UN Peacekeeping in Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2003–2010
An Operational Perspective for Air Power Employment

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Air power has played a critical role in counter-insurgency and irregular warfare across the world. India's own rich experience is full of documented roles of air power in such campaigns. This article documents the unique experience of Indian air power in 'robust' peacekeeping under the United Nations (UN) flag in Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2003–2010. A modelling is attempted to understand doctrinal and conceptual issues of this experience. Lessons are gleaned to improve air power's effectiveness in such less-than-war situations. This is an imperative in light of the increasing importance of protection of civilians during conflicts.

Keywords: *Indian Peacekeeping Model; MONUC; DR Congo; Air power; Robust Peacekeeping*

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: INDIAN AIR POWER IN COUNTER-INSURGENCY

Beginning with the legendary exploits of Dakotas and 'Baba Meher' and his gang of can-do pilots in 1947–48, a feat that saved Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) for India, the Indian Air Force (IAF) has almost

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continuously been involved in less-than-war and limited or low-intensity conflict operations (LICO). A major portion of this has been counter-insurgency or COIN within the Indian borders. The IAF's helicopter and transport fleets have put in yeomen service towards this and continue to do so till date. This has been matched by a humongous effort by supporting echelons of IAF bases and detachments spread across the country. Yet, there is very sketchy understanding and acknowledgement in IAF doctrine of these complex operations.

The IAF's rich legacy of commitment over decades to conflicts that are variedly termed as irregular war, COIN operations, hybrid wars, sub-conventional operations and less-than-war is not too well documented. Recently (a decade or so), some books have covered this facet, for example, *Operation Pawan* (Bharat Kumar), *Operation Cactus* (Ashok K. Chordia), 1962 Sino-Indian War and the post-independence wars with Pakistan. The IAF's experience of United Nations Peace Keeping (UNPK), under Chapter VII, in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) between 2003 and 2010 was unique since it pioneered a new robustness in peacekeeping with the help of air power. This experience can be fleshed out for the conceptual framework followed and lessons within. It could be applicable as a working model to any unified command structure, as is being followed in India. A whole-of-government approach is necessary for these less-than-war scenarios.

IAF's UNPK Operational Experience in DRC

The Indian Aviation Contingents (IACs) in United Nations (UN) missions have truly stood tall among all others in the business of peace. Though nations in the UNPK set-up do not publicly acknowledge other nation's achievements for varied reasons, they have been witness to the will and professionalism displayed by the IAF warriors, which was second to none. Even the Indian Army, deployed since decades, has gone through its ups and downs, including scathing criticism at times. However, report after report, both UN-sponsored and independent, has conceded that even before 'robustness' became fashionable, the IAF had already set benchmarks in terms of ethos, ethics and practices.[1]

All Indian Army deployments in the Congo, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan have documented and acknowledged the critical role that IAF helicopters have played in their success, and very often their survival,

against some of the toughest odds. In fact, if there is a role-model of jointness, it is in these deployments. Two cases in point are DRC and Sierra Leone under UN Chapter VII. The employment included: show of force; close air support; communication; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR); airborne early warning and control capability; target acquisition; combat air patrol; special heliborne operations; and casualty evacuation. Yet, care and calibration ensured no collateral damage in the almost seven years of aggressive peacekeeping in the Congo (IAC-1 and IAC-2) and Sudan (United Nations Mission in Sudan [UNMIS]).

Air Power Employment: Dictated by India's Own Experience

Clear, hold and build have been the timeless principles of counter-insurgency though they may overlap each other or run parallely in different scenarios. Clearing is literally cleaning a designated territory of insurgents, while Holding is about securing the same in terms of safety to the population in general. The 'build' part is more complex and involves consolidation of military successes by building functional institutions, improving governance and improving the local economy. The third leg is where the military effectively needs civil support, and should shed the lead to civil agencies. But local civil agencies may inevitably atrophy without sufficient capacity to undertake development in a conflict-destroyed area. Additionally, political, public and media attention too moves on to other and newer issues once violence statistics have improved.

India's successful handling of many insurgencies with patience, resources and civilian-driven effort has consistently used air power as an enabler. It is worthwhile to model this in a framework, as given in Figure 1. In fact, in DRC, it was this framework around which the aviation concept of operations (CONOPS) and tasking was finalised.

Referring to the model given in Figure 1, Table 1 gives out sequential actions while employing air power in COIN. The numbers (starting from 1) do not denote the sequence but flow out of the centre of the core (population) in the model. This may be an oversimplification since many actions are simultaneous and parallel. Also, complex higher-degree effects force adaptability and many changes in sequence. The dotted lines in Figure 1 are just to differentiate among the different actions along the same path.
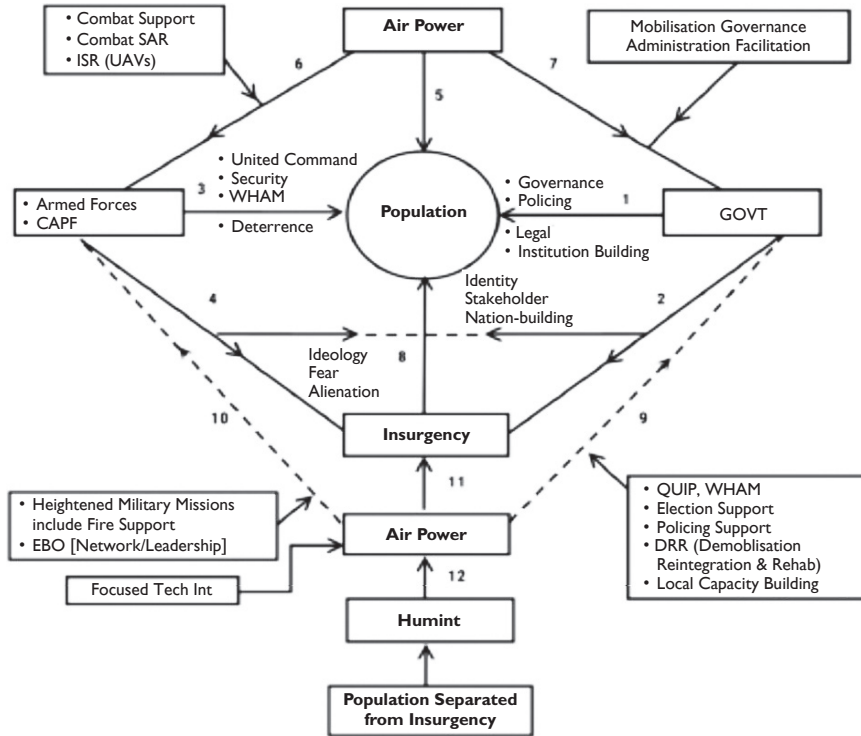
Figure 1 The Indian COIN Model

Source: Author's model based on extensive COIN experience in India, Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and UNPK.

