The Role of Small States in Promoting International Security: The Case of Mongolia

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ABSTRACT

Multilateralism and preventive diplomacy are essential in productively addressing common interests and challenges, including issues related to nuclear security. Although the world knows about the successful negotiation of the Iran nuclear deal and the fate of the six-party talks to denuclearize the Korean peninsula, not much is known about the interaction of nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states. A notable example of such interaction is the not so well known agreements reached by the five nuclear-weapon states (P5) and Mongolia regarding the latter’s nuclear-weapon-free status and the significance of that status for efforts to strengthen regional confidence and predictability. Mongolia’s case demonstrates that given appropriate political atmosphere and goodwill, great powers and small states can come to agreements that advance their individual and common interests.

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Introduction

The role of small states in international relations is growing as a result of the changes in the international environment. These changes include globalization and the post-Cold War shift toward multipolarity. Global efforts to address the challenges of climate change and related issues are also increasing the role of small states, especially small island states.

One area in which the role of nuclear-weapon states was seen almost exclusive was nuclear weapons-related area, including nuclear weapon policies and doctrines and their impact on international security despite the fact that the use of such weapons would affect the non-nuclear-weapon states as well. Unfortunately, the end of the Cold War has not produced the expected dividends in this regard. The result is a mixed one. Today, in the third decade of the post-Cold War era, the world is witnessing the gradual weakening of the non-proliferation regime, an increase in spending on nuclear weapons, and a gradual lowering of the threshold of possible use of nuclear weapons. Even the taboo on the use of nuclear weapons is eroding. One positive development was the conclusion in 2015 of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (known as the P5), Germany, the European Union, and Iran. That agreement was hailed as a triumph of multilateralism.
and preventive diplomacy. The US Trump administration has withdrawn support of the agreement and is working to sabotage its continued implementation by other parties to the agreement, including imposing secondary sanctions to discourage its further implementation.

The almost two decades of multilateral efforts, including through six-party talks (SPT), to halt and reverse the DPRK’s nuclear weapons programme have not yielded practical results. In the meantime, the DPRK was able to acquire practically useable nuclear weapons, including nuclear capable ICBMs. The inter-Korean summit in April and the ensuing US–DPRK summit in May of this year have resulted in yet another vague and general agreement to move towards the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula without concrete commitment of the sides nor a timeline to achieve that objective. Nevertheless this generic agreement provides an opportunity for the US and the DPRK to pursue direct bilateral talks and agree on initial trust building parallel or simultaneous steps that could then involve China and other states of the SPT. The process would be slow and painstaking since there is some doubt that the DPRK would be inclined to completely giving up its nuclear weapons or its program.

The policies of the P5, that is, of the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France and of the de facto nuclear-weapon states clearly demonstrate that they are keen to perpetuate possession of the weapons indefinitely, thus increasing the risk of their further proliferation. That is why in 2017, more than 120 member states of the United Nations have negotiated and adopted in July of that year the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The treaty, which fulfils a UN General Assembly resolution, prohibits the possession, development, testing, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons. Although the nuclear-armed states and the other countries under the “nuclear umbrella” boycotted the negotiations of the treaty, most non-nuclear-weapon states and antinuclear movements clearly expressed once again their repudiation of nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence. The task of bringing the treaty rapidly into force will not be easy, but once the treaty enters into force, it will create an additional legal and political lever in support of nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament.

Besides global efforts to ban nuclear weapons, there are effective measures that prohibit nuclear weapons in certain geographical regions. These measures already cover five geographical regions (Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific, Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia), and there are also talks to establish additional nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs) in the Arctic, the Middle East and Northeast Asia. In the latter two cases, it would in fact be denuclearization of these regions by removing the existing nuclear weapons and making sure that they remain nuclear-weapon free. Much has been written about the current NWFZs and prospects of establishing such zones in the three areas mentioned above.

In 1975, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution defining the concept and principal obligations of NWFZs, and in 1999, it adopted a resolution on the establishment of new NWFZs “on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the State of the region concerned”. These agreed guidelines would surely contribute to a further broadening of the geographical areas that exclude nuclear weapons.

It should be noted, however, that so far the definition of an NWFZ has been based on a “group approach” to the issue – that is, a zone would comprise a group of
countries – although the 1975 comprehensive study of the question of NWFZs in all its aspects tried to foresee different forms of such zones, including entire continents, large geographical groups, smaller groups of states, and even individual countries. The latter issue has not yet been properly studied. Nevertheless, in 1990, there was some talk between the United States and the Soviet Union of making the German Democratic Republic a nuclear-weapon-free state with appropriate security assurances. As they say, when there is a will there is a way.

The question of establishing single-state NWFZs was raised in 1992 by Mongolia in connection with its initiative to preclude the country hosting nuclear weapons. Mongolia raised again the issue in 1997–1999 at the UN Disarmament Commission when the latter began discussing establishment of new NWFZs. It proposed a working paper on establishing single-state NWFZs to the Disarmament Commission for its consideration (UN Disarmament Commission 1999). However, the P5 were reluctant to consider the issue, believing that establishing single-state NWFZs would distract from and impede promotion of traditional (group) zones. The P5 objection prevented the issue from being considered by the commission. But the final report incorporated a footnote regarding Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-free status and the General Assembly resolution on the issue. At that time, it was understood that at some appropriate time, the issue could be raised again and considered separately. Since that time, the nuclear-weapon states have been reluctant even to consider the concept of such a NWFZ or its possible contribution to the goal of non-proliferation. Mongolia therefore decided to establish in practice the first single-state NWFZ and demonstrate how a region could benefit from the decision to accept that status. It believed that the concept could then be based on Mongolia’s experience and demonstrate its practical utility for others.

As of today, Mongolia is the only country with internationally recognized nuclear-weapon-free status. However there are other non-nuclear-weapon states that due to their geographical location or for some political reason cannot be part of traditional NWFZs. There are also territories under control of some UN members that would most probably want to be part of a gradually emerging nuclear-weapon-free world and not to be considered as grey areas or “blind spots” where nuclear weapons could be placed, making the countries legitimate military targets. There is also an interest among some junior partners within military alliances to avoid agreeing to the stationing of nuclear weapons on their territory, at least during peacetime. Thus Denmark, Norway and Spain do not allow deployment of nuclear weapons on their territory in peacetime, while Iceland and Lithuania prohibit deployment any time. Iceland, Denmark and Norway also prohibit passage of nuclear ships through their ports (ILPI 2015). These cases naturally call for considering carefully the issue of single-state zones as steps in denuclearizing parts of nuclear alliances.

For the past two and a half decades, Mongolia has been promoting its NWFZ policy and working to institutionalize it properly. To that end, it has met more than 80 times with the representatives of the P5 in different formats (bilaterally, trilaterally and even with all P5) and also had the issue considered at broader international fora. As a result,

Footnote “g” of the guidelines read as follows: Owing to its unique geographical circumstances, Mongolia has declared its nuclear-weapon-free status in order to promote it security. This status was welcomed by the General Assembly in its consensus resolution 53/77 D of 4 December 1998.
it was able to have the P5 jointly recognize Mongolia’s unique status and jointly pledge not to contribute to any act that would violate it.

This article sheds some light on Mongolia’s efforts to negotiate with the P5 the terms of their recognition of its unique status and provide it with Mongolia-specific assurances. The experience shows that the P5 representatives are neither angels nor devils but represent their government interests or common interests as the P5. Negotiations are more than mere bargaining. To be productive, each party needs to understand the interests of the others and find solutions without compromising its own legitimate interests. The article also tries to show that given political will, even asymmetric diplomacy can be productive and that quiet and discreet diplomacy, which provides diplomatic room for manoeuvre, has a better chance to succeed than headline-grabbing declarations and political score settling. Cooperation and reasonable compromise are the way for the future in this increasingly interconnected world.

This article has six parts dealing, respectively, with the increasing role of small states in international relations, Mongolia and its evolving foreign policy, Mongolia’s declaration of its territory as an NWFZ and the steps taken to institutionalize it, the challenges it encountered in having the General Assembly adopt a resolution on the issue and in implementing its provisions and the future of Mongolia’s status.

The Increasing Role of Small States in International Relations

International relations are rapidly developing and changing. The end of the Cold War and of the bipolar world have briefly transformed the world into a predominantly unipolar one, which is now gradually changing into a multipolar one. The roles of not only the great powers but also of the medium-sized and even small states are undergoing changes. In the emerging globalizing, multipolar world, the role of regional powers and international organizations or fora is increasing. Although it has not drawn much notice, the potential role of small states is also increasing as a result of growing interdependence. This is reflected in the increase in the literature on international relations, politics and the role of medium and small states (Ingebritsen et al. 2006; Long 2017).

The 20th century saw three waves of increase in the number of small states: after each of the two world wars and at the end of the Cold War. The reasons for and effects of such increases are a topic for separate research. For the purposes of this article, I would only point out that with the end of the Cold War and the division in the hierarchal structure of international relations, small states are acquiring a greater degree of freedom of expression, choice, and action in their domestic and foreign policies. Small states only recently have been more objects of international relations than subjects of such relations. The situation is now changing. Researchers focus on specific states and on their opportunities and limitations, addressing both theoretical issues and practical policies of certain small states.

Although small states make up the majority of UN member states, not all of them pursue foreign policy that affects regional developments or international relations. In this connection, many researchers believe that small states are not necessarily weak states despite the quantitative limitations of their power. At times, their influence can be considerable, in part because membership in international organizations can
provide them with additional legal and political instruments to influence events or decisions. Mindful of the nature of small states, it is accepted that they represent a force for progressive development and strengthening of international law. Researches provide many concrete examples of successful and failed small states while pointing out the domestic and external factors that affected their policies and choices (Alford 1984; Henderson 2016; Mansbch 1998; Maniruzzaman 1982; Nye 2011; Soni 2002).

