

Defense Diplomacy Implementation By Indonesian Contingent In Un Southern Lebanon Peace Mission

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Abstract

Defense diplomacy in peacekeeping operations is becoming increasingly important in facing the complexity of global security. This study analyzes the contribution of the Indonesian Eastern Military Staff Sector to the UNIFIL operation in Lebanon as an implementation of defense diplomacy. The purpose of the study is to examine the effectiveness and implications of Indonesia's involvement in peace missions on defense diplomacy and the country's geopolitical position. The method used is a qualitative approach by combining literature reviews and meta-analyses from various secondary sources including official UN documents, UNIFIL mission reports, and academic publications. The results of the study indicate that the contribution of the Eastern Military Staff Sector has a significant impact on the implementation of Indonesian defense diplomacy. Indonesian personnel succeeded in building constructive relationships with local communities, increasing stability in the area of operation, and strengthening Indonesia's positive image in the eyes of the international community. Involvement in UNIFIL also greatly benefits the development of national defense capacity and the professionalism of the TNI. In conclusion, Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL through the Eastern Military Staff Sector has strengthened Indonesia's position as a global actor responsible for world peace efforts, while increasing the country's soft power and defense diplomacy network

Keywords: Defense diplomacy, Indonesia, Eastern Military Staff Sector, Peacekeeping, UNIFIL

INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly complex global security landscape, the role of defense diplomacy in peacekeeping operations is becoming more crucial. Indonesia's involvement in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) through the contribution of Military Staff in the Eastern Sector is a tangible manifestation of the nation's commitment to world peace and the implementation of defense diplomacy. Countries cooperating to protect one another by using military strength is known as defense diplomacy (Manullang & Rachman, 2022). At present, most countries in the world have shifted towards defense diplomacy as a result of the increasingly complex contours of international security (Samy & Kusumadewi, 2021). This paradigm shift reflects the understanding that traditional approaches to security are no longer adequate in facing contemporary challenges. Defense diplomacy, which combines elements of soft power with military capabilities, offers a more nuanced and effective approach in managing conflicts and building international cooperation. According to Nye (2004), soft power is the ability to achieve desired outcomes through the power of attraction rather than coercion or payment. This concept emerges from a nation's culture, political ideals, and policies (Febriani & Hamdi, 2024). Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL is not only a fulfillment of international obligations but also a strategic means to strengthen its geopolitical position and enhance national defense capacity. Referring to Bismarck's triumph in 1866 and 1870, the highest art of diplomacy is not to maintain peace under all circumstances, but to continuously shape the political situation of the State in such a way that it is always in a favorable position to enter a war (Vagts, 2019).

According to UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, 1978), since September 2021, Indonesia has had the largest military contribution (Khoirunnisa et al., 2023). The Military

Staff of the Eastern Sector, as an integral component of Indonesia's contribution to UNIFIL, plays a vital role in operationalizing this defense diplomacy. They are not only responsible for technical and tactical aspects of the peacekeeping mission but also serve as national representatives in daily interactions with local communities, multinational forces, and other stakeholders. This dual role requires unique expertise that blends military professionalism with diplomatic sensitivity and cross-cultural understanding.

Indonesia's contribution to UNIFIL through the Military Staff of the Eastern Sector also carries significant implications for international perceptions. The presence and performance of Indonesian personnel in Lebanon not only reinforce the country's image as a responsible global actor but also enhance Indonesia's soft power in the Middle East. Daily interactions between Indonesian personnel and various stakeholders in Lebanon create opportunities to foster closer diplomatic relations and strengthen cross-cultural understanding.

Defense diplomacy implemented through peacekeeping is not solely focused on traditional security aspects but also encompasses broader peacebuilding efforts. This reflects the paradigm shift in international conflict management, where holistic approaches that combine military and non-military elements are increasingly important. According to Boutros-Ghali (1992), several types of peace operations include conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and peacebuilding (Wirawan et al., 2024).

