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Indonesia's UNIFIL Dilemma: Balancing Strategic Autonomy and Peacekeeping Risks after the 2026 Casualties

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Abstract

Although Indonesia's participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations has received considerable scholarly attention, research specifically addressing the intersection of defense diplomacy, strategic autonomy, and rising peacekeeping risks within the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remains limited. This study aimed to analyze how Indonesia balances its defense diplomacy objectives and strategic autonomy amid escalating operational risks affecting peacekeeping personnel in southern Lebanon. A qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical case study design was employed, relying on purposively selected documentary sources relevant to Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL. Data were collected through document analysis of United Nations reports, UNIFIL publications, Indonesian government documents, policy statements, academic literature, and reputable international media sources. The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis through data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and synthesis of recurring themes. The findings indicate that deteriorating security conditions in southern Lebanon have significantly transformed the operational environment of peacekeeping missions, increasing personnel vulnerability and operational unpredictability for

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troop-contributing countries, including Indonesia. Despite these growing risks, Indonesia has maintained its participation in UNIFIL while strengthening institutional preparedness, diplomatic engagement, and force protection considerations. The findings further suggest that Indonesia's continued participation reflects a strategic balancing process between maintaining international legitimacy and responding to domestic accountability concerning personnel safety. This study contributes to defense diplomacy and strategic autonomy literature by demonstrating that peacekeeping participation increasingly requires institutional adaptation under volatile and high-risk operational conditions. The study concludes that stronger institutional preparedness and multilateral coordination are essential to sustaining Indonesia's peacekeeping commitments in increasingly unstable conflict environments. Its implications include theoretical contributions to peacekeeping and defense diplomacy scholarship and practical relevance for policymakers in strengthening deployment preparedness and peacekeeper protection mechanisms.

Keywords: UNIFIL; Defense Diplomacy; Strategic Autonomy; Peacekeeping Risks; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations have become one of the most important multilateral mechanisms for maintaining international peace and security amid increasingly complex global conflicts. Since their establishment in 1948, peacekeeping missions have evolved significantly, from traditional military observation tasks to multidimensional operations encompassing civilian protection, conflict mediation, humanitarian assistance, institutional rebuilding, and post-conflict stabilization (Clayton & Dorussen, 2022). Despite these expanded mandates, contemporary peacekeeping operations are increasingly confronted with severe operational challenges due to changing patterns of armed conflict characterized by hybrid warfare, transnational militancy, asymmetric threats, and the growing involvement of non-state actors (Karlsrud, 2015; Rahmadhani et al., 2025). Consequently, peacekeepers are now operating in environments that are substantially more dangerous and politically fragile than those faced in earlier decades.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) represents one of the most strategically important yet operationally challenging peacekeeping missions under the UN framework. Established through United Nations Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426 in 1978, UNIFIL was initially mandated to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from

southern Lebanon, restore international peace and security, and assist the Lebanese government in reestablishing effective authority in the region. However, following the 2006 Lebanon War between Israel and Hezbollah, the mission's mandate was significantly expanded through Resolution 1701, transforming UNIFIL into a more robust peacekeeping operation involving ceasefire monitoring, civilian protection, and conflict de-escalation efforts. While this expansion increased the mission's strategic relevance, it also exposed peacekeepers to heightened operational risks due to recurring hostilities along the Blue Line, the informal border separating Lebanon and Israel (Willasey-Wilsey, 2020).

In recent years, southern Lebanon has experienced repeated military escalations involving exchanges of fire, drone attacks, missile strikes, and broader regional security tensions associated with the Middle East geopolitical landscape (Lee, 2017; Rahmadhani et al., 2023). These developments have substantially increased the vulnerability of UN peacekeepers stationed in the area. Reports from the United Nations have repeatedly highlighted deteriorating operational environments in southern Lebanon, including increasing restrictions on peacekeeper mobility, heightened threats to personnel safety, and incidents involving damage to UN facilities and military assets (Azizah et al., 2020). Such conditions illustrate a broader transformation in contemporary peacekeeping environments, where peacekeepers are increasingly expected to fulfill traditional stabilization mandates while simultaneously confronting active conflict dynamics that challenge the neutrality and operational capacity of multilateral missions (Hermanto, 2025).

Within this increasingly volatile environment, Indonesia has maintained a consistent and prominent role as one of the major troop-contributing countries (TCCs) to UN peacekeeping operations (Oktreza et al., 2024). Indonesia's participation in international peacekeeping is deeply rooted in its constitutional and ideological commitments to global peace, as explicitly articulated in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution, which emphasizes Indonesia's obligation to contribute to world order based on freedom, lasting peace, and social justice (Prabandari, Prabaningtyas, & Timur, 2013). Since the deployment of the Garuda Contingent to UNIFIL in 2006, Indonesia has continuously strengthened its engagement in peacekeeping activities as part of its broader foreign policy orientation. Indonesia's participation reflects not merely a humanitarian commitment but also a strategic diplomatic effort to reinforce its international legitimacy and geopolitical influence (Husana et al., 2026).