Table 1 Explanation of the Indian COIN Model

Number	Actions and Explanation
1	Action is the influence of governmental agencies and general administration through its mandated actions, including overall good governance, policing (law & order) and institution building (legal, academic, social, etc.).
2	Actions are direct actions by the administrative machinery against insurgents, such as police, magisterial processes and intelligence gathering. The aim is to keep chipping away at the movement and work on those who can be weaned away.
7	In remote and inaccessible areas, air power plays a powerful role in mobilisation and facilitating governance. This includes movements of teams, equipment and requirements to expedite development projects. Move of political figures to 'hot zones' is a critical component of the same.

Number	Actions and Explanation
5	Air power also provides direct and very visible support to the public in terms of medevac and movement of medical teams, as also support during disaster response and management.
3	In large insurgencies where local capacities are not enough to manage the affairs, the military or Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) are mobilised. They form part of the larger matrix of a whole-of-government approach. For example, the concept of unified command in Assam and J&K that was started by General S.K. Sinha (Retd) when he was the Governor in these states.[2] It acts on the populace in terms of providing physical presence, mobility and quick reaction with large and capable forces. This also brings in a component of deterrence as the insurgents fear quick retribution.
6	There is also a large component of 'winning hearts and minds' (WHAM). All these actions are enabled or facilitated by air power by helicopters and transport aircraft. Surveillance and reconnaissance are enabled through specialised electronic intelligence aircraft and helicopter surveys. A core part is providing casualty evacuation or even combat search and rescue from conflict areas, such as ambush sites, by day and night. Combat support comes in the form of air-delivered (landed or air dropped) logistics to sustain operations, quick reinforcements by air and other such innumerable imaginative and innovative uses.
2 & 4	These actions denote all direct missions against the insurgency. For example, 'search-and-cordon' and 'clear-and-hold', which are essentially armed actions, followed by governance elements. Communication infrastructure is a prime target for insurgents to disable the critical capacity of the government. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are a crucial capability in their hands. Till the time this battle is won by government forces, air power plays a crucial part in the clear-and-hold tactics.
8	The entire effort is to separate the insurgent from the populace. This is a core political move other than the concern for collateral damage. Besides negation of the insurgent's tools, such as ideology, fear and grievances, government agencies are armed with tools for nation-building, identity-building and making the public stakeholders in their economic growth. Air power, especially helicopter support, plays a vital part.
9	Once the physical and mental separation has been done, the field is ready for more vigorous and offensive employment of air power. Actions to support governance initiatives include: supporting the political process, such as elections; proactive police actions; enabling

Number	Actions and Explanation
	the demobilising, reintegration and rehabilitation of those who surrender; and local capacity building, especially of the security apparatus. Development efforts, such as quick impact projects, require movement of large equipment by air, for example, bulldozers, earth movers, generators and telecommunication set-ups. Instead of waiting for road/rail infrastructure to come up, aerial delivery kick-starts the whole programme.
10	On the other side, air power is freed to play a more direct role in containing the insurgency, including fire support to ground action, effect-based combined arms operation, taking on time-sensitive targets and targeting various levels of leadership.
11&12	A key to aerial action (11) is targeting information that comes through focused tech intelligence via unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), electronic and communication monitoring and aerial surveys. But the most important source is humint though various agencies that form part of the unified command. The separation of the populace from the insurgent allows free flow of credible information (12). However, the set-up for gathering and analysing is different from the usual joint set-ups that the military is used to.[3] A key requirement is knowledge, familiarity and networking of intelligence analysts who prepare target folders for aerial missions.

Source: Author's own.

In summary, to sustain an insurgency, the insurgents have certain core needs: money; arms, ammunition and explosives; leadership, communications and command and control; and ideology, popular support and sanctuaries. A holistic, consistent and well-resourced civil–military effort tries to take away these elements vital for their survival. The mix of operations includes conventional clear–hold–build operations and special forces action for high-risk targeted operations. An effort has to be mandated to organise, train, equip and build infrastructure for the local police and paramilitary forces. At the same time, a larger effort must go into facilitating good governance and associated infrastructure and capacities. There will be requirement to improve basic services, education, infrastructure, access to food and healthcare to win the battle for the population. This is the essence of the unified command concept.

THE MONUC MANDATE

Military operations throughout United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) were guided by goals

and objectives determined at the highest levels of the UN. The overall direction was by the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) in Kinshasa.[4] In August 2003, the following principal objectives were enunciated by higher UN leadership:[5]

1. Stopping the killing and ending the tragedy of war and conflict.
2. Facilitating political transition leading to free and transparent elections.
3. Working towards the establishment of a rule of law and respect for human rights, which are essential foundations for economic development.
4. Addressing the legacy of war by improving human conditions for sustainable peace.

This vision was transmitted down to all levels of the mission, and was also put out as written intent, orders and guidance in all departments of the Mission. For the military component, these manifested as the Force Commander's direction and intent. For Sector 5 (the two districts of North and South Kivu), these were as follows:

Establish a UN presence in key terrain, evolve mechanisms for local conflict resolution monitor and verify activities of belligerents. Also, provide support to Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration and Resettlement (DDRRR) to create stability within Sector 5.

