



IDSS COMMENTARIES (98/2006)

IDSS Commentaries are intended to provide timely and, where appropriate, policy relevant background and analysis of contemporary developments. The views of the authors are their own and do not represent the official position of IDSS.

Indonesian Peacekeepers in Lebanon

Leonard C. Sebastian *

13 September 2006

PRESIDENT Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's decision to send a first wave of 1,000 peacekeeping troops to the Middle East as part of the enhanced United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL2) benefits the peacekeeping operation in two ways. First, it ensures that UNIFIL2 is not purely a Western European force. Second, the participation of Indonesia, a major country from the Islamic world, gives the mission more credibility.

Indonesia has an impressive track record in peacekeeping operations in many parts of the world, including in the Congo in the 1960s, Vietnam in the 1970s, Cambodia and Mindanao in the Philippines and Bosnia in the 1990s. Having participated in UNEF I (1957) and UNEF II (1974) in the Sinai region, the Indonesian armed forces or TNI is no stranger to peacekeeping deployments on the Israeli border. Indonesian peacekeeping troops then and now are operating under conditions where Indonesia does not have diplomatic relations with Israel.

Similar to the situation in the 1970s, the two belligerents in the current conflict should come to trust and respect the Indonesian presence. The fact that the majority of Indonesian troops will be Muslim only means it will work harder to dispel notions (particularly in Israel) that some of its soldiers will be more sympathetic towards the Hizbullah. TNI institutional ethos and outlook will be a reflection of Indonesia's longstanding commitment to pluralism despite being the most populous Muslim majority country in the world.

Indonesia's approach to peacekeeping

The TNI has received well-deserved criticism for its excesses during the Suharto era. To be fair, there are many instances where TNI mediation in local conflict through Territorial Management Operations (*Operasi Pembinaan Teritorial*) brought about sustained peace. A critical lesson learned which has been applied during international peacekeeping operations was the requirement to build good relations with all sides in the conflict. There is no fixed notion of "good guys and bad guys" so evident in U.S. approaches to peacekeeping in Somalia, one of the triggers leading to the Battle of Mogadishu in 1993. Territorial operations in Indonesia have taught TNI commanders to place significance on geography, local culture and social systems in their operational strategies. As a key component in the preparation for overseas peacekeeping duties, territorial operations require a soldier to develop person-to-person experiences at the local level. A key to the Indonesian success in Cambodia was its willingness to establish good relations with members of all political factions adopting the perspective that there was no "enemy". This emphasis gradually won acceptance by the

Khmer Rouge.

Relating to the mechanics of the Indonesian deployment, Defence Minister Juwono Sudarsono has said that Indonesian soldiers would not be allowed to carry out the UN's mandate to disarm Hizbullah. Within the framework of United Nations Resolution No 1701, Indonesia's mandate is to be defined by Chapter 6, namely, to maintain peace and stability and to monitor the ceasefire.

Requiring the TNI to disarm the Hizbullah would create significant controversy within the country and expose fault-lines within the community and the Yudhoyono cabinet. It is not surprising that Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda has stated his government's preference that the Lebanese military be responsible for disarming Hizbullah. Indonesia feels that the most effective way of securing southern Lebanon would be for Hizbullah's "troops" to be "absorbed" into the Lebanese army.

With the Indonesian government strapped for funds, the biggest domestic dilemma is how the peacekeeping operation will be funded. Apparently a budget will be set aside from the modified 2006 State Budget. The amount will reach Rp374 billion (about US\$40.2 million) for the first two months of the deployment, following which, Indonesia expects the United Nations to fund the rest of the operation.

Why Indonesia wants to go to Lebanon

There are three reasons why participating in the peacekeeping mission will benefit Indonesia:

- *Raise its international profile:*

President Yudhoyono has openly expressed his ambition to play the role of peacemaker in the Middle East. Domestically, there have been mixed reactions, including suggestions he takes care of his own problems before trying to fix the complex problems in the Middle East.

- *Diminish the impact of hard-line views:*

With local militant groups grabbing the headlines through aggressive posturing in televised combat training sessions wearing camouflaged fatigues and balaclavas, the sight of Indonesian troops taking part in a peace mission should have a calming effect on domestic anger over the Middle East violence. Such developments will counter public perceptions that the Indonesian government is apathetic to the needs of the Islamic world; prevent local militants from going to Lebanon and returning in a radicalized state; and allow greater space and legitimacy for countervailing voices of reason within its Islamic community in the domestic debate.

- *Improve TNI professionalism:*

Participation in UN missions has also become a training ground for future leaders of the TNI. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono first came to prominence as the Indonesian contingent commander in Bosnia-Herzegovina. More recent graduates of Indonesian peacekeeping missions have been former TNI Commander Gen. (ret) Endriatono Sutarto, former Army chief Gen. (ret) Ryamizard Ryacuddu and the

former National Police chief Gen. (ret) Roesdiharjo.

In this regard, President Yudhoyono's "hands-on" experience is valuable and it is likely that he will keep a watchful eye on the performance of the TNI contingent. In fulfilling *reformasi* goals, peacekeeping duties should also be seen as an important building block in facilitating professionalism within the TNI. In fact through interaction with other peacekeeping troops, the TNI is likely to learn from other contingents. The TNI has been isolated from other armed forces as a result of restrictions imposed by the US and other Western states over the past 15 years that were only lifted in 2005.

* Leonard C. Sebastian is an Associate Professor with the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies at the Nanyang Technological University. He is author of a recently published book on the Indonesian military entitled *Realpolitik Ideology: Indonesia's Use of Military Force*.