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Indonesia's Defense Diplomacy through the MONUSCO Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes Indonesia's defense diplomacy through its participation in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). The prolonged conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has created multidimensional security challenges that require collective international responses through United Nations peacekeeping operations. Indonesia's involvement in MONUSCO reflects not only its commitment to maintaining international peace and security, but also its strategic efforts in strengthening its role within multilateral security cooperation. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method through literature studies, document analysis, and the examination of official reports from the United Nations, MONUSCO, and the Indonesian National Armed Forces. The study uses the theory of defense diplomacy to examine how Indonesia utilizes peacekeeping operations as an instrument to support foreign policy objectives and strengthen international cooperation. The findings show that Indonesia carries out defense diplomacy through peacekeeping activities, civil-military cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and Quick Impact Projects (QIP) aimed at supporting local communities in conflict areas. These activities contribute to strengthening Indonesia's international image, enhancing military professionalism, and building trust with local communities. However, Indonesia also faces operational and security challenges in implementing defense diplomacy within the complex dynamics of multidimensional peacekeeping missions. This study concludes that Indonesia's participation in MONUSCO represents a form of cooperative defense diplomacy that combines security and humanitarian approaches in supporting international peace efforts.

1. Introduction

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains one of the most conflict-prone regions in Africa, characterized by prolonged armed violence, political instability, humanitarian crises, and the presence of numerous non-state armed groups. Since the late 1990s, the conflict has evolved into a multidimensional security issue involving domestic actors, neighboring states, and international organizations. The eastern regions of the DRC, particularly North Kivu and Ituri, continue to experience violence caused by armed groups competing over political influence and natural resources such as coltan, gold, and other strategic minerals. As a result, the humanitarian impact has become increasingly severe. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2025), the DRC

currently hosts one of the largest internally displaced populations in Africa, with approximately 6.9 million internally displaced persons (United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment), 2019).

The persistence of conflict in the DRC has attracted significant international attention due to its implications for regional and global security. The inability of the Congolese government to fully stabilize the country has encouraged the international community, particularly the United Nations (UN), to establish peacekeeping mechanisms aimed at protecting civilians and supporting post-conflict stabilization. In response to the escalating violence, the United Nations Security Council established the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) in 1999, which later transformed into the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) through Resolution 1925 in 2010. MONUSCO is currently one of the largest and most complex multidimensional peacekeeping operations conducted by the United Nations, involving military, police, and civilian personnel from various countries (United Nations Peace keeping, 2024)

As part of its commitment to international peace and security, Indonesia has actively participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations under the framework of its free and active foreign policy (Williams, 2007). Indonesia's involvement in MONUSCO reflects not only humanitarian concerns but also broader strategic objectives related to defense diplomacy. Defense diplomacy refers to the peaceful utilization of defense resources and military cooperation to support foreign policy objectives, strengthen international trust, and promote regional or global stability. Through its participation in MONUSCO, Indonesia employs peacekeeping operations as an instrument of cooperative defense diplomacy aimed at enhancing its international reputation and strengthening multilateral security engagement.

Indonesia's contribution to MONUSCO is primarily carried out through the deployment of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia/TNI) under the Garuda Contingent. Beyond traditional security functions, Indonesian peacekeepers have also engaged in humanitarian and civil-military activities through Quick Impact Projects (QIP), including the construction of public infrastructure, medical facilities, clean water access, and conflict mediation initiatives within local communities. These activities demonstrate how Indonesia combines security and humanitarian approaches in implementing defense diplomacy through peacekeeping missions (Pertiwi et al., 2025).

Several previous studies have discussed Indonesia's participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations from different perspectives. Hermanto (2024) argues that Indonesia's peacekeeping participation contributes significantly to improving the country's international image and diplomatic reputation. Similarly, Rasi et al. (2025) emphasize that Indonesian peacekeepers in UNIFIL successfully implemented defense diplomacy through peacebuilding and soft power approaches. Meanwhile, Adhiguna (2025) highlights the role of the Indonesian Army as an instrument of defense diplomacy in MONUSCO, particularly in supporting humanitarian and security activities in conflict areas.