This is also evident in Indonesia's approach to peace operations, where the country not only deploys military personnel but also actively engages in various aspects of peacebuilding. The Military Staff of the Eastern Sector, as part of Indonesia's contribution to UNIFIL, are not only tasked with maintaining security stability but also participate in community development projects, humanitarian assistance, and reconciliation efforts. This comprehensive approach aligns with Indonesia's vision of sustainable peace and reflects an understanding that long-term security can only be achieved through inclusive socio-economic development. According to Drab (2018), defense diplomacy aims to formulate and implement a country's security policy with a focus on building stable and long-term defense relations with other countries (Ferisetiadi et al., 2022).

The role of the Military Staff in the Eastern Sector has become increasingly complex and multidimensional. They are required to possess not only military expertise but also skills in project management, cross-cultural communication, and a deep understanding of local socio-political dynamics. One of the ways Indonesia pursues bilateral, regional, and international efforts to ensure global peace and security is by deploying the Garuda Contingent in Lebanon. This enhances Indonesia's diplomatic reputation in the eyes of the international community and advances Indonesia's objectives in international politics (Ardani et al., 2021). Their success in carrying out these tasks not only contributes to the overall effectiveness of UNIFIL but also strengthens Indonesia's position as a country capable of making significant contributions to the resolution of international conflicts.

Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL through the Military Staff of the Eastern Sector also provides significant benefits for the development of national defense capacity. The experience gained from multinational operations serves as a living laboratory for the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) to sharpen their operational, tactical, and strategic skills in the international arena. The knowledge and skills acquired from interactions with troops from various countries and the experience of dealing with complex field situations are valuable assets in the modernization and professionalization of the TNI. The presence of TNI troops in UNIFIL is considered the application of Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy platform (Rachmat, 2016).

Furthermore, involvement in UNIFIL also creates opportunities for Indonesia to expand its defense diplomacy network. Regular interactions with military and civilian personnel from different countries create platforms for knowledge exchange, trust-building, and future cooperation. This aligns with Indonesia's broader defense diplomacy strategy, which aims to

strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations in defense and security. Participation in peacekeeping operations such as UNIFIL also brings its own challenges. The complexity of the situation in Lebanon, with its geopolitical factors and evolving conflict dynamics, demands high flexibility and adaptability from the Military Staff of the Eastern Sector. They must be able to navigate an operational environment that is often ambiguous and sensitive while maintaining neutrality and professionalism. The ability to balance operational mandates with sensitivity to local dynamics becomes the key to success in carrying out their duties.

Indonesia's role in UNIFIL must also be viewed more broadly in the context of national foreign and defense policy. This contribution represents the manifestation of Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy principles, in which the country is committed to playing an active role in creating global peace. Through participation in UNIFIL, Indonesia not only demonstrates its commitment to global peace but also strengthens its position as an influential middle power on the international stage. Indonesia's contribution to world affairs is highly needed by other nations (Armawi, 2019).

Indonesia as the world's largest Muslim nation holds significant diplomatic weight when involved in peace missions in the Middle East. Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) demonstrates this country's capacity as a diplomatic bridge between the Muslim world and the international community, which is crucial in regional conflict resolution. As a middle power, Indonesia presents itself as a mediator and legitimacy provider in the Indo-Pacific regional order (Erskine, 2022). The contribution of Indonesian military contingents in UNIFIL's eastern sector is not only tangible proof of commitment to global peace, but also a defense diplomacy strategy — one that combines soft power approaches, such as social and cultural activities, with hard power in the form of operational military capabilities. For example, recent research shows that Indonesia's defense diplomacy through UNIFIL encompasses routine patrols in conflict zones, free medical treatment for Lebanese citizens, social activities, and introduction of Indonesian culture — all of which contribute to strengthening relationships with local communities and enhancing Indonesia's positive presence in the international arena (Sugiyanto dkk., 2024).

