

On Some Developmental Trends for The Russian-Mongolian Relationships

Naumkin, Vitaly Vyacheslavovich

*Professor (Sc.D), Chair, Faculty of World Politics, M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, Full member of RAS, President, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, RUSSIA
email: director@ivran.ru*

Abstract: *This article made available for publication is compiled on the basis of a report presented at the International Science Conference that took place on September 2nd, 2021, in the city of Vladivostok (Russky Island). It deals with the ordinary and megatrends reflecting the specific aspects in relation to the current stage of the Russian-Mongolian bilateral relationships. Such trends include, for example, diversification of external ties or orientation towards multidimensional collaboration. It is asserted that, throughout the century-old history of close interaction between Russia and Mongolia, since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states, there have been a lot of epoch-making events and developments of landmark nature, which up to date constitute the meaningful elements of historic memory for our peoples, defining the overriding megatrend of our mutual understanding and affinity that bears a sustainable character, defying any influence of the political and economic environment factors.*

Keywords: *Mongolia, Russia, century, gas pipeline, trends, megatrends, strategic cooperation, tripartite format, historic memory.*

The International Conference attended by the most prominent figures representing Mongolian and Russian humanitarian sciences was held at the Far Eastern Federal University on the sidelines of the Eastern Economic Forum on the 2nd September, 2021, at the time when Russia and Mongolia marked a hundredth anniversary of the diplomatic relations

between the two nations. It was symbolic that the anniversary coincided with the centennial of the first academic structure in Mongolia – the Scientific Committee set up with the assistance of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and also the sixtieth anniversary of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences.

It cannot go unmentioned in this

Received: 12 September, 2021; Accepted: 27 September, 2021



ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9644-9862>
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

context that, historically, the scientific tradition in Mongolia traces back much more than a hundred years ago. It dates back, as we all know, to the Middle Ages, to the epoch of Kubilai Khan, who was the founder of the first scientific body in history, the patron of scholarship and an advocate of religious tolerance, therefore, by virtue of this fact, representatives of various confessions were enabled to be in service at his Court, including Christians (of the Nestorian Church) and Muslims. Incidentally, the year 2021 marks the 750th anniversary of the establishment of the Yuan Empire that encompassed the territory of China, Mongolia, and partly the territory of Korea and Burma.

Apart from that, 2021 is the year remarkable for other no less significant anniversaries, which are worth mentioning here. For instance, it was 85 years ago when a Soviet-Mongolian Mutual Assistance Pact was signed on March 12th, 1936, (whereas shortly before, in 2019, we celebrated 80th anniversary of the most crucial victory scored by the Soviet-Mongolian troops over militarist Japan on the Khalkin-Gol river). The year 2021 also marks the 60th anniversary of Mongolia's membership in the UNO, while it was the Soviet Union who was most instrumental in paving the way for Mongolia to join this organization, and who was the only nation until the end of World War II to recognize the Mongolian independence. Also, this year we mark the 40th anniversary of the Soviet space flight carrying on board the first Mongolian cosmonaut Jugderdemidiyn Gurragchaa, who was conferred upon, on the occasion of this anniversary, a prestigious

Russian award – the Order of Alexander Nevsky. And, last but not least, it has been 15 years since the conclusion of the Mongolian-Russian Agreement on Strategic Partnership.

However, let's not be carried away by the magic of numbers beyond measure. The relationships between our peoples have been developing for over a hundred years, and we have deep-rooted connections binding our fates together through the long historical span. Nonetheless, it is not my intention to dwell on the past too much. While Eric Hobsbawm spoke about the "Short Twentieth Century" (1914-1991) [Hobsbaum, 1996], I would prefer to refer to that century as the "long" one, as the importance of realities forged by it has largely retained its validity until the present day. Let the matter rest with some of the most painful pages of history during that "long" century, as the chief tracks for the evolution of the social development projects for both our states were not determined by them.

It was exactly a hundred years ago when the world was shaken by the most enormous events of monumental proportions and colossal magnitude. The end of World War I, revolutions in Russia and Mongolia, the emergence of new states, military interventions, national liberation movements, civil wars. A thorough and systemic transformation of our societies got underway across the Eurasian territory. The Russian and Mongolian peoples appeared to be divided into the Red and the White, while the remaining traces of this division can be perceived even now, from time to time. In our history, we have retained the

names of some prominent figures fighting for the White movement at that time, whose role was assessed differently by our compatriots, such as Baron Ungern-Sternberg or Baron Wrangell.

