

## Mongolian “Third Neighbor Policy” and Strategic Partnership with USA

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the evolution of Mongolia–United States relations through the lens of Mongolia’s ‘Third Neighbor Policy,’ with particular attention to the influence of the United States’ Indo-Pacific Strategy. Mongolia’s security is influenced both positively and negatively depending on how the country develops its relations with its two neighbors and with highly developed nations of the East and the West, as well as how it maintains a balance among their respective interests. Mongolia faces the challenge of navigating the geopolitical dynamics between its two powerful neighbors, China and Russia, while also fostering relations with nations such as the United States and those in the European Union. This requires a delicate diplomatic strategy to ensure that no single influence dominates its foreign policy. Additionally, Mongolia must address internal pressures and economic dependencies that can arise from unequal partnerships, ensuring that its sovereignty and national interests remain protected. Therefore, studying the United States’ policy in Asia—one of the world’s major powers—and the alignment of its interests with Mongolia is essential for defining Mongolia’s policy toward the U.S. In contrast, U.S. policy toward the Asia-Pacific region has consistently included engagement with Mongolia. The terminology and concept of that regional framework were revised under President Trump’s administration, and the U.S. government’s policy toward the region was renamed the Indo-Pacific Strategy. Despite Mongolia and the United States having interacted for more than a century, diplomatic relations were established in 1987, and

were elevated to the status of a “Strategic Partnership” in 2019. It is the purpose of this short article to outline the distinctive characteristics of their historical relations, the current situation, and the prospects for the future.

**Keywords:** *Third neighbor policy, strategic partnership, Mongolia–United States relations, foreign policy, diplomacy*

## **I. The Historical Tradition of Mongolia’s “Third Neighbor” Policy**

In the 21st century, only a few countries in the world use the term “third neighbor.” However, throughout history, there have been numerous instances where nations, facing various forms of pressure or coercion from their immediate neighbors, sought support or balance by turning to a “third party” or external power beyond those neighbors.

There are several explanations for the concept referred to as the “third neighbor,” “third partner,” or “third country.” For example:

- Third partner – cooperation focused on trade and industry, rather than political relations;
- Third country – all other states that do not share a border;
- Third neighbor – powerful nations from which protection or support is sought (Bold, 2018).

However, in the Mongolian language, the terms “gurav dakh” (third), “guavdugaar” (third in order), and “guavdagch” (third party) have similar meanings. Yet, rather than indicating sequence or order, “guavdagch” conveys a sense of *externality* or *plurality*. Therefore, when referring to neighboring or partner countries, it is more appropriate to use the term “guavdagch”.

The pursuit of a “third party” or “third neighbor” by Mongolia in the 20th century began as soon as it declared its independence from the Manchu Qing Empire, when the Bogd Khanate of Mongolia began to pay close attention to its foreign relations and diplomacy.

In general, researchers have concluded that “*the period from 1911 to 1930 can be regarded as the time when Mongolia genuinely aspired to establish relations with its ‘third neighbors’ in the history of the country’s foreign relations*” (Ulambayar, 2009). In 1911, Mongolia ended more than 200 years of Manchu Qing rule, declared its independence, and declared itself a sovereign nation. As a result of this historic event, Mongolia has experienced a national revival, a significant achievement in the people’s struggle for freedom, and a profound effect on the country’s political, economic, and social development.

It was on October 29, 1912, the second year of the Bogd Khanate, that the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs transmitted the following formal communication: “*To the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of France, Britain, Germany, the United States, Belgium, Japan, Denmark, the Netherlands, and*

*Austria... Please be informed that...* (National Archives of Mongolia x-A4, д- 1 хн- 5) A letter was sent by Mongolia declaring its independence and expressing its desire to establish and maintain diplomatic relations in the future. In the context of Mongolia and other countries, this document is regarded as the first official record relating to the establishment of formal relations.

The term “third neighbor” in relation to Mongolia’s foreign policy and international relations is generally associated with the visit of James Baker, U.S. Secretary of State, to the Mongolian People’s Republic in August 1990 (Batsaikhan et.al, 2011), shortly after the two countries established diplomatic relations and mutually recognized each other.

