

India's Role in UN Peacekeeping Operations

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The basic role of the armed forces is to defend the country against external aggression and to protect it from internal threat when its 'national security' is jeopardised. Apart from carrying out these functions, in the seven decades of independence, the Indian Armed Forces have been actively participating in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations.

UN AND PEACEKEEPING

Though no specific provision for 'peacekeeping' exists in the UN Charter, it is the most visible function of the UN. Any assessment of the UN's effectiveness is dependent on its success or failure in this function.

In May 1948, the UN Security Council sent 36 unarmed military observers to the Middle East as 'the first UN peacekeepers'. In the 74 years since then, more than 800,000 peacekeepers, the vast majority of them soldiers, have served in 72 peacekeeping operations. More than 1,800 military and civilian peacekeepers have died while serving in UN operations. The UN peacekeeping was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1988 for its service to mankind.

As of November 2021, there were 12 active UN peacekeeping missions being conducted all over the world, staffed by over 80,000 military, police and civilian personnel drawn from 100 countries. The

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estimated cost of UN peacekeeping operations from 1948 to December 2021 was US\$ 31.54 billion, while the annual budget in 2020–21 was US\$ 6.5 billion.¹

INDIA AND UN PEACEKEEPING

As one of the founding members of the UN, India's contribution to the cause of democracy has been second to none. India's ideal has been to strengthen the world order and work towards international peace and security.

India has been one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations. Since its first commitment in Korea in 1950, Indian troops have supervised complex, unmanageable peace operations, earning universal admiration for their professional excellence. Truly, India's participation in peacekeeping operations has served its national security strategy and her world order interests.

The aim of this commentary is to examine India's role in UN peacekeeping operations during the past seven decades, including its utility in the present scenario.

INDIA'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

India's Contribution towards UN Peacekeeping

Indian peacekeepers have taken part in 49 of the 72 missions, providing over 253,000 personnel all over the world.² The Indian Army has contributed outstanding force commanders, elite military contingents, impartial military observers and committed staff officers. In all, 173 Indian officers, soldiers and other personnel have laid down their lives while serving with the UN.³ Currently, there are around 8,500 troops, police and civilian personnel from India who are deployed in 10 UN peacekeeping missions, the fifth highest among troop-contributing countries.

India has taken part in UN peacekeeping operations in four continents; its most significant contribution has been to peace and stability in Asia and Africa. The Indian Army's action in the Congo, in the 1960s, became the 'first peace enforcement operation' in the history of the UN.

Further, India has been a part of every UN peacekeeping mission in Africa, except the present one in Mali; and it is unlikely that any other

nation has contributed so much towards peacekeeping in West Asia, having served in seven missions.

India also has a long tradition of sending women on UN peacekeeping missions. In April 2007, India became the first country to deploy an all-woman contingent to a UN mission in Liberia.

Participation in Cold War Era

Indian involvement in international peacekeeping began with the emergence of first peacekeeping operation itself, and that too in two ways. First was by way of deployment of UN peacekeeping observers in the Indian subcontinent post-Partition in 1948, in the form of United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), which is still alive as one of the oldest missions of UN in its own form. The second, but more importantly, was the participation of Indian Army in international peacekeeping operations in Korea in 1950.⁴ Thus, for India and the Indian Army, international peacekeeping is not something new. The Indian Army has been witness to this concept since its inception, maturing and current state in the world environment.

UN Operations in Korea—November 1950–53⁵

1. India's involvement in peacekeeping began with the Korean War, which has been one of the success stories of UN peacekeeping. Troops from 16 countries constituted the UN Multinational Force (MNF) under General (Gen) Douglas MacArthur. India contributed 60 Para Field Ambulance to the MNF to facilitate withdrawal of the sick and wounded from November 1950 till July 1954, the longest tenure by any unit under the UN flag.
2. *Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC)*: After the ceasefire, the UN set up NNRC in Korea in 1953 to resolve the issue of captured prisoners of war. Lieutenant General (Lt Gen) K.S. Thimayya was appointed as the Chairman, with members from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Sweden and Switzerland.
3. *Indian Custodian Force*: Towards the end of the war, India also provided a Custodian Force under Major General (Maj Gen) S.P.P. Thorat, which rendered yeoman service during the entire span of the mission. India's impartial and constructive role was widely acclaimed.
4. One brigade group of the Indian Army participated in the operation in Korea.

