



MONGOLIA SECURITY ANALYSIS REPORT

AI-Assisted Open Source Intelligence Assessment

Analysis Period: May 26, 2026 - June 02, 2026

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Security Analysis Report: Mongolia (May 26, 2026 - June 02, 2026)

Executive Summary

During the period of May 26 to June 02, 2026, Mongolia actively engaged in significant military exercises and diplomatic initiatives, underscoring its multi-vector foreign policy. Joint military drills, "Steppe Partner 2026," commenced with China in Inner Mongolia, focusing on counter-terrorism, while engineering exercises, "Road-2026," continued with Japan, aimed at enhancing peacekeeping capabilities. Mongolia also participated in the multinational "EFES-2026" exercise in Turkey, broadening its international defense cooperation. Cybersecurity remains a critical concern, with ongoing implementation of a national strategy amidst persistent threats from state-aligned actors. These developments highlight Mongolia's strategic efforts to balance relations with its immediate powerful neighbors, China and Russia, through its "Third Neighbor" policy, while simultaneously addressing internal security and defense modernization challenges.

Key Security Developments

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

Mongolian troops arrived in China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region on May 27, 2026, for the "Steppe Partner 2026" joint army training, which officially launched on May 30, 2026, and is scheduled to run from late May to early June. This marks the second iteration of these exercises, focusing on joint strikes against illegal armed groups, aiming to deepen friendship, mutual trust, and enhance regional peace and stability. More than 600 military personnel from both countries attended the opening ceremony on May 30.

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

The joint exercises "Road-2026" between the Armed Forces of Mongolia and the Japan Self-Defense Forces began on May 18, 2026, in Hitachinaka, Ibaraki prefecture, Japan. The theoretical training component of these exercises will continue in Japan until June

19, with practical field exercises scheduled to take place in Mongolia in August. This twelfth year of joint training focuses on enhancing the engineering capabilities of the Mongolian Armed Forces for United Nations peacekeeping operations, including the construction and development of bases, as well as electricity and water supply systems. Fifteen Mongolian soldiers are participating in the exercises, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel G. Khatanmura.

- Military Activities and Exercises: Participation in "EFES-2026" Multinational Exercises in Turkey

Mongolian servicemen participated in the "EFES-2026" joint military exercises with live fire, which took place at the Doganbey training ground in Seferihisar, Turkey, from April 20 to May 21, 2026. These large-scale exercises gathered over 10,000 participants from 50 countries, including the USA and Azerbaijan, and showcased modern military equipment and AI-supported operational management systems. The Commander of the Mongolian Ground Forces, Major General Tsogtjargal Chimeddorj, met with the Commander of the Turkish Ground Forces, General Metin Tokel, to discuss bilateral cooperation.

- Defense Policy and Strategic Shifts: "Third Neighbor" Policy Reinforcement

Mongolia continues to actively pursue its "Third Neighbor" policy, aiming to diversify its strategic partnerships beyond its immediate neighbors, Russia and China, to enhance its political and economic independence. This policy was evident in the ongoing military cooperation with Japan and its strategic dialogue with the United States, as well as participation in multinational exercises with Turkey.

- Diplomatic Relations: U.S.-Mongolia Strategic Third Neighbor Partnership

While the 17th Annual Bilateral Consultations between the U.S. and Mongolia took place on March 17, 2026, in Ulaanbaatar, the discussions from this period continue to shape ongoing diplomatic relations within the reporting window. Both nations reaffirmed their shared interest in global peace, freedom, democracy, and economic prosperity, pledging to deepen cooperation within the Strategic Third Neighbor Partnership. Key areas of discussion included cooperation on peace and security matters in the Indo-Pacific, human rights, and economic engagement, particularly in critical minerals and clean energy. The next consultations are scheduled for 2027 in Washington.

