

The Impact of Global Geopolitical Shifts on the Security of Northeast Asia and Mongolia

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Abstract: The current international situation is transforming rapidly, becoming more unstable and unpredictable. Major transitions and changes occurring in international relations and geopolitics. Unfavorable military and political factors have increased at the regional security theaters; therefore, the international security environment has worsened. In the Northeast Asian region, the geopolitical situation caused by the new "Cold War" still prevails.

Northeast Asia contains economically developed relatively well-integrated countries but lacks the confidence-building mechanism and security cooperation. Now the Northeast Asian region is considered as the region with the highest probability of armed conflict arising from disputed territorial issues.

Keywords: new world order, risks, challenges, Northeast Asia, security environment, international relations

I. Global Geopolitical Situation

In the last 20th century, the geopolitical competition between the world's influential countries basically "settled" after World War II and became entangled in competitions between capitalist and socialist systems. In the aftermath of the Cold War, a unipolar international system dominated

international relations led by the United States (Zaheer M. Quraishi 1996).

But in world history, a situation like "Mongolia's period of great peace" was never repeated. The geopolitical confrontation of the Cold War resurged along with the struggle between



democratic and authoritarian systems (AFE, The Mongols 2025). In its shadow, the competition for energy resources and space for natural resources is taking place, which has been "strengthened" by religious extremists and international terrorism. Post-Cold War geopolitical confrontations affected much of the Middle East and North Africa, resulting in new flows of refugees to Europe, with negative economic consequences for smaller and less developed countries.

Currently, the international security environment is unstable, unpredictable. Events are rapidly unfolding, and major transition changes are taking place at the level of world geopolitics and international relations. This period will probably last until the 2040s, as the fundamental dynamics of the security environment shift, the scope and amplitude of the coverage may be unprecedented in the history of the world. Some experts see this period of transition in international relations as the establishment of a new order after the unipolar dominance of the West (Batjargal Purevdorj 2024).

In recent years, unfavorable military and political factors have increased in the regional security environment. The overall international security situation has worsened. The current international relations, including major countries, and their prospects are complicated, new and old conflicts continue to persist, and the participation of major countries in geo-conflicts is still active.

In fact, the US National Security Concepts of 2017, 2021, and 2022, defined China and Russia as strategic

competitors and adversaries who are basically forcing the emergence of great power competition (Michael M & O'Hanlon 2024). The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation (approved in July 2021) identified the location of NATO military infrastructure along the Russian border and the US missile defense complex as threats undermining strategic stability (President of the Russian Federation 2025).

As mentioned above, the overall setting creates some complexity in the relations of major countries that play a dominant role in the international system. Therefore, the geopolitical "power struggle" between great/major powers continues incoming year. At the same time, the number of "hot spots" is not predicted to decrease, but to increase, and the situation is not expected to improve soon.

As the geostrategic "game" between the major powers took place, they appear to be focused on three geographical areas: Asia-Pacific Region, Europe and the Middle East. However, in the near future, the African continent is likely to become a new field of geopolitical struggle.

Thus, while dealing with traditional security challenges, the humanitarian and refugee crises caused by climate change, war, armed conflict, and internal instability have become reality. Soon, there might be a new challenge of "ecological refugees" due to natural disasters and climate change (Issa Ibrahim Berchin & et al.,) 2017).

New challenges emerging from the rapid advancement of science and technology are increasingly manifesting

in areas such as geopolitical tensions, cyberspace, and outer space.

If we assess the international security landscape on a global scale, we are clearly in an era marked by intense crises and conflicts, where the drive to resolve issues through force often outweighs efforts to find political solutions. As a result, geopolitical tensions have escalated, leading to armed confrontations that span entire regions.

