



Small-power diplomacy: Mongolia's peacekeeping commitment





MONGOLIAN GEOPOLITICS #11

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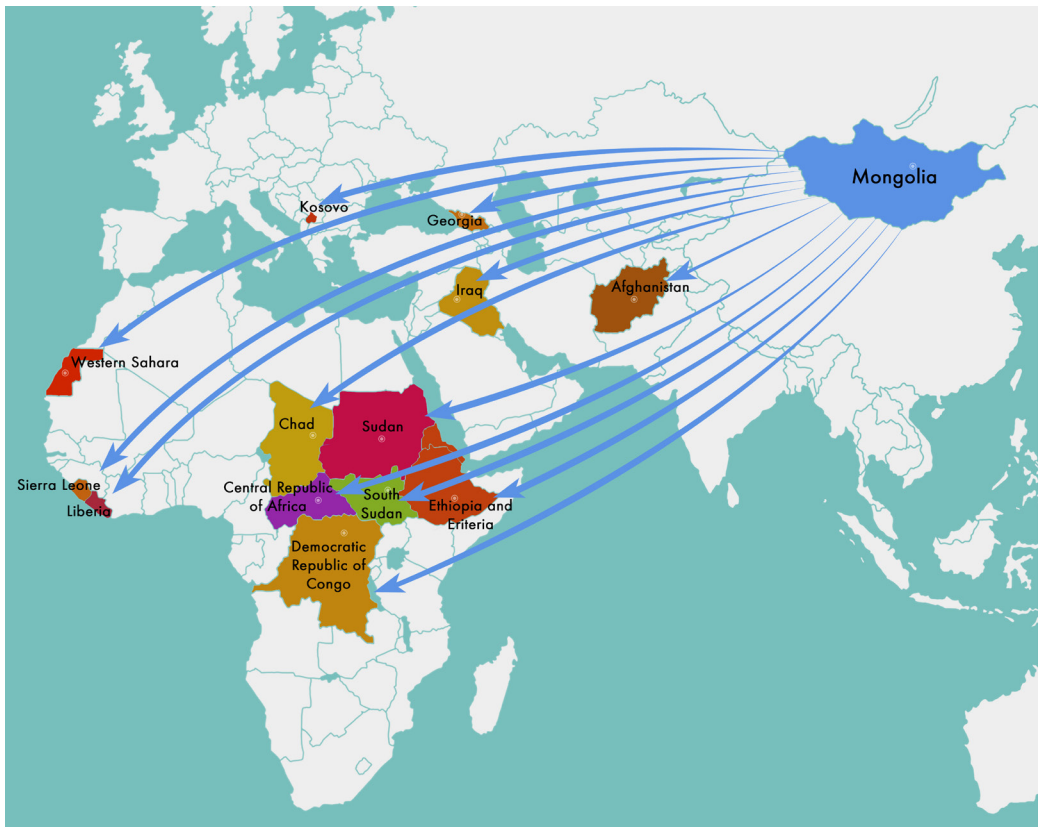
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Mongolia first emerged on the United Nations peacekeeping contribution list in 2002 with four military observers and it ranked at 82nd out of 89 countries in terms of personnel deployed. Today, Mongolia stands at 24th out of 123 countries. At the time of writing, 881 military personnel, including 15 experts, were being deployed to peacekeeping missions.¹ To maintain this size of the force, Mongolia needs to make available more than 2,000 military personnel or three rotations: one group in the mission, another in preparation and the third just out of a six- to nine-month deployment. Simultaneously, Mongolia deployed its military to the coalition operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo along with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members. Given the country's small GDP, population and military, Mongolia's contribution to the United Nations and NATO is a remarkable commitment and is considered as a reliable partner in peacekeeping.²

In addition to the peacekeeping deployments, Mongolia established an internationally recognized state-of-the art peacekeeping training centre, known as the Five Hills Peace Support Operations Training Centre.³ The centre provides bilateral training opportunities for militaries, from the largest (Indian and German) to the smallest (Belgium and Qatar). The centre hosts a small but unique peace-keeping exercise, Khaan Quest, which brings the militaries of China, Japan, South Korea and the United States together with emerging troop-contributing nations around the world for UN peacekeeping drills. Mongolia's peacekeeping efforts can be seen as an example of a modest constructive collaboration of major and small powers in a gloomy geopolitical setting.