But still, our societies contrived to overcome the internal division caused by the ideological contradictions and enter the consolidation trajectory within the framework of a nation-state. Today, the Russian-Mongolian relationships feature a nexus of intertwined influences exerted by global and regional megatrends (the trends and megatrends are described by the author of this article in a number of writings, for example: Baranovsky, Naumkin, 2018), as well as long-term, medium-term and short-term regional trends. A thorough-going analysis and classification of those trends deserve to be the subject of a specifically focused scientific analysis, however now we are going to confine ourselves to a brief general overview. Among the key megatrends of our times, mention should be made of the globalization process of the world politics, a shift in the role of the West in the international affairs, strengthening of the position of the non-Western states, reinforcement of the sovereignty of nation-states, Failure of the interventionism and the strategy of changing regimes from the outside by force, climate change, the impact of domestic development factors upon the system of international relations, the influence of a definitive universalization of political systems (within this process, democratization and modernization can be singled out), growth of the competition between various coalitions of states and individual states, Complication of human

interaction with the environment. While designating the latter trend, I cannot fail to say the both Russia and Mongolia, like all other nations, are fully aware of this problem. Its manifestations include the pandemics, pollution of the atmosphere, deforestation, disappearance of certain species of animals, water crisis, floods, fires etc.

A separate discourse can be devoted to such a vital regional trend as the shaping of a unified Eurasian space, or the Great Eurasia, in which Mongolia and Russia are given a vital and mutually complementary role to play. Apart from the bilateral relations, our two nations are engaged in developing ties in a triangle with China. Here, crucial significance is attached to the evolving cooperation in the energy and transportation sectors. A groundbreaking project along this direction is the Yamal – China gas pipeline across the Mongolian territory known as Soyuz Vostok (this is the name of its Mongolian segment, the entire project is called the Power of Siberia-2 similarly to the already commissioned Power of Siberia pipeline to China).

As of today, Gazprom of Russia has endorsed the technical study for this project, which stipulates for the gas pipeline to be laid along an adequately designated route across the Mongolian territory, assessing its length, diameter, tubing pressure and the number of gas compressor stations. However, as Russian analyst Tatiana Dyatel writes, it is not yet clear so far what the Russian segment of the project – the Power of Siberia-2 – will look like [Dyatel, 2021]. It is most likely that the pipeline is slated to run from the west of Yamal peninsula to the city of

Krasnoyarsk, while the major part of the route will cut through the uninhabited dense marshy forests of Siberia (taiga). According to the estimates made by the analytical community, with such routing, the pipeline length will be over 2,000 km, and the cost and complexity of works will be comparable to the Power of Siberia construction project. Now, the time has come to draft a feasibility study for the Power of Siberia-2 project, including investment and operation costs. It is planned that a transit pipeline through Mongolian territory, with a capacity of up to 50 billion cubic meters per year, will connect the gas transportation infrastructures of the western and eastern parts of Russia and provide gas supplies to Eastern Siberia, which currently has no access to the main gas pipelines.

A Fitch agency analyst Dmitry Marinchenko indicates that at the present stage it is very problematic to evaluate the profitability of the gas pipeline project to China through Mongolia: neither the allocated budget is known, nor the supply volumes or the terms for gas supplies. However, the expert concedes that this transit route can afford greater flexibility to Gazprom – the gas recovered in Western Siberia can be exported either to Europe or to China. Experts believe that if, in relation to the Power of Siberia-2 construction project, it is decided to build a fully robust new gas main from Yamal to Mongolia through Krasnoyarsk, then the construction project will be tantamount in terms of cost and complexity to the Power of Siberia project magnitude [Ibid]. Whereas, in 2019, in the city of Bishkek, Kirghizstan, a question on the implementation of

the road map for the development of cooperation and establishment of an economic corridor China – Mongolia – Russia was discussed. The range of issues on the agenda comprised such critical joint projects as the modernization of the Ulaanbaatar railway track or the extension of the energy supply system of the republic of Mongolia. Russian companies, in 2015, started to implement a project to increase the capacity of the Ulaanbaatar Thermal Power Plant (TTP) No.4.

I am positive that the execution of such a grandiose project in the energy sector as the transit gas pipeline will have a favorable impact on the overall situation in the trade and economic collaboration area between the two states, in general. Thus far, the trade balance between Moscow and Ulaanbaatar is negative for Mongolia, and it is highly desirable that Russia would import more commodities from Mongolia, as there are plenty of opportunities for it, very successfully taken advantage of by China. In matters of trade with Mongolia, Russia is seriously lagging behind China, whose share in the Mongolian turnover constitutes 57% (USD 7,383 million), while the Russian share is only 11% (USD 1,467 million) [Bank of Mongolia, 2020]. Trade is most certainly due to be on the rise, including border trading. It does not seem appropriate to pay too much attention to the critical utterances made by some Mongolian experts regarding the state of Mongolian-Russian cooperation. One of them, as is well known, accuses the ambassadors of the post-Soviet period of having “missed the boat” with Mongolia, as they failed to perceive the growth of invest-

ment attractiveness of the coal-mining industry and acted in accordance with the outdated Soviet stereotypes. In other words, the Russian diplomats who were in charge of managing the relations with Mongolia were not keeping abreast of the new Mongolian realities.