From a strategic perspective, Indonesia's involvement in UNIFIL can be understood through the framework of *defense diplomacy*. According to Cottey and Forster (2004), defense diplomacy refers to the utilization of military resources and defense institutions for non-coercive diplomatic purposes, including confidence-building, conflict prevention, military cooperation, and international engagement. In contrast to traditional military approaches emphasizing coercive power, defense diplomacy seeks to employ military assets as instruments for promoting peace, fostering trust, and strengthening bilateral or multilateral relations. Through active participation in peacekeeping missions, Indonesia has sought to project itself as a responsible international actor committed to peacebuilding while simultaneously enhancing military professionalism, interoperability, and international credibility (Sejati et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Indonesia's engagement in UN peacekeeping missions aligns closely with its broader aspiration to position itself as a *middle power* within the international system. Middle powers are generally characterized by their tendency to pursue influence through multilateral institutions, diplomatic engagement, coalition-building, and norm entrepreneurship rather than military dominance (Sani, et al., 2024). Indonesia's consistent participation in peacekeeping missions, including UNIFIL, reflects its effort to strengthen diplomatic visibility and demonstrate constructive contributions to global governance (Anwar, 2014; K. Khoirunnisa & Adeliya, 2023). In this regard, Indonesia's foreign policy behavior may also be understood through the concept of *strategic autonomy*, which refers to a state's ability to maintain independent policy choices while balancing domestic interests, international obligations, and geopolitical pressures (T. A. Khoirunnisa et al., 2022). Through strategic autonomy, Indonesia seeks to maintain flexibility in foreign policy decision-making without becoming overly dependent on major powers or military alliances.

Nevertheless, Indonesia's sustained involvement in UNIFIL is increasingly confronted with serious dilemmas arising from the changing nature of security threats in Lebanon. Escalating violence and deteriorating stability in southern Lebanon have intensified concerns regarding the safety and effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. For troop-contributing countries such as Indonesia, participation in increasingly dangerous peacekeeping environments creates a fundamental tension between international commitments and domestic responsibilities. On one hand, continued engagement in peacekeeping strengthens Indonesia's diplomatic reputation, reinforces multilateral commitments, and sustains its image as a constructive middle power. On the other hand,

increasing operational risks raise difficult questions concerning personnel protection, political accountability, and the sustainability of troop contributions.

The dilemma becomes even more significant considering the broader transformation of peacekeeping missions globally. Traditional peacekeeping models were designed primarily for post-conflict settings characterized by consent among parties, neutrality, and limited use of force. However, contemporary conflicts increasingly involve fragmented armed actors, unstable ceasefire arrangements, and blurred distinctions between war and peace. Consequently, peacekeeping personnel often operate in situations resembling active conflict zones rather than post-conflict stabilization settings. This transformation raises important questions regarding whether existing peacekeeping mechanisms remain adequate for addressing modern security challenges and how troop-contributing countries should adapt their strategic calculations accordingly.

Several previous studies have examined Indonesia's role in peacekeeping operations from diverse perspectives. Existing literature generally emphasizes Indonesia's participation as an extension of foreign policy objectives, military diplomacy, and peace-oriented diplomacy (Bintang et al., 2022; Santoso, 2024). Studies on defense diplomacy have highlighted how Indonesia employs military engagement to strengthen international cooperation, improve institutional reputation, and expand diplomatic influence. Meanwhile, research on middle powers and strategic autonomy has explored how states such as Indonesia navigate geopolitical uncertainties through multilateral engagement and diplomatic balancing. Other studies focusing on peacekeeping operations have analyzed institutional challenges, mandate limitations, and operational vulnerabilities faced by UN personnel in conflict-prone regions.

Despite these scholarly contributions, important gaps remain within the existing literature. First, previous studies tend to examine *defense diplomacy*, *strategic autonomy*, and peacekeeping challenges separately, resulting in fragmented explanations regarding Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL. Second, limited research has comprehensively explored how increasing operational risks within peacekeeping missions reshape Indonesia's foreign policy calculations and diplomatic priorities. Third, the growing complexity of the Lebanese security environment has received insufficient attention in explaining Indonesia's strategic responses as a troop-contributing country. Consequently, there remains a lack of integrated analysis capable of explaining how Indonesia balances competing priorities between

sustaining defense diplomacy objectives and protecting national military personnel under increasingly volatile conditions.

This study seeks to address these gaps by integrating the concepts of *defense diplomacy*, *strategic autonomy*, and *peacekeeping risk dilemma* into a unified analytical framework to understand Indonesia's continued engagement in UNIFIL. Unlike previous studies that often prioritize either diplomatic benefits or operational risks independently, this research examines the interaction between these dimensions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Indonesia's policy choices in contemporary peacekeeping contexts. Theoretically, this study is grounded primarily in Cottey and Forster's (2004) framework of defense diplomacy and the concept of strategic autonomy in middle-power foreign policy behavior, while also incorporating perspectives on evolving peacekeeping risks in contemporary conflict environments.

Based on these considerations, this article aims to analyze how Indonesia balances its defense diplomacy objectives and strategic autonomy amidst increasing peacekeeping risks within the UNIFIL mission. Additionally, this study seeks to evaluate the broader implications of changing security dynamics in Lebanon for Indonesia's future participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations and the sustainability of its role as a constructive middle power in international peace and security governance.

While existing works explain Indonesia's peacekeeping motivations and UNIFIL's general risks, they rarely examine how rising casualties directly shape policy choices. This study fills that gap by linking real security incidents to Indonesia's balancing act between diplomacy, autonomy, and safety

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a descriptive-analytical case study method to examine Indonesia's strategic dilemma in balancing defense diplomacy commitments and peacekeeping risks within the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study seeks to understand complex political and security dynamics, institutional responses, and strategic decision-making processes that cannot be adequately explained through numerical measurements alone. The study focuses on interpreting policy responses, diplomatic considerations, and security developments surrounding Indonesia's participation in UN

peacekeeping operations, particularly in the context of changing conflict dynamics in southern Lebanon.