Since then, the term “third neighbor” has appeared in official high-level bilateral documents and statements, with phrases such as “*The United*

*States is proud to be Mongolia’s ‘third neighbor’” and “We are pleased to serve as Mongolia’s ‘third neighbor’.” Immediately following the adoption of Mongolia’s new Constitution in 1992, the “Concept of Mongolian Foreign Policy” was approved. The term “third neighbor” does not appear explicitly in this document. The revised “Concept of Foreign Policy of Mongolia” approved by Resolution No. 10 of the State Great Khural (Parliament) on February 10, 2011, contains the following statement regarding political foreign policy: “14.2. *Within the framework of the ‘Third Neighbor’ policy, Mongolia shall expand and develop partnership relations and cooperation with countries and unions of both the East and the West countries, such as the United States, Japan, the European Union, India, the Republic of Korea, and Turkey*” (Concept of Foreign Policy of Mongolia, 2025).*

## II. The Beginning of Bilateral Relations

Historiographers generally divide Mongolia’s foreign relations with Western countries over the past century into three to four stages. It is, however, possible to view the timeline somewhat differently in the case of the United States, since official diplomatic relations were established only in 1987, when democracy and reform began to stir in Mongolia.

First American official to visit Mongolia was diplomat and oriental scholar W.W.Rockhill. Upon arrival in Niislel Khüree (present-day Ulaanbaatar), he met with Mongolian authorities and

personally acquainted himself with the country’s internal and external affairs. Rockhill reported his observations and impressions of Mongolia in his 1914 article titled “The Question of Outer Mongolia” (Rockhill, 2024) in the Journal of the American Asiatic Association.

According to historical sources, the Mongolian government placed a high value on establishing direct relations with the United States, a country whose power and influence are considerable on the international stage. The U.S. provided broad support to Mongolia in gaining

recognition of its independence, opening embassies in the capitals of each other, expanding trade and economic relations, and establishing embassies in each other's countries (Ishjamts, 1999).

Mongolian government officials continued their efforts to gain international recognition of Mongolia's independence after the National Democratic Revolution of 1921 by establishing relations with Russian and Chinese as well as other countries such as the United States (Mongol Ulsyn tüükh, 2003).

Through the American Consulate in Kalgan (Zhangjiakou), Mongolian leaders maintained contact with the United States and worked to establish formal diplomatic relations. As for the U.S. government, it dispatched its consul in Kalgan, Samuel Sokobin, to Mongolia five times to observe and study the country's internal political, economic, and foreign affairs. These visits made it possible for a form of semi-official communication to develop between the two countries through these visits.

Soon after the victory of the People's Revolution, in mid-August 1921, U.S Consul Samuel Sokobin arrived in Mongolia and met with D.Bodoo, the first Prime Minister of the People's Government. It was Bodoo's emphasis during their conversation that the United States should recognize Mongolia's independence and establish official relations with the country (Ishjamts, 1999).

In those days, Mongolia had attracted a number of foreign investors and businessmen, particularly from countries

in the west, such as the United States. A state monopoly over foreign trade was established in 1930 by the Mongolian People's Republic under the "Agreement on the Fundamental Principles of Mongolian-Soviet Relations" signed in June 1929 (Mongol Ulsyn tüükh, 2003 & BNMAU-yn tüükh, 1969). Foreign firms and companies were effectively prohibited from operating in Mongolia as a result of this decision.

From July 2 to 4, 1944, U.S Vice President Henry A. Wallace visited Ulaanbaatar on his way to the Soviet Union at the end of World War II. As a matter of fact, it was the first time that an American official at the highest level visited Mongolia.

A few months later, during the Yalta Conference in February 1945, which was attended by the presidents of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain, the Soviet side proposed, and the two other powers agreed, that the status quo in Mongolia should be maintained after the war (Bold, 2008). It is true that this decision played a significant role in gaining recognition of Mongolia's independence by the major powers and in shaping the future of Mongolia-U.S. bilateral relations in the years that followed.

During the period of fifteen years following the Mongolian People's Republic's initial application for membership in 1946, its application was considered thirteen times. Each time a resolution on Mongolia's admission to the Security Council was brought to a vote, the United States voted against it.

