

United Nations Peace Operations

Personal Experiences and Reflections

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PREVAILING GLOBAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

We are passing through a decisive stage in the history of the international system. The threat of war between great states, or nuclear confrontation between major powers, is well behind us and, in fact, fading in our memory. However, new and diverse forms of threats, some clear and present, others only dimly perceived, are testing our resolve and questioning the validity of our existing mechanisms. Developments at the international level over the last two decades have exposed deep divisions within the membership of the United Nations (UN) over fundamental policies on peace and security. They have included debates on how best to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (including chemical and biological weapons), combat the spread of international terrorism, the criteria for the use of force and the role of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the effectiveness of unilateral versus multilateral responses to security, the notion of preventive war and the

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place of the UN in a world that has been dominated for some time by a single superpower.

These debates have emerged after several years of agonising debate on issues of no less importance, such as, our collective response to civil wars; the effectiveness of existing mechanisms in responding to genocide; so-called ethnic cleansing and other severe violations of human rights; changing notions of state sovereignty; and the need to more tightly link the challenges of peace and the challenges of development. There is little doubt that aspects of restructuring and institutional reform of the UN machinery and its organs to meet the new challenges need to be addressed. The changes called for are not merely a matter of the functioning of the UN Secretariat and other such administrative details, but also need to focus on the world body's character and ethos.

The mechanism of preventive deployment, without doubt, is a most useful tool. Even so, there can be little argument that prevention often fails. When that happens, threats will have to be met by military means. The UN Charter provides a clear framework for the use of force. States have an inherent right to self-defence, enshrined in Article 51. Long-established customary international law makes it clear that states can take military action as long as the threatened attack is imminent, no other means would deflect it and the action is proportionate. Equally, Chapter VII of the UN Charter provides the international community, represented by the UNSC, with the authority to deal with situations where military force needs to be applied against an errant state that resorts to aggression against another member state. On preventive use of military force by member states to deal with not-so-imminent threats, there is clearly a view that states that fear the emergence of distant threats have an obligation to bring such concerns to the notice of the UNSC for appropriate action. Also, there is general acceptance that, on this specific aspect, the UNSC would need to be more proactive than before. The use of force should only be considered after all other options have been exhausted, and the fact that force can be legally used does not always mean that it should be used.

The responsibility of the international community to protect innocent civilians who are victims of genocide is a sensitive aspect, especially in the context of the fact that state sovereignty is still a very important issue for most developing countries that have emerged from colonial rule not too long back. Notwithstanding all the developments at the global level, the concept of state sovereignty remains at the root of the international

system. Even so, there appears to be some consensus that in the twenty-first century, such sovereignty cannot be absolute. The emerging norm of a collective responsibility to protect civilians from large-scale violence has been endorsed—a responsibility that lies first and foremost with national authorities. When a state fails to protect its civilians or is incapable of doing so, the international community would appear to have a responsibility to act, through humanitarian operations, monitoring missions and diplomatic pressure, and with force, if necessary, as a very last resort. The reality, of course, is that the international community remains largely indifferent unless the vital interest of one or more of the important players is directly affected. Even when there is consensus that force has to be applied, resources are not always readily available or forthcoming.

Notwithstanding the internal challenges that India faces, and the imperative need to focus on economic growth, it would be prudent for the governing establishment and the strategic community in the country to dwell on the fact that within the international setting, as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century and probably beyond, India will have a role to play both regionally and globally. Internationally, the situation is that most countries, including major players like the United States (US), European Union (EU), Russia and Japan, as also possibly some of the regional organisations, would, without much doubt, like to see India play a more active role in promoting democratic values and contributing to stability in the region. This is primarily because of the perception that India has the ability to do so, as also because of their desire not to be directly involved in many cases. The only element that could inhibit the Indian establishment in developing the appropriate military capability to support such a role is perhaps the ability to build a national consensus in this regard.

