

## **Mongolia and its security concerns**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Security as a concept has globally been changed in the post 9/11 era. In the international system with the announcement of “War on Terror” by the former U.S. President George Bush Jr. the world leaders started to reframe the whole facets of security. Security in this context is a relative concept, not an absolute one. Undoubtedly, as security to its fullest extent is not achievable, state actors in the international system have to weigh up security as maximization of power in order to satisfy their survival needs in the system. States have to pour resources to ensure the desired level of security by acquiring hard, soft and smart power. Marginal increases in security may only be available at relatively high cost and an actor will have to balance these costs against other benefits. Political analysts agree that international security is the most important contemporary global issue. Other concerns include global inequality, disease control, the effectiveness of international treaties, economic expansion, environmentalism, and so on. However, the focal concern for all states is security.<sup>1</sup> State interest that implies independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity has always been one of the major security concerns for a small state like Mongolia.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the communist bloc had a great impact on the international system, as a multi-polar world replaced the formerly bipolar world. At the same time, the security environment has changed; these changes have had a wide impact on Mongolia’s security environment. As compared to other ex-communist countries, Mongolia is one of the most successful countries in transforming to democracy and a free-market economic system. The external and internal changes involved profoundly affected Mongolia’s traditional national security concepts. For a small country like Mongolia, sandwiched between two huge countries, security remains a major concern. The security of small states depends on their particular geographical, domestic and regional environments. Before the end of the Cold War, Mongolia’s national security concept was based on a threat-based scenario, the “China threat,” and security was managed through a military alliance with the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup>

Mongolia occupies an important strategic location at the heart of Central Asia. Surrounded by Russia in the northern side and by China in the other three sides it is a landlocked country in northern Asia without any blue water facilities. It shares 4,673 km border with China and

3,441 km with Russia.<sup>3</sup> Population wise, it is the smallest country in Asia but geographically it is counted among the biggest Countries of the world. This signifies the strategic importance of Mongolia. The security environment of Mongolia is directly related to global and regional political, economic, social and army processes and furthermore, their internal society, political life, bilateral relations and cooperation of the Russian federation and People's Republic of China.

The security environment of Mongolia is directly related to global and regional political, economic, social and army processes and furthermore, the activities of foreign policies, their internal society, political life, bilateral relations and cooperation of the two neighbouring countries, namely the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China.<sup>4</sup> Chinese economic and demographic expansion may directly impact Mongolia and the precedent of the signification of Inner Mongolia demonstrates new challenges to the isolated Mongolian Republic.<sup>5</sup> The policy of ensuring and strengthening national security seeks to identify and eliminate any threat at the 'probable' stage of occurrence, and directly depends on it. The national security, in terms of political spatial security, is divided into global, regional and sub-regional.<sup>6</sup>

Since 1990s or more precisely the post- Cold War period, Mongolia redefined its priority directions in the domestic and foreign policies because not only. State interest but also social and civilian interests came to the forefront as the overall national security concerns. As the, it become clear that national security of Mongolia could be ensured not only in terms of preserving independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity but also achieving a sustainable socio-economic development with guarantee human rights and freedom to civilians. It was more so because in today's context, "security is defined not by a country's self-defence capacity but by its capacity to survive and compete".<sup>7</sup> In that perspective relations with without world often play key roles in ensuring a country's overall Mongolia national security.

### **Mongolia's security reforms in the post-cold war period :**

The end of the communist bloc totally changed the external and internal security environments of Mongolia and led to the search for newer forms of economic and security arrangements.<sup>8</sup> From the 1990s, Mongolia, like some other ex-communist countries, chose to establish a democratic and humane society with a new constitution and social, political and economic changes, thus opening a new page in Mongolian history. Mongolia's national security policy has always been defined by external, rather than internal factors. Mongolia was under the Manchu Empire between 1691 and 1911, the state Mongolia gained a short-lived independence between 1911 and 1919, and was engaged by the new Republic of China between 1919 and 1921.<sup>9</sup> During these periods, the occupiers exercised cruel policy in Mongolia. Even during the short period of its sovereignty, Mongolia did not really work out its own independent national security and foreign policy because of external influence from neighboring countries. In 1921, Mongolia declared its independence again and established the Mongolian People's Republic. Since then, and until 1990, Mongolia was the first military and political ally of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and was a member of the communist camp. During the Cold War, this close relationship open economic assistance, and a nuclear and predictable arms umbrella, with the USSR assurance Mongolia's

independence and national security<sup>10</sup>.

