

Mongolian Game on Geopolitical Chessboard or the comprehensive national power of Mongolia

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Main elements of the comprehensive national power of Mongolia

In the geopolitical sphere, « the interests of the [...] countries, are best defended through [...] skillful manipulation [...] of the changing international balance of power. « (Alan K. Henrikson, 2003). Which interests are vital for Ulaanbaatar - its sovereignty, security or quite simply its existence in the current world”? Could Mongolia defend its interest by itself, or does it need to be comforted by the presence of other states? In the second case, how will it orchestrate this symphony? Why would the other actors participate in this composition?

This paper aims to answer to these questions.

Mongolia is performing acrobatics on the global geopolitical chessboard.

Surrounded by its two neighbors, China and Russia, its geographical, economic and ecological situation dictates the role of an acrobatic player. Nevertheless, it is interesting to guess how long Mongolia could still be playing this game of balance. Who and where are the spectators supposed to be. Is this acrobat capable of “getting others to want what it wants?” (Nye, Joseph S, 1990) and create the dependence of other countries on it in this time of uncertainty?

The Age of uncertainty (2010 UK National Security Strategy) for the power balance over the world for the coming years will be “decisive” as declared by Putin (Clover, Charles, 2012) and by Biden in 2023 (Mueller Julia, 2023).

These years of uncertainty will be decisive; it is true for big powers as well as for small countries like Mongolia. On the one hand, “the classical thesis that predominantly great powers are able to decide the fate of the world...is increasingly being questioned (Rodionov V.A, 2022) do the small countries in the modern world pursue to “feel themselves small comparing with the more powerful partners” (Hey J. A. K, 2003)?

With its 3 million of population is Mongolia blocked in its subjective feeling of smallness (Hey J.A. K, 2003), “between a hammer and anvil” (François, Ph; Cambacéras J-M ; Desportes V, 2008) or could it play as a player with the ability to influence global issues? Brzezinski did not name Mongolia either as pivot, neither as player on the geopolitical chessboard.

This ability to influence global issues by using of its potential is the comprehensive national power (CNP) that ... lies in its harnessing a wide spectrum of its resources — from natural resources to human resources to its economic and military potential.” (Bajwa J.S, 2008). “Calculating CNP can aid a nation not just for war but also to “coordinate a political and diplomatic offensive, to psychologically disintegrate the enemy forces and subdue them.” (Bajwa J.S, 2008).

By the way, the national security strategy reflects the main elements of CNP. The National Security Strategy of Japan adopted in December 2022 underlines the following elements of its comprehensive national power such as diplomatic capabilities; defense capabilities; economic capabilities; technological capabilities and intelligence capability. The USA National Security Strategy encompasses—diplomacy, development cooperation, industrial strategy, economic statecraft, intelligence, and defense. For the usage of our paper, we suggest that the comprehensive national power covers an array of internal and external elements such as:

- A geological advantage (strategic resources)
- Economic capability
- Human capital (education; health, R&D expenditure as a proportion of GDP)
- Military capability (air, navy and land military equipment, including the drones and anti-detector materials, resistance capacity, ability to wage war over a long period and outside its territory, capability to maintain during an eventual wartime an acceptable level of infrastructure, energy provisioning, civil security, digital security, banking service, inflation management, etc.)
- Diplomatic capability
- Political stability (social coherence, wealth repartition, corruption);
- An ideology of belonging to one community, cultural identity
- An ecological situation.

Moreover, in our mind, on one hand, the national power is in correlation with the national power components in the neighboring countries. On the other hand, the CNP of one country is dependent on the perception of this country by other countries.

Therefore, we research the Mongolian geopolitical influence via the essential components of its comprehensive national power.

Strategic resources of Mongolia

Mongolia possesses strategic resources – coal, copper, gold, uranium and rare earth.

The mineral resources and mining sector alone makes up $\frac{1}{4}$ of Mongolia's GDP and over 70 % of foreign direct investment. 93% of Mongolia's export revenues come from mining products with coal and copper alone accounting for over 60% (National Statistical Office, 2020). The second largest exporter of coal in the destination to China after the Indonesia, Mongolia exported almost 6 million tonnes in March 2023 alone. Coal exports surged by 446% year-on-year to 13.8 million tonnes during January-March 2023, totaling USD 2.24 billion (Amar Adiya-2023).