In preparing ourselves for continued participation in UN peacekeeping operations, it would be appropriate to take stock of the changes that have taken place in the environment in which such operations are being increasingly mounted in recent years, as well as the manner in which they are being executed. The end of the Cold War and the euphoria generated by the success of the Gulf War in 1991 resulted in the international community (particularly the dominant Western powers) assuming a greater role in the maintenance of international peace and security. There was, therefore, a greater demand for UN peacekeeping operations. The perceived setbacks suffered by the organisation in its

efforts in Somalia and Bosnia–Herzegovina, and the inadequacy of response to the situation in Rwanda, were not actually attributable to any deficiency in the performance of peacekeepers. They were occasioned by the confused mandates issued by the UNSC and the lack of political backstopping. Even so, they induced a sense of retrenchment. There is, therefore, a more measured approach in the developed world to the aspect of participation in UN peacekeeping.

We must indeed take into account the radical changes in the nature of the peacekeeping commitment. The UN peacekeepers are increasingly being sent to regions where civil war-type situations prevail; where there are no agreements or if there are, these are rather tenuous or broken without compunction; where the consent or cooperation of the belligerent parties cannot be relied upon; and where constitutional authority does not exist in many cases or if it does, it has limited authority. In such situations, today's peacekeepers are not only required to keep the warring parties apart to the extent they can, but are also increasingly called upon to safeguard humanitarian relief operations, monitor human rights violations, assist in mine clearance, monitor state boundaries or borders, provide civilian police support, assist in rebuilding logistics infrastructure, like roads, railways and bridges, and support electoral processes. In much of this, the Indian Armed Forces have practical experience based on the conduct of counter-insurgency operations in North-East India (Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and Assam), Jammu and Kashmir (since 1989) and Punjab, thus providing our forces with a marked advantage over most forces from other parts of the world.

INDIA AND UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

It is probably not very widely known that there is no specific provision for peacekeeping in the UN Charter. It was an invention of the UN Secretary-General and the Secretariat, evolved in the late 1940s as a non-coercive instrument of conflict control, at a time when Cold War constraints precluded the use of the more forceful steps permitted under the Charter. During the Cold War, neither of the two superpowers was amenable to UN intervention against their allies or within their spheres of influence. Hence, an improvisation—'peacekeeping without combat connotations'—emerged. As it evolved over the years, UN peacekeeping became an extraordinary art that called for the 'use of the military personnel not to wage war but to prevent fighting' between belligerents. Unarmed military observers provided by member states were deployed,

under the authority of a UNSC Resolution, to ensure the maintenance of ceasefires and to provide, by their presence, a measure of stability in an area of conflict while negotiations were conducted. Hence, peacekeeping is based on a triad of principles that give it legitimacy as well as credibility, namely: consent of the parties to the conflict; impartiality of the peacekeepers; and the use of force by lightly armed peacekeepers only in self-defence.

As one of the founding members of the UN, India's contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security has been second to none. In no other field of activity has this been manifested more than in UN operations, commencing with our participation in the operations in Korea in 1950. The operation in Korea, led by the US, was a major military undertaking. India participated militarily with a medical unit comprising 17 officers, nine junior commissioned officers (JCOs) and 300 other ranks (ORs). It then provided a Custodian Force of 231 officers, 203 JCOs and 5,696 ORs under the command of Major General (Maj Gen; later Lieutenant General [Lt Gen]) S.P.P. Thorat for the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC), whose Chairman was Lt Gen (later General [Gen]) K.S. Thimayya.¹ India also contributed significantly to the Indo-China Supervisory Commission deployed in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam from 1954 to 1970: a medical detachment from 1964 to 1968; and 970 officers, 140 JCOs and 6,157 ORs over the period 1954–70.