*UN International Control Commission (ICC) in Indo-China/
Vietnam—1954–70*

Pursuant to the Geneva Accord, the ICC was set up for Indochina in 1954. India was the Chairman of the Commission, which implemented the ceasefire agreement between Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and France. India provided an infantry battalion, whose tasks included provision of mobile teams of officers for monitoring the ceasefire and repatriation of prisoners of war.

*United Nations Emergency Force 1 (UNEF 1) in Gaza Strip/Egypt
and Israel—November 1956 to May 1967*

The Indian contribution in UNEF accounted for the bulk of the UN forces where, for the first time, armed troop contingents were deployed. Maj Gen (later Lt Gen) P.S. Gyani and Brigadier (Brig; later Maj Gen) Inderjit Rikhe were the Force Commanders of this operation, which, being the first, became the template for many subsequent peacekeeping operations.

*United Nations Operations in the Congo (ONUC)—July 1960 to
June 1964*

The success of UNEF 1 led the UN Security Council to readily accept a request by the government of the newly independent Republic of the Congo, in 1960, to intervene.⁶ The ONUC established in the Congo (now Democratic Republic of the Congo) was unique in many ways. The UN, for the first time, undertook an operation where the task was to prevent intra-country strife, instead of inter-country warfare; thus, the concept of UN peace enforcement took shape.

The Indian Armed Forces contribution to the ONUC consisted of two infantry brigades, along with a detachment of Indian Air Force (IAF) deployed at Katanga, with Brig K.A.S. Raja as the Commander. Brig R.S. Noronha later replaced him. Maj Gen (later Lt Gen) Dewan Prem Chand commanded Headquarters (HQ) Katanga Area (UN) during the operations.

The Indian Army's action in the Congo became the 'first peace enforcement operation' in the history of the UN, when it launched operations in Katanga province on 31 December 1961 and regained full control amidst stiff resistance offered by a breakaway faction (Katangese Gendarmerie) led by Belgium officers. By the end of 1962, the gendarmerie once again commenced attacks on the UN forces. Resolute leadership

by Maj Gen Dewan Prem Chand and Brig R.S. Noronha ensured the swift advance of Indian brigade into the key town of Kolwezi, which stunned and surprised the rebels. The gendarmerie suffered high reverses and were demoralised in the face of Indian onslaught and laid down their arms, resulting in unification of the Congo. A flight of six Canberra bomber aircraft of the IAF also participated in the operations. During these operations, 36 Indian personnel died, while 124 were wounded. Captain G.S. Salaria was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra.

UN Transition Assistance in Namibia—May 1989–May 1991

Considered as one of the success stories of the UN, Indian military observers, police monitors and electoral supervisors formed part of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) that oversaw the smooth withdrawal of foreign troops, conduct of elections and subsequent handing over of the authority to the Government of Namibia (former South West Africa). Lt Gen Dewan Prem Chand distinguished himself as the Force Commander in the operations, which oversaw the country's transition to independence.

India's Participation in Other Missions

1. The Cyprus operation (United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus [UNFICYP]), undertaken in 1964, saw three Indian Force Commanders: Lt Gen P.S. Gyani; Gen P.S. Thimayya, who died in harness on 18 December 1965; and Maj Gen Dewan Prem Chand. Their outstanding performance has been widely acclaimed.
2. The Indian Army provided a Force Commander, Lt Gen P.S. Gyani, and military observers for the United Nations Yemen Observation Mission (UNYOM) in 1963–64.
3. India sent military observers to UN missions in Iran–Iraq (United Nations Iran–Iraq Military Observer Group [UNIIMOG]) and Kuwait (United Nations Iraq–Kuwait Observation Mission [UNIKOM]). Brig V.M. Patil was appointed as Assistant Chief Military Observer (Iraq).