The government of Mongolia, which has 34% ownership, and Rio Tinto, which owns 66%, jointly owns Oyu Tolgoi, which will be by 2030 the world's fourth largest copper mine. The project total cost is 7.06 billion USD (Jamasmie C. 2022). In 2022, the production of 110,000-150,000 tonnes of copper and 150,000-170,000 ounces of gold in concentrates was expected.

Copper exploration company - Erdenet Mining Corporation (EMC) started its activity in 1978 in accordance with an agreement between governments of Mongolia and the Soviet Union (website of EMC). Anecdotally, the parents of the Ukrainian president V. Zelensky worked in this plant during the soviet period and lived in Erdenet with their son. In order to deepen the strategic decision-making in exploration and exportation of copper, in June 2016, Mongolian Copper Corporation has acquired 49% of EMC from the Russian Federation's "Rostec."

Orano Mining (former Areva) has been present in Mongolia for more than 25 years. Badrakh Energy, the JV between Orano (66%) and the Mongolian national company Mon-Atom (34%), holds mining licenses for the Zuuvch Ovoo and Dulaan Uul uranium deposits in the Dornogobi Province. The registered resources for these deposits have placed the country 12th in the world in terms of uranium resources. During the state visit of the French President E. Macron in Mongolia in May 2023, it was

aimed to accelerate the negotiation of draft investment and shareholder agreements regarding the Zuuvch-Ovoo project with a view on concluding these agreements in autumn 2023 (French and Mongolian Joint declaration – 2023). As per TASS, in the Joint Declaration the parties did not mention about the construction by Orano of a nuclear plant in the province of Uvurkhanghai despite the preliminary negotiations regarding this possibility (Zundueva, 2023).

Mongolia imports oil products worth USD 1 billion annually, the situation will be changing in the coming years because an oil refinery of USD 1 billion is being built with Indian aid in Mongolia. Poland has expressed its interest in jointly building a copper smelter and a fossil fuel power station in Mongolia.

As per Bloomberg Mongolia, the Mongolian reserves in rare elements are estimated as 3.1 million of tones (Bloomberg TV Mongolia, 2023). Mongolia is deepening cooperation with the USA in the sector of critical minerals and a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding concerning cooperation on mineral resource sector development has been signed on June, 2023. South Korea will finance the Bilateral Research Institute on rare elements and Germany and Mongolia agreed to start joint research work related to the implementation of the semi-processing of rare earth elements. The Group Samsung intends to invest during 2022 – 2026 350 billion of USD to the development of AI et 5G and in capacity of production of semi-conductors and wants to product quickly 3 nm chips (Saint-Etienne. Ch, 2023).

For Mongolia, on the one hand, it is crucial to develop the necessary expertise linked to the exploration, processing of these critical elements and environmental safeguard. On the second hand, Mongolia, as a country with an important reserve of rare elements, must establish itself as a technology hub in the North East Asia.

National strategic document “VISION-2050” Long-term development policy of Mongolia (thereafter Vision-2050) stipulates that by 2041-2050 Mongolia aims to bring the development of the following priority areas such as nano, bio, information technology, artificial intelligence as well as green, e-economy and intellectual industry up to world standards. As Ukhnaa Khurelsukh emphasized rightly for the landlocked developing countries, the science, technology and innovation have essential roles in unlocking new opportunities to global markets (Ooluun B, 2023; Manlai B, 2023).

Mongolian military capabilities

After the end of the Cold war, the military expenditure in percentage of GDP decreased from 6,5 % in 1990 to less than one per cent in 2020 (World Bank, Military expenditure, 2021). Mongolian defense budget for 2021 was USD 0.11 billion, a 3.49% decline from 2020 (MacroTrends, 2023). Its army has 35,000 active soldiers for 135,000 reservists.

According to the Global Firepower 2023, the PowerIndex of Mongolia is 2.0263 and ranks at 99 of 145 countries.

In order to get the whole picture about the weight and war capabilities of Ulaanbaatar, a comparison with the military power of its close- and third neighbors is needed.

