

## **Defense Diplomacy through Peacekeeping Operations (PKO): A Reflection on the Role of the Garuda Contingent in 2023**

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### **Abstract**

*Defense diplomacy has gained prominence in advancing international peace through participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (PKO). This study examines the deployment of Indonesia's Garuda Contingent in 2023—particularly in UNIFIL (Lebanon), MINUSCA (Central African Republic), and MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of the Congo)—as a strategic instrument for implementing defense diplomacy and projecting soft power. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through document study and content analysis of official reports from the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI), the UN, academic publications, and credible media sources. The findings show that Indonesia's PKO involvement produced three major outcomes: (1) strengthening international trust and military interoperability through confidence-building with other contributing nations; (2) enhancing Indonesia's image as a constructive, democratic Muslim-majority state via humanitarian activities such as medical support, civil-military cooperation, and infrastructure rehabilitation; and (3) improving TNI's non-combat operational capabilities and adaptability in complex conflict environments. These outcomes confirm that the operationalization of OMSP (Military Operations Other Than War) functions not only as a doctrinal extension of Indonesian defense policy but also as an effective soft power instrument for elevating Indonesia's strategic profile in global peacebuilding.*

**Keywords:** *Defense Diplomacy, Peacekeeping Operations, Garuda Contigen, Soft Power, Indonesia.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the increasingly complex dynamics of the international system, security issues are no longer confined to conventional military threats but have expanded to include non-traditional challenges such as human security, civil conflicts, terrorism, and protracted humanitarian crises. Within this context, United Nations-led Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) have emerged as a critical pillar in maintaining global peace and facilitating post-conflict reconstruction across vulnerable regions (Martani et al., 2020).

As the largest democratic nation in Southeast Asia and a country whose constitution upholds international peace, Indonesia has adopted PKOs as a principal instrument of its defense diplomacy. A concrete manifestation of this role is the deployment of the Garuda Contingent (KONGA) to various peacekeeping missions, including UNIFIL (Lebanon), MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of the Congo), and MINUSCA (Central African Republic) (Rachmat & Ratmoko, 2020). Since its initial participation in 1957, Indonesia has significantly increased its contributions and now ranks among the world's top ten largest troop-contributing countries (Sari, 2020).

The year 2023 presents a reflective moment to assess the effectiveness of Indonesia's defense strategy through Military Operations Other Than War (OMSP), particularly in the context of soft power projection and collective diplomacy. The missions undertaken by KONGA not only test Indonesia's military capabilities in multinational environments but also enhance the country's global legitimacy as a moral force in conflict resolution. As noted by Asmoro, Mahroza, and Santoso (2024), peacekeeping is a concrete embodiment of Indonesia's defense diplomacy in promoting international peace through non-combat military instruments.

Indonesia's active engagement in PKO missions is also intrinsically linked to its defense diplomacy agenda as outlined in national defense documents and the strategic roadmap of the TNI Peacekeeping Center (PMPP TNI). Within this framework, defense diplomacy is conceptualized as the expansion of military functions to foster international cooperation, build mutual trust, and advance national interests through participation in global non-combat operations (Asmoro et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the deployment of military contingents to conflict zones serves as a vital mechanism for projecting Indonesia's image as a nation committed to upholding international norms, human rights, and the foundational principles of the United Nations Charter. This aligns with the soft power approach, which emphasizes influence through values, culture, and ethical leadership rather than military dominance (Chadhafi, 2023).

Nevertheless, peacekeeping missions are not without challenges. These range from logistical constraints and cultural adaptation to security risks in conflict zones and the demands of complex multilateral diplomacy. Such conditions necessitate robust institutional readiness, personnel professionalism, and strong inter-agency coordination. In this regard, the Indonesian Peacekeeping Mission Center (PMPP TNI) plays a strategic role in ensuring unit preparedness and implementing cross-cultural training prior to deployment. As highlighted by Yossy (2017) and further emphasized by Asmoro, Mahroza, and Santoso (2024), pre-deployment training is a critical prerequisite for operational and diplomatic readiness in peacekeeping missions.

