

Steppes of Resistance

Mongolian Nationalism as a Strategic

Resistance to Chinese

Revanchism in the Indo-Pacific



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Geographically wedged between two giants, the once expansive Mongol Empire now occupies a fraction of its former territory, balancing its desire to maintain its relatively young modern sovereignty against a growing dependence on and influence of Russia and China. Mongolians, having been controlled by both powers, grasp at any opportunity to reinforce their historical identity and preserve their cultural traditions in order to assert their autonomy in the complex geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific. Despite persistent Chinese efforts to exert soft power and influence, the Mongolian people have seen the most success in resisting external pressure by maintaining their deeply rooted culture and rejecting Chinese ideologies. This article examines Mongolian nationalism as a nonkinetic strategy of resistance to Chinese revanchism, demonstrating how identity, history, and ideology not only deflect Chinese influence but also present the United States with a strategic opportunity to cultivate a resilient partner force through information operations, civil-military engagement, geostrategic messaging, and irregular warfare planning.

Historical Foundations of Mongolian Nationalism

Mongolia's national identity is intricately tied to the legacy of the Mongol Empire. Chinggis Khaan,

historically known as an influential military leader, was also a unifying figure whose image continues to represent the strength and independence of the Mongolian people. In the early thirteenth century, Chinggis Khaan consolidated disparate nomadic tribes into a singular institution, forming world history's largest contiguous land empire. Weatherford notes that the "Mongol armies destroyed the uniqueness of the civilizations around them by shattering the protective walls that isolated one civilization from another and by knotting the cultures together."¹ While often remembered internationally for his military campaigns in which his armies benefited from adaptability and numerous engineering feats, Mongolians revere him as a lawgiver and civilizing figure who established an early governance system; promoted religious tolerance at a time where religious persecution was common; and created the modern ideas of diplomacy, passports, and diplomatic immunity.

Following Mongolia's transition from Soviet-supported socialism to democracy in the 1990s, there has been a pronounced resurgence in public references to Chinggis Khaan and the Mongol Empire. The Soviets were aware of the power that the idea of a nationalist hero like Khaan could wield and specifically and systematically erased him from school curriculums, government buildings, and cultural mentions apart



An honor guard braves the cold to welcome Air Force Gen. Richard B. Myers during the chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff's 13 January 2004 visit to Mongolia. (Photo by Jim Garamone, Department of War)

from limited footnotes in museum texts. In his stead, they erected statues of Mongolians who fought alongside the Soviet army to win Mongolia's freedom from China but who were also eager to adopt Soviet socialism. After Mongolia's embrace of democracy, they were quick to once again embrace their historic hero.

"After the breakup of the Soviet Union," Mei-hua Lan states, "the Mongolians were desperately searching for a redeeming figure who would remind them of their own greatness ... the most preferred choice was certainly Chinggis Khaan."² His name and image are widely embraced across commercial, civic, and governmental platforms, including on currency, public infrastructure (e.g., Chinggis Khaan International

Airport), and national holidays. It is almost expected to see a portrait of either Chinggis Khaan or Kublai Khaan in every office, store, and home; unlike state-required portraits of Xi Jinping or Mao Zedong in Chinese businesses, this choice by citizens seems almost in patriotic defiance of the decades of being barred from celebrating his legacy. This resurgence reconnects the population with its historical roots and distinguishes Mongolian identity from its powerful neighbors, particularly China and Russia, who have historically challenged Mongolian autonomy. As Michael Dillon notes, while the violence of the imperial era is acknowledged, many Mongolians view the revival of Chinggis Khaan's legacy as a way to recover "at least some of the



The Chinggis Khaan Equestrian Statue in Tsonjin Boldog, Mongolia, faces east toward his birthplace, the Dadal Soum. (Photo by author)

former greatness” and assert cultural sovereignty in the face of modern geopolitical pressures.³

