The Role of Indonesian Military Women in Peacekeeping Operations as Agents of Changes

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KEYWORDS
Indonesian Military Women, Peacekeeping Operations, Gender Inclusion

ABSTRACT
This study explores the role of Indonesian military women in peacekeeping operations, focusing on their contributions, challenges, and potential as agents of change. Using a qualitative case study approach, this analysis examines the historical involvement, present contributions, and future prospects of Indonesian military women in peacekeeping operations. The study relies on document analysis and secondary data from peacekeeping missions, with a particular focus on the roles and impact of female personnel in the Garuda Contingent. Findings reveal that Indonesian military women actively contribute to operational effectiveness by performing diverse roles such as community engagement, healthcare provision, and logistical support, while addressing gender-sensitive issues in conflict zones. Their participation enhances mission outcomes, builds trust with local populations, and promotes Indonesia's international image as a proponent of global peace. However, challenges persist, including societal expectations and institutional barriers that limit leadership opportunities. By aligning with the United Nations' gender inclusion goals, Indonesia demonstrates its commitment to expanding women's roles in peacekeeping missions. This study highlights the transformative impact of gender integration on operational efficiency and offers insights into strategies for addressing barriers faced by military women. The findings contribute to the growing discourse on the significance of women in peacekeeping and provide a framework for advancing inclusive practices in international peace missions.

1. Introduction:

The goal of peacekeeping, also referred to as peacekeeping operations, is to help nations afflicted by conflicts establish peaceful environments [1]. Extending the term of peace agreements [2], preventing civil wars from starting again [3], helping to put a stop to the violence [4], fostering local collaboration [5], and aiding in the reconstruction process after a conflict. Peacekeeping Operations for Peace (PKO), which are run by the UN Security Council, are essential to preserving peace [6]. Multifaceted oprations involving new jobs, positions, settings, and actors, such female military peacekeepers [7], have supplanted traditional UN peacekeeping missions where troops were mostly observing ceasefire agreements and borders [8].

The UN is currently making a concerted effort to elevate women's participation in peacekeeping missions worldwide [9]. Equal participation of women in all facets of peacekeeping operations, including the military, is encouraged by Security Council Resolution 1325. The Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support's policy on gender equality and the UN Military's guidelines for incorporating gender perspectives into their work further support this [10]. Achieving enduring peace and improving the well-being of women and girls in areas impacted by violence are two benefits of greatly increasing the number of female peacekeepers deployed to peace operations [11].

Take the presence of women in uniform in the United Nations peacekeeping force as an example of the roles that women play in international peacekeeping [12]. Although it is ultimately up to Member States to deploy uniformed women as part of their efforts, the UN continues to make a strong case with them [13]. When it comes to planning operations and making important decisions, especially ones that impact civilians, especially women and girls, female soldiers offer another viewpoint. In addition to driving armored vehicles, operating weaponry systems, communicating with the local population, providing healthcare, and taking part in high-risk mine clearance operations, these women carry out a

number of vital duties and activities [14], [15]. They operate in every field, including communications, planning, logistics, political and civic affairs, and civilian protection [16], [17].

Women face several obstacles and difficulties when it comes to taking part in peace operations [18], especially in Indonesia itself, there are various gender gaps that require several gender aspects to be the benchmark for every female military. Regardless of their rank, nationality, or upbringing, women face comparable taboos and stigmas during their military careers [19]. These taboos and stigmas cause problems for women's national defense systems, UN peace operations, and individuals and communities. The initial effort to systematically gather data, examine, and classify the obstacles female troops encounter when trying to deploy on peacekeeping missions was the baseline study released in July 2018 by the Elsie Initiative (Ghittoni et al., 2018). These fourteen challenges involve limited candidate availability, selection and criteria for deployment, household limitations, rigid leadership, inadequate facilities, unfavorable past experiences, factors discouraging redeployment, traditional gender norms, and social exclusion have been whittled down and consolidated into ten by subsequent research since the baseline study was published [20]. Many of these obstacles speak to the cultural obstacles that women encounter in their own societies and inside the armed forces.

Indonesia has been a prominent contributor to UN peacekeeping missions since 1957 [21], beginning with the deployment of the Garuda Contingent (KONGA) to the Suez Canal [22]. Female Indonesian peacekeepers occupy strategic roles, including as military police, healthcare providers, and officers within battalions, further showcasing their value in international operations [23]. Beyond their operational roles, Indonesian female peacekeepers engage in knowledge exchange with their counterparts from other countries, contributing to a broader understanding of best practices in peacekeeping. Indonesia’s involvement reflects its broader strategic objectives, using peacekeeping participation to strengthen its international presence and leverage its contributions as a means to enhance its diplomatic influence and national defense capabilities [22].

