

An Undeclared Northeast Asian War

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Abstract: When the Russian President Vladimir Putin made world shocking visit to International Criminal Court member state for the first time since his arrest warrant in 2023. One of his visit purposes was to commemorate 85th anniversary of Khalkhiin gol War. After a fall of Soviet Union, Soviet-satellite country faced their own destiny to run sovereign foreign policy without directive from Kremlin. Mongolia has unique geographic setting, located between two authoritarian nuclear power competing with the west. Mongolian diplomats effectively used their favorable period as two neighbors not paying strong attention to their buffer state to find long lasting solution for security assurance. The country chosen neutral, multi pillared, open and peaceful foreign policy principles through political-diplomatic means. After 85 years, international atmosphere becoming more dismal and even risky for small and medium states. Current situation highlights importance of studying the geopolitical settings and consequences of Khalkhiin Gol War. Following paper discusses prewar geopolitical settings and causes using bargaining theory.

Keywords: Khalkhiin Gol War, Geopolitics, Nomonhan

Introduction

The 85th anniversary of a little-known war attracted a great deal of attention from Russia. President Putin made a state visit to Ulaanbaatar for a commemoration Khalkhiin Gol War (Khalkh River). Why were there so many Russian dignitaries in Ulaanbaatar to celebrate the anniversary

of this undeclared war? More importantly, what caused this war?

To answer these questions, this paper will use the bargaining theory of war and contend that *Khalkhiin Gol War* was a failure of bargaining between Japan and Russia. The paper will, firstly, explicate

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why the bargaining theory of war explains well, secondly, provides a brief description of the war, thirdly, analyzes each party's probability of victory and calculation of costs and benefits of the war, fourthly, examine Russian's tactics of 'feigning weakness' or incentives to misrepresent private information about its resolve and capabilities, and finally, conclude with thoughts on why warring parties avoided to declare a war.

Khalkhiin Gol War has been examined extensively by the Japanese, Mongolian, and Russian militaries; however, there is a little scholarly work produced in the west. Interestingly, the US military studied this limited war in early 1950s to understand conditions that might drag the Soviet Union into the Korean War because the US administration was curious if the Soviet Union would demonstrate same resolve for North Korea as it did for Mongolia (Bold, 1996, 275).

The Bargaining Theory of War vs. the Khalkhiin Gol War

The *Khalkhiin Gol* War will be better explained by the bargaining theory of war for several reasons. First, the Soviet Union and Japan, the unitary actors, were the two players of the game. Second, these two players were in the bargaining process from beginning to end. The battles in remote Manchuria were factoring in every negotiation in Moscow and Tokyo. Third, as the bargaining theory assumes, the war was over once a settlement was reached between the Soviet Union and Japan. Fourth, both states acted rationally based on their private information and had incentives to misrepresent. Finally,

There are three major scholarly works produced on the *Khalkhiin Gol* War in the United States. Dr. Alvin Coox published two well-regarded volumes, *Nomonhan: Japan against Russia* (1985), Dr. Katsu Young wrote an article, '*The Nomonhan Incident*' (1967), and Dr. Edward Drea produced detailed description of a war in his monograph, *Nomonhan: Japanese Soviet Tactical Combat, 1939* (1981). Because all authors exclusively draw on Japanese sources, they even adopted the Japanese name of the war, *Nomonhan*, the name of a village near border in the Manchurian side. On the other hand, earlier works of Mongolian and Russian scholars were also solely based on their own sources and suffered from ideological scrutiny of the respective communist parties. Now might be a convenient time to investigate causes and consequences of this undeclared war as all parties normalized their relations in last three decades and archival materials increasingly become available.

