Mongolia: A Bridge in Northeast and Central Asian Dialogue

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Abstract

This paper argues that Mongolia, given its unique geographic position and diplomatic traditions, is well suited to serve as a functional bridge between Central and Northeast Asia. Drawing on Mongolia's strategic geography, cultural heritage, and foreign policy orientation, the paper proposes the creation of a Northeast and Central Asia Dialogue Architecture (NECADA)—an inclusive forum linking Mongolia, the five Central Asian states, Japan, South Korea, and other willing partners. NECADA would focus on soft-security domains such as climate resilience, infrastructure connectivity, cultural exchange, economic and trade cooperation, and non-traditional security, while deliberately avoiding great-power entanglements. Grounded in Mongolia's evolving foreign policy strategy—particularly its Third Neighbor Policy and the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue—the paper outlines a roadmap for institutionalizing Mongolia's convening power. By positioning itself as a mediator and convener between Central and Northeast Asia, Mongolia can diversify its regional linkages and gradually reduce its structural dependence on its two immediate neighbors through expanded multilateral engagement.

Keywords: *Regional Integration, Small-State Diplomacy, Northeast and Central Asia Dialogue Architecture, Bridge State*

Introduction

The concept of Mega-Asia rethinks regional boundaries in the twenty-first century, challenging the compartmentalization of Asia into discrete sub-regions and envisioning an interconnected system defined by interdependence and historical flows[1]. Within this broader reconceptualization, Mongolia's position at the intersection of Central and Northeast Asia acquires renewed significance. Situated between two great powers—Russia and China—and historically linked to both Turkic Central Asia and Northeast Asia, Mongolia embodies the connective potential that the Mega-Asia framework seeks to illuminate.

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[1] Ru, Sung Hee. 2022 "Characteristics of the Concept of Mega-Asia Viewed through a Comparison with World-Systems Analysis: Coexistence of a Theoretical System and a Methodological Tool" in *Asia Review* 2022, 12(2), pp.171~206

The contemporary geopolitical environment further heightens the relevance of this perspective. Amid intensifying U.S.–China rivalry, Russia's confrontation with the West, and global realignments following the war in Ukraine, middle and small powers increasingly turn toward flexible multilateralism and interregional linkages. Although landlocked and small, Mongolia has long pursued a foreign policy centered on neutrality, dialogue, and balance. Its Third Neighbor Policy has enabled engagement beyond China and Russia by cultivating partnerships with democratic and multilateral actors.

Yet diversification has remained extra-regional and bilateral in nature. This paper advances the argument that Mongolia can further reduce its structural dependence on its two immediate neighbors by positioning itself as a mediator and convener between Central and Northeast Asia. By embedding itself within interregional dialogue, trade, energy, and connectivity frameworks, Mongolia can transform geographic constraint into diplomatic leverage, replacing narrow bilateral dependence with broader multilateral interdependence.

Accordingly, this paper argues that Mongolia can expand its diplomatic vision into a new strategy of inter-Asian connectivity. The proposed Northeast and Central Asia Dialogue Architecture (NECADA) envision Mongolia as a convening state capable of facilitating cooperation across regional divides. Following this introduction, the paper outlines the theoretical foundations of small-state bridge diplomacy, explores Mongolia's historical and cultural basis for mediation, proposes an institutional design for NECADA, addresses counterarguments, and concludes with implications for Mega-Asian regionalism.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of Small-State Diplomacy and the "Bridge State" Concept[2]

The concept of the bridge state emerges from broader theories of small-state diplomacy and regionalism. Small states, constrained by limited military and economic resources, often leverage niche diplomacy, mediation, and multilateralism to enhance strategic relevance. In regions characterized by great-power rivalry, bridge states function as connectors facilitating dialogue, reducing misperceptions, and fostering trust across competing blocs. Singapore's diplomatic agility in Southeast Asia and Kazakhstan's multivector foreign policy in Central Asia are frequently cited examples.

