THE FUTURE IS NOW

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From the early 1970s until 1987, knowledgeable Americans and Mongolians looked with eagerness to the future day when official relations would finally be established. Today we are living that future. Together, Americans and Mongolians -diplomats, academicians, economists, scientists and government officials - are trying to shape this future and explore its many dimensions. But now that we have what we wanted for so many years, do we know what to do with it?

Relations between sovereign states are never simple, no matter how close the two nations are in either geography or culture. For example, U.S.-Canadian relations appear straightforward: we have bilateral commissions, numerous treaties, NAFTA and semiannual summits. But seemingly small and manageable problems like salmon fishing, timber exports and television broadcasts can easily become very emotional issues, requiring the daily attention of a great number of state and provincial officials. Even so, some Canadians harbor suspicions of domination by "big brother" Americans, while some Americans feel that Canadians should be less assertive in their demands.

Similar problems occur in U.S.-Mongolian relations. The United States' unfamiliarity with Mongolia, for instance, is still a limiting factor: in the past, Mongolia was officially terra incognita - unknown territory - to the U.S., just as the U.S. was unfamiliar to most Mongolians. Mongolians viewed the United States, to the extent that they were allowed any glimpse at all, through the faulty prism of Soviet-American relations. Most Americans, on the other hand, saw not Mongolia, but a large pink-colored space on the map (the color commonly used to denote the USSR and its satellites in Western nations.)

A good example of this mutual lack of knowledge was the great Tulsa River flood of July 1966. How many Mongolians or Americans were aware that the U.S. government provided disaster relief funds to Mongolia through the Mongolian delegation to the UN? When the New York Times reported that the flood had caused great devastation, killing dozens of people and washing away bridges and rail lines, officials in Washington were moved to respond. Because there were congressional restrictions on U.S. assistance to the Soviet Upon and its allies, a high level decision was needed to grant the relief funds which were subsequently provided through the Red Cross. Yet this decision was only re-

cently made public, when a friend in Washington declassified the confidential document in U.S. archives in March 1998.

In general, the U.S. paid little attention to Asian - not only Mongolian - affairs until after World War II. The main events in U.S.-Asian relations up to 1945 were America's colonial experience in the Philippines and the Pacific as a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898; the maintenance of the Open Door Policy in China for American commerce in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, culminating in gunboat diplomacy and the Boxer Rebellion; and the attempted containment of Japanese aggression between the two World Wars to prevent Japan from becoming a threat to others in Asia (mainly European powers • and U.S. interests in China) by limiting its naval armaments. Isolationist impulses in the U.S., combined with the economic collapse of the Great Depression, meant that the U.S. turned a blind eye to Japan's invasion cuff China and attempted invasion of Mongolia.

The Revolution in China, the flight of U.S. ally Chiang Kai-Shek to Taiwan, and attempts to contain the PRC consumed much of the United States' attention in the post-World War II period. At the same time, the U.S. sought to ensure that Japan would not again become a threat to its neighbors by assisting in the development of the Japanese Constitution and implementing anti-war provisions. Through the U.S. — Japan Security Treaty, the U.S. assumed responsibility for the security of Japan's home islands, establishing U.S. bases in Japan and Okinawa and naval and air build-ups in the Philippines. The post-war devastation in Europe presented additional challenges: while the U.S. created the Marshall Plan to reconstruct defeated nations, the "Iron curtain" fell over Eastern Europe. And when North Korea, supported by Russia and China, invaded the South, a new and unwanted focus was centered on Asia.

What little attention was paid to Mongolia during this period was conditioned by general trends on the world scene, such as the Sino-Soviet split and events in U.S.-Soviet relations. For most of the post-WWII period, negative developments - such as the advance of communism, military threats (e.g., Taiwan Straits), and the need to protect the interests of European allies in Southeast Asia - dominated U.S. involvement in Asia. Yet in the era following the Vietnam War, the U.S. matured in its approaches to Asia and elsewhere and was more able to deal with communist governments, provided that they met certain expectations. The U.S. found it increasingly possible to have diversified relations with Communist states, despite an emphasis on strategic deterrence vis-a-vis the USSR. The consequences of these changes were openings to China

during the Nixon and Carter years, improved (mainly economic) relations with Eastern Europe, and an enhanced ability to deal with "non-aligned" but communist Asian governments - while still taking the hard line on totalitarian regimes such as the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. There were some sporadic exceptions to the lack of relations between the U.S. and Mongolia. After the fall of Manchu Rule, a few U.S. diplomats sought to establish commercial contacts with Mongolia, visiting Ulaan Baatar between 1919 and 1921, but their attempts were ignored by Washington.[1] Roy Chapman Andrews ("'Indiana Jones") explored the Gobi Desert for National Geographic in five expeditions, from 1922 to 1928, investigating the geological history of the area. Vice President Henry Wallace visited Mongolia in 1944, with Supreme Court Associate Justice William O. Douglas following two decades later, in 1963.

