

Mongolian game on the geopolitical chessboard or the comprehensive national power of Mongolia

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The comprehensive national power of Mongolia or the Mongolian game on the geopolitical chessboard

Dashtseren Batchimeg

“I do not care how ephemeral I am, I care how eternal my empire is”.

Peu m'importe mon être éphémère, que soit éternel mon empire.

Genghis Khan (1162-1227)

“A profound spiritual sensitivity belongs to the very fibre of your cultural identity, and it is proper that

Mongolia should be a symbol of religious freedom”

Pope Francis (during his visit to Mongolia in 2023)

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 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 equilibrist**. 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 equilibrist capable of « getting others to want what it wants? » (Nye, Joseph S, 1990) and to create interdependence in this « Age of uncertainty (2010 UK National Security Strategy) »?

The uncertainty 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 be a pivot or a player with the ability to influence global issues, according to Brzezinski's wording, 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).

CNP of a country is commonly announced in its strategic vision document. 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:

- **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**
- **A geological advantage** (strategic resources)
- **Economic capability**
- **Human capital** (education; health, R&D expenditure as a proportion of GDP)
- **Political stability** (social coherence, wealth repartition, corruption)
- **Cultural identity**
- **An ecological situation.**

Moreover, in our mind, on the one hand, the national power is **in correlation** with the national power components of **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.**

Mongolian military capabilities and its destination

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. To get the whole picture about the weight and war capabilities of Ulaanbaatar, a **comparison with the military power** of its close- and third neighbours 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, 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 increased by 13% comparing to the previous financial year (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 Courier International 09/11/2022).

As we notice, humanity is again faced with the question « who can deter who, 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 that was « a meeting between East and West» (Brèves économiques, Septembre 2023) 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, 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.

Deputy Director at the Institute for Defense Studies of Mongolia points out, « If tensions continue to escalate, Mongolia may end up back in the Cold War-like external settings it experienced in the 1960s–70s — stuck between Russia, China and the West. In such a scenario, Mongolia's record of investment in military confidence-building efforts and balanced collaboration between sides may allow the country to avoid being pulled in any one direction, keeping it centred as a neutral party and potential balanced mediator. » (Mendee Jargalsaikhan, 2021).

National strategic document « VISION-2050» Long-term development policy of Mongolia (thereafter 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. In its quality as **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» (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.

If 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, Ulaanbaatar plays an organizing role in another military exercise – Khaan Quest (KQ). This multinational military exercise is hosted by the Mongolian Armed Forces. In KQ23 there were 26 participating countries. All elements of KQ23 are focused on peacekeeping and stability operations and involve Mongolian, U.S. and multinational forces working jointly « to increase interoperability and readiness for the peacekeeping mission set» (U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Chris Smith, deputy commanding general for USAPRAC (Cantero T. 2023).

Diplomatic capabilities

It is evident that with its limited military potential Ulaanbaatar could not play « the casuistry of deterrence» (Aron R. 1976) but it must be capable to play a « **casuistry of cooperation**».

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.

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» (sectscsco.org, 2023). At the extended Meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the SCO Member States, which took place in Bishkek, the Kyrgyz Republic, on October 25-26, 2023 (hereafter SCO 2023) the Prime Minister of Mongolia Luvsannamsrain Oyun-Erdene affirmed eagerness to expand relations and cooperation between Mongolia and the SCO participants and to develop mutually beneficial cooperation in trade, investment, food and agriculture, mining, energy, industrialization, transport logistics, port infrastructure, humanity, environment, tourism, and information technology.

Always at the inter-regional level we remark that Ulaanbaatar has intention to become the voice for the **landlocked developing countries**. In this sense the International Think Tank for Landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), the first intergovernmental body of the LLDCs is in the capital of Mongolia.

Currently as the Vice-Chair of the **Group of LLDC** at the United Nations, Mongolia 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 Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh

highlighted that for the **LLDC**, the science, technology and innovation have essential roles in unlocking new opportunities to global markets (Ooluun B, 2023; Manlai B, 2023). In addition, at the SCO 2023, the PM of Mongolia urged the Meeting participants to pay more attention to the transportation problems facing landlocked countries. He also said that the sea does not belong only to maritime countries, but that access to it is significant for the sustainable development of all countries.