The descriptive-analytical approach is applied to provide an in-depth understanding of the interaction between defense diplomacy objectives, strategic autonomy considerations, and operational risks faced by Indonesia as a troop-contributing country (TCC). By emphasizing contextual interpretation, this study aims to generate a comprehensive explanation of how Indonesia formulates and maintains its strategic position within increasingly complex peacekeeping environments (Aprila & Dwiharyadi, 2026).

This research adopts a qualitative case study design, focusing specifically on Indonesia's involvement in the UNIFIL mission as an empirical case for examining the intersection between peacekeeping diplomacy and security risks. The case study design was selected because it enables intensive examination of a specific phenomenon within its real-world political and institutional context. In this regard, Indonesia's continued participation in UNIFIL amid evolving regional tensions provides a relevant case for understanding how middle-power states manage competing priorities between international obligations and domestic security concerns.

The research design is structured to align with the objectives of the study. First, the study identifies the strategic role of Indonesia in UN peacekeeping missions as part of its defense diplomacy agenda. Second, it analyzes the evolving security environment surrounding UNIFIL and its implications for troop-contributing countries. Third, the study evaluates Indonesia's policy responses through the lens of strategic autonomy and peacekeeping risk management. This sequential framework allows the study to connect empirical developments with theoretical explanations systematically (Sugiyono, 2024).

Given the qualitative nature of this study, the research does not involve survey respondents or experimental participants. Instead, the study relies on purposively selected documentary sources and key institutional references relevant to Indonesia's peacekeeping involvement and defense diplomacy practices. The selection of sources follows a purposive sampling technique, where documents are chosen based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the research objectives.

The primary sources include official reports and policy documents published by the United Nations (UN), UNIFIL, the Government of Indonesia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), and

relevant international organizations discussing peacekeeping developments in Lebanon. Secondary sources consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy briefs, reputable international media reports, and scholarly publications concerning defense diplomacy, strategic autonomy, middle-power foreign policy, and peacekeeping operations.

To ensure data relevance and analytical rigor, sources were selected based on several criteria: (1) direct relevance to Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL, (2) discussion of defense diplomacy or strategic autonomy frameworks, (3) publication credibility and institutional authority, and (4) recency of publication, prioritizing materials published within the last five to ten years whenever possible (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The primary instrument used in this study is document analysis, supported by a structured documentation framework to systematically collect, categorize, and interpret relevant data. Data collection was conducted through an extensive review of official documents, international reports, policy statements, academic literature, and publicly accessible institutional publications relevant to the research topic.

The data collection process was conducted in several stages. First, the researcher identified and collected official institutional documents concerning Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL and developments in peacekeeping operations in Lebanon. Second, relevant academic literature related to defense diplomacy, strategic autonomy, middle-power diplomacy, and peacekeeping risks was systematically reviewed to establish theoretical grounding. Third, supplementary information from reputable international media sources and policy reports was utilized to contextualize recent security developments affecting UNIFIL operations.

To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of findings, the study applies data triangulation, comparing information across multiple authoritative sources to minimize inconsistencies and potential bias. The credibility of documentary evidence was assessed based on institutional legitimacy, scholarly reliability, and consistency across independent sources. This process was intended to strengthen analytical validity and ensure that interpretations remain grounded in verifiable empirical evidence.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, which enables systematic interpretation of complex textual and documentary materials. The analysis process followed several stages. First, data reduction was conducted by selecting and organizing relevant information according to the study's focus on defense diplomacy, strategic

autonomy, and peacekeeping risks. Second, data categorization and coding were undertaken to identify recurring themes, policy patterns, institutional responses, and strategic dilemmas emerging from the documentary sources.

Third, the categorized findings were interpreted through the theoretical perspectives of defense diplomacy and strategic autonomy, allowing the study to explain how Indonesia balances diplomatic objectives and security considerations within peacekeeping operations. Finally, the findings were synthesized into broader analytical themes to evaluate the implications of evolving security conditions in Lebanon for Indonesia's long-term peacekeeping strategy. Through these analytical procedures, the study aims to produce an empirically grounded and theoretically informed explanation regarding Indonesia's strategic positioning within UNIFIL amid increasingly complex operational risks.

This study focuses only on Indonesia's deployment in UNIFIL, covering the period up to May 2026. It relies on publicly available documents, so it does not include classified military details or internal decision-making minutes. Future research could compare Indonesia's response with other troop-contributing countries to draw broader conclusions.

RESULTS

Escalating Security Conditions in the UNIFIL Operational Environment

The documentary findings reveal a substantial transformation in the security environment surrounding the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Originally designed as a peacekeeping mission operating under relatively stable ceasefire arrangements, UNIFIL increasingly faced operational challenges associated with recurrent military escalation, asymmetric threats, and deteriorating regional stability. Findings derived from institutional reports, United Nations security briefings, and international documentation indicate that the operational context in southern Lebanon shifted significantly during the observed period.