Furthermore, the UNIFIL peacekeeping mission undertaken by the Garuda Contingent (KONGA) demonstrates strategic significance as an instrument of Indonesia's foreign policy. By 2023, the Garuda Contingent positioned Indonesia as the eighth-largest contributor of peacekeeping troops in the world. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this mission still requires further analysis from a diplomatic perspective and its practical impact (Rizky, 2025).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach by combining the methods of literature review and meta-analysis. Qualitative research, according to the definition of Denzin and Lincoln (2011), is a methodology that provides tools to comprehensively understand the meaning of complex phenomena and the processes that occur in social life. Creswell (2010) also states that qualitative research is a way of transforming theoretical statements from a constructive or participatory perspective, or both (Agustini et al., 2023). Zed (2008:3) explains that the literature study method consists of various activities such as reading, noting, and managing literature (Kartiningrum, 2015). Through a comprehensive literature review, this study collects and analyzes various secondary sources, including official UN documents, UNIFIL mission reports, academic journal articles, and government publications related to Indonesia's involvement in peacekeeping missions.

Meta-analysis is one form of research that uses data from other existing studies (secondary data). Hunter and Schmidt (2004) argue that meta-analysis is necessary because no

research is entirely free from error, even though researchers have attempted to minimize mistakes or biases in their studies. To achieve this, research imperfections, also known as artifacts, must be corrected (Retnawati et al., 2018). Meta-analysis is conducted to synthesize findings from various relevant empirical studies in order to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of defense diplomacy in peacekeeping. The combination of these two methods enables the researcher to identify patterns, trends, and key factors influencing the contribution of the Military Staff in the Eastern Sector of the UNIFIL operation, as well as to analyze its broader implications for Indonesia's defense diplomacy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that the contribution of the Eastern Sector Military Staff in the UNIFIL operation has had a significant impact on the implementation of Indonesia's defense diplomacy. Their role is not limited solely to military operational aspects, but also encompasses broader diplomatic dimensions. The Eastern Sector Military Staff are actively engaged in building relations with local communities, coordinating with contingents from other countries, and facilitating dialogue between conflicting parties. The Eastern Sector Military Staff have been involved in carrying out technical tasks such as preparing joint patrol schedules of combat units from various countries, as well as ensuring security in the Eastern Sector of Lebanon (Untung, 2016). This strategy has proven effective in enhancing stability in the operational area and building trust between peacekeeping forces and local communities. Their involvement in infrastructure development projects and humanitarian assistance has strengthened Indonesia's positive image in the eyes of the international community. However, challenges such as cultural differences, limited resources, and the complexity of the security situation in Lebanon remain factors that must be addressed to maximize the effectiveness of defense diplomacy.

One of the main findings is the effectiveness of the multidimensional approach applied by the Eastern Sector Military Staff in carrying out their duties in Lebanon. Analysis of various literature sources indicates that Indonesian personnel do not only focus on traditional security aspects but are also actively involved in broader peacebuilding initiatives. This emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach in peace operations, encompassing conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and peacebuilding. The involvement of the Eastern Sector Military Staff in community development projects, humanitarian aid, and reconciliation efforts in Lebanon has proven to be a key factor in building trust and support from local communities. This finding strengthens the argument that modern defense diplomacy must go beyond traditional security approaches and adopt more comprehensive and inclusive strategies. As defense diplomacy aims to establish stable and long-term defense relations with other countries, this is reflected in Indonesia's efforts to build constructive relations not only with conflicting parties but also with civil society and other international actors.

Furthermore, the success of the Eastern Sector Military Staff in carrying out their dual role as peacekeepers and cultural ambassadors of Indonesia has made a significant contribution to enhancing Indonesia's soft power in the Middle East. This ability to influence others through cultural appeal and values is increasingly important in contemporary diplomacy. The presence of Indonesian personnel who can effectively interact with various stakeholders in Lebanon, while upholding professionalism and neutrality, has strengthened Indonesia's image as a moderate Muslim country committed to global peace. This also reveals that participation in UNIFIL has provided significant benefits for the development of Indonesia's national defense capacity.