Specifically, it was to:

1. Establish UN presence in key terrain and areas not accessible to military observers (MILOBs) and civilian UN staff.
2. Establish mechanisms to achieve local conflict resolution, in particular between the factions of the transitional government and armed groups.
3. Monitoring and verify reports of the activities and presence of: Rwandans; uncontrolled armed groups; the humanitarian situation and employment of child soldiers.
4. Support DDRRR through identification, awareness building and support structures, e.g., assembly areas close to areas where combatants and dependants are.
5. Assist where possible with humanitarian operations, human rights and child protection activities.
6. Be prepared to assist with evacuation plans.

7. Conduct civil–military cooperation (CIMIC) tasks to support the mission objectives, including route improvement.

CONOPS

The MONUC was to have an ability to militarily carry out the following missions:

1. Preventive aerial deployment capacity to 'nip-in-the-bud' emergent violence.
2. Monitoring or supervision of a tense situation, stalemate, ceasefire or settlement.
3. Surveillance of cantonment areas, demilitarised zones or buffer zones between warring parties.
4. Supporting any process of peace including disarming and demobilising of the warring factions.
5. Protection and support of humanitarian assistance.
6. Non-combatant evacuation under threat and establishment of protective zones.
7. Support in election-conduct, maintenance of civil order and enforcement of sanctions.

In light of the outlined missions, the Force Commander's operation order directed the following to IAC-1:

1. Carry out tasks that UN civilian aviation cannot undertake.
2. Carry out peace enforcement operations.
3. Protect UN personnel, facilities, installations and equipment.
4. Ensure security and freedom of movement of MONUC personnel.
5. Protect civilians and humanitarian workers under imminent threat.
6. Contribute to improvement in security conditions.

The attack helicopters' roles envisaged to fulfil the CONOPS were:

1. Armed escort to utility helicopters, civilian aircraft and ground convoys.
2. Recce (reconnaissance) missions.
3. Fire support to heliborne and ground operations.
4. Assist in insertion and extraction of troops.
5. Psychological and information operations.
6. Search and rescue operations.

7. Special operations (with special forces).

Those by utility and medium-lift helicopters were:

1. Troop insertion/extraction, including special heliborne operations.
2. Medevac/casualty evacuation.
3. DDRRR (disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement).
4. Psychological and information operations (for example, leaflet dropping).
5. Underslung operations in inaccessible areas.
6. Armed and recce role.
7. Logistics supply.
8. Search and rescue operations.
9. Communication/patrol/observation/recce.

Operational Challenges

Environmental Threats

In DRC, there were very few emergency landing fields due to the undulating terrain, with thick tropical forests. The area was sparsely populated and lacked navigational features. The next threat was weather: very fast-changing and fiery cumulus/ thunderstorm build up during the afternoon hours, leading to heavy and violent spells of rain. This assumed more significance in light of the fact that Mi-25 helicopters were not allowed to cross any international boundaries, even for weather avoidance. Another major hindrance was the near absence of navigational aids. Thus, as there were no aids at many of the airfields in DRC, the aircrew had to rely on the on-board systems only. The greatest threat of all were the belligerents themselves.[6]

As was expected, there were no aerial threats to IAC. However, there were a fair number of infantry weapons and small arms in the hands of the militias. These were used by them during a helicopter's take-off and landing phases. In the first six months itself, three helicopters, one airplane and one fighter aircraft—all but one helicopter belonging to the Interim Emergency Military Force (IEMF)—had been shot at and damaged by renegade elements. Additionally, one Mi-25 of the IAC and one Mi-17 of Bangladesh Air Force were also shot at and hit in the first year itself. As time progressed, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) were used to deter IAC helicopters from operating in critical areas.

Considering the alien flying environment in DRC, IACs had to evolve standard operating procedures (SOPs) on a regular basis, with continuous tweaking to match the situation in hand. Some of these are highlighted next:

1. MONUC was advised to establish UN MILOB sites along routes where no force landing fields were otherwise available.
2. When helicopters were planned for a halt at a helipad, four armed UN soldiers were carried on board for protection.
3. A system of flight tracking was established in parallel to the rudimentary one followed by the UN. This enabled the IAC aircrew to be in continuous high-frequency contact with the base, allowing better situational awareness and reaction times.
4. Regular intelligence analysis and updated briefings were conducted for the aircrew.
5. Mi-17 operations were restricted to out-of-ground effect ops to allow higher power margins for aggressive manoeuvring, with random routing/approaches being mandatory on helipads. Where deemed necessary, an Mi-25 escort was also sent.
6. Mi-25s were given height restriction and defined operating envelopes to stay out of small arms range.
7. All crew carried satellite phones and mobiles to ensure connectivity at all times.

Force Protection

Probably the least glamorous, yet perhaps a most critical component of air power in UNPK is force protection of air assets and manpower, including pilots and technicians. A force can only fight if it survives and retains its combat edge. Thus, the value of aerial assets as enablers and force multipliers makes them prime lucrative targets; amply demonstrated by the LTTE attack on the military airport in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and the attack on a Pakistani naval base at Mehran. Also, in this regard, the returns to belligerents or terrorists far outweigh the risks involved. While MONUC operations were lower down in the spectrum of conflict, in terms of intensity and suicidal motivation of the militia, possibility of a debilitating attack on assets on ground was never far away.

IAC locations at Bukavu and Bunia (Ituri) were well away from population centres. Surrounded by UNPK troops, obstacles, concertina wires, watchtowers, lights and early warning systems, they had depth due to at least two to three tiers of protection. Unfortunately, in the case of

Goma in North Kivu, the centre of gravity of MONUC operations, there was no luxury of choosing the right location. The solidified lava flow of the active volcano Mount Niyragongo and restricted parking area just adjacent to the city's main road meant that every rule in preventive or pre-emptive force protection had to be thrown to the winds. To compensate, an aggressive deployment of Indian troops (armed to the teeth) and a no-nonsense posturing was adopted. Also, following measures, among others, contributed to the overall security and a track-record of no damage ever to static helicopters and their infrastructure.

1. Floodlights focused on key areas with careful attention to location/height and possible interference with other devices.
2. Fortified walls and wire fences were augmented by watchtowers and patrolling.
3. Perimeter security was a combination of sensors (night vision goggles), warning devices and frequent patrols by dedicated teams. The composition of the patrol team and their backpack and mobile communication was a priority as they would have to be the first to neutralise a potential developing threat.
4. The people of surrounding villages and areas were cultivated and kept under continuous surveillance. This was actually a key area.

