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Strengthening Mongolia's Public Diplomacy

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Mongolia has long sought to strengthen its global presence beyond its two immediate neighbors. Its “third neighbor” policy reflects a strategic effort to build diversified and balanced international partnerships across the world. In recent years, Mongolia’s international reputation has improved through outstanding achievements in sports (the Mongolz, FIBA 3x3, Physical Asia etc) and arts, the growth of tourism, and the success of the recent national branding campaign, Go Mongolia.

Despite these accomplishments, a critical question remains: how can Mongolia further strengthen its public diplomacy? Which countries offer useful models, and what lessons can be adapted to Mongolia’s unique context?

Since the concept of public diplomacy originated in the United States--one of Mongolia’s most important third neighbors--this article explores how Mongolia can refine its public diplomacy strategy by learning from U.S. experience and contemporary diplomatic practice.

Public diplomacy scholars widely agree that nation branding forms its foundation. As Dutch scholar Ellen Huijgh observes, “successful public diplomacy starts at home. ” A well-informed domestic public strengthens a country’s international messaging, because public diplomacy is ultimately an extension of national interest. Without strong public understanding and support, foreign engagement remains fragile.

In this respect, Mongolia faces a challenge. While the country possesses a rich history and distinctive traditions, many citizens remain uncertain about the values and identity that define modern Mongolia. What truly differentiates Mongolia in today’s global landscape? What shared values bind Mongolian society together? Although academic studies have addressed these questions, public awareness remains limited, and this gap represents the starting point for strengthening Mongolia’s public diplomacy.

Since the establishment of official diplomatic relations in 1987, the United States has become one of Mongolia’s most reliable partners. Today, nearly 30,000 Mongolians reside in the United States, and approximately 8,000 Mongolians--including former and current parliament members, prime ministers, ministers, and senior officials--have participated in U.S.-funded exchange programs. These programs demonstrate how public diplomacy connects governments with culture, education, and people-to-people engagement, producing long-term and lasting effects.

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At its core, public diplomacy is built on listening and mutual benefit. It fosters trust by encouraging dialogue between societies rather than one-way messaging. The United States has refined this model for decades through flagship programs such as Fulbright, IVLP, and Peace Corps. As one U.S. State Department official explained, "The United States is now focusing on whom to reach rather than how to reach - a strategic shift from programs to audiences."

This audience-centered approach is particularly relevant for Mongolia, where nearly 30 percent of the population is between the ages of 15 and 34. An official at the U.S. Embassy in Ulaanbaatar emphasized that youth, journalists, and U.S. program alumni represent the core audiences for current embassy initiatives. These groups serve as natural bridges between societies and play a central role in shaping public perceptions.

The two countries also share a commitment to democratic values. Mongolia's consideration of adopting English as a second official language, as noted by embassy officials, reflects the country's openness and ambition to integrate more deeply into the global community. Education and exchange programs are designed to strengthen this understanding, though their true impact becomes visible only over time.

U.S. diplomats also highlighted the importance of local collaboration in public diplomacy. Wherever U.S. representatives work, they strive to engage local partners--from organizing workshops and masterclasses to supporting community initiatives--ensuring that cooperation always involves mutual learning and shared benefits.

Media engagement remains another essential pillar of public diplomacy. As communication increasingly shifts to digital platforms, social media has become a powerful tool for reaching and engaging the public. Journalists play a particularly influential role, as they help translate diplomatic efforts into stories that resonate with wider audiences. Recognizing this, the U.S. Embassy in Ulaanbaatar maintains specialized programs dedicated to supporting journalistic capacity and professional development.

Transparency further strengthens trust. The embassy's commitment to openly sharing information and data through public platforms demonstrates how openness reinforces credibility. Civil society and non-governmental organizations also function as key actors in public diplomacy. Through grants and collaborative programs, the U.S. Embassy encourages NGOs not merely to receive support, but to reinvest their knowledge and resources back into local communities - reinforcing democratic participation and social development.

Mongolia has shown strong receptiveness to U.S. values and programs, and U.S. officials expressed a clear interest in expanding cooperation wherever goals and principles align. Looking forward, emerging areas such as artificial intelligence and digital innovation present

new opportunities for deeper partnership.

Ultimately, Mongolia's next stage of public diplomacy will depend not only on external partnerships but on strengthening its domestic foundation: cultivating a clear national identity, empowering young leaders, and building long-term trust with global audiences. The U.S. experience offers valuable lessons, but Mongolia's success will lie in shaping a public diplomacy strategy rooted in its own history, values, and future ambitions.
