

Small is Not Vulnerable: India in Mongolia's Third Neighbour Dilemma

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Abstract

Genghis Khan laid the foundation of the Mongol Empire as one of the largest contiguous empires in history. Khan once observed that “with Heaven's aid I have conquered for you a huge empire. But my life was too short to achieve the conquest of the world. That task is left for you”. Stretching from Eastern Europe, parts of Central Europe to the Sea of Japan, parts of Arctic, Mongolian empire expanded in the eastward and southward into the Indian subcontinent, mainland South East Asia and the Iranian plateau; and westward as far as the Levant, Carpathian Mountains and to the borders of Northern Europe. It was the second largest empire in history only second to the British Empire.

12th and 13th century Mongolian power and domination were nearly unchallenged. 700 years later, modern Mongolia today is in search of political space, identity and Mongolian experience of autonomy. Squeezed between gigantic Russian territory and ever expanding Chinese domination, Mongolia is in critical search for a ‘Third Neighbour’ to save Mongolia from the overriding neighbourhood influence. Search for a credible ‘Third Neighbour’ is a contemporary Mongolian national policy quest.

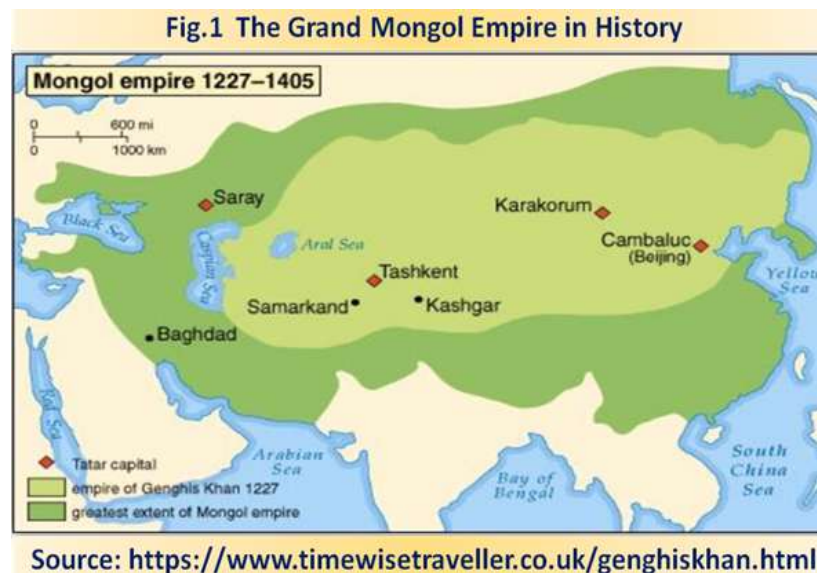
In the context of Mongolia's ‘Third Neighbour Dilemma’, this paper examines India as an emerging possible Third Neighbour for Mongolia.

Key Words: Mongol, India, Third Neighbour, Switzerland, Dilemma, Neutrality

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Introduction

Mongolia's biggest tryst with destiny is its political geography. Former Prime Minister of Mongolia D. Byambasuren, back in early 1990 had a very appropriate observation on the contemporary Mongolian state and its current geography saying, "Mongolia is located at the cross roads of three great civilizations, Christian Russia in the North, Confucian China in South and Muslim Central Asia in the West". When we look at the Mongol empire in 13th or 14th century (Fig.1), it was about raw power of domination, bravado and empire on forward march. Beginning with Genghis Khan, Mongolian territory expanded for the next over 200 years. Their territory spread from Eastern Europe, parts of Central Europe to the Sea of Japan and parts of Arctic, Mongolian empire expanded in the eastward and southward into the Indian subcontinent, mainland South East Asia and the Iranian plateau; and westward as far as the Levant, Carpathian Mountains and to the borders of Northern Europe. It was the second largest empire in history only second to the British Empire.



13th- 14th century Mongolian power and domination were nearly unchallenged. 700 years later, modern Mongolia today (see Fig.2) is in critical search of political space, identity and Mongolian sense and experience of national autonomy. Squeezed between gigantic Russian territory in the North and ever expanding Chinese domination in South and West, Mongolia is in critical search for a 'Third Neighbour' to hedge Mongolia from the overriding neighbourhood influence. Search

for a credible ‘Third Neighbour’ is a contemporary Mongolian national policy quest. From Japan to European Union and several other political clusters are hotly debated to be Mongolia’s possible third neighbour and correspondingly, Mongolia is walking a tight rope to negotiate its diplomacy and foreign policy choices.

Fig.2 Mongolia between China & Russia



Source: www.goway.com/travel-information/asia/mongolia/geography-and-maps/

While India is geographically located far away, given India’s quest to open and expand her contact and engagement into Central Asia, this paper explores the prospect of India playing a possible Third Neighbour for Mongolia opening a small window for Mongolian political aspirations.