Indonesia’s peacekeeping involvement is also tied to its regional commitments within ASEAN, particularly in fostering collaborative frameworks like the ASEAN Peacekeeping Centers Network (APCN) under the ADMM framework. The establishment of national peacekeeping training centers, including in Indonesia, supports the development of skilled personnel, with female peacekeepers actively participating in both operational deployments and knowledge-sharing initiatives. These efforts underscore Indonesia’s dual focus on fulfilling international obligations while enhancing its influence through peacekeeping diplomacy, solidifying its reputation as a leading advocate of peace and security.

Then, whether it is important to play the role of military women in world peace missions. This research will discuss the role of women military in world peace missions. Whether the influence is felt, or as Jennings, (2011) says, women in peace missions can be categorized as agents of change or stranded symbols. This raises further discourse to examine the ways in which women peacekeepers contribute to the operational effectiveness of peacekeeping missions and how these contributions differ (or not) from the performance of male peacekeepers.

2. Methods:

This case study employs a qualitative approach to explore the role of Indonesian military women in peacekeeping operations, focusing on their contributions, challenges, and potential as agents of change. Data collection involves document analysis and observation of the peacekeeping operations. The study prioritizes examining historical participation, current roles, and future opportunities to enhance inclusive gender integration. Sources include official UN documents, Indonesian military publications, and field reports from peacekeeping missions. This contextual analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Indonesian military women's involvement and its alignment with global gender inclusion goals.

With a focus on their contributions and difficulties in attaining inclusive gender integration, this case study offers a descriptive examination of the role played by Indonesian military women in

peacekeeping operations. The study looks at the Garuda Contingent's involvement in missions like those in Lebanon and other conflict areas, using historical documents and current actions. Testimonies, reports, and official data demonstrate how these women manage the particular difficulties presented by institutional and cultural hurdles while juggling operational duties including communications, logistics, and civilian protection.

3. Result and Discussion

Global Trends Women in Peacekeeping

Twenty-four years after the passing of Resolution 1325, the participation of women in international peace and security as military personnel remains limited to specialized areas and mainstreaming has not occurred. Only 3,789, or roughly 6.0%, of the 63,310 exclusively military peacekeeping personnel deployed to these twelve operations are female, according to data from October 2022 on the Contribution of Uniformed Personnel to UN by Mission, Personnel Type, and Gender (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2023).

Despite the slow rise over the years, the percentage remained low. In 1993, women made up less than 1% of deployed uniformed personnel [26]. In 2015, UN Security Council Resolution 2242 urged the Secretary-General, in partnership with member states, to “double the number of women in military and police units within UN peacekeeping operations over the next five years.” [27]. Despite this call to action, female participation has not increased significantly since the end of 2009 [28]. The 2018-2028 Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, approved by UN member states in 2018, established a target of 15% female military participation by 2028 (Department of Peace Operations, 2018). In order to achieve this ambitious objective, it also set yearly goals for the Secretariat. 1,909 female peacekeepers fell short of the 2022 target of 9% (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2023).

The United Nations' contribution target of 9% for the proportion of women deployed was surpassed by South Africa, Ghana, Ethiopia, and the United Republic of Tanzania as of October 2022, out of the 15 nations that send more than 1,000 personnel to peacekeeping missions. Several nations that use less military have also performed well. For instance, Estonia boasts a 100% female peacekeeping force (1/1) while Nigeria has a 21.5% female peacekeeping force (14/65). India is at the other extreme of the spectrum; although it contributes the second most troops in the world with 5,548 deployed, it only sends 51 women on their missions (0.9%) [30].

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) employs 781 women, followed by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) with 776 and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) with 746 in October 2022. Although such percentages are impressive, women in uniform made up only 6.4% of MINUSCA, 5.9% of UNMISS, and 6.0% of MONUSCO in relation to the overall force. The United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) has an 8.9% (66/740) female soldier composition, followed by the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) with 40.0% (8/20) [25].