Personnel and officers charged with security were required to critically review all the existing mechanisms to revalidate their strength and identify weak links. A good mix of technology, intelligence and analysis, training, well-rehearsed procedures and robust physical security allowed for even a determined attack to be thwarted in the early stages of formation. Surprisingly, the UN, while compensating for injuries/death of troops, offers no liability to combat losses to air assets on ground or in the air. In other words, since these military machines cannot be insured, the entire risk of damages/shoot-down falls on the aviation-contributing country. This is a lacuna that the UN HQ has to resolve if it looks forward to professional air power in peacekeeping.

Unique Constraints

There were other unique operational challenges too, including lack of clear distinction lines between actors, existence of multiple armed groups with varying goals and culture, criminalisation of politics for greed and profit, wide-ranging strategies of various actors and targeting of civilians as a norm of the conflict rather than an exception. This melting pot

of diversity was further complicated by multiple international actors and relief agencies, along with their own diverse agendas. The lack of resources in terms of manpower (quantity and quality), specialist units (engineers, medics, special forces, interpreters), armoured personnel carriers, helicopters, UAVs, etc., were all real constraints in the vast expanses of the Congo. Neglect of infrastructure, such as roads, rail and communication, was a method of poor and manipulated governance that allowed unhindered exploitation for more than a century. In fact, the number of advance landing grounds available was only indicative of the exploitation carried out by light airplanes. The only way MONUC could develop any credible presence and deterrence was by adding mobility and firepower to the meagre strength of ground troops. First-class professional aviators and machines of the IACs provided this critical capability, which was to prove as an enabler and force multiplier in the next eight years.

A larger issue was the bureaucratic wheels of the UN systems at New York which could not respond in time to critical assessments of unfolding crises. For example, the Ituri problem in 2003, the crisis in Bukavu in 2004 and the Goma situation in 2006 and 2008 were all foreseen and additional resources were asked for by MONUC. However, in all cases, the clearance and cumbersome deployments happened only after the worst was over. It was quite evident during these eight years that the mandate of wholesome civilian protection from even imminent harm (the core objective) was way beyond the means at hand. Repeatedly, as in the case of fall of Bukavu in 2004, even where the numbers were there, the training, will and indoctrination of troops showed up extremely poorly. In the same crisis, despite the town falling to the rebels for loot, plunder and rape, the only shots fired by the entire UN Brigade of South Kivu were by IAC Mi-25s only.

Even at the mission level, there were problems of bureaucratic inertia and lag. High-tempo operations involving the use of military aircraft, night operations, special forces, attack helicopters, operations with multinational composite units at battalion level with a Chapter VII mandate, all required flexibility in logistics procedures, flight safety rules and aviation regulations. The UN Department of Flight Safety (DFS) had stringent rules for flight safety and operations based more on civil airlines' code of customer-safety first. Therefore, procedures were very inflexible and most of the time, virtually impossible to change.[7] Troop-contributing country rules, for example, IAF rules, could have truly added more teeth and punch; however, DFS and civilian actors could

not be swayed. This did not bode well for a military operational tasking whose key characteristics were flexibility, rapid response and adaptability to fast-changing situations.

<div align="center">Tactical Imperatives</div>

Deterrence

Any deterrence cannot be based primarily of rapid reaction teams organised at certain bases. All fielded units need to possess capacities to deter any mischief or trial of strength by belligerents. Peacekeeping inevitably consists of sudden and unpredictable situations that, if uncontrolled, spiral to higher-order effects. Therefore, UN units on the ground must be attuned to the mentality of lower-level belligerent commanders, who often act on their own. Till the Indian troops arrived, this was lacking in North and South Kivu initially, and had to be compensated by on-call helicopter support, an expensive proposition in itself. However, the Ituri Brigade with mostly South Asian troops learnt its lessons faster and improved on this.

Control

Field experience informs that UN tactical field units and other agencies should have higher protection, mobility and firepower capacities than usual infantry battalions. While there are distinct situations where house-to-house searches and intensive foot patrols require infantry soldiers, and because peace operations are dispersed and generally of lighter weight in numbers, the ability to quickly withdraw or redeploy infantry is essential. Thus, troop transport and helicopter support need to be organic to all tactical units. For example, MONUC's DDRRR campaign started in December 2001 and required tremendous support by the IAC helicopters because of the extremely hostile and unpredictable environment, and the complete lack of roads. DDRRR was targeted at members of foreign armed groups, including Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

Another problem of control in the DRC was the many unregistered aeroplanes flying around carrying, among other things, illegal arms and ammunition. This was probably the most difficult monitoring task of the military. The area to cover was vast and without roads; and constraints of manpower and equipment aggravated the problem of surveillance. For example, a cache of arms seized in Beni during August 2003 was only because the pilot ran out of luck with the weather and fuel. It led to better

coordination and synergising of information from remote airfields at UN nodal points. The plan incorporated quick reporting and response by MONUC, mostly by helicopters.

Elections in 2006 were a litmus test of MONUC's control over the peace process. In addition to the primary function of supporting the MONUC mandate, IACs provided support to the electoral process. As the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) had insufficient assets to manage such a complex operation, MONUC Aviation Section provided logistical support for voter registration, the referendum and both rounds of the elections. The electoral process was extensive and covered over 200 electoral sites across the DRC by air, enabling almost 18 million Congolese to exercise their right to vote in the first round of the elections. While all 11 Mi-17s were pooled in for this huge logistics exercise, Mi-35s provided the necessary deterrent strength in troublesome areas.

IAC Helicopters in Combat

Defence

At a tactical level, defensive combat includes planned withdrawal to better positions under covering screens, etc. Defence of safe havens may also require forward screens, which are enabled by artillery and troops deployed by helicopter units. Rescuing besieged UN or Congolese Army units happened quite regularly in Ituri. However, at least in the initial few years, calls for attack helicopter support were more due to a lack of will to suffer causalities on ground.