Participation in Post-Cold War Era

1. *United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC)—February 1992–September 1993*: One of the biggest peacekeeping operations completed successfully was the UN operation in Cambodia. The Indian Army, after a gap of 25 years (after Gaza,

UNEF 1 in 1967), sent an infantry battalion group. It was one of the most challenging missions for the Indian Army.

2. *United Nations Operations in Mozambique (ONUMOZ)*—December 1992–October 1994: The UN established ONUMOZ to restore peace and conduct elections in Mozambique, after a devastating civil war of 16 years, where India provided a large contingent of two engineer company groups.
3. *United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR; former Yugoslavia)*—March 1992–March 1993: Lt Gen Satish Nambiar was specially chosen as first Force Commander and Head of Mission of UNPROFOR from March 1992 to March 1993. The main achievement of the mission was preventing resumption of war between Croatia and Serbia, despite the ongoing conflict in neighbouring Bosnia–Herzegovina.
4. *United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II)*—March 1993–December 1994: The operation in Somalia is considered as one of the most difficult and challenging operations the UN has ever attempted. The Indian Army contributed a brigade group under Brig Mono Bhagat. Indian naval ships and personnel were involved in patrolling duties off the Somali coast, in humanitarian assistance on shore, and also in the transportation of men and material for the UN. The UNOSOM II involved ‘peace enforcement’ under a Chapter VII mandate, with the objective being humanitarian relief.

The Indian contingent successfully combined the often-conflicting roles of coercive disarmament and humanitarian relief. With ‘stand-alone capacity’, the Indian brigade had operational responsibilities for one-third of Somalia, that is, 1,73,000 square kilometres area of responsibility, the largest ever held by any contingent. Although the mission in general was a failure, the Indian contingent earned unsurpassed praise for its contribution. The most significant indicator of the Indian success was the praise by the Somalis themselves.

5. *United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR)*—October 1993–March 1996: Following widespread violence in the former Belgian colony of Rwanda between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes, UNAMIR was established in October 1993. The Indian contingent consisted of an infantry battalion group, while Brig Shiva Kumar served as the Force Commander in 1995–96.
6. *United Nations Angola Verification Mission III (UNAVEM III)*—February 1995–June 1997: The signing of the Lusaka Protocol on 20

November 1994 led to the creation of UNAVEM III from the earlier military observer missions. The Indian contingent of an infantry battalion group did a remarkable job in disarming and demobilising the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rebels, quartering them, and monitoring the completion of Armed Forces of Angola (FAA), the joint national army, as well as carrying out meaningful humanitarian activities to alleviate the sufferings of the locals. The engineer company did an excellent task in demining the areas and opening of road axis, along with construction of bridges and demobilisation camps. The commendable job done by the Indian contingent can be aptly summarised by the compliment given by Gen Van Kappen, Security Advisor to the UN Secretary-General, 'I wish all six battalions in Angola could be from India.' Brig. Y.K. Saxena served as the Deputy Force Commander of UNAVEM III.

Later developments led to the scaling down of UNAVEM III to a United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA), from July 1997 to July 1999, where India left a rapid reaction force of a mechanised company and military observers to maintain peace in the country.

7. *United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)—November 1999–February 2001*: UNAMSIL was established in 1999 to bring about peace and stability in Sierra Leone. India deployed two battalion groups, a medical unit and an attack helicopter unit in December 1999. Maj Gen V.K. Jetley was its first Force Commander.