The Role Women’s Participation in Peacekeeping Operations

Given the United Nations Charter's (UN Charter) commitment to women's equality, the issue of "gender imbalance" should have been a concern for PKOs from the beginning. However, the shift in their mission, scope, and nature has made the issue of gender balance more pressing. [31]. Women's widespread participation in grassroots post-reconstruction initiatives in post-conflict nations, has become an important facet of contemporary PKOs [32]. After UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (SCR 1325) was adopted, the clamor for more women in PKOs grew more forceful, it calls on the Secretary-General to work toward increasing the participation and involvement of women in UN field operations, particularly among civilian police, military observers, human rights workers, and humanitarian aid workers.

The most cited argument for increasing female participation in UN peace operations is that it boosts the overall effectiveness of a mission [33], [34], [35], [36]. This argument's main tenet is that greater female involvement could improve civilian protection, particularly for women and children [37]. Female peacekeepers are often regarded as more capable of engaging with local communities, which enhances the efficiency of mandate execution (Sharland 2019) and a deeper comprehension of the factors that lead to conflict [38]. According to this argument, women should be assigned to positions requiring a high degree of interaction with local populations in order to make a noticeable difference (IPI 2019a; Sharland 2019). There is increasing agreement that women's involvement promotes enduring peace after conflict [39], [40].

Another reason for increasing the deployment of female peacekeepers lies in their role in promoting greater focus on gender equality within the mission (Osland et al., 2020) this might also motivate local women to work in the political and security spheres, which would improve gender equality in the host nation (IPI 2019b; Sharland 2019). Emerging research supports this claim, revealing that the involvement of women's protection advisers in a UN operation is linked to an increased likelihood of the host country implementing legal frameworks and political strategies to prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) [42]. It's unclear if this is due to the mission's emphasis on SGBV or the rise of female peacekeepers in general (Ghittoni and Watson 2018). Relatedly, studies show that more terms pertaining to political reform are included in peace accords signed by women (Krause et al. 2018).

The critical role of women in peace education, highlighting their importance not only because they represent the majority of the global population but also because they drive transformative changes in mindsets, institutions, and cultures (UN Women, 2014). However, Brock-Utne & Skattum, (2009) points out a persistent societal issue where women's contributions to peace education are undervalued, arguing that despite women often forming the backbone of peace organizations, their efforts rarely receive due recognition. Agbalajobi, (2010) further argues that the inclusion of women in peacebuilding should not hinge on stereotypical traits but rather on the fact that women constitute half of post-conflict communities and have a vital interest in securing lasting peace.

UN Women underscores the systemic exclusion of women from peace processes. A 2012 review of 31 major peace processes revealed that between 1992 and 2011, women accounted for only 4% of signatories to peace agreements and less than 10% of negotiators (UN Women, 2012). Hunt & Posa, (2001) argue that such exclusion undermines the potential for sustainable and inclusive peace outcomes. Encouragingly, recent UN Women publications (2015; 2015b) and Bell and O'Rourke (2010) note an upward trend in women's participation, largely attributed to the adoption and implementation of UNSCR 1325, which has facilitated greater integration of women into formal peace processes. Women seem to have the same inclination to exclusively pursue positions that are specifically matched to their qualifications at the other professional levels as they do at the highest level. Women's propensity to apply is therefore influenced by the way the job is advertised and described.

Contributions of Indonesian Military Women to Peacekeeping Missions

The involvement of Indonesian military women in peacekeeping missions highlights their vital contribution to achieving operational objectives and building trust within communities [21], [46]. Indonesia's commitment to peacekeeping aligns with the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution, the Foreign Relations Act No. 37/1999, the Indonesian Armed Forces Act No. 34/2004, the Indonesian State Police Act No. 2/2002, the State Defense Act No. 3/2002, and the UN Charter, alongside related UN Resolutions on global peace.

Indonesia initiated its peacekeeping efforts in 1957 with the deployment of the Garuda Contingent to Egypt (UNEF) to support stability in the Suez Canal and the Egyptian-Israeli border. Operating under the UN's "Blue Helmet," Indonesian peacekeepers have served globally, from Congo (ONUC) to

Lebanon (UNIFIL) [47]. By 2025, the Indonesian military will have contributed 964 uniformed female personnel to UN Peacekeeping Forces, ranking it as the sixth largest contributor in the world and actively supporting gender inclusion with 155 female peacekeepers currently serving (Indonesia Military Air Force, 2025).