Through involvement in complex multinational operations, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) have gained valuable experience in terms of interoperability, operational management, and crisis handling in international environments. This finding reinforces the

argument that defense diplomacy implemented through participation in peacekeeping operations can serve as a strategic instrument for enhancing professionalism and modernizing the armed forces. According to Desriyanti (2017), one type of multitrack diplomacy is cultural diplomacy. Multitrack diplomacy is a process of realizing peace in which individuals, organizations, and communities work together to achieve it. According to John W. McDonnal, multitrack diplomacy is a method of resolving conflicts between countries that involves four elements: government, non-governmental institutions (private), people, and the media (Desriyanti, 2017).

The UNIFIL mission demonstrates that Indonesia's contribution in the international arena, particularly through the Eastern Sector Military Staff, has received positive recognition from the international community. This not only strengthens Indonesia's position as an influential middle power but also opens opportunities to expand its defense diplomacy network. Regular interaction with military and civilian personnel from various countries within the context of UNIFIL has created an effective platform for knowledge exchange, trust building, and potential future cooperation. However, several challenges are faced by the Eastern Sector Military Staff in carrying out their duties in Lebanon. The complexity of the geopolitical situation in the Middle East, the ever-changing conflict dynamics, and the need to balance operational mandates with sensitivity to local dynamics are significant challenges. A meta-analysis of various case studies shows that the ability of Indonesian personnel to adapt to complex and sensitive operational environments has been a key factor in the success of their mission.

Indonesia's role in UNIFIL has broader strategic implications, particularly in the context of Indonesia's free and active foreign policy. As the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Indonesia's participation in peacekeeping missions in the Middle East has positioned it as a potential bridge between the Muslim world and the wider international community. This finding strengthens the argument that defense diplomacy, when effectively implemented through peace operations, can be a powerful instrument for achieving broader foreign policy objectives. Indonesia's contribution to UNIFIL has had a positive impact on peacebuilding efforts in Lebanon. The involvement of Indonesian personnel in community development projects and humanitarian assistance has helped create a more conducive environment for long-term peace. This aligns with contemporary understandings of peacekeeping that emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach integrating security, development, and reconciliation.

The success of the Eastern Sector Military Staff in carrying out their duties in Lebanon cannot be separated from their ability to combine military professionalism with diplomatic sensitivity and cross-cultural understanding. Various mission reports and case studies indicate that Indonesian personnel have succeeded in building constructive relationships with various stakeholders in Lebanon, including local communities, multinational forces, and conflicting parties. This ability not only contributes to the overall effectiveness of the UNIFIL mission but also strengthens Indonesia's position as a responsible and reliable global actor.

Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL has made a significant contribution to conflict prevention and regional stabilization efforts. Through active involvement in various aspects of peacekeeping operations, including routine patrols, ceasefire monitoring, and facilitating dialogue between conflicting parties, the Eastern Sector Military Staff have played an important role in preventing conflict escalation and maintaining stability in their area of operation. This finding reinforces the argument that defense diplomacy, when implemented through peace operations, can serve as an effective instrument for conflict management and regional stability. In line with this, Indonesia's involvement in UNIFIL has had a positive impact on efforts to build local capacity in Lebanon. Through various training programs, knowledge transfer, and technical cooperation, Indonesian personnel have contributed to strengthening the capabilities of local institutions in addressing diverse security and development challenges. This is consistent with contemporary peacekeeping principles that stress the importance of empowering local actors as the key to sustainable long-term peace.

Moreover, Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL has provided an effective platform to promote the values and principles upheld by the country on the international stage. Analysis of various policy documents and official statements shows that involvement in peace operations has allowed Indonesia to project its image as a nation committed to peace, tolerance, and international cooperation. This not only strengthens Indonesia's soft power but also enhances its credibility as a constructive global actor. Various official UN documents and diplomatic reports indicate that Indonesia's active participation in peace operations has increased its visibility in the international arena and strengthened its voice on global issues. The League of Nations was established to prevent instability, but conflict and wars among humankind caused it to evolve (Fadillah et al., 2018). This is in line with Indonesia's broader diplomatic strategy to play a more active and constructive role in global governance. Routine interactions between Indonesian personnel and local stakeholders have created a strong foundation for broader cooperation in various fields, including economy, education, and cultural exchange. This strengthens the argument that defense diplomacy, when effectively implemented through peace operations, can serve as a catalyst for strengthening bilateral and regional relations.