For Mongolia, this tradition is well established. Historically, national leaders have emphasized balance without confrontation and diversification without provocation. The Third Neighbor Policy institutionalized this orientation by encouraging engagement with distant partners to offset dependence on immediate neighbors. Bridge-state diplomacy builds on

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[2]   "A small or middle power that leverages its geographic position, political neutrality, and diplomatic credibility to facilitate communication, cooperation, or integration between larger or rival regions or blocs." This concept appeared works of Ramon Lopez-Reyes, (2001) "Bridge State: A New Form of Neutralism for The Post-Cold War Era". Cooper & Shaw (2009) *The Diplomacies of Small States*, Kim Sung-Han (2012) discussing Korea as a bridge nation in East Asia, and Thorhallsson (2018) describing small-state "shelter theory," emphasizing connector roles. According to these authors, a bridge state is defined as a small or middle power that leverages its geographic location, diplomatic neutrality, and convening capacity to foster dialogue and cooperation between larger or rival regions. It mediates tensions, promotes multilateralism, and transforms geographic limitations into strategic assets.

this foundation by offering a functional mechanism through which Mongolia can mitigate asymmetric dependence on Russia and China—not through confrontation or balancing, but through diversification of regional embeddedness. By serving as a neutral intermediary between Central and Northeast Asia, Mongolia can widen its strategic environment and reduce vulnerability stemming from excessive bilateral reliance.

Table 1. Comparative Roles of Bridge States in Regional Diplomacy

Country	Region	Strategic Role	Key Mechanisms	Notable Initiatives
Mongolia	Central & Northeast Asia	Neutral convener between rival blocs	Third Neighbor Policy, Ulaanbaatar Dialogue	NECADA (proposed), Steppe Road Initiative
Singapore	Southeast Asia	Diplomatic hub and economic intermediary	ASEAN leadership, multilateral forums	Shangri-La Dialogue, ASEAN–ISIS
Kazakhstan	Central Asia	Multivector diplomacy balancing powers	Nurly Zhol, SCO, Belt and Road alignment	Astana Peace Talks, Eurasian integration
Finland	Northern Europe	Neutral mediator during Cold War	Nordic cooperation, EU integration	Helsinki Accords, OSCE founding Mediation for Peace initiative

Inter-Asian Regionalism and the Mega-Asia Framework

The Mega-Asia framework, articulated by the SNUAC HK+ Research Group, conceptualizes Asia as a continuous system of economic, cultural, and civilizational flows. Within this paradigm, inter-Asian regionalism extends beyond trade to encompass dialogue architectures—flexible and inclusive institutional arrangements that facilitate cooperation without rigid hierarchy or binding commitments. These platforms prioritize trust-building and policy coordination over formal integration.

Mongolia's bridging potential aligns closely with this model. Its participation in platforms such as the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian Security, the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, as well as its observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, positions it within overlapping regional networks. Acting as a trans-regional intermediary, Mongolia can leverage Mega-Asia connectivity not only to contribute to regional cohesion but also to dilute structural dependence on its two immediate neighbors by embedding itself in wider multilateral frameworks.

Historical and Cultural Foundations of Mongolia's Bridging Identity

Mongolia's integrative capacity is deeply rooted in history and culture. The Pax Mongolica unified much of Eurasia through trade and governance, fostering cross-cultural ex-

change that continues to shape Mongolia's diplomatic ethos (Weatherford 2004). In the twentieth century, Mongolia functioned as a Soviet-aligned buffer state, but following the 1990 democratic transition, it reoriented toward neutrality and dialogue.

Initiatives such as participation in UN peacekeeping operations, advocacy for nuclear-weapon-free status, and the institutionalization of the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue demonstrate Mongolia's ability to translate historical cosmopolitanism into contemporary soft power. Culturally, Mongolia shares nomadic heritage and post-communist experience with Central Asia while maintaining Buddhist and Confucian affinities with Northeast Asia (Mendee and Soyolgerel). This hybrid identity enables Mongolia to function as a cultural mediator, translating norms across regions and reinforcing its bridge diplomacy.