**What is a small state?** Any discussion of small states starts with a definition of the term. There is plenty of literature on this issue. The most accepted and natural way of defining “small state” is based on the size of the population, the territory, the economy and the armed forces. But even on these quantitative factors there is no unanimity. For example, some believe that a small state should be one with a population of no more than 1 million. Others believe that 1 million is an arbitrary figure and propose other figures, above or below it. The same can be said about the size of the economy. In the case of defence capacity, some suggest that small states are those that cannot defend themselves against external aggression. Such criteria are also arbitrary because they ignore the concrete situation and concrete threat. Thus a logical question would be whether the states that are parties to military alliances or under a nuclear umbrella should be considered small states. The answer would be no. In short, despite increasing literature, there is still lack of a commonly agreed definition of a small state.

Despite the lack of agreed criteria of a small state, there is a growing understanding that quantitative criteria are not enough to consider the size or strength of a state, especially its effectiveness, which is an important factor in successfully addressing the country’s domestic and international challenges. There is still a lack of an agreed criteria of “effectiveness of a state”. Nonquantifiable factors such as political will, national resilience, internal cohesion, state structure, comparative advantage and soft power affect the power of states to influence others.

Like other social phenomena, globalization and liberalization affect small states, in most cases enhancing at least their political freedom of expression and some action. Market forces can work positively or negatively. In the latter case, small states become even more vulnerable to market forces, economic pressures and interferences especially in their economic and hence political decisions. This prompts the small states to be more proactive and promote their national interests, especially in conjunction with the common interests. For small states with a small population, there is also an increased risk of weakening their national identity, especially among the young, due to the enormous forces of globalization and convergence. This also prompts some small states to pursue an active foreign policy so as to address these objective challenges.

Despite the proactive foreign and economic policy of small states, it should be pointed out that small states are not able to fully influence international relations and are more exposed than larger states to the risks of being involved in conflicts. Small states usually receive protection or assistance from powerful states (mainly through alliances) or support balance-of-power policies that maintain stability and confidence among the greater powers. Likewise, small states are more interested in developing and strengthening international law and international mechanisms. In that sense, their foreign policy objectives and their means of attaining those objectives differ from those of great powers and other large states.
The past few decades have seen some small states conduct active foreign policies and play an important role in international relations. For example, in the 1970s, Malta (especially Maltese Ambassador Arvid Prado) played an important role in calling for and holding the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea that defined the rights and responsibilities of states in agreeing on the limits of the territorial sea, conditions of innocent passage through the territorial sea and passage through international straits, the uses of the world’s ocean’s living and nonliving resources, establishing the rules of their exploitation, protection of the marine environment and establishing of international mechanisms to implement the agreed rules. Singapore, through its Ambassador, Tommy Koh, played an important role in bringing these negotiations to a successful conclusion. The roles played by Malta and Singapore in international relations provide clear examples of the positive role of small states (Chong 2010, 383–403). K.C. Ulrichsen (2012) has highlighted the active role of Qatar in Arab politics, which includes supporting the relatively independent-minded news organization Al Jazeera and brokering the end of hostilities between Chad and Sudan. J. Braveboy-Wagner (2010) describes the role of Trinidad and Tobago, a small Caribbean island state that was instrumental in reviving the issue of establishing the International Criminal Court. A recent example of the role of small states is the back-channel mediation of Oman in bringing together Iran and the United States to talks that eventually led to the successful negotiation and JCPOA (Shohini 2015).

All these cases demonstrate that an active foreign policy that is based on national interests and regional or broader common interests and does not pose a threat to the interests of great or regional powers can be effective and successful. The comparative advantage of the small states in such cases is based in part on the lack of a self-serving goal or agenda and having room to manoeuvre that the great powers usually lack due to their political or strategic position or commitments.

The cumulative role of countries other than great powers has been demonstrated by the successful negotiation and adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017. Although nuclear-weapon states and their allies boycotted the negotiations, entry into force of the treaty will be a landmark in prohibiting and stigmatizing possession of nuclear weapons. This will strengthen and broaden the basis for small states to reject nuclear weapons, not only on their territories but in the world as a whole.

Hopefully, with globalization, the role of small and medium states will increase in establishing new norms of active participation of such states in world affairs.

Mongolia’s Evolving Foreign Policy

Mongolia is a landlocked state situated in east-central Asia. It is bordered by Russia to the north and China to the south, east, and west. It covers 1,564,116 square kilometers (km)², making it the world’s 19th largest country. Also it is one of the most sparsely populated countries. Approximately 30% of the population is nomadic or seminomadic, while more than 40% lives in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. The predominant religion in Mongolia is Tibetan Buddhism. The overwhelming majority of the state’s citizens are of Mongol

²Most of Mongolia’s trade with the outside world passes through the port city of Tianjin in northeastern China.
descent, although Kazakhs, Tuvans and other minorities also live in the country, especially in its western part.

As a landlocked country, it has no free access to world seas and oceans, and hence to world markets. This factor alone drains around 2–3% of the gross domestic product so as to allow trade with states beyond its immediate neighbours. The nearest seaport is Tianjin about 1,000 km from its south-eastern border.

A Brief History

Mongols have made many contributions to world development about which not much has been written. However, many people know about the Mongol conquests. Thus the Mongol Empire, the largest land empire in world history, served as a land bridge between Europe and Asia, maintained an effective chain of relay stations (for communications purposes), promoted tolerance of different 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.3

In the 13th and 14th centuries, Mongols ruled parts of Russia and China, but by the mid-14th century, the empire started gradually to disintegrate. Russia expanded to the east and China to west and north, gradually squeezing the remnants of the Mongol empire. After the collapse of the Yuan dynasty, Mongols retreated altogether to their homeland, north of the Great Wall of China. By the end of the 17th century, Russian expansion had reached the land of the Mongols. The internecine wars and attempts to revive forcibly a united Mongol state further weakened the state.

In 1636, the Manchus subjugated Southern Mongolia4 and in 1691 by the Dolonnor Convention, Northern Mongolia became part of the rising Manchu empire. The Mongols’ hope and understanding was that by doing so, they would be able to protect and preserve their nomadic national identity and Tibetan Buddhist religion, which would separate and differentiate it from the religions of the two expanding neighbouring powers.

Most history is geography. The gradual expansion of Russia and China led to the conclusions of the Nerchinsk (in 1689) and Kyakhta (in 1727) agreements that delineated their borders, which at that time included some of Mongolia’s borders as well. By 1850, the Manchus had weakened their legislation regarding protection of the Mongols and their way of life, which threatened with gradual settlement of the Chinese in Mongolia.

Declaration of National Independence and Struggle for Recognition of its Independence

In 1911, when Manchu/Chinese rule was collapsing, Mongolians declared their independence and tried to obtain support from Russia and some other great powers.

3Free trade between Europe and Asia flourished during the Pax Mongolica. Through this trade, the West enriched its knowledge of arms and armaments and printing. Marco Polo’s travels and books contributed to greater exchanges of people between Europe and Asia. In Asia itself, Persian and Indian products and food made their way into China, while the latter’s science benefited the peoples of Europe and other regions.

4In history, it is known commonly as Inner Mongolia.
However, due to its secret treaty with Japan regarding spheres of influence and a desire not to antagonize China, Russia was reluctant to support Mongolia’s independence directly. On the other hand, the main aim of the newly independent Mongolia was to try to unite some parts of former larger Mongolia. In addition to Khalkha (Northern/Outer) Mongolia, this would include Inner Mongolia, Barga (Khulunbuir) and Uriankhai (TannuTuva). But Mongolia’s efforts to gain recognition, unite its peoples and territories, and establish diplomatic relations with other great powers, including the United States, Japan and some European powers, have failed because these powers were reluctant to antagonize Russia and/or China.

**The tripartite conference.** To address Mongolia’s status, a tripartite conference was held in the Russian town of Kyakhta in 1914 and 1915. The conference resulted in the signing of the so-called Treaty of Kyakhta, whereby Mongolia was forced to agree to an autonomous status under Chinese suzerainty.

Russia was extremely weakened and divided as a result of its civil war and World War I. Mindful of that, China presented Mongolia in 1919 with a 64-point ultimatum, sent in troops, and unilaterally annulled Mongolia’s autonomous status. Trying to play on the sentiments of Mongolians for a united nation, White Russian ataman Grigory Semyonov, in collaboration with the Japanese organized the so-called “Dauria Conference”, known in history as an attempted Pan-Mongolia conference. Although Outer Mongolia was invited to the conference, it did not participate in it, seeing it as serving as a tool in the Russian Civil War and Japanese imperial designs.

Squeezed between two expanding empires, Mongolia at that time chose the lesser of the two evils. It sided with Soviet Russia, which was seen as more sympathetic to its cause and had never laid territorial claims to Mongolia. Although Soviet Russia was reluctant to antagonize China, the spillover of the Russian Civil War into Mongolia forced Russia to assist Mongolians in getting rid of the White Russian invaders. Despite Chinese protests against the Soviet intervention in Mongolia as meddling in China’s affairs, the Soviets, responding to Mongolian request, forcibly intervened and drove the White Russian troops out of Mongolia.

**National revolution.** In July 1921, Mongolia again declared the country’s independence. In November of that year, the Soviet government recognized the new Mongolian government and established diplomatic relations with it.

At the same time as it was establishing diplomatic relations with Mongolia, Soviet Russia held secret negotiations with China and on 31 May 1924 the two countries signed a treaty that recognized China’s suzerainty over Mongolia. Mongolia protested, but to no avail. China refused to recognize Mongolia until the end of World War II, that is, after the 1945 Yalta conference of the Allied powers in 1946 by the Republic of China and then in 1949 by the People’s Republic of China. So did other nations. Gradually Mongolia became a Soviet satellite state, while its pro-Soviet internal and foreign policies further isolated it from the outside world.