The UNSC first authorised the use of armed military contingents with the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in the Gaza Strip and the Sinai, after the Arab–Israeli War in 1956. From 15 November 1956 to 19 May 1967, 11 infantry battalions from India successively served with this force: a total of 393 officers, 409 JCOs and 12,393 ORs in all. Maj Gen (later Lt Gen) P.S. Gyani and Brigadier (later Maj Gen) I.J. Rikhye were force commanders in this operation. This operation became a model for many subsequent peacekeeping operations. The success of UNEF led the UNSC to readily accept a request by the Congo, in 1960, for intervention on attaining independence from Belgium. The UN accepted responsibility for ending secession and reunifying the country. The rules of engagement were modified to cater for 'use of force' in pursuance of the mandate, for carrying out humanitarian tasks and to deal with well-armed and organised mercenaries. India's contribution to this operation was not only substantial but also most vital. Between 14 July 1960 and 30 June 1964, two Indian brigades comprising a total of

467 officers, 404 JCOs and 11,354 ORs participated. In this operation, 36 Indian personnel lost their lives and 124 were wounded; Captain G.S. Salaria of the 3 Battalion of the 1 Gorkha Rifles was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra.

The operations in Cyprus, launched in 1964, saw three Indian force commanders: Lt Gen P.S. Gyani; Gen K.S. Thimayya, who died in harness on 18 December 1965; and Maj Gen Diwan Prem Chand. Maj Gen (later Lt Gen) Prem Chand also distinguished himself as the force commander in the operations in Namibia in 1989, which oversaw that country's transition to independence.

With the increased commitment in peacekeeping assumed by the UN in the post-Cold War era, India continued to provide commanders, military observers and staff officers to many of the UN missions deployed to keep the peace in various parts of the world. Some examples are: Iran and Iraq in 1988–90, after the bloody conflict in the region; on the Iraqi–Kuwait border after the Gulf War in 1991; Angola in 1989–91 and again, in 1995–99; Central America in 1990–92; El Salvador in 1991; Liberia in 1993; Rwanda in 1994–96; Sierra Leone in 1998–2001; Lebanon from 1998 to date; Ethiopia–Eritrea in 2001–09; the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 1999 to date; Cote d'Ivoire from 2003 to date; Burundi in 2003–06; Sudan/South Sudan from 2005 to date; and the Golan Heights from 2006 to date. India has also provided police personnel to a number of UN missions. For example, in Namibia, Western Sahara, Cambodia, Haiti, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Congo, Liberia (where it created history by providing all-women-formed police units that drew acclaim locally as well as internationally) and Sudan/South Sudan.

In addition, sizeable military contingents were made available for the UN operations in Cambodia in 1992–93 (a total of 2,550 all ranks in two successive battalion groups); Mozambique in 1992–93 (a total of about 1,000 all ranks); Somalia in 1993–94 (a brigade group totalling about 5,000 all ranks); Angola in 1995 (a battalion group and an engineer company totalling over 1,000 all ranks); Rwanda in 1994–95 (a total of about 800 all ranks); Sierra Leone in 2000–01 (a force commander and a contingent comprising 131 officers, 163 JCOs and 2,613 ORs, together with 14 military observers and 31 staff officers); and Ethiopia–Eritrea in 2001–09² (a battalion group and a force commander). Insofar as the former Yugoslavia is concerned, the Government of India had, at the request of the then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali,

deputed me as the first Force Commander and Head of Mission, in which capacity I set up the operation that comprised uniformed personnel from about 34 countries, together with civil affairs and administrative personnel from many more (a total of over 28,000), and ran it from 3 March 1992 to 2 March 1993.

The current deployment of 5,439 personnel reflects the commitment of troops, military observers, staff officers and civilian police from India in eight of the 13 current UN operations. This includes 2,342 personnel and the force commander in South Sudan, 2,007 personnel in the Congo, 762 personnel in Lebanon and 175 personnel in the Golan Heights.³ India has had the privilege of providing the first military adviser, Maj Gen I.J. Rikhye, at the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) when it was formed over five decades ago; as also two others subsequently: Lt Gen R.S. Mehta in early 2000 and more recently, Lt Gen Abhijit Guha.