Toward a Northeast and Central Asia Dialogue Architecture

This section outlines how Mongolia could institutionalize its bridging role through the creation of a Northeast and Central Asia Dialogue Architecture (NECADA). Such a framework would not replicate existing organizations but rather link them through soft, flexible coordination. Why NECADA is Strategically Necessary?

Specific structural and geopolitical trends underline the urgency and feasibility of creating a Northeast and Central Asia Dialogue Architecture. First, NECADA fills a critical institutional gap between Central Asia and Northeast Asia, two regions deeply interconnected economically and environmentally yet lacking a regularized dialogue mechanism. Japan, South Korea and China are the largest investors in Central Asia region and yet there is a lack of multilateral mechanism. Second, Mongolia is uniquely positioned to serve as a neutral convener: trusted by Central Asian states, accepted by Northeast Asian partners, and not perceived as threatening by any major power. Third, rising U.S.-China rivalry and the fragmentation of Eurasian governance make neutral, small-state led platforms not only feasible but increasingly necessary.

NECADA provides a depoliticized, functional venue for cooperation in areas such as climate resilience, connectivity governance, cultural exchange, and humanitarian coordination domains where rivalry does not fully obstruct collaboration. Fourth, Mongolia's diplomatic record including Ulaanbaatar Dialogue, peacekeeping leadership, and nuclear-weapon-free status, demonstrates both capacity and credibility. Finally, NECADA aligns with the interests of all major external actors, from Japan and Korea to the EU and the United States, who seek stable and transparent connectivity links across Eurasia. Specifically, the proposed loose mechanism will not contradict China led BRI connectivity and DSR projects and will not undermine Russia's security concerns by providing neutral and nonwestern platform. Moreover, in line with USA and EU, the mechanism encourages transparency, connectivity, rules based dialogue hosted by a democratic nation. For Japan and South Korea, this mechanism offers wider engagement opportunities with Central Asia outside China-led frameworks.

Crucially, this convening role offers direct strategic benefits for Mongolia itself. By

institutionalizing dialogue and cooperation between Central and Northeast Asia, NECADA would enable Mongolia to diversify energy supply chains, trade partnerships, infrastructure routes, and diplomatic engagements. Over time, this would reduce Mongolia's excessive dependence on its two immediate neighbors by embedding the country within a broader web of interregional cooperation.

Together, these arguments reinforce the strategic logic for NECADA as a timely, neutral, and forward-looking platform.

1. Institutional Model and Objectives

The NECADA could be conceptualized as a Track 1.5 mechanism a semi-official forum combining governmental and non-governmental participation. Its primary objectives would include:

• Enhancing policy dialogue among Central and Northeast Asian states.
• Promoting sustainable connectivity in infrastructure, energy, trade, and digital domains.
• Encouraging cultural and academic exchange; and
• Building confidence and trust in an increasingly fragmented regional environment.
• Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar, could serve as the hub for annual meetings, research symposia, and thematic working groups, drawing inspiration from the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian Security.

Yet, NECADA should be flexible and scalable. We should not envision to establish international organization or association right away, it is proper to start small by annual meetings, technical working groups, soft-law cooperation, joint research project and conferences, issue based discussion, hosting of small festivals, cultural and sporting events and once trust and mutual confidence rise then this mechanism can scale up.

As a candidate for host, Mongolia is a good one because it is considered neutral, trusted in both Northeast and Central Asian partners, as well as non-threatening without any hegemonic ambitions. Mongolia is uniquely located between the Central Asia and Northeast Asian regions both geographically as well as diplomatically. Mongolia can convene without the least suspicion.

2. Synergy with Existing Frameworks

The NECADA could leverage complementarities between existing initiatives to create greater regional coherence rather than institutional overlap. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) extend these same routes into the Trans-Eurasian transport network, with railways and energy pipelines running through Kazakhstan and western China toward Northeast Asian ports. Simultaneously, the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program already links Mongolia with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in transport, energy, and trade facilitation. Its corridors particularly CAREC Corridor 4

(connecting Russia, Mongolia, and China) and Corridor 5 (linking East Asia with Central Asia via Mongolia) offer a strong physical foundation for deeper integration.

