



# MONGOLIA SECURITY ANALYSIS REPORT

## AI-Assisted Open Source Intelligence Assessment

Analysis Period: April 25, 2026 - May 02, 2026

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# Security Analysis Report: Mongolia (April 25, 2026 - May 02, 2026)

## Executive Summary

During the period of April 25 to May 02, 2026, Mongolia's security landscape was primarily shaped by significant cybersecurity threats and ongoing military and diplomatic engagements with its key neighbors and "third neighbors." A notable development was the public reporting of a sophisticated cyber espionage campaign by a China-linked Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) group, GopherWhisper, targeting Mongolian government entities. Concurrently, Mongolia continued its active military cooperation through joint exercises with China and maintained high-level defense and diplomatic dialogues with Russia, Turkey, the United States, and the European Union, underscoring its multi-vector foreign policy. These interactions highlight Mongolia's strategic efforts to balance its geopolitical position while addressing persistent cyber threats and enhancing its defense capabilities and economic resilience.

## Key Security Developments

- Major Cyber Espionage Campaign Uncovered

Between April 23 and April 27, 2026, cybersecurity researchers publicly reported a sophisticated cyber espionage campaign conducted by a China-linked APT group named GopherWhisper. This group has been actively targeting Mongolian government entities since at least November 2023, with a previously unknown backdoor, LaxGopher, discovered in January 2025 within the infrastructure of a Mongolian government agency. The attackers utilized legitimate cloud services such as Discord, Slack, and Microsoft 365 Outlook for command and control, and File.io for data exfiltration, compromising at least 12 systems. This incident highlights a persistent and advanced cyber threat to Mongolia's national security and critical infrastructure.

- Ongoing China-Mongolia Joint Military Training

The "Steppe Partner-2024" joint army training between China and Mongolia was ongoing in Mongolia's Dornogovi Province during this period, with an opening ceremony held on March 30, 2026, and exercises scheduled to last until late May. This training focuses on enhancing the capabilities of both armies in jointly combating

illegal armed groups, demonstrating continued bilateral military cooperation and coordination on border security.

- Preparations for "Steppe Partnership 2026" Joint Exercises

Mongolia and China are actively preparing for the "Steppe Partnership 2026" joint military exercises, which are scheduled to take place on Chinese territory from May 26 to June 10, 2026. These exercises will include ground maneuvers with live fire and are part of an annual cooperation plan, indicating a sustained commitment to deepening strategic trust and practical military interaction between the two nations.

- Recent High-Level Military Diplomacy with Russia

Lieutenant General S. Ganbyamba, Chief of the General Staff of the Mongolian Armed Forces, conducted an official visit to the Russian Federation from April 15-18, 2026, marking the first such visit in sixteen years. During this visit, high-level negotiations were held regarding military and military-technical cooperation, and the Mongolian delegation was briefed on advancements in the Russian defense industry. This engagement underscores the historical camaraderie and ongoing strategic defense ties between Mongolia and Russia.

- Recent Defense Cooperation Agreement with Turkey

The 11th consultations between the Ministries of Defense of Mongolia and Turkey took place in Ankara from March 23-27, 2026. The discussions led to an agreement on cooperation in various defense sectors, including military training, joint exercises, education, cybersecurity, and scientific collaboration. This agreement signifies Mongolia's efforts to diversify its defense partnerships beyond its immediate neighbors.

- EU Support for Public Financial Management

A new project, funded by the European Union, was launched to strengthen Mongolia's public financial management systems, with implementation scheduled from 2026 to 2029. This initiative, focusing on budget planning, public spending efficiency, transparency, and fiscal risk management, aims to bolster Mongolia's economic security and governance, aligning with its broader development agenda.

- Continued "Third Neighbor Policy" Engagement with the US and EU

Mongolia continued to actively pursue its "Third Neighbor Policy," engaging in high-level diplomatic dialogues with the United States and the European Union. The 17th Annual Bilateral Consultations between the U.S. and Mongolia were held on March 17, 2026, in Ulaanbaatar, reaffirming their Strategic Third Neighbor Partnership and discussing cooperation on economic resilience, democratic principles, and security matters, including in the Indo-Pacific. Similarly, the EU is strengthening ties, supporting Mongolia's economic diversification and global connectivity efforts.

- Discussions on Russia-Mongolia Energy Cooperation

Russia has pledged uninterrupted fuel supplies to Mongolia for 2026, addressing recent supply fluctuations and ensuring energy stability. Furthermore, discussions are ongoing regarding potential large-scale energy projects, including a proposed nuclear power plant and uranium mining projects, which were finalized in technical design in September 2024. These developments are crucial for Mongolia's long-term energy security and economic development.

## Geopolitical Impact and Regional Dynamics

Mongolia's security developments during this period reflect its delicate balancing act within a complex geopolitical environment, situated between two major powers, China and Russia. The reported cyber espionage campaign by a China-linked APT group highlights the pervasive nature of state-sponsored cyber threats and the challenges Mongolia faces in protecting its digital sovereignty, even while maintaining close diplomatic and military ties with Beijing. This incident could subtly strain trust, emphasizing the need for robust cybersecurity infrastructure and international cooperation.