During World War II, Mongolia sided with the Soviet Union and contributed a great deal to the Allies’ struggle, ranking first in per capita terms in providing material assistance. As a result and upon Soviet insistence, the Allies recognized Mongolia’s status quo at the Yalta Conference in February 1945. This opened up the possibility of acquiring de facto recognition by the great powers. In 1949, Mongolia established
diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China. It took several decades of Mongolia’s efforts to have the Western nations to give Mongolia a de jure recognition of its independent status.

The 20th-century quest for international recognition was rewarded when Mongolia was admitted as member of the United Nations in October 1961.

**Mongolia’s Geopolitical Reality**

The Soviet agreement in the late 1980s to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan and Mongolia, as well as to ensure withdrawal of Soviet-backed Vietnamese forces from Cambodia, opened the way for normalization of the tense Sino-Soviet relations. The disintegration of the so-called socialist world and later of the Soviet Union itself fundamentally changed Mongolia’s geopolitical environment. In the country itself, a peaceful democratic revolution has changed the autocratic nature of the regime to a democratic one, providing an opportunity to draw strength and wisdom from its own people and its own history. These changes have allowed Mongolia to abandon its one-sided pro-Soviet policies and promote a more balanced policy that would somehow make up for the power vacuum resulting from the Soviet withdrawal from Mongolia. In these circumstances, for the first time in the past 300 years, Mongolia was provided with the opportunity to define and pursue its own national interests and priorities in harmony with the interests of other states, including its big neighbours.

Geographically and physically Mongolia today is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. It borders on two historical adversaries that also happen to be veto-wielding permanent members of UN Security Council and recognized nuclear-weapon states. In Northeast Asia, with which Mongolia identifies its future, there is no multilateral security mechanism or arrangement to properly channel or address great-power rivalry or relations of other states of that region. In today’s world, possession of nuclear weapons is translated into geopolitical advantage, as evidenced by the current turn of events on and around the Korean peninsula. This is a reality that cannot be overlooked in the security or foreign policies of states.

**A New Pragmatic Foreign Policy**

In this new geostrategic environment, Mongolia was able to adopt a multipillared foreign policy, diversifying its foreign relations beyond its immediate neighbours. This major pragmatic turn, that rejected any form of Brezhnev or Monroe doctrines of limited sovereignty, has found reflection in the national security and foreign policy concepts adopted by Mongolia’s parliament, the State Great Khural, in June 1994 and slightly revised in 2010 and 2011, respectively. The foreign policy concept has thus declared that Mongolia’s policy would henceforth be based on political realism, nonalignment and pursuit of its own national interests, and that its priority would be to safeguard its security and vital national interests primarily by political and diplomatic means rather than through alliance with great powers. The National Security Concept of 1994, referring to the issue under consideration, stressed that it was necessary to “strictly observe the policy of not allowing the use of the country’s territory against other States” and “ensure the
nuclear-weapon-free status of Mongolia at the international level and make it an important element of strengthening the country’s security by political means”.

That is based on the fact that Mongolia cannot alone protect itself from a determined big country. On the other hand, it knows well the perils of overdependence on one state and serving as the “little brother” in an unequal alliance. For these reasons, it took the decision to promote the policy of nonalignment and balancing the interests of its neighbours unless its own vital national interests were affected. In the latter case it would, of course, follow these interests. These basic tenets of its foreign policy have been clearly explained to its neighbours and other states.

**Self-Imposed Red Lines**

Political and diplomatic means of ensuring security have their limits. Mongolia remains sceptical that others, even its neighbours or other close partners, would actually risk their own core interests to assist Mongolia in a time of danger. That is why part of the foreign policy challenge is to determine its own red lines. One such red line is raising the issue of the territories that Mongolians sought to unite in 1911–1915. Likewise, situations threatening national security need to be avoided altogether. It has pledged to respect the legitimate interests of its neighbours and partners when championing its national interests and not to be used as a Trojan horse by any state or group of states. The national security concept defined disputes and conflicts between its neighbouring two states as potential threats to its national security. That is why it called for promoting a policy of maintaining strategic stability and establishing a reliable system of strengthening peace and security in Asia and the Pacific, particularly in Northeast and Central Asia.

According to a Mongolian saying, “duck is calm when the lake is calm”. One of the effective ways of ensuring national security is trust-building and conflict prevention in the region, a conflict into which Mongolia could be drawn. Bearing that in mind, it has more than once called for regional security dialogue and establishing a regional security mechanism for that purpose.

**Continuity and Change in Foreign Policy**

Although the political landscape is changing, geography has not changed in the post-Cold War era. Hence relations with its two immediate neighbours remain the country’s foreign policy priority. Bearing in mind the bitter experience when it sided with one against the other, Mongolia declared a policy of non-involvement and neutrality with regard to possible disputes between the two countries unless the dispute affected its vital interests.

A novelty in Mongolia’s post-Cold War foreign policy was promoting a “third neighbour” policy. That approach involves reaching out to other states with which it shares common values and which are economically developed. It is intended not only to

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5History knows many examples when the powerful states would abandon their smaller and weaker “allies” to accommodate other stronger powers. The “appeasement” examples and the beginning of World War II are still fresh in the minds of historians and political scientists.
broaden relations with them but also encourage their investments and use that to diversify its trade and economic relations.

**Mongolia’s Nuclear-Weapon-Related Challenge**

Since the dawn of the nuclear era, Mongolia has been against nuclear weapons. One of the lessons it learned during the Cold War and Sino-Soviet tension was that an alliance with a nuclear-weapon state can be perilous. As an ally and especially host of military bases of such states, one can easily become a legitimate target of opposing nuclear-weapon states. The threat of being drawn into Sino-Soviet confrontation was especially felt by Mongolia during the height of Sino-Soviet tension from the mid-1960s to early 1980s. At the height of Sino-Soviet confrontation and border conflict in 1969, when more than a thousand soldiers were killed on both sides during armed clashes along parts of their border, Moscow had more than 10,000 nuclear weapons in its arsenal and China had about 50. By that time, Moscow had around 60,000–75,000 troops, including 2 tank and 2 motorized rifle divisions, plus unspecified air force units stationed in Mongolia. Some of the troops were equipped with dual-use intermediate-range ballistic missiles and aircraft. Hence, Mongolia served not only as a buffer between China and the Soviet Union, but also as a potential springboard from which the Soviets could launch a blitzkrieg-type military offensive into northern China.

In mid-1969, the Soviets briefly entertained the idea of undertaking a pre-emptive nuclear strike against Chinese nuclear weapon facilities and installations. It therefore was no coincidence that Soviet military experts and strategists were writing at that time that “along with conventional war and instantaneous nuclear war of incredible magnitude and devastation, war involving limited use of nuclear weapons in one or more theaters of military operations should not be excluded” (Sokolovsky and Cherednichenko 1968).

**High Risk of Becoming a Victim of a Nuclear Conflict**

Archival materials show that in 1969, the Sino-Soviet tensions could have led to a nuclear conflict. This is also confirmed by the post-Cold War writings of US, Russian and even Chinese statesmen and scholars such as former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (Burr 2001), former Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin (Dobrynin 2001), Chinese scholar Liu Chenshan (Bolton 2010) and others. According to Dr Kissinger, the Soviets had approached the United States to “sound out” its reaction in case the Soviet Union would make a “surgical” strike against the Chinese nuclear arsenal. In response, the United States warned that if China suffered a nuclear attack, Washington would consider it the start of World War III. Had the United States indicated that it would remain neutral to Soviet surgical strike, the 1962 Cuban missile crisis would have become a footnote compared to possible Sino-Soviet clashes. That was the lesson that Mongolia learned in being aligned with a nuclear-weapon state.

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6Global nuclear stockpiles, 1945–2002. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. November/December 2002, p.103.
Mongolia Declares Its Territory a NWFZ

In September 1992, Mongolia declared that it was free of foreign military bases and thus by implication of nuclear weapons of a nuclear-weapon state as well and that it would work to strengthen its security by political and diplomatic means. It was aware that as long as there were nuclear weapons and great-power rivalry, there would always be a risk of being drawn into such rivalry. Measures therefore needed to be taken to make sure that such situations did not arise. The most effective way was to outlaw nuclear weapons and totally eliminate them, but that task would not be accomplished quickly or easily. In the meantime, partial or regional measures were seen as important practical preventive measures.

By September 1992, Russia was completing withdrawal of its bases and troops from Mongolia. With this in mind, Ochirbat Punsalmaagiin, the first democratically elected president of Mongolia, proposed that as a contribution to disarmament and confidence-building in the region and as a measure to prevent any nuclear-weapon state from using Mongolian territory to harm the interests of others, Mongolia would become a NWFZ. In order to underline the seriousness of the initiative, he pointed out that the country would not merely declare it, but work to have that status internationally guaranteed. The idea was partially based on the fact that in 1975, the UN General Assembly had adopted resolution 3472 (XXX) regarding a special report of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament on a comprehensive study of the question of NWFZs, which specifically underlined that “even individual states could establish such zones”.

President Ochirbat knew that it was a difficult task but not altogether impossible. He felt that it would also be a vivid expression of Mongolia’s independent foreign policy to strengthen the country’s security primarily by political and diplomatic means.

The president made his statement in the general debate of the General Assembly on 25 September 1992. He underlined that Mongolia was developing balanced relations with its neighbours, that withdrawal of Russian troops was being completed and that such a withdrawal was in full accord with the new concept of the country’s national security. He also added that Central Asia, strategically located as a bridge between Europe and Asia, was emerging as a separate geopolitical entity and that therefore Mongolia was against using it as a nuclear testing ground.