The Mongolian ability to maintain identity under foreign domination proves their nationalistic fortitude. Whether under Qing rule, Soviet alignment, or contemporary global pressures, Mongolia has consistently worked to preserve its language and culture. The revival of Classical Mongolian script and the protection of Buddhist and shamanistic traditions help illustrate how Mongolians have resisted cultural erasure. This cultural preservation is not only an expression of national pride but is also formally supported by the Mongolian state. Article 5 of the Law on Culture, as amended in 2002, outlines the civic duty of every citizen to protect and develop historical and cultural traditions, pass on the mother tongue, and defend cultural values from any form of attack.⁴

These historical and cultural elements create a lasting framework that will consistently help in shaping public sentiment, reinforcing civil-military trust,

and countering external influence. In strategic terms, Mongolian nationalism represents a deeply rooted form of ideological resilience that, if properly understood and supported, could serve not only as a buffer against adversarial soft power in the Indo-Pacific but also as dormant armor that is ready to be deployed when threats arise.

Comparing Historical Nationalism as Strategic Resistance

While Mongolian nationalism provides a unique case of resistance against foreign influence, it is not without historical precedent. Other nations under occupation or external pressure have similarly turned to nationalism as a tool of nonkinetic defense. These comparisons provide context for Mongolia’s current position between two historically revisionist powers and highlight the strategic importance of cultural identity as a stabilizing and mobilizing force.

During the Nazi occupation of France (1940–1944), nationalism became a core instrument in sustaining internal resistance. Resistance groups embraced symbols of French identity in Vichy France and the German-occupied northern regions like Marianne and Joan of Arc.⁵ These figures helped inspire a sense of unity and common purpose, bringing together people with different beliefs and strengthening the spirit of the French populace. Although the French Resistance varied widely in political orientation, a shared belief in French sovereignty and cultural survival was a central motivator for civilians to conduct sabotage operations and create underground communication networks. As Matthew Kocher et al. argue, nationalism in occupied France did not automatically produce resistance, but where it was effectively channeled into collective memory and local networks, it proved essential to both morale and operational resilience.⁶ Similarly, the idea of Chinggis Khaan and collective pride in the Mongol Empire create a motivating factor in modern Mongolian society—one that can be utilized to inspire and potentially mobilize Mongolians during times of conflict or crisis.

While many national resistance movements, such as those in occupied France during World War II, emphasized cultural defiance and armed resistance to foreign control, nationalism is not always oppositional. In Iraq, for instance, nationalism did not lead to a blanket rejection of foreign intervention. As Karl C. Kaltenthaler



Left: A map of Asia highlights Mongolia's location between Russia and China. (Map from Adobe Stock) Top: The Mongolian national flag was adopted in 1992. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

et al. demonstrate, national identity among Iraqis often increased support for foreign military involvement, particularly when those interventions were perceived as protecting the nation's survival.⁷ Iraqis who identified primarily with the nation-state were more likely to support intervention by external powers, whether the U.S.-led coalition, Iran, or Russia, when those actions were seen as defending Iraqi sovereignty against threats like the Islamic State. A similar view in tying nationalism to embracing foreign assistance for the purposes of survival can be seen in Mongolia's vocal appreciation for its "third neighbors," a title they regularly apply to Western-minded countries who do not physically border them but with whom they have established economic, educational, and nonalliance military ties. Careful to not commit too explicitly to Western countries for fear of retribution from Russia or China, Mongolia often uses memorandums of understanding and capacity-building military exercises as ways to deepen their bilateral relationships, which encourages the population to support these neighbors should conflict or crisis occur.

While not currently engaged in open conflict, Mongolia uses its nationalism as a long-term tool of cultural preservation and selective alignment, resisting coercion from powerful neighbors while reinforcing ties with trusted partners. Still, the cases of France, Iraq,

and Mongolia demonstrate how deeply rooted national identity can be mobilized strategically, whether to repel unwanted influence or align with external actors under specific conditions. In Mongolia, nationalism operates as a preventative defense, resisting gradual ideological encroachment through the preservation and practice of their culture and traditions. This identity reinforces internal cohesion and positions Mongolia as a potential partner to the United States in a conflict scenario, where sovereignty and ideological resilience can matter as much as conventional force posture.

