

*The Takhi, The Bear, The Dragon, and The Eagle:  
Mongolia's Historic Foreign Policy Challenges*

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**Abstract**

Despite multiple interactions between the United States and Mongolia over the course of 70 years, a formal relationship was not established until 1987. Much of that delay was because U.S.-Mongolian relations often took a backseat to other strategic interests including relations with China and the Soviet Union. Three years after the normalization of relations, a visit by Secretary of State Baker strengthened the relationship by raising the Third Neighbor concept, providing a strategic framework for future relations between the two nations. Drawing on the memories and memoirs of the American, Mongolian, Japanese, and Russian diplomats; and declassified records from the CIA and the State Department this paper provides insights and perspectives on the haphazard path that led to diplomatic recognition in the waning days of the Cold War. It also identifies challenges for Mongolia dating back to 1688 resonate in the post-2022 international dynamic.

Keywords: Mongolia, 20<sup>th</sup> Century History, U.S. Policy in Asia, Jebtsundamba Khutughtu

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## Introduction

The authors see the story of the *takhi*<sup>1</sup> as symbolic of the story of Mongolia. The takhi is a unique Central Asian native declared extinct in the wild in 1969 before being reintroduced in 1992. Mongolia, like the takhi, reemerged unexpectedly into the world when it ended 69 years of Marxist isolation in March 1990. Both faced significant challenges – after their reemergence each has grown and prospered with international support and assistance in difficult times built on the foundation of their own strength and resilience. Both still have challenges that lay ahead of them.

In 1242 the Mongols ruled the largest contiguous land empire in history stretching from Korea to the outskirts of Vienna. After the empire broke up, Russia's gradual eastward expansion to the Pacific officially brought it to the northern border of twenty-first century Mongolia with the treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689 (Krausse, *Russia in Asia. 1899*, pp. 33-40). However, the impact of Russia's eastward expansion was already being felt by the Mongols. In 1688 the Mongols of the Dzungar Khanate drove the Khalkha leadership from their homeland in modern Mongolian. At a meeting in Inner Mongolia, the exiled leadership debated whether to seek Russian or Chinese assistance to defend themselves (Onon and Pritchatt, *Asia's First Modern Revolution*, 1989, pp. 44-45). The Khalkha would need to choose whether to seek assistance from the Russian Bear or the Chinese Dragon.

It was not the first time the Khalkha had to decide how to manage relations with Mongolia's two modern neighbors. But it was the first time the choice had been so stark. This balance is still Mongolia's most critical challenge today. In 1691 at Doloon Nuur representatives of the Khalkha Mongols pledged allegiance to the Manchu emperor Kanghxi (Ewing, "The Forgotten Frontier", 1981, p. 179). However, Russian expansion to the Pacific continued as did their interest in Mongolia. As the Mongolian relationship with Beijing crumbled at the end of the Qing dynasty, Russia became increasingly important to Mongolia.

## Mongolia Today

Mongolia's 20th century history was marked by two key periods – 1911 to 1924 and 1984 to 1991. Given its history and its location as a central Asian landlocked country Mongolia's only two neighbors, China and Russia, were key players in both periods. Yet both times Mongolia reached out to a third power – the United States.

The focus of this paper will be on the second period 1984 to 1991. This period was marked by Mongolia's changing relationship with the old Soviet Union and its ultimate disintegration, the rapid rise of China, and finally 75 years after Mongolia's first approach to the United States the establishment of diplomatic relations.

## 1911 to 1921

Even before their proclamation of independence from China on December 1, 1911 (Onon and Pritchatt, 1989, p.15), the Mongols had sought support from Russia (Onon and Pritchatt, p.6). Russia and China made decisions based on their own interests and desires – a recurring challenge for Mongolia. After extended negotiations in both St. Petersburg and Khüree

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as "Przewalski's horse".

(modern day Ulaanbaatar) on November 3, 1912, Russia and Mongolia signed a treaty which recognized Mongolia's "autonomous" status, but not its independence.

On November 18 the Mongolian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ch'in Van Khanddorj drafted a diplomatic note to the major powers other than China and Russia, but including the United States<sup>2</sup>, to inform them of Mongolia's independence and requesting the conclusion of trade and friendship treaties. On December 13, 1912, the American consulate in Harbin received a message written in Mongolian from the "Foreign Office of the Mongolian Empire" accompanied by a Chinese language translation. The Consulate translated the message from Chinese to English. Even though it was translated from Mongolian to Chinese to English, and is not identical, it is similar enough to the Mongolian record that we believe it is the November 18 message (Bold, *Independence and Recognition*, pages 70 and 374).