In the 1990s political and social reforms began in Mongolia which has become the key factors in re-defining the country's defence policy. In addition, the diminishing of the common defence system of the so-called socialist community countries, the cessation of outside military assistance and consequent drastic reduction in military expenditures, the number of armed forces personnel, and the terms of military service were all pre-cursors of the reforms needed in the defence sector. The turning face, however, was Gorbachev's 1986 Vladivostok proposal for removing pressure and conflict in the Asia-Pacific region, which in addition changed the current political position of Mongolia as a "buffer" in the Sino-Soviet relations.<sup>11</sup> Emergence of new geopolitical condition as well as impact of domestic political and economic reforms particularly during 1990-1992 compelled Mongolia to consider its future development and security issues in the framework of new realities.<sup>12</sup>

As such, a major review of its foreign and security policy was undertaken in June 1994 which resulted in the formulation of three very important documents i.e., Concept of National Security, Concept of Foreign Policy and Military Doctrine.<sup>13</sup> Earlier the State Great Hural (Mongolian Parliament) adopted the Law on the Defence of Mongolia in 1993 in order to facilitate establishment of an integrated defence system in Mongolia, determine the structure, organization, and functions of the armed forces, and regulate relations rising from implementation of the state defence policy. The Law on the Border, the Law on Civil Defence, and the Law on State of Emergency were framed in accordance with the Law on the Defence of Mongolia.<sup>14</sup>

As specific in the Concept of National Security of Mongolia, the national security consists of the following main components; security of the existence of Mongolia, social order and state system, citizens' rights and freedoms, economic security, scientific and technological, security of information, security of Mongolian civilization and ecological security. The overall concerns for Mongolia's security thus aimed at achieving favourable internal and external conditions for ensuring vital national interests, which include the existence of the Mongolia people and their civilization, its independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, sacredness of the state frontiers, relative economic independence, sustainable ecological development and national unity.<sup>15</sup> The vital national interests of Mongolia constitute the object of special core and protection on the part of the state and people.

In 1994, the State Great Hural adopted a document entitled "Fundamentals of the Military Doctrine of Mongolia" which was of great significance. It formulated the main directions of foreign and domestic policies in relation to a legal basis for implementing military reforms and ensuring military security. On the other hand, the Action Program of the Mongolian Government (1996-2000) focused much on an integral military system in order to have a national defence system, which talked about an effective and professional border troops. Priority was given to the political and diplomatic means in defence policies of the country. An armed forces equipment policy was designed to keep a close eye on the international and regional military-political and geopolitical environment. Confidence building measures were taken to strengthen security framework as well as national Security Council by raising its competence and power.

In the year 2010, new National Security Concept was adopted by State Great Hural

(SGH), the parliament of Mongolia. This document has assessed the national security environment and stated goals and objective of national security policy including the defense policy. Military should “take active participation in international peace support operations” as a leverage of political strategy to “continuously develop bilateral and multilateral security and defence relations and cooperation with its two huge neighbours Russia and China, the United States, NATO member nations, the European Union, and nations of the Asia Pacific”.<sup>16</sup> The year 2011 has eventually become the year of starting point of the security sector reform in Mongolia. At least seventy laws should be amended to achieve the goals stated in National Security Concept of Mongolia.<sup>17</sup> As a part of this, the ministry of defence submitted the draft of Basics of National military policy to the Government Cabinet. Two main subject of this document have been managing fast economic growth and blancing of big powers.

