy decision-making⁶:

Rational choice: In this model, foreign policy decisions are made by a single individual with authority in the state.

Institutional: Foreign policy decisions are made in accordance with the established government structure and powers, rather than by a single individual.

Bureaucratic: Decisions are based on conflicting views and interests of government authorities, reached through consensus and negotiation.

Incremental: Foreign policy decisions are broken down into parts, with the most crucial aspects separated for focused decision-making.

In practice, a combination of the four models mentioned above is typically used for decision-making rather than strictly adhering to one model. Due to the influence of the political process and various factors, it is unlikely that a single model can be consistently applied.

In small democratic countries, it is generally more advisable and less risky to base decisions on the established government structure, which aligns with the second model.

¹ Myagmar, D., & Suhee, G. (2006). The concept of national security: New conditions, need for clarity and update. *Strategic Studies*, 3, 6-7.

² Baasankhuu, G., Batbayar, B., Dolgorsuren, G., & Jargalsaikhan, D. (2016). *Fundamentals of international relations and globalization*. (p.98). Admon Press.

³ State Great Khural of Mongolia, 2010, para. 3.1.1

⁴ Batchimeg, M. (2012). *Mongolia in the chess game*. Munkhiin Useg.

⁵ Baasankhuu, G., Batbayar, B., Dolgorsuren, G., & Jargalsaikhan, D. (2016). *Fundamentals of international relations and globalization*. (p.75). Admon Press.

⁶ Tumturchuluun, G. (2009). *World of the world: Mongolian geopolitics and diplomacy*. (p.37). Admon Press.

The foreign policy decision-making process involves several stages, such as information collection, analysis, opinion formation, drafting decisions for higher authorities, and final decision-making, followed by implementation.¹

While there is no specific regulation on who can propose foreign policy initiatives or which official statements constitute state policy in democratic countries, there is a general consensus at the decision-making level in this regard.

An ambiguous and underdeveloped foreign policy decision-making process could jeopardize the coherence of the state's foreign policy, the primacy of national interests in foreign relations, and the use of subjective approaches in making foreign policy decisions.

The essence of neighborly relationships

The external security environment of any country is primarily influenced by its geographical surroundings, including its neighbors, adjacent countries, and the region in which it is situated, regardless of the country's size. For Mongolia, a landlocked country positioned between two superpowers, establishing friendly relations with its neighboring countries is more of a necessity than a choice in foreign policy. Some scholars argue that national interests are directly linked to a country's geographical location, with geopolitical factors serving as the main criteria for defining national interests. These interests are shaped by enduring factors such as a country's geographical location, population size, and historical traditions.²

As tensions rise between major powers, each side seeks to court smaller countries to their side, using them as pawns in their conflicts. The escalating relationship between Russia and China presents a significant risk of drawing Mongolia into conflict, given its position between the two countries. Mongolia, which relies on both neighbors to some extent, faces a serious security threat if relations with one deteriorate. It is important to note that Mongolia considers neither Russia nor China more important than its "Third Neighbor." To effectively implement its "Third Neighbor" policy, Mongolia must carefully navigate the attitudes of its two large neighbors.

Mongolia's search for a Third Neighbor - a concept attributed to U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, who noted that Mongolia has two good neighbors, but, if it needed a third, the U.S. would be happy to be it. While Russia and China are the giant neighbors that Mongolia shared borders with, the idea of a third neighbor refers to countries other than Russia and China that Mongolia has built relationships with. The term 'third neighbor' was first mentioned by U.S. Secretary of State James Baker during a meeting with Mongolian leaders during his visit in August 1990. "Baker said that referring to the U.S. as a third neighbor". "That was a rhetorical gesture to support Mongolia's first move toward democracy." The concept of third neighbors was picked up by Mongolian policymakers and eventually became formalized in its foreign policy and legislation.³

The National Security Concept emphasizes the importance of developing bilateral and multilateral relations with highly developed democratic countries in various areas such as politics, economy, culture, and humanitarian efforts within the framework of the "Third Neighbor" policy.

The security of a country is significantly influenced by its neighboring and nearby countries, which is particularly crucial for smaller nations that may face the risk of excessive reliance on their neighbors.

While the primary objective of Mongolia's "Third Neighbor" policy is to reduce the influence of its two neighbors, it is not intended as a policy that is hostile towards them.

In terms of security, Mongolia aims to enhance its security through the implementation of the "Third Neighbor" policy. This policy focuses on receiving support for security, promoting democratic governance, securing economic support and investment, and fostering cooperation in integration.

The priority direction of Mongolia's foreign policy is evident in its emphasis on relations with its two major neighbors.

By prioritizing relations with neighboring countries, Mongolia risks being constrained by geographical determinism and potentially limiting its engagement with other directions. If this trend continues, Mongolia may find itself in a subordinate political and economic position, with the influence of European or Russian culture diminishing.⁴

Mongolia's foreign policy is guided by the principles of maintaining balanced relations with its two neighbors and engaging with third countries to avoid undue influence from its neighbors. Active participation in international organizations and regional cooperation is essential for small countries to be effective members

² Baasankhuu, G., Batbayar, B., Dolgorsuren, G., & Jargalsaikhan, D. (2016). *Fundamentals of international relations and globalization*. (p.111). Admon Press.