Historically U.S. policy in Asia had been driven by commercial interests and focused primarily on China. After the Spanish-American War, the U.S. became a colonial power with the acquisition of the Philippines. In 1911 the U.S. involvement in Asia was focused on China, Japan, and the Philippines. Thus, when the message arrived in Washington (Onon and Pritchatt, Page 166) it was viewed in the context of U.S. interests in China and Japan. The U.S. focus was on the collapsing Chinese empire, not Mongolia.

Mongolia's 20th century struggle for international recognition was once again dominated by the competing interests of its two giant neighbors – China and Russia – and affected by the internal problems in both nations. It was only after World War II that China achieved internal stability. As for Russia, after the 1917 seizure of power by the Marxist-Leninist in Moscow, it became preoccupied with its own internal challenges. But by 1921, after success in Siberia, Moscow was willing to support the ouster of Baron Ungern-Sternberg and the communist takeover in Mongolia. Inevitably after 1921 Mongolia considered the Soviets its protector from China. In the interest of its relationship with Moscow, the United States successfully pressured a reluctant China to recognize Mongolian independence after the end of World War II. Before 1990 the challenge for Mongolia was the same as its nobles discussed in 1688 – Russia or China (Onon and Pritchatt, p. 3)? It was only with the end of Mongolia's own Marxist-Leninist rule in March 1990 that the United States finally became an important player in Mongolia's changing presence on the world stage.

### **After 1921**

The U.S. showed episodic interest in Mongolia prior to 1987. In April 1921 the U.S. ignored political arguments for opening a Consulate in Ulaanbaatar and opened one in Kalgan (modern day Zhangjiakou) instead (Campi and Baasan, *The Impact of China and Russia on U.S.-Mongolian Relations in the Twentieth Century*, p. 84). Commercial interests remained the driving force as Kalgan had historically been a key gateway from Mongolia to Beijing. When the chaos of the Chinese civil war engulfed the region American missionaries and commercial firms fled and the Consulate was closed on April 18, 1927 (*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1927*, The Minister in China (MacMurray) to the Secretary of State). After the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences the Soviet Union successfully pressed the United States to pressure China to recognize Mongolia's independence as part of its agreement to enter the Pacific Theater of Operations at the end of World War II.

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<sup>2</sup> The Austro-Hungarian Empire, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

After World War II, three major changes would occur that impacted the United States' relationship with Mongolia. The United States began to play a significant role in international affairs and as a result the State Department bureaucracy began to address relations with countries of lesser interest such as Mongolia. The Korean War hardened American attitudes on numerous foreign policy issues – especially in Asia. And the presidential election of 1960 ushered in new ideas in Washington.

In 1961 the U.S. considered recognition of Mongolia as part of a broad policy initiative, but domestic politics in the U.S. and Chiang Kai-shek's government in Taipei successfully blocked any active initiative for normalization of relations (Lake and Lake, "Changing the Conversation"). However, the U.S. tacitly supported Mongolian admission to the United Nations that year by abstaining from both the Security Council and General Assembly votes. As the U.S. became increasingly engaged in Vietnam that conflict began to dominate Asia policy, so Mongolia continued to take a back seat. Mongolia remained a part-time responsibility for someone who worked on the mainland China desk at Foggy Bottom. The question of Mongolia was only kept alive based on occasional input from political appointees and feelers from Mongolia.

The February 1972 Shanghai communique changed the nature of U.S. relations with China, and Mongolia's place in the U.S. bureaucracy. The Office of Asian Communist Affairs was renamed the Office of China and Mongolia Affairs. Mongolia now officially existed in the bureaucracy. Unknown to the United States in October 1972, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP, the ruling Marxist party) authorized the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to establish formal relations with the United States (D. Yondon, *To Tell You the Truth*, 2016). On March 14, 1973, the White House approved negotiations with Mongolia in response to this overture. This time, however, it was Moscow which ended negotiations by literally stopping an instruction cable from the Mongolian Foreign Ministry to their United Nations Mission in New York. Moscow then finally made it clear to Ulaanbaatar that negotiations should not continue. The U.S. side heard only silence. A recurring theme in U.S.-Mongolia relations has been that neither side ever fully understood the other.