Mongol Empire: Reflections from History

Mongolian legendary conquests and spread of Mongolian territory are well documented. Unfortunately however, Mongolian contributions to international system and world development are inadequately written about. Mongolia played a critical role in the Silk Road international trade flow. In order to expand control over Silk Route trade flow, they systematically destroyed Arabian and Turkic cities standing on the southern route prohibiting their commodity exchange control (AlKhateeb, 2017).

During 13th and 15th centuries when successors of Genghis Khan expanded their rule over Central Asia, Iran and the steppes of Eurasia, active Silk Route trade between the East and the West

continued to flourish and intensify. The Mongol Golden Horde (the territory from Siberia to Eastern Europe governed by the grandson of Genghis Khan, Berke) with the capital in Serai Berk dominated all over the northern intercontinental caravan road going from China via Otrar and Khoresm, the bottom Volga region, Azov, the Crimea and Europe - the huge part of international trade in the 14th and 15th centuries (Thillaikumar, 2018).

Mongolian political control stimulated the popular caravan trade between China and the Mediterranean countries and several items prominently including sale of silk from China in the European markets flourished (Smith, 2017). Most caravans followed round Transoxiana (ancient name referring to a region and civilization located in lower Central Asia roughly corresponding to modern day eastern Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Kazakhstan and southern Kyrgyzstan), going directly to the Volga to the north from the Caspian Sea, and moved to the Black Sea from here. Khoresm, also called as Greater Khorasan (northeast province of Greater Iran) was the southern sector of that northern route that continued to play the role of the link in the chain of regional and intercontinental goods exchange. Urgench (a city in present Uzbekistan) was another major center of trade whose markets witnessed great trade flow. Conscious of trade flow and its corresponding profits, the Mongols actively maintained and protected the trade corridor; making it safe for trade relations flowing to and fro the East and the West practicing liberal trade and taxation policies while ensuring bribery, mal trade practice and bureaucracy are under check (Morgan D. , 2009).

Thus, connecting Europe and Asia, the Mongolian empire served as a land bridge between the two continents while maintaining effective chain of relay, watch and communication centers for communications and trade flow purposes. Mongolian empire also promoted interfaith tolerance of divergent faiths and religions, and established inviolability of the special status of the emperor's envoys. In the 13th and 14th centuries the lands of the Mongol Empire were under the Pax Mongolica that provided peace and safe travel within the empire and contributed to free and safe trade through the Silk Road. In the 13th and 14th centuries, Mongols ruled parts of Russia and China. However, by the mid-14th century, the empire started developing fissures and gradually to disintegrated.

The Mongol empire, the largest contiguous land empire in history and second largest to British Empire in size, served as a critical trade, culture and civilization linkage bridge and meeting point

between Europe and Asia that in turn, promoted confluence civilizations. Acting as a link and catalyst empire, Pax Mongolica, if we can call it, provided political stability as a means to safe travel within the empire and contributed to free and safe trade through the Silk Road corridor (Jargalsaikhan, 2018).

During 13th and 14th centuries, Mongolians ruled parts of present day Russia and China. However, by the mid-14th century, the mammoth empire started slackening and incrementally started to disintegrate (Morgan D. , 2009). Russian territory expanded to the east while China started to move west and north, squeezing gradually the loose ends of the Mongol empire. After the collapse of the Mongolian Yuan dynasty (Yuan dynasty first emperor was famous Kublai Khan) that ruled China; Mongols retreated altogether to their homeland, north of the Great Wall of China. Several Chinese rebellions and weak Mongolian governance finally ended Mongolian control over Chinese territories (Zeidan, 2020). Towards the end of the 17th century, Russian expansion had reached well into the lands of the Mongols (Jargalsaikhan, 2018). As the corona virus has been bothersome to the health and economy of the world today, ‘Black Death’, apparently emanating from Gobi desert area and traveling through silk route corridor of Mongolia, seemed to have caused devastating loss to human life, trade and economy as well as causing lasting blows to the Mongolian empire too. As we see from hindsight understanding, among several other reasons, ‘Black Death’ or ‘Bubonic Plague’ as it was called, could well be traced to the Mongol Empire and Pax Mongolica, which provided safe travel of the disease through the Silk Road that otherwise had facilitated transportation of goods and services and prosperity also became the final nail in the down fall of great Mongol empire (Shipman, 2014).

Today Mongolia is territorially, culturally and in terms of political and religious identity and persuasion is fully squeezed between Russia, China and Central Asia. Standing at a crossroad of cultures and contemporary political designs and ambitions of sphere of influence, Mongolia indeed is facing the heat of Samuel Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilization’ and its existential threats.

Mongolia’s Neighbourhood Dilemma

Being a small country next to a big one is tragedy enough. Mongolia unfortunately has two very powerful countries of the world as its immediate neighbour. The challenge correspondingly is bound to be manifold. As we analyze Mongolia’s neighbourhood to capture the tiny country’s

predicament, it is necessary to explain and simplify the depth of Mongolia's neighbourhood challenges.

