



***MONGOLIA SHOWS SOVEREIGNTY
AND GLOBAL ORGANIZATIONS CAN
CO-EXIST***

BY REP. ED CASE, REP. AMI BERA,
AND REP. JONATHAN JACKSON

Rep. Ed Case (D-Hawaii) has represented Hawaii's 1st Congressional District since 2019. Rep. Ami Bera (D-California) represents California's 6th Congressional District, and Rep. Jonathan Jackson (D-Illinois) represents the 1st Congressional District of Illinois.

In [remarks](#) to the 80th session of the UN General Assembly, President Trump invoked “sovereignty” as a key guiding principle for nations, framing it against “globalism.” For the President and select other leaders, sovereignty means turning inward—cutting ties and stepping back from global institutions. But after a recent trip to Mongolia to see firsthand how the US and UN are working together in one of the world’s key locations, we came away convinced of the opposite: sovereignty and multilateralism are not contradictions. They are, in fact, complementary.

As Jaap van Hierden, the UN’s top official in Mongolia, put it, “The United Nations provides unwavering support for Mongolian sovereignty.” For a country landlocked between Russia and China, that support is not symbolic—it’s essential. And for the United States, it is squarely in our interests. Mongolia cannot change its “eternal neighbors” and it must coexist with them, but it has also chosen to cultivate a “third neighbor” in the US—through language, trade, and security. The UN has been the steady interlocutor furthering this strategic relationship.

Language as strategy

In 2023, Mongolia made the bold and controversial decision to designate English its official foreign language. The move was unpopular in nearby Beijing and Moscow, but it signaled Mongolia’s determination to orient outward. Public schools must now teach English, and a new generation of teachers is being trained. This June, the government, the US Embassy and international organizations opened the Center of Excellence for English Language Teaching in Ulaanbaatar.

“The Center will play a pivotal role in elevating English education in Mongolia,” said US Ambassador Richard Buangan, “ultimately making Mongolians more competitive in the international labor market.” UN agencies like UNICEF and the UN Development Program (UNDP) are critical to this overall effort, strengthening digital learning and training teachers across the country. Sovereignty here is not isolation; it is about choice, equipping citizens to participate in a global economy on their own terms.

Trade that balances power

Economic sovereignty is even more precarious. China buys 90% of Mongolia’s exports. Cashmere illustrates the challenge: Mongolia is the world’s second-largest producer, but most cashmere is exported raw to China for processing and re-export. The UN, through UNDP, is working to change that dynamic by helping herders adopt sustainable practices, improve quality and access high-end markets through eco-labeling and certification. Local entrepreneurs are being supported to keep more of the value chain inside Mongolia. The United States does and should reinforce these efforts. Passing the bipartisan Mongolia “Third Neighbor Trade Act” would allow duty-free cashmere exports to the US, creating jobs in America and in Mongolia, while reducing dependence on China. Again, supporting Mongolia’s economic sovereignty is in America’s strategic interest.

Peacekeeping as sovereignty in action

And then there's security. Since 9/11, Mongolia has stood shoulder to shoulder with the US—in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in UN peacekeeping missions. Over the past two decades, more than 22,000 Mongolian troops have deployed with the UN, often trained through the State Department's Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). Today, the annual "Khaan Quest" exercises in Mongolia bring together US, Mongolian and other forces to train to UN standards and improve interoperability.

"We face increasingly complex security challenges, from regional conflicts to humanitarian crises," [said](#) Lt. Gen. Joel B. Vowell, deputy commanding general of the US Army Pacific, at this year's kick-off event. "Khaan Quest prepares us to meet these challenges, equipping us with the skills and trust needed to operate in volatile environments."

For Mongolia, contributing to peacekeeping enhances sovereignty; for the US, it builds reliable partners who share the burden of global security.

Why US leadership matters

This is why US leadership in the UN matters. And why both the Trump administration's harsh rhetoric and its package that cuts all remaining US funding to the UN regular budget is so alarming. The pocket rescission also slashes over \$500 million from peacekeeping and claws back more than \$70 million from GPOI—the very program that helped build Mongolia's peacekeeping capacity. This is not reform; it is retreat. And retreat hands influence to our rivals.

UN peacekeeping is [eight times less expensive](#) than deploying US troops. Supporting Mongolia's English-language initiative and cashmere industry costs a fraction of what a military confrontation with China would.

In other words, investing in sovereignty—both ours and that of our partners—through the UN system is not pointless charity; it is a potent strategy.

PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.