In this paper, we provide an overview of Mongolia's peacekeeping participation, explain how it aligns with the country's national security and foreign policy objectives, discuss its benefits for the military and recommend establishing an international think tank for peacekeeping in Mongolia.

Background

After concluding a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations in 1999 to provide staff officers, military observers and medical officers to peacekeeping missions and passing a law permitting military and police participation in peacekeeping in 2002, Mongolia sought ways to deploy its military contingent in peacekeeping operations. But it was a competitive business. For example, in October 2002, Mongolian President Bagabandi Natsag requested support from then-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to deploy an infantry platoon (about 30–36 personnel) and to use the military training centre as a regional peacekeeping training centre for the United Nations. However, a team of experts from the UN Peacekeeping Department investigated the Mongolian military's peacekeeping preparations and concluded that the country would need at least two or three years of training and would need to meet the UN table of organization and equipment.⁴ It became clear that the Mongolian military needed time to qualify for UN peacekeeping operations.

In March 2003, the government decided to deploy a contingent in support of military operations in Iraq, led by the United States and the United Kingdom. This was a risky but independent foreign policy decision because its powerful neighbours both opposed the coal-

tion's military operations. From September 2003 to October 2008, Mongolia deployed 1,192 personnel of an infantry company and construction platoon through ten rotations to Iraq. The Mongolian contingent served in the Polish-led Multinational Division Central–South until the end of the mission. Mongolia's deployment to Iraq contributed positively to bilateral relations with the United States, the United Kingdom and Poland. In 2005, US President George W. Bush made an official visit to thank Mongolia for its contribution to the coalition operations in Iraq as well as Afghanistan.⁵

Mongolia's participation in the coalition operations in Afghanistan slowly expanded. First, the Mongolian military was in charge of the training and maintenance of the Afghan National Army artillery force. From October 2003 to March 2012, around 14 mobile training teams (about 300 personnel in total) worked in Afghanistan to develop the national training programme, train Afghan artillery officers and non-commissioned officers and repair artillery weapons. Then, beginning in October 2010, Mongolia sent eight rotations of a helicopter maintenance and training team to support the Afghan Air Force, which was equipped with Russian-made helicopters.

Second, Mongolia deployed a company (120–130 personnel) to protect Camp Eggers, one of the main military camps in Kabul, beginning in October 2009. A platoon worked with the German-led provincial reconstruction team in Feyzabad, in northern Afghanistan, as of December 2009. And in May 2011, a Mongolian platoon began working with the Belgium military to provide security for the Kabul International Airport.

As of 2010, Mongolia was officially recognized by NATO as a troop-contributing nation to its missions in Afghanistan.⁶ Mongolia also deployed two platoons to join with the Belgium and Luxembourg militaries to the NATO mission in Kosovo. This was an interesting effort, made by two small members of NATO, to provide opportunity for the Mongolian military to be deployed with franco-phone-speaking forces in Europe while following the NATO standard of operations.

Meanwhile, as the original UN mission in Sierra Leone ended in 2005, Mongolia was given an opportunity to deploy a military contingent of 250 personnel to protect the Special Court for Sierra Leone. It was an international court tasked with prosecuting individuals responsible for war crimes during the civil war there. Between 2005 and 2011, when the Mongolian contingent was in charge of security, a number of war criminals, including former Liberian President Charles Taylor, were imprisoned and prosecuted by the Special Court. This was the first-ever UN peacekeeping deployment of the Mongolian military. From 2009 to 2010, Mongolia also deployed two contingents (528 personnel in total) to the UN mission in Chad to protect civilians. And Mongolia set up a level-II medical field hospital in Darfur as a part of the United Nations–African Union operations. From 2010 to 2017, eight medical teams of 554 Mongolian doctors and nurses provided medical services to more than 11,000 people. From 2011, Mongolia began its largest deployment of 850 personnel (a battalion) to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. More than 370 officers have been deployed to most of the UN missions as staff officers, liaison officers, mission experts and military observers since 2002.⁷

The participation of Mongolian women in the UN peacekeeping deployments has also expanded. To date, nearly 800 women have been deployed in the peacekeeping operations: 56 observers and staff officers and 742 with the military contingents. Around 44 per cent of personnel for the level-II field hospital were women doctors and nurses. Now, more than 6.5 per cent of the Mongolian contingent members serving in peacekeeping missions are women.⁸

The national security and foreign policy rationale

Peacekeeping supports Mongolia's security and foreign policy objectives. In the post-Cold War period, Mongolia's security and foreign policies have changed dramatically.⁹ The Sino-Soviet rapprochement ended the military alliance with the Soviet Union. This resulted in the complete withdrawal of the Soviet military from Mongolia, removed the mutual defence obligation of the 1966 treaty with the then-Soviet Union and Russia and ended massive military-technical assistance for the Mongolian military.