Mongolian Nationalism as Strategic Resistance

The U.S. ambassador to Mongolia, Richard Buangan, said, "Countries that were once empires cling to their nostalgia to fuel modern pride."⁸ For this article, Mongolian nationalism should be understood as a form of cultural nationalism grounded in the country's historical legacy (Chinggis Khaan and the Mongol Empire), linguistic identity (Mongolian language and script), and belief in their national sovereignty. Rather than functioning as an exclusionary or ethnocentric ideology, it operates as a social force emphasizing cultural continuity, shaped by a collective memory of a legacy of both conquering (Mongol Empire) and subjugation (Qing dynasty and Soviet Russia), and resilience in the face of external pressure and influence. Drawing heavily from the legacy of the Mongol Empire, particularly the unifying narrative of Chinggis Khaan, modern expressions of nationalism are visible across city landmarks, in public education, and during national



A group of traditional Kazakh eagle hunters hold their golden eagles while galloping on horseback through a river in Ulgi, Mongolia. (Photo by Kertu, Adobe Stock)

holidays. Elements like living in *gers* (a traditional circular dwelling also known as a yurt), the last wild horse species on earth (known as Przewalski's horse, or *Takhi*), and the multiday patriotic sports festival called *Naadam* are especially exalted and celebrated as proof of Mongolian superiority. Sarah Thompson, assistant public affairs officer at the U.S. Embassy in Mongolia, stated, "Even after many centuries, Chinggis Khaan and the legacy of the Mongol Empire are the most significant and unifying claims to Mongolians culturally."⁹ These cultural figures create a durable link between past and present, reinforcing that Mongolian identity has withstood centuries of subjugation and political pressure from Mongolia's larger neighbors.

In the current geopolitical environment, this nationalism plays a critical role in resisting Chinese ideological and cultural expansionism. Beijing's efforts to exert influence through economic dependency, targeted information narratives, and regional diplomacy are often met in Mongolia with skepticism, especially when they are perceived as attempts to redefine Mongolian identity or history, which can be seen in the People's Republic of China's (PRC) treatment of Mongols in

Inner Mongolia. In this context, nationalism becomes a nonkinetic form of resistance: the population's commitment to cultural preservation, national symbolism, ownership of their country, and traditional nomadic values function as a fortification against ideological assimilation. Furthermore, this deeply ingrained cultural pride fosters internal cohesion and bolsters national morale, which can prove strategically significant during a crisis or conflict.

The strategic relevance of Mongolian nationalism becomes clearer when viewed against sustained Chinese influence operations. While Mongolia has formally resisted alignment with Beijing, the PRC has invested heavily in their attempts to shape Mongolia's political, cultural, and economic landscape. Influence activities include the expansion of Confucius Institutes (there are currently five institutes in Mongolia) to promote the Mandarin language and Chinese historical narratives, and strategic investments in infrastructure and mining

projects tied to the PRC Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Jargalsaikhan Mendee notes, “Mongolia has supported all types of initiatives by China regarding the BRI ... and began to seek funds for possible infrastructure projects from Chinese banks.”¹⁰ These efforts are often accompanied by strategies designed to gain economic leverage over other countries. Without internal resistance, the pressure from the PRC could compromise Mongolia’s cultural independence, allowing the emergence of narratives that align more closely with the PRC’s worldview.

The utility of Mongolian nationalism is further illustrated when contrasted with the experience of ethnic Mongols in China’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. In recent years, the PRC has taken strong measures to suppress expressions of Mongolian identity within its borders. These measures include mandating that all subjects in Inner Mongolian public schools be taught Chinese-Mandarin, banning the instruction or use of Mongolian language in education entirely. The PRC has also removed textbooks on Mongolian history from classrooms, replaced Mongolian programming on state-run media with Chinese cultural programs and detained activists who advocate for Mongol cultural preservation. These policies have led to protests among ethnic Mongols and have attracted international attention to the PRC’s agenda. While Inner Mongolians face increasing cultural erasure, many have secretly maintained their language and taught history through a Mongolian lens to others, in part due to the strength of their nationalism. This can be seen during Mongolian holidays where Inner Mongolians travel to Mongolia to participate in Mongolian holiday traditions, often filming their cultural performances to promote the Mongolian culture throughout the region.¹¹ By contrasting these outcomes, it becomes evident that Mongolian nationalism can be an effective strategic resistance method.