Due to the tense atmosphere of the

Cold War and the rivalry between the two superpowers at the time, the United States was unable to directly support Mongolia's admission to the UN.

As a result of the floods near Ulaanbaatar in July 1966, the Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations informed the Mongolian delegation that the U.S. government had decided to provide \$25,000 for flood damage reconstruction.

Nevertheless, the MPRP Central Committee's Politburo adopted Resolution No. 203 in 1966, which stated:

As a result of this action, American imperialists are attempting to conceal their growing isolation, which is being strongly condemned by the international community because of their aggression in Vietnam (Ibid).

Thus, Mongolia rejected the aid, which serves as a stark example of how deeply ideological influences shaped international relations during a period of global political tension during the 1960s.

In spite of this, both sides gradually began to express an interest in establishing diplomatic relations through their Permanent Missions to the United Nations. As part of this process, the media, the public, and scholars played an important role. In 1972, the MPRP Central Committee's Politburo adopted Resolution No. 250, which states: “*...To authorize the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to work toward establishing diplomatic relations with the United States.*”

For its part, the United States made two formal proposals, the last of which was sent in March 1973 when the U.S.

President personally communicated his desire to establish diplomatic relations with the Mongolian delegation.

Due to the Cold War confrontation between the major powers, these initiatives remained unrealized for approximately twenty years.

After the Soviet Foreign Minister visited Ulaanbaatar in January 1985, the Soviet side declared that it would not object to the agreement. It culminated in Resolution No. 20 of the MPRP Central Committee's Politburo and Decree No. 5 of the Presidium of the People's Great Khural in 1987, which resulted in a formal agreement being signed in Washington, D.C., officially establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries.

It is not only the establishment of official diplomatic relations between the two countries that became an important event for bilateral ties, but also for international relations as well. This resulted in the achievement of political, economic, and social cooperation, which, in turn, led to the emergence of a new era of progress.

The global political system underwent a dramatic transformation at the end of the 20th century, and the collapse of socialism allowed Mongolia to join the mainstream of human development. Despite decades of ideological distinctions, a fundamental change has been witnessed in the country's foreign policy over the past few years. In order to foster mutually beneficial cooperation with countries around the world, a new foundation was established for the development of an active and multi-pillar

foreign policy.

In January 1991, President P. Ochirbat of the Mongolian People's Republic visited the United States, where he exchanged views with President George H. W. Bush and reached an understanding on principles for promoting bilateral cooperation. Through this visit, long-term general prospects for relations between the two countries were opened, evidencing a shared commitment to democratic principles between the two nations.

### **III. A New Era in Relations and Cooperation — “Strategic Partnership”**

During the period since the establishment of official diplomatic relations, both sides have continued to conduct mutual high-level visits of state, all of which have been characterized by mutual benefit and productive cooperation between both sides.

During President Barack Obama's administration, cooperation between the two countries expanded significantly within the framework of a comprehensive partnership, with the U.S. Secretary of State reaffirming continued assistance to Mongolia. This was also confirmed by a special resolution passed by the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2009.

Over the past decade, both countries' presidents have made reciprocal visits, accompanied by a wide range of political and diplomatic activities in all sectors of cooperation. High-level visits from both sides have included the Speaker of the Mongolian Parliament, the Prime Minister, Foreign Ministers, and other

The visit by Mongolia's first President to the United States was the first official visit of a Mongolian head of state to the United States in the 20th century. It marked an important milestone in Mongolia-U.S. relations and in Mongolia's foreign policy generally. Mongolia's reforms and aspiration to contribute actively to the international community were symbolized in the visit, and it provided a strong foundation for the further development of relations between Mongolia and its neighbors.

senior officials, as well as members of the U.S. Congress, Secretaries of State, and Defense Secretaries. These exchanges have yielded tangible results and deepened mutual understanding.

Congress' “U.S.-Mongolia Friendship Caucus” has been active since 2004. It has been institutionalized since 1999 that regular consultations have taken place between the foreign ministries of the two countries concerning regional and global political issues. In 2003, these consultations were upgraded to a permanent mechanism co-chaired by the Mongolian Deputy Foreign Minister and the United States Assistant Secretary of State.