Mongolia, at the peak of Pax Mongolica had an almost unending empire. If we simplify Pax Mongolica size in modern parlance of nation-states, Mongolian territory expanded over 30 countries of today's world with a population of around 3 billion people. Present day Mongolia is just the opposite of its historical past and sobered down in almost all ways.

Corresponding to the rise of China, it is now been a time for military muscleman ship in many parts of the world. Be it Indo-Pacific or Tibetan heights or even the interiors of Russia, there is a huge unilateral and joint-multilateral defense exercises all over the world. MALABAR to Milan and Sea Guardian to Russian Victory parade in June last year, several joint defense exercises try and communicate that the changing international order is anything but volatile.

Last year June 24, Russia celebrated victory parade with grandeur. The 2020 Victory Day Parade in Moscow took place in a spectacular way in Moscow's Red Square on 24 June 2020. It was to commemorate two goals – first, the '75th Diamond Jubilee' of the capitulation of Nazi Germany in the Second World War in 1945 and second, to revisit the historic Moscow Victory Parade of 1945. Defense forces from twenty countries participated in the parade including Mongolia, Armenia, Belarus, Serbia, and Uzbekistan. Even India joined the event to reconsolidate India-Russia friendly ties.

Though Mongolia officially participated in the Victory Parade, several things went wrong and Ulaanbaatar, even after joining the event became in the receiving end of Russian wrath. On the same day, Mongolia was to hold Mongolia's regular, democratic parliamentary elections. As a result of Mongolian national election code of conduct and in order to project electoral neutrality, Mongolian state television (MNB), in the last moment decided not to telecast the live parade in Mongolia. Putin had visited Ulaanbaatar in the previous year and had signed "Permanent Treaty of Friendship" with his Mongolian counterpart President Khaltmaagiin Battulga indicating a state of bilateral friendship and mutuality. At the time of the signing of the treaty, Putin stressed on the

importance of the “political, economic and cultural” relationship between Russia and Mongolia (Hussain, 2020).

When the Mongolian National Broadcaster (MNB) last moment scrapped the plans to live broadcast the Red Square Victory Parade, the Russian Embassy at Ulaanbaatar openly criticized this decision in a rather ill tempered Face book page public post, accusing MNB of an “aberration of vision” and even subservience to Western interests. May be inadvertently or otherwise, the MNB board of directors joined ... a whole campaign of accusing and counter accusations of Russian electoral interference nearly everywhere in the world” (Radchenko, 2020).

The remarks caused a storm of controversy. MNB Director Luvsandashiin Ninjamts in a letter to Russian Ambassador Iskander Azizov, called the embassy’s remarks “clearly insulting” and demanded an official apology. Mongolia has seen it all and Mongolia-Moscow interface has never been mutual nor respectful. Sanjaagiin Bayar, former Mongolian Prime Minister who had also served as Mongolia’s ambassador in Russia, connected the Russian embassy’s outburst to the old practice of Soviet ambassadors trying to dictate to their foreign host governments what they should and should not do.

Mongolians know firsthand how Soviet Union intervened in Mongolian affairs. The country became a Soviet satellite two decades before the same ill fate were extended to Central and Eastern European countries. In the 1930s, the Soviets and their Mongolian puppets, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (MPRP) initiated a policy of purging, very often called as ‘Great Purging’. The policy was unhesitant in slaughtering tens of thousands of people in anti religious campaigns and waves of political repression which continues to remain vivid in Mongolian political psyche even to this day.

Mongolia has witnessed two sets of political leaders. One set were nationalists and had their Mongolia identity close to their heart. Mongolian Prime Minister Peljidiin Genden and Anandyn Amar belonged to this set of political leaders who had to sacrifice their life for the national pride of Mongolia. The other set of leaders like Khorloogiin Choibalsan and Yumjaagiin Tsendenbal were all overly ready to toe the Soviet line.

It is in this cross currents of Mongolian nationalism and personal political ambition, the celebrated victims were Mongolian Prime Minister Peljidiin Genden. Genden had the nerve to publicly quarrel with Joseph Stalin. Peljidiin Genden seems to have smashed the Soviet dictator's smoking pipe to pieces in one nasty altercation in a party hosted in Ulaanbaatar. It was no mean offence. Genden was sent to Moscow and executed in 1937. His successor, Anandyn Amar, suffered a similar fate too. Amar was arrested, sent to the Soviet Union, and executed there in 1941 (Radchenko, 2020).