First Reactions to the Initiative

Although not many were aware of Mongolia’s initiative, most of the people that followed Mongolia’s foreign policy agreed that it was in Mongolia’s own interests and at the same time, contributing to regional stability and predictability. On the other hand, there were also voices of concern and caution in Mongolia itself that such a policy might negatively affect the country’s relations with Russia and China. This note of caution was connected with the fact that Mongolia did not consult with its neighbours beforehand. However, since the initiative was in line with the Russian–Chinese joint statement that they would not use the territories and airspace of neighbouring states in

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7 At that time, the Conference on Disarmament was called Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (or CCD).
8 See UNGA, 30th Session, Official Records, document no. 27A (A/10,027/add.1), p. 31.
taking any actions against each other, Mongolia did not see any need to consult. The events that followed Mongolia’s announcement of the initiative have shown that had it consulted with the neighbours or the United States and other nuclear-weapon states, their response most probably would not have been very encouraging.

Although the initiative represented an important strategic foreign policy move at that time, Mongolia did not have a clearly defined road map for reaching the goal. At the first stage, the Mongolian side decided to follow the trial-and-error method of promoting the issue with an understanding that much would depend on the degree of support the initiative would receive from the P5, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the wider membership of the United Nations. Therefore, the highest priority was to explain clearly the significance and the positive role of the initiative for the region and beyond it.

The thinking of Mongolian leaders at that time was that in the short term, they did not see any imminent nuclear threat, directly or indirectly. But because it bordered on two rival nuclear-weapon states, they felt that it faced a certain level of risk as long as nuclear weapons existed. They believed that one should not rule out the possibility that under certain circumstances outside powers, when space and time are becoming decisive strategic military factors, there might be a temptation to use Mongolia’s vast territory as a necessary or expedient space either to protect or promote their security interests. In that sense, Mongolia could be seen as an asset for some states, but a liability for others. Mongolia should not repeat its previous mistake of allying with one great power against the other. Hence the thinking was to turn this possible risk into an opportunity to strengthen its security and make sure that Mongolia did not in the future host nuclear weapons or part of such weapons systems. In short, it was a form of preventive diplomacy.

A few months later, Mongolia’s wish to be free of nuclear weapons was reflected in the country’s treaty on friendly relations and cooperation with Russia. In the treaty, which was signed in January 1993, Russia pledged to respect Mongolia’s policy of not permitting the deployment on and transit through its territory of foreign troops, nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

The first concrete opportunity to promote the idea and work for its realization came later, when the international community started to prepare for the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The P5 was interested in having the treaty extended for an indefinite period and thus needed the support of other states, especially of the treaty’s non-nuclear-weapon states.

Mongolia decided to use this interest of the P5 in extending the NPT indefinitely to put its initiative on the bargaining table with them and use the pending decision on NPT extension as leverage to promote its initiative. It explained that recognition and institutionalization of Mongolia’s NWFZ status would not only be an important regional confidence-building measure, but also a conflict-prevention and even an early warning measure.

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9Later this message was reflected in operative para. 2 of UN General Assembly resolution 53/77D of 1998, which endorsed and expressed support of “Mongolia’s good-neighborly and balanced relations with its neighbors as an important element of strengthening regional peace, security and stability”.
Procedurally, Mongolia approached each one of the nuclear-weapon states separately. It started with the United States, as the most influential of the five and the one that had the largest stake in geopolitical predictability and the indefinite extension of the NPT.

**Initial Steps to Promote the Initiative**

**P5 Political Decision is Needed**

As a rule, governments take political decisions to embark on diplomatic negotiations with a view to arriving at an agreement on the issue or dispute. But the world is full of diversity, contradictions and exceptions. Thus, when it came to establishing NWFZs during the Cold War, the P5, by virtue of their special responsibility as Permanent members of UN Security Council, were expected to look at establishing such zones through the interests of strengthening international security rather than through the prism of their own interests. However in reality it was the other way round. That is why the Latin American states initiated the process of establishing an NWFZ in their region without prior consultation with or approval of the nuclear-weapon states. Likewise, other NWFZs were initiated by the states of the region without direct consultation or prior political negotiation or agreement with the P5. And they all worked. The political decision of the P5 to sign and ratify the protocols to these agreements, with some caveats and interpretative statements, usually followed the conclusion of such regional agreements.

Mongolia followed this pattern. It did not consult with the P5 before making the initiative. Judging by the P5’s reaction to Mongolia’s initiative, the group did not take any decision at a high political level either to support and recognize Mongolia’s status or to reject it. Judging also by their reactions, the issue was considered at a middle level, or even perhaps at the level of disarmament departments of foreign ministries. If that was the case, then there could be no serious negotiations to talk about, but rather a search for a way to somehow address the issue without assuming any commitment beyond a general statement of support for the decision of Mongolia to declare the country a NWFZ and using the excuse of “precedent setting” as a way of deflecting the growing support of the initiative by the overwhelming majority of the international community. For Mongolia, the fact that the P5 did not take a high-level decision to reject the initiative provided an opportunity to continue to push the issue with the group. Mongolia therefore approached the United States and hinted that Mongolia’s support of the indefinite extension of the NPT would to a certain extent depend on US support of its 1992 initiative. Washington’s first response was that it could not specifically endorse Mongolia as an NWFZ for technical and legal reasons and that Mongolia’s announcement did not warrant security guarantees beyond the ones that the United States had already provided to all NPT non-nuclear-weapon states. The United States further explained that a formal endorsement of Mongolia’s NWFZ policy would require, at a minimum, a clear and detailed understanding of how the Mongolian government intended to implement it. After some talks and an explanation of Mongolia’s policy, it was agreed that the United States could make a separate statement in support of the initiative. After more talks, the two sides agreed on the content of a possible US statement.
**United States Makes an Official Statement of Support**

The United States and Mongolia agreed that the former would welcome Mongolia’s decision to support the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995. US accent on its positive reaction to Mongolia’s initiative was connected with the fact of supporting it as any other peace initiative and not with its content, which it said needed further study from political and legal points of view. That was the position of the other nuclear-weapon states as well. The United States agreed to state that Mongolia, as a sovereign non-nuclear-weapon state friendly to the United States, benefited from the US commitment to seek UN Security Council assistance for non-nuclear-weapon states that were members of the NPT in the event of a nuclear attack on them and from the US assurances that it would not use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear-weapon state not allied with a nuclear-weapon state. Responding to Mongolia’s request and agreeing with its reasoning, the United States agreed to add, as a sign of good relations, that “if Mongolia ever faced a threat and decided to refer the matter to the United Nations Security Council, the United States, along with other members of the Council, would consider appropriate steps to be taken”.

The agreed statement was made public in early October of 1993. After the US statement, China, the United Kingdom and France also made unilateral statements of support for the initiative. Soon Russia, in a separate statement, noted that it already had a treaty commitment to respect Mongolia’s policy regarding foreign troops and weapons of mass destruction.

Thus, by the end of January 1994, all P5 had officially unilaterally reacted to the initiative, which was the first positive sign of their separate support. Encouraged by this development, Mongolia sought the next logical practical step – to work for their joint support and endorsement. With that in mind, in spring of 1994, it drafted a P5 joint statement. Based on a provision of the US statement of October 1993, it would have declared that the P5 would respect Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-free status and that in case the status or Mongolia’s national security were to be threatened from the outside and Mongolia decided to refer the matter to the Security Council, the P5 would take all necessary measures for the council to eliminate such a threat. With that draft in hand, Mongolia approached each member of the P5 on a bilateral basis. The reaction was polite, yet elusive. Each country said that it was happy to help and support the effort if others would do the same but that it would not take the lead in promoting the issue within the P5. However, France vetoed the idea.

Mongolia decided not to take “no” for an answer. It also decided to clarify President Ochirbat’s 1992 statement regarding “international guarantees” as acquiring legally based assurances and not limited to political statements of support of the initiative, however important they were, and to work to acquire such assurances. With that in mind, Mongolia decided to pursue the issue through multilateral diplomacy.

**Turning to the NAM for Political Support**

Since members of the NAM were non-nuclear-weapon states with strong positions on non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament, Mongolia decided first to get the support

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10 Statement of U.S. Department of State. Press release of 7 October 1993.
11 This would not necessarily be a nuclear threat.
of this group, which it joined in the early 1990s. Mongolia raised the issue of support for the initiative at the 11th NAM summit, held in October 1995 in Cartagena, Colombia. Mongolia’s proposal was positively received, and the Final Document welcomed the unilateral declaration of Mongolia’s territory as a NWFZ as a “commendable contribution to regional stability and confidence building”.12 The document was adopted by the heads of state and government of more than 110 countries; it therefore amounted to strong statement of political support and served as an inspiration to Mongolia to continue its efforts to promote the initiative.

None of the nuclear-weapon states was member of the NAM. Three of them (the United States, the United Kingdom and France [known as P3]), especially the United States, had ideological and doctrinal objections to the movement, seeing it as anti-Western. There thus was a certain risk that the P5 or some of its members could take a negative stand on Mongolia’s issue because it enjoyed wide support from the NAM. That was a risk that Mongolia had to take.

At the April 1997 ministerial meeting of the NAM, the group went further, welcoming Mongolia’s efforts to institutionalize its status as an NWFZ. That showed the wide support that the issue could enjoy if it were brought to the UN General Assembly.