President George W. Bush's November 2005 visit to Mongolia marked an important milestone in U.S.-Mongolia relations. Both countries heralded President Bush's precedent-setting visit as a success. (Slutz & Goldbeck, 2020/08) Mongolia's sovereignty, transformation from communism to democracy and a free

market economy, and status as a regional and global player of consequence were reaffirmed by a major “third neighbor.”

As part of President N. Enkhbayar’s visit to the United States in 2007, Mongolia signed an agreement with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) for \$285 million USD in development assistance - one of the largest aid packages Mongolia has ever received. In all areas of bilateral relations, the principles of this cooperation remain guiding principles.

The Vice President of the United States, Joe Biden, visited Mongolia in June 2011, highlighting the growing importance of the bilateral partnership. The United States has recognized and supported Mongolia's contribution to international peacekeeping, stability, and democratic development, particularly in maintaining peace in certain regions of the world and strengthening global security.

There have been more than 30 intergovernmental documents and agreements signed between the two countries as of 2024 (Bilateral Documents). Approximately 25,000 Mongolian citizens reside in the United States, and over 20 Mongolian-based voluntary organizations, associations, and chambers of commerce are registered and operating there (MFA Mongolia).

A visit by Secretary of State John Kerry in 2016 to Mongolia highlighted the importance of bilateral relations on a political and economic level, expanded cooperation, maintained the frequency of high-level visits, and initiated discussions regarding the facilitation of reciprocal

travel between citizens.

During the visit, both sides discussed Mongolia’s democracy, its challenges, foreign policy, and, particularly, the role of the United States within Mongolia’s “Third Neighbor” policy. From July 29 to August 3, 2019, President Khaltmaa Battulga of Mongolia paid an official visit to the United States. During meetings and discussions, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to deepening and expanding bilateral relations and cooperation.

While acknowledging the close collaboration already established in political, defense, cultural, and humanitarian fields, the two sides emphasized the importance of enhancing trade and economic cooperation.

The visit confirmed that relations between Mongolia and the United States are strengthening on the basis of shared strategic interests, democratic values, good governance, sovereignty, and respect for human rights. Both countries expressed their shared intention to:

- Promote economic growth by encouraging investment and supporting free, fair, and equitable trade, thereby increasing economic opportunities, creating new jobs, and reducing poverty
- Strengthen cooperation to maintain peace, security, and stability in the region
- Further expand collaboration across all sectors — political, economic, cultural, educational, humanitarian, and people-to-people exchanges — to overcome evolving challenges and make full use of new opportunities (MFA Mongolia, 2019, p.30).

Both countries signed the “Joint

Declaration on Mongolia-United States Strategic Partnership” at the conclusion of the visit.

As stated in the Joint Declaration between Mongolia and the United States: *“As part of this agreement, the two sides will cooperate to ensure the sovereignty of all peoples in the Indo-Pacific region*

*and to foster conditions for economic development that are compatible with international law and fair competition principles, thereby promoting national security and stability”* (Declaration on the Strategic Partnership between Mongolia and the United States of America, 2019)

### ***Parliamentary Cooperation***

There is no doubt that professional and institutional ties have developed between the legislative bodies of the two countries over the past few years. Congressional cooperation between the United States and Mongolia began in 2004 when the “U.S-Mongolia Friendship Caucus” was established (Mongol Ulsyn

Ikh khurlyn gadaad khariltsaa, 2010).

Currently in Mongolia, there are 32 members of the Mongolia-U.S Parliamentary Group in the State Great Khural (Parliament) (Parliament.mn, 2025). It is chaired by Member of Parliament Kh.Gankhuyag.

### ***Economic Relations***

Considering the Indo-Pacific Strategy, there is hope - from a researcher’s perspective - that bilateral relations will continue to improve, particularly in advancing economic ties that have remained relatively limited over the past 30 years. However, the trade statistics between Mongolia and the United States, which has one of the world’s leading economies, are still modest.

During Prime Minister U. Khurelsukh's official visit to the United States in 2018, the two sides negotiated a “Roadmap for the Expanded Economic Partnership between Mongolia and the United States.” Both countries agreed to cooperate in various areas such as agriculture and renewable energy under this framework.