Operationalizing Mongolian Nationalism

Recognizing Mongolian nationalism as a form of resistance offers the United States a unique opportunity to cultivate a resilient, ideologically aligned partner in the Indo-Pacific. Rather than viewing Mongolia’s cultural independence as a passive byproduct of geography and history, U.S. policymakers and military planners

should treat it as an operational asset that can be reinforced and mobilized in ways that complicate PRC influence without requiring permanent basing or overt military escalation. The following lines of effort (LOE) represent practical avenues through which Mongolian nationalism can be integrated into strategic planning and partnered engagement.

LOE 1: Narrative Development and Information Operations

The first and most immediate opportunity lies in shaping and amplifying Mongolian nationalism that resists Chinese soft power and influence. Mongolian identity is already steeped in pride for its historical legacy, with Chinggis Khaan representing not just a figure of military conquest but also as a lawgiver and founder of civilization. U.S. support for initiatives highlighting this legacy, particularly through cultural exchanges, public diplomacy, and partner-led information operations (IO), can help reinforce the United States as a critical third neighbor to Mongolia that values and supports their sovereignty as a fellow democracy. As an example, one such effort already exists within the U.S. embassy’s social media strategy. Thompson stated that the U.S. embassy does “lots of public messaging. When it comes to Mongolian holidays and traditions, the ambassador wears traditional clothing and does his best to utilize the Mongolian language ... Other ambassadors do not make this same effort to emphasize the importance of Mongolian customs and traditions.”¹² This messaging often sees positive responses from Mongolians, proving its effectiveness, and shows that the United States is dedicated to its role as a third neighbor.

Statistics provided by the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Mongolia show that posts highlighting the U.S. ambassador participating in Mongolian customs and traditions do well on social media. A video posted to celebrate Mongolian Lunar New Year (which uses a separate lunar calendar calculation than Chinese Lunar New Year) of the ambassador learning and practicing traditional Mongolian script calligraphy had a combined view count of over 75,000 views, 1,752 “likes,” and over 60 “shares.”¹³ A different post showing the ambassador and other U.S. foreign service officers reciting Mongolian poetry gained over 112,000 views, 6,490 “likes,” and 646

“shares.”¹⁴ These two social media posts highlight the strong relationship Mongolians have with their customs and traditions and the positive response received when Americans participate in them.

Equally as compelling is the Mongolian public’s strong negative reaction to perceived slights to their cultural identity. For example, Mongolians traditionally positively call Russia their “big brother” in reference to how they felt supported and protected by Russia in gaining their independence from China and then being under Soviet alignment for the subsequent decades. However, when the Russian ambassador to Mongolia did not share Mongolian Lunar New Year greetings with the public in 2024 via social media or traditional media channels, the criticisms were swift. Mongolian social media users commented on how insulting it was to be overlooked in this way, and they even started calling Russia “little brother” to express how far their respect for Russia had fallen as a result of ignoring this Mongolian custom.

When utilizing U.S. Army psychological operations (PSYOP) and IO, narrative development in Mongolia should be oriented toward reinforcing national identity and the United States’ appreciation of

Mongolian nationalism. Messaging such as the social media posts above can be boosted through Army unit capabilities, furthering the reach of Mongolia-positive messaging. PSYOP units can further craft culturally resonant messages that emphasize Mongolia’s democratic values, historic nonalignment (neutrality between China and Russia), and long-standing resistance to foreign control. Messaging products should incorporate widely recognized national symbols such as the writing system, Przewalski’s horse, the snow leopard, and historical figures like Chinggis Khaan as themes to promote unity and nationalism and as a reminder of their prior empire. Americans participating in Mongolian traditions has also shown to be an effective method of messaging, as it relates to Mongolian nationalism. These efforts can be distributed via targeted print, radio, and social media campaigns through local partners to maintain credibility.