Combat

Since consent and pre-agreed manoeuvre are the bottom-line in an UN operation, there has to be care and due consideration before military units are given any freedom to tactically engage.[8] Inevitably this means that UN forces do not have the leeway of being proactive and surprise the 'enemy'. Both attack and troop helicopters helped in alleviating this gap, giving some semblance of a 'surprise' capacity. In the DRC, fortunately, all belligerent groups had such poor records in terms of atrocities on civilians that it was easier to take for granted populace consent and resort to force whenever required.

A good example is the crisis around Goma, DRC, in 2006. On 26 November 2006, in Sake, 25 kilometres from Goma, MONUC established a security cordon to halt the advance of renegade Congolese Brigades (the 81st and 83rd) led by General Nkunda who decided to

attack Goma. But they were in for a surprise with night-attack enabled helicopters ready for them. Mi-35 helicopters flew the first helicopter night-attack sorties in MONUC's experience. IAC helicopters, equipped with advanced night-vision devices, spotted the attackers in the pre-dawn, distinguished them from friendly forces and then played a major role in the ensuing fight.

With the imminent threat of Goma falling to rebels, IAC Firebirds (Mi-35s) were tasked to spearhead the defence of this strategic town and HQ of North Kivu Brigade. The ensuing operations saw the attack helicopters in action incessantly, by day and night, for four days. In the face of a sustained fire by rebels with small arms, mortars and RPGs, they successfully engaged the militia and their command centres with rockets and guns. This timely and effective attack crippled the rebel assault and resulted in securing Goma and regaining control of Sake. The militia could not use tree cover, or other terrain masking, to obscure themselves from the foliage-penetrating Mi-35 FLIR cameras. Soon, the UN and Congolese government forces regained control of the town of Sake, with no dead or wounded from MONUC's side, and displaced civilians of the town began to return.

A contrary example is from 2008 in DRC. Nkunda's troops created another crisis in their efforts to expand influence in the Kivu by threatening Goma again. In spite of efforts to integrate the rebels or National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) into the Congolese Army, Nkunda attempted to create serious disruption. MONUC was supporting a badly led and ill-disciplined FARDC. When Nkunda's troops pushed in the end of October 2008, it looked as if neither the FARDC nor MONUC could hold them off. IAC attack helicopters were very robustly used against CNDP, but FARDC units broke down completely. After hectic diplomatic parleys with Rwanda and threat of a European Union (EU) deployment, Nkunda declared a ceasefire on 29 October 2008.

MONUC did not utilise its forces efficiently, with nearly 4,000 of the mission's 17,000 troops in the immediate conflict zone and only 800 in Goma. It could have, with foresight, redeployed units that were idle all across the DRC. Interestingly, despite written and other frantic parleys by the Secretary-General himself, no North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or EU forces deployed in the manner of Operation Artemis in 2003. The mission and UN came in for heavy criticism for failure to protect civilians. Excuses galore followed blaming faulty ROEs, UN

Mandate, lack of will among UN leadership and poor military cohesion between different forces. However, it seemed to be more a case of justifying the non-deployment of the EU's Battlegroup (rapid reaction).

Uniqueness of the IACs

In many visits by dignitaries over the years to IACs, an often-asked query was on how did the IACs manage to standout with their professionalism, good and balanced risk-taking abilities and commitment to the cause (UNPK) despite, what others interpreted as, flawed mandates? How was it that in crisis after crisis—Ituri, 2003–05; Bukavu, 2004; Goma, 2006; Kivus, 2008–09—IAC helicopters stood out as role models of 'robust' peacekeeping, while other contingents were reluctant to engage aggressively? This point was driven home during the visit of the UN Best Practices Section to India in 2010. Also, during the Indo-US Joint Working Group on Peacekeeping meeting in March 2011, the United States (US) Additional Secretary co-chairing the meet openly expressed the same observations. They were all keen that the IAF share its 'trade secrets' with other aviation contributors. The reasons were multiple, but some issues do stand out.

A long and varied COIN operational experience at home had given a firm foundation to IAF helicopter pilots towards aspects such as the 'larger' political picture in COIN, the dire necessity to reduce collateral and civilian deaths and an understanding of peacebuilding issues and their importance. In the eight years in the DRC, there was not a single case of collateral damage despite innumerable occasions when attack helicopters had to open fire. A total of 2,100 rockets (57 millimetre [mm]) and 1,680 rounds of 23/12.7mm front gun rounds were expended in MONUC by the IACs. This not only called for a good mix of aggressive 'robustness' but also a deeper understanding of issues involved so that there were no 'trigger-happy' issues.

All commanding officers led from the front by being in the thick of things themselves. This set the tone and culture for professional combat attitudes. Admittedly, with only IAF officers in the cockpit, there was a higher intelligence and maturity gradient compared to ground troops. Ultimately, what set apart Indian aviators was careful selection (India has always sent its best to UNPK) and thorough training back home. While supervisors had tremendous experience and good track records, younger ones were chosen for their skill and maturity levels. Compare this with some countries who recruited people for UN duties only three months

before deployment in MONUC and that too from the civil street! The official term used for such troops was 'reservists'.

India's core commitment to peace and the UN does define the overall frame. There were no hidden 'national' agendas and the bottomline was, 'go do a good job'. Decision-makers in the contingents were encouraged to take well-calculated professional risks, and one knew that the IAF would stand by the decisions. This was in complete reversal of the UN mindset, especially civilians who were in the driving seat, whose major and primary thought was self-preservation. Self-defence as a sole motive stood out rather glaringly exposed during the Bukavu crisis in 2004. The only actions ordered and executed were those that protected the UN Brigade HQ and the UN staff. In fact, except by the Mi-25 on two occasions, not one shot was fired in defence of the town which was plundered for almost a week.

Pre-deployment flying and firing training was mandatory where all SOPs were revised. Currency training and range work by Mi-25 aircrew in the mission was demanded from the UN as a prerequisite for armed employment. Despite several hurdles and attempts to stall by the civilian-dominated aviation set-up in Kinshasa, persistence paid off and they were able to hone their skills and, more importantly, accuracies to ensure that 'costly' mistakes did not happen. While precision missiles were available, the UN did not want to use them until the chips were really down. More importantly, MILOBs of various nationalities were rigorously trained by IACs in the nuances of calling-in and directing attack helicopter. This at least helped in better situational awareness of the Mi-35 crew. Inevitably, pilots resorted to close-by warning shots before unleashing their real capabilities.

