

BRUNEI SECURITY ANALYSIS REPORT

AI-Assisted Open Source Intelligence Assessment

Analysis Period: October 24, 2026 - October 31, 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 October 24 to October 31, 2026, Brunei Darussalam demonstrated a proactive and engaged approach to regional security and diplomatic relations. Key developments included co-chairing a significant counter-terrorism forum, the reopening of its embassy in Tehran, and continued advancements in defense modernization with the impending delivery of new helicopters. The nation actively participated in regional dialogues addressing transnational crime, cybersecurity, and irregular migration, underscoring its commitment to multilateral cooperation. These efforts collectively reinforce Brunei's strategic posture, balancing internal security enhancements with robust diplomatic engagement to foster regional stability and address evolving threats.

Key Security Developments

- Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime Cooperation

On October 24, 2026, Brunei and Malaysia announced their intention to co-chair the Senior Officials' Counter-Terrorism Policy Forum in 2027. This decision was made during the seventh Sub-Regional Meeting on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime held in Jakarta, Indonesia. Brunei's delegation, led by Coordinating Minister for National Security, Minister at the Prime Minister's Office and Minister of Defence II Pehin Datu Lailaraja Major General (Rtd) Dato Paduka Seri Awang Haji Halbi bin Haji Mohd Yussof, emphasized the importance of regional collaboration to address evolving threats from terrorism, violent extremism, irregular migration, cybersecurity, and transnational crime. This initiative highlights Brunei's commitment to unifying policy approaches to shared security challenges within Southeast Asia.

- Diplomatic Reopening in Iran

On October 28, 2026, Brunei Darussalam officially announced the reopening of its Embassy in Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran, with full diplomatic operations. This follows a temporary closure that had been in effect since March 3, 2026. The reopening signifies a re-establishment of direct diplomatic engagement and potentially renewed bilateral relations with Iran.

- Improvement in Human Trafficking Report Ranking

Brunei's standing in the United States Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report improved to Tier 2 in 2026, up from the Tier 2 Watch List in 2025. This elevation reflects recognized progress in human trafficking prevention measures, including successful

convictions, enhanced investigations, victim protection, and improved coordination among security agencies.

- Cyber Defence Exercise (CDEX 2026)

The Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF) organized the third Cyber Defence Exercise (CDEX 2026) on October 22, 2026, in Tanah Jambu. This exercise, conducted by the Cyber Defence Unit, Joint Force Headquarters, aimed to strengthen participants' preparedness in responding to cybersecurity incidents and enhance internal cybersecurity readiness within the military.

- Defense Acquisition: Airbus H145M Helicopters

Brunei is on track to receive its first batch of six Airbus H145M helicopters in November 2026. The Customer Acceptance Test (CAT) certificate for these multi-role helicopters was signed by the Ministry of Defence in Germany around October 15-20, 2026. These new helicopters are intended to replace the decommissioned Bölkow BO 105 fleet, significantly enhancing the Royal Brunei Air Force's operational capabilities for missions such as close air support (CAS) and aerial observation.

- Diplomatic Visit to Singapore

His Royal Highness Prince 'Abdul Mateen, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brunei Darussalam, conducted an introductory visit to Singapore from October 21 to 23, 2026. During his visit, he met with Singaporean leaders, reaffirming the special and longstanding bilateral relationship and discussing ways to further strengthen cooperation in areas of mutual interest, as well as exchanging views on ASEAN, regional, and international developments. The visit also included an engagement with think tanks and a briefing on Singapore's AI strategy.

- Military Personnel Promotion Ceremony

A Rank Insignia Presentation Ceremony for one Senior Non-Commissioned Officer (SNCO) and nine Junior Non-Commissioned Officers (JNCOs) of the Joint Force, Royal Brunei Armed Forces (JF RBAF) was held at the Gymnasium, Bolkiah Garrison, on October 23, 2026. This event underscores ongoing internal military administration and career progression within the RBAF.