The escalation of conflict was characterized by recurring artillery exchanges, drone incursions, projectile attacks, and growing military tensions surrounding the Blue Line. Such developments created an increasingly uncertain operational environment in which peacekeeping personnel encountered heightened exposure to unpredictable security risks. In practical terms, the transformation of the security landscape affected not only the movement and operational flexibility of peacekeepers but also the overall sustainability of peacekeeping

implementation in contested areas. To better understand the dimensions of operational deterioration affecting UNIFIL, several recurring indicators identified from documentary evidence are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Security Escalation Affecting UNIFIL Operational Conditions

Dimension	Empirical Findings
Conflict intensity	Increasing military exchanges and ceasefire violations near operational areas
Personnel vulnerability	Greater exposure of peacekeepers to armed hostilities
Operational mobility	Restricted movement and patrol limitations in sensitive areas
Mission stability	Growing uncertainty affecting implementation effectiveness

As shown in Table 1, the deterioration of UNIFIL operational conditions occurred across multiple dimensions simultaneously rather than as isolated security incidents. The findings demonstrate that conflict intensity emerged as one of the most visible indicators of instability, reflected in repeated armed exchanges and military escalation occurring in proximity to peacekeeping deployment zones. This development increased uncertainty regarding ceasefire sustainability and significantly affected mission predictability.

Furthermore, personnel vulnerability became increasingly apparent as peacekeepers operated under closer proximity to active hostilities. The documentary evidence consistently highlighted growing exposure to indirect fire, projectile incidents, and restricted operational safety. These developments suggest that peacekeeping personnel were no longer operating solely in conventional post-conflict environments but increasingly within unstable and dynamic security conditions.

As indicated in Table 1, another important finding concerns operational mobility limitations. The collected data reveal increasing restrictions on patrol access and movement flexibility in high-risk areas. Such limitations potentially reduced the effectiveness of observation and monitoring activities, which represent central components of the UNIFIL mandate. Reduced mobility also increased logistical challenges and complicated institutional coordination among peacekeeping contingents.

Finally, mission stability, as presented in Table 1, reflects broader uncertainty affecting peacekeeping implementation. The accumulation of recurring security incidents, restrictions, and operational disruptions collectively contributed to a more fragile peacekeeping environment. These findings indicate that UNIFIL increasingly operated

under conditions that differ substantially from traditional peacekeeping assumptions centered on stable ceasefire arrangements and relatively secure deployment conditions.

Empirical Evidence of Security Risks Affecting Indonesian Peacekeepers

The findings further demonstrate that Indonesian peacekeepers operating under the Garuda Contingent within UNIFIL faced direct exposure to the deteriorating security conditions in southern Lebanon. Documentary evidence collected from institutional statements, international reporting, and operational documentation indicates that the escalation of hostilities during March–April 2026 significantly affected the security of Indonesian military personnel deployed in peacekeeping assignments.

The findings identify the period between late March and April 2026 as one of the most critical operational phases for Indonesian peacekeeping participation in recent years. Several documented incidents resulted in fatalities and injuries involving Indonesian peacekeepers, reflecting a substantial increase in operational vulnerability compared to earlier deployment periods. These incidents occurred amid broader regional escalation affecting multiple peacekeeping contingents stationed near conflict-prone areas. To understand the sequence and operational consequences of the incidents affecting Indonesian personnel, the chronology of documented security events is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Documented Security Incidents Affecting Indonesian UNIFIL Personnel (March–April 2026)

Date	Location	Reported Incident	Operational Consequence
29 March 2026	Adchit Al Qusayr	Attack affecting UNIFIL operational position	Casualties and injuries among Indonesian personnel
30 March 2026	Bani Hayyan	Security incident involving operational convoy	Additional fatalities and operational disruption
April 2026	Beirut medical treatment	Medical deterioration of injured personnel	Increased casualty count

Based on Table 2, the findings indicate that the security incidents affecting Indonesian personnel occurred within a relatively short timeframe, suggesting a period of intensified operational instability. The first documented incident on 29 March 2026 demonstrated the increasing vulnerability of peacekeeping facilities to direct military escalation. Documentary evidence indicates that the incident affected a UNIFIL operational position and resulted in immediate casualties among Indonesian peacekeepers. This event

represented a significant shift in the level of risk faced by Indonesian personnel compared to ordinary peacekeeping operational conditions.

Furthermore, Table 2 demonstrates that the incident occurring on 30 March 2026 further intensified operational concerns. The documented disruption involving a convoy route near Bani Hayyan illustrates how logistical and movement-related activities also became vulnerable to conflict-related threats. The occurrence of multiple incidents within consecutive days suggests that the operational environment had become increasingly unpredictable and difficult to stabilize through standard precautionary procedures.

Another important finding reflected in Table 2 concerns the prolonged implications of conflict exposure. The later deterioration of injured personnel receiving treatment in Beirut indicates that the operational consequences extended beyond immediate battlefield impacts and involved longer-term medical and institutional implications. This finding highlights how peacekeeping-related risks are not limited to direct operational casualties but also encompass secondary consequences affecting personnel sustainability and institutional preparedness. Overall, the findings suggest that Indonesian peacekeepers increasingly encountered security risks that exceeded conventional peacekeeping assumptions, thereby requiring more adaptive operational preparedness and stronger force protection mechanisms.

Indonesia's Institutional Response to Security Developments

The documentary findings reveal that Indonesia adopted a multidimensional institutional response to the deteriorating operational environment affecting its peacekeeping personnel in Lebanon. The response involved executive leadership, diplomatic institutions, military authorities, and multilateral engagement channels aimed at addressing personnel safety concerns while maintaining Indonesia's broader peacekeeping commitments.

