

# The Role of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) in Supporting Regional Development Acceleration in Papua

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**ABSTRACT:** The conflict in Papua has evolved into an increasingly complex situation, with the separatist movement led by the Free Papua Organization (OPM) seeking to break away from Indonesia. This study examines the role of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) in supporting the acceleration of regional development in Papua amidst the ongoing conflict involving the Free Papua Organization (OPM). The primary objective is to analyze the TNI's use of a "smart power" strategy that combines soft, hard, and diplomatic approaches to address security challenges while promoting socio-economic development. Employing a qualitative research method, this study gathers data through in-depth interviews, case studies, and secondary sources, including reports, documents, and media coverage. The results indicate that the TNI's operations significantly contribute to infrastructure development, human resource improvement, and basic service delivery in Papua, despite persistent security threats from OPM. Strategies such as territorial engagement, community empowerment, and inclusive social communication have proven effective in mitigating conflict impacts. The findings also highlight the challenges posed by international narratives on human rights violations, requiring a balanced approach that fosters local trust and international accountability.

**Keywords:** Papuan Conflict, Free Papua Organization (OPM), role of the TNI, Papua Development, Synergy of Ministries/Institutions (K/L)

## INTRODUCTION

The condition of the conflict in Papua is increasingly complex. Until now, the movement of the Free Papua Organization (OPM) that wants to separate from Indonesia has developed in such a way that it only takes up arms to carry out local resistance to develop towards resistance that uses diplomacy channels that take advantage of its sympathizers abroad. OPM and its sympathizers used the loophole in human rights abuses as the main material to attract the attention of other UN member states (Gere, 2015). OPM as an armed group that in its resistance to the TNI and the National Police often uses local civilians so it is not easy for the TNI and the National Police to deal with it with full military force. On the other hand, OPM has caused a prolonged conflict, with sovereignty at stake, because of its desire to secede from the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). The complexity of security disturbances in Papua is still high to date, which results in regional economic development not growing rapidly. The development approach by granting special autonomy can also be said to be difficult to realize quickly because of the security disturbances that come from the OPM, making it difficult for regional and central officials to carry out development in the Papua region (Risman & Surryanto, 2020; Sulaiman, Dwilaksana, & Muta'ali, 2023).

The Indonesian National Army (TNI) has the task of carrying out War Military Operations (OMP) and Non-War Military Operations (OMSP). Based on TNI Law Number 34 of 2004, the TNI carries out each of its duties with the consideration and decision of state politics taken by the President. The long history of the Indonesian nation has proven the important role of the TNI in maintaining the integrity of the Republic of Indonesia, starting from the War of Independence to the present day. In the context of the conflict in Papua, efforts to handle it have involved various state instruments in an integrated manner to create optimal security stability (Ismanto, 2019; Mella, Widodo, & Kertopati, 2024; Syailendra, 2016). The TNI in this case has carried out various operations, including Territorial Operations and Intelligence Operations to overcome separatism with other institutions oriented to non-combat-based operations, whose goal is to help create security and help improve people's well-being. The current condition of handling the Papuan conflict requires the involvement of the TNI which is carried out through state political decisions carried out in synergy with other relevant ministries and agencies in supporting the acceleration of regional development, especially in the Papua region in providing extensive and comprehensive assistance and support, both in terms of security, logistics, and community development as a whole (Nasution & Nainggolan, 2023; Priamarizki, 2017). However, it is also important to note that the role of the TNI must remain within a clear legal framework and not interfere with the independence and functioning of local governments.

The conflict in Papua has evolved into a complex challenge that intertwines historical, political, and socio-economic dimensions. Over the years, the Free Papua Organization (OPM) has intensified its efforts to gain international attention, leveraging allegations of human rights violations and marginalization to garner sympathy and support. This narrative, amplified by international sympathizers and advocacy groups, poses a significant threat to Indonesia's sovereignty and creates an urgency for a comprehensive solution. The persistent security disruptions in the region hinder the effectiveness of development programs, leaving critical sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure in dire need of stability and sustained intervention.