At the bilateral level, Mongolia is deepening substantially its diplomatic capability, at the post-Covid 19 period. The geographic extent (**Asia, Europe, Gulf, Caribbean, and North America**) and the number of state visits reveals the intensification of its diplomatic activities.

At the SCO 2023 L. Oyun-Erdene reaffirmed the principle of the foreign policy of the country: « Mongolia always pursues a peace-loving, open, independent, and multi-pillar foreign policy». Indeed, 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).

It is worth to dedicate a few lines to the relation of Mongolia with 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 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).

During the official visit of the Chinese Foreign Minister's visit to Ulaanbaatar in August 2022 have been reaffirmed respect to the one-China principle and opposition to interference in China's internal affairs, mutual respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity.

On September 1, 2023, during the visit of the Chairman of China International development Cooperation to Mongolia, L. Oyun-Erdene expressed the intention to enhance development cooperation with China under the Belt and Road Initiative and Global Development Initiative.

On the sidelines of the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF III), in Beijing, on October 19, 2023, the President of Mongolia Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh, and the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping met and discussed ways to expand the Mongolia-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas. They agreed, among others, to increase the trade volume to USD 20 billion in the near future; diversify the trade

structure, accelerate the progress of major infrastructure projects, expand cooperation in environment, health, education, science, and innovation.

Mongolia is conscious about the role of China in the worldwide geopolitical climate. PM of Mongolia suggested to the German chancellor that « Both Germany and China could help negotiate a peaceful outcome to the conflict in Ukraine» (Speech of the PM Mongolia during his visit 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 any new Cold War on the global economy (Visit of the PM Mongolia to Washington, August 2023).

Russia

In 2019, during the visit of the Prime Minister of Mongolia to the Russian Federation the parties discussed the project of developing natural gas infrastructure from Russia to China through the Mongolian territory. Additionally, during the President of Mongolia's 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. Moreover, trade turnover between Mongolia and Russia in 2022 amounted to \$2.7 billion, which became a historical record for these two states. (Zondueva, 2023).

During the visit of the Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin to Ulaanbaatar in September 2023 the agenda included the issues of providing legislative assistance to economic, financial, interbank cooperation between Russia and Mongolia (The State Duma, 2023).

On the sidelines of the BRIC III the President of Mongolia U. Khurelsukh met with President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. During this meeting the presidents discussed about reducing trade barriers on agricultural products and deepening Mongolia-Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership relations. For supporting Mongolia to meet its growing energy demands, the two sides agreed to conduct comprehensive research on constructing the Eg River hydropower plant in Mongolia.

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 serious to ignore this situation, and the prolonged conflict would harm all countries. »

Besides the bilateral ties the **trilateral relationships** begin to take root in the Mongolian current diplomacy.

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, 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. Also 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.

The President of Mongolia, the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping and the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin signed in 2022 an agreement on the implementation of the « **China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor**» (CMR). The corridor targets to improve transport connectivity and cross-border trade services through infrastructure development, and to strengthen cooperation across energy resources management, agribusiness, communication, technology, tourism, and environmental protection. At the SCO 2023 the PM of Mongolia affirmed that major projects outlined in CMR Program could be coordinated with SCO activities.

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

Another reason to be perceived positively by the international community resides in the peaceful transition of the « Red Hero» (Ulaanbaatar in English) to **democracy in 1990**. The democracy in this North Asian country is largely applauded by the Western countries sharing the same democratic values (Speech by Olaf Scholz during the visit of the PM of Mongolia to Germany in October 2022 and Declaration by Emmanuel Macron during the State visit of the Mongolian President to France in October 2023). In addition, Mongolia occupied the Presidency of the Community of Democracies during 2011 to 2013 and 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 a 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.

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 Tsakhiagiin.

Ulaanbaatar Dialogue (UBD) has served as a mediation platform to promote peace and dialogue on the issue of the denuclearization of North Korea. At the same time, North Korea is not the only security issue in Northeast Asia. Mongolia wants to be the region's most prominent confidence-building mechanism. As stated the FM of Mongolia Battsetseg Batmunkh « Mongolia is becoming more influential in promoting security dialogue and communication in the region» (Bolor Lkhaajav, 2022). During the UBD 2023 conference, Nakamitsu Izumi, the United Nations' under-secretary-general and high representative for disarmament affairs underlined, « ...the confidence-building measures...can stabilize bilateral and regional relationships. » (Bolor Lkhaajav, 2023).