These political events led to the *de facto* premiership of Khorloogiin Choibalsan, also known as Mongolia's Stalin. Choibalsan was more than willing and submitted himself to serving Soviet aims and objectives in Asia. Ivan Ivanov, the then Soviet plenipotentiary in Ulaanbaatar closely collaborated and supervised Choibalsan. It was on Khorloogiin Choibalsan's and Ivanov's close supervision and strategy that Mongolia willingly got involved in the Soviet war efforts during the 1940s. Mongolia even sent nearly half a million horses (which proved their resilience on the front line) and sponsored a tank brigade to bolster several of the Russian conspiratorial missions. Though Mongolia is working out to gain Japanese support today as a part of its third neighbour strategy, back then, Mongolia also joined the Soviets in fighting the Japanese in Manchuria in August 1945 (Radchenko, 2020).

Choibalsan's successor, Yumjaagiin Tsedenbal, was even more anxious to enlist himself to his Soviet masters and repeatedly requested Mongolia's annexation to the Soviet Union. Fortunately for the nationalist Mongolians, Soviet Union refused complete annexation for some strange reasons. Tsedenbal also fought Moscow's case tirelessly in Beijing during the unfolding of Sino-Soviet doctrinal split in early 1960s. Apparently, in December 1962, in a conversation with the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, his ardent defense of Soviet policies got so charged and explosive that both of them nearly came to blows.

Mongolia has gone through many phases of political upheaval. Now in the last over two decades, corresponding to the disintegration of Soviet Union and economic meltdown in Russia, China has been an ever ambitious player in the region. While the international order is experiencing the impact of China's rise which Professor Graham Allison paraphrased as phenomena of 'Thucydides

Trap', Mongolia and Central Asia like the regions in South China Sea (SCS) are experiencing the immediate similar heat of Chinese rough ride in their domestic affairs. Starting from Chinese goods and services flooding their domestic markets to big and lucrative construction project contracts and China's ambitious revival of Silk Road and Belt and Road (BRI) project, the entire region has come under China's immediate sphere of influence. While the Russian's called Mongolia as their 'near periphery', China in all its actions and domination feels that the region is only a territorial extension of China.

Mongolia is wholly caught between the devil and the Dead Sea. Added to the Mongolian political woes, Buddhist Mongolia is also at the cross roads of Christian Russia, Confucian China and Muslim Central Asia converting the woes into a formidable depth of Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilization' in its grandeur manifestation.

In the context of Mongolian contemporary predicament, Mongolia has very actively explored a third neighbour option in its foreign policy choices. Sometimes European Union or Eastern European countries and other times exploring Japan as a possible third neighbour, Mongolia is going through this policy quest judiciously. Mongolia has also tried to ply between Russia and China to carve out its own political space. Mongolia has also imagined involving Washington or joining NATO as a third neighbour option. Third Neighbour policy therefore is a genuine official ongoing position and quest in Mongolia which has not yielded any assuring benefit as yet. The country therefore is open to series of third neighbours who possibly can supplant Mongolian sense of political insecurity. India is one such candidate in Mongolian foreign policy choices.

Mongolian Recourses: Boon or Bane?

Resources are supposed to be national assets for economic growth. Given Mongolia's mineral resources, both Russia and China are also equally provoked to carve out a sphere of influence in the tiny country of roughly 3 million people. Apart from geography, as Mongolian intellectual Batbayar Baatarkhuu would put it, Mongolia's wealth is the country's second curse too (Baatarkhuu, 2020). IMF identifies Mongolia as the 29th resource rich developing country in the world. One of the World Bank study theorizes resource abundance and economic growth correlation to sum up that there is no empirical correlation. Instead the report concludes with

empirical evidence that resourcefulness has very often led to resource mismanagement (World Bank, 2006). Diamonds have not made Angola rich. Oil has not delivered prosperity to Venezuela. Rich reserves of copper, gold, diamonds, cobalt, uranium, Colton and oil have fed and funded wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In Russia, a few oligarchs have gained immense wealth, while 70% of Russians earn less than \$380 per month (World Bank, 2006).

Caught in the limitations of geography and huge mineral resources like oil, gold, silver, iron, coal, copper, molybdenum, tungsten, phosphates, tin, nickel, zinc, and fluorspar, Mongolia has naturally been an attractive destination initially for Russia and now for China. Unlike Switzerland, since the country also witnesses' political corruption, critical economic assets and contracts pertaining to their extraction are also subject to bribery practices converting Mongolia, like most developing countries, to remain vulnerable too.

Small States Security Vulnerability: Normative Explanations

“Poor Mexico, so far from God and yet so close to the US” - is a popular Mexican saying (Carroll, 2017). Young and old, all Mexicans are very aware of the depth of this saying. Former President of Mexico, Porfirio Díaz very regrettably observed this some 150 years ago and the saying continues even today. Geography has been Mexico's biggest bane. Back in 1846, Mexico ceded territory to Americans in the Rio Grande war and Mexican territories like present day Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah constituting nearly 55% of Mexican territory were ceded to the United States (Carroll, 2017).