However, most previous studies tend to focus on operational contributions, peacebuilding, or Indonesia's international image without specifically analyzing peacekeeping operations as a direct instrument of defense diplomacy in the context of MONUSCO. Furthermore, limited studies examine the strategic role of Quick Impact Projects (QIP) as part of Indonesia's defense diplomacy approach in multidimensional peacekeeping missions. This study seeks to fill this research gap by focusing specifically on Indonesia's defense diplomacy within MONUSCO through the implementation of peacekeeping activities and humanitarian engagement in conflict areas.

Based on this background, this study addresses the following research questions: how does Indonesia implement defense diplomacy through its participation in the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission, and what challenges does Indonesia face in conducting defense diplomacy within the multidimensional dynamics of United Nations peacekeeping operations? Therefore, this study aims to analyze Indonesia's defense diplomacy through MONUSCO participation and to examine the challenges encountered in implementing defense diplomacy in conflict-affected regions.

2. Literature Review

In the contemporary international landscape, defense diplomacy has emerged as a crucial instrument of foreign policy, wherein military and defense resources are utilized for peaceful purposes to foster confidence-building measures (CBMs), prevent conflicts, and enhance regional or global stability (Cottey & Forster, 2004). According to Tan (2014), defense diplomacy has evolved significantly beyond traditional bilateral military alliances into complex multilateral frameworks, including humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) as well as global peacekeeping operations.

In the context of Indonesia, defense diplomacy is intrinsically aligned with its foundational "free and active" (bebas-aktif) foreign policy doctrine (Williams, 2007). Indonesia strategically employs cooperative defense diplomacy to project its image as a responsible global actor. Military participation in multilateral forums and United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions serves as a strategic avenue to strengthen Indonesia's diplomatic leverage and international standing (Hermanto, 2024). The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) represents one of the most volatile and complex peacekeeping environments in modern history, driven by protracted multidimensional conflicts, regional interventions, and fierce competition over strategic natural resources (Autesserre, 2010). The transition from MONUC to MONUSCO under UN Security Council Resolution 1925 in 2010 marked a pivotal shift from traditional ceasefire monitoring to an active stabilization mandate with an explicit emphasis on the protection of civilians (United Nations Peace keeping, 2024).

The operational landscape in the eastern DRC, particularly in North Kivu and Ituri, is further complicated by the fluid and asymmetric presence of non-state armed groups (Tull, 2018). Within this perilous environment, modern multidimensional missions demand that peacekeepers possess not only tactical military capabilities but also socio-humanitarian adaptability. This adaptability is vital for executing civil-military cooperation to win the "hearts and minds" of local populations amidst deep-seated mistrust toward domestic and international authorities. Indonesia has established a robust track record in UN Peacekeeping Operations through the deployment of the Garuda Contingent. Existing literature indicates that the field effectiveness of Indonesian peacekeepers is heavily driven by a culturally sensitive, soft-power approach and adaptive community engagement (Rasi et al., 2025). In MONUSCO, Indonesia's engagement uniquely bridges security maintenance with the execution of Quick Impact Projects (QIP), spanning public infrastructure development, medical aid, and community-level mediation (Adhiguna, 2025; Pertiwi et al., 2025).

While previous studies has extensively documented the operational milestones of the Garuda Contingent (Adhiguna, 2025) or evaluated its overarching impact on Indonesia's global prestige (Hermanto, 2024), there remains a critical gap in analyzing QIP as a direct instrument of cooperative defense diplomacy. Most existing studies relegate QIP to mere tactical, short-term humanitarian relief on the ground. This study addresses this lacuna by examining how the integration of MONUSCO's hard security mandates with the soft approach of QIP is strategically constructed as an instrument of Indonesian defense diplomacy amidst multidimensional conflict dynamics.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design utilizing a case study approach to evaluate the suitability and implementation of Indonesia's defense diplomacy through its participation in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). A qualitative design is highly suitable for this inquiry as it enables a comprehensive, contextual, and interpretive examination of complex socio-political phenomena, institutional practices, and defense policies within international security cooperation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lamont, 2015). The case study approach focuses specifically on Indonesia's military, humanitarian, and civil-military engagements such as Quick Impact Projects (QIP) within the conflict zones of the DRC. This bound empirical context allows the researcher to explore the intricate interplay between defense policy and multidimensional peacekeeping dynamics, ensuring a thorough assessment of how defense resources are utilized for peaceful diplomatic objectives.