The Russia-Ukraine war stands as a prime example of the ongoing political confrontation, with its scale, duration, and broad repercussions on international security still difficult to predict. As the conflict continues, the global economic system is likely to fracture along the geopolitical lines of the major powers. Over time, countries that have covertly supported Russia will be revealed, potentially giving rise to new blocks of de facto security alliances. Meanwhile, the influence and relevance of international organizations have significantly waned, with institutions like the UN Security Council and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe—whose mandate is to prevent and resolve conflicts—becoming increasingly impotent (Rawa Almakky 2023).

The military-political situation around our northern neighbor, Russia, became the main excuse and reason for NATO's resurgence and expansion. It is clear that expanding this military and political structure and turning it into a major global geopolitical factor is in the interests of the Western powers and large military-industrial groups.

The military-political situation in the

Asia-Pacific region remains complex, with growing tensions and open confrontations among key players. Apart from Mongolia, nearly all countries in the region are embroiled in territorial disputes, while issues such as North Korea's nuclear program, the South China Sea, and the Taiwan question further exacerbate the situation.

As the military and economic power of China's southern neighbor continues to grow, a cautious alliance is emerging in the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad—formed in 2007 at the initiative of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, comprising the United States, Australia, Japan, and India (Felix Heiduk & Christian Wirth 2023). The AUKUS agreement, established on September 15, 2022, between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, are seen by international security experts as the onset of a 'new Cold War' in the South China Sea, aimed at curbing China's expanding influence (US Department of Defense 2023). While these agreements and alliances cannot yet reach the level and power of NATO, they have nonetheless become a significant factor in regional security dynamics and may pose short-term risks to stability in the Indo-Pacific.

In the Middle East, the situation in Syria remains unstable, and the conflict between Israel and Hamas has escalated, turning the Gaza Strip into a war zone. As Israel launched military operations in Gaza, several Middle Eastern countries were drawn into the conflict, while Western nations supporting Israel saw an increase in anti-Jewish sentiment and

actions. Just as the Russia-Ukraine war triggered a global energy and food crisis, the ongoing instability in the Middle East has disrupted oil supply chains and maritime transport, leading to significant breakdowns in international trade and logistics. As the socio-economic crisis deepens due to these wars and conflicts, countries—regardless of political regime—are losing internal stability, and cross-border challenges are intensifying. Although the United States and some European nations are working to de-escalate the Middle East crisis, it appears unlikely that this long-standing conflict will be fully resolved anytime soon.

As geopolitical confrontations between major powers escalate, the international and regional security environment becomes increasingly complex and unpredictable. With deepening conflicts and partisanship among these key players, small states encounter heightened risks of instability both in terms of external and internal security. Great powers often impose their geopolitical agendas on small states, pressuring them to adopt military-political and geo-economic policies that serve these great powers' strategic interests. These pressures are intensified through the economic fragmentation, which complicates bilateral and multilateral relations and compromises the independence of small states (Shekhar Aiyar 2023).

Today, many countries, including U.S. allies, face challenges to determine their positions, policies, and strategies amidst

the geopolitical competition. Given Russia's relatively limited role in the global economy, U.S. allies were quick to unite in response. However, countries with significant security and economic dependence on Russia, particularly those nearby, have limited options for strategic alignment. In the U.S.-China divide, positions vary widely, with many states aiming to retain access to China's economic opportunities and markets. America's allies, meanwhile, continue economic relations with China while focusing primarily on security efforts to contain China's growing influence and restrict its international military-political reach.

Leading research organizations and experts anticipate that the competitive geopolitical landscape will grow increasingly challenging over the next 5-10 years and conflicts and confrontations are likely to intensify. However, several factors could shift this trajectory. First, internal dynamics within major powers—such as elections, socio-economic crises, or unrest in the United States, China, and Russia—could reshape their geopolitical ambitions and policies (Christopher S & Chivvis eds 2023). Second, if international security reaches a critical point of instability, potentially edging towards world war, great powers may be compelled to cooperate and negotiate. Finally, a global crisis, such as a natural disaster or pandemic, could temporarily ease geopolitical tensions by redirecting focus toward shared challenges.