Women in the Garuda Contingent have been actively involved in community outreach initiatives within the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) [48], helping to build trust and strengthen cooperation alongside nearby communities. Their ability to grasp and address cultural sensitivities makes them invaluable in regions where gender norms limit interactions with male soldiers [49]. By engaging directly with local women and children, they not only build trust but also provide critical insights into community needs, enabling peacekeeping missions to tailor their approaches more effectively [50]. These efforts also inspire confidence and hope within the affected communities, as Indonesian female peacekeepers demonstrate that women can lead and actively contribute to restoring peace and security. Reports from the UN highlight that the involvement of female personnel enhances engagement with local women and children in conflict areas, effectively addressing issues that cultural norms may limit male peacekeepers from handling [51].

Additionally, Indonesian military women help with vital operational duties including clearing dangerous mines and providing medical care [23]. These positions show their adaptability and capacity to handle the rigorous demands of peacekeeping operations. According to data from the Indonesian Ministry of Defense, the Garuda Contingent deployed 10% of its personnel as women in Lebanon between 2019 and 2023, which is in line with UN gender diversity targets [21], [52]. This involvement makes it possible to respond to local communities' concerns more thoroughly. The capacity of female peacekeepers to build trust has proven especially successful in conflict areas, where violence disproportionately affects women and children [53], [54].

In addition to their operational roles, Indonesian military women contribute to broader dimensions of peacekeeping, such as political and humanitarian efforts [55]. They are involved in disarmament, reintegration of former combatants, and the resolution of local conflicts, as demonstrated by Indonesia's success in facilitating the DDRRR (Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement) process in the Democratic Republic of Congo [23]. Furthermore, they act as pioneers of peacebuilding by serving as an inspiration for women in the community, inspiring greater participation in peace initiatives. This dual role in operational and peacebuilding activities underscores the importance of enhancing their capabilities through targeted training in negotiation, dispute resolution, and communication.

Through Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) operations, Indonesia integrates humanitarian assistance, ceasefire facilitation, and peace process [22]. CIMIC initiatives extend beyond basic operational functions to include programs that focus on health, education, arts, and culture [56]. Female peacekeepers often lead these efforts, using their cultural sensitivity and interpersonal skills to bridge gaps between peacekeeping forces and local populations [57]. For example, health initiatives provide essential medical services, while education programs empower communities with knowledge and skills. Additionally, cultural and artistic activities foster mutual understanding and respect, creating a platform for reconciliation and collaboration.

Indonesia's commitment to peacekeeping is evident in its efforts to strengthen female participation [58], despite the absence of specific policies for capacity-building and gender mainstreaming. Initiatives such as the establishment of the International Peace and Security Center (IPSC) and contributions to UN missions like UNIFIL in Lebanon and Darfur demonstrate Indonesia's dedication to global peace efforts [59], [60]. However, further political will is essential to develop comprehensive policies that align with UN resolutions [61], such as UNSC Resolution 1325, which promotes women’s roles in peace and security. Investing in education, training, and adequate resources will enable Indonesia to enhance the role of women in peacekeeping, ensuring a more inclusive and effective

approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Challenges Faced in Achieving Inclusive Gender Integration

Women continue to confront several obstacles in spite of these accomplishments, including institutional and cultural expectations [62], [63]. Nonetheless, their ongoing deployment demonstrates Indonesia's dedication to meeting the UN's target of 15% female representation in military forces by 2028. These women's continuous efforts not only improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations but also advance Indonesia's standing as a major player in world peace and security [58]. They establish a standard for inclusive gender integration in military operations globally by overcoming obstacles and doing very well in a variety of roles [64].

To substantially elevate the presence of women in peacekeeping operations, the UN System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity was introduced [65] calls on the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPO) and Field Support, with support from UN Women and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, to confer with nations that provide troops and create a specific plan [66]. Both the strategy and resolution 2242 recognize that member states must work to significantly increase the number of female peacekeepers.

The UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women is known as United Nations Women. UN Women is therefore involved in peacekeeping as well as other facets of gender equality (United Nations Women, 2024). UN Women has created a novel and distinctive training program specifically for female peacekeepers in partnership with DPO. The purpose of the Female Military Officers' Course (FMOC) is to train military women for the multiple roles that many female peacekeepers are expected to do and to directly address the slow advancement made in raising the count of female military personnel in peacekeeping operations [66].

DPO recognizes that in addition to carrying out the same conventional military duties as their male counterparts, female peacekeepers serve as local role models, motivating women and girls in countries that are frequently controlled by men to fight for their own rights and to take part in peace processes (Department of Peace Operations, 2018).

