

BRUNEI SECURITY ANALYSIS REPORT

AI-Assisted Open Source Intelligence Assessment

Analysis Period: October 25, 2026 - November 01, 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.

Security Analysis Report: Brunei (October 25, 2026 – November 01, 2026)

Executive Summary

During the period of October 25 to November 01, 2026, Brunei Darussalam maintained a proactive and engaged stance in regional security and defense diplomacy, primarily focusing on counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, and defense modernization. Key developments included active participation in high-level ASEAN defense and counter-terrorism forums, underscoring Brunei's commitment to multilateral cooperation and regional stability. The nation also made significant strides in its defense modernization program with the impending delivery of new Airbus H145M helicopters. However, the broader regional security landscape, particularly the escalating tensions and militarization in the South China Sea, continues to present a complex challenge, requiring Brunei to balance its diplomatic efforts with enhanced defense capabilities.

Key Security Developments

- Counter-Terrorism Policy and Regional Cooperation

Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia announced their co-chairmanship of the Senior Officials' Counter-Terrorism Policy Forum under the Sub-Regional Meeting on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (SRM) for 2027. This announcement was made during the seventh SRM held in Jakarta, Indonesia, on October 24, 2026, where Brunei's delegation, led by Coordinating Minister for National Security Pehin Datu Lailaraja Major General (Rtd) Dato Paduka Seri Awang Haji Halbi bin Haji Mohd Yussof, emphasized the importance of regional cooperation against terrorism and violent extremism. The meeting also addressed wider security concerns including irregular migration and cybersecurity. This signifies Brunei's continued dedication to enhancing regional security frameworks and its role in combating transnational threats.

- Diplomatic Engagement in ASEAN Defense Forums

Brunei actively participated in the 20th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and the 13th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), convened in Cebu, Republic of the Philippines, on October 28-29, 2026. These high-level meetings serve

as crucial platforms for Brunei to engage with regional and dialogue partners on pressing security issues, including maritime security and regional stability, reinforcing its commitment to ASEAN centrality in the regional security architecture.

- Defense Acquisition Milestone: H145M Helicopters

On October 15, 2026, Brunei's Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) signed the Customer Acceptance Test (CAT) certificate for the initial batch of Airbus H145M helicopters at Airbus Helicopters Deutschland (AHD) in Donauwörth, Germany. This marks a significant step in the acquisition of six H145M helicopters, ordered in April 2024, with delivery to Brunei scheduled for November 2026. These multi-role helicopters are intended to replace the decommissioned Bölkow BO 105 fleet, substantially enhancing the Royal Brunei Air Force's (RBAirF) capabilities in areas such as close air support and aerial observation.

- Cybersecurity Focus: CySec 2026 Conference

Brunei's flagship cybersecurity conference, CySec 2026, was underway, focusing on "Resilient by Design: Protecting Critical Infrastructure." Although the main conference was held from September 15-16, 2026, its ongoing relevance and discussions during this period highlight Brunei's proactive approach to bolstering its digital defenses against escalating cyber threats. Cyber Security Brunei (CSB) is strengthening guidance through an updated Code of Practice for Critical Information Infrastructure, alongside new AI Security Policy Guidelines and Secure by Design Policy Guidelines.

- South China Sea Developments: Chinese Airbase Construction

China commenced construction of a runway on Antelope Reef in the Paracel Islands within the disputed South China Sea, as reported on October 31, 2026, by the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. Satellite images from August showed earthwork, indicating the development of an airbase. This development contributes to the ongoing militarization of the South China Sea, a region where Brunei is a claimant state, and was a prominent topic at the ADMM-Plus meeting in Cebu.

- Improvement in Trafficking in Persons Ranking

Brunei Darussalam's ranking in the United States Trafficking in Persons Report improved to Tier 2 in 2026, marking two consecutive years of improvement from the Tier 2 Watch List in 2025. This upgrade reflects Brunei's sustained efforts and progress in combating irregular migration and human trafficking.

- Reopening of Embassy in Tehran

The Embassy of Brunei Darussalam in Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran, officially reopened on October 28, 2026. This diplomatic move signifies Brunei's efforts to expand its international engagement and strengthen bilateral relations beyond its immediate region.

- Commemoration of Brunei-Singapore Defence Ties

On October 26, 2026, former Deputy Ministers of Defence and former Commanders of the Royal Brunei Armed Forces visited the Golden Jubilee Gallery of Defence Relations between Brunei Darussalam and Singapore. This event, part of commemorative activities marking 50 years of defense relations, underscores the enduring and strong bilateral defense cooperation between the two nations.

Geopolitical Impact and Regional Dynamics

Brunei's security developments during this period underscore its consistent foreign policy of active engagement, multilateral cooperation, and strategic balancing within the dynamic Indo-Pacific region. The nation's participation in the 7th Sub-Regional Meeting on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (SRM) in Jakarta and its upcoming co-chairmanship of the Senior Officials' Counter-Terrorism Policy Forum with Malaysia in 2027 highlight its commitment to regional stability and addressing shared security challenges like terrorism, irregular migration, and cybercrime. This active role reinforces ASEAN's collective efforts in maintaining regional peace and security.