A Mongolian-led NECADA could act as a dialogue interface that ensures these networks function in a coordinated, transparent, and sustainable manner. For instance, Mongolia could host a joint CAREC–BRI policy forum under the NECADA umbrella, bringing together Central Asian transit countries and Northeast Asian end-markets such as South Korea and Japan to discuss regulatory harmonization, digital customs, and green infrastructure standards. Similarly, NECADA working groups could focus on multimodal connectivity linking BRI rail lines to CAREC road networks and exploring new logistics corridors through the Mongolia–China–Russia Economic Corridor.

Flowchart 1. NECADA's institutional positioning
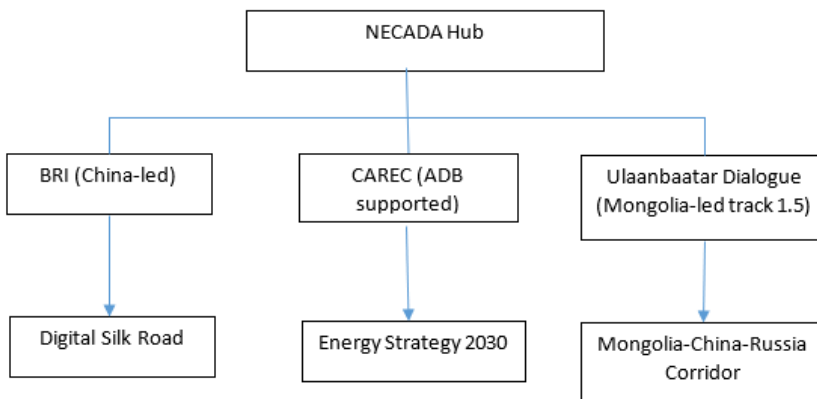
Figure: NECADA as a soft institutional hub linking major regional initiatives through dialogue and coordination.

Beyond infrastructure, NECADA could enhance policy alignment in areas like renewable energy and digital connectivity. BRI's Digital Silk Road and CAREC's Energy Strategy 2030 can connect through Mongolia's initiatives in solar and wind power cooperation, making Ulaanbaatar a center for interregional energy dialogue. Thus, rather than competing with BRI or CAREC, NECADA would function as a meta-coordination mechanism, adding a layer of soft institutional coherence that transforms existing connectivity into a more inclusive and sustainable Mega-Asian framework.

3. Role of Partners and International Support

External partners such as the European Union, Japan, and South Korea could support this initiative under their respective "connectivity" and "free and open Indo-Pacific" frameworks. This would align Mongolia's strategy with global initiatives while preserving its neutrality. The NECADA could also integrate academic institutions such as the National University of Mongolia and Seoul National University as intellectual anchors for inter-

regional research collaboration. Moreover, it is also possible to develop similar platform for cooperation like the ASEAN-ISIS engaging research institutes and think-tanks in the region.

4. Expanding Regional Trade Regimes and Free Trade Possibilities

In addition to infrastructure and policy coordination, Mongolia's bridging role could also extend into regional trade architecture. Central Asia's integration with Northeast Asian supply chains remains limited, despite complementary economic structures: Central Asia's resource base and agricultural potential naturally align with Northeast Asia's manufacturing and high-tech industries. Mongolia, with its experience in trade facilitation through CAREC, could serve as a neutral forum for exploring interregional free-trade dialogues, beginning with non-binding feasibility discussions among Mongolia, Kazakhstan, South Korea, and Japan.

Rather than proposing a formal Free Trade Agreement (FTA) bloc which may be geopolitically sensitive Mongolia could lead a process of incremental trade liberalization, focusing on:

- digital customs and single window systems.
- agro-food export standards.
- green supply chains and carbon-neutral coordination.
- harmonization of technical standards across Central and Northeast Asia.

These initiatives would not replace existing bilateral FTAs but provide a soft institutional ecosystem for long-term trade integration. A NECADA-linked trade facilitation platform could thus become a steppingstone toward a future interregional free-trade zone when political conditions permit.