Back in 1926, three American mariners while cruising in the Gulf of Mexico apparently strayed into the Mexican territorial waters. The mariners were quickly arrested by Mexican authorities. The Americans were so furious that they demanded apology from the Mexican government. Though Mexico initially resisted, finally it so happened that Mexico had to officially apologize and as though it was not enough, Mexico had to pay a twenty-one gun salute to the American flag. For the generations of Mexicans, history has always been troublesome and too humiliating.

In the context of Mexican geographic proximity to the Americans and successive American high handedness, there is yet another popular slogan in Mexico that says “you have taken our land and

we will populate it". Given Mexican domestic economic development challenges, crossing over to the American side is almost like a Mexican national sport. Somehow, young Mexicans have to sneak into the American territory. Strange as it may appear, most of Southern States of USA today have more than 60% Mexican population who have sneaked over.

Unlike Mongolia, Mexico is not land locked nor is it a vulnerable state. Instead, Mexico is a rising economic power and since 1994, Mexico has forged NAFTA- a free trade agreement with USA and Canada which has seen many American jobs vanishing to Mexico. Ever since NAFTA was signed, several mainland American industries have moved their bases to USA-Mexico border to take advantage of Mexican cheaper labour force. While this has caused American job loss, it has created what is known as Maquiladora Traders- a term in Spanish referring to border traders.

Mexico has somewhat taken revenge of their humiliation and it is an American requirement to halt Mexicans entering into their territory. Instruments like NAFTA are yet another method through which small states may reconstruct their engagement paradigm. Unfortunately however, Mongolian market and economy are already deluged initially by Russians and now by Chinese and free trade instrument option is neither available to Mongolia nor advisable either.

While Mexicans handled and continue to handle their vulnerability in variety of ways, normatively, most countries in the world small or big are vulnerable in many ways. In spite of India being a very large country and a nuclear power, Indian vulnerability is critical and very large too. Choked between Pakistan sponsored Islamic terrorism and rising Chinese ambition of territorial aggrandizement, India indeed is negotiating a difficult power balance which can unfold into a major war. Japan also faces similar predicament of Chinese rise and sphere of influence. Such predicaments are there for almost every country in variety of formats and intensity. Each nation therefore has to evolve its own mechanism of security suitable for itself. It can be soft diplomacy to security coalition as well as trade cooperation and many such modules. Argentina and Brazil had mostly been opposed to each other and in search of regional hegemony. Located between them are tiny Paraguay and Uruguay who felt the pinch of Brazil-Argentina rivalry. However, the free trade agreement of MERCOSUR in 1990s softened the political climate for all of them.

Negotiating Vulnerability: Mongolian Options

Easier said than done, Mongolian choices indeed are limited. However, there are several choices and options and several evidences around the world are available too where number of countries have handled their vulnerability in variety of ways.

Case of Djibouti: Djibouti- the horn of Africa and one of the smallest country in Africa and vulnerable in all dimensions and perspective is a great case example today where several countries from across the world are trying their foothold in search of political designs. A former colony of France, today Djibouti is open to any country to use Djibouti's land even for defense purposes. France has a naval base in Djibouti under a bilateral agreement and 5000 troops are stationed that also includes German and Spanish soldiers (Igroupane, 2019). The United States has also leased a Naval base 'Camp Lemonnier' - US Naval Expeditionary Base, situated next to Djibouti - Ambouli International Airport in Djibouti City, and houses a Combined Joint Task Force (Simon, 2020). The British are also using the American base for surveillance purposes. Corresponding to the rise of China and the intensifying geopolitical challenges in the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR), host of countries today have already opened their defense bases in Djibouti and the lease revenue is now a source of major revenue earning for Djibouti. China and Japan have already leased and opened their naval and air force base in Djibouti and Saudi Arab is in line to explore a defense base in Djibouti. China is expanding fast and wide in most part of Africa with huge seaport, dams and several other construction, mining and energy projects. The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Support Base in Djibouti is a new strategic frontier for China in the Horn of Africa. China began constructing its first PLA's overseas base at Djibouti's Doraleh Port in March 2016 (Bhat, 2020). China is also building and developing seaport facilities in Djibouti. Japan similarly has opened an air force base in Djibouti since 2009 (Ryall, 2018).

Given the pluralisation of defense bases and forces in Djibouti, while the regional influence of Djibouti has expanded, it also becomes a larger neutralizing platform for the critically opposing powers and forces like US and Japan with that of China.

Swiss Neutrality & Lessons

Europe has been the most conflict ridden in most part of history both within and outside of Europe. In the midst of raging conflicts and institutionalized colonization policies and European powers

highhanded political and economic rough ride in most part of the world, Switzerland serves as a unique case example of militarized neutrality – a prize position rarely possible and serves as a case example for all the small nations of the world including Mongolia. Land locked like Mongolia and located well within the middle of Germany, France, Italy and Austria, Swaziland in fact inherits the geographic liability and provocations of all possible wars. Yet, learning from Europe's culture and regime of conflict and their own defeat from France, Switzerland has learnt to maintain a state of neutrality is no mean achievement. The greater lesson from Swiss neutrality emerges from its evolution to be a peace buffer and place of peace negotiation and diplomacy not for Europe alone but for the international community as a whole.