We could see that Moscow and Beijing hold together 6 605 nuclear warheads and count 2 850 000 active soldiers and 760 000 reservists, without taking into account the police and militiaman. The latter are of significant number, in China, for example, according to a research study, there are 900,000 police officers and 8 million militiamen (Saint-Etienne Ch, 2023).

The perception of this stunning military arsenal and the current geopolitical atmosphere, where the vast majority of Americans have unfavorable views of Russia (91%) and China (83%) (Silver L; Gubbala S, and Lippert J, 2023) dictate Ulaanbaatar to make a strategical choice to invest in balanced relationships in foreign affairs and in confidence building in the military field.

Nevertheless, Mongolia is concerned by the increasing militarization in the region. Six of the top ten military powers are Asian countries. With the 20 warheads held by North Korea (Grotteria A, 2023), the region would count for 6 946 warheads.

The defense budget is increasing rapidly in number of countries. The planned increase in the Japanese military budget to 2% of GDP over five years compared to 1% currently, could rank Tokyo among the top five defense players in the world instead of its current 8th place (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022). This increasing also corresponds to the commitment of NATO member states to devote 2% of their GDP to military expenditure by 2024. (Péron-Doise M, 2023). As the National Security Strategy of Japan announces, “The defense capabilities could not be replaced by another element taking into account the actual situation.” The Indian total defense budget is an increase over the previous financial year by 683.71 billion rupees, or about 13%. (Raghuvanshi V, 2023).

The Chinese actual military budget, in purchasing power parities, is around USD 450 billion in 2022-23 (Saint Etienne, 2023). The Chinese President Xi Jinping urged his armed forces to “accelerate the improvement of their ability to win” in a context where “the uncertainty of China's security situation is increasing.” (Le Figaro 06/07/2023 and CourierInternational 09/11/2022).

As we notice, humanity is again faced with the question “who can deter whom, from what, by what threats, in what circumstances” (Aron, R, 1976).

In this sense, the declaration of the Secretary General of the UN, Antonio Guterres, “nuclear-free Mongolia is a “symbol of peace in a troubled world” has its significance. Pope Francis during his historical visit to Mongolia qualified the country the “symbol of religious freedom”. During “this meeting between East and West” (Brèves économiques, Septembre2023) His Holiness stated “May Heaven grant that today on this earth devastated by countless conflicts, there be a renewal, respectful of international laws, of the conditions of what was once the Pax Mongolica, namely, the absence of conflicts (Vatican.va, 2023)”.

Mongolia, in accordance with the constitution, conducts a peaceful foreign policy and maintains permanent neutrality as of 2015.

Mongolia's self-declared “nuclear weapon - free” status was recognized by the United Nations in 2012 (Amaraa E, 2021). Ulaanbaatar adopts a policy of refusal to deploy nuclear weapons and foreign military bases in Mongolian territory, as well as the active participation in UN peacekeeping operations.

As Mendee Jargalsaikhan, a Deputy Director at the Institute for Defence Studies of Mongolia, points out, “as geopolitical tensions increase among major powers, it is increasingly difficult for small states to remain neutral. However, Mongolia's small military sets a model for contributing to global peace and stability while investing in confidence building. Mongolia's record of investment in military confidence-keeping it centered as a neutral party and potential balanced mediator.” (Mendee Jargalsaikhan, 2021).

“Vision - 2050” declares the importance of the armed forces highly capable to play a multifaceted role in peacekeeping missions, and build their capacity to perform duties anywhere in the country and in the region.”

Mongolia is the second largest troop contributor to the United Nations from the Northeast and Central Asia region after the Chinese People’s Liberation Army. Mongolian military contingents have been deployed to UN missions in Chad, Sierra Leone and Sudan.

Mongolia is NATO’s global partner. From 2003 onwards, Mongolia dispatched its military personnel to serve in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

Identifying Mongolia as a “reliable, capable and natural partner” in the same vein as Singapore, New Zealand and Taiwan (Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, 2019) the United States supports Mongolia’s initiative of converting its Soviet-style military base into a state-of-the-art regional peacekeeping center. Mongolia annually hosts a multinational military exercise Khaan Quest exercise hosted by the Mongolian Armed Forces.

At the same time, Mongolia takes part in The Vostok 22 drills launched by Russia alongside troops from several ex-Soviet nations, China, India, Laos, Mongolia, Nicaragua and Syria.