- Diplomatic Relations: Engagement with Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

On April 22, 2026, a delegation from Mongolia's Institute of Strategic Studies visited the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Secretariat in Beijing to discuss Mongolia's interaction with the SCO as an observer state and explore expert and analytical cooperation. A delegation from the SCO Secretariat is expected to attend the 11th International Forum "Ulaanbaatar Dialogue" on June 4-5, 2026, indicating

continued engagement with this regional security bloc.

- Security Incidents and Threats: China-aligned Cyber Espionage

A previously undocumented China-aligned threat actor, named "GopherWhisper" by ESET researchers, targeted a Mongolian government entity. Discovered in January 2025, this group has been active since at least November 2023 and utilized popular communication platforms such as Discord, Slack, and Microsoft 365 Outlook for covert communications and data exfiltration. The malware, dubbed LaxGopher, was deployed on approximately a dozen systems within the organization, highlighting persistent cyber espionage threats against Mongolian government institutions.

- Cybersecurity: National Cyber Security Strategy Implementation

Mongolia is currently in the second phase (2026-2027) of its comprehensive National Cyber Security Strategy, which aims to safeguard its information assets and protect the nation's digital landscape against cyber threats. The strategy focuses on improving the legal framework, protecting critical information infrastructure, enhancing human resource capacities, expanding international and domestic cooperation, and developing resilience against cyberattacks. Despite a solid legal and regulatory foundation, a report from May 8, 2026, indicated that compliance rates remain critically low, and there is a significant need for more skilled cybersecurity professionals.

- Internal Political Concerns: Democratic Party Demands

On May 25, 2026, the Democratic Party caucus in the Mongolian parliament announced several decisions, including a demand for the dismissal of the Defense Minister. This demand was made in response to repeated deaths and serious injuries among conscript soldiers, with 46 deaths and 144 major injuries recorded over the past decade without ministerial accountability. The party also raised concerns about the Constitutional Court's leadership and potential political influence.

- Counter-terrorism: Low Threat Assessment

As of January 26, 2026, the U.S. Department of State assessed Ulaanbaatar as a LOW-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. While there have been no reports of terrorist attacks or indigenous terrorist groups operating in Mongolia, authorities are aware that porous national borders could potentially allow transnational terrorists entry and closely monitor visitors from countries known to host such groups. Mongolia has detailed counterterrorism provisions in its domestic law, including the 2019 Law on Counter-Terrorism and Proliferation.

Geopolitical Impact and Regional Dynamics

Mongolia's security developments during this period underscore its delicate and active geopolitical balancing act between its two powerful neighbors, China and Russia, and its "Third Neighbor" partners. The commencement of the "Steppe Partner 2026" joint military exercises with China in Inner Mongolia demonstrates a commitment to strengthening defense ties with Beijing, particularly in counter-terrorism efforts. This cooperation is crucial for Mongolia, given its significant economic dependence on China as its largest trading partner. Simultaneously, the ongoing "Road-2026" engineering exercises with Japan highlight Mongolia's efforts to diversify its defense cooperation and enhance its capabilities for UN peacekeeping missions, aligning with its "Third Neighbor" policy.

The participation in Turkey's multinational "EFES-2026" exercises further illustrates Mongolia's broader engagement with international partners beyond its immediate region, showcasing its commitment to multilateral security cooperation and exposure to modern defense technologies. This multi-vector approach is vital for Mongolia to maintain its independent statehood and navigate the complex international landscape, especially as Russia and China increasingly align their voices against the West. The continued U.S.-Mongolia Strategic Third Neighbor Partnership, as discussed in the March 2026 bilateral consultations, reinforces this strategy by fostering cooperation in peace, security, and economic development, including critical minerals and clean energy.

However, this balancing act is not without challenges. The reported China-aligned cyber espionage against a Mongolian government entity underscores the persistent security risks associated with its proximity and engagement with major powers. Mongolia's economic reliance on Russia for fuel and a significant portion of its electricity, coupled with its abstention in UN votes condemning Russia's actions in Ukraine, highlights the constraints on its foreign policy autonomy. The ongoing engagement with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as an observer state also reflects Mongolia's pragmatic approach to regional security, seeking to maintain dialogue and cooperation within various frameworks.