The ongoing tensions in the South China Sea remain a critical geopolitical factor. China's reported construction of a runway on Antelope Reef in the Paracel Islands, a disputed territory, on October 31, 2026, is a significant development that escalates militarization in the region. As a claimant state, Brunei is directly affected by these developments. The South China Sea dispute was a central topic at the 20th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and 13th ADMM-Plus in Cebu, where Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles described China's military buildup as the largest conventional military expansion since World War II, creating a "condition of pressure" in Southeast Asia. Brunei's participation in these forums, alongside its strong defense ties with the United States through exercises like CARAT Brunei 2026 (concluded in September 2026), demonstrates its strategy of leveraging partnerships to enhance maritime security and uphold international law in contested waters.

Brunei continues to navigate its relationships with major global powers carefully. While maintaining robust security partnerships with the United States, as evidenced by joint exercises and discussions on maritime security, Brunei also engages with China on various fronts. The reopening of the Brunei Embassy in Tehran on October 28, 2026, further illustrates Brunei's independent and diversified diplomatic approach, seeking to broaden its international influence and partnerships. This balanced approach allows Brunei to contribute to regional stability while pursuing its national interests and defense modernization.

Military and Defense Analysis

Brunei's military and defense posture during this period is characterized by a clear focus on modernization and enhancing interoperability with key partners, as outlined in the updated 2026 Defence White Paper. This document emphasizes the necessity for defense to continually review, reconfigure, and redefine Brunei Darussalam's defense priorities, including strengthening cyber defense capabilities, enhancing intelligence and surveillance systems, and investing in innovative technologies. The paper also highlights the importance of maintaining a strong defense capability as a national priority amidst an increasingly uncertain regional and international security landscape.

A significant development in force posture and capability enhancement is the impending delivery of the first batch of Airbus H145M helicopters. The Customer Acceptance Test (CAT) certificate for these six multi-role helicopters was signed on October 15, 2026, with delivery to Brunei scheduled for November 2026. These new helicopters will replace the aging Bölkow BO 105 fleet, significantly bolstering the Royal Brunei Air Force's (RBAirF) operational capabilities for missions such as close air support, aerial observation, and potentially combat search and medical evacuation. This acquisition reflects a strategic investment to maintain a modern and capable air force, ensuring it can effectively contribute to national defense and regional security operations.

Defense spending trends, while not explicitly detailed for this specific week, have shown a commitment to modernization. Brunei's defense budget saw a 32% surge to B$796.3 million in 2024, indicating a fiscal commitment to modernizing the Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF) maritime fleet and integrating new technologies. The RBAF's ongoing participation in bilateral and multilateral exercises, such as the recently concluded CARAT Brunei 2026 with the U.S. (September 2026) and the newly launched Exercise Vanguard with Singapore (October 1, 2026), further underscores its commitment to strengthening maritime security capabilities and fostering interoperability with key partners. These exercises are crucial for developing shared maritime domain awareness and refining tactical skills in areas such as anti-submarine warfare and maritime interdiction operations.

Outlook and Forecast

Short-term trends (1-3 months): Brunei is expected to continue its active engagement in regional diplomatic and security forums, particularly within ASEAN. The upcoming co-chairmanship of the Senior Officials' Counter-Terrorism Policy Forum with Malaysia in 2027 will likely see Brunei further solidify its role in regional counter-terrorism efforts. The delivery of the first batch of Airbus H145M helicopters in November 2026 will be a significant event, initiating a period of integration and training for the Royal

Brunei Air Force. This will enhance Brunei's air capabilities and contribute to its overall defense modernization. Cybersecurity will remain a high priority, with the momentum from CySec 2026 translating into further policy discussions and operational initiatives to address AI-enabled cyber threats and protect critical information infrastructure.

Critical flashpoints and risk areas: The South China Sea remains the primary critical flashpoint. China's continued militarization, exemplified by the reported construction of a runway on Antelope Reef, poses an ongoing risk of increased tensions and potential miscalculation. While Brunei maintains a diplomatic approach, the escalating activities by other claimants and major powers in the region could indirectly impact its maritime security and economic interests. Cyber threats also represent a persistent risk, with the increasing sophistication of attacks targeting critical infrastructure. Brunei's efforts to enhance its cyber resilience are crucial, but the dynamic nature of these threats requires continuous vigilance and adaptation.

Indicators to monitor: Key indicators to monitor include further developments in the South China Sea, such as additional construction or increased military presence by any claimant state, particularly China. The operational integration and deployment of Brunei's new H145M helicopters will be an important measure of its defense modernization progress. Continued participation and outcomes from regional security dialogues, especially those concerning maritime security and counter-terrorism, will indicate Brunei's diplomatic influence and commitment. Furthermore, any significant cyber incidents targeting Brunei's critical infrastructure or government networks would be a critical indicator of evolving threat landscapes.

Strategic recommendations: Brunei should continue to advocate for peaceful resolution of disputes in the South China Sea through international law, particularly UNCLOS, and actively participate in ASEAN-led mechanisms for de-escalation and confidence-building. Investment in advanced maritime domain awareness capabilities, including surveillance and reconnaissance assets, is crucial to monitor its territorial waters and exclusive economic zone effectively. Strengthening cybersecurity defenses through public-private partnerships, continuous training, and adherence to international best practices, as highlighted by CySec 2026, should remain a top priority. Finally, Brunei should continue to diversify its defense partnerships and engage in joint exercises to enhance interoperability and collective security, while maintaining its balanced diplomatic approach with major global powers.

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