5. Energy Connectivity and Petroleum Diversification

Mongolia's emerging oil refinery project, supported through Indian assistance, further strengthens the case for NECADA as an interregional coordination platform. Once operational, the refinery will require sustained and reliable inflows of crude oil. Given the geographic proximity and substantial reserves of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian producers, NECADA could facilitate structured dialogue on long-term supply agreements, pipeline linkages, and multimodal transport arrangements for delivering Central Asian crude to Mongolia.

This cooperation is not only economically rational but strategically vital. Mongolia currently imports approximately 90 percent of its gasoline and diesel from the Russian Federation, creating significant vulnerability to price fluctuations, geopolitical risk, and supply disruptions. Through NECADA, Mongolia could explore diversified import sources particularly from Kazakhstan and potentially Uzbekistan while developing transparent regulatory frameworks, shared logistics models, and harmonized technical standards that reduce reliance on a single supplier.

Such diversification would strengthen Mongolia's energy security, enhance market resilience, and embed the country more deeply into Northeast and Central Asia supply chains. NECADA's soft institutional format provides an ideal venue for these conversations, complementing existing trade and connectivity initiatives while avoiding geopolitical sensitivities.

6. Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Cooperation: A NECADA Peacekeeping & Disaster-Response Hub

Mongolia's participation in UN peacekeeping operations one of the most active per capita in Asia offers another pillar for bridge diplomacy. Building on the success of exercises such as Khaan Quest, Mongolia could institutionalize a NECADA Peacekeeping & Humanitarian Training Center.

This center could:

- train multinational contingents from Central and Northeast Asia.
- standardize UN peacekeeping procedures.
- host NECADA peacekeeping exercises.
- run search-and-rescue (SAR) and natural disaster response simulations, crucial as climate-related disasters intensify in both regions.

Central Asia faces increasing floods, earthquakes, and heat-related disasters, while Northeast Asia confronts typhoons, tsunamis, and industrial emergencies. A Mongolian-led regional SAR/PKO hub would provide shared training, build trust, and enhance interoperability among regional militaries and emergency agencies an ideal soft-security agenda that avoids triggering great-power tensions.

This vision fits NECADA's identity as a non-militarized, nonaligned platform focused on humanitarian, environmental, and peacebuilding cooperation.

Counter-Arguments and Challenges

The platform is not an idealistic aspiration but a pragmatic response to growing regional interdependence and institutional fragmentation. The very conditions that appear to constrain NECADA such as rivalry, mistrust, and competing connectivity projects are also the very reasons that justify a neutral dialogue mechanism. In other words, the very causes such as geopolitical rivalry among big powers making the already existing official institutions and multilateral channels slow and ineffective, demands for small, flexible, and neutral platforms to continue mutual engagement and continue dialogue.

Despite its conceptual promise, Mongolia's bridging role faces substantial skepticism. Critics advance three main counterarguments:

- Structural Limitations: Mongolia's landlocked geography, small economy, and limited infrastructure constrain its ability to serve as a physical bridge.

- Geopolitical Vulnerability: Situated between two major powers, Mongolia risks constraints by Chinese and Russian strategic interests.
- Institutional Capacity: The country's diplomatic and administrative resources may be insufficient to sustain complex multilateral initiatives.

1. Addressing Structural Constraints

While geography imposes constraints, it also provides opportunities for innovation. Geo-connectivity diplomacy describes Mongolia's strategic use of infrastructure and policy coordination to transform its landlocked geography into a regional asset. By aligning with trans-Eurasian transport and energy networks, Mongolia positions itself as a vital connector in Mega-Asia. This approach transforms geography into a strategic asset rather than a limitation.

The Mongolia-China-Russia Economic Corridor (MCRC) already provides a precedent for trilateral cooperation on rail, road, and energy projects. For instance, the planned modernization of the Ereentsav-Choibalsan-Bichigt railway will connect to Russia's Trans-Siberian line and China's northeastern provinces, making Mongolia a crucial transit route for both cargo and energy (ADB 2023). Likewise, Mongolia's participation in the Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) and Asian Highway Network (AHN) creates potential to link CAREC's Central Asian corridors to Northeast Asian markets.