Indonesia has positioned itself as one of the leading troop-contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Among its most significant contributions is the deployment of the Garuda Contingent (Konga) to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Recent research by Wirawan et.al (2024) highlights that the effectiveness of Indonesia's peacekeeping battalion in South Lebanon is determined not only by its military readiness but also by its professionalism and ability to engage constructively with the local community. Indonesia's involvement in peace operations in Lebanon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Central African Republic also reflects the intricate geopolitical layers of contemporary conflict zones. Within such complexity, the Garuda Contingent is expected not only to deliver core peacekeeping tasks but also to translate Indonesia's national values into daily practice through civil-military engagement, humanitarian outreach, and confidence-building with local communities. Case evidence from UNIFIL shows Indonesian units investing in sustained civil-military coordination and community programs to cultivate trust and mission access—an approach that operationalizes defense-diplomacy aims under OMSP (Kaabachi, 2018). Complementing this, studies on Indonesia's female peacekeepers find that their presence improves engagement with vulnerable populations and strengthens community confidence—outcomes now prioritized across UN missions and closely aligned with Indonesia's soft-power projection (Fitriani et al., 2025; Sumertha et al., 2021). At the systemic level, as reported by the United Nations Peacekeeping (2024) Indonesia's consistent position among the top troop-contributing countries underscores reputational dividends in multilateral forums and the credibility of its “free and active” foreign policy when channeled through non-combat operations. Recent assessments likewise frame Indonesia's PKO posture as a purposeful instrument of defense diplomacy, integrating OMSP doctrine with practical interoperability gains and humanitarian messaging (Asmoro et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, this article seeks to address two fundamental research questions:

1. How does the Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) reflect Indonesia's defense diplomacy strategy?
2. How can the performance of the Garuda Contingent in 2023 be interpreted as a projection of Indonesia's soft power and as part of the implementation of Military Operations Other Than War?

Through these two questions, the article aims to explore the contribution of PKOs as a strategic tool of defense diplomacy and to offer a critical assessment of the Garuda Contingent's effectiveness in strengthening Indonesia's strategic posture in the global arena.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze Indonesia's defense diplomacy through the deployment of the Garuda Contingent in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) during 2023. The qualitative method is particularly relevant for capturing complex social phenomena and the strategic meaning embedded in state behavior (Creswell, 2018). A case study design was employed to provide an in-depth and contextualized analysis of Indonesia's non-combat military participation, reflecting the characteristics of exploratory research in international relations (Yin, 2017).

Data collection relied entirely on secondary sources, including official reports issued by the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI), United Nations documents, academic journal articles, policy papers, and reputable media publications. To analyze the data, thematic content analysis was applied to identify, interpret, and organize patterns related to defense diplomacy, OMSP, and soft power projection (Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2014). The analysis process followed three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure research credibility, source triangulation was applied by cross-verifying official documents, scholarly literature, and media reports (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This approach strengthens the validity of findings and mitigates potential biases. The research specifically examines Indonesia's participation in three UN peacekeeping missions in 2023: UNIFIL (Lebanon), MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of the Congo), and MINUSCA (Central African Republic). Particular emphasis is placed on UNIFIL due to Indonesia's significant maritime contribution and its strategic engagement in Middle Eastern diplomacy. Through this approach, the study aims to demonstrate how peacekeeping missions function as instruments of defense diplomacy and vehicles for projecting Indonesia's soft power in global affairs.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Indonesia's Defense Diplomacy Strategy through Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs)

Indonesia's engagement in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) represents not only its commitment to global peace, but also a fundamental component of its defense diplomacy, operationalized through the framework of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW/OMSP). Within this context, OMSP provides both legal and strategic foundations for the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) to participate in non-combat operations such as humanitarian assistance and international peace maintenance (Setyawan, 2017).