³ Densmaa, O., Kaliinaa, G., Nanzad, N., & Otgonbayar, T. (2021). Mongolia's "third neighbor policy." In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Regional Security and Global Development* (p. 74). RS Global. https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_conf/25012021/7365

⁴ Bold, R. (2019). *Some issues of Mongolian geopolitics*. (p.23). Academy of Management.

of the global community. In today's interconnected world, no country can guarantee its security in isolation. Mongolia, situated in a region with strategic importance and potential conflicts, focuses on building relationships with all countries in Northeast Asia to safeguard its security. Despite the challenges in this region, Mongolia remains committed to pursuing a rational foreign policy approach.

Collective security system

The regional cooperation system consists of two main forms: collective security and collective defense.

The core principle of collective security is that countries set aside their individual interests in aggression and power struggles to collaborate with other nations in order to maintain international security. Through this cooperation, countries collectively work to safeguard their own security as well as that of others within a unified security framework.

Despite some confusion among prominent scholars in the field, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of collective security and collective defense, as they are fundamentally distinct from each other.

The concept of collective defense involves states with similar ideologies coming together to protect themselves against a common enemy.¹ NATO and the Warsaw Pact were prominent examples of this during the Cold War, with both alliances operating under a collective defense system to deter threats.

In contrast, a collective security system aims to prevent threats both from external sources and within the system itself. The primary objective is for all member countries to unite against any aggressor, ensuring that no powerful force can invade. Essentially, the principle of a collective security system is "if one attacks, all will defend."

The collective defense system brings together allies who act unilaterally, while the collective security system allows adversaries to come together and regulate each other within the system.²

This concept is rooted in Wilsonianism, as former US President Woodrow Wilson emphasized in his 14-point declaration that international relations should be based on the self-determination of nations rather than the balance of power. He also advocated for security to be ensured through collective security rather than military alliances.³

Most importantly, however, was Point 14, which called for a "general association of nations" that would offer "mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small nations alike." When Wilson left for Paris in December 1918, he was determined that the Fourteen Points, and his League of Nations (as the association of nations was known), be incorporated into the peace settlements.⁴

For Mongolia, the option to join the collective security system is available based on its foreign policy direction and fundamental principles, but the opportunity to join the collective defense system is limited.

Given the current likelihood of increased confrontation and conflict in international relations, joining the collective defense system could potentially jeopardize Mongolia's existing relationships with certain partner countries.

Conclusions

The distinctive geographical position of Mongolia plays a crucial role in shaping the security and future progress of our nation. Given this exceptional external security landscape, the significance of state policies in safeguarding Mongolia through political and diplomatic channels is growing. It is therefore recommended to enhance our country's security by pursuing a strategic and proactive foreign policy, fostering mutual trust, friendship, and cooperation in a balanced manner with neighboring countries and the "third neighbor."

Mongolia's strategic significance lies in its unique position between two major powers, offering both advantages and vulnerabilities in terms of national security. This positioning underscores the importance of careful strategic navigation to maintain sovereignty while leveraging geographical advantages.

The "Third Neighbor" policy is imperative for Mongolia as it ensures balanced relationships with its two major neighbors. This strategic approach allows Mongolia to diversify diplomatic relationships, reduce economic vulnerability, expand cooperation opportunities, and maintain strategic autonomy in foreign policy decision-making.

¹ Capie, D. H. (2007). *The Asia Pacific security lexicon*. (p.56). Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

² Ibid.

³ Kissinger, H. (2012). *Diplomatic practice* (D. Chuluundorj, Trans.). (p.18). Munkhiin Useg. (Original work published 1994)

⁴ Wilson, W. (1918, January 8). *Address to Congress on the fourteen points* [Speech]. U.S. Congress. <https://www.theworldwar.org/learn/peace/fourteen-points>

Small democratic states benefit from institutional model-based decision-making mechanisms, which provide reliability and lower risks. This framework ensures decision-making based on established governmental structures, prioritization of national interests, coherence in foreign policy, and reduction of subjective influences in strategic decision-making.

While Mongolia has opportunities to join collective security systems, participation in collective defense systems remains limited. This distinction offers enhanced opportunities for international cooperation, foundation for regional cooperation mechanisms, multilateral approaches to security challenges, and avoidance of exclusive military alliance commitments that could compromise neutrality.

Strategic Recommendations:

Policy Implementation: Maintain balanced policies to enhance trust, friendship, and cooperation with neighboring countries; Implement the "Third Neighbor" policy consistently and sustainably through concrete diplomatic and economic actions; Increase diplomatic influence by actively engaging in international organizations and multilateral frameworks; Develop comprehensive strategies that combine bilateral relationships with multilateral partnerships.

Institutional Strengthening: Improve foreign policy decision-making processes for effectiveness and coherence; Update the National Security Concept to address current challenges and opportunities; Establish capacity-building programs for diplomatic personnel and foreign policy institutions; Enhance inter-agency coordination for consistent policy implementation.

Future Considerations: In a complex global environment with rising regional tensions, Mongolia can utilize its strategic location to pursue an effective foreign policy. By staying flexible yet principled, Mongolia can safeguard national security and promote sustainable development.

Achieving these goals requires ongoing political support, institutional development, and adaptable strategies that respond to changing regional and global dynamics while upholding Mongolia's core interests and values.

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