



MONGOLIA SECURITY ANALYSIS REPORT

AI-Assisted Open Source Intelligence Assessment

Analysis Period: May 19, 2026 - May 26, 2026

This report was produced using open-source intelligence analysis. The assessment is grounded in publicly available reporting and should be cross-referenced with primary sources. RSS feed articles are listed in the annex for reference.

Executive Summary

During the period of May 19-26, 2026, Mongolia's security landscape was characterized by a blend of intensified diplomatic and military engagements with its powerful neighbors, China and Japan, alongside persistent internal security challenges and significant cybersecurity threats. Joint military exercises, "Steppe Partner 2026" with China and "Road-2026" with Japan, underscored Mongolia's commitment to regional stability and peacekeeping capabilities, while also highlighting its strategic balancing act. Domestically, Ulaanbaatar experienced political uncertainty following a mayoral resignation and an international drug smuggling network bust, indicating ongoing internal security concerns. Furthermore, the Mongolian government continued to grapple with a high volume of cyberattacks, including sophisticated targeting by a Chinese Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) group, emphasizing critical vulnerabilities in its digital infrastructure.

Key Security Developments

- Military Activities and Exercises: "Steppe Partner 2026" with China

China and Mongolia commenced the "Steppe Partner 2026" joint military exercise in Inner Mongolia, northern China, from late May to early June. Announced by Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson Senior Colonel Jiang Bin, these drills are the second iteration of "Steppe Partner" and focus on joint operations against illegal armed groups. The exercise aims to deepen bilateral military trust, enhance practical defense cooperation, and improve both countries' ability to jointly maintain regional peace and stability.

- Military Activities and Exercises: "Road-2026" with Japan

Joint exercises titled "Road-2026" began on May 18, 2026, between the Armed Forces of Mongolia and the engineering unit of the Japan Self-Defense Forces in Hitachinaka, Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan. This marks the twelfth year of such joint training, focusing on enhancing the engineering skills necessary for UN peacekeeping operations, including base construction, electricity, and water supply systems. Fifteen Mongolian soldiers, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel G. Khatanmura, are participating in the theoretical training in Japan until June 19, with practical exercises scheduled for August in Mongolia.

- Diplomatic Relations: High-Level Engagements with China

Mongolian Ambassador to China N. Enkhbold met with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Hua Chunying in Beijing on May 19, 2026, to discuss bilateral relations and upcoming joint activities. This meeting reaffirmed the importance Beijing places on developing the comprehensive strategic partnership with Mongolia. Furthermore, Chinese President Xi Jinping is expected to visit Mongolia in 2026, his first trip since 2014, signaling Mongolia's growing strategic importance between China and Russia.

- **Border Security: Seventh Joint Border Commission Meeting with China**

Officials from Mongolia and China held their seventh Joint Border Commission meeting in Beijing from May 19-20, 2026. The discussions focused on reviewing the implementation of bilateral agreements on border management and port operations, covering border security cooperation, law enforcement coordination, cross-border water management, and wildfire prevention. A protocol was signed at the conclusion of the meeting.

- **Security Incidents and Threats: International Drug Smuggling Network Busted**

On May 18, 2026, Mongolian police arrested 12 individuals linked to two organized criminal groups involved in smuggling and selling narcotics across international borders. Coordinated raids at nine locations led to the seizure of over 3.7 kilograms of illegal drugs, estimated to be enough for more than 38,000 single uses, smuggled from Europe and Eurasia.

- **Political Uncertainty in Ulaanbaatar**

Political uncertainty grew in Ulaanbaatar following the resignation of former mayor Kh. Nyambaatar amid criticism over rising meat prices and city management. Prime Minister N. Uchral reportedly ordered investigations involving anti-corruption, police, and intelligence agencies. First Deputy Governor B. Munkhbat was temporarily appointed as acting city governor, with the ruling Mongolian People's Party considering appointing a government plenipotentiary representative to oversee Ulaanbaatar before selecting a new mayor.

- **Cybersecurity: Chinese APT Group Targeting Mongolian Government**

A previously undocumented China-aligned Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) group, named "GopherWhisper" by ESET researchers, has been targeting a Mongolian government entity. Active since at least November 2023, the group was discovered in January 2025 and utilized popular communication platforms like Discord, Slack, and Microsoft 365 Outlook for command and control and data exfiltration. This highlights the sophisticated and persistent cyber threats faced by Mongolia.

- **Cybersecurity: Persistent Threats and National Strategy**

Mongolia continues to face a high volume of cyberattacks, with an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 attacks each week in 2025. The country has a National Cyber Security Strategy, approved in January 2023, which outlines a structured approach to

safeguard its digital landscape, focusing on legal frameworks, critical information infrastructure protection, human resource capacity, and international cooperation. However, compliance rates for security audits and risk assessments remain critically low, and there is a shortage of trained cybersecurity professionals.

- Diplomatic Relations: US-Mongolia Cultural Agreement and Air Links

Mongolia is set to sign an agreement with the United States on cultural values in 2026. Additionally, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) is partnering with Mongolia to advance secure, direct air links between the two countries. This initiative aims to support the Mongolia Civil Aviation Authority in achieving a U.S. Federal Aviation Administration Category 1 rating, which would facilitate direct flights and potentially boost the export of critical minerals.

- Intelligence Activities: "Year of Young Officers' Development 2026"

The General Intelligence Department of Mongolia is promoting the "Year of Young Officers' Development 2026," indicating a focus on human capital development and training within its intelligence services.