II. Regional Security in Northeast Asia

The geopolitical tensions of the "Cold War" era still persist in Northeast Asia. This region, comprising relatively well-integrated and economically advanced countries, lacks a formal framework for military-political and security cooperation, making it particularly susceptible to conflicts over territorial disputes. Since 2000, the United States has pursued policies to curtail China's military and political influence, restrict its economic expansion, and maintain its own strategic advantage. As part of this strategy, the U.S. has actively sought to bolster its political influence and military presence in Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, key partners in this geostrategic landscape.

Northeast Asia has long maintained a high concentration of military forces and weaponry compared to other regions worldwide. Since Kim Jong-un assumed power in North Korea, he has aggressively pursued weapons development, conducting multiple tests of intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear devices, and hydrogen bombs, and openly threatening U.S. allies. In response, South Korea and Japan raised their defense spending and expanded the scope and frequency of joint military exercises with the United States.

Several factors currently contribute to the relative stability and balance in Northeast Asia. These include:

- The strategic partnership between Russia and China in countering NATO's influence;
- Cooperation with countries that

have territorial disputes with China, especially in response to its policies in the South China Sea;

- The policies of regional countries regarding North Korea;
- The stable political regimes of influential regional powers, such as Russia and China, and the relative quiet in religious and ethnic tensions;
- The momentum of economic alliances and initiatives like the SCO, ASEAN, and China's "Belt and Road" Initiative.

However, predicting the durability of this stability is challenging as geopolitical tensions continue to escalate. Despite emerging issues, the region's major powers have reinforced strategic partnerships and prioritized economic cooperation. Nevertheless, in the event of an armed conflict on the Korean Peninsula, territorial disputes in the South China Sea, or separatist movements, there remains a risk of reigniting historical conflicts and grievances that could destabilize the entire region (Center for Preventive Action 2024).

China is actively implementing major geopolitical proposals and initiatives aimed at sustaining economic growth while shaping a regional and international system that supports its future economic interests. There is a growing need for access to raw materials, strengthening trade routes and infrastructure, and ensuring self-defense, which has led to an increase in military capabilities. While some analysts believe that China is pursuing a specific

timeline for the forceful reunification of Taiwan, both China and the United States seem reluctant to escalate the issue into an international conflict or war (Joshua Keating 2024). Countries in the region and multinational corporations are also keen to avoid such a scenario. Additionally, the geopolitical tensions arising from the Russia-Ukraine war are influencing Beijing's cautious approach, making it more prudent in its decision-making.

As noted earlier, the Korean Peninsula remains a critical hotspot in the Asia-Pacific Region. Despite repeated economic sanctions imposed by international organizations, particularly the United States and Western countries, the effectiveness of these sanctions has diminished. The Russia-Ukraine war and the US-China trade war have provided North Korea with opportunities to revive its economy and deepen trade and economic ties with Russia and China. Pyongyang has asserted that South Korea and Japan possess the capability to launch a nuclear attack on the United States, but for the past 30 years, its demands have remained consistent. That is a peace treaty with the United States to normalize the bilateral relations.

Leveraging the geostrategic advantages of Northeast Asia, the U.S.-led alliance continues to expand its influence and position in the Indo-Pacific region. However, the relationship between Japan and South Korea, two key U.S. allies in the region, remains complicated. Domestic political dynamics have led both countries to pursue independent policies in certain areas, resulting in occasional tensions. In response,

Washington is taking steps to further solidify its regional alliances with Tokyo and Seoul. A clear example of this effort is the revival of the tripartite summit in 2023, aimed at strengthening the trilateral partnership with Japan and South Korea.

Washington is making significant efforts to encourage its two allies, Japan and South Korea, to set aside their historical differences and collaborate more closely in response to the evolving security environment. The growing alignment between China, Russia, and North Korea has strengthened their position against the West, with China's assertive policies in the East and South China Seas and North Korea's intensifying nuclear and missile programs posing shared security challenges. This tripartite relationship serves as a foundation for strengthening cooperation.