While I am not inclined to support such pronouncements in principle, nonetheless, I'd like to note that Moscow should have paid greater attention to the prospects for engaging in highly lucrative trade and economic cooperation with Ulaanbaatar. This would have been in line with the friendly and trust-based political relationships between the two states. Interestingly, one of the ordinary trends is that these relationships have developed steadily, irrespective of the fact which party was in power at this or that time in Mongolia. Our relationships constitute an integral part of the foreign policy strategy that is designed on the basis of a pragmatic approach with due account of the priority held by the national interests, the same is also characteristic of the outlook adopted by Moscow. Meanwhile, as evidenced in practice, those interests of both states are in sync with each other or they can be easily adjustable and compatible. As a matter of fact, this is a decisive factor for defining such trend in the bilateral relations between Russia and Mongolia as their transformation into the overall strategic partnership, which has acquired a geopolitical nature and is bound to make headway in an increasingly prosperous way.

Speaking about local trends in Mongolia's foreign policy, its diversified character can be mentioned as an

example. Bearing in mind Mongolia's middle position, it is small wonder that it seeks to promote collaboration not only with China and Russia, but also with the US, Japan, Korea, India. In this context, such consistent trends can be cited as commitment to the principles of sovereignty, non-interference into domestic affairs, honoring the role of historic memory, preservation of the value of the Buddhist legacy, nomadic livestock farming development. The mere fact that in the country, whose population slightly exceeds three million people, heads of livestock animals total 70 million is astounding, (at the same time, Russia has provided assistance to Mongolia in the implementation of the program to improve the livestock quality and breeding). Though, some experts believe that the controversy between the traditional livestock farming and industrialization is likely to grow, as the country possesses huge deposits of mineral resources and industrialization most certainly holds a high priority on the development agenda. I might add that the greater part of Mongolia's exports to Russia is fluorspar (over 80%).

Finally, I would like to identify a trend so relevant for us today when we are having a tough time getting by, it is boosting the efforts to increase our cooperation in the defense and security sectors, where the expertise amassed by Russia and its capabilities will be highly in demand. Our two nations have signed a long-term military cooperation program, the Selenga-2019 annual military training exercise has been conducted since 2008 to coordinate joint action to fight terrorist activities. On September

3rd 2019, a Protocol on the resumption of the operation of the intergovernmental agreement, dated 4th March 2004, on the provision of military and technical assistance to Mongolia on a gratuitous basis was signed. The Mongolian party was granted, in particular, two MiG-29UB aircraft.

As Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stressed during a joint press-

conference with Mongolian Foreign Minister, Mrs. Batmunkh Battsetseg, after the talks in Moscow on June 1st, 2021: “The talks have been traditionally warm, friendly and frank. Our good neighborly relations are based on many years of fruitful interaction, solidarity throughout the years of crisis, including during World War II”.

Conclusion

Summarizing the above, it can be underscored that a fresh look at the current state of the Russian-Mongolian relationships through the prism of the ordinary and mega trends as set out in this brief review, including the short-term, medium-term and long-term ones, is a very useful exercise. The century-old history behind these relationships chronicles a wealth of events and developments relevant for their evolution, while the mightiness of the historical memory of our two peoples closely linked with each other helps to bolster

the significance of our bonds. While there have been ups and downs along the way in the development of our bilateral partnership, and overall, its fabric has been woven in an uneven manner, it is generally characterized by sustained continuity and forward movement. Over the recent years, we have witnessed such a megatrend as the prevalence of a tripartite format, whereas cooperation in the energy sector, transport infrastructure and security industry has been given special priority.

References

- Baranovsky V., Naumkin V. 2018. Key Trends of the Centennial Development. – *The Middle East within the Changing Global Context*. Moscow: The Institute of Oriental Studies. P. 14-53.
- Dyatel T. 2021. Gazprom Has Mapped Out the Route through Mongolia. – *Commercant*, No. 64 (7026). 13 April 2021.
- Bank of Mongolia. 2020. *Mongolia's Foreign Trade Review*, December 2020.
- Hobsbaum E. 1996. *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*. New York: Vintage Books.