India's spontaneous and unreserved participation in UN peacekeeping operations over the years has been a clear demonstration of the country's commitment to the objectives set out in the UN Charter. Indeed, this has not been in terms of rhetoric and symbolism, but in real and practical terms, with approximately 240,000 personnel over the years, and even to the extent of accepting casualties to personnel (about 150 fatalities to date). This commitment has been acknowledged by the international community, successive Secretaries-General and the UN Secretariat. Even more significantly, the effectiveness of such participation and commitment to UN peacekeeping efforts has drawn respect and praise from fellow professionals of other countries, and many others, that have served jointly with our commanders, observers, police monitors and contingents in various parts of the world. Hence, the image of the Indian forces in the international arena is that of highly competent and well-trained professionals.

It is important for the people of our country to recognise that much of our participation in UN peacekeeping operations relates to national security interests. Our participation in the Korean and Cambodian operations demonstrated our stake in the stability of East and Southeast Asia. Our vital interests in West Asia, both in terms of our energy requirements and our historical connections, have been more than adequately reflected in our participation in the peacekeeping operations undertaken in the Gaza Strip and Sinai, the Golan Heights, Iran–Iraq, Iraq–Kuwait, Lebanon and Yemen. Our geostrategic interests in the stability and well-being of the newly emerged states of Africa have been

underscored by our contributions and participation in the operations in the Congo, Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia–Eritrea, Sudan, Burundi and Cote d’Ivoire. In fact, it is of some significance that India has participated in *every* UN peacekeeping operation in Africa (with one possible exception being the most recent one in Mali).

USE OF FORCE IN UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

Use of force is not necessarily a panacea for all the problems in mission areas. Experiences of combat operations undertaken by multinational forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, among others, clearly suggest that the use of force has to be complemented and supplemented by political efforts for reconciliation, and by peace-building activity for restoration of governance, infrastructure, rule of law mechanisms, etc. To that extent, it may be desirable that the use of force by peacekeepers be limited to actions required to be taken for the ‘protection of innocent civilians’. Use of force by UN peacekeepers means appropriate resources must be available. In almost all UN missions deployed today this is wanting because those who have the resources, both in terms of trained manpower and equipment, namely, countries of the developed world, are not participating in UN peacekeeping operations. If UN peacekeeping is to remain effective, the developed world *must return* to this commitment. This should go beyond the present arrangement of seeking positions in senior management and command, to provision of ‘boots on the ground’ and equipment resources.

I think it is imperative that the UN should be prepared to undertake peacekeeping operations in intra-state conflict at the request of the parties involved, and after agreement with the belligerents, wherein the use of force to implement the terms of the agreement is mandated by the UNSC and adequate resources for the purpose are made available to the UN force. It needs to be stressed here that the UN forces should only be inserted for such operations after an agreement between the belligerents has been arrived at. After insertion, if sporadic acts of violence are initiated by elements not responsive to the agreement, like warlords acting on their own, the UN mission should be prepared to use military force to restore peace, as was done by the Indian-led forces in the Congo in the early 1960s (United Nations Operation in the Congo [ONUC]).

I am also quite clear that in cases where the government of a member state seeks international assistance to deal with internal rebellion or

insurgency, or in failed or failing state scenarios, or where genocide is taking place or there is a humanitarian situation that calls for action, and where the UNSC determines that intervention is essential, multinational 'stabilisation operations' mandated by the UNSC need to be launched. The aspect that merits emphasis here is that these operations are required to be undertaken under Chapter VII and hence, need to be multinational combat operations under a lead nation or regional organisation. They should *not* be UN 'blue-helmeted' peacekeeping operations.

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR TRAINING OF PEACEKEEPERS

In order to build on our expertise and experience in this arena, as Director of United Service Institution of India (USI), I was able to set up a Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK) in September 2000, with support from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)⁴ and my armed forces colleagues. The CUNPK, besides overseeing the training of contingents earmarked for peacekeeping operations, undertakes conduct of training courses for our sub-unit commanders, military observers and officers earmarked for deputation on staff appointments. It is a measure of India's commitment to the UN that a minimum of 15 vacancies on each of the international courses we run are offered to developing countries, with all expenses incurred on travel from home country and back, training, accommodation and meals borne by the MEA, Government of India. A number of developed countries, like the US, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, Norway and Singapore, also subscribe to these courses on a self-financing arrangement. It is indeed a matter of great satisfaction that, in the last 20 years, the CUNPK has established itself internationally as a centre of excellence and is now regularly called upon to conduct specialised international courses on behalf of UN DPKO. Besides this, the CUNPK had, for a number of years, taken on board, from the Pearson Centre for UN Peacekeeping, the responsibility of providing the Secretariat backstopping of the International Association for Peacekeeping Training Centres (IAPTC).