Beyond physical connectivity, geo-connectivity diplomacy involves functional alignment with international norms and technology-sharing partnerships. The "Steppe Road Initiative," Mongolia's own connectivity vision, can coordinate with the BRI and CAREC to emphasize sustainability, transparency, and digitalization like how Kazakhstan's Nurly Zhol program successfully aligned with multiple regional frameworks while preserving national ownership. By promoting green transport corridors and digital customs integration (through the SMART Border Initiative), Mongolia can redefine "landlockedness" as "land-linkedness."

Moreover, the concept of the bridge is not merely physical but functional it involves serving as a diplomatic interface and intellectual hub, not solely a transit corridor. Mongolia's ability to convene multilateral transport and energy dialogues such as those held under the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian Security illustrates how geography, diplomacy, and innovation can reinforce each other.

2. Managing Geopolitical Vulnerability

Mongolia's neutrality and non-aligned foreign policy provide resilience in an era of great-power competition. Its successful balancing between China and Russia while maintaining strong ties with democratic partners demonstrates a unique form of strategic autonomy.

To manage geopolitical pressures, Mongolia can continue to employ multi-vector engagement like Kazakhstan's approach diversifying partnerships without provoking rivalry.

For example, Mongolia's active participation in both the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (as observer) and the Community of Democracies illustrates its capacity to bridge normative divides. Hosting dialogues that include adversarial powers such as the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue, which has brought together representatives from both North and South Korea proves that Mongolia's trustworthiness and credibility.

Another tool is energy diplomacy. By positioning itself as a regional hub for renewable energy cooperation through projects like the proposed Asian Super Grid (linking Mongolian wind and solar resources to Northeast Asian demand) Mongolia can diversify its economic dependencies and build cooperative leverage. This mirrors how Finland and Austria maintained neutral diplomacy during the Cold War while integrating economically with both blocs.

The Third Neighbor Policy remains the foundation upon which this bridging role can rest allowing Mongolia to engage democracies like Japan, South Korea, and the EU without undermining its relations with China and Russia. By framing initiatives like NECADA as inclusive, non-aligned, and mutually beneficial, Mongolia can avoid perceptions of bloc alignment and reinforce its legitimacy as a neutral convener.

3. Enhancing Institutional Capacity

We could address the institutional limitations through networked multilateralism that is, by outsourcing aspects of the dialogue process to partner institutions, think tanks, and regional networks. This model allows Mongolia to maintain intellectual and diplomatic leadership without bearing the full administrative burden.

For example, a NECADA Secretariat could be co-managed by the National University of Mongolia in partnership with institutions such as the Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC), University of Tsukuba's Central Asia Initiative, and Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies (KAZISS). This distributed governance model mirrors the structure of the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) network, which successfully links academic and policy dialogues across member states.

Mongolia can also institutionalize public–private partnerships for regional cooperation projects, as seen in Singapore's use of business-led councils for regional connectivity. For example, the Mongolian National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MNCCI) could coordinate with Central Asian and Northeast Asian counterparts to promote investment corridors and technology clusters.

Human capital is another critical resource. Mongolia's growing cadre of internationally trained diplomats and scholars provides the expertise to manage multi-layered dialogues. Establishing a Mongolian School of Regional Diplomacy or a Mega-Asia Policy Lab could institutionalize this talent pool, ensuring continuity and intellectual leadership in future NECADA initiatives.

Through these mechanisms, Mongolia can transform institutional constraints into opportunities for collaborative governance anchoring its bridge diplomacy in sustainable, networked, and knowledge-based multilateralism.

Implications for the Mega-Asia Framework

Mongolia's bridging role carries broader implications for the emerging Mega-Asia paradigm. It reveals that connectivity in Asia extends beyond infrastructure it is also normative and relational, centered on building shared spaces of understanding, trust, and cooperation. As a small state, Mongolia illustrates how non-hegemonic actors can generate regional public goods by serving as conveners and facilitators of dialogue rather than competitors for dominance.