the territory of Mongolia was the object over which the Soviet Union and Japan attempted to bargain. The *Khalkhiin Gol* War was a failure of bargaining - based on its own private information, Japan did not want to bargain with the Soviet Union over the territory of Mongolia. The Soviet Union knew that Japan would not follow its commitments; therefore, it secretly prepared for decisive victory against Japan in unpopulated territory of Mongolia. As Wagner argues, "nearly all wars end not because the states that are fighting incapable of further fighting but because they agree to stop" (Wagner 2000,

469), Japan and the Soviet Union, even though they were capable of engaging in further battles, agreed to stop their battle in Mongolia. They demarcated the trilateral borders of the Soviet Union, Manchukuo, and Mongolia in 1940 and concluded the non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union in the following year. Although both players did not consider audience costs at home, governments of Japan and Soviet Union were rational actors who were executing their well-calculated strategies. For the resource-starved Japan, it was important to expand its gain into the northeast Asia whereas for the new Soviet Union, it was to maintain its security in Eurasia.

The *Khalkhiin Gol* War had significant global and regional implications. For one, it stopped the Japanese expansionist strategy to Inner Asia and Russian Far East and Japan began its military campaign into Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Also, following its decisive victory, Russia became able to concentrate its war efforts in Europe. Both Japanese and Soviet militaries tested their war strategies, military tactics, weaponry, and exposed their officers to modern land warfare, which would be dominant throughout the World War II. Moreover, its consolidated Mongolia's *de-facto* independence and enabled Chinese and North Korean communist forces to intensify their resistance against Japanese occupation. Finally, Mongolia became the only state who did not suffer from Japanese expansion in Northeast Asia. From all these implications, this war was clearly important for the Soviet Union and Japan, but it is interesting to try to understand

why it occurred at the unpopulated eastern border of Mongolia and what geo-strategic significances the Mongolian territory hold for Japan and the Soviet Union.

If "territory is probably the main issue over which states fight wars" (Fearon, 1995, 408), the territory of Mongolia, in this case, has been regarded as strategic territory. Any attacks from Mongolia to Beijing or Russian Siberia can result in destabilizing China and separating the Russian Far East from the control of Moscow. "Historically, successful invasions of China have come often from the north," Wachman stresses, "it is no accident that China's Great Wall is built where it is" (Wachman, 2009, 14). It is interesting to note that Russia did not make any concessions over Mongolian territory although it gave away most of its territorial gains and strategic assets (e.g., ports and railways) in Manchuria to Japan. As driven by its expansionist desire, Japan wanted to control Mongolian territory in order to cut the Soviet assistance to Chinese government and to gain strategic advantage for its further expansions to resource abundant Siberia. As Zhukov explained to Stalin, "the immediate aim [of Japan] was to seize Mongolian territory beyond the Khalkhiin Gol and then build a fortified line along the river to defend the second railway track of strategic importance to be built close to the boundary of ... Trans-Baikal area west of the Chinese Eastern Railway" (Zhukov 1985, 206). Because the Mongolian border is located within 10-15 kilometers from the Japanese second railway track, Mongolian and Soviet forces could easily destroy Japanese military and rails in the vicinity with artillery. Therefore, Japanese

initial attempt was to establish a 50-60 km military stronghold deep in Mongolian territory - that means to occupy the west bank of *Khalkh Gol* (river), which runs along the far eastern border of Mongolia. Also, Mongolia is only accessible for large-scale military campaigns from the far eastern border because it is surrounded

by inaccessible Altai Mountain range in the west and continuous ocean-like Gobi Desert in the south. Therefore, the eastern plateau and rolling hills of Mongolia is the only gateway which could provide unhindered access into the central part of Mongolia and also some Siberian strategic locations.