At the executive level, findings indicate that government responses emphasized both symbolic recognition of peacekeeper sacrifice and institutional commitment to continued international engagement. Official state communications documented condolences, public recognition of military sacrifice, and reaffirmation of Indonesia's long-standing contribution to peacekeeping missions under the United Nations framework.

At the diplomatic level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs intensified institutional communication concerning peacekeeper safety and accountability mechanisms. Findings indicate that Indonesia supported calls for transparent investigation processes while

simultaneously encouraging stronger international attention toward peacekeeper protection measures. To summarize the institutional dimensions of Indonesia's response, the main categories identified from documentary evidence are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Indonesia's Institutional Responses to Security Developments in UNIFIL

Institutional Dimension	Main Response
Executive leadership	Public recognition and reaffirmation of peacekeeping commitment
Diplomatic response	Calls for investigation and stronger peacekeeper protection
Military response	Internal operational evaluation and preparedness enhancement
Policy continuity	Continued deployment commitment with increased safeguards

As shown in Table 3, Indonesia's response extended beyond symbolic political statements and included practical institutional measures aimed at sustaining operational readiness. The executive leadership dimension primarily reflected state-level efforts to maintain national morale and institutional legitimacy through formal recognition of personnel sacrifice and public reaffirmation of Indonesia's peacekeeping commitment.

Meanwhile, Table 3 shows that the diplomatic response dimension focused on multilateral engagement mechanisms. Documentary evidence indicates that Indonesia consistently emphasized accountability, institutional transparency, and enhanced peacekeeper safety through diplomatic channels. These efforts suggest that the government attempted to address security concerns through cooperative international approaches rather than unilateral policy adjustments.

The military response dimension, as illustrated in Table 3, involved operational reassessment and preparedness evaluation. Documentary findings suggest that internal military reviews emphasized force protection, personnel readiness, and deployment risk management. Such measures indicate institutional awareness regarding the changing realities of peacekeeping operations under increasingly unstable conflict conditions. Importantly, Table 3 also demonstrates that Indonesia maintained policy continuity despite heightened risks. Rather than pursuing withdrawal, documentary evidence shows a tendency toward operational adjustment and increased safeguards while preserving peacekeeping participation.

International and Multilateral Responses to Peacekeeper Security Risks

The findings further reveal that incidents affecting peacekeeping personnel generated substantial concern at the international level. Documentary evidence suggests that security

risks faced by peacekeepers increasingly became a collective issue involving troop-contributing countries (TCCs), international institutions, and multilateral diplomatic actors.

Institutional findings indicate that the United Nations publicly emphasized concerns regarding the safety of personnel operating within UNIFIL. Simultaneously, multiple contributing countries expressed solidarity and concern regarding deteriorating operational conditions affecting peacekeeping missions in southern Lebanon. To better illustrate the patterns of international response, the main multilateral reactions identified in the study are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. International and Multilateral Responses to Peacekeeper Security Risks

Actor	Main Response
United Nations	Condemnation of attacks and support for personnel protection
Troop-Contributing Countries	Diplomatic concern and coordinated institutional responses
International organizations	Calls for accountability and operational safety enhancement
Multilateral forums	Discussions regarding force protection and mission sustainability

Based on Table 4, the findings indicate that peacekeeper security concerns extended beyond national-level interests and increasingly emerged as a broader multilateral issue. The United Nations response, as summarized in Table 4, focused primarily on condemnation of attacks and reinforcement of commitments to personnel safety. Such institutional responses indicate recognition of increasing vulnerabilities affecting peacekeeping implementation.

Additionally, Table 4 demonstrates that troop-contributing countries responded collectively to growing unpredictable operational conditions. The findings reveal increasing diplomatic coordination and concern regarding peacekeeper safety, suggesting a shared institutional awareness among states contributing personnel to UNIFIL.

The findings also indicate that multilateral forums, as presented in Table 4, increasingly emphasized discussions concerning mission sustainability and operational risk management. This development suggests that deteriorating security conditions affected broader institutional confidence in the effectiveness of traditional peacekeeping mechanisms.

Emerging Documentary Patterns from the Findings

Following thematic categorization of the documentary evidence, four recurring patterns emerged from the findings regarding Indonesia's peacekeeping involvement in UNIFIL. These patterns illustrate the changing operational realities faced by Indonesia as a

troop-contributing country operating within increasingly unstable security conditions. To summarize these recurring patterns, the thematic findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Emerging Documentary Patterns in Indonesia's UNIFIL Participation

Category	Key Findings
Security transformation	Increasing operational volatility and conflict intensity
Personnel vulnerability	Greater exposure of peacekeepers to security threats
Institutional continuity	Sustained peacekeeping commitment despite risks
Operational adaptation	Increasing emphasis on force protection and preparedness

As shown in Table 5, the first recurring pattern concerns security transformation, where documentary evidence consistently highlighted growing instability surrounding operational areas. The findings indicate that peacekeeping personnel increasingly operated under uncertain conditions characterized by active military escalation and reduced predictability.

Second, Table 5 demonstrates increasing personnel vulnerability, reflected in greater exposure to conflict-related risks and heightened unpredictable operational conditions. Documentary findings repeatedly emphasized the changing threat environment affecting peacekeeper safety and institutional preparedness.