- Continued Maritime Security Focus in South China Sea

While the annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) Brunei 2026 exercise with the United States maritime forces concluded in September 2026, its focus on enhancing interoperability, anti-submarine warfare, maritime domain awareness, and command-and-control coordination in the South China Sea remains a significant and ongoing aspect of Brunei's maritime security posture. Lessons learned from this exercise are crucial for refining naval tactics and interdiction capabilities.

- Bilateral Security Discussions with Australia

On the sidelines of the seventh Sub-Regional Meeting on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime in Jakarta on October 24, 2026, the Brunei delegation held a courtesy call with Australia's Minister for Home Affairs Tony Burke. Both countries expressed satisfaction with their longstanding ties and cooperation, particularly in security, and discussed strengthening collaboration on matters of mutual interest, including border security and cybersecurity.

Geopolitical Impact and Regional Dynamics

Brunei's security developments during this period underscore its consistent foreign policy of active engagement and multilateral cooperation, particularly within Southeast Asia. The decision to co-chair the Senior Officials' Counter-Terrorism Policy Forum with Malaysia in 2027, announced on October 24, 2026, highlights Brunei's commitment to regional stability and its role in coordinating responses to shared security threats like terrorism, irregular migration, and cybercrime. This move strengthens ASEAN's collective security architecture and positions Brunei as a key contributor to regional policy formulation.

The reopening of Brunei's Embassy in Tehran on October 28, 2026, signals a nuanced diplomatic approach, indicating Brunei's willingness to maintain relations with a diverse range of global actors. This could potentially allow Brunei to play a bridging role or at least maintain open channels in a complex geopolitical landscape, though its direct impact on broader regional dynamics in Southeast Asia is likely limited. Meanwhile, the introductory visit of HRH Prince 'Abdul Mateen to Singapore from October 21-23, 2026, reaffirmed robust bilateral ties with a crucial ASEAN partner, emphasizing defense cooperation and shared regional perspectives.

Brunei continues to navigate the complex dynamics of the South China Sea through "quiet diplomacy" rather than confrontation. Its participation in the CARAT Brunei 2026 exercise with the United States, which concluded in September but whose implications are ongoing, demonstrates a commitment to strengthening maritime capabilities and interoperability with major powers. This balanced approach, maintaining strong defense ties with both the US and China (as reaffirmed in September 2026), allows Brunei to leverage cooperation for its defense modernization and maritime security while avoiding exclusive alignment, thereby contributing to regional stability.

Military and Defense Analysis

Brunei's military and defense posture during this period reflects a clear focus on modernization and enhanced operational readiness, particularly in air and cyber domains. The most significant development is the impending delivery of the first batch of six Airbus H145M helicopters in November 2026, following the Customer Acceptance Test (CAT) certificate signing in Germany around October 15-20, 2026. These multi-role helicopters will replace the older Bölkow BO 105 fleet, marking a substantial upgrade to the Royal Brunei Air Force's (RBAirF) capabilities for missions such as close air support and aerial observation. This acquisition aligns with the strategic direction outlined in the Defence White Paper Update 2026 and the Force 2035 initiative, which aims to enhance the RBAF's credibility and capabilities.

In the realm of cybersecurity, the 3rd Cyber Defence Exercise 2026 (CDEX 2026), conducted by the Cyber Defence Unit of the Joint Force Headquarters, RBAF, on October 22, 2026, demonstrates a proactive approach to strengthening digital defenses. This exercise is crucial for improving the military's preparedness and response mechanisms against increasingly sophisticated cyber threats. Furthermore, Brunei's engagement in regional cybersecurity dialogues and its role as a host for upcoming cybersecurity conferences in 2026-2027 indicate a broader national strategy to bolster cyber resilience across all sectors. While specific defense spending figures for this exact period were not detailed, the ongoing modernization programs and active participation in joint exercises suggest a sustained investment in practical readiness and adaptation to contemporary security landscapes, building on a reported 32% surge in Brunei's defense budget to B$796.3 million in 2024.