Overview of the War

The *Khalkhiin Gol* War occurred from May 11 to August 31, 1939. It initially started as border conflicts between the Mongolian military and the Manchurian forces, a Japanese puppet state, in the disputed border areas. Within three months, this border clash drew large military forces of Japan and the Soviet Union. Although the sources differ, the Japanese side had 76, 000 troops, 182 tanks, 300 aircrafts while the Soviets deployed 35, 000 troops, 500 tanks, 581 aircrafts (Baabar 1999; Bold, 1991, 282-283; Coox 1985, 590, 1123; Drea 1981, Young 1967). Mongolia provided 20,000 troops for the battle (IDS 1996). The Japanese carried out three major offensives into the territory of Mongolia. The first was an air attack and then a ground attack was conducted in June and July respectively. Before the third attack by the Japanese forces in August, the Soviet and Mongolian forces conducted a decisive preemptive attack and defeated Japanese forces by the end of August. The 23rd Kwantung division (15,000 men) was completely destroyed (Bold, 1991; Coox 1985, 1124). Japan lost 18,100 soldiers (48,600 wounded) while the Soviet Union lost 8,900 boots on the ground (15,900 wounded) (IDS 1996, 331-332, Coox 1985, 1124-1126).

The major battle was led by Georgy Zhukov who became the well-known Soviet general during the Second World War. When Zhukov came to *Khalkhiin Gol* on June 5, Japan was conducting the first major offensive against the Soviet-Mongolian forces. Within 2 months, Zhukov accumulated massive military force in the *Khalkhiin Gol* area and led combined arms offensives skillfully, which will be discussed later. He also used similar counteroffensive tactics against Germany in the battles of Moscow and Berlin in the WWII.

The result of the Soviet-Japanese battle became clear around mid-August. Although the Japanese War Minister Mr. Itagaki Seishiro urged the Foreign Ministry to initiate negotiation with the Soviets at the Japanese Five Ministries' Conference on July 18, 1939, the Navy Minister opposed Itagaki's proposal, as cited by Young, "that you [Army] started the incident while concealing it from us [Navy and other Cabinet members], and then once you fail you bring it up to us for remedy...why don't you continue fighting until you recover the frontier line?" (Young 1967, 95). In the logic of Itagaki, the Japanese government did not want to expand this border clash into a

full-scale war. Following the conference, Japanese Foreign Minister instructed its Ambassador in Moscow to learn Soviet positions without indicating that Japan was willing to settle the issue by diplomatic means (Young 1967, 95). Meanwhile, the Japanese General Staff was attempting to reinforce the Kwantung Army in Manchuria in order to increase their bargaining range. But, within a month, the situation changed unfavorably for Japan. The Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact (known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) was signed on August 23, 1939. This was a big blow for Japanese-German alliances and their strategy. Also, the Japanese major force in Manchuria was hit badly by the Soviet-Mongolian counteroffensive just before all the Japanese reinforcement units arrived. As a result, the Japanese government initiated a diplomatic settlement for *Khalkhiin Gol* War on September 5, 1939. In the beginning of the negotiation, Japan was proposing its own conditions for settlements, including the non-militarized zone in *Khalkhiin Gol*. Although the Japanese military was beaten badly, it was planning to attack on September 8-9, 1939 with fresh forces (35-40,000) from Japanese forces at the Chinese front and also from Korea (Bold, 1996; IDS, 1996). Even after the Japanese side notified the plan was cancelled following the directives from Tokyo, the Japanese forces carried out two separate attacks against the Soviet

forces on September 6, 1939. This was a clear attempt to reinforce the Japanese conditions at the Moscow negotiation and also to advance Japanese territorial gains just before the settlement. After these Japanese attacks failed, Japan agreed to accept the Soviet conditions of settlements on September 14, 1939 (Bold, 1996; Young, 1967; Coox, 1985). Afterwards, Japan ceased its Northern direction (*hokushin*) plan to expand its military campaign into Mongolia and Siberia. Japan intensified its South direction (*nanshin*) into Southeast Asia and eventually to Pearl Harbor in 1941 by relying heavily on its naval and air components (Coox, 1985, 1033-1049, Sagan 1988, 903-904).