### Decision to Go to the UN General Assembly to Legitimize NWFZ Status

By the end of 1995, with the clear support of the NAM, Mongolia decided to bring the issue to the United Nations General Assembly. The overwhelming majority of the General Assembly’s members were non-nuclear-weapon states that were demanding credible security assurances from the P5. Some of them were parties to already-existing NWFZs, while others were working to establish NWFZs in their parts of the world.13 Mongolia’s main negotiating partners would still be the nuclear-weapon states, since they would be the ones asked to provide security assurances. However broad support from the General Assembly was politically important. At the same time Mongolia was aware that it should not antagonize the P3 or their allies and sympathizers in the General Assembly, which could weaken the international support. It knew that any voting victory would be a Pyrrhic one that could lead to complications with the P5 and to a political setback. On the other hand, reaching consensus at any cost had the danger of stalling the issue or moving it at a snail’s pace. Mongolia’s approach was to work with all the countries and try to move the issue in accordance with the principles of sovereign equality, the accepted principles and norms regarding NWFZs, and the legitimate interests of its neighbours and other states. It was not in a hurry and saw no need to push for a vote on the issue. It was very aware of the example of Sri Lanka’s 1971 initiative to turn the Indian Ocean into a “zone of peace” and the adoption of the declaration on the issue by forcing a vote14 that divided UN membership on the issue.

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12See para. 86 of the Final document of NAM summit held in Cartagena, Columbia, on 18–20 October 1995. Doc. A/50/752-S/1995/1035.
13At that time, negotiations were already underway in Africa and Southeast Asia to finalize draft treaties that would establish such zones in those regions.
14See Res/2832 (XXVI of 16 December 1971. The resolution was adopted by 66-0-55 votes thus almost dividing in half the General Assembly membership.
The ad hoc committee on the issue has not been able to make any substantive progress in the four decades since then. Such a situation had to be avoided.

**Exploring the Possibility of Forming Part of a Possible Central Asian NWFZ**

The most appropriate General Assembly forum for discussing NWFZ-related issues – and especially for clarifying the position of Russia and China regarding Mongolia’s initiative, and Mongolia’s possible participation in a future Central Asian NWFZ – was the First Committee of the General Assembly, which considers issues of disarmament and international security. The possibility of Mongolia forming part of a Central Asian NWFZ was not excluded. Thus, in 1996, Mongolia, together with Kyrgyzstan, drafted and circulated a draft resolution whereby the General Assembly would welcome the intention of the states of Central Asia to establish an NWFZ, commend the Central Asian state that had declared its territory an NWFZ (meaning Mongolia), and call upon the P5 and other states to support the idea of the zone, extend the necessary cooperation and refrain from any action contrary to that objective.

The reaction of the P5 to the draft resolution was lukewarm, while Central Asian states, other than Kyrgyzstan, said that they needed instructions from their capitals to decide on co-sponsorship of the resolution. The reaction of the P5 indicated that Mongolia’s participation in the prospective Central Asian NWFZ would not be wholeheartedly supported since that might lead other states, such as Afghanistan or Iran, to try to join and expand the zone. Mongolia approached Russia and China to seek clarification on this issue.\(^{15}\) Both of them immediately let Mongolia know that they would have difficulties in seeing Mongolia included in any possible future Central Asian NWFZ since it did not border on any one of the five Central Asian States and that due to geographical location about 50 km of Russian strip territory would have to be included in the NWFZ if Mongolia were to become part of that zone, to which Russia would not agree. China also indicated its reluctance to see Mongolia as part of an NWFZ that did not have the support of Russia.\(^{16}\) With Russian and Chinese positions clarified, Mongolia was ready to promote the idea of a single-state NWFZ, which was based on the comprehensive 1975 UN study and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution in 1976.

**Promoting the Concept of a Single-State NWFZ in the UN Disarmament Commission**

The first step in putting Mongolia’s issue on the agenda of the General Assembly was to raise it in a form of the possibility of establishing a single-state NWFZ that could be discussed in the UN Disarmament Commission, the assembly’s subsidiary deliberative body, when it started drafting guidelines for establishing future NWFZs in the spring of 1997. With that in mind, on the second day of the Disarmament Commission’s substantive session, Mongolia submitted a working paper formulating the concept of

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\(^{15}\)Mongolia’s plan B was to go for a single-state NWFZ as a novelty in international relations.

\(^{16}\)The US position would be a factor later, when it was against expanding the Central Asian NWFZ beyond the five Central Asian countries so as not to allow Iran’s possible membership.
establishing single-state NWFZs in cases when traditional (group) zones could not be established. The working paper laid out the principles of establishing such zones, elements of a model agreement establishing such zones and the practical stages of considering guidelines in the commission that would coincide with the consideration of guidelines for establishing further the traditional zones.

As expected, many developing countries welcomed this new angle of approaching the issue of establishing of NWFZs. They agreed with Mongolia that life was rich in its diversity and that the cases of individual States needed to be addressed as foreseen in the 1975 comprehensive study. When speaking to the P5 countries, Mongolia tried to allay their fears by explaining that the concept could be promoted while bearing in mind the security interests of the states concerned and without undermining the security of any state or alliance. However, the P5 had difficulty supporting the idea, seeing it as distracting from considering establishment of traditional zones.

During consideration of the issue of establishing new NWFZs, representatives of some developing countries, including Nepal and Afghanistan, expressed keen interest in the issue. However, in the final text of the guidelines agreed in 1999, Mongolia was not able to reflect in the recommendations any reference to the concept of single-state NWFZs due to the opposition of the P5 and application of the rule of consensus when adopting the final text of the guidelines. However, on the insistence of Mongolia, a footnote to the guidelines mentioned the initiative, indicating that the status had been welcomed by the General Assembly in 1998. In so doing, Mongolia hoped that with passage of time the footnote would serve as a foothold to revert to this issue of principle at the United Nations.

**Working for a Separate General Assembly Resolution on Mongolia’s Status**

In parallel with its work through the Disarmament Commission to promote the concept of a single-state NWFZ, and without waiting for the outcome of the commission’s work, Mongolia thought it important to have the issue of its initiative considered by the General Assembly’s First Committee.

With that in mind, in the summer of 1997, Mongolia prepared a draft resolution, as a trial balloon, to seek the reaction of the P5. The draft in its preamble made reference to the 1975 study of NWFZs, which had acknowledged the right of individual countries to establish NWFZs. In its operative part, the draft would have recognized and provided support for Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-free status and would have invited its neighbours and other nuclear-weapon states to cooperate with it in institutionalizing the status.

As it turned out, the draft presented many difficulties, especially for the P3. Hence the P5 cautioned against using the term “zone”. The United States argued that more time would be needed for legal experts from the P3 to study the issue carefully and expressed hope that Mongolia would not table any resolution during that session. It also cautioned that lack of support for the resolution by the P5 would undermine the fundamental political objective that Mongolia was trying to achieve.
P3 Joint Démarche

To signal their displeasure with Mongolia’s intention to introduce a draft resolution in the First Committee, the P3 countries made joint démarches in Ulaanbaatar, Geneva and New York in which they warned Mongolia that any attempt to go beyond its political declaration of 1992 toward institutionalizing it would be seen as a departure from the recognized concept of NWFZs and would raise difficult issues of principle that the P5 would need to consider very carefully. The P3 noted that Mongolia already benefited from the general security assurances of the P5 reflected in Security Council resolution 964 of 11 April 1995, and that the P5 took those assurances very seriously. They warned that tabling a resolution of the type that was being presented unofficially would be “premature, unhelpful and possibly counterproductive” and urged Mongolia not to table it in the First Committee. When asked whether the reference to the P5 meant that Russia and China also were part of the démarche, the answer was that they were aware of the joint démarche but, because of their relations with Mongolia, avoided direct involvement with the démarche itself.

Sensing possible complications regarding the draft resolution, the chair of the EU group took the initiative to try to help both sides to narrow their differences and come to some agreed understanding. He approached the Mongolian delegation and suggested that the best way out might be not to press for a resolution at that session of the General Assembly with an understanding that the next year (1998), the nuclear-weapon states, the European Union and others could agree to a separate resolution on Mongolia’s initiative. It was also suggested that perhaps Mongolia could think of promoting the initiative not as a “zone”, which the P5 was not prepared to accept, but rather in the vague form of a “status”.

Mongolia agreed not to insist on a separate resolution at that session. It was agreed later with the US delegation, which was now acting on behalf of the whole P5, that additional informal consultations might be helpful.

Settling for the “Status” Language

After having agreed in principle in 1997 to have the General Assembly adopt in 1998 a separate resolution on its initiative, Mongolia and the United States held a number of informal meetings. The goal was for each side to gain a better understanding of the other’s position and on that basis, to try to come to an agreement on a possible resolution in the fall of 1998.

After meeting with the United States and analysing the thrust of the talks, the Mongolian side concluded that pushing for a single-state NWFZ as a concept with Mongolia as its embodiment would not yield direct results, but would instead close off chances for promoting the initiative with the P5. The two countries agreed to switch from the concept of a single-state zone to a notion of “nuclear-weapon-free status” and on that basis to conduct the talks. The concept of nuclear-weapon-free status was more ambiguous and thus more acceptable for the P5. For its part, Mongolia believed that pursuing the notion of nuclear-weapon-free status did not exclude a single-state zone and gave Mongolia the latitude to revert to the latter concept when it was accepted internationally and thus was politically ripe.
**Precedent**

“Precedent” turned out to be an important issue that could determine how difficult it would be to institutionalize Mongolia’s status would be. Precedents can be positive or negative, depending on their impact and consequences. Positive precedents lead to progress, becoming pioneers in specific areas. Hence they are needed and should be supported and emulated. That is why it is believed that the approach to precedents should be assessed by their possible effect. In international relations they should be assessed by the impact they have on international peace, mutual understanding and cooperation, not by how they serve or affect the narrow interests of specific states. In this sense, innovative thinking and solutions can originate not only from great powers, but also from other states, international organizations, and even nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The great powers usually tend to want to preserve the status quo and doubt the utility of precedents if they are not the initiators of the precedent or if the precedent does not accord with their narrow national interests.