3.2 Participants

The participants for the primary data collection of this study consist of Indonesian peacekeeping personnel deployed under the Garuda Contingent who have direct operational experience within the MONUSCO mission. This participant pool includes military officers, strategic planners, and field personnel from the Indonesian National Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia/TNI). To select these participants, a purposive sampling technique was employed (Sugiyono, 2020). This non-probability sampling method was chosen to deliberately select individuals who possess specialized knowledge, first-hand operational insights, and direct involvement in executing defense diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, and conflict mediation in the DRC, thereby maximizing the depth and credibility of the primary data.

3.3 Instruments

The primary data collection instrument used with the selected participants is the semi-structured interview guide. This instrument was developed to gather open-ended, detailed accounts from TNI personnel regarding their operational experiences, field challenges, and interactions with local communities. The flexible nature of the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to probe deeper into specific instances of civil-military cooperation and strategic defense diplomacy practices. In tandem with primary instruments, documentary checklists and literature matrices served as secondary instruments. These were used to systematically extract, organize, and analyze data from official institutional repositories and databases. These instruments were applied to United Nations Security Council resolutions, MONUSCO mission reports, official publications from the Indonesian Ministry of Defense and TNI Headquarters, as well as humanitarian databases from the UNHCR.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in this study follows a qualitative interpretative and thematic analysis procedure, structured through data classification, data reduction, and data interpretation (Sugiyono, 2020). First, data from interviews, literature studies, and official documents were systematically categorized based on the core themes of the theoretical framework: defense diplomacy practices, civil-military cooperation, and operational challenges. Second, data reduction was performed to screen out irrelevant details, focusing strictly on text segments that explain Indonesia's strategic maneuvers and Quick Impact Projects (QIP) within MONUSCO. Finally, the reduced data were interpreted to identify meaningful patterns concerning how

Indonesia combines security and humanitarian approaches to project its international reputation. To ensure data validity and reliability, source triangulation was rigorously applied. This involved cross-verifying and comparing the primary insights gained from participant interviews with empirical evidence extracted from UN institutional reports, academic literature, and international databases, thereby minimizing analytical bias and enhancing the credibility of the findings.

4. Findings

4.1 Indonesia's Defense Diplomacy through MONUSCO Peacekeeping Operations

Indonesia's participation in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) represents one of the concrete manifestations of its defense diplomacy within the framework of multilateral security cooperation. Through the deployment of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia/TNI) under the Garuda Contingent, Indonesia demonstrates its commitment to maintaining international peace and security as mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and the principles of its free and active foreign policy. Indonesia's involvement in MONUSCO also reflects the increasing role of middle powers in contributing to global peacekeeping and humanitarian missions (Hermanto, 2024).

Defense diplomacy emphasizes the peaceful use of defense resources and military cooperation to achieve foreign policy objectives, build mutual trust, and strengthen international partnerships (Cottey & Forster, 2004). In the context of MONUSCO, Indonesia utilizes peacekeeping operations not merely as military deployments, but as strategic instruments to strengthen international legitimacy and diplomatic engagement through cooperative security approaches. Indonesia's peacekeeping personnel in MONUSCO are involved in various operational activities, including civilian protection, conflict monitoring, humanitarian assistance, patrol operations, engineering support, and civil-military coordination. Indonesian peacekeepers have also actively participated in infrastructure development projects such as road repairs, bridge construction, clean water facilities, and public service assistance in conflict-affected communities (Adhiguna, 2025). These activities indicate that Indonesia's defense diplomacy combines both security and humanitarian dimensions in supporting peacebuilding efforts.