Diplomatic capabilities

With its limited military potential Ulaanbaatar could not play “the casuistry of deterrence” but it must be capable to play a “casuistry of cooperation” in order to prevail its national interest and, furthermore, in order to maintain the common interest of the region.

Mongolia promulgated the first “multi-pronged” foreign policy in June 1994. As of February 2011 when Mongolia declared “The United States and other Western and Eastern countries as its third neighbors“, “the balanced relationship is the spirit of (its) foreign affairs” (The Foreign Minister Batmunkh Battsetseg, the press conference of 03/01/2023).

The peaceful transition of the “Red Hero” (Ulaanbaatar in English) to democracy in 1990 was a source of enthusiasm for many countries of the region (Rodionov, V.A, 2022) and is largely applauded by the Western countries sharing the same democratic values. The president of the Community of Democracies during 2011 to 2013, Mongolia remained on the

group's executive committee from 2015 to 2017 (U.S. Department of State, 2021). In 2015, Mongolia chaired the Freedom Online Coalition. Mongolia was elected to a seat on the UN Human Rights Council from 2016 to 2018.

Having been a socialist country between 1921 until 1990, the country went through the centralized economy with the state ownership and one party-political system. "Mongolian experience and knowledge of two systems that are socialism and democratic economy will enable Mongolia to become a bridge to peace in Northeast Asia", announced in 2019 the then-FM D. Tsogtbaatar.

At the global stage, Mongolia is a member of a wide range of the international organizations such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Currently as its quality of the Vice-Chair of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDC) at the United Nations Ulaanbaatar is making advancement on the initiative to set up a group of LLDCs in the WTO. During the Summit on Science, Technology, and Innovation of the Group of 77 in Havana, in September 2023 the President of Mongolia Ukhnaa Khurelsukh calls upon the members of the Group to consolidate its solidarity and further intensify its cooperation in order to overcome together...the recent outbreak of global pandemic, climate change, geopolitical conflicts, financial and debt crisis, as well as poverty and hunger.

At the regional and inter-regional levels, Ulaanbaatar is participating in the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement and Bao Forum for Asia. In addition, Mongolia is a participating state in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and an observer state in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). During his visit to Mongolia in April 2023, the SCO Secretary-General Zhang Ming expressed the hope that "Mongolia would expand its involvement in SCO activities ... which would give a fresh impetus to peace, security and stability in the region"(sectsco.org, 2023).

Mongolia aiming to contribute to international stability is taking part in the formal talks as the Strategic Dialogue between the United States and Mongolia (2022), the U.S.-Mongolia-Japan trilateral talks in 2022, and the first-ever U.S.-Mongolia-Republic of Korea trilateral talks in May, 2023. During these talks have been exchanged views on a broad range of issues of mutual

interest, including regional and multilateral cooperation, political and security partnership (Free and Peaceful Indo-Pacific; Peaceful and Prosperous Korean Peninsula) and strengthening mutually beneficial economic ties.

In 2022, the President of Mongolia, together with Russian President V. Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping reached an agreement on the implementation of the “China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor.”

Ulaanbaatar intends to develop and expand relations and cooperation between Mongolia and Gulf countries and with the Central Asian countries.

The President Ukhnaa Khurelsukh, in September 2023, met with the President of the Republic of Cuba Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel y Bermúdez.

During 2022 and 2023 the Mongolian President organized the bilateral meetings with the Presidents of the European countries (Poland, France, Swiss, Czech and Slovenia). Political dialogue, trade, development assistance, cooperation in the field of agriculture and rural development, energy, climate change, research and innovation, education and culture between the European Union and its Member States and Mongolia are subject to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1 November 2017.

In 2022, in the complex geopolitical situation, Ulaanbaatar welcomed on its soil the Foreign Ministers of China, Russia, South Korea and the Indian Defense Minister to name several of them. On the sidelines of the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly in September 2023, Ukhnaa Khurelsukh held bilateral meetings with the Korean president and the Prime Minister of Japan.

It is worth to dedicate a few lines to the bilateral relation of Mongolia regarding to its immediate neighbors: China and Russia.