Moreover, Mongolia's approach suggests that Asia's regional order need not rely on formal or hierarchical institutions. Instead, it can evolve through flexible and inclusive "dialogue architectures" adaptive frameworks that reflect the continent's cultural and political diversity.[3] By linking Central Asia's resource-rich and demographically young economies with Northeast Asia's technological and capital strength, Mongolia contributes to a more integrated and balanced continental ecosystem.

In this sense, Mongolia's bridge diplomacy embodies the spirit of Mega-Asia: a cooperative vision of connectivity that aligns physical integration with intellectual and normative cohesion. Positioned at the crossroads of major trans-Eurasian initiatives from the EU's Global Gateway to South Korea's K-Silk Road Mongolia serves as a symbolic and functional connector in the reconfiguration of inter-Asian relations.

Ultimately, acting as a mediator and convener between Central and Northeast Asia enables Mongolia to reduce structural dependence on its two immediate neighbors while enhancing strategic autonomy through diversified interdependence.

1. Emerging U.S. and EU Engagements with Central Asia

Recent geopolitical developments further underscore the timeliness of Mongolia's bridging vision. The revitalized U.S.-Central Asia Dialogue, elevated to a presidential summit in 2025, highlights shared priorities in energy transition, mining collaboration, digital governance, and infrastructure all central to the themes proposed under NECADA. Similarly, the EU-Central Asia Connectivity Initiative embedded in the Global Gateway framework has expanded cooperation on sustainable infrastructure, green energy, and transport corridors linking Europe and Asia. These high-level dialogues illustrate that Western actors increasingly view Central Asia as a pivotal hub in Eurasian connectivity.

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[3]   Acharya, Amitav. 2016. *Constructing Global Order: Agency and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

By positioning itself as a neutral interlocutor between these Euro–Atlantic initiatives and the innovation-driven economies of Northeast Asia, Mongolia could function as a platform for aligning parallel agendas. NECADA's emphasis on soft institutional cooperation particularly in digital and renewable energy sectors could complement the US-Central Asia and EU–Central Asia programs, offering a space for inclusive and non-confrontational coordination. This would situate Mongolia's dialogue architecture not in competition with existing frameworks but as a meta-coordinating bridge linking diverse regional and extra-regional efforts.

2. Toward a Networked Mega-Asia

Integrating these emerging dialogues into the Mega-Asia framework demonstrates that Mongolia's bridge diplomacy can evolve from concept to practice by aligning with ongoing policy processes. The country's capacity to convene stakeholders from the U.S., EU, and Asia in neutral settings like Ulaanbaatar reinforces its value as a dialogue hub. Such positioning enhances the visibility of Mongolia's Third Neighbor Policy while providing tangible contributions to the architecture of Eurasian connectivity.

3. Mongolia's Nuclear-Weapon-Free Status and prelude to potential Central Asian–Northeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Belt

Mongolia's internationally recognized nuclear-weapon-free status (NWFS) is one of its most distinctive contributions to regional and broader security. Since the UN General Assembly acknowledged Mongolia's single-state nuclear-weapon-free regime in 1998, Ulaanbaatar has advanced nuclear disarmament diplomacy grounded in neutrality and peace-building.

In the long term, this experience could inspire a broader Central and Northeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Belt. Central Asia already hosts the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CANWFZ), and Mongolia acts as a geographic and diplomatic bridge between this zone and Northeast Asia where no such framework yet exists.

While political conditions in Northeast Asia remain complicated, Mongolia could:

- host Track 1.5 dialogues exploring denuclearization norms,
- support confidence-building measures around nuclear transparency,
- connect CANWFZ best practices with humanitarian nuclear discourse in Japan,
- promote a long-term vision of a continental nuclear-weapon-free corridor spanning Kazakhstan to Japan.