The findings reveal that Indonesia's participation in MONUSCO contributes positively to strengthening its international image as a country committed to global peace and humanitarian values. Through active participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions, Indonesia gains broader opportunities to enhance diplomatic relations with other contributing countries and international organizations. In addition, participation in MONUSCO improves the professionalism and interoperability of Indonesian military personnel through multinational operational experiences and coordination within complex peacekeeping environments (Rasi et al., 2025). From the perspective of defense diplomacy, Indonesia's involvement in MONUSCO also functions as a confidence-building measure (Okano-Heijmans, 2011). The interaction between Indonesian peacekeepers and local communities helps strengthen trust and social legitimacy in conflict areas. Indonesian personnel are often recognized for their community-oriented approaches, cultural adaptability, and humanitarian engagement, which contribute to creating a more positive perception among local populations. This demonstrates that defense diplomacy can be implemented through non-coercive approaches emphasizing cooperation, communication, and humanitarian assistance rather than military force alone (Paleri, 2008).

4.2 Humanitarian Engagement and Quick Impact Projects (QIP)

One of the important findings of this study is the strategic role of humanitarian engagement and Quick Impact Projects (QIP) as instruments of Indonesia's defense diplomacy in MONUSCO. QIP refers to small-scale projects conducted by peacekeeping contingents to provide immediate assistance and tangible benefits to local communities affected by conflict. These projects are designed to improve community welfare while simultaneously strengthening relations between peacekeepers and civilians (United Nations Peace keeping, 2024).

Indonesian peacekeepers have implemented various QIP programs in MONUSCO operational areas, including the construction of schools, public sanitation facilities, clean water systems, health services, and infrastructure rehabilitation. In several areas, Indonesian contingents also organized medical outreach programs and educational assistance for children affected by armed conflict (Adhiguna, 2025). These activities demonstrate how Indonesia integrates humanitarian values into its defense diplomacy practices. The implementation of QIP contributes significantly to enhancing Indonesia's cooperative approach within peacekeeping missions. Humanitarian engagement allows Indonesian peacekeepers to establish closer communication with local communities, thereby increasing social acceptance and trust. This finding indicates that defense diplomacy is not solely conducted through formal military cooperation but also through humanitarian interactions capable of influencing public perceptions and supporting long-term peacebuilding processes (Rasi et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the humanitarian role carried out by Indonesian contingents strengthens Indonesia's reputation within the United Nations peacekeeping framework. Indonesia is increasingly perceived as a constructive and cooperative actor that prioritizes humanitarian principles and civilian protection. This positive image supports Indonesia's broader foreign policy interests, including strengthening its diplomatic standing at the international level and increasing its credibility in multilateral forums (Hermanto, 2024). The findings also show that humanitarian engagement in MONUSCO reflects the transformation of contemporary peacekeeping operations from traditional military observation missions into multidimensional missions involving social, humanitarian, and development aspects. Indonesia's defense diplomacy therefore adapts to this transformation by combining military professionalism with community-centered approaches in conflict management (United Nations Peace keeping, 2024).

4.3 Challenges in Implementing Defense Diplomacy within MONUSCO

Despite the positive contributions of Indonesia's participation in MONUSCO, this study also identifies several challenges in implementing defense diplomacy within multidimensional peacekeeping operations. One of the primary challenges is the complex security environment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The presence of multiple armed groups, ongoing armed violence, and unstable political conditions create significant operational risks for peacekeeping personnel, including Indonesian contingents (United Nations Peace keeping, 2024).

The eastern regions of the DRC continue to experience attacks from armed groups that frequently target civilians and peacekeeping forces. This condition complicates the implementation of humanitarian and civil-military programs conducted by Indonesian personnel. In several situations, limited security conditions restrict the mobility and operational effectiveness of peacekeepers in delivering assistance to vulnerable communities (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2025). Another challenge relates to the multidimensional nature of MONUSCO missions. Peacekeeping personnel are required not only to perform military functions but also to engage in humanitarian assistance, conflict mediation, civilian protection, and social development activities. Such multidimensional

responsibilities demand high levels of adaptability, coordination, and intercultural communication skills from Indonesian peacekeepers. Operational effectiveness therefore depends not only on military capability but also on diplomatic and humanitarian competencies (Cottey & Forster, 2004).