Third, the findings presented in Table 5 reveal strong institutional continuity in Indonesia's peacekeeping participation. Despite growing risks and documented casualties, the evidence suggests that Indonesia maintained its broader peacekeeping commitment while emphasizing institutional adjustments rather than policy withdrawal.

Finally, operational adaptation, as summarized in Table 5, emerged as an important recurring theme. Documentary evidence consistently highlighted increasing attention toward force protection, operational preparedness, and deployment safeguards, suggesting growing institutional adaptation to evolving peacekeeping realities. Taken together, these findings indicate that Indonesia's peacekeeping participation increasingly operated within a dynamic operational environment requiring institutional flexibility, preparedness, and sustained policy coordination.

DISCUSSION

Interpreting Indonesia's Strategic Dilemma in UNIFIL: Between Normative Commitment and Operational Risks

The findings of this study indicate that Indonesia's continued participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) increasingly reflects a complex strategic dilemma situated between normative international commitments and intensifying operational risks. As demonstrated in the Results section, deteriorating security conditions in southern Lebanon have transformed the operational landscape surrounding peacekeeping implementation from a relatively controlled ceasefire-monitoring mission into an environment characterized by unpredictability, active military exchanges, and heightened personnel vulnerability. This finding is particularly important because it reveals that contemporary peacekeeping missions no longer operate under the assumptions of traditional post-conflict stabilization, where consent among conflicting parties and relatively secure deployment conditions could be expected. Instead, Indonesia's experience in UNIFIL illustrates the emergence of what may be described as a *peacekeeping risk dilemma*, namely the growing tension between maintaining multilateral peace commitments and protecting military personnel under increasingly dangerous operational conditions.

This finding directly addresses the central objective of the study, which seeks to understand how Indonesia balances its defense diplomacy commitments and strategic autonomy amidst changing security realities in Lebanon. The empirical evidence suggests that Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL can no longer be understood solely through normative narratives emphasizing peace, humanitarian commitment, or constitutional obligations. Rather, the findings indicate that Indonesia increasingly operates within a multidimensional strategic calculation involving diplomatic credibility, international legitimacy, domestic accountability, military readiness, and force protection considerations simultaneously.

A particularly important finding concerns the contradiction between international legitimacy and operational vulnerability. On one hand, continued participation in peacekeeping missions strengthens Indonesia's international image as a responsible contributor to global peace and reinforces its diplomatic identity as a constructive middle power committed to multilateralism. Indonesia's role within UNIFIL contributes symbolically and politically to its foreign policy reputation, particularly within Global South

diplomacy and multilateral governance forums. Sustained participation demonstrates consistency with Indonesia's long-standing bebas aktif (independent and active) foreign policy principle, which encourages active international engagement while avoiding excessive dependence on major powers.

However, the findings simultaneously reveal increasing operational exposure affecting Indonesian personnel. The escalation of hostilities in southern Lebanon demonstrates that peacekeeping missions are increasingly deployed within unstable environments resembling active conflict settings rather than conventional peace implementation contexts. Consequently, Indonesia faces growing pressure to reconcile international commitments with domestic expectations regarding troop safety. This dilemma is particularly sensitive because military casualties within peacekeeping operations may generate domestic political concerns, public scrutiny, and questions regarding the sustainability of overseas military deployments.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that Indonesia did not respond to heightened risks through immediate disengagement or strategic withdrawal. Instead, Indonesia maintained peacekeeping continuity while increasing emphasis on operational safeguards, diplomatic coordination, and institutional preparedness. This response suggests that Indonesia adopted a balancing strategy aimed at preserving international credibility without disregarding force protection concerns. Such an approach indicates that peacekeeping participation increasingly involves risk management rather than unconditional normative commitment.

This finding also challenges simplistic assumptions that troop-contributing countries (TCCs) necessarily react to operational risks through withdrawal or reduction of participation. In the Indonesian case, the findings reveal a more nuanced institutional response characterized by continuity, recalibration, and adaptation. Rather than abandoning multilateral obligations, Indonesia appears to interpret operational risks as requiring institutional adjustment, improved preparedness, and stronger diplomatic engagement concerning peacekeeper safety.

Moreover, the findings highlight a broader transformation in the logic of contemporary peacekeeping participation. Traditionally, peacekeeping has been associated with relatively neutral and low-risk engagement centered on ceasefire monitoring and civilian protection. However, the findings of this study suggest that contemporary peacekeeping

increasingly occurs within unstable security environments involving asymmetric threats, fragmented actors, and blurred distinctions between peace and conflict. Such developments fundamentally alter the risk profile of peacekeeping participation and require troop-contributing countries to reconsider the strategic assumptions underlying overseas military engagement.

The significance of this finding extends beyond the Indonesian case alone. More broadly, the study demonstrates how middle-power states participating in multilateral security arrangements increasingly face competing pressures between global legitimacy and domestic accountability. This suggests that future peacekeeping participation may depend not only on diplomatic commitment but also on institutional capacity to manage evolving operational risks effectively.

Reassessing Defense Diplomacy and Strategic Autonomy in High-Risk Peacekeeping Environments

The findings of this study provide important insights into the continuing relevance of defense diplomacy theory in increasingly volatile peacekeeping environments. According to Cottey and Forster (2004), defense diplomacy refers to the use of military institutions and capabilities for non-coercive purposes, including trust-building, conflict prevention, diplomatic engagement, and security cooperation. Within this framework, military participation in peacekeeping missions serves not merely operational objectives but also broader diplomatic functions related to international legitimacy and cooperative engagement.