But positive precedents come from states that are not great powers as well. Thus, establishing a regional NWFZ in Latin America and the Caribbean set a positive precedent for other non-nuclear-weapon states and for that matter, for P5 joint action. However, the P5 has so far resisted the idea of establishing a single-state NWFZ. The P5 states argue that it would be a bad precedent that might serve as a disincentive for establishing regional zones although there is not a shred of evidence to prove that. This double standard for establishing NWFZs is incomprehensible. If a small country that cannot be part of a regional zone and wants to establish itself as a single-state zone, there is no reason to deny it something that is considered a given to groups of states. In fact, as mentioned earlier, in the early 1990s, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to turn the German Democratic Republic into a state that would not have nuclear weapons. This illustrates how the approach to “precedents” frequently depends on political expediencies of great powers and not on principles.

**Mongolia’s Ambitious Draft Resolution**

In preparation for the 1995 session of the General Assembly, the Mongolian side put its ideas regarding the issue in the form of an ambitious draft resolution entitled “Mongolia’s security and nuclear-weapon-free status”. The draft had 12 preambular and 8 operative paragraphs.

The operative part would have recognized and supported Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-free status, welcomed its good-neighbourly and balanced relationship with its two neighbours, and invited them and other nuclear-weapon states to cooperate with it in institutionalizing that status. It would also have requested the secretary-general to assist Mongolia in institutionalizing the status, report on the implementation of the resolution the following year, and include in the provisional agenda of that session a separate item entitled “Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-free status”.

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17Thus in 1982, Ambassador Alfonso Garcia Robles of Mexico received the Nobel Peace Prize for his enormous efforts not only to establish a NWFZ in Latin America, but also for promoting the goals of disarmament in general. He shared the prize with Ambassador Alva Myrdal of Sweden, whose contribution to the cause of disarmament was also enormous.
The P3’s Four-Point Proposal

At the Geneva meeting of representatives of the P3 and Mongolia, held in June 1998, the former made a four-point proposal that they thought could help achieve Mongolia’s objectives of broadening international support for its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity more effectively than a mere formal recognition of Mongolia’s NWFZ. They argued that a single-state NWFZ concept would raise difficulties for them if applied in other circumstances. With that in mind, the P3 proposed four ideas of a more political nature that, in their view, could help Mongolia achieve its broad foreign policy objectives. The proposals were as follows:

First, at the 1998 First Committee of the General Assembly, Mongolia could table a resolution that would recognize the “permanent neutrality of Mongolia”. It would be similar to the one that Turkmenistan had tabled in 1995, which was adopted without a vote.

Second, an additional General Assembly resolution could be tabled in 1999 that would urge greater cooperation and comity among the states of the region, a concept similar to that which had inspired a series of resolutions regarding the development of good-neighbourly relations among the Balkan states. This time it would benefit Mongolia.

Third, Mongolia could conclude a border security treaty with its neighbours similar to the 1996 treaty concluded among Russia, China, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The agreement could focus on transparency measures for conventional forces, including advance notification of manoeuvres; restrictions on the scale, geographical limits, and number of troop exercises; and an agreement that military forces of a party would not be used to attack another party or conduct any military activity threatening other parties and thus upsetting calm and stability in the border area.

Fourth, Mongolia could seek from China a treaty-based recognition of its nuclear-weapon-free status. The model could be the relevant provision of the 1993 Mongolian-Russian treaty on friendly relations and cooperation.

The P3 expressed the hope that the Mongolian side would consider these ideas and would respond soon before the UN General Assembly session.

When the Mongolian representative inquired whether Russia and China were aware of these proposals, he was told that they were.

Mongolia’s Four-Point Response to the P3 Proposals

After considering the P3 proposals, Mongolia politely declined them and proposed the following:

First, Mongolia agreed with the three-step approach to addressing this question, namely the adoption by the General Assembly in 1998 of a resolution on Mongolia’s international security status (in order not to emphasize solely the NWFZ status), conclusion with its neighbours of a trilateral treaty that would address the external security-related issues of Mongolia, and then a second resolution after the trilateral treaty had been concluded.

Second, in 1998, Mongolia could table, as agreed in principle, a resolution in the First Committee that would welcome and recognize Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-free status, take note of the importance of this status for enhancing stability in the region,
welcome Mongolia’s good-neighbourly and balanced relationship with its neighbours and invite Mongolia’s neighbours as well as other nuclear-weapon states to cooperate with it in institutionalizing its nuclear-weapon-free status. A draft resolution to this effect was annexed to the Mongolian written response.

Third, Mongolia could conclude a treaty of a general political nature with its neighbours on its security and its nuclear-weapon-free status. Many of the provisions of the treaty could be drawn from the treaties of friendly relations and cooperation that Mongolia concluded with its neighbours separately in 1993 and 1994. Since the treaty would deal to some extent with Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-free status, perhaps the P3 could express their support for the treaty in a form of a protocol or a joint declaration.

Fourth, the General Assembly, perhaps at its 55th session in 2000, could welcome the conclusion of the treaty and its support by the P3 mentioned earlier and call upon all states to respect and support Mongolia’s status. Mongolia did not receive any clear response to its four-point suggestions.

**Negotiating the Text of the First, Seminal Resolution**

Although declined by the P5 in principle, Mongolia’s ambitious draft resolution formed the basis for negotiations. The P5 argued that the draft was too extensive and too ambitious and thus needed to be shortened and moderated, and that any reference to “institutionalizing” needed to be omitted. The P5 also thought that the focus of the draft needed to be on Mongolia’s external security and not on institutionalizing the nuclear-weapon-free status. At some point, the talks reached an impasse, with Mongolia insisting on a substantive and meaningful resolution and not a modest one. To avoid the impasse, the P3 produced two short draft resolutions focusing on Mongolia’s international security. (Russia and China were aware of this.) Version A was a reproduction of the Mongolian draft minus any reference to institutionalization of the status, which the P5 knew would be rejected by Mongolia. Version B was a more attractive one, since it would not only “welcome” (instead of “taking note of”) Mongolia’s declaration, but also would invite Mongolia’s two neighbours to cooperate with it to consolidate and strengthen its independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of its frontiers, nuclear-weapon-free status, ecological balance and non-aligned foreign policy. It would also request the secretary-general to provide assistance in that trilateral cooperation. Having carefully studied version B, Mongolia drafted a version C that, agreeing with the focus on the country’s international aspect, refocused it on the nuclear-weapon-free status, emphasizing that such a status was one of the means of ensuring national security of states and that the internationally recognized status of Mongolia would contribute to enhancing regional stability and confidence-building. As to the focus on trilateral cooperation with Russia and China, it agreed to such emphasis and at the same time suggested that the General Assembly call upon other nuclear-weapon states, as well as the entire UN membership, to respect and support the status.

Mongolia soon learned that Russia and China were not pleased with the emphasis on trilateral cooperation, believing that the P3 also needed to play a significant role. As a result, any reference to trilateral cooperation had to be dropped, and the focus of the part of the draft on the role of nuclear-weapon states changed from “interested states” to “concerned states” and, in the end, to “member states, including the five nuclear-
weapon states”. It was decided that the entire P5 – not just Russia and China – would be involved equally in working with Mongolia.

In principle, the resolution would cover the international aspects of Mongolia’s security as well as its nuclear-weapon-free status. In short, Mongolia and the P5 had agreed in principle on several key points. There would be no reference to institutionalization,\textsuperscript{18} a single-state NWFZ, or security assurances. On the other hand, the General Assembly would welcome Mongolia’s declaration of its status – though the content of the status was yet to be defined – and decide to inscribe a separate item entitled “Mongolia’s international security and nuclear-weapon-free status” on its 2000 agenda. Diplomacy is a delicate process that needs its own time and space. Mongolia was not in any hurry and preferred to provide time for the P5 to better understand Mongolia’s case and how nuclear-weapon-free status would contribute to the common goal. Also for Mongolia, the process of having the issue on UN General Assembly agenda was as important as the ultimate goal. It was a positive outcome for all. The resolution was adopted by the General Assembly without a vote, which opened the way to pursuing the issue further by political and diplomatic means.

**Challenges in Implementing the Resolution and the Results Achieved**

Adoption of General Assembly resolution 53/77 D was a diplomatic achievement involving great powers and a small state. It was welcomed not only by Mongolia but also by the international community, which saw it as an important measure toward strengthening the non-proliferation regime in the region.

But the devil is always in details, and the resolution’s implementation was not as easy as it seemed. Implementation of each one of its operative provision implied specific actions of states. Since most of the actionable provisions are addressed to the UN general membership, the P5 countries tried to distance themselves, to the extent possible, from implementing such provisions, except for issues dealing directly with nuclear weapons.

Immediately after the adoption of the resolution, Mongolia began working on its national legislation. It defined nuclear-weapon-free status and criminalized acts violating that status. When the legislation was adopted, Mongolia had the text circulated as an official document of both the General Assembly and the Security Council. At the beginning, the P5 were keen to see Mongolia adopt legislation defining the status at the national level. But once it had been adopted, they lost interest in it, saying that national legislation was an internal affair of Mongolia.

Mongolia’s priority with regard to the P5 was to obtain security assurances in connection with the status. In 1999, Russia expressed its readiness to work with others to provide “appropriate” security assurances to Mongolia. Based on that, Mongolia proposed to the P5 to conclude a memorandum of understanding similar to the one

\textsuperscript{18}In Mongolia’s case, institutionalization does not have to mean a permanent standing international body, but rather an agreement in principle on such issues as observation of the status, exchanging of relevant information, reporting (mostly by Mongolia), and if need be, conducting consultations as well as designating relevant units (most probably at MFAs) that would in general be in charge of the issue. On a number of occasions, Mongolia has explained its view on the issue to the P5; however, they were reluctant to assume any obligation regarding the status beyond their general political support. The P5 did not want to proliferate international institutions nor set precedents for other individual cases.
that the United States, Russia and the United Kingdom concluded with Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan in December 1994 in Budapest, whereby they have pledged to provide security assurances to the latter three.