While the Indonesian government has made significant strides through programs like Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2017 and No. 9 of 2020, the effectiveness of these initiatives has been limited due to ongoing security challenges. The TNI's role in maintaining security while supporting development is crucial, but its efforts often face criticism, both domestically and internationally. These criticisms underscore the importance of adopting a balanced approach that integrates security measures with local community development. The inclusion of cultural sensitivity and participatory methods in these strategies is essential to foster trust and cooperation among indigenous Papuan communities.

Given the unique topography and socio-cultural dynamics of Papua, traditional methods of conflict resolution and development implementation have proven insufficient. There is a pressing need for innovative, collaborative strategies that leverage the TNI's operational capabilities while addressing the root causes of conflict. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the synergy between the TNI's smart power approach and the government's welfare acceleration programs. By doing so, it aims to offer a nuanced understanding of how integrated security and development frameworks can create a pathway for sustainable peace and progress in Papua.

Previous research has explored the role of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) in maintaining security and supporting development in conflict-prone areas. For instance, studies by Haripin (2019) and Nasution & Nainggolan (2023) have highlighted the TNI's

contributions to counter-insurgency efforts and its pivotal role in safeguarding infrastructure projects in Papua. Similarly, Mella, Widodo, and Kertopati (2024) have examined the application of military capabilities in addressing separatist threats, emphasizing the need for non-combat strategies such as community engagement and diplomacy. However, while these studies provide valuable insights into the TNI's operational strategies, they lack an in-depth analysis of how its efforts align with broader government development programs, particularly in the context of smart power strategies that combine soft, hard, and diplomatic approaches.

The urgency of this research stems from the escalating complexities of the Papuan conflict, which continue to hinder the region's socio-economic development. Despite substantial government investment in welfare programs, persistent security threats from OPM have impeded the effectiveness of these initiatives. Moreover, the international dimension of the conflict, with external sympathizers amplifying narratives of human rights abuses, has further complicated the resolution process. Addressing these challenges requires an integrated framework that not only ensures security but also promotes inclusive development and community empowerment.

The research gap lies in the limited exploration of how the TNI's smart power strategy can synergize with the government's welfare acceleration initiatives to achieve sustainable development in Papua. Existing studies have predominantly focused on either security operations or development programs in isolation, neglecting the interplay between the two. This study seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing the TNI's role in implementing a holistic approach that addresses security, infrastructure development, and human resource capacity building simultaneously.

The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on the smart power strategy as a unifying framework for the TNI's operations and the government's development programs. By integrating security measures with community engagement and participatory development, this study provides a fresh perspective on conflict resolution and regional development in Papua. It also introduces the concept of the "Empowerment of Papua Regional Welfare Potential" (PPKDP) program as a collaborative model for addressing the region's unique challenges.

The objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of the TNI's smart power approach in supporting the acceleration of welfare development in Papua, with a focus on identifying actionable strategies for improving security, infrastructure, and human resource development. By doing so, the research aims to offer practical recommendations for enhancing the synergy between the TNI and government agencies in achieving sustainable peace and progress in the region.

The benefits of this research include providing policymakers, the TNI, and other stakeholders with evidence-based insights to optimize their strategies in Papua. It highlights the importance of integrating security and development initiatives to create an environment conducive to growth and stability. For the broader academic community, the study contributes to the literature on conflict resolution, regional development, and military-civil collaboration.

The implications of this research extend beyond Papua, offering a model for addressing similar conflicts in other regions facing security and development challenges. By demonstrating the potential of a smart power approach, this study underscores the importance of multi-faceted strategies that combine security, diplomacy, and community empowerment to foster long-term peace and development.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To achieve the objectives of this research, the researcher uses Qualitative Research. This research aims to understand the complexity of conflicts in Papua, with a focus on social, political, and diplomatic dynamics. This method involves in-depth interviews, case studies, and analysis of secondary data such as reports, documents, and media coverage to understand the motivations and actions of the Free Papua Organization (OPM) as well as the response of the TNI and the Indonesian government. Using these methods, the research can provide a comprehensive understanding of the conflict in Papua, the challenges faced by the Indonesian government and the TNI, as well as potential solutions and paths to development and stability in the region.