As of 2023, Indonesia ranks among the top ten troop-contributing countries to UN missions, with over 2,700 personnel deployed in various conflict zones, including Lebanon (UNIFIL), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) (Costa, 2024). This significant presence underscores Indonesia's proactive stance in supporting international stability and order.

Indonesia's participation in PKOs strengthens the implementation of its defense diplomacy across three principal dimensions: confidence-building, enhancement of non-combat military cooperation, and projection of a positive national image in international forums (Asmoro et al., 2024). As such, PKOs serve as a strategic instrument that combines military engagement with diplomatic and reputational objectives. This strategy reflects how OMSP operationalizes

Indonesia's "free and active" foreign policy, demonstrating that constructive, independent participation in global affairs can be achieved through cooperative and non-coercive means (Widiatmaja, 2018).

On a technical level, PKO missions offer the TNI valuable opportunities to improve interoperability and professionalism in multinational environments. Pre-deployment training, such as those conducted for the Garuda UNIFIL Task Force at the Indonesian Peacekeeping Mission Center (PMPP TNI), enhances both the technical readiness and cultural sensitivity of deployed personnel (Asmoro et al., 2024). Field experience in conflict areas further develops TNI's tactical and strategic capabilities, particularly in logistics management, cross-border communication, and environmental adaptability, capabilities essential for building a responsive and flexible non-traditional defense posture (Darwan et al., 2018).

In multilateral forums such as the UN Human Rights Council and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), peacekeeping contributions elevate Indonesia's diplomatic leverage in regional and global negotiations (Sondakh et al., 2024). The presence of TNI in conflict zones not only contributes to stabilization but also enhances Indonesia's soft power. By promoting narratives of peace, tolerance, and cooperation, PKOs function as a diplomatic channel that balances military engagement with humanitarian values (Kusuma & Harisman, 2024). From a legal standpoint, Indonesia's military involvement in PKOs is firmly grounded in international law, particularly within the framework of the United Nations Charter and international humanitarian principles. This legal foundation reinforces Indonesia's foreign policy legitimacy and prevents any perception of undue intervention (Zulkarnain & Rosiah, 2018).

According to Yossi (2017), Garuda Contingent XXIII-J in UNIFIL not only carried out security operations within the Blue Line area but also participated in community-oriented activities, such as school rehabilitation, medical services, and vocational training. These initiatives contributed to strengthening civil-military relations and supporting post-conflict recovery in the host areas.

Strategically, PKOs have enabled Indonesia to build an international military cooperation network. Collaboration with foreign forces grants the TNI access to advanced technologies, doctrines, and tactical experiences—factors that enhance Indonesia's defense competitiveness (Setyawan, 2017). Beyond military gains, PKO participation has influenced domestic public perceptions. TNI's involvement in peacekeeping reinforces its image as a modern force committed not only to warfare but also to global peacebuilding efforts (Asmoro et al., 2024).

In the long-term perspective, PKOs function as a mechanism for the systematic development of the OMSP doctrine. Routine evaluation of operational successes and challenges in peacekeeping missions provides critical input for improving Indonesia's future defense policies (Prasetyo & Berantas, 2014).

Considering all these aspects, Indonesia's defense diplomacy strategy through PKOs can be viewed as one of the most effective and ethical instruments for projecting national power in a peaceful and measured manner. This strategy demonstrates that military capabilities can be harmonized with humanitarian values and international norms to elevate a country's stature on the global stage.

## **2. Reflections on the Performance of Garuda Contingent in 2023**

The year 2023 marked a significant milestone in Indonesia's peacekeeping missions, as represented by the deployment of the Garuda Contingent to various conflict-affected areas. Assignments in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) serve as concrete evidence of Indonesia's active engagement in global defense diplomacy. These three missions reflect the operational diversity and complexity that the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) must navigate in fulfilling United Nations mandates within dynamic and high-risk environments.