Strategic resources of Mongolia

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

The mineral resources and mining sector alone makes up ¼ 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).

Mongolia is the second largest exporter of **coal** in the destination to China after the Indonesia. 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.»

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.

As of 1 January 2021, Mongolia's total identified conventional **uranium recoverable resources** amounted to 144 620 tU, while in situ resources comprised 192 241 tU (Uranium 2022: Resources, Production and Demand - the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency and International Atomic Energy Agency's joint report). No uranium has been mined there since the closure in 1995 of an open pit mine at the Dornod deposit. This mine was operated by Russian interests and produced 535 tU over six years of production (World nuclear News. 13 October 2023).

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. 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 Emmanuel Macron to Ulaanbaatar in May 2023 Paris was committed to facilitating the financing of Mongolia's ecological transition with cooperation on renewable energies and nuclear power. In this view draft investment and shareholder agreements regarding the Zuuvch-Ovoo project have been decided to be accelerated (French and Mongolian Joint declaration – May 2023).

In continuation of the discussions an agreement between Orano and Mongolian state-owned investment company Erdenes Mongol LLC sets out the framework for an investment agreement that will lay the foundations for a long-term relationship for the development and industrial operation of the Zuuvch-Ovoo uranium project. The protocol was signed on 12 October 2023 in Paris by Orano Chairman Claude Imauven and Erdenes Mongol CEO Sanjaagiin Narantsogt, in the presence of President Emmanuel Macron of France and President Ukhnaagiin Khürelsükh of Mongolia.

The deposit has 93,291 tU of resources (Latribune.fr. 2 Oct 2023), in other words, 4 % of the de world supply, almost the equivalent of Niger (Goetz. E. Les Echos. 12/10/2023) that was the third supplier of natural uranium to France during 2005-2020, behind Kazakhstan and Australia (Latribune.fr ;12 Oct 2023).

« This cooperation will enable us to develop the uranium sector in Mongolia while furthering the Group's strategy of diversifying its mining activities," Orano Chairman said. (Orano's website. 12/10/2023). « This is good news for our nuclear industry and our energy sovereignty," greeted Agnès Pannier-Runacher, France's Minister for Energy Transition, on X (formerly Twitter).

The joint Franco-Mongolian project will be based on international standards and best practices in terms of safety, security, and the environment, setting a benchmark for the development of the industry in Mongolia, the French company added. Over a forecast 30-year mine life, the project has the potential to bring Mongolia some USD1.6 billion of direct investment over the life of the project as well as USD1 billion in tax income nationally and locally.

France consumes around 7,000 tonnes of natural uranium per year to produce 40% of its energy (Camba. G. Euronews. le 24/05/2023) and its strategic stocks of uranium..., the equivalent of two years of consumption» (Latribune.fr. 12 Oct 2023). « In a context of strong needs for uranium over the coming decades, Mongolia is positioning itself as a **strategic player** and an important contributor to the global climate effort», said Imauven.

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 in 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. We remind that 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 exploration and to process the strategic mineral resources. It is primordial to be reassured regarding extraction methods ‘safety for humans and the environment and the mine projects have no negative impact on the environment, the health of people and livestock.

On the second hand, Mongolia, as a country with an important reserve of rare elements, must establish itself as a **technology hub** in the Northeast Asia. Vision 2050 states that the development of the areas such as nano, bio, information technology and artificial intelligence would reach, by 2040-2050, **world standards**. But if Ulaanbaatar intends to become a technology hub in the near future a veritable acceleration in these areas is needed.

To conclude, in the matter of exploration and exploitation of the Mongolian strategic minerals far seeing and prudence are imposed.

Cultural identity

The state visit of U. Khurelsukh in France was the excellent occasion to inaugurate the Exhibition "Genghis Khan. How the Mongols changed the world" in the Castle of the Dukes of Brittany, Nantes.

