

HMDC Presents... CRISIS - MONGOL 1225: Part 3 (International Efforts)

HMDC Presents... Mongol Empire 1225: Death of Genghis Khan (Research Report, December 2026)

Prepared for HMDC Forensics delegates attending Harvard Model United Nations Online, December 5-6, 2026. Every fact below comes from a page or official document that was opened and read in October 2026. Each evidence entry repeats its publication and date so the source is always visible.

This is a historical crisis committee. The real history of 1225-1229 is the foundation, but the committee staff will invent events. In this report, anything that did not happen is clearly marked **CRISIS INVENTION** so that no delegate mistakes an invented scenario for history. Parts 2 and 3 also include brief modern parallels, clearly marked **MODERN PARALLEL**, because the United Nations did not exist in 1225.

A note on names: the same person appears in sources as Genghis Khan, Chinggis Khan or Čengiz Khan. His sons appear as Jochi (Jöchi, Joči), Chagatai (Chaghatai), Ögedei (Ögödei, Ogodei) and Tolui (Toluy). These are different spellings of the same names.

WHAT OUR CHAIRS WILL FOCUS ON

Harvard tells us that in December we sit as members of the Mongol Empire in 1225, at the moment when Genghis Khan is close to death. The empire is huge, but it has two weak points that Harvard names directly: keeping the family and the army united, and finding a steady way to pass power to the next ruler. As delegates, we will face growing threats to the empire and decide which direction it takes next. Harvard asks us to work together to keep the Mongols in power while we shape the empire's "political, economic, and military institutions."

Harvard Model United Nations, HMUN Online Committee Page, Last Accessed: October 2026
<https://www.harvardmun.org/mongol-online>

The parts of this report that match that focus most closely are the **TIMELINE**, the **CRISIS INVENTION BOX**, 1A (the succession and unity entries), Major Solutions 1 to 5 in 1B to 1F, 2H (the factions of the Mongol court) and 3A to 3C (envoys, the postal relay network and trade).

How we use this report: Our first job is succession and unity, so we study 1B to 1D and 2H until we can defend one plan for who rules next and how the family stays together. Next we prepare ideas for the empire's institutions: taxes and trade in 1E and 3A to 3C, and law, writing and army units in 1F. The modern United Nations material in Part 2 (2A to 2G) and in 3D and 3E, along with the DNA and climate entries in 1A, is background only, because none of it can be used inside a committee set in 1225. We read it once for understanding, but we spend our practice time on the 1225 court.

PART 3, INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS

In 1225 there were no international organisations, but there were diplomacy, trade agreements, envoys and a network of roads and relay stations that linked many peoples. The Mongols' own system of safe travel and trade, often called the Pax Mongolica, was one of the largest "international" systems of its time. This part covers those efforts and, briefly, one modern parallel.

3A. ENVOYS, TRADE DEALS AND THE ROAD TO WAR

Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026: Each of Chinggis Khan's three invasions began with an economic dispute

Tagline: Fighting over trade terms

Source: According to... Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: https://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/conquests/conquests_2c.htm

Fact: It states... In 1209 Chinggis Khan attacked the Tanguts of Xi Xia over a trade dispute, won a reduction in the tariffs they charged on trade, and went home without taking their land. Against the Jin, also in a trade dispute, his troops seized the area of present-day Beijing by 1215, and he again returned home once he had the trade he wanted. The Central Asian war began when the shah killed envoys who had asked for changes to trade terms. A related Columbia page explains that the Jin and Xia dynasties had tried to reduce trade with the Mongols, who badly needed grain and manufactured products.

This means... Many Mongol wars began as fights over trade access, not land. Delegates can propose trade agreements with neighbours as a way to reduce the need for future wars.

Encyclopaedia Iranica, December 15, 1990: The governor of Otrar killed a Mongol caravan in 1218

Tagline: Killing the caravan at Otrar

Source: According to... Encyclopaedia Iranica, December 15, 1990

Link: <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cengiz-khan>

Fact: It states... The war with Khwarazm was triggered in 1218 when Inaljuq Ghayir Khan, governor of Otrar, ordered a Mongol merchant caravan killed and robbed. When a Mongol ambassador came to protest, the Khwarazm-shah had him executed. In 1219 the Mongols invaded with a three-pronged attack; Bukhara and Samarkand were sacked, and the shah fled and died on an island in the Caspian Sea.