The ongoing joint military exercises with China ("Steppe Partner-2024" and "Steppe Partnership 2026") and the recent high-level military dialogues with Russia underscore Mongolia's continued reliance on its immediate neighbors for defense cooperation and regional stability. These engagements reinforce the existing comprehensive strategic partnerships with both countries, particularly in areas like counter-terrorism and border security. However, they also highlight the inherent challenge of maintaining strategic autonomy while deepening military ties with powerful neighbors, especially in the context of broader geopolitical competition.

Mongolia's persistent pursuit of its "Third Neighbor Policy" with the United States, the European Union, and other partners like Turkey, is crucial for diversifying its foreign relations and reducing overreliance on China and Russia. The recent consultations with the US and the EU's financial support project demonstrate a commitment from these "third neighbors" to bolster Mongolia's economic resilience and democratic governance. This policy helps Mongolia navigate regional power dynamics by fostering alternative economic and security partnerships, thereby enhancing its strategic flexibility and international standing. The agreement on defense cooperation with Turkey further exemplifies this diversification strategy, seeking new avenues for military modernization and expertise.

## Military and Defense Analysis

Mongolia's military posture remains focused on maintaining a small, professional force capable of border defense, internal security, and contributing to international peacekeeping operations. While no major defense acquisitions were reported in this specific week, the recent visit of the Chief of the General Staff to Russia, including briefings on Russian defense industry advancements, suggests an ongoing interest in military-technical cooperation and potential modernization programs. Mongolia has historically relied on Russia for military equipment and training, and these discussions likely aim to sustain and upgrade its defense capabilities.

Joint military exercises, such as "Steppe Partner-2024" with China and the upcoming "Steppe Partnership 2026," as well as past exercises like "Selenge-2024" with Russia and the multinational "Khaan Quest" with the US, are central to Mongolia's defense strategy. These exercises are vital for enhancing interoperability, improving tactical skills, and strengthening coordination in areas like counter-terrorism and peacekeeping. Mongolia's commitment to peacekeeping, as welcomed by the United States, demonstrates its role as a responsible international actor and a means to gain experience and training from diverse partners. Defense spending trends were not explicitly detailed in the available news, but the emphasis on military cooperation and modernization suggests a continued allocation of resources to these areas, albeit within the constraints of its economic capacity.

## Outlook and Forecast

Short-term trends (1-3 months):

In the immediate future, Mongolia is likely to continue its active diplomatic and military engagements. The upcoming "Steppe Partnership 2026" joint military exercises with China in late May and early June will be a key event, signaling ongoing defense cooperation with its largest neighbor. Cybersecurity will remain a critical concern, with the recent GopherWhisper APT revelations prompting heightened vigilance and potential internal reviews of government network security. Mongolia will likely seek to strengthen its cyber defenses and potentially engage international partners for assistance in this domain. Diplomatic efforts under the "Third Neighbor Policy" will persist, with continued engagement with the US and EU on economic diversification and governance reforms.

Critical flashpoints and risk areas:

A critical flashpoint remains the persistent cyber threat from state-sponsored actors, as evidenced by the GopherWhisper campaign. The potential for further sophisticated cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure or government data poses a significant risk to national security and stability. Geopolitically, while Mongolia strives for neutrality and a multi-vector foreign policy, its close proximity and economic

dependence on China and Russia present inherent vulnerabilities. Any escalation of tensions between these major powers could place Mongolia in a precarious position, impacting its economic and security choices. Internal political stability, as highlighted by the constitutional crisis in early 2026, also remains a risk area, potentially diverting attention and resources from external security challenges.

Indicators to monitor:

Key indicators to monitor include the frequency and sophistication of reported cyberattacks against Mongolian entities, particularly those attributed to state-linked actors. Developments in Mongolia's military cooperation with China and Russia, such as the scale and nature of joint exercises and any new defense acquisition agreements, will be important. Progress in the implementation of EU-funded governance and economic diversification projects, as well as the outcomes of high-level diplomatic visits from "third neighbors," will indicate the effectiveness of Mongolia's balancing strategy. Additionally, internal political stability and public sentiment regarding economic conditions will be crucial for overall security.

Strategic recommendations:

Mongolia should prioritize strengthening its national cybersecurity capabilities through increased investment in technology, training, and international partnerships for threat intelligence sharing. It is recommended to conduct regular, independent audits of government networks and critical infrastructure. Diplomatically, Mongolia should continue to actively cultivate and expand its "Third Neighbor Policy" relationships, leveraging these partnerships for economic diversification, technical assistance, and political support to enhance its strategic autonomy. While maintaining necessary cooperation with China and Russia, Mongolia should ensure transparency in its defense engagements to mitigate perceptions of alignment that could undermine its neutral stance. Internally, addressing governance issues and fostering political stability will be essential to present a unified and resilient front against external pressures and threats.

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