This contribution aligns with Mega-Asia's normative aspirations and elevates Mongolia's image as a principled, peace-oriented actor.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Mongolia's unique geopolitical, cultural, and diplo-

matic attributes position it as a potential bridge between Central and Northeast Asia within the broader conceptual framework of Mega-Asia. By advancing a Northeast and Central Asian Dialogue Architecture (NECADA), Mongolia can expand its traditional Third Neighbor Policy into a new form of proactive regionalism one that emphasizes dialogue, cooperation, and shared development over competition.

The strategic rationale behind NECADA strengthens this vision. By filling an institutional vacuum, leveraging Mongolia's trusted neutrality, and aligning with the interests of both regional and extra-regional partners, NECADA represents a realistic and necessary addition to Asia's evolving architecture. In a fragmented geopolitical environment, small-state platforms like NECADA are uniquely capable of facilitating dialogue that major-power initiatives cannot.

While challenges remain, particularly regarding infrastructure, geopolitical constraints, and institutional capacity, these do not invalidate the bridging concept. Rather, they call for creative adaptation and networked partnerships. Mongolia's success in maintaining neutrality, fostering multilateral engagement, and promoting peacekeeping demonstrates its potential to serve as a hub of constructive diplomacy.

The bridge diplomacy should evolve from concept to practice through targeted initiatives such as the institutionalization of a NECADA Secretariat, the creation of a Mega-Asia Policy Forum in Ulaanbaatar, and the development of shared research platforms linking Central and Northeast Asian universities. For scholars, future research could explore the comparative dynamics of small state "bridge diplomacy" in other regions, assess Mongolia's role within emerging digital and green connectivity networks, and examine how cultural diplomacy can reinforce inter-Asian cohesion.

By filling an institutional vacuum and embedding itself in multilateral networks, Mongolia can gradually reduce reliance on its two immediate neighbors while strengthening national resilience. In a fragmented geopolitical environment, small-state platforms such as NECADA offer a realistic and necessary pathway toward inclusive regional cooperation. Mongolia's bridge diplomacy thus represents both a national strategy and a contribution to the evolving architecture of Mega-Asia.

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Монгол Улс Зүүн хойд Ази болон Төв Азийн яриа хэлэлцээний гүүр болох нь

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Монгол Улс, Улаанбаатар, МУИС, УТСОУХНУС-ийн УТС-ын тэнхим

Хураангуй

Энэхүү өгүүлэл нь газарзүйн өвөрмөц газарзүйн байршил, дипломат уламжлал, соёл-иргэншилийн огтлолцолд орших онцлогтоо тулгуурлан Монгол Улс Төв Ази ба Зүүн хойд Азийг холбох "гүүр улс"-ын үүргийг гүйцэтгэх бодит боломжтойг гэж мэтгэх юм. Үүний хүрээнд Монгол Улс, Төв Азийн таван улс, Япон, Өмнөд Солонгос болон сонирхсон бусад түншийг хамарсан Зүүн хойд ба Төв Азийн яриа хэлэлцээний архитектур (NECADA) байгуулах санал дэвшүүлж байна. Уг механизм нь уур амьсгал, дэд бүтэц, соёл, худалдаа, уламжлалт бус аюулгүй байдлын чиглэлд төвлөрсөн, уян хатан, их гүрнүүдийн өрсөлдөөнөөс ангид талбар байх юм. Монгол Улсын Гуравдагч хөршийн бодлого, Улаанбаатарын яриа хэлэлцээний туршлагад дулдуйдах энэхүү санаачилга нь Монголын зуучлагч, зохион байгуулагч чадавхыг улам бэхжүүлж, бүс нутгийн харилцааг олон талт болгох замаар хоёр шууд хөршөөсөө хамаарах бүтцийн хамаарлыг аажмаар бууруулах боломжийг бүрдүүлнэ.

Түлхүүр үгс: Бүс нутгийн интеграц, жижиг, буурай орны дипломат бодлого, Зүүн хойд Ази болон Төв Азийн яриа хэлэлцээний архитектур, гүүр, холбогч улс