The Soviets secured its far eastern flank with a decisive battle against Japan; therefore, it started shifting its forces to fight war in Europe, where the Soviets invaded Poland and prolonged its war with Finland. The Japanese loss provided opportunities for Chinese and Korean (especially, North Korean) forces to intensify their guerrilla operations to weaken Kwantung Army bases. This battle consolidated Mongolia's sovereignty and increased its geo-strategic values for the Soviets. After the slight political ideology changes, Mongolia then served as an important strategic area for the Soviets to support national liberation movements in China.

Probability of Victory and Costs, Benefits of the *Khalkhiin Gol* War

All parties had different understandings on the probability of victory, costs, and benefits of the war.

The Japanese Kwantung Army, which had already consolidated its bases in Northeast Asia, saw a high-probability of victory,

low costs and high benefits of war. The Kwantung Army was initially started with a small expeditionary force of 10,000 men to protect the Manchurian Railway and Japanese leased territory in Manchuria. By 1939, it became the largest military command of the Japanese Imperial Army to run the Manchukuo state and to carry out military campaigns to expand Japanese gain in Northeast Asia.

The Japanese initial estimates of the Soviet and Mongolian military were right. First, Japan defeated the Russian military in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and Russia gave away its strategic assets and occupied-Korea and Manchuria (railway, ports, fishing rights). The Soviet Union's unwillingness to contradict with Japan militarily over its assets in Manchuria demonstrated its weakness. Therefore, the Japanese military was confident in winning the Soviets again in a major war. Second, there were doubts in Russia's ability to transfer its military forces to Far Eastern Russia and Mongolia, given Russia's tensions in Europe (especially with Finland) and Russia's economic and internal challenges (eg. famine in 1930s; purges). Both the Soviet Union and Mongolia had faced domestic armed oppositions and public were suffered from purges by the communist governments. Third, according to Japanese sources, the Japanese considered the Soviet military doctrine as too inflexible and the Russian character too rigid to adapt in the face of Japanese tactics which stressed both surprise and maneuver (Drea, 1981).

Using indigenous military personnel and resources of the Manchukuo, Japan was confident it would defeat the Russians

and Mongolians in summer months of 1939. The benefit of the war thought to be extremely high for Japan. First, it would be able to control resource abundant Mongolia and Inner Mongolia. At that time, the Inner Mongolians were cooperating with Japan and Japan was treating Mongolians and Manchus with special privileges. The Japanese might have strongly believed the traditional fear of their big neighbors' dominance, Mongolians and Manchus would rather gain their independence with the Japanese assistance. Therefore, Japan would establish a pan-Mongolian state, which is pro-Japan, between Russia and China. Second, Mongolia would serve a good geo-strategic base for further Japanese expansions to China and Russia. Aforementioned, historically, the most successful attacks of China often came from the north. Japan could easily cut the Far Eastern Russia from Moscow by blocking key strategic routes in Siberia (ie. the Trans-Siberian Railway). Finally, Japan was able to cut the Soviet military assistance to Chinese guerrilla forces by taking Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang. This would complicate the Sino-Soviet alliance against Japan. Eventually, Japan would become the largest Eurasian land empire, which could link up with the Germans if their offensives to Russia would have been successful.

The cost of war was high and the probability of victory was uncertain for both Russia and Mongolia. If Japan prevailed in Inner Mongolia and Mongolia by establishing an autonomous Mongolian state, the Soviet Union would lose its support bases for the Chinese government and guerrilla forces and eventually lose

Siberia and Far Eastern Russia to Japan. On the other hand, for Mongolia, although a sovereign state, would face a risk to lose its independence to Japan - to become another puppet state like the Manchukuo and even worse as a battlefield of rivalry powers. Therefore, benefits of not losing in the war were high for the Soviet Union and Mongolia. If the Soviets won, the Soviet Union could strengthen Mongolia's defenses as a buffer state and continue its support to the government and guerrilla forces in China to prolong the Sino-Japanese war and guerrilla forces in North Korea to weaken Japanese occupation. Mongolia could maintain its sovereignty under the Soviet security umbrella. All would serve as buffer for the Soviet Union.