"The Big Veto," written by Ambassador Yondon and published in January 1997, is a highly detailed and insightful study and should be published in an American academic journal.[2] It gives views from the Mongolia side of the off again - on again effort by forward-looking people in the Mongolian government to seek a relationship with the U.S. separate from the USSR. Nearly 40 years ago, the first efforts were made in connection with Mongolia's entry into the UN. These efforts were thwarted in 1971 by Taiwan (then the representative of China in the UN Security Council), which still viewed "Outer Mongolia" as part of China. In those years, the barometer of U.S.-Soviet relations determined the extent of contact with Mongolian diplomats in New York. Ambassador Yondon says: "by 1971, the horse of Mongolian-American relations was still standing asleep and without a saddle." But the first "golden swallow," Arthur Sulzberger of the New York Times, visited Mongolia in 1971; he wrote that the People's Republic of Mongolia was "the [only] sovereign state in the world with which the U.S. does not have diplomatic relations."

Bilateral history between 1971 and 1987 was truly of the "'Big Veto" variety, as relations were held hostage by the USSR. Ambassador Yondon states that while Mongolian leaders had different opinions on when and whether to seek ties with the U.S., Moscow always found an excuse - stated or implied - to say "not yet." The casualty was that academicians were not permitted to have contact, although the USA Institute in Moscow was an important channel of U.S.-Soviet relations. It was not until 1984 that an American diplomat, Donald Johnson (later Ambassador), came on a private visit while assigned to Beijing. First scholarly contacts were permitted in 1985 when Professor Robert Scalapino of the University of California, Berkeley and a delegation came and met with

Prime Minister Batmunkh, but caution prevailed even though these Americans urged the establishment of diplomatic relations.

Then, in 1987, the U.S. State Department, led by George Shultz, found new energy to pursue contacts suggested by the Mongolian UN Delegation in December 1986. Secretary Shultz said simply, "Let's do it." Ambassador Stapleton Roy led the team from the U.S. side.

Then did the "horse go to sleep again"? The U.S. appointed a non-resident Ambassador, and in time a Mongolian Embassy was established in Washington. At that time, both sides were preoccupied with "Glasnost," the collapse of the USSR and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Mongolia, Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Relations were correct rather than close, and there was great uncertainty regarding the future of the socialist system in the post-Soviet period.

Finally, the Democratic movement in Mongolia cast new [1] light on U.S. relations. Mongolia, like the Central Asian Republics and other states of the former Soviet Union, was viewed as a democracy in transition. There was quick and early support for political liberalization, followed by the opening of a resident U.S. mission under Ambassador Joseph Lake. During visits by Secretary of State Baker in 1991 and 1992, the U.S. embraced democracy in Mongolia and gave Mongolia important visibility in Washington. Secretary Baker still serves as a strong booster today.

From 1991 to 1996, the U.S. emphasis was on implementing programs to assist Mongolia. The Peace Corps began in 1991 and now provides about 60, soon to he 100, volunteers per year. USAID first offered emergency energy assistance and economic policy advice, and now stresses economic growth, private sector development, privatization, U.S. investment, and rural infrastructure. Education and exchanges serve to build relationships and encourage the flow of students to the U.S. Food aid (P.L. 480) was established to meet emergency needs, originally for butter and butter oil, and provided 10.000 tons of wheat in 1997 and a similar amount in 1998. The beginnings of military cooperation appeared in the form of English language teaching, military justice, medicine, civil-military relations, civil defense, disaster relief, and humanitarian aid. A variety of U.S. agency programs, from NASA to the USIS to the Library of Congress, are currently providing support to Mongolia. Major issues of U.S. concern are democracy and human rights, the development of NGOs, voter education, combating violence against women, and International Republican Institute (IRI) assistance to Parliament. USAID assistance rose to $12 million

this year, plus $5 million in food aid and more in global programs. While this is a large amount for a single country these days, it is not as large as the sum provided by the Japanese government or through multilateral organization assistance to •Mongolia. U.S. assistance is provided entirely in the form of grants, with no expectation of repayment.

U.S. objectives are to strengthen policy dialogue concerning regional affairs in Northeast Asia, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and APEC. On the business side, we are working to improve the business climate and infrastructure, starting with the report of the U.S. Business Group. We will enhance investment opportunities under a new USAID project with the Board of Foreign Investment and make Mongolia better known in corporate circles. Finally, in working to enhance democracy and social progress, the IRI program is a major priority. We are working to prevent violence against women and curb international trafficking, and to assist in alleviating poverty by promoting rural business and income-generating activities.

The Joint Statement made during Secretary Albright's visit fulfilled the Mongolian government's long-standing desire for an authoritative statement on bilateral relations and forms the baseline of our relationship over the next few years. The new statement offers explicit support for Mongolian independence, political and economic reform, and shared democratic ideals. It emphasizes judicial and legal training and exchanges, more programs for students in the US, the prevention of domestic violence, and support for women's programs such as LEOS, the Center against Violence, and the East Asian Women's Forum. Secretary Albright said, "We support you" as a top-level reaffirmation of the bilateral relationship from Washington. But it is up to us to determine the substance of the US-Mongolian relationship. The horse is no longer asleep. The future is now.

1. "The US-Mongolian Political Relationship 1915-1987," by Alicia J. Campy. Paper given at the January 1998 SEAAS, University of Virginia. Reprinted in Mongolia No. 7, spring 1998.

2. The authors wish to thank Ambassador Erdenechuluun for drawing our attention to this work.