This means... The breakdown of diplomacy led to one of the most destructive wars in history. Delegates should treat the safety of envoys and merchants as a matter of war and peace.

3B. THE POSTAL RELAY NETWORK

Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026: Relay stations about every 20 miles supplied food, horses and lodging

Tagline: Connecting the empire every twenty miles

Source: According to... Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: https://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/history/history4_a.htm

Fact: It states... The Mongols set up postal stations about every 20 miles along major trade routes, first to carry official mail across the empire. The stations were stocked with food, horses and lodging and became a major help to all travellers, including merchants. Under the Mongols, merchants did not face the heavy confiscation of earlier Chinese dynasties, and in Persia the Mongols gave traders tax breaks to promote commerce.

This means... The relay network was how orders, and news of a khan's death, travelled across the empire. Delegates must decide how to use it during the succession: to call the family to a kuriltai quickly, or to control what news spreads.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, Last Accessed: October 2026: An iron safe-conduct pass reads "By the strength of Eternal Heaven, an edict of the Emperor"

Tagline: Carrying the khan's travel pass

Source: According to... Metropolitan Museum of Art, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/39624>

Fact: It states... The museum holds a paiza, or safe-conduct pass, from the late 13th century (Yuan dynasty, China). It is a round iron plaque, about 18 cm high, with lettering inlaid in silver. Its inscription, in the Phakpa script used to write Mongolian, reads: "By the strength of Eternal Heaven, an edict of the Emperor [Khan]. He who has not respect shall be guilty."

This means... This pass comes from later in the Mongol era, but it shows how the khan's authority travelled with his messengers: anyone who disrespected the holder was disrespecting the khan himself. Whoever becomes khan after 1227 inherits this power, so delegates must decide who may issue such passes during the succession.

3C. PAX MONGOLICA AND CONTACT WITH THE WORLD

Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026: Traders were generally safe for about 100 years of Mongol rule

Tagline: Keeping roads safe for traders

Source: According to... Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: <https://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/history/history5.htm>

Fact: It states... The Mongols promoted relations between states through the "Pax Mongolica", the Mongol Peace. Having conquered a huge territory in Asia, they could guarantee the safety of travellers. Although the Mongol khanates sometimes fought each other, they recognised that trade and travel mattered to all of them, so traders were generally safe during the roughly 100 years of Mongol rule over Eurasia.

This means... The empire's later fame for peaceful trade depended on surviving the succession crisis of 1227. If the empire had broken apart then, there would have been no Pax Mongolica.

Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026: Merchant partnerships called ortogh shared the risks of caravans

Tagline: Sharing risk in caravan partnerships

Source: According to... Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: https://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/history/history4_b.htm

Fact: It states... The Mongols set up merchant associations called ortogh to support long-distance caravan trade. A single caravan might have 70 to 100 men who needed food, pay, camels and horses for long periods, and many caravans were lost to natural disasters or bandits, which could ruin a single merchant. In an ortogh, merchants pooled their money and shared the losses, risks and profits. The Mongols offered loans at relatively low interest, but only to merchants who belonged to an ortogh.

This means... The Mongols did not only protect trade with soldiers; they built financial institutions for it. Delegates can propose that the next khan keep these partnerships and loans running during the succession, so merchants do not abandon the roads.

University of Washington Silk Road Seattle, Last Accessed: October 2026: Merchants reported the road from the Black Sea to China was safe "by day and by night"

Tagline: Travelling safely across Eurasia

Source: According to... University of Washington, Silk Road Seattle (essay by historian Daniel C. Waugh), Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: <https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/exhibit/mongols/essay.html>

Fact: It states... Chinggis Khan invaded Khwarazm in 1219-1220 after a trade mission he had sent was murdered. After his death in 1227, the capital was at Karakorum on the Orkhon River. Later, the Florentine agent Pegolotti reported that, according to merchants, the road from Tana (on the Sea of Azov) to China was safe by day and by night, and Italian merchants and missionaries were present in China. By the end of the 13th century, however, the parts of the empire had become independent of each other and were competing for control of the trade routes.

This means... Safe roads across a whole continent were a real achievement, but they did not survive the empire's split into rival parts. Delegates can argue that keeping the empire united after 1227 is the best way to protect trade.

Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026: The empire linked Europe and Asia and welcomed foreign travellers

Tagline: Linking Europe and Asia

Source: According to... Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: https://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/history/history_a.htm

Fact: It states... The Mongol Empire linked Europe and Asia and began an era of frequent contact between East and West. Once their lands were stable, the Mongols did not block relations with foreigners and were hospitable to foreign travellers, even those whose rulers had not submitted. European merchants, craftsmen and envoys travelled as far as China for the first time, and European demand for Asian products later helped inspire the search for a sea route to Asia.

This means... Openness to outsiders was a Mongol strength. Delegates can argue that the next khan should continue this policy because it brings wealth and information.

Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026: The Pope sent envoys to the Mongols in 1245 and 1253-1255

Tagline: Receiving envoys from Rome

Source: According to... Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: <https://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/history/history3.htm>

Fact: It states... Two European missions travelled to the Mongols: John of Plano Carpini, who left Europe in 1245, and William of Rubruck, who travelled through Mongol lands in 1253-1255. Both hoped to stop Mongol attacks on Europe and to convert the Mongols to Christianity. Some Mongol women, including Chinggis Khan's own mother, had become Nestorian Christians. The envoys were received politely and, though their missions failed, brought back the first accurate European accounts of the Mongols.

This means... These missions came after 1227, but they show that the empire's decisions about religion and diplomacy shaped how the rest of the world saw it. Delegates can decide in 1225 what kind of foreign relations the empire wants.

Encyclopaedia Britannica, July 28, 2026: Carpini was the first noteworthy European traveller in the Mongol empire

Tagline: Sending the first European observer

Source: According to... Encyclopaedia Britannica, July 28, 2026

Link: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Giovanni-da-Pian-del-Carpini>

Fact: It states... Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (John of Plano Carpini), an Italian Franciscan friar born about 1180 who died on August 1, 1252, was the first noteworthy European traveller in the Mongol empire. He wrote the earliest important Western work on Central Asia, and Britannica calls his account of Mongol customs and history probably the best treatment of the subject by any medieval Christian writer. A separate Britannica article on the Mongol empire (August 1, 2026) adds that Carpini was an eyewitness to the election of Güyük as Great Khan in 1246.

This means... A foreign envoy watched a Mongol succession happen and reported it to Europe. Delegates should remember that the way the court handles succession is seen by neighbours and rivals, who will judge the empire's strength from it.

Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026: Mongol openness to foreigners started an "extraordinary interchange" across Eurasia

Tagline: Building a bridge between East and West

Source: According to... Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: <https://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/history/history2.htm>

Fact: It states... The Mongols' attitude toward foreigners was a key factor in cultural exchange and led to "an extraordinary interchange of products, peoples, technology, and science" across their lands. Marco Polo from Venice and Ibn Battuta from Morocco both reached China in this period, and Rabban Sauma, a Nestorian Christian from the Beijing area, travelled to Europe and met the kings of England and France and the Pope. The page suggests that global history begins with the Mongols and the bridge they built between East and West.

This means... **ADVANTAGE:** An open empire gains goods, skills and information from every direction. Delegates can argue that the next khan should guarantee safe passage for foreign travellers and envoys from the first day of his reign.

3D. MODERN PARALLEL: THE UNESCO SILK ROADS PROGRAMME

UNESCO, Last Accessed: October 2026: Studying the shared legacies of the Silk Roads for more than three decades

Tagline: Studying shared Silk Road legacies

Source: According to... UNESCO, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: <https://www.unesco.org/en/silkroads>

Fact: It states... The UNESCO Silk Roads Programme is one of UNESCO's flagship "Routes of Dialogue" projects and has run for more than three decades. It studies the shared legacies and mixed identities that grew from commercial, cultural and scientific exchange along the Silk Roads, and how those exchanges shaped modern societies, under the motto "Shared pasts, connected futures".

This means... **MODERN PARALLEL:** The trade routes the Mongols protected are now studied as a shared heritage of many nations. Delegates can see that the empire's choices about trade had effects that lasted for centuries.