For Japan, China's expanding economic and military power is viewed as a direct threat, while for South Korea, the increasingly aggressive nuclear and missile tests by North Korea remain a key concern, forming the basis for their joint efforts.

China strongly criticizes the trilateral relationship between the United States, Japan, and South Korea, viewing it as a nascent NATO-style security alliance in the Pacific region. Beijing perceives this alignment as a strategic move that could potentially undermine its influence and escalate tensions in the region, particularly in light of its growing concerns over the military cooperation and shared security interests of the three countries.

Despite numerous efforts by the countries in the region to maintain peace

and security, clear results have yet to materialize. The region's increasingly unstable security situation suggests that the ability of Northeast Asian countries to maintain control and balance of power is gradually eroding. Some researchers argue that the current dynamics in Northeast Asia are increasingly resembling the conditions in Western Europe before the outbreak of the two World Wars, with rising tensions and the potential for conflict looming over the region (Bazarvaani Gungaa & et al., 2024).

Western analysts often frame the conflict of interests in Northeast Asia as a political, economic, and territorial competition between the authoritarian regimes of Russia, China, and North Korea on one side, and the democratic liberal regimes of the United States, Japan, and South Korea on the other. However, it would be overly simplistic

to characterize the current tensions in the region merely as a clash between democracy and authoritarianism. This conflict is more likely to be viewed as part of a broad shift in Asia that reflects the evolving dynamics of international relations, requiring a fundamental change in the global system.

In summary, while the likelihood of geopolitical conflict and confrontation in Northeast Asia remains high, all parties are cautious about expanding the scale of tensions and prefer addressing issues through bilateral dialogue mechanisms. China's stance on Taiwan's unification is closely tied to internal political developments in Taiwan, while the United States views Taiwan as a strategic leverage point to assert its geostrategic superiority over China. However, the ongoing arms buildup in the region may persist, potentially reinforcing a Cold War-style dynamic in regional relations.

III. Possible Risks and Challenges to Mongolia's Security from the External Security Environment

Mongolia's external security environment is closely tied to the security of its two neighbors, namely Russia and China. While there are no open conflicts and the relations with these countries may seem balanced, the influence and pressure from these great powers permeate all aspects of Mongolia's security and economy, creating both risks and challenges. Despite Mongolia's historically dependent security situation in relation to Russia and China, it has faced numerous risks and challenges throughout its history, which will likely continue in the future. Currently, the

Sino-Russian relationship can be viewed as a comprehensive strategic interaction partnership, a situation that is both the closest and most favorable for Mongolia's external security context.

Historically, positive relations between Russia and China have generally had a favorable impact on Mongolia and the broader region. However, for Mongolia, overly close ties with either of its neighbors can also pose risks. For instance, the 1915 Tripartite Agreement between Russia, China, and Mongolia undermined Mongolia's aspirations for independence, as it primarily served

the interests of the two larger powers. Currently, as relations between Moscow and Beijing remain positive, Mongolia benefits from the opportunity to avoid choosing sides, fostering friendly relations with both countries. At the same time, the mutual wariness between Russia and China may help to limit their influence over Mongolia, allowing the country to maintain its sovereignty and balance in its foreign policy.

It is likely that the relationship between Russia and China will continue in its current form. However, several key factors, such as the outcome of the war in Ukraine, the status of the Taiwan issue, the evolving U.S.-China relationship, and tensions between Russia and NATO, will significantly influence this dynamic (Wenxing Zhou & Jing Chen 2023). It is becoming increasingly apparent that China, Russia, and North Korea are solidifying their positions against the West whereas the United States, Japan, and South Korea are strengthening their alliance in response. This growing regional tension could eventually pressure Mongolia to take sides, posing a risk of being drawn into the broader geopolitical struggle.