The U.S. official position of what transpired between March 1973 and November 1979 was there was "no real urgency" to normalize relations with Mongolia, but that "we remain interested" and would "welcome the opportunity to resume negotiations." The bureaucracy had given up.

### **The Beginnings of Change**

In the 1980s, leadership changes in Moscow and Ulaanbaatar altered the dynamic of the relationship. In Moscow the rapid shift over three years from Leonid Brezhnev (1982) to Yuri Andropov to Konstantin Chernenko to Mikhail Gorbachev (1985) was dramatic. No less dramatic was the 1984 removal in Ulaanbaatar of Yumjaagiin Tsedenbal after 32 years in office. However, the accurate story of the events of 1984 through 1987 in U.S.-Mongolian relations have remained obscured by secrecy laws, regulations, and efforts by key officials in both countries to work behind the scenes and off the record. Some authors writing about the period have also been misleading and provided inaccurate information. The story of this period is one of challenges faced by key Soviet and Mongolian officials seeking to bring change to their 65-year-old partnership, efforts. These efforts unfolded concurrently with Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* initiative in the Soviet Union and his initiation of a new East Asian policy seeking to improve relations with China.

In 1984 Moscow had concerns about Tsedenbal's failing health, the machinations of his wife Anastasia Filitova, and the possibility of a worsening situation undermining Soviet interests in Mongolia. On April 29, 1984, the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) passed a resolution that Tsedenbal should be encouraged to resign from all his leadership posts in both the government and the Party (Nadirov, *Tsedenbal and the Events of August 1984*, 2005, p. 92).

During their 1984 vacations in the Soviet Union, then Prime Minister Jambyn Batmónkh and fellow Politburo member D. Molomjamts were "invited" to Moscow on short notice to meet with key Soviet officials on August 9. This meeting was chaired by CPSU Politburo member Mikhail Gorbachev. Even though Chernenko remained in charge of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev was becoming the de facto leader due to Chernenko's failing health.

Tsedenbal's physician, Doctor Yevgeniy Chazov, briefed the attendees on Tsedenbal's medical situation. Gorbachev knew from the Soviet representatives in Ulaanbaatar that Tsedenbal was planning to convene a Plenum of the Central Committee of the MPRP in August to remove Batmónkh and Molomjamts from the Politburo. Gorbachev pushed for the immediate removal of Tsedenbal from his positions.

On August 17, just over a week after the initial meeting with the Soviet leadership, the MPRP Politburo recommended Tsedenbal's removal from all official positions. Six days later at the 8<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the MPRP Central Committee Tsedenbal was officially relieved of his duties. Batmónkh was elected to replace him as General Secretary (Nadirov, *Tsedenbal and the Events of August 1984*, 2005, p. 110).

### **The Johnson Visit**

By coincidence, on September 19, 1984, just 27 days after Tsedenbal's removal, Don Johnson from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing arrived in Ulaanbaatar. Johnson had suggested the visit. Although approved by the Department of State, Washington did not expect any significant result. Just prior to his return to Beijing on September 28 Johnson was granted a meeting with a Foreign Ministry Policy Planning official Jalbuu Choinkhor. A month after Tsedenbal's departure, Johnson became the first American official received officially by the Mongolian government since Vice President Henry Wallace had visited in 1944.

### **The Soviet Union and East Asia**

Soviet interests in China again had an impact on Mongolia. On March 10, 1985, Chernenko died and was quickly replaced by Gorbachev as General Secretary. Gorbachev immediately stated his desire for improved relations with China saying at an emergency CPSU Plenum on March 11, "We would like a serious improvement in relations with the PRC". When he met Chinese Vice Premier Li Peng on March 14, Gorbachev reiterated his call for "serious improvement" in relations (Mills, "Gorbachev and the Future of Sino-Soviet Relations" (1986). The significance of Gorbachev's public pronouncements about China could not have been missed by senior officials in the Soviet Union's oldest ally. One of the "three obstacles" to improved Sino-Soviet relations was the Soviet military deployment in Mongolia.

## **Asia Society Study Mission to Ulaanbaatar**

In another coincidence in October 1985 an Asia Society study mission headed by Dr. Robert Scalapino from the University of California at Berkeley visited seven Asian capitals and financial centers – including Ulaanbaatar. The visit to Ulaanbaatar was at the suggestion of one of the members of the delegation (Michael Allen Lake, personal correspondence, May 19, 2022). Although the significance of the Scalapino visit is obscured in American records, an early 1987 review of the normalization process conducted by the State Department’s East Asian Bureau identified this academic contact as one of the two seminal events for the United States (Department of State FOIA 199900358, 24 February 1987 Draft Dr. Gaston Sigur, “Request for Authorization to Open American Embassy Ulaanbaatar, Mongolian People’s Republic”).