Even with the notable advancements, there are still many barriers for Indonesian women who want to work as peacekeepers, especially social and cultural ones [69]. Cultural traditions in Indonesia frequently uphold conventional gender roles, drawing lines between men's and women's duties [70], particularly in military settings [71], [72]. Women are rarely assigned to combat or frontline duties, thus even if some have joined the military successfully, their roles are frequently more restricted than those of their male colleagues [19]. Societal biases also persist, with many still viewing military service, including peacekeeping missions, as a predominantly male domain. These prejudices often lead to women being placed in administrative or support roles rather than in operational or leadership positions [73].

Future Opportunities for Gender Integration

1. Opportunities for Enhanced Gender Integration in Peacekeeping

The evolving landscape of international peacekeeping presents numerous opportunities for strengthening gender integration, particularly for Indonesian military women. The United Nations' Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security emphasizes the need for the full and meaningful participation of women in peace operations. Indonesia, as a significant contributor to UN peacekeeping forces, has committed to achieving gender representation targets, with women constituting 15% of military contingents by 2028. This objective aligns with global efforts to ensure that women are involved not only in operational roles but also in strategic decision-making processes, a shift that has been shown to improve mission effectiveness and responsiveness to local needs.

2. Building Local Engagement and Trust

Indonesian military women offer a unique advantage in engaging with local populations, especially in culturally sensitive environments where male personnel might face restrictions. For example, in Lebanon under the UNIFIL mission, female peacekeepers facilitated dialogues with local women and conducted gender-specific training on community safety. According to a 2022 report by the UN Department of Peace Operations, missions with increased female representation saw a 20% higher rate of trust-building with local communities. This engagement not only enhances operational outcomes but also ensures that peacekeeping missions address the nuanced needs of vulnerable groups such as women and children.

3. Capacity Building and Leadership Opportunities

Investing in capacity-building programs can amplify the contributions of Indonesian military women to peacekeeping. Initiatives such as leadership training, conflict resolution workshops, and gender-sensitive operational planning are vital for preparing women to take on commanding roles in missions. Indonesia has begun addressing these gaps through specialized training for female personnel before deployment. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Defense in 2023 indicates a 35% increase in training participation by female officers, demonstrating progress toward equipping them with skills to lead in diverse and challenging operational contexts.

4. Overcoming Institutional Barriers

While opportunities for gender integration continue to expand, institutional challenges such as limited access to leadership roles and societal perceptions persist. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-pronged approach, including policy reforms, mentoring programs, and greater advocacy for gender inclusivity within the military. A 2023 study by the Elsie Initiative revealed that countries with comprehensive gender policies in the military saw a 25% increase in female representation in leadership roles over five years. Indonesia’s alignment with these best practices through initiatives like the Garuda Contingent serves as a stepping stone for broader institutional change, paving the way for Indonesian military women to play a more prominent role in global peacekeeping efforts.

4. Conclusion

The inclusion of women in peacekeeping missions has demonstrated significant value in enhancing operational effectiveness, fostering trust with local communities, and addressing gender-specific needs in post-conflict zones. Despite the increasing recognition of their contributions, global progress in achieving gender parity remains slow, with women accounting for only 6% of military peacekeeping personnel as of October 2022. Efforts such as the adoption of the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028) aim to accelerate female representation, yet the UN fell short of its 2022 target, highlighting persistent systemic and societal challenges.

Indonesian military women have made commendable contributions to peacekeeping missions, exemplifying their roles in critical operations, such as mine clearance, healthcare, and community outreach. Their participation underscores Indonesia's commitment to global peace efforts, aligning with the UN's gender diversity goals. With 155 women serving in peace operations in 2025, Indonesia is setting a precedent in promoting inclusive practices within peacekeeping forces, particularly in culturally sensitive areas where female personnel can engage more effectively with local populations.

Evidence supports the argument that increasing female representation in peacekeeping enhances mission outcomes, with women bringing unique perspectives to conflict resolution and fostering gender equality within host communities. Female peacekeepers contribute to improved civilian protection, greater trust-building, and higher-quality peace agreements. Their presence also encourages societal shifts, inspiring local women to engage in politics and security.

However, achieving inclusive gender integration requires overcoming substantial barriers, including

institutional constraints and societal expectations. The UN's System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity and dedicated training programs like the Female Military Officers' Course demonstrate a commitment to addressing these challenges. Sustained efforts from member states and global institutions will be essential to realizing the long-term benefits of gender-balanced peacekeeping, advancing both operational effectiveness and equitable representation.

Acknowledgements

The authors express their sincere gratitude to Universitas Padjadjaran for providing the necessary resources and support throughout this research.

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