Mongolia signed its second Compact

Agreement with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) in 2018, which included a \$350 million project aimed at improving the water supply system in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar.

In addition to promoting the export of agricultural and cashmere products, third-neighbor countries such as the United States have also assisted Mongolia in diversifying its export structure. These efforts contribute substantially to the reduction of Mongolia's heavy reliance on mineral exports and to the diversification of its economy.

Moreover, during President Khaltmaa Battulga's official visit to the United States in 2019, the two sides discussed a project with an impact comparable to that of the mining industry - namely, the development of tourism, specifically

space tourism. While in the United States, President Battulga toured the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and met with its Administrator, Jim Bridenstine, to discuss the possibility of implementing a space tourism program in Mongolia (Bolor, 2019).

In the context of economic cooperation, Mongolia has continued to face a number of challenges in the area of creating tangible economic interests for “third neighbor” countries. The Oyu Tolgoi investment agreement has been the subject of controversy in recent years. However, since the revitalization of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, several initiatives have been launched to enhance the “third neighbor” policy.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has resumed its operations in Mongolia and reestablished its representative office there. Approximately USD 9.4 million

has been provided in total - USD 6.4 million for programs supporting good governance, the rule of law, reliable and inclusive energy, and private sector-driven sustainable economic growth, and USD 3 million for the LEAD Mongolia initiative.

As far as the economy is concerned, the above-mentioned projects and programs developed in cooperation with third neighboring countries - particularly democratic nations of the Indo-Pacific region - represent important steps towards diversifying Mongolia's economic structure and reducing economic dependence.

There is a growing consensus among researchers that the United States should promote an economic cooperation model that is not based on one-sided aid, but rather on public-private partnerships that encourage sustainable and mutually beneficial growth (Anthony Kim, 2019).

### ***Trade and Investment Cooperation***

Mongolia's main trading partner is the United States, which is one of the country's largest trading partners. There was a total trade turnover of USD 701.6 million between the two countries in 2024 (Gogo.mn, 2025.04.03), of which USD 535.2 million was accounted for by imports and USD 166.4 million by exports.

In addition to tungsten ore and concentrations, Mongolia exports knitted garments and textiles to the U.S. Imports from the U.S. primarily consist of trucks, machinery, agricultural and mining equipment, automobiles, household electrical appliances, and food products.

There is, however, a way for both parties to address this shortcoming through active and proactive efforts on their part.

A group of ten members of the U.S. House of Representatives, led by Ted Yoho, introduced the “U.S.-Mongolia Third Neighbor Trade Act” in July 2018. Unfortunately, the bill was not passed by the House of Representatives. By allowing Mongolian sewn and knitted products to be exported duty-free to the United States, the proposal aims to increase trade between Mongolia and the United States (President.mn, 2025).

During the period 1999-2005,

Mongolia did not fully utilize the trade preferences granted by the United States, which allowed foreign investors to export their products under Mongolia's quota, thereby missing out on an important opportunity for Mongolian producers.

In accordance with Article 3.2.2.2 of Mongolia's National Security Concept, "There shall not be more than one third of the total foreign investment coming from any one foreign country. In sectors of strategic importance, the government should follow a policy of limiting foreign state-owned investment and ensuring a balanced level of investments from neighboring countries."

More than half of Mongolia's foreign direct investment (FDI) comes from just two countries - China and Canada. Due to this situation, Mongolia's economy has become overly dependent on the economic cycles of these nations, causing investment flows to become unstable (NDA.gov.mn).

Comparatively, U.S. investment accounts for only about 4 percent of Mongolia's total foreign direct investment. It is intended that Mongolia can create tangible economic interests for the United States within the country by increasing U.S. investment in the country. Meanwhile, such investments would contribute to upholding the "one-third principle" outlined in Mongolia's National Security Concept, which prevents excessive dependence on any one country.

The United States and Mongolia have agreed to increase bilateral trade and investment, focusing on completing the Transparency Agreement, identifying new sectors and opportunities for trade,

and improving infrastructure. The two sides intend to utilize the involvement of the U.S. Export-Import Bank (Exim Bank) as well as the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) in order to achieve these objectives.