### **Security concern for Mongolia :**

Mongolia’s security policy always affected internal and external factors. Mongolia faces no immediate external or internal threats as long as it keeps friendly relations with Russia and China. As the margin between security and development has been narrowed, for small and underdeveloped country like Mongolia, development challenges definitely constitute the biggest security challenges.<sup>18</sup> There are two immediate security challenges, economic and political: managing the fast growing economy and balancing interests of two big powers. The state policy of Mongolia aimed at embarking upon the way to democracy and social reforms, developing market economic relation, formation a democratic state system, protection human rights, reviving and maintaining national uniqueness, and protecting Nature is being implemented in conventionality with the extreme objective of ensuring national security.<sup>19</sup>

The end of Soviet Union totally changed the external and internal security environments of Mongolia and led the quest for newer forms economic and security arrangements. From the 1990s, Mongolia, like some other ex-communist countries, chose to establish a democratic and humane society with a new constitution and political, social and economic changes, thus starting a new page in Mongolian history. The geopolitical scenario influenced the Mongolia’s security policy. But the first and foremost priority of Mongolia is its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. As for a small country like Mongolia these security concern always play significant role. In the beginning of 1990’s after the end of Cold War when Mongolia redefined it’s domestic and foreign policy “not only state interest but also social and civilian interests came to the forefront as the overall national security concerns”.<sup>20</sup>

### **In search of a multi-pillared and open door policy :**

The new domestic and international situation demanded new policies concerning national foreign policy and security policy. Under these circumstances, Mongolia’s response was a conduct of a multi-pillar and open door policy. The Mongolian Parliament in 1994 and in 1998 respectively though the adoption of the three landmark documents: the Foreign Policy Concept, the National Security Concept and the Military Doctrine.<sup>21</sup> The essence of this new policy lies in having relations with several countries beyond its two huge neighbours as possible. These relations have been established in diplomatic, economic cultural, health, educational, human rights, environment and military areas.

Presently, consensus exists amid Mongolian society and the political parties on multi-pillared and open door policies. The essential foreign policy objective was to expand with the Western Countries and Asia, implement non-aligned nuclear free policy and prohibit stationing of foreign troops on Mongolian soil. This has been translated into a six-point foreign policy programme while top priority is placed on maintaining good relation with Russia and China and other priority include expanding relation with developed countries from East and West, Asian countries, international organizations, former allies of Mongolia in Eastern Europe, and the developing nations.<sup>22</sup> Indeed the acceptance of “open door” policies assisted recapturing the nationalist ground changing the countries “satellite state” image and enormously enhancing Mongolia’s status as an independent nation in an era of international uncertainty. Definitely, the history of Mongolia’s post reforms reflects the dominance of foreign policy in influencing domestic politics.

The national security concept further proposes that in its foreign relations Mongolia shall exercise “political realism and consistently principled approach, accord top priority to vital national interests and other national considerations, seek to secure many partners in its international relations and promote a non-aligned policy so long as it does not threaten the countries vital interests.”<sup>23</sup>

Following this inclusive approach Mongolia is now pursuing an open foreign policy with a commitment to “promote the policy of consultation with influential countries on issues of strengthening world peace and security, of developing international cooperation, of enhancing the country’s strategic significance and fostering strategic interests of major powers in Mongolia.” Mongolia is also committed to ensure the security of its existence by strictly observing the policy of not allowing the use of the countries territory against other states ensuring its Nuclear-Weapon-Free status at the international level and making it an important element of strengthening the countries security by political means.<sup>24</sup> While making a reappraisal of the second document, it seems that Mongolia’s security thinking further depends on its active foreign policy that too focuses on the national interests. It has been clearly mentioned in the foreign policy concept that “the priority of Mongolia’s foreign policy shall be safeguarding of its security and vital national interest by political and diplomatic means, and creating a favourable external environment for its economic, scientific and technological development”<sup>25</sup>

In order to achieve this objective Mongolia’s approach has been to secure maximum benefits offered by international and regional multilateral cooperation. Obviously, by adopting a “multi-pillar” foreign policy Mongolia not only discarded the lopsided attitude of the Cold War period but also opted for a non-aligned policy so as to make its presence in the world felt as developing countries. During the last ten years of the post-Cold war period, it has broadened its diplomatic outlook and the scope of its international activities by adhering to the principle of flexible priorities in foreign policy implementation.<sup>26</sup> “Pragmatism” as part of quite a new thinking has been one of the main characteristics of Mongolia’s foreign policy. Therefore, the country relies on ongoing international political reality as well as on the international legal system besides following the trends of international economic development. However, the key issue involving Mongolia’s foreign policy priorities is to ensure the security and prosperity of the countries both internally and externally by “forming with influential countries in the

region and in the world a network of relationship based on the interdependence of political, economic and other interests.<sup>27</sup>