To maintain neutrality, Mongolia's 1992 Constitution and subsequent national security and foreign policy concepts restricted the provision of any access to foreign military forces and prohibited the country from joining military alliances.¹⁰ Mongolia declared its territory a nuclear weapon-free zone in 1992 and joined the Non-Aligned Movement in 1993.¹¹ In the absence of any military alliance or security guarantee by major powers, its commitment to neutrality has become the only choice for Mongolia to maintain its sovereignty and independent statehood. Chinese and Russian geopolitical interests could be satisfied by not asserting their geostrategic or military inter-

ests in Mongolia and also Mongolia's commitment for not welcoming any security interests from their geostrategic competitors. Given this external setting, peacekeeping has evolved as the most convenient tool for Mongolia's security and foreign policies.

First, peacekeeping is a comfortable means to develop military ties with China, the Russia Federation and with third neighbours: the United States, Japan, the European Union, India, South Korea and Turkey. Due to the purpose of peacekeeping for global peace and security, the assistance for peacekeeping capacity-building by the Mongolian military is easily justified. Such development assistance includes the provision of non-combat military equipment, language and professional military training and open exercises. At the same time, China and the Russian Federation have contributed: China built the recreational facility for peacekeepers and provided engineering equipment and the Russian Federation provided military equipment (armoured personnel carriers) at the Five Hills peacekeeping training centre.

Second, peacekeeping deployment substantiates Mongolia's multilateral diplomacy, which aims to increase the country's international profile and to strengthen its sovereignty. In the absence of self-defence capability and security guarantees, Mongolia must rely on international organizations, especially the United Nations, for its independent statehood. Thus, Mongolia's peacekeeping contribution supports its foreign policy objective as well as the UN objective to maintain global peace and security. Similarly, it helps Mongolia to be recognized by NATO as an official partner and by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as a member State.

And it helps Mongolia develop ties with European partners, including former socialist States, that share a similar past and transformation as well as new relationships in Western Europe.

Third, peacekeeping provides another layer to Mongolia's foreign policy efforts to host international and regional events, building on its Finland- or Switzerland-like neutrality. Even during the Cold War, especially in the 1970s and the 1980s, Mongolia took the initiative to host small-scale regional events. Now, Mongolia has hosted several international events (the Asia–Europe Meeting), thematic events (with the UN, OSCE and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization) and its own Ulaanbaatar Dialogue. With the United Kingdom, Mongolia co-hosted the first-ever peacekeeping exercise with four permanent members of the United Security Council, in July 2004. Also, the Khaan Quest, an annual event co-organized with the United States, has into a multinational venue welcoming country from the region as well as emerging troop contributors¹² (see the table at the end of the paper).

The military rationale

Peacekeeping deployment has made important contributions to civil–military relations and military reform. As with many other European former socialist States, control of the Mongolian military transitioned from one-party rule to the multiparty system in which democratically elected officials exercise power. Under the 1992 Constitution, a new civilian control mechanism was established. The decision to deploy military for peacekeeping missions became a clear test for this type of civilian control. Throughout all peacekeeping deployments, civilian leaders have been in charge of the decision-making process, and the

military participates in a professional capacity.¹³ The peacekeeping deployments have gradually helped to build healthy civil–military relations within Mongolia. Unlike the period of the 1990s, when Mongolians questioned the need for armed forces and witnessed unpopular news coverage of alcoholism, hazing and other unattractive aspects of the military, peacekeeping has cultivated a new image. Politicians began to see it as a foreign policy tool. The public became aware of Mongolian military's global deployments, and some youth saw professional opportunities, including foreign schooling and deployment. Peacekeeping saved the military, which had become one of the less-funded, marginalized security services in the absence of any external threat.