Based on First Deputy Foreign Minister Daramiin Yondon’s book (Yondon, *To Tell You the Truth, Үнэн учрыг өгүүлбээс*, 2016.), the authors believe that key figures in the Mongolian government, including Batmönkh himself, saw the Asia Society visit as a gesture from the United States. And thus, it was a catalyst for Mongolian efforts to pursue normalization again despite the failure of the 1970’s attempt.

## **The 1985 Geneva Summit**

The November 1985 Gorbachev-Reagan Geneva Summit changed the tenor of U.S.-Soviet relations. In his November 27 report to the Supreme Soviet, Gorbachev made the following point:

The Soviet leadership attaches great importance to the Asian and Pacific region...It is extremely important to ensure that this region is not a source of tension and an area of armed confrontation. We stand for the broadening of political dialogue among all the States in the region, in the interests of peace, good neighborliness, mutual trust and co-operation. (“Report by Deputy Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary,” 4 December 1985)

Recognizing the change, Batmönkh had said at the November 26 meeting of the MPRP Politburo,

the positive beginnings achieved at the Soviet-American summit talks, ...paved the way for by the constructive initiatives and practical steps of the Soviet Union and other socialist community countries aimed at...improving the international climate. (“MPRP Issues Communique on Geneva Summit,” FBIS, 29 November 1985)

However, Batmönkh was not likely to forget that the attempt to develop relations with the United States in the 1970’s had been abruptly halted by Moscow. The Soviets had made it clear ever since that they would not support change in the Mongolian-U.S. relationship. Moreover, from Ulaanbaatar’s perspective Soviet support was crucial in facing their greatest threat – China.

## **Shevardnadze’s January 1986 Visit to Ulaanbaatar**

During his January 24, 1986, meeting with Batmönkh, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze took the initiative to raise normalization of relations between Mongolia and the

United States. The transcript of the Shevardnadze-Batmónkh meeting confirms a brief discussion of the topic. Shevardnadze made a strong statement saying that the question had been considered by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU and that establishing relations with the United States was in the common interests of the Socialist community. He said it was not about speeding things up, but diplomatic relations were possible and necessary (Joseph E. Lake, personal correspondence, 2021 and 2022).

Some Mongolian supporters of normalization saw this as encouragement to push forward. Others in the MPRP Politburo, however, were not happy with moving ahead quickly. Batmónkh and Foreign Minister Mangalyn Dүgersүren continued to express ambivalence. The U.S. was unaware of the discussion and remained disinterested.

### **January To May 1986**

The authors continue to research the key events between the January 1986 and the U.S. formal approach to Gendengiin Nyamdoo, Mongolia's Ambassador to the United Nations, in August 1986. The U.S. has so far declined to declassify and release seven documents in the normalization process. Because of Mongolia's secrecy laws we have been unable to obtain Mongolian documents and the Mongolian officials involved are reluctant to share information. There is contradictory information from sources on both sides (including First Deputy Foreign Minister Yondon) as to exactly what happened. Some of which the authors have been able to confirm as accurate, and some of which the authors can confirm is incorrect.

In early 1986, according to a well-informed source, Buyantyn Dashtseren the new Mongolian Ambassador to Japan, arrived in Tokyo. He instructed his staff to send the routine circular diplomatic note announcing his arrival and looking forward to continuing good relations to the U.S. Embassy. Such notes are normally not sent to an embassy of a country with which one does not have diplomatic relations. The same source also stated that Dashtseren would speak with U.S. Ambassador Mike Mansfield at events where they were both present. Similar to the situation with the diplomatic note, it is unusual for an ambassador to speak to another ambassador from a country with which they do not have diplomatic relations. The authors have found no record that any of these activities were reported officially to Washington, suggesting that Mansfield was using back channels, secure telephones, and stops by visiting officials in Tokyo to communicate about Mongolia. Such activity would not be surprising as the Reagan-Poindexter era National Security Council of the early 1980s was known for carrying out foreign policy via back channels and informal relationships. A classic example of this being the Iran-Contra Affair.

### **Johnson's 1986 Visit**

According to State Department records, in April 1986 the Japanese passed a message from the Mongolians to U.S. Embassy Tokyo expressing the "strong hope" that relations between the U.S. and Mongolia could be normalized. We do not know the content of the message nor who sent it. As the reporting cable has not been released, we can only speculate. We can confirm from other records that the United States government saw the approach as significant.