In May 2000, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels took some UN military observers and a UN helicopter air crew as hostages, and later surrounded two company locations of the Indian troops at Kailahun. When all other means to come to an agreeable solution failed, Operation Khukri was launched on 15 July 2000. The Indian forces, both ground and air, launched a well-planned and coordinated military operation to trace the hostages and facilitate breakout of the companies by road and air extrication. Operation Khukri was a grand success that ensured safety of all UN troops and a great loss to the RUF rebels. It also boosted the image of the Indian and the UN forces, and placed the RUF on the defensive.

The 3,000 Indian peacekeepers were withdrawn from Sierra Leone in February 2001, due to change in mandate and other reasons.

8. *Ivory Coast (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire [UNOCI])—April 2004–June 2017*: The mission was supported by military observers and staff officers from its inception in 2004 till 2017.
9. *United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE)—2006–08*: The Indian contribution comprised one infantry battalion group, while Maj Gen Rajinder Singh served as the Force Commander of UNMEE.

Current Indian Peacekeeping Missions

The Indian Armed Forces are currently undertaking the following UN missions:

1. Lebanon (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon [UNIFIL]): One infantry battalion group has been deployed in Lebanon since 1998. Maj Gen L.M. Tewari has served as the Force Commander of UNIFIL.
2. The Congo (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo [MONUSCO]): An infantry company, military observers and staff officers have been deployed in the mission area since November 1998. After an extended Chapter VII mandate, an augmented infantry brigade group (four infantry battalions) with level III hospital, army aviation contingent with five MI-17 and four MI-25 helicopters, and number of military observers and staff officers have been deployed in the Congo since January 2005. In addition, two formed police units (FPUs), ex Border Security Force (BSF) and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), have also been deployed since 2009. Lt Gen Chander Prakash was the Force Commander in MONUSCO, Maj Gen Bikram Singh was the Divisional Commander in the Congo, while Gen Bipin Rawat, the ex-Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) of India, once commanded a MONUSCO brigade.
3. Sudan and South Sudan (United Nations Mission in Sudan [UNMIS]/United Nations Mission in South Sudan [UNMISS]): Two infantry battalion groups, sector HQ and an IAF contingent with utility helicopters have been deployed since April 2005. Lt Gen J.S. Lidder was the Force Commander of UNMIS in 2006.
4. Golan Heights (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force [UNDOF]): A logistics battalion has been deployed since February 2006 to look after the security of UNDOF. Maj Gen I.S. Singha was the Force Commander and Head of Mission, UNDOF.

Police Missions

In addition to the Indian military contingents and observers, a large number of civil police have actively participated in UN missions and won acclaim. Deputy Commandant Satish Menon, BSF, laid down his life while serving in Kosovo in August 2003, and became the 109th Indian casualty for the UN cause.

1. *Western Sahara (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara [MINURSO])*: Civil police officers have been serving from November 1997 till date.
2. *Haiti (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti [MINUSTAH])*: Apart from the deployment of three Indian FPU, that is, from Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Assam Rifles, which has been successful, the mission has been supported by military observers and staff officers from the army since December 1997.
3. *Kosovo (United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo [UNMIK])*: A Rapid Action Force (RAF) contingent of BSF and ITBP, apart from civil police officers, have been deployed since December 1999.
4. *Liberia (United Nations Mission in Liberia [UNMIL])*: India has been contributing both male and female FPUs from CRPF and its specialised unit, RAF, in Liberia since April 2007. The Indian female FPU was the first such unit in the host nation and has become a trendsetter for other such female FPUs across the globe. Gautam Sawang was the acting Police Commissioner in UNMIL.

INDIA'S POLICY IN PEACEKEEPING

As one of the founding members of the UN, India has always been keenly interested and actively involved in the evolution of conceptual and policy aspects of UN peacekeeping.

As a developing country,⁷ a predominant member of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Commonwealth and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), a major troop contributor and a country with an independent perspective on many multilateral issues, India recognises that peacekeeping operations appear to have become the core function of the UN and any assessment of the UN's effectiveness is dependent on its success or failure in this core function.

India, with a large standing army and vast experience in counter-insurgency operations, is ideally suited to take part in UN peacekeeping

operations. Hence, our government advocates willing and whole-hearted participation in UN missions.