Postponed in 2020, the exhibition puts into evidence, according to its Organisers, « how the Chingiskhanides became a **driving force in the development of the world in the Middle Ages**. At its peak, the gigantic Eurasian empire founded by Genghis Khan and his descendants covered 22% of the globe, from Korea to Poland, from Russia to Persia. The Mongols contributed to everything we consider a **symbol of modernity: religious tolerance, efficient administration, long-distance trade, the development of writing, science, medicine, and the arts**. This is evidenced by the abundant iconography with remarkable objects of Mongolian heritage, a universal heritage, coming from major museums, notably the Chinggis Khaan National Museum, and prestigious private collections» (Favereau M. 2023). Emmanuel Macron visited the Chinggis Khaan National Museum during his visit to Mongolia last May.

Tolerance to the different cultures and religions was and is the identity of the Mongolian people. It is why the Pope Francis declared during his visit « A profound spiritual sensitivity belongs to the very fibre of your cultural identity, and it is proper that Mongolia should be a symbol of religious freedom».

At a meeting with members of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, Russian President Vladimir Putin reminded the history of Alexander Nevski (1221-1263), the Grand prince of Vladimir who preserved separate statehood and orthodoxy, agreeing to pay tribute to the then powerful Golden Horde. « The Golden Horde behaved themselves brazenly and harshly. Nevertheless, they did not touch the essential that is our language, tradition, and culture.... It is the most important, because if the culture, tradition, and history of people will be destructed, the people begin to disappear as an ethnos and to melt as a late spring snow. For his choice, Alexander Nevsky is revered as a saint». (KAZ365.KZ. 05/11/2023)

« Two pitfalls face us when it comes to approaching the history of the Mongol Empire, the image of the brutal and bloodthirsty warrior, nourished by a hostile historiography and by the cinema, and that of the peaceful nomad in his steppe immutable conveyed by current tourism. The reality is completely different and more complex, » confides Bertrand Guillet, director of the Nantes history museum. ... It seemed important to us to work on globalizations, the Mongolian empire is one of the great globalizations of the medieval era. ...We had to question ... how it revolutionized the history of humanity", he concludes.

Sustainable development

Taking into consideration the current international situation and the advantages and disadvantages of its comprehensive national power Ulaanbaatar could reinforce its regional 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 is among the world's 20 largest countries by its surface. However, **77 % of its territory is classified as degraded** or desertified (UNDP). Mongolia 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. Ulaanbaatar city was planned for a population of 500,000-600,000, but today it has a population of 1.7 million. As a result, the city faces pressing problems, such as air pollution and traffic congestion.

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 comprehensive power of Mongolia might 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 and in cooperation with the partner countries.

Mongolia became the first country to join the UN PAGE – Partnership for Action on Green Economy in 2013 and started mainstreaming green economy policies into its national development strategy (Shigang Zhang, UN document).

Thanks to the governments coherent measures, the air pollution of Ulaanbaatar decreased by 50 percent (Munkhzul. A, 2021). The Mayor of Ulaanbaatar Kh. Nyambaatar relies on the adoption of the Law on Alleviating Traffic Congestion and Constructing Comfortable Apartments in the Ger Districts to resolve these issues. During her visit to Ulaanbaatar in October 2023 the UK Minister of State at the Department for Business and Trade, Minister of State for the Investment Security Unit expressed the UK's intention to cooperate in this field. (Batbayar L. Montsame, 31 October, 2023).

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% 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 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.

During the Havana Summit of the **Group of 77** U. Khurelsukh calls upon the members of the Group to consolidate its solidarity and further intensify its cooperation to overcome together...the recent outbreak of global pandemic, climate change, geopolitical conflicts, financial and debt crisis, as well as poverty and hunger.

Mongolia will host the 17th Conference of the Parties (**COP17**) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in 2026. During his meeting with the head of State of Mongolia, Ibrahim Thiaw, the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD in September 2023 emphasized the importance of afforestation and environmental rehabilitation in reducing the effects of climate change, desertification, dust storms, and soil degradation.

The President of Mongolia declared before more than 150 countries attended the BRF III that « I am confident that this conference will serve as a pivotal platform for countries to share their own and regional best practices in combating land degradation and desertification and discuss strategies to address the triple environmental crisis, strengthen sustainable forest management, and formulate future policies, objectives, and actions» and stated solemnly « Green development constitutes the cornerstone of humanity's sustainable progress. Hence, Mongolia's long-term development policy pivots on green development as its **foundation and starting point.** »

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 is capable to consolidate** its allies on the geopolitical chessboard.

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