Eventually the Office of China Mongolia Affairs at the State Department, which had not been involved in earlier contacts, became aware of the Tokyo approach. The Mongolia Desk

informed U.S. Embassy in Beijing political officer Don Johnson volunteered to make his second trip to respond. He received a diplomatic visa and arrived in Ulaanbaatar on Thursday May 8.

Unfortunately, Johnson discovered that all Mongolian government offices were closed in honor of the Soviet bloc's May 9 celebration of the end of World War II in Europe. No one was available to receive him, and he returned to Beijing after three days.

### **Vladivostok Speech and Soviet Withdrawal**

Gorbachev changed the situation dramatically with his Vladivostok Speech on July 28, 1986. Batmönkh knew in advance about Gorbachev's speech and was concerned with the implications for Mongolia. Fifteen days after the speech on August 12 he discussed the withdrawal announcement with Gorbachev. In his papers, Batmönkh writes that Gorbachev said his intention was to withdraw only "one or two divisions" of Soviet troops. Batmönkh pointed out that despite this move the reason for inviting the Soviet troops to Mongolia in the first place had not been completely resolved – relations with China (J. Batmönkh, "My Perspective," 2001).

Gorbachev's Vladivostok speech was also read with interest in Washington. Assistant Secretary of State Gaston Sigur's interest was undoubtedly encouraged by Chinese Communist Party Secretary General Hu Yaobang's July 1986 conversation with former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski when Hu suggested that now was the time for the United States to normalize relations with Mongolia. This discussion was echoed in a direct approach to Sigur in Washington by Chinese Ambassador Han Xu. While the Chinese were acting in their own self-interest, coupled with the Vladivostok speech there was no doubt that the dynamics in East Asia were changing (Department of State FOIA 199900358 86.08.19 State 260137).

### **August to September 1986 Exchanges**

The only accurate record we have found of events during this period are the official records the Department of State has released thus far. Unfortunately, they are not complete in certain areas and the memories of the officers involved are starting to fade. We have relied on the clearly identifiable facts.

Secretary of State George Shultz directed Sigur to initiate talks with Mongolia. The United States repeatedly assumed that the official Mongolian position was to move ahead quickly. However Foreign Minister Dүgersүren was following a go-slow approach. The Mongolians were engaged in negotiations with the Soviets concerning the promised withdrawal of at least some of the Soviet forces stationed there. Washington did not understand the difficult situation faced by Ulaanbaatar (Batmönkh, "My Perspective," 2001).

### **Mixed Signals**

On August 28 Vernon Walters, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, approached Mongolian Ambassador Nyamdoo and proposed reopening the dialogue on normalizing relations. Nyamdoo responded on September 17 and said the Mongolian government agreed to begin negotiations at a mutually agreed time. Walters observed that Nyamdoo wanted the U.S. to propose a time to report back to Ulaanbaatar. In an apparent violation of his

instructions, Nyamdoo ultimately said that his government was prepared to begin talks any time before Dүgersүren's address to the United Nations General Assembly scheduled for October 2.

### **New York and Washington: September to December**

As discussed above, the U.S. was unaware of the negotiations on Soviet troop withdrawal, the tensions within the Mongolian government, or the increasing strains in Ulaanbaatar's relationship with Moscow. However, with the decision to send the August instructions, the Washington foreign affairs bureaucracy became engaged.

Sigur requested an analysis of why Moscow was sanctioning U.S.-Mongolian discussion of diplomatic relations. The authors believe the analysis was requested to put at least some of the backchannel information on the record following the official approach to Nyamdoo to shifting relevant record of contacts into regular diplomatic channels. It was also done in anticipation of the October arrival of the new Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (DAS) responsible for China and Mongolia, J. Stapleton Roy. Roy had been one of the first two Foreign Service Officers trained in the Mongolian language during the early 1960's. He was one of the Department of State's foremost China specialists and his arrival at this stage of the negotiations with Mongolia was coincidental yet important.

According to the CIA analysis, Mongolia had not made a direct and authoritative approach to the U.S. since Johnson's abortive May visit. The analysis also reflected how little the U.S. understood about what was transpiring in Ulaanbaatar. The analysis mischaracterized Foreign Minister Dүgersүren's presence in New York as an attempt to emphasize the high level of importance attached to the talks. In his as yet unpublished oral history interview Roy says that when he returned to Washington in October 1986 he found "desultory interest in reviving efforts to establish diplomatic relations with Mongolia" and said he gave the issue top priority.