The research approach used in the introduction is a qualitative approach. Appropriate Theory Grounded Theory: Developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, grounded theory is a systematic approach in qualitative research that aims to generate theories based on data collected from the field. This approach is suitable for understanding conflict in Papua because it allows researchers to develop theories that emerge directly from data collected through interviews, case studies, and document analysis. Conflict Theory: Introduced by Lewis Coser and Ralf Dahrendorf, conflict theory emphasizes the importance of understanding social conflict as part of social change. In the context of Papua, this theory can help explain how tensions and differences between the OPM and the Indonesian government are understood and overcome through the perspective of social and political dynamics. With that Focusing on Conflict Complexity, this study seeks to understand the complexity of conflicts in Papua, including the social, political, and diplomatic factors involved. The qualitative approach is perfect for in-depth exploration of complex and dynamic issues.

Data collection is a crucial step in the research process that aims to obtain the information necessary to answer the research question by using various techniques and methods designed to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data. (Sugiyono, 2016): Stating that data collection is a systematic process or method to obtain the data needed in a research. It involves various techniques such as interviews, observations, and questionnaires to obtain valid and reliable information.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Research Results**

#### **a. Acceleration of Regional Development in the Papua Region.**

In the context of Accelerating Welfare Development in Papua Province and West Papua Province in the fields of health and education, local economic development, basic infrastructure, digital infrastructure, and connectivity to realize a peaceful and prosperous community in Papua Province and West Papua Province, the government has issued Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2017 about the Acceleration of Welfare Development in Papua and West Papua Provinces. The Presidential Instruction is the legal basis for the Acceleration of Welfare Development program in Papua Province and West Papua Province until 2019. Continued with Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2020 about the Acceleration of Welfare Development in Papua Province and West Papua Province, is clear evidence of the government's commitment to find solutions in supporting economic development in the Papua region, as a follow-up to the implementation of Presidential Regulation (Perpres) Number 18 of 2020 concerning the National Medium-Term Development Plan for 2020-2024 (Elmslie, Webb-Gannon, & King, 2011).

The government is trying to accelerate the welfare that must be realized in Papua. To make it happen, the government conducts a program; Infrastructure development and human resource development of Papuans. Infrastructure development is characterized by the construction of connecting roads, hospitals, schools, telecommunication facilities to pioneer airports. Human resource development is carried out by providing the greatest opportunity for local residents to get adequate education just like students in Java. No less important is the provision of adequate health service facilities is the government's top priority policy to build human resources in Papua. However, it is not easy to realize the process of realizing these two main areas of development if we see security disturbances carried out by OPM. The number of casualties ranged from the TNI/Polri, migrants to the local community due to acts of violence and destruction carried out by the OPM (Chauvel, 2021; Laksmana, 2024; Muslimin & Arifiyanto, 2023).

In accordance with their main duties, the TNI together with the National Police carry out their duties to realize a sense of security and comfort in the development process in the Papua region. On the one hand, the process of physical infrastructure development in Papua must be able to run according to the planned time, but on the other hand, many terror intimidation with destruction and murder are carried out on the workers of the infrastructure project (Haripin, 2019). The impact of losses caused by security disturbances by OPM, not only from the field of weapon materials, but also the number of casualties that are always associated with human rights violations committed by the TNI/Polri. The existence of OPM sympathizers from small countries in the Pacific who always shout about human rights violations and the financial support that continues to flow to OPM, is a challenge that must be faced by the Indonesian government until now (Yusnaldi, Mamahit, Supartono, & Halkis, 2020).