As a representation of the world's largest Muslim-majority country that upholds the principles of moderation and tolerance, Indonesia has helped build bridges of understanding among various communities in Lebanon. This not only contributes to local reconciliation efforts but also strengthens Indonesia's role as a model of diversity and harmony in the global context. The involvement of the Eastern Sector Military Staff in UNIFIL has made a significant contribution to the development of Indonesia's peacekeeping doctrines and practices. The experiences gained from participation in the UNIFIL operation have been integrated into the broader training and capacity-building of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI). This not only enhances Indonesia's preparedness to participate in future peace operations but also strengthens its position as a credible and professional contributor to global peacekeeping efforts.

Indonesia has also actively promoted the participation of female personnel in its UNIFIL contingent, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. According to the United Nations Security Council (2000), the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda was endorsed under Resolution 1325 on October 30, 2000, as an effort to address women's involvement in violent extremism, acknowledging that factors, motivations, and impacts differ between men and women (Veronika, 2021). In addition to contributing to the operational effectiveness of the mission, this initiative also strengthens Indonesia's position as an advocate of gender equality in the context of international security. Official policies and statements indicate that Indonesia has consistently promoted greater integration between peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and long-term development efforts. This approach, which reflects Indonesia's understanding of the interconnection between security and development, has received positive recognition from the international community and has reinforced Indonesia's position as a thought leader in the evolution of global peacekeeping practices.

This research also reveals that the involvement of the Eastern Sector Military Staff in UNIFIL has made a significant contribution to efforts to enhance interoperability between Indonesian forces and those of other countries. Analyses of various mission reports and operational evaluations indicate that the experience of working in a complex multinational environment has improved the TNI's ability to operate effectively within the framework of international coalitions. This has not only increased the professionalism and operational effectiveness of the TNI but also strengthened Indonesia's position as a reliable partner in global collective security efforts.

The experiences gained by the Eastern Sector Military Staff in the UNIFIL operation have not only enhanced the TNI's ability to operate in multinational environments but have also provided valuable insights into the complexity of contemporary conflicts and innovative approaches to conflict resolution. Analyses of various mission reports and case studies indicate

that Indonesian personnel have developed a more nuanced understanding of conflict dynamics in the Middle East, including the social, economic, and political factors that affect the security situation in Lebanon. This knowledge not only benefits the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations but has also been integrated into military training and education curricula in Indonesia, enriching the strategic perspective of the armed forces in addressing contemporary security challenges.

Indonesia's active involvement in UNIFIL has also provided an effective platform to promote Indonesia's distinctive approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Various policy documents and official statements show that Indonesia has consistently emphasized the importance of dialogue, inclusivity, and respect for local sovereignty in peacekeeping efforts. This approach, rooted in Indonesia's own experience in managing diversity and internal conflicts, has gained positive recognition from various stakeholders in Lebanon and the broader international community. This has not only strengthened Indonesia's soft power but also positioned the country as a source of knowledge and best practices in the fields of peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

Furthermore, Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL has provided a unique opportunity to strengthen bilateral relations with other countries contributing to the mission. Analyses of various diplomatic communications and cooperation agreements indicate that regular interactions between Indonesian personnel and contingents from other countries have paved the way for more intensive dialogue and closer cooperation in various fields, including defense, economy, and education. For example, technical cooperation and knowledge exchange with contingents from developed countries have supported Indonesia's military modernization efforts. Conversely, Indonesia's experience in addressing communal conflict and extremism has served as a valuable source of learning for partner countries.