Concurrently, IO elements utilizing Field Manual (FM) 3-13, *Information Operations*, should support these efforts through synchronized messaging that degrades adversary influence.¹⁵ This includes identifying, exposing, and neutralizing Chinese propaganda narratives, particularly those framing economic



A monument featuring the iconic *Soyombo* symbol overlooks the Khatgal Soum in Khovsgol Province, Mongolia. The symbol, also found on the Mongolian national flag, represents the country’s independence and enduring spirit. (Photo by author; for more on the Soyombo symbol, see “The Soyombo Symbol: Mongolia’s Ancient Emblem of Identity and Freedom,” Mongolia Travel Guide blog, <https://mongolia-travelguide.com/the-soyombo-symbol-mongolias-ancient-emblem-of-identity-and-freedom/>)

dependency as a partnership (such as with the BRI) or downplaying the erosion of Mongolian cultural autonomy (seen in Inner Mongolia). IO planners can leverage influence assessment tools and cultural terrain analysis to identify key demographic groups susceptible to PRC messaging and employ tailored content that reframes Chinese tactics as coercive threats to national sovereignty. These operations should be synchronized with embassy public affairs campaigns and host-nation public affairs to achieve unity of effort across the information environment.

Beyond direct messaging, U.S. Army efforts should prioritize building Mongolian capacity to independently conduct culturally grounded information operations. In coordination with public affairs personnel, PSYOP units can facilitate train-the-trainer programs to help Mongolian defense and civil information institutions develop their message production capabilities. These programs should integrate Mongolian history, language, and symbolism into established IO and PSYOP models, allowing Mongolian practitioners to generate content aligning with national values and modern information tactics. Furthermore, these messaging capabilities can lend their focus to inspire more nationalism throughout the population.

Drawing from FM 3-13, planners should also assist in developing host-nation influence assessment frameworks that enable Mongolian partners to identify vulnerable audiences, measure message effectiveness, and respond to PRC influence operations. Support could include workshops delivered through military-to-military exchanges or in collaboration with the U.S. embassy's public affairs and educational outreach initiatives. In this model, the U.S. role shifts from primary communicator to enabler, reinforcing a Mongolian-led information strategy that is more resilient and sustainable in the face of long-term ideological pressure.

LOE 2: Civil-Military Engagement and Capability Building

Civil-military engagement provides an effective opportunity for reinforcing internal cohesion and Mongolian nationalism. The decentralized nature of Mongolian society, shaped by its nomadic heritage and tight-knit, insular communities in austere provinces (*aimags*), means that trust often flows through smaller networks and respected local figures rather

than centralized institutions. Outside of Ulaanbaatar, the capital city, home to 1.5 million out of 3.5 million Mongolians, citizens live in small, isolated communities. Capability-building initiatives prioritizing aimags, and at the smaller town (*soum*) level, can play a decisive role in helping Mongolia resist foreign influence, especially when those efforts align with the country's cultural values and historical narratives.

Civil-military support elements (CMSE) operating in the country are well-positioned to support this effort by enhancing Mongolia's ability to sustain civil stability at the *soum* level. Mongolians, already having pride in their country, will be willing to participate in engagements that further their country's sovereignty. Drawing on FM 3-57, *Civil Affairs Operations*, civil affairs operators can coordinate resilience seminars that bring together a conglomerate of Mongolian stakeholders, military officers, educators, historians, nongovernmental organizations, and religious figures at the aimag level to provide instruction to locals throughout that area.¹⁶ Focusing on disaster response, the workshops would entail classes that concentrate on basic lifesaving techniques, disaster preparedness, leadership during crisis, and other sessions designed to empower the local population. These workshops build capacity and encourage host-nation ownership of strategic response during periods of instability or external pressure. Including Mongolian Armed Forces personnel during these seminars also builds trust and confidence between the local population and their armed forces.