As a result of Mongolia's participation in the "Blue Dot Network," Mongolia may be able to attract investments from U.S. pension funds and insurance funds, resulting in greater economic cooperation between the two countries. A significant amount of American investment can be attracted into Mongolia's infrastructure sector, in particular. By providing investment, technical assistance, and loan guarantees, the newly established U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) is supporting the development of foreign countries. Through collaborations with this organization, Mongolia would be able to attract funding for the construction, improvement, and expansion of infrastructure, thereby addressing critical infrastructure gaps.

Under the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the Government of Mongolia and the United States Government signed a second Compact Agreement worth USD 350 million during Prime Minister Ukhnaa Khurelshkh's visit to the United States. (MFA Mongolia, 2025) It is estimated that USD 350 million in assistance will be provided by the U.S. over the period of five years, while USD 111 million will be contributed by the Mongolian government, bringing the total investment to USD 461 million. (Sanchir, 2018) As a result of this assistance, new opportunities

for Mongolia's development are created by the establishment of environmentally friendly infrastructure, the improvement

of Ulaanbaatar's water supply, and the improvement of the quality of life of its citizens.

### ***Cultural and Educational Cooperation***

The Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs held the opening ceremony of the “U.S.-Mongolia Year of Youth” on February 27, 2019. In this context, both countries plan to organize cultural, artistic, and sports events involving young people from both countries, as well as essay competitions, Facebook forums, and collaborative initiatives related to university and research-based innovation.

Additionally, the program aimed to bring American Nobel laureates, young entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, investors, and startup founders to Mongolia in order to share their experiences.

The opening of the conference coincided with the launch of the international conference “LEAD Alliance 2019 - Young Leaders Strengthening

Democracy”. The participants exchanged experiences and insights on the roles of young leaders in society, discussing issues such as environmental protection, unemployment reduction, poverty alleviation, and transparency.

In addition to the delegates from the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the U.S. Embassy in Mongolia, the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Peace Corps Mongolia, the LEAD Mongolia Program, and the Capital City Youth Development Agency, over 100 representatives attended the opening ceremony. Mongolian Alumni Association in the United States, the Federation of Mongolians Abroad, and the Mongolian Alumni Association in Mongolia were among the participants.

### ***Military and Defense Cooperation***

In 2003, Mongolia and the United States held their first joint military exercise as part of their defense cooperation. The Khan Quest exercise has since grown to become an international event, involving around 20,000 military personnel from more than 70 countries. As a result of this training program, participating nations are able to enhance their peacekeeping capabilities, while at the same time strengthening their friendship, partnership, and military trust with each other (National Police Agency,

2025).

Over the past few years, the military and security cooperation between the two countries has intensified and become more regular. It was held in Washington, D.C., in 2024 that the Mongolian and U.S. ministries of defense held their 20th Defense Consultative Meeting (Embassy of Mongolia).

It marked the first-ever visit by a senior White House National Security Council official to Mongolia by John Bolton, U.S. National Security Advisor

and Ambassador. During the same year, in August 2019, U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper also visited Mongolia. It is noteworthy that this was his first overseas trip after he became Secretary of Defense, and he selected Mongolia to begin his tour of Asian countries.

Furthermore, several high-ranking U.S. military officials visited Mongolia, including General Raymond Thomas

(Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command), Admiral Philip Davidson (Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command), and General Charles Brown (Commander of Pacific Air Forces). In addition, Admiral Davidson attended the opening ceremony of the international peacekeeping field exercise “Khaan Quest 2019”, which was held in Mongolia from June 14 to 28.

#### **IV. Strategic Partnership and the U.S.**

During an official visit N.Bagabandi, Mongolian President to the United States in July 2004, the two sides issued a joint statement committing themselves to developing bilateral relations into a comprehensive partnership based on shared strategic interests.

It was fourteen years later, in September 2018, during Prime Minister Khürelsükh’s official visit to the U.S., that the two countries agreed to elevate their relations to an “Expanded Comprehensive Partnership” (IKON.mn. 2019.08.01).

It was less than a year later, during President Kh. Battulga’s visit to Washington, when the two nations decided to establish a “Strategic Partnership” As part of its Indo-Pacific Strategy, the United States has increased its attention toward Mongolia, and as part of its “Third Neighbor” policy, Mongolia has consistently advanced bilateral relations.