The presence of the Eastern Sector Military Staff in Lebanon has also made a significant contribution to Indonesia's efforts to strengthen its role in global humanitarian diplomacy. Various mission reports and program evaluations show that Indonesian personnel have been actively involved in a range of humanitarian assistance and community development initiatives in their operational areas. These activities, which include providing healthcare services, infrastructure rehabilitation, and educational programs, have not only helped improve the living standards of local communities but have also reinforced Indonesia's image as a nation committed to human development and international solidarity. This holistic approach, combining elements of security and development, reflects Indonesia's understanding of the interconnection between development, security, and sustainable peace.

Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL has also provided strategic opportunities to strengthen the country's position in various international forums. Analyses of Indonesia's policy statements and positions at the United Nations and regional organizations indicate that the experiences and knowledge gained from involvement in UNIFIL have enriched Indonesia's contributions to global discussions on peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and international security. For instance, Indonesia has actively advocated for reforms in UN peacekeeping practices, including greater focus on civilian protection, strengthening local capacities, and better integration between peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts. Indonesia's stance on these issues, supported by concrete field experience, has gained attention and support from many UN member states, reinforcing Indonesia's role as a contributor of ideas and policies in global security governance.

The involvement of the Eastern Sector Military Staff in UNIFIL has also made a significant contribution to efforts to enhance the professionalism and institutional capacity of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI). Various evaluation reports and internal studies show that the experience of operating in a complex multinational environment has fostered higher standards of professionalism, ethics, and discipline among TNI personnel. For example, exposure

to international operational standards and best practices has assisted the TNI in developing and updating its doctrines, standard operating procedures, and human resource management systems. Furthermore, interaction with military personnel from developed countries has helped the TNI identify capability gaps and areas requiring improvement, providing clear direction for future modernization and capacity-building efforts.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia's participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), particularly through the Eastern Sector Military Staff, demonstrates the country's strong commitment to global peace and the practical application of defense diplomacy. This engagement shows that Indonesia is not only fulfilling its international obligations but also strategically strengthening its geopolitical standing as a middle power. The Eastern Sector Military Staff have successfully combined military professionalism with diplomatic sensitivity, cultural understanding, and humanitarian efforts, positioning Indonesia as both a credible peacekeeper and a constructive diplomatic actor in the Middle East.

The findings highlight that Indonesia's defense diplomacy in UNIFIL is multidimensional, encompassing traditional military tasks such as ceasefire monitoring and patrols, as well as peacebuilding initiatives like humanitarian assistance, infrastructure support, and community development. This holistic approach reflects Indonesia's belief that sustainable peace can only be achieved through a combination of security, reconciliation, and socio-economic development. By engaging actively in both hard power and soft power measures, Indonesia has contributed significantly to regional stability while also reinforcing its soft power image as a moderate Muslim-majority country committed to tolerance and cooperation.

From a national perspective, Indonesia's involvement in UNIFIL has provided valuable opportunities for the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) to improve their professionalism, interoperability, and strategic capacity. The experiences gained in Lebanon—ranging from operating in complex multinational environments to engaging in cross-cultural diplomacy—serve as a living laboratory for strengthening the TNI's capabilities. These contributions are not only relevant for enhancing Indonesia's defense readiness but also play an important role in advancing the country's broader foreign policy goals, which are grounded in the principle of free and active participation in global security.

Ultimately, Indonesia's role in UNIFIL illustrates how defense diplomacy can serve as a powerful instrument for bridging security and diplomacy. The Eastern Sector Military Staff have successfully demonstrated that peacekeeping missions are not limited to maintaining security but can also function as platforms for dialogue, trust-building, and long-term cooperation. As Indonesia continues to integrate its peacekeeping experience into its broader defense and foreign policy strategies, the country is poised to play an even more significant role in shaping international peace and security. This achievement reinforces Indonesia's position as a responsible and influential actor in global diplomacy, capable of contributing to both regional stability and the evolution of international peacekeeping practices.

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