UNESCO, September 21, 2026: Over 7,000 young people from 100 countries photographed living Silk Road heritage

Tagline: Seeing Silk Road heritage through young eyes

Source: According to... UNESCO, September 21, 2026

Link: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/discover-winners-8th-edition-unesco-youth-eyes-silk-roads-photo-contest>

Fact: It states... The 8th UNESCO Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads Photo Contest, held from April 8 to July 28, 2026, received more than 7,000 entries from 100 countries, in two age groups, 14-17 and 18-25. Its theme was "Living Heritage along the Silk Roads": traditions, crafts and cultural practices that are still part of Silk Road life today. Winners from Central Asia included a photograph of a traditional Kyrgyz horseback game and one of a young craftswoman weaving a carpet in Uzbekistan.

This means... **MODERN PARALLEL:** Horse culture and craft traditions from the steppe lands the Mongols once ruled are still alive, and young people around the world now celebrate them together. Delegates can argue that the trade and contact the empire protected left a heritage that outlived its armies.

3E. MODERN PARALLEL: THE 2026 UN DESERTIFICATION CONFERENCE IN ULAANBAATAR

United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, August 28, 2026: The UN land conference in Mongolia launched US\$1.2 billion for rangelands

Tagline: Restoring the grasslands of the steppe

Source: According to... United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe (UNRIC), August 28, 2026

Link: <https://unric.org/en/unccd-cop17-advances-new-pathways-for-land-restoration-drought-resilience-and-implementation/>

Fact: It states... The 17th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP17) ended in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on August 28, 2026, after two weeks of negotiations among its 197 Parties. During the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, the conference launched a Rangelands Flagship Initiative bringing together 1.2 billion US dollars across 45 projects, the largest single effort for rangelands in the Convention's history. Rangelands cover 54% of the Earth's land surface, support around two billion people and are cared for by about 500 million pastoralists.

This means... **MODERN PARALLEL:** In 2026, Chinggis Khan's homeland hosted the world to protect the same grasslands that once fed the Mongol herds and armies. Delegates can argue, as the PNAS evidence in 1A suggests, that protecting pasture is a matter of power and survival, then and now.

KEY VOCABULARY

1. **Khan and Khagan:** a khan is a ruler; khagan (Great Khan) is the supreme ruler over other khans. Ögedei was the first to use the title khagan.
 2. **Kuriltai (khuriltai):** a great assembly of Mongol nobles and princes that chose or confirmed a new khan and decided major campaigns.
 3. **Succession:** the process by which power passes from one ruler to the next.
 4. **Regent:** a person who rules temporarily until a new ruler is chosen or is old enough to rule; Tolui was regent from 1227 to 1229.
 5. **Ulus:** a family domain or people given to a prince to rule under the Great Khan.
 6. **Yasa (Jasagh):** the body of Mongol law and rules linked to Chinggis Khan; historians disagree on whether it was a formal written code.
 7. **Anda:** a sworn blood brother; such alliances helped Chinggis Khan rise to power.
 8. **Decimal system:** the Mongol army's organisation into units of 10, 100, 1,000 and 10,000 soldiers.
 9. **Steppe and pastoral nomadism:** the steppe is the vast grassland of Central Asia; pastoral nomads move with their herds of animals instead of farming in one place.
 10. **Xi Xia (Tangut kingdom):** the Buddhist kingdom in northwest China that Chinggis Khan was fighting when he died in 1227.
 11. **Khwarazm:** the Central Asian empire the Mongols conquered from 1219 after the killing of Mongol merchants and an envoy at Otrar.
 12. **Pax Mongolica:** "the Mongol Peace", the period of relatively safe travel and trade across Mongol-ruled Eurasia.
-

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should the next khan be the person the dying ruler chooses, the eldest son, the youngest son who keeps the homeland, or whoever a kuriltai elects? Which method would the whole court accept?
2. Jochi, the eldest son, is estranged from his father and powerful in the west. Should the court try to reconcile with him, limit his power, or let him rule his lands independently?
3. Should the empire be divided into family domains (ulus), or kept as one state under a single Great Khan? What does history after 1260 suggest?
4. Should the empire keep conquering, or turn to governing the lands it already holds through taxation and administration?
5. How should the court treat conquered peoples such as the Tanguts and the people of Khorasan, whose cities and farms were destroyed?
6. Should the khan's death be kept secret until the family gathers? What are the risks of secrecy and of openness?
7. Should advisers from conquered peoples, such as Yelü Chucai, have a role in governing the empire?
8. CRISIS INVENTION: If a rival prince seizes the army while the family is travelling to the kuriltai, what directive would your character issue first?