IMPERATIVE NEED FOR A STANDING RAPID RESPONSE UN CAPABILITY

There are many changes that need to be addressed in order to meet the emerging challenges of UN peacekeeping, particularly in regard to the compelling mandate for the 'protection of innocent civilians, including women and children'. These are already under discussion at various

forums. However, I would like to flag one specific issue for discussion in the context of the perennial delay in provision of forces and equipment resources for a mission after a decision is taken by the UNSC. There is little need to dwell at any great length on the point that a military force of modest dimensions (together with police and other civil affairs and humanitarian aid personnel where necessary) inserted into a conflict zone as soon as some semblance of agreement between belligerents is negotiated can achieve much more in terms of implementation of the terms of the agreement, than a much larger force introduced two to three months later. Given the fact that during such delay, the political situation within the mission area can change dramatically, hostilities could well have resumed and the ground situation so much changed as to reduce the chances of peaceful resolution. If this is so clearly evident, it would appear that reservations about having a suitably organised, structured and equipped force that is readily available to the UN when required are somewhat misplaced.

While this idea has been mooted in the past on several occasions, including by veteran peacekeepers like former Under-Secretary-General in charge of peacekeeping, Sir Brian Urquhart, and there is general agreement to the concept in principle, a point often made in New York by those who do not lend their support to such a proposal is that it is unlikely to receive the endorsement of member states of the UN on grounds of costs of establishing and supporting such a force, as also on grounds of political acceptance of the idea. To the objective analyst, these postulations seem quite unconvincing. In my view, reluctance to endorse such a concept, particularly by the more powerful countries of the developed world, is primarily because they would not like to see their own influence and ability to manipulate events diluted by the provision of such ready capability to the UN. To that extent, much of the talk about strengthening the UN and making it more effective is largely rhetoric. The point is probably underscored by the increasing reluctance of the developed world over the last few years to provide military personnel and equipment for UN peacekeeping operations, particularly in difficult missions in Africa. Governments of developed countries of the Western world seem to prefer making available their well-equipped and trained forces to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or EU-sponsored interventions even in missions outside their area of operations, to complement UN peacekeeping operations rather than being part of such operations.

I am, therefore, of the view that in the context of ready availability of forces for UN peace operations, the only real answer for meeting crisis situations that call for speedy deployment of military forces, civilian police and some civil affairs and humanitarian aid personnel for the maintenance of international peace and security within days, if not hours, of a UNSC decision is to raise and maintain a 'Standing United Nations Rapid Deployment Force' of appropriate dimensions. This will be manned by selected volunteers in the various categories, suitably equipped and trained under the aegis of the UN, and positioned at an appropriate location, possibly in Africa. Such a force, or elements of it, deployed for a mission should be replaced as soon as feasible by forces deployed under current arrangements; and it should be pulled back into reserve status—for redeployment again or for providing immediate reinforcements to existing missions should the necessity arise. Such volunteers must be on a fixed non-extendable tenure of two to three years; to be replaced by fresh volunteers on a staggered arrangement. They should not be allowed to become 'indispensable' gladiators, as much of the current UN secretarial staff consider themselves to be.

Acknowledgement

This perspective is a modified extract from an undelivered speech that the author was scheduled to deliver at Shiv Nadar University. The views expressed here are his own.

NOTES

1. See *For the Honour of India: A History of Indian Peacekeeping*, New Delhi: Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research, USI, 2009.
2. Ibid.
3. Details are available on the United Nations Peacekeeping website, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en>.
4. This was through my old friend and Indian Military Academy colleague, Jaswant Singh, who was then the Foreign Minister, and the then Joint Secretary (UN), Dinkar Srivastava.