Targeting policy was complicated not only because of the poor quality of intelligence and analysis but also due to inept control and direction from the ground. Many of the MILOBs and ground contingent officers had never handled offensive air power. While the elaborate and painstaking training imparted by IACs helped, it could not replicate real-life experiences. This void had to be catered to by Mi-25 pilots on mission. A procedure of double verification through dummy runs was required to ensure correct hits. This at times took away the advantage of surprise, and at times led to unintended consequences, such as the helicopter receiving AK-47 bullet holes (Ituri in 2004). Air-to-ground radio contact was mandatory when UN troops called in for airstrikes. On-board recording facilities ensured that necessary evidence to that

effect was available in case of future allegations and inquiries. These measures allowed pilots to do what was needed to be done after SOPs had been followed.

It was important not to get deterred by hits on helicopters in terms of signalling intent. In fact, every hit was followed by suitable retribution on the correctly identified group and in a measured manner. This gave 'credibility' to the capability and mindset of IAC pilots, especially in the psyche of various militia groups. There were also hints of sources leaking out flying programmes and critical information to blunt an attack's effectiveness. Unfortunately, the UN's bureaucratic set-up had no answer or way out of this. However, pilots innovated and a covert system evolved to hoodwink everyone, UN and militia included. Very significantly, as firepower and mobility providers, IAC insisted that it be an integral part of the conceptualising, planning and execution of the 'integrated' peace initiatives. After initial hesitancy, and especially after the dependency on air power had set in, this was institutionalised. Multiple actors, even non-governmental organisations (NGOs), greatly benefited from this contextual understanding of the ground situation by aircrew of IACs.

Operation Artemis: A Comparison

In the second quarter of 2003, after a series of strategic and tactical mistakes by MONUC and UN HQ, a situation of near-genocide magnitude arose with well-armed UN contingents still three months away from deployment. Ituri, and in specific Bunia, was up in flames fluctuating between Lendu and Hema-initiated atrocities. The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, requested France to lead a multinational force to stabilise the crisis. EU saw this as an opportunity to showcase its intervention powers. Operation Artemis had 2,088 troops of which 1,785 were French. The United Kingdom (UK), Belgium and Sweden were the only other EU members to make troop contributions of any size and Brazil sent a few helicopters. Artemis was a short-term success, stabilising the key town of Bunia while taking no casualties.[9]

While this was a cheap advertisement for European unity and military efficiency, the mission under Chapter VII had huge flaws. Artemis had clear goals and a clear timeframe. The IEMF was ruthless and decisive with the help of snipers, machine guns on Gazelle helicopters and Mirage-2000 fighter jets. Anyone with a gun or a threatening posture in Bunia was eliminated. The commander, Brigadier General Jean Paul Thonier, saw his mandate did not include stripping the militias of

their guns, venturing outside the city or getting in the middle of gun battles. Separating the factions was not the mandate, but that was the core challenge being put off. The mandate only required that it provide protection for the civilians remaining in the internally displaced camps around Bunia, and IEMF were to intervene to restore security in case of an outbreak of violence there.

Larger issues were put on hold, such as stabilisation of whole of Ituri under stricter and more accountable UN ROE and bureaucratic control. There was the onerous task to monitor both the borders for nefarious activity by Uganda and Rwanda. Another task was cutting off the arms flow to Ituri, which was a central element to the pacification process. As long as different militias were able to obtain cheap weapons from private means (an AK-47 sold for US $30–$50 in the Bunia market) or from foreign backers, the conflict would fester. There were six to eight known roads, four Lake Albert delivery sites and a dozen airstrips through which weapons suppliers were delivering their cargo. These tasks, including the whole painstaking process of counter-militia action (DDRRR, CIMIC, etc.), were carried out by the Ituri Brigade with South Asian troops and Indian attack helicopters very successfully in the subsequent months and years. Documented successful operations in Ituri, where violence levels, risks and conduct of combat under UN rules stand out in contrast to Western interventions, clearly bring out the difference in approaches.

A similar request by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to NATO/ EU in end-2008 during the Goma crisis did not materialise. The options in Goma were risky—a proposal to use a small EU force to secure Goma airfield, but the danger was that European forces could easily have been dragged into an open-ended wider conflict, with attendant casualties. Despite the let-down by EU, MONUC (Indian Brigade) managed and the crisis was tided over. It seemed as if the SRSG and other civilians had a preference for EU intervention, even if in reality it contributed little to the actual processes.

A true analysis of the Ituri crisis after the temporary and fierce clampdown by the IEMF will clearly highlight the tremendous contribution of South Asian contingents in general, and IAC-1 in particular. Similarly, General Isberg was an utter failure in Bukavu in 2003, yet this reality does not get reflected in the report. Quite often, his only orders were for Mi-25s to open fire, without taking responsibility for what could follow! Therefore, it would be quite naïve to assume UNPK is about noble aims and lofty ideals; the reality is quite hard-hitting. While

today it may seem wishful thinking, in light of the joint operations in the Congo, a South Asian partnership in UNPKs could indeed be very potent in times to come.

<center>ANALYSING ROBUSTNESS IN PEACEKEEPING</center>

Use of Force

Debates over the use of force within the UN have frequently served as a proxy for other issues. For example, in Bosnia, reluctance to use military force was a cover for disagreements among the major powers about their objectives and the continuing absence of a coherent policy towards the conflict itself. Dissecting UNPK experiences of the post-Cold War period, some specialists conclude that the use of force by UN peacekeepers has been marked by political controversy, doctrinal and conceptual confusion and failure in the field.