China

Amid COVID-19 outbreak, in February 2020 then President of Mongolia Khaltmaa Battulga paid a State visit to China, reaffirmed firm support for Chinese people as comprehensive strategic partner of China and gave 30,000 sheep as gift. Xi Jinping appreciated this visit and stated “... Two neighbors are in the same boat and working hand in hand to help each other” (Yang Sheng, 2020). In August 2022, the Chinese Foreign Minister visited Ulaanbaatar.

Mongolia reaffirmed its adherence to the one-China principle and opposition to interference in China's internal affairs. Both sides emphasized respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity (Wang Wenbin, 2022).

On September 1, 2023, during the visit of the Chairman of China International Development Cooperation to Mongolia, Luvsannamsrai Oyun-Erdene committed to enhancing development cooperation with China under the Belt and Road Initiative and Global Development Initiative (Brèves économiques, Septembre 2023).

Mongolia is conscious about the role of China in the geopolitical climate. PM of Mongolia proposed “Both Germany and China could help negotiate a peaceful outcome to the conflict in Ukraine” (Speech of the PM Mongolia to Germany, October 2022). He not only emphasized the importance of maintaining good relations with China but also warned of the potential negative impact of a new Cold War on the global economy (PM visit to Washington, August 2023).

Russia

In 2019, the Mongolian head of government paid a working visit to the Russian Federation and discussed the project of developing natural gas infrastructure from Russia to China through the Mongolian territory. Additionally, during the President's official visit in Russia in December 2021, the parties reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen ties and cooperation in areas such as trade, economy, reliable supply of petroleum products, education, and culture, concluding pertinent documents.

Trade turnover between Mongolia and Russia in 2022 amounted to \$2.7 billion, which became a historical record for these two states. (Zondueva, 2023).

In 2022, Ulaanbaatar abstained from a UN General Assembly vote on supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity by condemning Russia's unilateral declaration of its annexation of several Ukrainian regions. Recently, the official Mongolia voiced for in favor of maintaining peace based on international law affirmed in the bilateral and trilateral declarations.

During his visit to Germany in 2022, the Prime Minister Oyun-Erdene emphasized that “the world had no choice but to talk to Putin”, stating that the situation was too grave to ignore and that prolonged conflict would harm all countries.”

At the end of September 2023, the Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin paid an official visit to Mongolia. The agenda included issues of providing legislative assistance to economic, financial, interbank cooperation between Russia and Mongolia, as well as transport, energy, agricultural and tourism cooperation (The State Duma, 2023).

In this manner, as we notice, Mongolia pursues to defend its interest by a subtle game of equilibrium with the most powerful countries.

As a Russian scholar Rodionov notes, “maintaining friendly relations with virtually all Northeast Asian states, Mongolia seeks to become a platform for international negotiations similar to that of Switzerland or Helsinki” (Rodionov, V.A, 2022). A concrete example in this field is the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian Security which was established in 2014 at the initiative of the then-president of Mongolia, Elbegdorj Tsakhia. Ulaanbaatar Dialogue (UBD) has served as a mediation platform to promote peace and dialogue in particular on the issue of the denuclearization of North Korea.

At the same time, North Korea is not the only security issue in Northeast Asia. During 2022’s conference the participants were reassembled around five panels: “Regional Security Challenges and Opportunities,” “Multilateral Cooperation in Northeast Asia,” “Post-Covid Regional Economic Cooperation,” “The Future of Peaceful Northeast Asia,” and “Energy in Transition.” Mongolia wants to see Ulaanbaatar become the region’s most prominent confidence-building mechanism. The FM of Mongolia Battsetseg Batmunkh stated, “Mongolia is becoming more influential in promoting security dialogue and communication in our region” (Bolor Lkhaajav, 2022).

During the UBD 2023 conference, Nakamitsu Izumi, the United Nations’ under-secretary-general and high representative for disarmament affairs underlined, “As the confidence-building measures...they can stabilize bilateral and regional relationships. Ultimately CBMs can serve as a baseline for the pursuit of legally binding measures and agreements on arms control and disarmament.”(Bolor Lkhaajav, 2023).

Sustainable development

Taking advantage of the current international situation and of the above-mentioned array of courtesy visits, Ulaanbaatar could deepen its field of influence. Maybe is it time to enlarge its “limited foreign policy resources and corresponding ambitions” (Rodionov, 2022)?

One of these options may consist in the creation of a region wide platform for sustainable development.