Outlook and Forecast

Short-term trends (1-3 months): In the immediate future, Brunei will likely focus on integrating the newly acquired Airbus H145M helicopters into the Royal Brunei Air Force, with initial deliveries expected in November 2026. This will involve pilot and technician training, which is already underway in Germany, and the development of new operational doctrines. Diplomatically, Brunei will continue its active participation in regional forums, particularly in counter-terrorism and transnational crime, as it prepares to co-chair the Senior Officials' Counter-Terrorism Policy Forum in 2027. The reopening of the embassy in Tehran may lead to renewed bilateral engagements, though significant shifts are not immediately anticipated. Cybersecurity efforts within the RBAF, following CDEX 2026, will likely continue to emphasize readiness and incident response.

Critical flashpoints and risk areas: The South China Sea remains a persistent area of concern, with ongoing territorial disputes and the potential for increased tensions, despite Brunei's preference for "quiet diplomacy." While Brunei maintains a balanced foreign policy with major powers, any escalation in the broader region could indirectly

impact its security and economic interests. Cybersecurity threats continue to be a critical risk, given the increasing sophistication of attacks and Brunei's growing digital infrastructure. Transnational crimes, including human trafficking and irregular migration, as discussed at the Jakarta meeting, will also remain significant challenges requiring sustained regional cooperation.

Indicators to monitor: Key indicators to monitor include the smooth integration and operationalization of the new H145M helicopters, which will reflect the effectiveness of Brunei's defense acquisition and modernization programs. Progress in regional counter-terrorism and cybersecurity initiatives, particularly those co-chaired or hosted by Brunei, will indicate its continued influence and commitment to regional security. Any shifts in Brunei's diplomatic engagements with major powers, especially concerning the South China Sea, should be closely observed. Domestically, the continued improvement in human trafficking prevention and prosecution efforts will be a measure of internal security governance.

Strategic recommendations: Brunei should continue to prioritize its defense modernization programs, ensuring that new acquisitions are effectively integrated and personnel are adequately trained to maximize their operational impact. Strengthening cybersecurity defenses through continuous exercises, international collaboration, and public-private partnerships is paramount. Diplomatically, Brunei should maintain its balanced foreign policy, leveraging its relationships with both the US and China to enhance its security capabilities and promote regional stability. Continued active participation in ASEAN and other regional security forums will be crucial for addressing shared threats and fostering collective resilience against transnational crime and terrorism. Investing in maritime domain awareness capabilities and border security measures will also be vital to safeguard its exclusive economic zone and control irregular migration.

Structured Assessment

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ANNEX: COLLECTED ARTICLES BY SOURCE

Source: The Scoop

• Brunei completes 10 liver transplants, expanding access to specialist care (2026-10-24 17:24)

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN – Brunei has completed 10 living donor liver transplants since launching its local programme in February 2025, marking a milestone in the country’s ability to deliver specialised treatment. Led by the Ministry of Health (MOH) in collaboration with Jerudong Park Medical Centre (JPMC), the programme allows patients to undergo liver transplantation in-country, with local doctors working alongside visiting specialists throughout the treatment process. Dr Taufique Ahmed, lead of the Liver Transplant Programme, said an estimated 60% to 70% of patients who underwent transplants in Brunei would previously have been unable to receive the treatment because they were too unwell to travel overseas or faced other clinical challenges. Before the programme was established, MOH typically sent only one or two patients abroad for liver transplants per year. What the milestone means for patients A living donor liver transplant is possible because of the liver’s unique ability to regenerate. During the procedure, a healthy person has a portion of their liver surgically removed and transplanted into a recipient to replace their diseased liver. Within a couple of months, the liver pieces in both the donor and the recipient regrow to normal size and take over typical function. Having a […] This story 'Brunei completes 10 liver transplants, expanding access to specialist care' appeared first on The Scoop.