According to Simon Chesterman, the reluctance of the UN to effectively use force in peacekeeping flows out from its wrong lessons learnt in three interventions, i.e., DR Congo (1960–63), Somalia (1993) and Bosnia (1994–95).[10] This was as it transitioned hesitatingly from the concept of self-defence to defence of the mission. In fact, UN directions in 1995 clearly showed the confusion that self-defence might encourage UN forces to open fire in a wide variety of situations.[11]

Trevor Findlay, one among many critics of the UN's hesitancy in using timely and appropriate force, advocated a newer doctrine to balance effectiveness and own vulnerability. His study includes detailed analysis of case studies such as Bosnia and Somalia which brings out that timing is all important in stopping a cascade effect to build up.[12] But as evident in most instances, debates and prolonged deliberations are proxies for other underlying agendas. Susan Woodward explains this in her book *Balkan Tragedy*, where the hesitation to use force was actually a cover non-alignment of differing national objectives.[13]

According to a popular view, the Secretariat, which survived the Cold War with gifted amateurism, is regularly stretched beyond its capacity. Force commanders, on whom much has depended (a fall guy), have sometimes been chosen with higher regard for nationality than for military competence. This criticism may equally be levelled at SRSG. Peacekeepers themselves have been inconsistent in their actual use of force, though by and large they have been extremely reticent about using any force at all.[14]

Coercion and Consent

Peacekeeping is a matter of consent rather than coercion; of political processes rather than force. However, robust peacekeeping increases the control of area of operations where a crisis is taking place and protects those involved in the peace process. Neither imposing by force nor yielding to force, but protecting and persuading is the ethos of robust peacekeeping. IACs in Congo demonstrated this quite effectively. Time and again, this has been acknowledged at every level of the UN system and by delegations from the US, the EU, etc. In fact, these outfits have been held as role models in their action and conduct in robust peacekeeping.

Notwithstanding performances of the IACs, UNPK has weaknesses at every level of its implementation of action: tactical, operational and strategic. Vulnerable civil population, legality and morality issues of those protecting them, and lack of political will and decisiveness of UN leadership are some of these. The physical vulnerability at the tactical level is a core issue since weak states are less able to guarantee and back up their consent. Nowhere was this demonstrated more vividly than in MONUC in 2003. Chapters VI and VII of the UN Charter give out the political and military procedures for UN involvement in a conflict management situation. Chapter VI establishes a means for dialogue and, if the situation becomes threatening, Chapter VII guides the military action.[15]

Both are complementary in spirit, and the wording of one does not exclude the other. Over time and especially in the post-Cold War period, the idea that peacekeeping operations should not use force, except in exercising the right of self-defence, had become doctrinal. After the failures in Somalia and Yugoslavia, the UN tried to convince member states that this limitation only existed under Chapter VI of the Charter, but Chapter VII gave permission to go further in the use of force. A legally wrong practice of 'robust under Chapter VII' and 'others under Chapter VI' came into being. There is no basis for pleading the distinction between peacekeeping and coercion in the differences between these two chapters. In fact, peacekeeping is not referred to in either of them. It has emerged from the spirit of Chapter VI, but it is only in Chapter VII that the tools of force that it uses are considered.

Chapter VIII of the UN Charter allows the existence of regional arrangements to deal with maintenance of international peace and security. For example, the African Union's Organisation of African

Unity (OAU) can establish own missions but enforcement action needs authorisation by the Security Council.

Key Objectives

Peacekeeping does not actively seek combat for conflict resolution, but it often has to resort to it for self-defence and, in robust situations, to support its action plan of intervention. While resorting to force, certain limitations must be understood. First, peacekeepers must not fail or even seem to fail. As such, robust action is one of the last acts in the play; after that, there may be no other recourse left. The entire international action will have a question mark over it. Somalia is a case in point.

Second, collateral damage to the population and fratricide among different national contingents can easily and gravely dent or even wipe out the painstaking work done in the field. Third, use of force has to be calibrated in a manner that there is sufficient control to pause, stop or pace the action by higher decision-makers. Unlike conventional wars of attrition where the aim is to destroy all capability of the opposing side, avenues for negotiation and exit routes must be always available to all actors. Not having this option can send the situation into an ever-increasing spiral of confrontation.

While the objectives are not to be necessarily achieved by force, a critical requirement for the force on ground is to have the freedom to act in accordance with the mandate. Strictly speaking, the larger political aims of the mandate require control over the crisis area, and this can only happen if the force in being is intact and retains its capabilities. Therefore, robustness in operations must have some primary objectives, for example:

1. The first is the physical safety of the operations, including all those that the UN involves in the process, equipment and support infrastructure.
2. The ROE must be well thought out so that a holistic legal protection is accorded to the robust process. There is also a great moral risk involved when actions of peacekeepers can actually result in greater danger to civilians. This happened in the Congo after the Kimia series of operations by FARDC, supported by MONUC. Legal backing, especially when things go awry, is critical.

3. Area control encompasses force interposition, interdiction of areas, protection of the population, prevention and pre-emption of outbreaks of violence, movement and access control, etc.
4. Participating lightly armed or unarmed observers and troops need to be protected at all costs.

At the theatre level, shortage of forces allows only a weak deterrence posture to belligerents. A case existed for use of pre-emptive and proactive force in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and even Ituri in the DRC. While it is politically difficult for the UN to punish acts of aggression, it has to find ways of preventing them. Unarmed observers and lightly armed interposition units in danger have to be protected from those who threaten them. Peacekeepers existing as rapid reaction reserves only will inevitably reveal the limitations of the force. IACs provided this capability in the DRC in terms of aerial mobility and firepower as quick reaction and deterrence.

Operational Hazards

There are some noticeable threats and weaknesses in the approach to robustness. Some are unaccounted landmines, crossfire between warring factions, intimidation acts and even kidnapping. Then there are direct threats such as random firing, car bombs and explosives, and ambushes. The easy availability of weapons, IEDs, RPGs and others has increased the threat to life and limb of peacekeepers. Some peacekeepers from poorer countries lack training, indoctrination, skills and aptitude to handle such complex operations. Even if the UN provides sophisticated equipment, they are not able to use it due to poor educational background. The training and military experience of peacekeepers vary—for example, from India and those from Uruguay—and consequently their ability to tackle difficult situations.