Although the Soviet Union was aware of Japanese military capability, it was confident it would defeat Japan in the *Khalkhin Gol* Battle if it could accumulate more air power, mobile forces and artillery assets. First, the Soviets tested the Japanese Kwantung Army's strength at the *Khasan Lake* clash in August 1938. This clash continued for two weeks and the Japanese military was beaten badly after their invasion into the Soviet territory. Second, the Soviets prepared for this battle intensively from 1934 following Stalin's announcement of mutual assistance to Mongolia in the event of Japanese invasion. Even earlier, the Soviets increased its military assistance to Mongolia and started the Mongolian military build-up from 1932.

This indicates that the Soviet Union was aware of Japanese intentions to expand into Mongolia and Siberia. After the disastrous Russo-Japanese War,

the Tsarist Russia recognized Japanese suzerainty over Korea, ceded the south half of Sakhalin Island and lost South Manchuria to Japan. In 1906, the Japanese Imperial Army established its Kwantung Garrison (10,000 men infantry division) to protect the Japanese leased territory in Manchuria and in particular the South Manchurian Railway, which is a part of the Chinese Eastern Railway. The Chinese Eastern Railway, including the South Manchurian Railway, was built by Russia and linked to Trans-Siberian Railway. Throughout 1920s-30s, the Kwantung Army took control of Manchuria and established the Manchukuo puppet state in 1932. The Soviet Union sold Chinese Eastern Railway to Manchukuo and negotiated over fishing rights in the Pacific. However, the Japanese expansion did not stop in Manchuria. The Kwantung Army planned future expansion into Siberia and Mongolia where the borders were not demarcated properly between the Chinese to Qing Dynasty and Tsarist Russia; therefore, Japan was able to manipulate the Manchukuo to initiate border disputes with Mongolia and the Soviet Union. In the 1930s, Japan carried out numerous attacks along the Soviet-Manchurian borders. The Soviet Union knew that Japan would eventually threaten them in the long run; therefore, Moscow wanted to demonstrate its resolve to Tokyo before it engaged in a conflict in Europe. Otherwise, it would be impossible for the Soviet Union to engage in two wars: one in Manchuria and other in Europe. It was clear for the Soviet leaders that Japan would not want to bargain. Because, from the Japanese standpoint, they were too confident that they could win quickly while the Soviet Union was

struggling with its internal problems and industrialization efforts.

Although the Soviets signaled their intentions to defend its far eastern borders and also Mongolia, Japan was doubtful in the Soviet resolve and capability. Japan did not realize that the Soviets (Stalin) had consolidated their political powerbase in Moscow, far eastern Russia, and Central Asia by eliminating opposing internal forces through bloody purges in 1936-1938 (Barber and Harrison 1991, 17). By 1938, the Soviet military was equipped with better armor and equipment and its operational capability had improved noticeably as the Soviet expansion succeeded.

Meantime, Soviets successfully exported ideology and consolidated their rule with satellites in Mongolia. In 1932, Stalin wrote to Voroshilov, People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs, "if the political course in Mongolia can change more or less normally, Mongolia will keep its independence, but if not, no amount of "military action" will help Mongolia from becoming the prey of Japan-Manchuria" (Terayama, 1998, 94). Following this warning and instruction, Marshall Choibalsan, communist leader of Mongolia, conducted massive purges against religious figures, monks, former aristocrats, and political dissidents who had more critical views about the Soviets and communists. The communist government suppressed armed rebellions by the Mongolian monks in 1932 and 1937. The totalitarian regimes in Moscow and Ulaanbaatar massacred over 30,000-35,000 Mongolian people and many fled into China (Kaplonski, 2008; Baabar, 1999, 315-317; 361-365). The Soviets executed many influential Mongolian