The present findings strongly support the relevance of defense diplomacy in explaining Indonesia's continued participation in UNIFIL. Documentary evidence demonstrates that Indonesia continues to view peacekeeping involvement as an important diplomatic instrument capable of enhancing international visibility, strengthening multilateral credibility, and reinforcing its reputation as a peace-oriented middle power. Indonesia's persistence in maintaining troop deployment despite deteriorating operational conditions suggests that peacekeeping participation remains strategically valuable from a diplomatic perspective.

However, the findings also indicate that traditional understandings of defense diplomacy may require reconsideration in contexts characterized by escalating operational insecurity. Existing theoretical discussions often assume that defense diplomacy primarily generates cooperative benefits with relatively manageable operational costs. Yet, the findings

from UNIFIL demonstrate that diplomatic gains increasingly coexist with substantial operational vulnerabilities. In this regard, the study argues that contemporary defense diplomacy cannot be understood solely through the lens of diplomatic engagement but must also account for risk exposure, personnel protection, and institutional resilience.

This finding represents an important contribution to defense diplomacy scholarship because it suggests that peacekeeping participation increasingly functions under conditions of high-risk diplomacy, where military personnel simultaneously serve diplomatic and operational functions under heightened threat environments. Consequently, the effectiveness of defense diplomacy may increasingly depend upon a state's ability to maintain institutional preparedness while preserving diplomatic consistency.

The findings also demonstrate the importance of strategic autonomy in understanding Indonesia's policy response. Koga (2018) conceptualizes strategic autonomy as the ability of states to maintain independent decision-making while balancing external obligations and domestic priorities. The Indonesian case strongly illustrates this dynamic. Rather than responding to operational risks through automatic alignment with external preferences or domestic withdrawal pressures, Indonesia appears to pursue an independent balancing strategy that preserves both diplomatic engagement and national interests.

Importantly, the findings suggest that Indonesia's strategic autonomy is not manifested through isolation or disengagement but rather through selective adaptation. Indonesia maintained participation in UNIFIL while simultaneously emphasizing institutional reforms, operational readiness, and stronger peacekeeper protection mechanisms. This indicates that strategic autonomy in middle-power diplomacy may increasingly involve adaptive engagement rather than rigid neutrality or passive participation.

The findings also differ from earlier assumptions suggesting that middle powers primarily rely on multilateralism as a low-risk diplomatic mechanism. In the context of UNIFIL, multilateral engagement increasingly involves exposure to substantial security risks, thereby complicating traditional understandings of middle-power behavior. Indonesia's continued participation under deteriorating security conditions therefore suggests a more sophisticated diplomatic calculation involving reputational incentives, geopolitical signaling, domestic legitimacy, and operational adaptation simultaneously.

Furthermore, the findings raise broader theoretical questions concerning whether traditional peacekeeping assumptions remain sufficient for understanding contemporary

conflict environments. As demonstrated in Lebanon, peacekeeping missions increasingly operate within unstable conditions characterized by active hostilities and limited predictability. Under such conditions, strategic autonomy and defense diplomacy may require reinterpretation to incorporate stronger emphasis on institutional resilience, deployment flexibility, and operational sustainability.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that Indonesia's continued engagement in UNIFIL reflects neither idealistic commitment nor purely pragmatic calculation. Instead, the study demonstrates the emergence of a hybrid strategic approach in which diplomatic objectives, national identity, multilateral legitimacy, and operational caution coexist within a dynamic and evolving policy framework.

Comparison with Previous Literature and Scholarly Contribution

The findings of this study generally support previous scholarship arguing that peacekeeping participation functions as an important instrument of Indonesia's foreign policy and diplomatic projection. Existing literature frequently emphasizes that Indonesia utilizes international peacekeeping not only as a humanitarian contribution but also as a mechanism to strengthen diplomatic visibility, military professionalism, and multilateral engagement. In this regard, the present findings reinforce arguments suggesting that Indonesia's participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations forms an important component of its broader diplomatic identity as a middle power committed to international stability and cooperative security.

More specifically, the present findings align with studies emphasizing the diplomatic dimension of military engagement within Indonesia's foreign policy orientation. Previous research concerning Indonesia's defense diplomacy has demonstrated that peacekeeping participation contributes positively to international credibility and strengthens Indonesia's reputation as a state committed to peaceful conflict resolution. Similar patterns are reflected in the findings of this study, particularly regarding Indonesia's decision to maintain peacekeeping continuity despite increasing operational insecurity. Such continuity indicates that diplomatic reputation and multilateral legitimacy remain strategically important considerations shaping Indonesia's policy behavior.

Nevertheless, while previous studies predominantly highlight the diplomatic benefits of peacekeeping participation, the findings of this study reveal a more complicated and risk-sensitive reality. Existing literature often assumes that peacekeeping engagement occurs

within relatively manageable operational environments where diplomatic benefits substantially outweigh security concerns. However, the empirical findings presented in this study demonstrate that contemporary peacekeeping increasingly occurs under deteriorating operational conditions involving active hostilities, fragmented actors, and elevated personnel vulnerability. Consequently, peacekeeping participation can no longer be understood exclusively as a diplomatic asset but must also be recognized as a source of institutional risk and strategic uncertainty.