As a result of the war in Ukraine, Russia's position and power are likely to decline significantly, which will further enhance China's influence within their bilateral relationship. Isolated by Western sanctions, Russia has little choice but to shift its focus eastward, increasingly relying on China to navigate its geopolitical challenges. For China, this relationship will be approached pragmatically, prioritizing its own

strategic interests and addressing issues selectively. Consequently, China's influence in the region, and particularly over Mongolia, is expected to grow stronger. This shift could lead to greater economic, political, and security pressures on Mongolia as it navigates its relationships with these two powerful neighbors.

Given Mongolia's unique geopolitical position and international relations, if global power dynamics become structured into blocs, Mongolia may be compelled to align with a major power that influences its external security environment and economy. In the Russia-West confrontation, China is likely to play a leading role in shaping the relationship between the West and Russia. Furthermore, if the balance of power between the United States and China remains intact, both neighboring countries—Russia and China—could exert significant pressure on Mongolia, leveraging their influence over its security and economic decisions.

An equal power balance between the U.S. and China is also an undesirable scenario for Mongolia. In such a situation, Mongolia would face the challenge of navigating the political and economic pressures from both sides, which could create significant risks. The need to maintain neutrality while balancing these external pressures would complicate Mongolia's foreign policy, potentially leading to a situation where it is forced to make difficult choices that could undermine its sovereignty and stability.

To balance the influence of external powers, maintaining independence

is crucial (Mendee Jargalsaikhan & Altankhuu Badarch 2025). In international relations, shifts in power dynamics and the emergence of blocks are unlikely to happen quickly. Thus, our primary goal is to remain independent of any neighbour in the medium and long term. However, achieving economic independence from our southern neighbor is becoming increasingly challenging. Although several "third neighbors," such as France, Japan, South Korea, Germany and India, have established strategic partnerships and are actively working to strengthen cooperation in critical areas, any disruption in the current balance of power, as we foresee, could prompt our two neighbors to implement political and economic measures aimed at reinforcing their influence. This poses a risk of potential coercion. Consequently, if the balance of power is disrupted, we may find ourselves within China's sphere of influence, whether we desire it or not.

The 2019 signing of the *Friendly Relations and Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement* between Mongolia and Russia marked a significant milestone, reflecting the mutual trust in this new era of bilateral relations (Mendee Jargalsaikhan & Munkhtulga Batmunkh 2023). However, political pressure from the northern neighbor, including both overt and covert interference in strategic projects, aims to maintain Mongolia's dependence in key sectors such as energy, railways, mining, and defense. Notably, for the first time, Russia's foreign policy concept document specifically highlighted the need to "strengthen traditional and friendly relations with Mongolia."

(Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. 2016) This suggests that Russia's policy toward Mongolia will likely continue to follow traditional lines.

Mongolia and China have now established a comprehensive strategic partnership, marking the most favorable period in their shared history, with no unresolved contentious issues. Nevertheless, Mongolia faces both overt and covert pressures from its southern neighbor, largely due to the heavy dependence of its economy and trade on China, which has become a critical "card" China can leverage. Successive Mongolian governments have consistently upheld China's "One China" policy, recognized each other's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, and adhered to a principle of non-interference in internal affairs. Despite these foundations, certain issues continue to create tension in the bilateral relationship.

China's investments, both in our country and globally, offer a rapid path to economic development but also heighten the risk of falling into a "debt trap" and increasing Chinese influence (Spencer Feingold 2025). As part of China's "Belt and Road" initiative, international organizations have cautioned that developing nations could become vulnerable to debt dependency. Given Mongolia's reliance on Chinese loans and financing for recent large-scale projects, we risk facing political and economic pressure to align with China's stance and participate in its projects and programs if debt burdens become unsustainable.

Future economic cooperation with China should be approached with

caution to avoid debt dependency and unfavorable loan conditions. It is essential to scrutinize loan terms closely, encourage investments from other countries to balance foreign influence, and diversify export markets by halting the export of unprocessed mining products to a single destination. Instead, we should prioritize establishing processing facilities through diverse investments to enable the sale of finished goods in third markets. Additionally, promoting and expanding the export of eco-friendly agricultural products will further enhance economic resilience and sustainability.