Peacekeeping also contributed to military reform. By 1992, the country's excessive defence establishment needed to downsize. The Soviet military had withdrawn, the massive officer corps was discharged and the militarized social structure (the three-year compulsory service along with the reserve system and special units for military training and planning at public organizations, including universities and secondary schools) was dismantled. Both the Soviet military technical assistance and a substantial share of the GDP for defence disappeared overnight. Even though the 1992 Constitution declared that Mongolia shall maintain an armed force for self-defence, the government cut the defence budget drastically due to the economic hardship during the political and economic transition period. The military began to pursue reform policies to develop a "capable, small and professionally oriented" armed force.¹⁴ Professionally oriented meant to bring the standards of the armed forces to a level similar to that of the NATO members. This goal was shared by most former socialist

States in Central and Eastern Europe as well as some former Soviet republics. But unlike Mongolia, they were assisted by the United States and NATO member States and the European Union.

Despite the lack of interest among the NATO members, Mongolia sought all opportunities to educate and train its military personnel. Peacekeeping began to serve as a venue to deploy its military personnel along with NATO member States. And deploying with foreign militaries provided opportunities to compare military capabilities, equipment and personnel and to expedite military reform. For example, the military quickly built up its linguistic capabilities because the peacekeeping missions are mostly conducted in English or French. Also, a core of military officers was educated and trained in Western countries to enable logistical interoperability with the United Nations and NATO forces. Interoperability has been a challenging issue in all areas of operation for any force deployed in peacekeeping operations. The disparity of command-and-control structure, organization, operating manuals, tactics, equipment and logistics creates difficulties for streamlining multinational operations. Bilateral and multilateral training events, exercises and liaison exchanges were created to mitigate the challenges of interoperability. Participation in peacekeeping operations helped the Mongolian military find ways to overcome these challenges and improve its training and operations.

Three major achievements have resulted so far from peacekeeping: It justifies the military to develop a designated, fully staffed and equipped peacekeeping force, such as the peacekeeping brigade, the engineering unit and the level-II medical field hospital. Second, with US assistance, the military created, from scratch, a non-com-

missioned officer corps that now constitutes more than 70 per cent of the military personnel for any given peacekeeping mission. And third is the establishment of the Five Hills training centre, which hosts pre-deployment training and bilateral and multilateral peacekeeping exercises as well as specialized training courses (for staff officers and military observers).

The future of Mongolian peacekeeping

Mongolia's peacekeeping commitment continues to expand. Today, peacekeeping has been recognized as one of the essential missions of the Mongolian military in support of the country's foreign policy objectives. Both Mongolia's peacekeeping deployments abroad and its hosting of bilateral and multilateral exercises have been endorsed by political leaders, parties and the public.

Building on these positive experiences and seeking broader acceptance, a logical next step is to develop its academic capacity. Mongolia could establish an international institute (think tank) for peacekeeping to encourage research on peacekeeping, peace support and humanitarian operations and to facilitate international collaboration between policy and academic communities.¹⁵

The institute would serve three purposes. One would be the bigger foreign policy objective of promoting Mongolia as a neutral, international platform for regional and international events, such as the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries, the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue and events for international organizations. It could be named the International Think Tank for Peacekeeping.

The institute would add one more level of activities to the current Five Hills Peace Support Operations Training Centre, which currently focuses on hosting multinational and bilateral command posts (tabletop) and tactical exercises and involves mostly military personnel. The institute could provide a platform for policymakers, academics and interested non-government organization specialists. The institute could conduct research on current and future peacekeeping operations and policy and legal matters and disseminate knowledge and expertise.

The institute could work with several international organizations and interested partners. Foremost, the institute could collaborate with the United Nations Department of Peace Operations to promote peacekeeping policy priority issues, such as a new initiative of the Action for Peacekeeping and empowering women in peacekeeping at the regional level.¹⁶ Then, it could work with NATO members to organize academic and educational workshops and projects, for example, to study the lessons learned of the coalition operations in Afghanistan, where Mongolian military personnel served along with other NATO partners.¹⁷ Along with Five Hills Peace Support Operations Training Centre as a member of the NATO network of Partnership Training and Education Centres and also peacekeeping as a key cooperation area, the institute would benefit both NATO and Mongolia.