Switzerland is not the only neutral country in the world. Countries like Ireland, Austria and Costa Rica also follow some degree of noninterventionist approach in many ways (Andrews, 2018). However, Switzerland curiously remains the oldest and most respected neutral nation in the world today. Five years ago, in November 2016, Switzerland celebrated five hundred years of policy of neutrality. Even during both the World Wars, Switzerland was able to be cautiously neutral (Mclaughlin, 2016).

Switzerland's earliest move toward neutrality goes back to 1515, when the Swiss Confederacy suffered a devastating loss to the French at the Battle of Marignano. Following the defeat, the Confederacy abandoned its expansionist policies and looked to avoid future conflict in the interest of self-preservation (Andrews, 2018). Switzerland came under the radar of Napoleonic Wars. France invaded Switzerland in 1798 and converted the tiny nation as a French satellite empire, forcing the small nation to compromise its neutrality. However, soon after Napoleon's Waterloo defeat, major European powers wisely and in the interest of regional peace and stability, concluded infavour of a neutral Swiss confederation. Neutral Switzerland could serve as a valuable buffer zone between France and Austria and contribute to regional stability and peace negotiations (Jesse, 2014). Two hundred years ago, Switzerland was acknowledged as a neutral state in the Treaty of Paris. Even Vienna Congress in 1815 recognized Swiss neutrality while League of Nations, formally recognized Switzerland's neutrality on Feb. 13, in 1920.

Post Second World War; while Switzerland continued to remain fiercely neutral in regard to military affairs, the country has taken more active role in international affairs through foreign aid

and humanitarian assistance initiatives. It has never joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the European Union, and only joined the United Nations in 2002. Despite its longstanding neutrality, the country still maintains a smart army of around 600,000 soldiers for defense purposes. While neutrality is Switzerland's political value, position and culture, Swiss nationals (all males between the ages of 18 and 34) however, are required to render part-time military service and Swiss army is considered a very smart army who can be mobilized very quickly for eventualities.

Mongolia has a great lesson to learn from Swiss neutrality experience. Given Switzerland's prominent international banking regime, and the country as a hub of international diplomacy and peace negotiations, geographically vulnerable countries can take great queue from Swiss experience.

Lessons from Singapore

Singapore serves as yet another example of economic wonders out of a small fishing village in South East Asia. Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of one of Asia's smallest but most developed economies, died in March 2015. Lee Kuan Yew, the statesman who transformed Singapore from a small port city into a wealthy global hub truly served the best of Singapore's national interest. After its separation from Malaysia in 1965, Lee led Singapore with vision and astuteness to develop it as one of the world's most powerful financial centers (Ketchell, 2015).

As per IMF assessment, Singapore's main industry was manufacturing at the time of independence. However, with the rise of modern seaport led economy and Singapore's service sector, its GDP per capita growth rate under Lee's leadership reached to be one of the highest in 2013, just behind oil-rich Qatar and private banking centre Luxembourg. A mixed population profile of Chinese, Malaysian and Indian heritage, Singapore's economic development could well have been a casualty of ethnic turmoil. Under the leadership of Lee, Singapore opted for the creation of a rule based state and capitalized on a port based economic development model facilitated under a political climate of efficiency and growth. National University of Singapore (NUS), National Technical University (NTU) as well as Lee Kuan Yew Institute of Public Policy are some of the finest academic institutions of the world which further highlight the structural,

human capital and efficiency focus of Singapore's nation building process. Net result, Singapore port does more business today than all the seaports of India could jointly imagine.

Singapore flourished on the inherited advantages and foresightedness of Lee to transform into the ranks of New York, London and Switzerland as a global financial hub. As a key port during the British Empire, Singapore was in a strong position for trading activity. Since Singapore had no other resources other than their natural port asset and location of Singapore right on the middle of maritime highways of the world, Lee built on this and the result is there for everybody to see (Bhaskaran, 2018).

Lee has been criticized by many for authoritarianism that stifled political dissent and press freedoms. However, his firm grip on power and foresight, corruption free financial practices and maintenance of political stability served the country's economic growth objectives very well. The orderliness that Singapore is known for today provided structural attractiveness to foreign investments and billions of dollar poured into the country, ensuring the country's success.

Mongolia lacks this structural vision and orientation. Mongolian leadership needs to learn from Lee Kuan Yew's model to examine the politico-economic grow path for Mongolia.