We must remind that this decade will be decisive not only in setting the geopolitical power balance but also in the efforts to handle the common challenges including climate change and demographic challenges.

Mongolia, at the regional stage, could be the voice for the shared sound future and contribute to the handling of sustainable development issues at the regional level.

Mongolia is among the world’s 20 largest countries by its surface. However, 77 % of its territory is classified as degraded or desertified (UNDP). Mongolia is a wood-deficit country, it has lost 180,000 ha of forests since 1990 and about 1.5 million ha of forests are severely degraded (Memorandum of understanding on a Forest Partnership between Mongolia and the European Union, 2022).

In Mongolia, due to the mining activities as well as other uses, 264 of 6,161 rivers, 286 of 3,895 lakes, and 704 of 12,591 springs have dried out in a brief time, as of 2019 (Rossab. M, 2021). Pursuant to the 2021 World Air Quality report, Ulaanbaatar was listed between the 20 most polluted cities in the world.

At the regional level, the situation with air and water pollution is more than alarming: in 2023, out of the 50 most polluted cities in the world, 49 are located in Asia. The pollution of the rivers Chitarum (Indonesia), Jamna (India) (Paddison L, 2016) and Yangtze River has the potential to cause one of the largest environmental threats to humanity (Taithe. A, 2012).

The long-range movement of dust and sandstorms has also contributed to severe environmental impacts along the way from Mongolia and China to the Korean peninsula and Japan even influencing “the global carbon cycle and having a significant effect on regional radiation balances and human health” (ADB, UNCCD, ESCAP and UNEP, 2005).

It is obvious that the problems could not be resolved at the level of one individual country. It is why the common effort is searched at the regional level.

Although we must note the lack of institutionalized regional integration in Asia in the same vein as the European Union, the African Union or Union of South American Nations. This issue has been mentioned in the literature and in the official reports (Panke D, Stapel S and Starkmann A, 2021; ESCAP, 2017).

Faced with climate change and challenges of sustainable development, the common interest consists in a common survival. The “interest is eternal and perpetual” if we borrow some words from Lord Palmerston (Yetkin. M, 2018). The capacity of Mongolia to be heard and seen by the different states, could serve to play a piloting role in creating a region-wide platform aimed to unify the common efforts in the reduction of poverty, the prevention of climate change-related migration, the handling of water and air pollution and of transboundary waste. No need to say that the creation of a region-wide platform (that might be named as the Asian Union of Sustainable Development) will permit to the small countries to participate on an equal footing with their neighbors in the elaboration of the regional strategies and in their implementation.

It is worth noting that Ulaanbaatar is already taking real steps in this direction.

Thanks to the governments coherent measures, the air pollution of Ulaanbaatar decreased by 50 percent (Munkhzul. A, 2021). In less than three decades, the population of Ulaanbaatar has nearly tripled, increasing the city's demand for water. To prevent imminent water shortages, the \$462 M Millennium Challenge Corporation-Mongolia Water Compact supports Mongolia's efforts to expand Ulaanbaatar's water supply by 80 percent.

Mongolia aims to reduce deforestation by 31% and forest degradation by 25% by 2025, and increasing the area of sustainably managed and conserved forests from 6.5 to 9.8 million ha by 2030.

For this reason, seen as one of the most appropriate remedies against desertification and afforestation, the “One Billion Trees” national movement, announced by the Mongolian President Ukhnaa Khurelsukh is largely encouraged. In support to this project, Japan pledged to plant 50,000 trees in Mongolia. China commends Mongolia's plan to plant one billion trees and has proposed to plant 70 billion trees in the next ten years. In Ulaanbaatar, the Center of China-

Mongolian cooperation for the prevention and control of the desertification has been inaugurated in September 2023 (Brèves économiques, Septembre 2023).

Mongolia will host the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in 2026. The President of Mongolia and the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD Ibrahim Thiaw during their meeting on September 19, 2023 emphasized the importance of afforestation and environmental rehabilitation in reducing the effects of climate change, desertification, dust storms, and soil degradation.

We argue that a sustainable development-oriented strategy will be the most beneficial and appropriate one for the Mongolian people. Thanks to its capacity of equilibrium player, Mongolia could consolidate its allies on the geopolitical chessboard.

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