In the UNIFIL mission, the Garuda Contingent, composed of personnel from the Indonesian Navy, operated under the Maritime Task Force (MTF), focusing on securing maritime zones and land borders between Lebanon and Israel. Beyond conventional military patrols and surveillance of the Blue Line area, the contingent also engaged in various Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) initiatives, such as providing free healthcare services, rehabilitating schools, and supplying clean water to local communities. These efforts align with the broader UN peacekeeping objectives that emphasize not only security but also post-conflict social recovery (Yossy, 2017).

Meanwhile, in North Kivu, Congo, the Garuda Contingent under the Indonesian Army faced significantly more complex security threats. MONUSCO is recognized as one of the largest and most challenging UN peacekeeping missions due to the persistent presence of non-state armed groups. Indonesian forces were tasked with securing strategic areas, escorting humanitarian aid convoys, managing refugee camps, and protecting civilians from violence (Asmoro et al., 2024).

In the Central African Republic, the Indonesian Air Force contributed to MINUSCA through the Air Task Force. Their roles included aerial logistics, troop transport, and medical evacuations from high-risk zones. This deployment highlights TNI's readiness and flexibility to operate in unpredictable and multifaceted operational theaters. It also underscores the strategic importance of air power, technological mastery, and integrated command systems in OMSP (Sondakh et al., 2024).

Reflecting on these deployments reveals a marked progression in TNI's professionalism, particularly in interoperability, multinational communication, and physical and psychological resilience. Field challenges included extreme geographic conditions, logistical limitations, language and cultural barriers, and security threats to both troops and civilians.

Despite these difficulties, the presence of the Garuda Contingent has had substantial strategic impact in enhancing Indonesia's international image. Through active participation in UN peace operations, Indonesia consolidates its position as a moderate and democratic Muslim-majority country committed to global peace promotion. This role significantly contributes to the country's soft power and public diplomacy strategies (Wulandari, 2022).

Institutionally, PKO missions serve as a platform for the practical application of TNI's core professional values, including foreign language proficiency, civil-military communication skills, and persuasive military diplomacy. The pre-deployment training (PDT) program conducted by the Indonesian Peacekeeping Mission Center (PMPP TNI) has increasingly adapted to the complexities of modern missions, incorporating humanitarian law, local cultural orientation, and international cooperation modules (Yossy, 2017).

Indonesia's presence in these missions also fosters deeper multilateral cooperation. The Garuda Contingent collaborates alongside personnel from other contributing countries in joint command rotations. This exposure strengthens troop resilience and expands Indonesia's strategic networks with other troop-contributing nations (Putra, 2021).

Nonetheless, performance evaluations highlight the need for improved procurement of primary defense equipment (*alutsista*) tailored to the specific demands of each mission. Operational readiness assessments conducted by PMPP TNI indicate that the availability and appropriateness of defense equipment are critical factors for mission success. UNIFIL and MONUSCO, in particular, have served as valuable case studies for evaluating equipment durability and compatibility with extreme operational environments (Martani et al., 2020).

In conclusion, reflections on the 2023 deployments reveal that Indonesia's PKO engagements go beyond technical contributions to global peace—they embody a form of defense diplomacy that synergizes military capability with humanitarian values. The Garuda Contingent

not only acts as a stabilizing force but also serves as a moral envoy of Indonesia in global conflict zones.

### **3. Peacekeeping as a Projection of Indonesia's Soft Power**

Indonesia's active participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) serves not only as an expression of its international responsibility, but also as a strategic platform for projecting soft power. According to Nye (2004), soft power refers to the ability to influence the preferences and behaviors of others through attraction—rooted in values, culture, and moral policies—rather than through coercive military or economic means. Within this framework, Indonesia leverages peacekeeping as a diplomatic tool that accentuates the country's peaceful, inclusive, and collaborative identity.

The deployment of the Garuda Contingent to missions such as UNIFIL, MONUSCO, and MINUSCA reflects this approach, as their role extends beyond maintaining security to include building social relationships with local communities, supporting civil reconstruction efforts, and promoting humanitarian and multicultural values (Rachmat, 2016). These engagements position peacekeepers not merely as soldiers, but as ambassadors of peace and cultural empathy.