At the aimag and *soum* level, civil affairs elements can help identify and support civil network nodes, trusted individuals, or institutions capable of preserving continuity and reinforcing public morale during disruption. These individuals and institutions should have a high level of nationalism to promote unity throughout different aimags. In border regions or geographically austere areas, these nodes can form the backbone of resistance

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networks, providing continuity and strength through conflict or crisis. When aligned with Mongolian values and delivered through trusted local platforms, civil-military engagement becomes a broader strategic force multiplier for Mongolia. In the context of long-term competition in the Indo-Pacific, these civil-military engagement efforts offer the United States a low-visibility, culturally attuned approach to strengthening partner resilience and shaping the environment that aligns with host-nation values and regional security objectives.

U.S. support for Mongolia's civil-military resilience can also be reinforced through targeted funding mechanisms to empower host-nation personnel and enhance nationalism. The Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDACA) appropriation, often managed through CMSEs, provides a scalable tool to strengthen infrastructure tied to cultural preservation, education, and public trust.¹⁷ According to Department of Defense Instruction 2205.02, *Humanitarian and Civic Assistance (HCA) Activities*, OHDACA-funded programs are intended to "promote regional stability and security by enhancing partner nation capacity and demonstrating U.S. commitment through low-cost, small-scale humanitarian assistance and civic action projects."¹⁸ Projects funded through OHDACA can prioritize austere border communities, cultural sites, or institutions vulnerable to external influence while expanding U.S. access and credibility.

Complementing this, the Department of State's Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) offers a diplomatic vehicle for reinforcing Mongolian cultural resilience.¹⁹ AFCP-funded efforts to restore monasteries, protect traditional art, or support language preservation, align directly with the strategic intent of nationalistic resistance, reinforcing the symbols and institutions that reinforce national identity. Since establishing AFCP, the program has funded over \$1,860,000 worth of projects.²⁰ Together, these programs allow U.S. entities to quietly shape the civil terrain, bolster Mongolian nationalism, and demonstrate long-term commitment while remaining within the bounds of Mongolian sovereignty.

LOE 3: Geostrategic Alignment and Messaging

Mongolia's "third neighbor" policy creates a strategic opportunity for the United States to posture itself

as a preferred security partner in the Indo-Pacific without triggering a regional backlash. For the U.S. Army, this alignment can be operationalized through tactical engagements and integration into broader theater-level shaping operations. Under the direction of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and in coordination with the U.S. embassy country team, Army component forces can support Mongolia's sovereignty by participating in and facilitating joint, multinational exercises; institutional development programs; and military education exchanges that reinforce nonalignment and strategic autonomy.

Joint exercises, such as Khaan Quest and other regional multilateral events, should be structured as interoperability demonstrations and opportunities to spotlight Mongolia's independent defense capabilities and leadership in regional cooperation. U.S. Army Pacific planners can work alongside Mongolian general staff counterparts to design scenarios that validate Mongolia's neutrality and preparedness in gray zone or hybrid conflict environments. These efforts should be nested within the theater campaign plan and aligned with other shaping activities from allies and partners (e.g., Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia) to avoid redundancy and enhance credibility.

An existing but often underleveraged asset in strengthening U.S.–Mongolia alignment is the Alaska National Guard's State Partnership Program. The Department of Defense National Guard Bureau State Partnership Program pairs each state with a partner country to increase international military collaboration, interoperability, and readiness.²¹ The Alaska National Guard has worked closely with the Mongolian Armed Forces for over two decades through recurring events like Khaan Quest, joint field training, and mutual exchanges focused on peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and noncommissioned officer development. The partnership has also facilitated a program for some Mongolians to be able to pay in-state tuition to attend part of the University of Alaska system. The value of this partnership goes beyond tactical interoperability as it builds trust through sustained relationships, shared doctrine, and geographic familiarity (as seen in the austere conditions of both Alaska and Mongolia). As part of a broader theater-shaping effort, the State Partnership Program can reinforce Mongolia's "third neighbor" policy and



position the United States as a consistent and culturally attuned security partner without pushing the bounds of Mongolia's nonalignment stance.