As such, Mongolia has the framework of its multi-pillared and multi-dimensional foreign policy, so as to ensure its security in terms of state as well as socio-economic and civilian interests. The third document, which becomes the guiding principles of preserving the countries strategic interest, is the Military Doctrine. It has adopted at a time when Mongolian leadership acknowledged that although the prospects for mutual understanding, trust and partnership came to be prevailed in international relations with the end of the Cold War, the danger of war and armed conflicts had not been fully eliminated and a collective security system had not yet been formed either at the global or regional level.<sup>28</sup> Mongolia, thus, needed a guiding principle, which has been enshrined in this military doctrine to avoid any kind of danger militarily. Significantly, the document asserts that Mongolia's international relation had "shifted from predominantly political and military fields to economic, scientific-technological and informational fields, in other words, from geopolitics to geo-economics."<sup>29</sup>

Mongolia has pledged that it would never engage in a conflict except if invaded and that the country would never enter into any military bloc so long as its independence and sovereignty were not threatened.<sup>30</sup> In sum, the military doctrine has been formulated on the basis of broader security issues particularly in the Asia-pacific region, and hence the goal of Mongolia's defence policy objectives at participating in the creation of collective security system.

Although Mongolia engaged itself in various dialogues on broader regional security issues in order to find a valuable place in the regional assistance, that still wished to do much. However, Mongolia's foreign policy and national security interests had a reflection of the internal politics as well as regional dynamics, and therefore, relations with the outside world had important roles to play in future.<sup>31</sup>

Forging cordial relation with outside world constitutes a major contributing factor in ensuring Mongolia's security. As a result of this new orientation, the foreign policy of the defence sector of Mongolia pursues a beneficial policy in order to properly use the fruits of cooperation and military relation with two huge neighbours and other countries. While maintaining 'complete equality' in its relations with two great neighbouring countries Russia and China, Mongolia has also focussed its attention towards developing political and economic cooperation with United States, Japan, Australia, European Union especially Germany, France, Britain, as well as Canada, and other western countries. Besides, in order to strengthen its position in Asia, Mongolia attaches great importance towards expanding its relation with India, Turkey, Thailand, the republic of Korea, Singapore and other ASEAN member's country. However, the post-Cold War period has also been witnessing growing concerns about Mongolia's search for a 'Third Neighbour', essentially quite a new approach to Ulaanbaatar's economic and strategic security.<sup>32</sup> Along with this having professional and compact armed forces, bringing military structure up to international values, and strengthening a united system of defence, national security and interests by political and diplomatic aims in context of Mongolian foreign policy shall be reached. Following discussion that factors affect Mongolia security policy and its engagements with both two huge neighbours, China and Russia as well as third neighbours.

**External security concern for Mongolia:**

The external influences on Mongolia security policy are largely geopolitical. Therefore this study focuses on relationships with the most important group of actors in Mongolia's foreign relations neighbours Russia and China and United State<sup>33</sup> and the significant role of international financial institutions. Mongolia interest that implies independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity have always been one of the major security concerns for a small state like Mongolia. While, in the post–Cold War period or more precisely in the beginning of 1990s, when Mongolia redefined its priority directions in the domestic and foreign policy, not only state interest but also social and civilian interests came to the forefront as the overall national security concerns.<sup>34</sup> Several centuries after the downfalls of The Great Mongolian Empire, Mongolians have now, for the first time, become genuine masters of their state and nation and that time has come that national independence and territorial integrity are no longer the target of threats from without. The time is past when the state was confronted with the probability of becoming entangled in the confrontation between the two global hostile camps or in a possible armed conflict between the Soviet Union and China. However, the security of Mongolia has not been ensured reliably and no sure guarantees have been developed for safeguarding Mongolia against becoming a victim of wars and conflicts in the future.<sup>35</sup>