After some discussions with Mongolia, the P5 decided to make a joint statement on security assurances in connection with Mongolia’s status. Having underlined Mongolia’s unique geographic location and their commitment to cooperate in implementing resolution 53/77 D, in their joint statement of October 2000, the P5 countries reaffirmed their commitment to positive security assurances as well as their respective unilateral negative security assurances specified in Security Council resolution 984 of 11 April 1995. They also announced in the joint statement that they had fulfilled their commitment under resolution 53/77 D.

**Campaign to Right the Wrong**

Although Mongolia officially stated that it considered the P5 joint statement to be an important step toward institutionalizing its nuclear-weapon-free status at the international level, it unofficially complained about the statement’s form and content. As to the form, it complained that it was only a political statement and not a legally binding assurance. As to the content, it thought that it was reminiscent of the Cold War period and failed to reflect the real situation on the ground. Simply put, it contained the conditions under which the P5 countries other than China – which pledged not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states and NWFZs at any time or under any circumstances – would not use nuclear weapons against it. Mongolia thought that it was not an appropriate assurance and decided to “right the wrong”. It therefore proposed to have Security Council adopt a short resolution that would welcome the joint statement, note that Mongolia’s good relations with its neighbours would strengthen its status and call upon states to respect and promote the status. The P5 countries, having consulted among themselves, announced that enough had been done for Mongolia and they thus could not support a Security Council resolution since that would set a precedent.

**Sapporo Spirit**

Mongolia believed that not enough had been done to address its concerns, and, in the spirit of the campaign to right the wrong, continued to pursue its objective. After some talks with the representatives of the P5 and the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs, the latter has agreed to hold an informal meeting of the P5 and Mongolia and discuss the legal standing of the “status” and how it could be promoted further. The meeting took place in September 2001 in Sapporo, Japan. The participants agreed that Mongolia’s status had not been clearly defined and that to legally define the status and make it viable, Mongolia needed to conclude a treaty to that effect either with all the P5 countries or just with Russia and China. In the latter case, there could be a protocol for the P3 to sign and commit to respect the treaty and not to contribute to any act which would violate it. Knowing a priori the P3’s reluctance to conclude a six-party treaty, Mongolia opted for the tripartite treaty, as it was prepared to do so in 1997.
In 2002, it presented to its two neighbours the possible elements of the tripartite treaty and asked for their comments. Then, bearing in mind their written comments, in 2007 it presented them with a 15-article draft treaty and a P3 draft protocol to it as discussed earlier in Sapporo and invited them to discuss the drafts. In 2009, the three countries met twice in Geneva to discuss the drafts. At both meetings, Mongolia extensively explained the draft provisions of the treaty and the protocol.

At the end of the two meetings, Russian and Chinese representatives announced that they would not want to set a precedent of two members of the P5 concluding separate treaties with a non-nuclear-weapon state and breaking the established practice of the P5 providing joint security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon-states. That is why they underlined that presence of the P3 was necessary at the next meeting. They also suggested that contacting those countries and ensuring their participation would be Mongolia’s responsibility. With regard to the draft treaty and the protocol to it, they said that they would present their joint written questions and comments prior to the following meeting. Subsequently, as promised, Russia and China provided their 25-point joint written questions and comments.

Mongolia’s contacts with the United States, the United Kingdom and France indicated that they were not keen to have “P5 + Mongolia” talks on the draft treaty. The P3 countries explained that they would not agree to provide treaty based security assurances to a single state but that they would be open to other ideas and suggestions. This invitation led Mongolia to review its insistence on treaty based security assurances and to propose signing parallel declarations. Under this plan, Mongolia would reaffirm its nuclear-weapon-free commitment while the P5 would in a joint declaration pledge to respect the status and not to contribute to any act that would violate it. After some discussion, the P5 agreed to the proposal. Thus, on 17 September 2012, the P5 and Mongolia signed the parallel declarations (see UNGA documents A/67/393-S/2012/721 and A/67/517-S/2012/760). The P5 joint declaration welcomed the passage of the Mongolian legislation in 2000 and pledged to respect the status and not to contribute to any act that would violate it. The Mongolian representatives saw the document as a pledge that their country would not be used as a pawn in future geopolitical rivalries that could destabilize the region through provocative missile defence or anti-missile defence policies. In short, Mongolia understood that the P5 had committed to Mongolia and to one another that the Mongolian territory would remain a transparent zone of confidence and stability and would not be used to harm interests of others or destabilize the region.

**Looking to the Future**

For Mongolia, obtaining international recognition of its nuclear-weapon-free status is not an end in itself but a means of strengthening its own security and contributing to the common cause of making the world more secure. Enjoying wide international support and having obtained political security assurances from the P5 countries, two of which are its immediate neighbours, Mongolia is now turning its attention to properly institutionalizing its status.
The next step at the international level is to have the General Assembly formally welcome Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-free status. So far the General Assembly has been welcoming (in the preamble of its biennial resolutions on the issue) the declaration by Mongolia of its nuclear-weapon-free status or its efforts (emphasis added by the author) to that effect, and since 2012 (in its operative part) welcoming the parallel declarations, but never the status itself. Mongolia is not satisfied with “welcoming Mongolia’s declaration” or “welcoming its efforts”. The General Assembly needs to say that it welcomes the status. Reluctance by the P5 to welcome Mongolia’s status is incomprehensible. Since 1998, the General Assembly in its resolutions on Mongolia’s status has been underlining its conviction that internationally recognized status of Mongolia “would contribute to enhancing stability and regional confidence-building”. However, when it comes to formal recognition of the status as such, due to the P5 reluctance, the Assembly has been avoiding to acknowledge it as a form of a NWFZ. The P5 reluctance is connected with the provision of General Assembly resolution 3472 (XXX) B regarding definition of the concept of a NWFZ, part III of which, that deals with the scope of the definitions, underlines that the definitions of the regional zone “in no way impair the resolutions which the General Assembly has adopted or may adopt with regard to specific cases of nuclear-weapon-free zones nor the rights emanating from the Member States from such resolutions”. Mongolia, like the overwhelming majority of United Nations membership, sees its unique status as a specific case that has been welcomed by the General Assembly in 1998.

Moreover, in their joint declaration, the P5 have already pledged not only to respect the status but also not to contribute to any act that would violate it. Their concern that such a provision might set a precedent is untenable since the General Assembly by its resolutions has already set a precedent and the P5 countries have provided appropriate security assurances in connection with the status, as reflected in their joint declaration. Therefore “welcoming” the status would only dot the “i” and cross the “t”. Nothing more, nothing less.

At the national level, the legislation needs to be updated by making sure that the territory of Mongolia includes increasing number of aircrafts and commercial ships that sail with Mongolian flag in open seas. Also, the law needs to define clearly the nuclear-weapon system support facilities that should be prohibited.

At the regional level, Mongolia needs to work to have the issue of its nuclear-weapon-free status considered at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and other regional fora that usually consider security-related issues and make the status an important stabilizing factor of regional security and confidence-building.

That is why Mongolia needs to make the status an organic part of the emerging East Asian regional security architecture. However, it is not adequate to have members of the East Asia region declare the status a “concrete contribution to nuclear non-proliferation and promoting confidence and predictability in the region”. In order to be viable and effective, the status needs to be clearly understood by the members of the East Asian region, have a verification arrangement so that it can play a practical positive role and even serve as an example of an innovative approach for non-traditional cases.

The most convenient forum for considering the issue is the ARF. In 1999, the forum welcomed Mongolia’s status and in 2012 it welcomed the P5 joint declaration. There are

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19 See, for example, General Assembly resolution A/RES/71/43 of 9 December 2016.
other reasons for turning to ARF. The forum is designed to foster constructive dialogue and consultations on political and security issues and contribute to confidence-building and conflict prevention. ARF membership includes three recognized nuclear-weapon states (Russia, China and the United States), three de facto nuclear-weapon states (India, Pakistan and the DPRK) and three nuclear capable states under an extended nuclear umbrella (Japan, South Korea and Australia). That is why Mongolia, first informally and then formally, approached the ARF with the proposal to have Mongolia’s status discussed at the forum as a contribution to promoting confidence and predictability. Informally, Mongolia first raised the issue at the ASEAN Inter-Sessional Meeting on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament held in July 2014 in Tokyo when ARF was holding a workshop entitled “A World Without Nuclear Weapons”. Then ARF held an expert-level workshop entitled “Promoting a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Status of Mongolia” in Ulaanbaatar in September 2015, which was attended by 39 participants from 13 ARF member states. The participants agreed that the workshop had contributed to a better understanding of Mongolia’s status, the national and regional significance of status, “second-generation” zones and non-traditional cases. All agreed that future cases would need a more creative, nuanced approach and hard bargaining.

Workshop participants displayed interest in Mongolia’s understanding and interpretation of “non-stationing of nuclear weapons” on its territory in the light of the political developments in Europe and Asia. Thus, Mongolia sees its status commitment as “prohibiting of placing on its territory of nuclear weapon-related support facilities such as communication, surveillance and intelligence-gathering facilities or air navigational installations designed to serve nuclear strategic systems”. Mongolia explained that such an understanding was important because the current trend among the nuclear-weapon states was to further modernize their nuclear arsenals and weapons systems and to develop technology to set up missile defence or anti-missile defence systems that would need to be placed on territories of third states.

Mongolia still believes that the best and most logical way to institutionalize the status is for the P5 to reverse its discriminatory policy and for Russia and China to conclude a trilateral treaty with Mongolia that would clearly define its status and have the other nuclear-weapon states sign a protocol supporting it. If such a stand-alone treaty approach is still unacceptable, then Mongolia could opt for a special international regime regarding Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-free status based on previously made international commitments regarding the status as well as by making use of the existing and emerging principles and norms regarding NWFZs. The regime, to be consistent with other zones, should have proper consultation, verification and enforcement mechanisms. This would be a win-win outcome for all and for regional stability and predictability.