The pressure from our two neighbors may partly stem from Mongolia's "third neighbor" policy, particularly its collaboration with the United States and its allies. Our relationship with the U.S., especially in defense areas like international peacekeeping and counter-terrorism, plays a key role in supporting democracy, strengthening the market economy, and enhancing Mongolia's security, making it a priority in our foreign policy. However, while deepening bilateral relations with the U.S. offers significant opportunities, it also introduces new strategic risks linked to the evolving external security environment.

Over the past 30 years, U.S. foreign policy toward Mongolia has focused on strengthening a political system that upholds democracy and human rights, fostering an economy grounded in private property, and supporting policies independent of influence from our two neighbors. While the U.S. respects Mongolia's principle of maintaining

balanced relations with neighboring countries, our strategic location and defense cooperation also align with U.S. geopolitical interests, driving its desire to deepen security-sector collaboration. However, political relations are sometimes leveraged in regional power dynamics, as seen in instances where U.S. representatives emphasize Beijing's human rights issues during high-level visits, support international initiatives challenging China's human rights practices, or advocate for Mongolia's stance against the Russia-Ukraine war.

The U.S. administration's emphasis on Mongolia as a participant in the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" initiative, intended to counterbalance China's influence, aims to deepen cooperation in this regional context, supporting broader Pacific integration (Mendee Jargalsaikhan 2022). However, should this initiative shift toward a direct confrontation with China, it risks complicating Mongolia's foreign policy, potentially challenging its balanced diplomatic stance.

Mongolia has maintained observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization since 2004, and the two neighbors, which are the leaders of the organization, continue to openly and secretly express their interest in promoting our country to become a full member. As the goals set in the development documents of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are still mere declarations without concrete implementation plans and roadmaps in the field of economic cooperation, we do not see a positive picture of economic opportunities (Rashid Alimov 2018).

Since the first main goal of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is to resolve border disputes and disputes between Central Asian countries, it is emphasized that the development of economic cooperation is a priority for Mongolia, which does not have any political or territorial disputes with the countries of the region. From a non-cautious point of view, it is better to make the two neighbors understand correctly and maintain the current participation and position as an observer.

As a member of the global community, Mongolia has consistently supported efforts to promote regional security and establish dialogue mechanisms. For instance, in 2013, Mongolia introduced the "Ulaanbaatar Dialogue" initiative on Northeast Asian

security, which was officially presented to the countries in the region. Since 2014, except during the pandemic, the "Ulaanbaatar Dialogue" international conference on Northeast Asian security issues has been held annually. This initiative does not seek to replace or compete with other efforts addressing Northeast Asian security; rather, its primary goal is to peacefully resolve the Korean Peninsula issue, build trust in Northeast Asia, support peacebuilding efforts, and lay the groundwork for a genuine cooperation mechanism in the region. By doing so, it aims to contribute to reducing security challenges. To maximize its impact, it is crucial to elevate this initiative and transform it into a key platform for regional dialogue.

Conclusion

The growing division between the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea on one side, and China, the Russian Federation, and North Korea on the other, is increasingly shaping the dynamics of Northeast Asia. While the region may seem relatively stable, it is rife with security challenges, making it crucial for Mongolia, situated at the heart of this complex landscape, to approach its relations with neighboring countries with heightened sensitivity.

As the world potentially transitions to a multipolar system, the shifting balance of power and the number of

emerging poles has become central topics of international relations and security studies. Therefore, for Mongolia, it is vital not only to monitor the actions and policies of its immediate neighbors, Russia and China, but also to closely study the key national security documents of the United States, given its significant influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

This understanding will help Mongolia anticipate potential risks and inform the development and implementation of effective policies and strategies to safeguard its security.

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