On December 5 new instructions were sent to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in New York to approach the Mongolians about a round of negotiations. The Mongolians agreed and a new round commenced on December 12 with Roy negotiating on behalf of the United States.

The pace had changed in Ulaanbaatar, suggesting that negotiations with the Soviets were concluding. On December 17 Nyamdoo presented a Mongolian counterproposal based on the U.S. draft. What appeared to be normal negotiations dragged out the process, but on January 15 Mongolian negotiators proposed signing the final communique as early as January 20.

Probably not coincidentally, on January 15 a formal announcement was also made that the first Soviet troops would be withdrawn from Mongolia beginning April 24, 1987. Mongolia's strategic relationship with Moscow and the world outside the Soviet bloc had changed.

On January 27, 1987, Ambassador Nyamdoo and Secretary Shultz signed the memorandum of understanding to establish diplomatic relations. Seventy-five years after Mongolia first approached the United States the two countries finally normalized their relationship. Soviet support for Mongolia continued to decrease over the next three years as Moscow wrestled with its own international and domestic economic problems. Moscow's economic support to

Mongolia ended in 1991, leading to disastrous economic upheaval for Mongolia's first post-Marxist government.

The failure of the Mongolian and American governments to understand each other, and the U.S. indifference continued until Secretary of State Baker's 1990 visit. They have enjoyed a growing relationship since Baker's 1990 and 1991 visits firmly put Mongolia in the minds of key U.S. officials. In 1990 Baker suggested that the United States be Mongolia's third neighbor. This theme became an important part of Mongolia's strategy as it reached out to the non-communist world.

### **Conclusions: 2023 – The Bear and The Dragon: A New Dynamic?**

The February 22, 2022, Russian invasion of Ukraine dramatically changed the international dynamic. All of Russia's European neighbors reached out to NATO as China supported Russia. Even as Mongolia's economic relationship with China has grown, this changing dynamic is impacting its ties with both Russia and China. Has the relevancy of the relationship with the United States been impacted by this new dynamic?

On March 13 in his first speech after being elected to a third term as President by the National People's Congress, Xi Jinping implicitly reminded Mongolia that the U.S. as a third player is still relevant. This notion is only reinforced by the repeated references made by the Mongolian Foreign Minister Batmunkhiin Battsetseg to third neighbors in a recent interview (B. Battsetseg: *The Whole World Is Watching Us*, 08 May 2023).

Xi said, "bullying by foreign powers tore the country apart." The Communist Party of China has united and "led the Chinese people of all ethnic groups in working hard for a century to put an end to China's national humiliation...China's national rejuvenation has become an historical inevitability." (*Xinhua*, 15 March 2023.) China has not forgotten that they consider Mongols as one of the traditional Chinese ethnic groups and, like Taiwan, they may consider Mongolia a part of China torn away by foreign powers.

Another reminder of China and Mongolia's intertwined past came on March 8 with the Dalai Lama's acknowledgement of a Mongolian 10<sup>th</sup> Jebtsundamba Khutughtu ("China on edge as Mongolian boy is hailed as new Buddhist lama", *The Times*, London, 22 March 2023) – the third highest ranking lama in the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy. The 8<sup>th</sup> Jebtsundamba Khutughtu had been the theocratic ruler of independent Mongolia from 1911 to 1924. His appearance has potential significance for China in its management of Tibet and implications for Inner Mongolia as reflected in Mongolian Foreign Minister Battsetseg's remarks after her early May visit to Beijing. (B. Battsetseg, *The Whole World Is Watching Us*, 08 May 2023) The 10<sup>th</sup> Jebtsundamba is also a potentially significant figure in the succession process for the next Dalai Lama. China's State Religious Affairs Bureau Order No. 5, "Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism" issued in July 2007 states that applications must be filed by all Buddhist temples before they are allowed to recognize individuals as tulkus (reincarnated teachers). (Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 2007).

Unfortunately, the issue is even more complex. As the 10<sup>th</sup> Jebtsundamba Khutughtu was reportedly born in the United States, there are also potential challenges for the U.S.

The bear, the dragon, and the eagle have all played an important role in Mongolia's modern history. Looking to the future, the sturdy takhi once again faces significant challenges. The challenge for Mongolian policy makers have to manage these challenges.

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