From a strategic perspective, Russia is interested not only in friendly Mongolia, but also in a Mongolia strategically allied with Russia. Their concern lies in a dramatic shift in the balance of power in Asia, if China or any other nation dominates Mongolia.<sup>36</sup> A political thinker argues that economy and political are key factors in securing each countries internal and external security. And so long China's influence in Mongolia and the rest of the world remains primarily economic in nature; there is little or no danger to Mongolia territorial security. On the other hand, a stable and neutral Mongolia is also vital for China's own security interest which is economically motivated as Beijing moves to great power states seeking to build up its power base in Northeast Asia.<sup>37</sup>

The central issue for Mongolian policy makers is whether Mongolia can move beyond buffer states to exercise a broader role in the region and garner greater security for its newly obedient sovereignty. If there were any clash between its neighbours, Mongolia's own sovereignty would be endangered, as it was for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mongolia's foreign policy therefore focuses on preventing any such clashes from arising, by binding its own policy as well as its neighbours to international law in order to ensure its own national security. Chinese policy makers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are fully conscious of the chickened past of devastating invasions of the Chinese heartland from the Mongolian plateau, and such memories are still significant when policies were shaped up. Although china has recognized the independent status of Mongolia, but the PRC has often published official maps which include the territory of Mongolia within its borders.<sup>38</sup>

However the natures of the relationship among the countries of the Asia-Pacific region have been changed, a collective security system is still not in place and conflicts of various sorts continue to persist. Given this situation, Mongolia faces the vital need to conduct an independent policy that gives priority to its national interests in order to ensure its national independence and sovereignty, and enable it to help address development issues. For its own

peace and security, Mongolia always seeks to participate in the Security Mechanism of Northeast Asia and as a member of international community. Thus Mongolia actively supports East Asian integration and formations of a multilateral security mechanism to emerge in Northeast Asia. Also, its aspiration to join it as a member will be in the best security interest of all Northeast Asian nations in general and of Mongolia in particular.<sup>39</sup>

The change in Mongolia's external security situation has made it imperative to alter the conception thereof, and above all to reconsider Mongolia's relationship with the two huge neighbours and other countries and ways to guarantee security on its own. Apart from developing a balanced relationship with the two great neighbours, Mongolia is striving to rely on a third force, which has become a key orientation in the country's foreign policy. A view toward implementing this policy Mongolia concluded a "Treaty on friendly relations and cooperation", first in 1992 with the Russian Federation and then in 1994 with the People's Republic of China.<sup>40</sup> In addition, Mongolia considers it vitally important to build up energetic support with other important countries and create a new national security situation in the Asia-Pacific region. In fact, Mongolia is working to develop such a strategy which would be understood and accepted by its neighbouring countries as well as other nations in the Asia-Pacific region.

### **Conclusion :**

The Soviet collapse in 1991 changed the geostrategic environment of Mongolia which made Mongolia politically insecure. Mongolia's security challenges thus came to the forefront as it moved away from Russia towards an uncertain future where the great concern was China. In this new environment, Mongolia found itself vulnerable to possible future threats and intimidation from China. As an advantage of the geostrategic position, Mongolia enjoyed the two big buffers of Russia and China and will remain the same way as long as the balance of power between them is kept. Mongolia feels no immediate military threat so far, but the location has its own disadvantage of isolation from the rest of the world and global development. Development challenges constitute political and economic risks for the national security of Mongolia.

In 2011 was a significant year for the Mongolian defence sectors in ways; reviewing national defence policy. Defence modernization of Mongolia will impact the regional balance of power, especially the balance of power between Russia and China. As such relationship under the concept of "Third Neighbour" was aimed at counterbalancing Russia and China so that Mongolia could overcome the perceived security threats from these two neighbours. Mongolia is keen to maintain a friendly relationship with the U.S and China a new U.S-China-Mongolia triangle is born. Maintaining good neighbourly and balanced relation with both Russia and China seems to be in the best interest of the country to maximum benefits for ensuring its overall security.

As such Mongolia's foreign policy activity focused on developing friendly relations with highly developed countries of the West and East and creating and bringing to an appropriate level their economic and other interests in Mongolia security concerns. For the foreseeable future Mongolia will have to rely much on its diplomatic initiatives to safeguard its security and foreign policy concerns for maintaining not only country's sovereignty and territorial

integrity, but also achieving the socio-economic security.

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