Mongolia and the Russian Federation, as members of the OSCE, could co-organize workshops and events and invite Central Asian States to conduct research. They could promote participation in OSCE peacekeeping and policing operations. The institute would also provide opportunity for Mongolia to work with the Shanghai Cooper-

ation Organization as an observer with an explicit aim of promoting talks and discussions on peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

Finally, the institute could serve policymakers and citizens. It would provide policy recommendations on future peacekeeping operations, conduct research on lessons learned, educate the military and related public servants on peacekeeping operations and help develop research and professional expertise (such as legal affairs). The institute would serve citizens by informing them of the country's peacekeeping contributions.

Conclusions

For Mongolia, a small State with limited military capability, peacekeeping has become a proven and powerful tool to increase its international profile and to be a responsible member of the international community. Participation in peacekeeping operations has strengthened the country's ties with international organizations and third neighbours and even supported its role as a neutral platform for confidence-building among the region's not-so-friendly militaries.

In 2002, when UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan visited Mongolia, political leaders were unsuccessfully keen for his help in deploying a small contingent to a UN peacekeeping mission and in establishing a regional training centre. Only seven years later, Mongolia's peacekeeping contributions was the highlight of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's 2009 visit. The Secretary-General thanked the Mongolian leaders for their participation. And he visited the Five Hills peacekeeping training centre to meet Mongolian peacekeepers who were readying to deploy to Africa.

Mongolia proudly served in the coalition missions in Afghanistan and Iraq until their end. On 17 June 2021, the Mongolian Armed Forces welcomed the return of one of its last contingents, the Mongolian Expeditionary Task Force, from the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan.¹⁸ Indeed, peacekeeping has added a new layer to Mongolia's identity—a reliable contributor to global peace and security and a promoter of confidence-building in the region.

Peacekeeping exercises in Mongolia

Exercises	Remarks
Exercise with Belgium	In 2003, the first peacekeeping exercise was conducted with the Belgium military to learn from its expertise. Later, Belgium conducted several bilateral exercises to support Mongolia's deployments to Afghanistan and Kosovo.
Khaan Quest	What started as a bilateral training event with the United States Marine Corps in the Pacific in 2003 has become, with the support of the US Global Peace Support Operations Initiative Fund, a regional capstone event since 2006.
PSOTMON	A P-5 exercise organized in July 2004, it brings military teams of five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council to Ulaanbaatar. The exercise was co-organized and funded by the Operational Training and Advisory Group in the United Kingdom.

Nomadic Elephant	A bilateral field training exercise with India that rotates the training venue between both countries.
Nomadic Warrior	A bilateral exercise with the Turkish military to increase interoperability in peace operations and counter-terrorism.
Decisive Action	A bilateral exercise with the Kingdom of Qatar to share Mongolia's peacekeeping experience with the Qatar military.
Exercise with Germany	A bilateral exercise to prepare Mongolia's military deployments to Afghanistan and share peace support-operations expertise.
Exercise with Chinese People's Liberation Army	A bilateral exercise with the People's Liberation Army military to share peacekeeping expertise and lessons learned.
Exercise with the Russian Federation	A bilateral exercise that resumed in 2008 to improve interoperability of the two militaries in peace support and counter-terrorism operations.

Note: Except Khaan Quest and exercises with the Russian Federation, all these exercises have been organized on an ad hoc basis.

Endnotes

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- 11 United Nations, "Mongolia's nuclear-weapon-free status", 19 June 2021. Available at www.un.org/nwzf/content/mongolias-nuclear-weapon-free-status.
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- 13 Thomas Bruneau and Mendee Jargalsaikhan, "Discovering peacekeeping as a new mission: Mongolia", in *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, edited by Thomas Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matei (London, Routledge, 2013), pp. 204–218; Providing for Peacekeeping, "Peacekeeping contributor profile: Mongolia", January 2014. Available at www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/2014/04/03/contributor-profile-mongolia/.
- 14 *The Basis of the State Military Policy of Mongolia* (Ulaanbaatar, Government of Mongolia, 1998); *The Defense White Paper* (Ulaanbaatar, Institute for Strategic Studies, 2000).
- 15 This issue was discussed within the military as it began to accumulate peacekeeping experience and to designate the Five Hills training centre as

a regional centre of excellence on peacekeeping. On the foreign policy side, MP Tsogtbaatar D (a former Minister of Foreign Affairs) and MP Enkhbold N (a former Minister of Defence) initiated and advocated the initiative in 2019.

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