Last year the United Nations ranked Indonesia as the seventeenth and Malaysia as the twenty-sixth largest contributors to UN peace operations worldwide and the two largest contributors among ASEAN member states. Indeed, at the end of January 2014, total Southeast Asian contributions to UN peace operations were 26 from Brunei Darussalam, 342 from Cambodia, 1697 from Indonesia, 909 from Malaysia, 703 from the Philippines, 22 from Singapore and 33 from Thailand.1 Both Indonesia and Malaysia have long histories in United Nations peace operations including Sinai, Egypt in the 1950s, Congo in the 1960s, Vietnam in the 1970s, Angola, the Balkans and the Iran-Iraq conflict in the 1990s. Yet the history of independent Indonesia is full of civil-military conflict and domestic political struggles illustrating potential contradictions with its external image projection and domestic realities. The most notable internal security issues are found in Aceh, East Timor (until c.1999) and Papua. Since the end of the Cold War and a shift to democracy, Indonesia has not only contributed to United Nations peace operations but has also been the recipient of them during East Timor’s transition to independence. While Indonesia as a recipient of UN peace operations is well covered in the literature for good reason, its role as a contributor has received relatively less attention. Likewise Malaysia has also hosted internal conflicts most notably between the Malayan Communist Party, Malayan National Liberation Army, and government security services from 1968 to 1989 while simultaneously contributing to UN peace operations again illustrative of a potential contradiction between external image projection and domestic realities.

First, this chapter investigates the motivations behind the decisions by Malaysia and Indonesia to contribute to UN peace operations. Second, this chapter utilises a multifocal lens to illustrate the different manifestations that these contributions to peace operations take. Through this investigation, both Indonesia and Malaysia illustrate that they seek greater political legitimacy

and leadership through their contributions to peace operations. However, the multifocal lens uncovers that it is not only the United Nations where legitimacy and leadership is sought, but also through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to project themselves as middle and regional powers.

However, more recently Indonesia’s frustration with more conservative ASEAN member states has led to some strategists and security scholars like Rizal Sukma to move away from regionalism and focus on global affairs and key bilateral relations if it is a better location to promote the national interest. Indeed, Indonesia along with other states such as South Korea and Australia has adopted the rhetoric of middle power diplomacy and since accession to the G20 has demonstrated its reconsideration of its strategic foreign policy priorities. As Beeson and Higgott (2013) argue the G20 is the “current middle power venue of choice and mark of status,” which further illustrates Indonesia’s self-perception and international acceptance as a middle power. In other words as a caution, groups of states in the international system come and go, and are not necessarily a stable criterion for determining middle power status. Rather more as these groups rise and fall they provide a snapshot of activity of selected states with an “active” foreign policy. In identifying middle power status with those states who demonstrate an “active” foreign policy, it makes the term “middle power” broader. In this sense, with the historical commitment of both Indonesia and Malaysia to international peacekeeping, they both qualify as middle powers in the broad interpretation of the term. Indonesia has generally been recognised as first among equals within ASEAN and has demonstrated its leadership through promoting regional institution building in ASEAN most notably through the ASEAN Political Security Blueprint and contributing to conflict management through diplomacy in the region like in the Thailand-Cambodia border dispute in 2011. This also reflects a broader trend,