Decisions on what equipment is to be used are mostly based on UN budget and not necessarily on mission needs. Contributing countries receive compensation and in order to economise, reduced scales are ordered. For example, battalion-sized contingents were authorised to bring not more than 15 armoured personnel carriers to Bosnia, which ultimately proved grossly inadequate. Certain contributing countries may have unresolved issues between them. These issues permeate their military that are trained to treat each other as adversaries. When these contingents are called upon to perform a joint task under the UN banner, distrust naturally sets in and affects the efficiency of the operations as a

whole. Surprisingly, South Asians were an exception to this observation while on UNPK duties, at least in DRC.

RECOMMENDATION

Area or perimeter control of a crisis area needs to be taken on as a prerequisite to stabilising a crisis situation. Since manpower is not unlimited, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations needs to invest in technology. A mission to protect has to have intervention capabilities with required sustenance. Without this, the deterrence value of accountability and retribution will not be credible. UNPK should be thinking of networking in real-time encrypted operational data, which when combined with rapid-reaction capability will enhance intervention. Quite obviously, an information and media plan with sufficient funding needs to be part of this area control strategy. Taking cue from the tragedies of Rwanda and former Yugoslavia, where media had a major role in inciting and organising ethnic cleansing, active control of information must form part of the arsenal to manage crises.

Intelligence collection and analysis suffers at the ground level because of excessive requirements of transparency by the UN, which needs balancing with the military need for security of tactical information. Under Chapter VII, UNPK is akin to low-scale conventional conflict among two well-armed foes; and a principle of war is protecting information to achieve surprise or reduce one's own vulnerability. Today, technology allows a better mix and match of these two conflicting requirements.

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to draw important lessons of air power employment in UNPK, based on the unique Indian experience in DRC (2003–2010). Indian Armed Forces have a long and credible record of success in COIN, which includes employment of air power, since independence. It all started with the famous Dakota sorties to J&K in 1947, which were game changers that saved the state. Indian air power has had a mixed record when operating under the UN flag, for example, Congo, Somalia and Sierra Leone. The most successful forays abroad have been the IACs from 2003 to 2010.

The article starts with encapsulating the Indian concept of air power employment as a model that clarifies main actions and interlinks them.

It is a simplified model to understand the complexities involved. Actual COIN is far more complex, with many higher-degree effects and after-effects that force adaptation at all levels. The article then moves to the actual mandate of MONUC, which evidently seems to be a tall order, and perhaps undoable. In fact, till date, these lofty objectives have not been met.

A practitioner's look at operational challenges brings out the vast scope and multiple variables that posed serious constraints for the mission. These include environment threats, force protection and other unique DRC-specific considerations. Tactical imperatives, namely, deterrence and control, have also been studied with examples from the deployment. Keeping all these in mind, the article then explores as to why IACs' 'robustness in peacekeeping' was unique. Examples from combat and defensive tasks bring out that prior experience and skills of aircrew, a larger Indian ethos of ethical conduct and 'jugaad' of circumventing UN bureaucracy contributed largely to its success. A comparison with the earlier EU Operation Artemis brings out the stark differences in levels of commitment to civilian protection in such missions.

It then goes on to analyse the reasons for non-robustness on ground by many nations, including complexities such as differences in perception of use of force, coercion and consent, key objectives and risk assessments. Some recommendations are made that can contribute to enhancing civilian protection in UNPK, especially in areas of force protection, networking and intelligence collection/dissemination.

Improving Civilian Protection Strategies

The duty to protect needs to be the main criterion rather than self-defence. At the same time, resources and capabilities should be sufficient to handle all contingencies and adverse fallouts of a robust and decisive posture.[16] A force that cannot survive or act freely will not be able to protect. Therefore, crafting of a reasonable, correct and doable mandate is the key. It also supposes that at the strategic level, mechanisms and procedures exist that allow deployments and reaction to any grave risks a mission's peacekeepers may face.

<div align="center">N O T E S</div>

1.   This is based on the numerous reports from the offices of Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Force Commander and others of United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic

of the Congo (MONUC) during the stay. For example, in 2003–04, it was only Indian attack helicopters that opened fire while entire MONUC land forces stood by undecided and paralysed. Many official reports at Air Headquarters (HQ) cite these, but are not available in the open domain.

2. Subir Bhaumik, 'Insurgencies in India's Northeast: Conflict, Co-option, and Change', Working Paper No. 10, East-West Center, Washington, July 2007; and Praveen Swami, 'For a Review of Counterinsurgency Doctrine', *The Hindu*, 13 April 2010, available at http://www.thehindu.com, accessed on 30 December 2020.

3. Sanjay Barbora, 'Rethinking India's Counterinsurgency Campaign in the Northeast', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 41, No. 35, 2006; and S.P. Sinha, 'Counterinsurgency Operations in Northeast—I', *Indian Defence Review*, 5 June 2011, available at http://www.indiandefencereview.com, accessed on 30 December 2020.

4. Rajesh Isser, *The Purple Legacy: IAF Helicopters in Service of the Nation*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2012, pp. 234–268.

5. The entire orders given next flow almost verbatim from the directives of the MONUC SRSG and Force Commander in 2003, which was put into the report to Air HQ by the author. It may be found in MONUC Archives.

6. Rajesh Isser, *Protection of Civilians: IAF Helicopters in the Congo*, New Delhi: KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2012, p. 89.

7. MONUC Aviation Section at UN website details these very inflexible rules framework, which mostly enables a tail-clear/no-responsibility attitude.

8. J.M. Guéhenno, 'Robust Peacekeeping: Building Political Consensus and Strengthening Command and Control in Robust Peacekeeping', in *Robust Peacekeeping: The Politics of Force*, New York: Center of International Cooperation, November 2009, pp. 7–11.

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12. Trevor Findlay, *The Use of Force in UN Peace Operations*, Oxford: SIPRI & Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 223, 271.

13. Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1995, p. 378.

14. P. Sartre, *Making UN Peacekeeping More Robust: Protecting the Mission, Persuading the Actors*, New York: International Peace Institute, July 2011.

15. UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 'General Guidelines for Peacekeeping Operations', UN Doc UN/210/TC/GG95, October 1995, available at www.un.org, accessed on 20 October 2020.

16. UN, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* [*Brahimi Report*], UN Doc. A/55/305/-S/2000/809, 21 August 2000, accessed on 25 October 2020.