Indonesia has prided itself in being an active Troop Contributing Country (TCC) to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions since the early period of its independence. The first Indonesian peacekeeping mission, known as Indonesian Garuda Contingent (IGC) or popularly known by its Indonesian acronym “Konga” I, comprising 559 military personnel, was sent to Egypt in 1957. Since then Indonesia has consistently participated in various UN as well as a number of non-UN peacekeeping missions around the world. In 2012 Indonesia had close to 2,000 military and civilian personnel in various UN peacekeeping missions stationed in Liberia, Lebanon, Haiti, South Sudan, Darfur, and Southern Philippines. Between 1957 and 2012 Indonesia has sent a total of over 25,874 personnel comprising mostly military contingents, observers, and staff as well as a few hundred civilian police to various UN and a few non-UN peacekeeping operations (PKO). To date 31 Indonesian peacekeepers have been killed on duty.1

Indonesia’s active role in contributing to the maintenance of world peace is part of its constitutional responsibility, enshrined in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution. Over the years a number of important legislations and regulations have been passed to strengthen the legal basis for Indonesia’s participation in international peacekeeping missions as well as to improve its overall capacity in
undertaking such missions. While in the first two decades of its participation Indonesia only sent military contingents as peacekeepers, since the 1980s the scope of Indonesian contribution to international peace support and stability missions has broadened considerably to include military and police observers, civilian police, and engineers. Indonesian peacekeepers have mostly been equipped with light arms for self-defense, while those tasked with specific mandates such as health services and construction works have had to bring their own equipment. In recent years Indonesia has put an even higher emphasis on enhancing both national and regional capacities to contribute to UN peace and humanitarian missions with the aim of becoming among the top ten TCC, able to deploy some 4,000 military, police, and other personnel for UN peacekeeping missions at any one period.2

Political Context of Participation in Peace/Stability Operations

Indonesia’s active participation in international PKO, primarily those under the auspices of the UN, basically stems from its sense of national identity and role vis-à-vis the outside world. The Preamble of the 1945 Constitution clearly stipulates that Indonesia must participate in the shaping of a world order based on freedom, abiding peace, and social justice. Thus from the beginning there was a conviction that the newly independent Republic of Indonesia should not simply remain a passive bystander in the unfolding international order immediately after World War II that was dominated by the bipolar Cold War politics. The Constitution mandated that Indonesia should actively contribute to maintaining world peace and at the same time refrain from becoming a party to international conflicts. This constitutional stance was further strengthened by Indonesia’s “Free and Active” foreign policy doctrine enunciated in 1948 that prevented, and continues to restrict, Indonesia from joining any military alliances. Jakarta believed that such alliances would reduce its ability to act independently in international fora, particularly during the Cold War, and may also drag Indonesia into a military conflict at the behest of the major alliance partners. Indonesia was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and non-alignment has continued to characterize its foreign policy outlook to these days, even long after the Cold War is over.