Geopolitical Impact and Regional Dynamics

Mongolia's security posture during this period reflects its delicate balancing act as a landlocked nation situated between two major powers, Russia and China, while simultaneously pursuing its "Third Neighbor" policy with countries like the United States, Japan, and the European Union. The "Steppe Partner 2026" joint military exercise with China, focusing on counter-terrorism, deepens military trust and practical defense cooperation with Beijing, reinforcing China's influence in Mongolia's immediate security environment. This is further underscored by the upcoming visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Mongolia in 2026, which is expected to redefine Mongolia's role in regional geopolitics and economic integration.

Concurrently, the "Road-2026" joint engineering exercises with Japan demonstrate Mongolia's continued engagement with its "Third Neighbors" for peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance capabilities. This multi-vector foreign policy is crucial for Mongolia to maintain its independence and sovereignty, preventing over-reliance on any single power. The US-Mongolia cultural agreement and the USTDA partnership for direct air links, aimed at facilitating trade and critical mineral exports, further illustrate Mongolia's efforts to diversify its strategic partnerships and economic ties beyond its immediate neighbors.

The ongoing cybersecurity threats, particularly the targeting of the Mongolian government by a Chinese APT group, highlight the complex nature of its geopolitical position. While military and diplomatic cooperation with China is expanding, the cyber

domain presents a different dimension of potential vulnerability and competition. The broader strategic landscape is also influenced by global efforts to diversify critical mineral supply chains away from China, with the US Department of Defense making significant investments in this area. Mongolia, rich in such resources, could become a more prominent player in these global supply chain dynamics, potentially increasing its geopolitical leverage but also exposing it to greater external pressures.

Military and Defense Analysis

Mongolia's military and defense strategy appears to be focused on enhancing its capabilities for peacekeeping operations and counter-terrorism, as evidenced by the nature of its recent joint exercises. The "Steppe Partner 2026" drills with China specifically target joint strikes against illegal armed groups, indicating a shared concern over regional security threats such as transnational crime and extremism. This aligns with Mongolia's broader commitment to maintaining regional peace and stability.

The "Road-2026" exercises with Japan, concentrating on engineering skills for UN peacekeeping missions, demonstrate a clear emphasis on developing specialized capabilities for international deployments. This focus on engineering, including base construction and logistical support, suggests a modernization program aimed at improving the practical and technical readiness of the Mongolian Armed Forces for complex peacekeeping environments. The long-standing nature of these exercises (twelfth year for "Road-2026") indicates a sustained effort in this area.

While specific defense spending trends or major defense acquisitions were not prominently reported within this period, the emphasis on training and human capital development, as seen in the General Intelligence Department's "Year of Young Officers' Development 2026," suggests an investment in personnel and expertise across the security sector. The participation in multinational exercises like "Khaan Quest" (though not within this specific reporting period, it's an annual event) further underscores Mongolia's commitment to interoperability and international standards in peacekeeping and stability operations.

Outlook and Forecast

Short-term trends (1-3 months): In the immediate future, Mongolia is expected to continue its active diplomatic and military engagements. The "Steppe Partner 2026" exercise with China will conclude in early June, likely followed by official statements on its outcomes and further bilateral defense cooperation. The theoretical phase of

"Road-2026" with Japan will continue until mid-June, with the practical field exercises anticipated in Mongolia in August. Diplomatic activity with China will remain high, particularly with the expected visit of President Xi Jinping later in 2026, which will likely involve discussions on economic cooperation and regional security. Internally, the political situation in Ulaanbaatar will likely see further developments regarding the appointment of a new mayor and the outcomes of anti-corruption investigations. Cybersecurity threats are expected to persist, requiring continuous vigilance and implementation of the National Cyber Security Strategy.

Critical flashpoints and risk areas: A critical flashpoint remains the delicate balance of Mongolia's "Third Neighbor" policy amidst increasing geopolitical competition between its two powerful neighbors, China and Russia, and its Western partners. Any significant shift in the regional power dynamics or increased pressure from Beijing or Moscow could challenge Mongolia's neutral stance. Internally, political instability, particularly in the capital, and the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures will be crucial to monitor. The persistent and sophisticated cybersecurity threats, especially from state-sponsored actors, pose a significant risk to critical infrastructure and government data. The porous borders and the international drug smuggling network highlight ongoing challenges in border security and transnational crime.

Indicators to monitor: Key indicators to monitor include the nature and frequency of future joint military exercises with China, Russia, and "Third Neighbors," as these will signal shifts in defense policy and alliances. The progress of infrastructure projects, particularly those involving foreign investment, will reflect economic stability and geopolitical alignment. The stability of Ulaanbaatar's governance and the public's response to anti-corruption efforts will be important internal indicators. In the cyber domain, the effectiveness of the National Cyber Security Strategy in improving compliance and mitigating attacks, especially from APT groups, will be a critical measure of national security. Furthermore, any developments related to Mongolia's role in critical mineral supply chains and related foreign investments should be closely watched.

Strategic recommendations: Mongolia should continue to actively pursue its multi-pillar foreign policy, diversifying its diplomatic and security partnerships to avoid over-reliance on any single power. Strengthening cybersecurity capabilities, including investing in human resources, improving compliance with existing laws, and fostering international cooperation on cyber defense, is paramount. Addressing internal governance issues, enhancing transparency, and combating corruption will bolster domestic stability and public trust. Furthermore, Mongolia should leverage its strategic position and rich natural resources to attract responsible foreign investment, particularly in critical minerals, while ensuring national interests are protected and environmental concerns are addressed. Continued participation in international peacekeeping missions will enhance its global standing and provide valuable training

and experience for its armed forces.

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