political leaders like Genden, former President (1924-1927) and Prime Minister (1932-1936), Amar, former Prime Minister (1924-1930) and President (1932-1936), and War Minister Marshall Demid (1930-1936) in 1936 (Sandag and Kendall 2000). They were reluctant to support the Soviet military deployments into Mongolia and to get involved in the Soviet- Japanese war. Rather they might have seen Japan as a third neighbor to balance against the Chinese and Soviet domination in Mongolia. The 836 Mongolian military officers, many of whom graduated from the Soviet military schools, were purged and other 1000 military personnel were discharged relations with these purged officers and others (IDS 1996, 269). Following this massive purge, the Soviet military units were deployed into Mongolian territory under the Mutual Assistance Pact in August, 1937 and more efforts were devoted to train and man the Mongolian army units, which suffered from the purges. Although Japanese knew the systematic purges had deteriorated Mongolian military capabilities, they overlooked the Soviet and Mongolian efforts of training and equipping the Mongolian military forces and also the Soviet troop concentration in Mongolia and in Russian Far East. "It might be related to the Japanese unwillingness to update their prior information after the Soviets and Mongolians sent signals of determination to fight against Japan. As Japanese and Western scholars stress, the Soviets were rational, methodical, and careful whereas the Japanese military were overconfident, inflexible, and obsolete in terms of combined arms and logistics (Coox, 1985; Drea, 1981; Tsuyoshi 1987).

Russian Tactic of Feigning Weakness

It is also important to note the Russian tactics of feigning weakness. For the Soviet victory, Zhukov's skill of misrepresenting the capability was critical. Within two months, Zhukov organized preparation for the major offensive without disclosing his preparation for the Japanese. First, he developed the plan with only few key military components and limited radio communication with Moscow. Messages about air battles and winter preparation were intentionally disclosed to Japanese. Second, he ordered constant night bombing and employment of special sounds equipment (with imitated aircraft engines, movement of tanks, the driving in of wooden files) at night "to accustom the Japanese to the noise" and to distress them. These night bombing and special sound effects started 12-15 days before the major offensive. Third, he ordered all movements of troops should take place at night when enemy's observation would be minimal. Into barren steppes of Khalkhiin Gol, the Soviets and Mongolians carried 18,000 tons of artillery ammunition, 6,500 tons of aircraft ammunition, 15,000 tons of petroleum, oil and lubricants, 4,000 tons of food stuffs, 7,500 tons of solid fuel by 2,636 trucks for round trip of 1,300-1,400 kilometers from the closest rail stations in Russia and Mongolia (Zhukov 1985, 185- 186, IDS 1996). The Soviet Army Group issued a plan to distract the enemy to conceal movement and concentration of troops from the Soviet Union and movement of supplies, and also to misinform the enemy regarding the true intentions of the Soviet and Mongolian forces. According to the Japanese sources

at that time, the Kwantung army was not aware of the large concentration of military personnel, artillery, and tanks, but only annoyed by the Soviet night bombing and air raids; therefore, requested best pilots and more aircrafts from the War Minister and General Staff (Coox, 1985; Zhukov 1985; IDS, 1996). Prior to 1939, there were no major Mongolian military units and border units in the *Khalkhiin Gol* area. The closest ones were located about 20-30 km distance whereas the 57th Soviet military corps, which was deployed to Mongolia in 1937, was stationed 400-500 km away from *Khalkhiin Gol* (river) (IDS 1996, 287). By August 20, 1939, the Soviet Union and Mongolia accumulated 50,000 military personnel, 496 tanks, 581 aircrafts, 346 armored vehicles, and 216 artillery at the battlefield of *Khalkhiin Gol* (IDS 1996, 330). Any disclosure of capabilities of the Soviet capabilities could have caused more resources and attention from the Kwantung Army and could extend the length of the war; therefore, the Soviets were extremely careful in misrepresenting their true intentions and capabilities prior to decisive offense.

Why the Undeclared War?