The Indian Commitment (UN Standby Force)

In response to the appeal of the UN Secretary-General pursuant to the Agenda for Peace in 1992, the Government of India has agreed to make available an infantry brigade group of a strength of 5,000 personnel at short notice for peacekeeping operations.⁸ Accordingly, an infantry brigade group with a reserve role has been tasked to train itself for this role, in addition to its primary role, and be prepared to deploy a battalion group in four weeks and the brigade group in eight weeks from the issue of orders.

UTILITY OF PARTICIPATING IN FUTURE OPERATIONS

The long and successful history of Indian peacekeeping notwithstanding, a question frequently raised by the media and intelligentsia in India is as to why the country should participate in such operations. This is specifically so when loss of lives is inevitable, and especially when Western nations are reluctant to do so, unless their interests are involved.⁹

This was the general feeling after the failure of the UN mission in Somalia in 1994, when we lost 14 lives, and more so after the Sierra Leone experience in 2001, when the Indian contingent had to be prematurely withdrawn from the mission. Developments in Iraq in the early 2000s and the United States (US) demand for Indian troops for the 'Stabilization Force' also resulted in a public debate in mid-2003 on whether India should send its troops to Iraq.

It is important to remember here that no nation takes part in peacekeeping operations unless its national interests are involved, or it perceives that it will stand to gain in some manner. Professional enrichment of our armed forces, especially the officer cadre, has been a major advantage, apart from the financial benefits accrued to the troops. In addition, whenever India has participated in peacekeeping operations, its world order interests have been enhanced. It has also boosted the nation's standing in the world community. The Indian Army is one of the most sought-after armies for UN peacekeeping operations and undoubtedly, participation in the operations serves India's strategic, national and security interests.

While there are several advantages of participating in UN peacekeeping operations, there is a major limitation on the size of the

contingent which India can provide. The 'operational scenario' along our borders does not permit committing a large-size force for peacekeeping mission abroad, as an emergency can arise anytime. Operation Parakram in 2001–02 is an example.¹⁰

Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK)

India not only has a large pool of UN-experienced officers/personnel but also the facilities and expertise to train and fight in all types of terrain. The CUNPK, established under the United Service Institution of India in September 2000 at New Delhi, imparts excellent peacekeeping-related training to both Indian peacekeepers and those from friendly foreign countries. In the last 20 years, the CUNPK has established itself internationally as a 'Centre of Excellence',¹¹ and is now often called to conduct special courses on behalf of the UN Department of Peace Keeping Operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Role India should Play

As India entered the twenty-first century, there were many in India and abroad, who perceived a significant role in world affairs for the country; which would mean participating in the various peacekeeping operations. If India is to fulfil such a role with any degree of creditability, it is inevitable that it accepts the responsibilities that go with such a role. Given its established professionalism, expertise and competence in the field of peacekeeping, India has a major contribution to make,¹² particularly in context of the fact that, notwithstanding criticism of some peacekeeping missions, as and when the next crisis arises, the international community, as well as the belligerents, will invariably turn to the world body for assistance in resolving it.

Today, India, as an emerging power, is rightly demanding a permanent seat in an enlarged UN Security Council. India has also held the presidency of the UN Security Council from August 2021 onwards. It is imperative that the country fulfils its commitment towards UN peacekeeping tasks, keeping its overall national interests in mind, should it desire to play a major role in the global context.

Implications of Commitment on Operational Preparedness

The operative scenario as pertaining in our subcontinent has been evaluated earlier. Hence, it is recommended that we restrict the force level

of our UN contingent to that of a brigade group in important, complex missions; and in other UN missions, to that of a battalion group.

Further, the Indian commitment for the UN standby force for peacekeeping operations is a realistic approach. One infantry battalion is to be ready to be deployed within 30 days and brigade group less an infantry battalion group within a period of eight weeks from issue of orders.

NOTES

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