India in Mongolia's Third Neighbour Dilemma

Geographically India is located well away from Mongolia for any possible immediate good neighbourly involvement and engagement. Forcing India to be a political savior of Mongolia's neighbourhood woes shall therefore suffer from serious bias of over extrapolation. Additionally, India's land connectivity to Central Asia continuously meeting Pakistan's spoil sport diplomacy, India's active role in Central Asia and Mongolia is structurally limited. Yes, Chabahar port deal with Iran in 2016 indeed opened India's glimmer of hope and prospect of India's maritime connectivity via Chabahar port and Afghanistan. However, now Afghanistan is almost in the doorstep of Talibanism ruling the roost, the civil war torn Afghanistan is in tatters which by default shatters India's Central Asia dream. Iran under American sanction has also posed additional problem for India. In a climate of sanction and strategic threat, Iran has been more and more cozying up with China which further complicates India's future in the region. India's Central Asia

score card is more with negative points and unfavourable strategic equations than any assuring developments.

Nevertheless, in a globalised international order of today, there is a good case for India-Mongolia engagement which can well qualify towards Mongolian third neighbour dilemma analysis. In the context of India's Act East Policy (AEP) and Indo-Central Asian growing engagement focus, Mongolia strategically figures as an extended neighbourhood for India's foreign policy scheme of things (Soni, 2016).

India and Mongolia share one of the finest bilateralism today. India established diplomatic relations with Mongolia as far back as December 1955. India was the first country outside the Eastern Bloc to establish diplomatic relations with Mongolia. India supported Mongolia in having UN and NAM memberships. In 2015, both countries marked their 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations which itself is a mile stone. Since then, there have been treaties of mutual friendship and cooperation between the two countries in 1973, 1994, 2001 and 2004.

Culturally and historically, India and Mongolia have interacted since antiquity through the powerful vehicle of Buddhism that emanated from India in late 6th century BC. According to number of Mongolian scholars, Buddhism traveled to Mongolia through the Tibetan highlands. During the Hunnu State of 3rd century BC, and later during the period of Pax Mongolica, Buddhist monks and several traders from India visited Mongolia. While Nalanda University has been a historical meeting point, most Mongols consider India as the holy land of Buddha.

India currently is in the process of developing Ramayan and Buddhism corridor for cultural and religious tourism economy to prosper. If these corridors take shape, in the times to come, the entire Buddhist community spread in Sri Lanka to South East Asia and Far East as well as China and Mongolian Buddhist religious imaginations and orientation may trigger great amount of travel, transport and range of interactions in the socio-religious front.

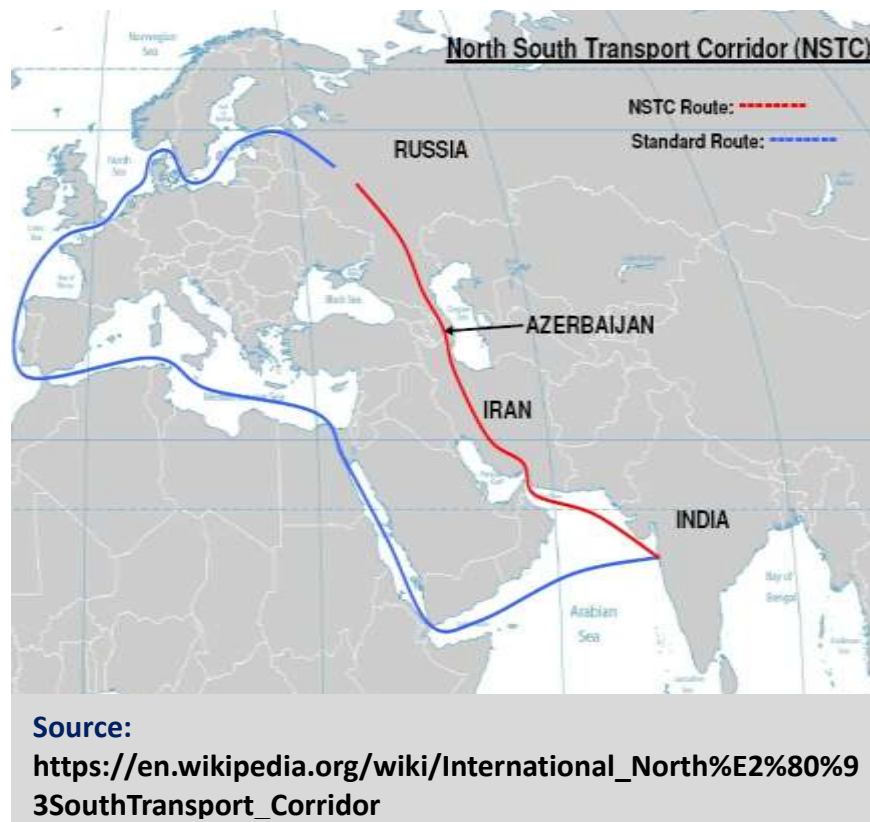
Though history and culture has gained greater currency and relevance as instruments of Joseph Nye's Soft Power Diplomacy', they are nevertheless, long distance instruments and more so in the case of Indo-Mongolian Bohemism.