Indonesia's presence in peacekeeping missions also reinforces its identity as a moderate Muslim-majority and democratic state committed to global peace. Through civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) have conducted various community-based initiatives, including the renovation of public facilities, the provision of medical services, and the delivery of educational support. These activities exemplify Indonesia's value-based and non-coercive defense diplomacy (Hidayat, 2014).

Peacekeeping further strengthens Indonesia's bilateral and multilateral relationships. In many cases, the direct and informal interactions between Indonesian peacekeepers and host country populations foster trust and serve as effective channels of communication. Simultaneously, Indonesia's commitment to peacekeeping enhances its strategic position in global institutions such as the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), boosting its bargaining power in international negotiations (Hutabarat, 2016).

This strategy broadens the scope of Indonesia's defense diplomacy from a traditional, hard-security orientation to a more adaptive approach that addresses non-traditional security threats. Indonesia's active engagement in PKOs positions the TNI as a global actor capable of transforming from a combat force to a "peace soldier", advancing the narrative that military strength can also serve as a force for peace (Anwar, 2014). Moreover, peacekeeping has become a vital component of Indonesia's "free and active" foreign policy narrative. Defense diplomacy through UN missions enables Indonesia to contribute concretely to a rules-based international order, while avoiding entanglement in great power rivalries (Hidayat, 2014). In this context, peacekeeping also functions as a tool for nation branding, shaping Indonesia's image as a peaceful and cooperative state. This international perception has broader implications for trade, investment, and tourism, demonstrating that soft approaches to defense diplomacy can generate multidimensional benefits.

Nonetheless, the projection of soft power through PKOs requires consistency, professionalism, and political sensitivity. Missteps in social engagement, ethical breaches, or logistical failures may undermine the positive image being cultivated. As such, enhancing TNI personnel capacities in cultural awareness, diplomacy, and strategic communication is crucial (Masyrofah & Lubis, 2022). As a non-coercive instrument, peacekeeping offers Indonesia long-term strategic opportunities to emerge as a norm entrepreneur in the international order—aligned with the spirit of the UN Charter and the country's aspiration to hold strategic positions such as a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council or leadership roles in regional institutions.

In conclusion, peacekeeping should not be viewed merely as an operational tool but as a diplomatic asset that strengthens Indonesia's moral legitimacy on the global stage. This affirms that projecting soft power through the MOOTW framework—particularly in the context of

PKOs—is a strategic and intelligent response to the complexities of the contemporary international system.

## CONCLUSION

Indonesia's participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) has proven to be a strategic instrument of defense diplomacy, rooted in the framework of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW/OMSP). Through the active deployment of the Garuda Contingent in international missions such as UNIFIL, MONUSCO, and MINUSCA, Indonesia not only affirms its commitment to global peace, but also leverages these engagements to enhance its strategic posture in international relations. The success of these missions reflects a synergy between military professionalism, civil diplomacy, and Indonesia's hallmark "free and active" foreign policy orientation.

Peacekeeping has emerged as an effective platform for projecting Indonesia's soft power. The embodiment of humanitarian values, global solidarity, and the Indonesian National Armed Forces' (TNI) operational capacity in non-combat contexts has strengthened Indonesia's image as a constructive, inclusive, and democratic Muslim-majority nation. This not only contributes to Indonesia's nation branding but also reinforces its standing as a moral power that prioritizes peace and international cooperation.

Despite substantial operational challenges—ranging from extreme geographical conditions and cultural differences to complex geopolitical dynamics—the TNI has consistently demonstrated high levels of adaptability and professionalism. These experiences are vital not only for enhancing the TNI's institutional capacity but also as empirical evidence that OMSP can be operationalized effectively as a tool of defense diplomacy.

Accordingly, Indonesia's involvement in PKOs offers more than a direct contribution to international peace; it also expands the country's strategic influence without resorting to coercive means. Defense diplomacy through OMSP has evolved into a flexible, adaptive, and high-value foreign policy instrument, reinforcing Indonesia's position as a key actor in a rapidly evolving international order.

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