In closing, it might be interesting to examine why parties, the Soviet Union and Japan, avoided declaring a war during the *Khalkhiin Gol* War. Mongolia was in middle of the complicated great power triangle of China-Japan-Russia. During the Manchu-ruled Chinese Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Mongolia was intentionally partitioned into two parts: Inner and

Outer Mongolia. Outer Mongolia gained its independence in a brief period (1911-1915) and even attempted to reunite Inner Mongolia during this period. But the weakened Tsarist Russia recognized Chinese suzerainty over Outer Mongolia again under the second treaty of Kyakhta in 1915. On the other hand, in 1921, the Soviet Union assisted Mongolian revolutionary forces to expel Chinese military and established the second communist (satellite) state in Mongolia; however, China still maintained its control over Inner Mongolia. By the 1924 treaty between the Republic of China and the Soviet Union, the Soviets agreed to withdraw its military from Mongolia, but recognized Mongolia as a part of China (Bold, 1996; Ulam, 1968, 172). Although the Soviets agreed to withdraw its military, they did not want to lose this strategic territory to China; therefore, the Soviets increased its assistance to the pro-Soviet government in Mongolia. As Japan threatened the Soviet Union by increasing its military incursions along the Soviet- Manchuria borders in 1930s and concluding the Anti-Comintern Pact (November, 1936), Mongolia's geo-strategic importance for the Soviet Union increased and the Soviets, first, declared its intention to protect Mongolia in 1934, and then concluded a written protocol in 1936 after assuaging Chinese anger over the violation of the 1924 Sino-Soviet treaty.

China's stance was softened since the Chinese government was urging the Soviets to enter into war against Japan long ago in order to enmesh Japanese military into two wars (against Soviets in Manchuria and China in the south (Bold, 1996). On the other hand, both Japan and the Soviet Union were reluctant to recognize their sphere of influence by declaring war. For the Soviets, any declaration of war against Japan would (1) recognize the Japanese Manchuko-puppet state, (2) attract more resources from Japan to concentrate its war campaign to Russian Far East, and (3) violate the 1924 Sino-Soviet treaty officially by recognizing Mongolia as an independent state. Similarly, Japan was always reluctant to declare a war against the Soviet Union because any declaration would recognize the Soviet sphere of influence in Mongolia and fight in two wars in Northeast Asia. Rather both Japan and the Soviet Union wanted to keep the war as a localized border conflict in order to settle their bargain in Manchuria. Although both parties did not declare the war, Mongolia had benefitted from this undeclared war, the 1936 Soviet-Mongolian Mutual Assistance Treaty and Sino-Soviet non-aggression pact of 1941 recognized Mongolia's *de-facto* sovereignty - and it remained as a key strategic territory during the Sino-Soviet tensions in 60s-70s.

Conclusion

Above all, the *Khalkhiin Gol* War is a good empirical case for the bargaining theory of war. Both players were in the process of bargaining from the start and they fought over the territory of Mongolia

as both failed to bargain. It was the most rational decision for the Soviet Union to stop Japanese expansion in unpopulated, strategic terrain in Mongolia - in order to have a buffer zone from its either

populated or resource rich areas in Siberia. The common methods of costly signals - building weapons, mobilizing troops, signing alliance treaties, and supporting troops in a foreign land - were employed by Japan and the Soviet Union. Japan entered alliance with Germany and Italy whereas the Soviet Union concluded the Mutual Assistance Agreement with Mongolia (1936) and non-aggression pact with China (1937). Both massed their militaries and clashed in the barren steppes of Manchuria while Japan and the

Soviet Union were still in negotiation in their respective capitals. Having limited war rationale, both parties ceased the war in September, 1939, even though both were able to continue the war. Once the deal was reached, Japan obliged to its commitment, even though it massed over 1 million troops in Manchuria, until the Soviet Union reluctantly declared a war on Japan following the American sustained request in 1945.

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