#### **b. Strategy *Smart Power*.**

The TNI's duties in order to support the acceleration of welfare development in the Papua region have been described in Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2020, point 33, as follows: first, providing security support in the context of Accelerating Welfare Development in Papua Province and West Papua Province; second, supporting local governments in the provision of basic services and education and health services in remote areas, inland, state borders, and small islands and remote indigenous communities; and third, building inclusive social communication with religious leaders, traditional leaders, community leaders, community organizations, and strategic Papuan groups in realizing the right development approaches and policies.

Currently, the policy taken by the TNI, is to use a strategy *Smart Power* in order to deal with security disturbances from OPM. Blended strategies *soft power*, *hard power* and *diplomacy* has been officially conveyed by the TNI Commander on November 23, 2023. *Soft power* with a territorial and intelligence approach is an approach that *Affirmative* faced with this very special situation in Papua, if you look at the diversity of tribes and cultures there. Coupled with the topography of the mountainous forest terrain which is very difficult to reach. That's why *hard power* With a strategic approach to the use of security forces, in this case, the TNI/Polri is still a smart choice to respond to the brutal actions carried out by the OPM. The combination of these strategies is to realize the TNI's support in the welfare acceleration program in the Papua region.

The next strategy is diplomacy and humanitarian approach. In addition to military action, the TNI can engage in peaceful negotiations with relevant parties in the conflict, including the OPM. This approach aims to achieve long-term conflict resolution and

reconciliation. The TNI also needs to be involved in a community approach to support the empowerment of the Papuan people. By building good relations with the local community, the TNI can more easily obtain intelligence information and support peace and stability efforts in the area. Various approaches have been taken by the Government in resolving the Papuan conflict, one of which is by designating the OPM group as an armed criminal group, because it has caused many casualties to the defense and security apparatus as well as civil society in Papua. Faced with the dynamics of the current situation, the TNI as one of the State instruments that have great strength and ability in dealing with every form of threat to the Indonesian Nation and State need to formulate a general concept of the best operation in Papua so that the Papuan conflict can be resolved immediately, so that progress in equitable development and security in Papua can be realized.

Overcoming OPM attacks cannot be separated from how the TNI is able to see The dimensions of the Papuan conflict are complex. The Papuan conflict is a multidimensional conflict. His efforts need to prioritize community approaches, such as market development, free medical treatment, and the provision of social assistance. In addition, the Papuan conflict is also colored by reactions in international diplomacy between the Republic of Indonesia and OPM and *United Liberation Movement for West Papua* (ULMWP) supported by Vanuatu and a group of countries *Melanesian Spread Group*, and political figures of other countries (*Regional Rivalry*). Another problem is the domino effect of *Great Power Rivalry* between the United States and China which continues to expand to South Pacific countries. This domino effect occurs because of Indonesia's close relationship with China in the economic field which is a separate problem for the US which is considered to be able to weaken the US to stem the expansion of China's influence into the South Pacific (*Global Rivalry*). Such special characteristics in the Papua region with its topographic terrain, culture and natural resources make the government's program in the form of Accelerating Welfare Development in the Papua region through Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2017 and Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2020 face considerable challenges. The government must face OPM security disturbances during the physical construction process begins.

Facing OPM security disruptions, the TNI has used a strategy *Smart Power* in exerting its strength in the Papua region. The choice of strategy is the right choice for the TNI to avoid casualties and damage to infrastructure facilities that have been built. Utilizing territorial capabilities with a local wisdom approach is a must that will be done in the future.

Referring to the government's national program to the Papua region through development programs to accelerate welfare in Papua and the strategy of *Smart Power*, there are several analyses that can be conveyed, namely:

- 1) The infrastructure development program of the Welfare Acceleration Development program in Papua is highly determined by the physical work process carried out. The main factor for the success of physical work is the safety condition for the workers in carrying out activities. With the absence of security disturbances by OPM in the Papua region, it is the main factor in the success of development there, meaning that the strength of the TNI/Polri must be attached and be part of the physical development process.
- 2) The human resource development program in the Welfare Acceleration Development program in Papua is determined by the facilities where teaching and learning are located, another main factor is the ability of teachers to be able to carry out *the transfer of knowledge* to local residents. The lack of teaching staff is the main obstacle to date in the Papua region. The safety factor is the main consideration for the comfort of teaching staff to devote themselves to Papua. In the health sector, it is also a welfare field that is the main concern

until now. Very minimal medical personnel and health facilities are a real condition faced in Papua today. Similar to teaching staff, medical personnel also face the same problem, namely security disturbances from OPM during medical activities in Papua. OPM does not hesitate to burn existing health facilities. There are only two solutions to overcome, namely making the TNI/Polri health team a mobile situational medical personnel. The solution is a short-term solution while the long-term solution is to provide opportunities for the young generation of Papuan Indigenous People (OAP) to receive full health education through central or regional government scholarships. This means that the involvement of the TNI in building human resources in the Papua region is a must to ensure the implementation of the human resource development program in the Papua region.

### **Research Objectives.**

The main objective of the research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the conflict in Papua, the challenges faced by the Indonesian government, especially the TNI, as well as potential solutions to achieve sustainable development and stability in the region. So that in this study, suggestions for actions for the TNI to make breakthroughs that are constructive and can be implemented immediately. Breakthroughs that can be made by the TNI are:

- a. Collaborating the *selected smart power* strategy with the Acceleration of Welfare Development program in Papua Province and West Papua Province. The collaboration is manifested in the "Empowerment of Papua Regional Welfare Potential" (PPKDP) program. The PPKDP program is a form of policy collaboration between the central government (K/L) and the TNI so that harmony is obtained for physical and non-physical activities carried out in the Papua region. The PPKDP program includes:
  - 1) Participatory infrastructure development (bringing physical development closer to safe points of interference from OPM). The goal is to build *sister districts* built in *districts* outside the cluster prone to OPM security disturbances. With the construction of almost all basic human living facilities in *sister districts*, it will become an "attractive" district for the surrounding districts that are not touched by the development acceleration program. The need for the TNI to form a "TNI Bhakti Task Force" which is tasked with maintaining security in the process of physical infrastructure development in the Papua region. Thus, development is a must to be carried out in remote Papuan schools without exception and without OPM interference.
  - 2) Accommodating human resource development. In addition to opening opportunities for Papuan Indigenous people (OAP) to be able to receive free education from the government, opening opportunities for formal and informal assimilation (blending) through the TNI foster parent program in the program to improve the welfare of joint village education. The goal is to further expand the process of assimilation of the Papuan Orang Asli (OAP) population with the immigrant population. The initial step of the program is carried out in villages that are still in the category of safe points from OPM security disturbances. The long-term program of assimilation implementation is carried out by trying to open the "Integrated Transmigration" program. As a first step, the Trans land clearing was carried out by the Papuan Indigenous People (OAP) with assistance from the TNI and related ministries and agencies.
  - 3) Building a sense of security together. The policy of sending the TNI/Polri task force together with the local territorial units continues by making two participatory activities of infrastructure development and accommodating human resource development as the main consideration in the planning of TNI/Polri operations in the Papua region.

Uniting the determination of all Indonesian people makes Papua always together within the framework of the Republic of Indonesia. The determination is realized in the form of unifying information related to the development of Papua through the TNI Puspen and the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and information.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study is that to achieve the acceleration of welfare development in Papua, the Indonesian government, especially the TNI, has implemented a smart power strategy that includes a combination of soft power, hard power, and diplomacy approaches. Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2017 and Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2020 are the legal basis for accelerating development in Papua, with the main focus on infrastructure development, human resource development, and improving basic services such as health and education. Despite the security challenges posed by the OPM, the TNI has adopted an inclusive and sustainable strategy to support stability and progress in the region. Currently, collaboration between the TNI and local governments and the Papuan people through the Papua Regional Welfare Potential Empowerment (PPKDP) program is a strategic step to overcome security disturbances, build infrastructure, and improve the quality of human resources. Through this approach, it is hoped that Papua can be more integrated in national development, strengthen the sense of security, and promote unity within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI).



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