The findings also reveal important distinctions from earlier research on troop-contributing countries (TCCs). Previous studies commonly suggest that heightened operational risks often trigger either mission withdrawal, reduction in troop commitments, or declining institutional confidence among contributing states. In contrast, the Indonesian case demonstrates a more adaptive response pattern. Rather than pursuing strategic disengagement, Indonesia maintained peacekeeping involvement while simultaneously strengthening force protection measures and institutional preparedness. This finding suggests that operational risks do not necessarily weaken multilateral engagement; instead, they may encourage recalibration and institutional adaptation within troop-contributing countries.

Furthermore, the findings differ from traditional understandings of peacekeeping missions grounded in assumptions of neutrality, consent, and relatively stable operational conditions. Classical peacekeeping literature frequently conceptualizes peacekeeping as an activity implemented in post-conflict environments characterized by relatively manageable security risks and cooperative conflict parties. However, the findings of this study indicate that such assumptions increasingly fail to capture the realities of contemporary peacekeeping missions, particularly in regions such as southern Lebanon where military escalation and instability persist despite formal ceasefire arrangements.

This divergence from conventional assumptions suggests that peacekeeping scholarship requires renewed analytical attention toward unpredictable operational conditions and hybrid conflict dynamics. The case of Indonesia in UNIFIL demonstrates that peacekeeping operations increasingly occupy a grey area between peacebuilding and conflict exposure, thereby complicating conventional distinctions between stabilization missions and active conflict engagement.

Importantly, this study contributes to the existing literature by integrating three analytical dimensions that are often discussed separately, namely defense diplomacy, strategic autonomy, and peacekeeping risk. Previous studies tend to prioritize one perspective at the expense of others, resulting in fragmented explanations concerning troop contribution behavior. By combining these perspectives into a unified analytical framework, this study offers a more comprehensive explanation of Indonesia's strategic calculations in peacekeeping participation.

In particular, the study contributes conceptually by introducing the understanding that peacekeeping participation may increasingly function as a form of high-risk diplomatic engagement, in which military deployment simultaneously serves diplomatic, political, and operational purposes under heightened uncertainty. Such a perspective expands conventional interpretations of defense diplomacy by emphasizing the importance of institutional resilience and risk management within peacekeeping commitments. Based on the findings, three practical steps can be considered:

- Risk-adjusted deployment: Conduct more frequent security assessments before and during missions.
- Better equipment and training: Upgrade force protection gear and train personnel for asymmetric threats.
- Stronger multilateral advocacy: Work with other contributors to push the UN for clearer rules and faster response when peacekeepers are attacked.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Indonesia's continued participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) increasingly reflects a complex strategic balancing process between defense diplomacy objectives, strategic autonomy considerations, and growing operational risks within contemporary peacekeeping environments. The findings demonstrate that deteriorating security conditions in southern Lebanon have significantly transformed the nature of peacekeeping implementation, shifting operational realities from relatively stable ceasefire monitoring toward increasingly volatile and risk-intensive environments characterized by military escalation, unpredictable operational conditions, and heightened personnel vulnerability.

The study further finds that Indonesia's participation in UNIFIL cannot be understood solely as a humanitarian or normative commitment to international peace. Rather, Indonesia's continued involvement represents a multidimensional strategic engagement shaped simultaneously by diplomatic credibility, multilateral legitimacy, national interest, military professionalism, and force protection concerns. Despite increasing security risks affecting peacekeeping personnel, Indonesia did not pursue disengagement or strategic withdrawal. Instead, the findings indicate a pattern of institutional continuity accompanied by operational adaptation, diplomatic engagement, and strengthened emphasis on personnel protection mechanisms. This demonstrates Indonesia's attempt to maintain international commitments while preserving domestic accountability and operational sustainability.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of defense diplomacy literature by demonstrating that peacekeeping participation increasingly functions under conditions of heightened unpredictable operational conditions. The findings suggest that conventional understandings of defense diplomacy, which primarily emphasize cooperative and diplomatic benefits, should be expanded to incorporate the realities of personnel vulnerability, institutional resilience, and operational risk management. Similarly, the study contributes to discussions on strategic autonomy among middle powers by showing that policy independence may increasingly manifest through adaptive engagement rather than rigid neutrality or complete disengagement from risky international commitments.

Practically and at the policy level, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening Indonesia's institutional preparedness for peacekeeping participation under changing conflict dynamics. Greater emphasis on pre-deployment risk assessment, hybrid conflict training, force protection mechanisms, and stronger coordination between military and diplomatic institutions may become increasingly necessary to ensure the sustainability of Indonesia's contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, Indonesia may strengthen its role not only as a troop-contributing country but also as an advocate for peacekeeper safety reforms within multilateral peacekeeping governance.

Ultimately, this study argues that the challenges faced by Indonesia in UNIFIL should not necessarily be interpreted as reasons to reduce international peacekeeping engagement. Instead, they should be understood as indicators of the need for institutional adaptation in responding to increasingly complex operational environments. In this regard, Indonesia's future role in international peacekeeping will likely depend on its ability to

balance diplomatic commitments with operational realism while maintaining its position as a constructive and credible middle power within global peace and security governance. This dilemma is not unique to Indonesia; many middle powers face the same trade-off, making these insights useful for understanding global peacekeeping trends today.

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