Strategic messaging in this context comes not from leaflets or broadcasts but from presence, posture, and partnerships. When the United States demonstrates sustained engagement that respects Mongolia's values, avoids encroachment, and enhances multilateral resilience, it signals to Mongolian citizens and regional competitors that the United States supports Mongolian sovereignty. This way, geostrategic alignment becomes a mutually reinforcing form of deterrence and assurance that advances U.S. interests by empowering a partner to stand independently.

LOE 4: Contingency Planning for Irregular Warfare

In a regional crisis or conflict, Mongolia's deeply rooted nationalism and decentralized social structure offer

Soldiers assigned to 390th Military Police Battalion, 11th Military Police Brigade, 200th Military Police Command, ride in the back of a Mongolian Armed Forces ZIL-131 utility truck during a simulated United Nations convoy mission during Khaan Quest on 17 June 2025 at Five Hills Training Area, Mongolia. Khaan Quest is an annual, multinational and multicomponent training exercise led by the Mongolian Armed Forces designed to promote regional peace and security. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Tristan Moore, U.S. Army)

a natural foundation for irregular resistance. U.S. Army planners, particularly within special operations forces and theater special operations commands, should work with Mongolian defense leaders to develop a tailored irregular warfare and unconventional warfare framework that aligns with Mongolia's nationalistic population. Members of the population who are highly nationalistic are more likely to respond to threats to their nation's sovereignty. Guided by doctrine in FM 3-05.130, *Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare* (defined in the FM as "operations conducted by, with, or through

irregular forces in support of a resistance movement, insurgency, or conventional military operations”), and Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, this framework would prioritize the integration of nationalism, indigenous authority structures, and terrain familiarity into a comprehensive resistance model, especially in the absence of large-scale U.S. presence.²²

Through security force assistance brigades, Special Forces operational detachment alphas, or civil affairs teams with unconventional warfare experience, the Army can support precrisis contingency planning beyond generic partnership building. This includes resistance node mapping to identify key population centers, transportation routes, and trusted local leaders capable of anchoring decentralized defense networks. Denied-area logistics coordination, such as planning for redundant supply routes, pre-positioned materiel caches, and low-signature resupply mechanisms, can be tailored to Mongolia’s austere terrain and dispersed population. Scenario-based rehearsals with Mongolian military and civil society actors would stress test these concepts under simulated warfare or occupation conditions. This approach would prepare Mongolian partners for irregular warfare environments and build institutional muscle memory that can be scaled or adjusted based on crisis severity, all without provoking escalation or infringing on Mongolia’s nonalignment policy.

Digital resistance training, using tools aligned with FM 3-12, *Cyberspace Operations and Electronic Warfare Operations*, could prepare Mongolian partners to operate in contested information environments where communications may be disrupted or surveilled. FM 3-12 notes that cyberspace operations “enable friendly influence activities, such as military information support operations, to improve or sustain positive relations with foreign actors in and around the operational area and to degrade threat influence over the same.”²³ When integrated into precrisis planning, these capabilities ensure that Mongolian partners can maintain continuity of governance and national messaging even in degraded or adversary-controlled information environments.

Additionally, the United States can help design diaspora engagement protocols, tapping into Mongolian expatriate communities across North America, Europe, and East Asia to support crisis messaging, funding streams, and external advocacy. There are currently approximately fifty thousand Mongolians living in the

United States (thirty thousand who claim Mongolian race alone), many of whom try to return to their homeland.²⁴ Thompson notes that many Mongolians believe their defining characteristics are born “not from what you can make of yourself, but rather where you came from,” and that when Mongolians move away from Mongolia, regardless of how long they intend to live abroad, they believe, “I am going to end up going back there because it is home.”²⁵ This further proves the strength of Mongolian nationalism as response to external influence.