Military and Defense Analysis

Mongolia's military posture during this period reflects a continued emphasis on enhancing its capabilities through international cooperation, particularly in specialized areas like peacekeeping and counter-terrorism. The "Road-2026" exercises with Japan are a prime example, focusing on developing military engineers for UN missions, which directly contributes to Mongolia's international standing and its ability to participate in global security efforts. This long-standing cooperation, now in its twelfth year, demonstrates a sustained commitment to building specific technical skills within the armed forces.

The "Steppe Partner 2026" exercises with China, centered on combating illegal armed formations, indicate a focus on internal and border security threats, which are common concerns for landlocked countries with extensive borders. The scale of these exercises, involving over 600 personnel and a joint command structure, suggests a move towards greater interoperability and coordinated response capabilities with its largest neighbor. While no new defense acquisitions were reported within this specific week, Mongolia's past acquisition of MiG-29 fighter jets from Russia in 2019 indicates a reliance on Russian military hardware, which is a factor in its overall force modernization and strategic alignment.

The internal political concerns raised by the Democratic Party regarding conscript soldier deaths and the demand for the Defense Minister's dismissal point to potential issues within military training, welfare, or accountability structures. Such concerns, if not adequately addressed, could impact morale, recruitment, and the overall effectiveness of the armed forces. Defense spending trends were not explicitly detailed in the available news, but the emphasis on international training and capacity building suggests a strategic investment in human capital and specialized skills rather than solely large-scale hardware acquisitions.

Outlook and Forecast

Short-term trends (1-3 months): In the immediate future, Mongolia is expected to continue its active participation in international military exercises and diplomatic engagements. The "Steppe Partner 2026" exercises with China will conclude, likely followed by official statements on their outcomes and future cooperation. The theoretical phase of "Road-2026" with Japan will finish in June, with preparations for the practical phase in Mongolia in August. Mongolia will also likely send a delegation to the 11th International Forum "Ulaanbaatar Dialogue" in early June, and potentially to the UN Counter-Terrorism Week later in June, further solidifying its diplomatic presence. Cybersecurity will remain a prominent area of focus, with ongoing efforts to implement the National Cyber Security Strategy and address identified vulnerabilities.

Critical flashpoints and risk areas: A critical flashpoint could arise from the delicate balance Mongolia maintains between China, Russia, and its "Third Neighbor" partners. Any significant escalation of tensions between these major powers could place Mongolia in a precarious position, potentially impacting its economic stability and foreign policy flexibility. The persistent threat of cyber espionage, particularly from state-aligned actors, remains a significant risk to government institutions and critical infrastructure. Internally, the political scrutiny over military accountability and conscript deaths could lead to further public discontent or political instability if not effectively managed. Economic vulnerabilities, such as reliance on fuel imports from Russia, also present a risk given global market instabilities.

Indicators to monitor: Key indicators to monitor include the frequency and scope of future joint military exercises with China and Russia, as well as the expansion of defense cooperation with "Third Neighbor" countries like Japan, the U.S., and Turkey. Progress in implementing Mongolia's National Cyber Security Strategy, particularly in improving compliance rates and developing skilled professionals, will be crucial. Diplomatic statements and outcomes from multilateral forums, such as the SCO and UN, will offer insights into Mongolia's evolving geopolitical alignment. Domestically, public and political reactions to military accountability issues and government reforms will be important gauges of internal stability.

Strategic recommendations: Mongolia should continue to strategically leverage its "Third Neighbor" policy to diversify its security and economic partnerships, reducing over-reliance on any single power. Investing further in cybersecurity infrastructure, training, and international collaboration is paramount to mitigate persistent cyber threats. Addressing internal military accountability concerns transparently and implementing reforms to improve soldier welfare and training standards will be essential for maintaining public trust and military effectiveness. Furthermore, exploring alternative energy sources and supply chains could enhance Mongolia's energy security and reduce its economic vulnerability to external pressures.

Structured Assessment

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