During the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, the United States began engaging Mongolia within the framework of the Indo-Pacific Strategy. Mongolia is referred to as an

important partner in the Indo-Pacific region in the Joint Declaration on the Expanded Comprehensive Partnership between Mongolia and the United States ([U.S. Embassy in Mongolia](#)

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On October 9, 2018, Patrick Murphy, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, visited Mongolia as part of his trip to East Asian countries with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. In his speech, he explained Mongolia's importance within the Indo-Pacific Strategy as well as its role within the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

According to Murphy, his remarks were as follows: *“The core idea of this policy is that regardless of size, all nations in the region must uphold openness, transparency, democracy, human rights, freedom, the rule of law, and respect for international norms — the fundamental principles of democracy — and that these principles must never be violated. Mongolia is one of the countries that exemplifies these values and best aligns with the foundational principles of the Indo-Pacific Strategy.”*

Furthermore, he stressed that this strategy is based on the four largest democracies in the region: the United States, India, Australia, and Japan. Therefore, the Indo-Pacific Strategy is an open policy for all nations that value democracy, rule of law, and human rights, and Mongolia - as one of the leading democracies in the region - plays an important role in its implementation.

A joint statement was issued in January 2020 during a trilateral meeting between Mongolia, the United States, and Japan. The statement declared that: “Mongolia, the United States, and Japan exchanged views on regional development, including future prospects for the Indo-Pacific region, and expressed their joint commitment to building a prosperous, peaceful region of free, independent, and democratic nations” (GKhYa-ny Bodlogo, Tölövlöltiin gazar, 2020). In this regard, Mongolia's bilateral relations with its key “third neighbors”

have entered a new stage of development during this period when the Indo-Pacific Strategy concept is gaining momentum.

Besides expressing its commitment to the Indo-Pacific ideals in joint declarations with its partners, Mongolia has also begun implementing concrete actions and initiatives under this shared vision. A unique multidimensional role has been assigned to the United States within Mongolia's Third Neighbor Policy by the United States. As a geopolitical balancer, a security partner, an advocate for democracy, and a contributor to the economy, the United States assists Mongolia in maintaining its strategic autonomy, institutional resilience, and diversified foreign relations. The significance of this partnership is likely to grow in the evolving Indo-Pacific security environment, reinforcing the centrality of U.S.-Mongolia relations in the foreign policy agendas of both countries.

## Conclusion

In spite of the fact that Mongolia has adopted its “Third Neighbor Policy” as an integral part of its foreign policy for more than thirty years, its strategic focus in foreign relations remains not only on its two immediate neighbors, but also on expanding partnerships and cooperation across all sectors with highly developed countries of the East and the West.

A key principle of Mongolia's “Third Neighbor Policy” is that it does not rank relationships by priority, but rather emphasizes establishing strategic partnerships and establishing cooperative ties with advanced nations beyond its

immediate neighbors. Mongolia has maintained a leading and vital position in its foreign relations within this framework; the United States remains one of Mongolia's principal “third neighbors” of the new century.

During President Donald Trump's administration, the Indo-Pacific Strategy has contributed significantly to the strengthening of the United States' relations with countries in this region. This policy has contributed to the elevation of U.S.-Mongolia relations; however, it is also a reflection of Mongolia's active pursuit of its “Third

Neighbor Policy.” Therefore, Mongolia’s strong interest in broad and multi-level cooperation with the United States, particularly in the economic sector, is evident in the development of bilateral relations, first as a “Comprehensive Expanded Partnership” in 2018 and then as a “Strategic Partnership” in 2019. This is not exclusively the result of American initiative.

In the context of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, it is possible to understand the strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries. Mongolia’s Third Neighbor Policy is based on the

principle of cooperating with other nations on the basis of mutual benefit and international law, while respecting the interests of its neighbors. In addition to aligning with the shared interests of both peoples, the development of bilateral ties also plays an important role in advancing and consolidating Mongolia’s economic development.

It is evident that Mongolia and the United States could be able to achieve significant benefits and long-term economic gains through an active cooperation within the economic framework of the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

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