In addition, logistical and geographical constraints present considerable challenges for Indonesia's peacekeeping operations. Difficult terrain, inadequate infrastructure, and limited transportation access in several operational areas often hinder the implementation of humanitarian projects and operational coordination. These challenges require stronger institutional preparedness and coordination mechanisms between Indonesia, the United Nations, and local authorities (United Nations Peace keeping, 2024). The findings further indicate that defense diplomacy through peacekeeping missions requires long-term consistency and policy support from the Indonesian government. Sustainable participation in international peacekeeping operations depends on defense budgeting, personnel readiness, diplomatic coordination, and institutional capacity-building. Therefore, Indonesia's defense diplomacy strategy must continue to adapt to evolving international security dynamics and the increasing complexity of multidimensional peacekeeping missions (Putnam, 1988).

Overall, the study demonstrates that Indonesia's participation in MONUSCO reflects a cooperative model of defense diplomacy that combines military engagement, humanitarian assistance, and international cooperation. Through peacekeeping operations, Indonesia not only contributes to global peace efforts but also strengthens its diplomatic position and international reputation within the framework of multilateral security cooperation (Hermanto, 2024).

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Indonesia's participation in MONUSCO has transcended mere military deployments or the routine fulfillment of constitutional mandates. Instead, it has evolved into a highly strategic instrument of cooperative defense diplomacy. Through the deployment of the Garuda Contingent, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) have successfully merged conventional security enforcement with a human-centric approach. This deliberate combination represents a unique model of defense diplomacy that effectively projects state influence on the global stage.

From a practical perspective, the execution of Quick Impact Projects (QIP) such as building public infrastructure, providing clean water access, and delivering free medical aid functions as far more than tactical, short-term welfare assistance. These micro-level humanitarian projects yield major macroeconomic and strategic dividends as vital confidence-building measures. In the volatile conflict landscape of the eastern DRC, where local communities often view external actors and domestic authorities with deep-seated skepticism, the cultural adaptability and empathy demonstrated by Indonesian peacekeepers have proven highly effective in winning local "hearts and minds." Securing this social acceptance on the ground directly mitigates security risks, providing a safer operational environment for the contingent.

However, interpreting these findings also uncovers a set of demanding institutional and operational challenges. The highly unstable security environment of MONUSCO, characterized by asymmetric threats from various armed groups and severe geographical obstacles, forces modern peacekeepers to expand their traditional capabilities. Soldiers must now operate simultaneously as combatants, diplomats, community mediators, and aid coordinators. This reality highlights an critical shift in the competencies required for modern military personnel. To sustain the long-term efficacy of this defense diplomacy model, spontaneous tactical successes in the field must be backed by consistent domestic policy support—specifically through robust defense budgeting, streamlined logistics, and the institutionalization of diplomatic and humanitarian training prior to deployment.

6. Conclusion

Indonesia's active engagement in the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission offers a powerful blueprint for cooperative defense diplomacy, masterfully balancing military professionalism with direct humanitarian action. The strategic implementation of Quick Impact Projects (QIP) serves as an indispensable soft-power asset that not only stabilizes conflict-affected communities in the DRC but also substantially elevates Indonesia's diplomatic prestige and credibility within multilateral forums. Nonetheless, the sustainability of this defense diplomacy framework is continually tested by the fluid conflict dynamics in the DRC, persistent threats from armed factions, and significant logistical bottlenecks. Overcoming these multidimensional hurdles requires continuous institutional adaptability from the Indonesian government. Securing long-term budgetary commitment, strengthening inter-agency coordination with the UN, and expanding pre-deployment training to heavily emphasize non-military competencies such as cross-cultural communication and conflict mediation remain paramount. Ultimately, ensuring these adjustments will guarantee that Indonesia's contributions to global peace remain structurally impactful, resilient, and capable of fortifying the nation's geopolitical leverage worldwide.

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