In the last few years however, both countries have bilaterally made great head ways. In April-May 2016, both countries had a joint military exercise with counter insurgency as focus (Parameswaran, 2016). While it could no way be called as a power display, nevertheless, it displayed a degree Indo-Mongolian meeting of minds.

In the process of a three nation tour of China, Mongolia and South Korea, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi landed in Mongolia on May 17th 2015. It was a historic visit as no other Indian Prime Minister had ever visited Mongolia before. Prime Minister Modi's visit to Mongolia opened new chapter in India-Mongolia relations. Modi himself twitted that Mongolia is an integral part of India's Act East Policy (AEP). If we expand India's rising focus in Central Asia and Mongolia, it is more in the context of China's squeezing India in Indian periphery through 'String of Pearls' and Beijing's ambitious US\$8 trillion Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Reaching to Central Asia and Mongolia, India, in a limited scale though, is trying to work around China's periphery for strategic counter balance.

Following Prime Minister Modi's visit to Mongolia, India extended a US\$1billion credit line to Mongolia for the construction of Mongol Petrochemical refinery project. India's State-run Engineers India Ltd (EIL) is extending project management consultancy for the development of the oil refinery near Sainshand in southern Dornogovi province in Mongolia which is expected to be commissioned by December 2022 (PTI, 2019). The refinery is projected to meet about 75% of Mongolia's oil requirement. India is also involved in the construction of roads, railways and power line for the refinery. India has taken lead in solar power tapping and International Solar Alliance (ISA) development. Responding to Indian invitation, Mongolia has requested for ISA membership.

Fig.3 International North South Transport Corridor



While India's engagement with Mongolia in quantitative terms is rather limited, given the fresh bilateral involvement and India's growing desire to play more creative role in the region, Mongolia can well configure India as one of the third neighbour. India is also exploring greater role in Central Asia through Chabahar port and Afghanistan. Additionally, India is also approaching the Central Asian region through International North-South Transport Corridor as well as Russia-India Corridor as well as Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor. Given the great infrastructure diplomacy China initiated for the first time as almost like a weapon of connectivity and influence paddling, several alternative proposals are emerging as China countering infrastructure initiatives. Road, rail and sea connectivity promising more international trade and movement of goods and services, regional conflicts are also likely to be pushed under the carpet or negotiated through

diplomatic modes. However, greater transport and trade movement shall demand economic efficiency for each country.

Though Mongolia is not directly connected through these infrastructure projects but more linked to China's BRI, it is obvious that there will be more and more trade movement. While trade has potential to soften political climate, Mongolia being a mineral resource rich country, internationalization of Mongolian extraction wealth may also work as a catalyst for Mongolia to negotiate with its neighbours.

Conclusion

Being located between Russian Federation and China, while geography has been the biggest present day predicament of Mongolia, Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilization' seems more in real manifestation in Mongolia making the tiny Asian Republic more vulnerable. While clash of civilizations is a net reality for Mongolia today and Joseph Nye's 'Soft Power' diplomacy seem the only option and way out, the weapons of soft power diplomacy appear too soft for Mongolia to address Mongolian predicament of dealing with two most powerful and ambitious nations of the world as its neighbours. Russia and China are global powers of serious consequence. Since the entire international political system and international order is deeply feeling the weight of Russia and China's ambitious and often dominating and coercing foreign policy mechanism, Mongolia has no immediate choice than to negotiate friendly ties with both of them for its existential reasons.

However, as discussed earlier, small states like Switzerland, Singapore or even Djibouti have tried and experimented with neutrality, hard core text book prescribed development models or opened them to internationalization like the case of Djibouti; Mongolia may have to try many such modules to safeguard Mongolian national interest and pride.

Additionally, Mongolia could well be internationalized in many ways. Like NUS or NTU, Mongolia can think of high reputed International Universities and institutions attracting international students and professors. It can also, like Switzerland, open international banking. Even internationalizing Mongolian tourism sector to attract substantial international visitors could well expand Mongolian national image from being a land locked country to an international

destination. Internationalization helps internally to develop and upgrade local skill while it creates an expanded profile for the nation. Such platforms are revenue earning instruments too.

Mongolian third neighbour dilemma is a political policy quest. Since India and Mongolia are willing, it makes a good case for consolidating the engagement further. Additionally, India is seen as a civilizational country with very positive and peace centric orientation and foreign policy practices. While China's rise has virtually ruptured international power balance, it is the rise of India as a counter balance is an assuring proposition. As the international order is experiencing more and more transition driven teething problems, contestations and conflict, India is seen and analyzed as a credible swing state that has the ability, orientation and desire for peace options. Mongolia may not be misplaced to configure India as a credible friend, well-wisher and a well-meaning third neighbour.

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