A Northeast Asian NWFZ

As mentioned earlier, Mongolia pursues a security policy in line with the saying that “a duck is calm when the lake is calm”. Steps such as linking Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-
free status with issues of regional peace and security and promoting the idea of establishing a Northeast Asian NWFZ are based on that approach to its external security. Establishing a Northeast Asian NWFZ is not a brand-new idea. A brief look at the informal proposals that already have been made\textsuperscript{21} shows that there is an abundance of different ideas in this regard. All of them in their own way underline the possibility of establishing such a zone. Also, the history of the establishment of the world’s five current NWFZs vividly demonstrates that such zones can be established elsewhere, provided that the proposal comes from the regional states concerned and that there is a real need for it and the political will to implement it.

Among the various approaches to a Northeast Asian NWFZ, it seems that the most practical and perhaps a doable one is a comprehensive approach that would focus not only on actual provisions that need to be reflected in an international treaty but also on political conditions and circumstances that need to be created to allow greater confidence, free exchange of ideas, greater interaction and direct cooperation. The approach would need to include the interests of all the potential parties to the NWFZ treaty and of the nuclear-weapon states that are expected to provide legally binding nuclear-security assurances to the states parties to the zone and to the zone itself. Such an approach is being promoted by organizations such as the Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University (Halperin, Hayes, and Sigal 2018; Suzuki 2018). They propose, besides establishing a Northeast Asian NWFZ, termination of the state of war on the Korean peninsula, creation of a permanent council on security, mutual declaration of no hostile intent, provision of assistance for nuclear and other energy, and termination of sanctions.

**Mongolia’s Possible Role**

When it comes to a Northeast Asian NWFZ, Mongolia sees for itself two possible roles. The first is to start an informal process to discuss the conditions and possibilities of establishing the zone. When addressing the high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament in 2013, Mongolia proposed that as a country with first-hand experience in ensuring security primarily by political and diplomatic means, it was prepared on an informal basis to work with countries of Northeast Asia to see if and how an NFWZ could be established in the region. That would not be easy and would require courage, political will and perseverance. It would certainly not happen right away. Second, once the process starts, Mongolia can contribute ideas and share its experience, such as the challenges it faced or still faces in institutionalizing its status. It has no interest in artificially imposing its experience onto others, especially those that pursue policies based on doctrines of nuclear deterrence.

\textsuperscript{21}Examples include John Endicott’s proposal on a limited nuclear-weapon-free zone involving only nonstrategic weapons; Andrew Mack’s proposal that would involve the two Koreas, Japan and Taiwan; Kumao Kaneko’s proposal of a zone involving a territory within a 2000-km radius of Panmunjom; Dr Hiromichi Umebayashi’s 3 + 3 proposal and model NWFZ treaty, Seongwhum Cheon and Tatsujiro Suzuki’s tripartite NWFZ involving the two Koreas and Japan; Jaejung Suh’s proposal of multilateralizing the 1992 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the Nautilus Institute’s comprehensive approach to security in Northeast Asia, which would include, *inter alia*, establishment of a Northeast Asian NWFZ and its latest more refined version by RECNA (Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University).
Trust-Building and Dialogue Are Needed

In order to seriously consider the various proposals, it is important to promote trust, without which such issues would end up only as good ideas and proposals. Hence trust-building and dialogue are crucial. For that reason, Mongolia has time and again been making and promoting confidence-building proposals.

In the 1980s, in 2001 and in 2013, it made concrete proposals to this effect. In the 1980s, the proposal to develop a regional mechanism was dismissed due to the Cold War mindset and considered by the West as a pro-Soviet initiative. The 2001 proposal was considered as proposing an intergovernmental track 1 mechanism which the states of the region were not prepared to accept. Due to the prolonged deadlock at the SPT on North Korea’s nuclear program, Mongolia launched in 2013 a semi-governmental 1.5 track Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian Security (UBD) initiative aimed, again, at trust-building in the region. This is because lack of trust prevented the SPT from generating the political will and practically acceptable proposals needed to productively address the challenges.

When Mongolia made its UBD proposal, states in the region, especially the countries involved in the SPT, were sensitive to it, believing that the initiative might somehow interfere with the talks that ceased in 2008 in case they resumed. The Mongolian side explained that the proposal was aimed at contributing to reducing mistrust through dialogue that could lead to the emergence of a needed dialogue mechanism.

As to the possible forms of such a dialogue, the Mongolian side explained that it would be an unofficial, academic approach under which researchers and government officials in their personal capacity could freely exchange their views on issues of common interest under the Chatham House Rule, meaning that information disclosed during the meeting may be disclosed while the source of the information may not be identified. The possible topics for such a discussion cover a wide range of soft security issues of mutual interest, such as economic cooperation, military transparency, environmental issues, non-traditional security threats and regional stability. If need be, the UBD could be converted into a track 1 mechanism addressing soft security issues of common concern and interest. The advantage of the UBD is that North Korea supports and regularly takes part in it. The UBD holds annual meetings that focus on specific aspects of regional soft security issues.

One overlooked area in promoting Northeast Asian security is making use of the potential of national and regional civil-society organizations that by their nature have comparative advantages and can provide added value in creating space for dialogue, facilitating dialogue, and even generating useful and practical ideas and proposals. Due to the serious challenges that the region is facing, there are many national and regional civil-society organizations that are keen or interested in promoting dialogue and confidence. One such organizations the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), which has 15 regional networks that promote their goals through efficient information exchange and sharing of experience. Dialogue and mediation is GPPAC’s one key priority, which is supported by a working group composed of representatives of nine regions, including Northeast Asia.
As far back as in 2005, when considering the comparative advantages of its focal points, GPPAC’s Northeast Asian network flagged the idea of launching an inclusive civil-society process to promote confidence and cooperation in the region. Due to Mongolia’s active foreign policy, its internationally recognized nuclear-weapon-free status and its maintenance of diplomatic and friendly relations with all the states of the region, including North Korea, it fell to Blue Banner, a Mongolian NGO devoted to promoting nuclear non-proliferation and the country’s nuclear-weapon-free status, to take up the challenge, together with its GPPAC colleagues. After careful consideration of the political-military situation in the region and the apparent deadlock in the SPT, the GPPAC Northeast Asian network decided to launch the Ulaanbaatar Process (UBP), a track 2 regional process to provide political space and a venue for unofficial meetings aimed at supporting 1.5 track political processes. The UBP was launched in Ulaanbaatar in June 2015. In that same year, the GPPAC Northeast Asia Network adopted a framework document for civil-society dialogues for peace and stability in Northeast Asia. The document defined its objectives, its expected impact, governing principles, priority thematic areas, engagement and target groups, core activities, funding, visibility, time frame and targets, and monitoring and evaluation. Priority themes in the initial years would be peace and security on the Korean peninsula and establishment of a Northeast Asian NWFZ.

Conclusion

This article has tried to show that non-nuclear-weapon states, including small ones, can contribute to strengthening regional confidence and predictability, and that given goodwill and perseverance, even great powers and small states can come to agreement on issues affecting their individual and common interests. Mongolia’s experience can be useful for small states including some small island states or entities that cannot be part of traditional (regional) NWFZs due to their geographical or geopolitical location, but do not want to be a blind spot in the emerging nuclear-weapon-free space. In a broader context, based on their specific needs, small states can also launch a process that could benefit the entire region and thus contribute in their own way to the cause of international peace and disarmament.

International practice demonstrates that negotiations are more than mere bargaining. However, to be productive, each side must make a genuine effort to understand the other’s legitimate interests and to find solutions without compromising those interests. Small states can pursue active and successful foreign policies that are based not only on their national interests but also on regional and broader common interests, trying not to pose a threat to the legitimate interests of great or regional powers. Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-free status policy is an example of such a policy.

Regarding Mongolia’s policy on nuclear-weapon-free status, Mongolia so far has not been able to obtain legally based security assurances from the P5 or to institutionalize

22Beijing, Hong Kong, Kyoto, Seoul, Shanghai, Taipei, Tokyo, Ulaanbaatar and Vladivostok. Pyongyang participates in the work as a partner.
23Besides the regional focal points, GPPAC’s global and regional secretariats as well as observers’ representatives of China Foreign Affairs University, Alliance for Peacebuilding (US) and American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) Dalian office (US) take part in the meetings as participants.
24Nepal or Afghanistan is a case in point.
the status at the international level. Aware that credibility of political commitments are usually “situational” and follow the strategic interests, Mongolia persists in obtaining legally based assurances. In this respect, the work is still in progress.

Promotion of the UBD, Northeast Asian NWFZ and the UBP could, in Mongolia’s view, lead gradually to greater confidence and dialogue that could advance a productive joint search for a more cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship in the region. These efforts can be considered as Mongolia’s contribution to regional peace and security. This, in turn, can provide an appropriate condition for institutionalizing Mongolia’s status as an organic part of the regional security structure. Duly institutionalized nuclear-weapon-free status would further promote the cause of strengthening confidence and international security by serving as an example of contribution of an individual small state to international security.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on Contributor

Enkhsaikhan Jargalsai Khan is the founder and Chairman of Blue Banner, Mongolian NGO dedicated to promoting the goals of nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear security. He served as Executive secretary of Mongolia’s National Security Council when the country adopted its first National security and Foreign Policy concepts in 1994. He also served as Mongolia’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations and as President of IAEA’s General Conference in 2010. He is a promoter and architect of the country’s nuclear-weapon-free status policy. He has contributed many articles on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament issues. In 2015, he published a book entitled Mongolia’s Nuclear Future... (in Mongolian).

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