Strategic Implications for U.S. Indo-Pacific Posture

The case of Mongolia illustrates how nationalism, when reinforced and operationalized through engagement and resistance planning, can serve as a strategic asset in great power competition. In an Indo-Pacific region increasingly shaped by revanchism threats, coercive diplomacy, and narrative warfare, the U.S. Army plays a critical role in shaping the environment below the threshold of conflict. From civil-military engagement and psychological operations to joint training and unconventional warfare planning, Army capabilities can help partners like Mongolia harden themselves against adversarial influence without triggering escalation or compromising their sovereignty.

Mongolia’s strategic value lies in its geography, resilient civic culture, historical self-conception, and commitment to nonalignment. These traits can be amplified, rather than overwritten, by U.S. security cooperation efforts synchronized with the theater campaign plan, integrated with interagency partners, and respectful of host-nation partners. In doing so, the United States will build a stronger bilateral relationship and strengthen the coalition of Indo-Pacific states seeking to preserve autonomy in the face of revanchist pressure.

Viewed through this lens, Mongolia’s operational methods offer a scalable model: U.S. forces shape the information and civil terrain through quiet, persistent engagement, empowering partners to stand on their own terms. This approach provides a culturally grounded form of flexible, sustainable, and increasingly relevant deterrence in the contested Indo-Pacific operational environment. This model directly supports Special Operations Command–Pacific objectives by enabling partner-led resistance, enhancing regional

interoperability, and expanding access and influence in areas critical to integrated deterrence.

The methods proposed in this article apply to Mongolia and offer a scalable framework for engagement across the Indo-Pacific. Countries like Nepal, Bhutan, and segments of the Philippines face similar challenges: geographic proximity to revisionist powers, complex historical narratives, and culturally distinct populations vulnerable to coercive influence. Helping countries strengthen their sense of identity and resilience gives them tools to push back without relying on a military presence. It does not look like militarization, but it still builds real defense. That approach fits squarely within the Department of Defense's push for integrated deterrence and shaping the environment early, not just reacting to crisis. In places where complex alliances are tricky or politically sensitive, working through nationalism gives the United States a way to support partners that's both practical and sustainable.

Conclusion

Mongolian nationalism, shaped by centuries of cultural resilience and a proud historical narrative, is more than just a symbol of identity. It is a strategic capability. This article has shown how national cohesion, history, and cultural pride quietly resist Chinese influence. The PRC has tried enticing Mongolia through soft power, economic leverage, and historical revisionism. However, what keeps Mongolia steady is not a

foreign military partnership or imposed ideology. It is the deeply rooted belief in who they are, where they come from, and the value of staying independent. That internal cohesion offers a rare opportunity for the U.S. Army and the broader joint force. Rather than trying to reorient Mongolia, the United States can reinforce what already exists.

CMSEs, PSYOP units, and special operations forces planners can help build local resilience and prepare for contingencies without violating the country's nonaligned stance. Through narrative development, community resiliency seminars, or irregular warfare planning, U.S. support can amplify Mongolia's natural resistance posture and show that American presence means partnership, not pressure.

What is happening in Mongolia is not isolated. Other small or buffer states across the Indo-Pacific are navigating similar pressures from revisionist powers. Mongolia's example gives us a model where identity is defense, culture is cohesion, and quiet engagement beats overt presence. This approach fits squarely within the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy: it shapes the environment, strengthens partner autonomy, and helps build resistance before conflict begins. In an Indo-Pacific environment increasingly shaped by ideological contestation and hybrid conflict, nationalism as a strategic resistance should be considered a core component of national defense and an asset that the United States is uniquely positioned to support. ■

Notes

1. Jack McIver Weatherford, *Genghis Khaan and the Making of the Modern World* (Broadway Books, 2004), 267.

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3. Michael Dillon, *Mongolia: A Political History of the Land and Its People* (I. B. Tauris, 2020), 13.

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