

India and the United Nations Peacekeeping

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Abstract

The author with his extensive experience in United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping writes that Peacekeeping is a 50-year-old enterprise that has evolved rapidly in the past decade from a traditional, primarily military model of observing ceasefires and force separations after inter-State wars, to incorporate a complex model of many elements, military and civilian, working together to maintain peace in the dangerous aftermath of civil wars. He brings out the differences between peacekeeping and peace building and brings out that strong military capabilities are a must for peacekeeping while continuity and civilian expertise is best for peacebuilding.

Introduction

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 peace operations commencing with our participation in the operations in Korea in 1950. Over the years, India provided commanders, military observers, staff officers, contingents, and, in later years, civilian police to many of the UN missions deployed to keep the peace in various parts of the world. The use of armed military contingents was first authorised by the UN Security Council (UNSC) for deployment with the UN Emergency Force in the Gaza Strip and the Sinai, after the Arab-Israeli war in 1956. From 15 November 1956 to 19 May 1967, eleven infantry battalions from India successively served with this force, total of over 13000 all ranks. The initial success of this force

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led the Security Council to readily accept a request by the Republic of the Congo in 1960 for intervention, on attaining independence from Belgium, for which India provided two successive brigade groups during the period 1960-64.

Since then, Indian contingents have been part of UN peacekeeping operations in Cyprus, Namibia, Cambodia, Mozambique, Somalia, Angola, Liberia, Rwanda, Congo, Sudan/South Sudan, Lebanon, the Golan Heights, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia/Eritrea, and so on. As it happens, India has participated in every peacekeeping operation in Africa, except the current one in Mali.

Capacity Building for the United Nations

India has a somewhat unique and enviable record in terms of the contribution for training of UN peacekeepers today. A Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK) was established under the United Service Institution of India in September 2000 at Delhi, with support from the Ministries of External Affairs and Defence, and Army Headquarters. Since then, this Centre, besides overseeing the training of contingents earmarked for peacekeeping operations, undertakes/conducts training courses for our sub-unit commanders, military observers, and officers earmarked for deputation on staff appointments. It is a measure of our commitment to the UN that a minimum of fifteen vacancies on each of the international courses that are conducted (about twice a year) are offered to developing countries, with all expenses incurred on travel from home country and back, training, accommodation and meals borne by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

A number of developed countries like the USA, UK, Australia, Japan, Norway, Singapore etc. also subscribe to these courses on a self-financing arrangement. It is indeed a matter of great satisfaction and pride that, in the last twenty years, the CUNPK has established itself internationally as a Centre of Excellence, and is now often called upon to conduct specialised international courses on behalf of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), as also joint initiatives with other countries and with international organisations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Dilemmas and Challenges of UN Peacekeeping Today

In preparing ourselves for continued participation in UN peacekeeping operations into the 21st Century, we must take into

account the radical changes in the nature of the peacekeeping commitment. 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; where constitutional authority does not exist in many cases or if it does, there is limited control.

In such situations, today's peacekeepers are not only required to keep the warring parties apart to the extent they can but are increasingly called upon to undertake peace-building operations; 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 infra-structure like roads, railways, bridges, and to support electoral processes.

Protection of civilians has become a mandated task for almost all UN peacekeeping missions deployed these days; a task with many ramifications that need to be understood by the political and military leadership. There is a great deal that can be stated on the subject but for the purpose of this paper, a few important points are made. Use of force for protection and implementation of the mission mandate was first resorted to in the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) in the early 1960s. As mentioned earlier, India had two successive brigade groups in that mission and this was used to launch combat operations against mercenaries and Katangese rebels led by Moise Tshombe. In the process, the Indian contingent suffered a number of fatalities (36) and many more injured (124). Hence, this is not a new concept or phenomenon. But it needs to be carefully calibrated and located within a credible political framework, both locally and internationally. This invariably poses problems because of inadequate political support to missions that are set up. Regional players, as also the major powers, pursue their own agenda that in many cases do not necessarily complement the mission mandate.

The use of force demands that appropriate resources be made 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, the developed world), are not participating in UN peacekeeping operations. If UN

peacekeeping is to remain effective, the developed world must return to the commitment. And this should go beyond the present arrangement of seeking positions in senior management and command, to provision of 'boots on the ground'. The connotations of the use of force must be clearly understood by Security Council members who mandate it, the staff at UN HQ, and by troop contributors; and the concept imaginatively evolved. Peacekeepers must be mentally and physically attuned to the fact that the use of force will mean inflicting casualties on belligerents, and that casualties may well be incurred by members of the force. Following up on the views expressed above, this author is of the view that there is an imperative need for troop contributor countries like India to deliberate, analyse and address the following three issues in context of the calls being made for deployment of UN peacekeepers:

- To deal with terrorism.
- To prosecute operations under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) regime.
- Peace-building being mandated as a task for UN peacekeepers.

Deployment of UN Peacekeepers to Deal with Terrorism

On the issue of use of UN peacekeepers to deal with terrorism, there would be no disagreement with the postulation that dealing with terrorists attacking UN peacekeepers deployed in a mission area is one thing while the Security Council mandating the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force to deal with terrorism in a member state is an entirely different issue. To buttress the argument about dealing with the former situation, the author's personal experience provides an example for what our approach should be. A few months after his return to the rolls of the Indian Army in March 1993 having declined an offer of extension in the assignment as the Head of Mission and Force Commander of the UN mission in the former Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR), the Government of India and Army Headquarters were grappling with the task of putting together a brigade group sized force for deployment to Somalia as part of a UNSC mandated peacekeeping mission following the withdrawal of the US led forces that had been deployed there without achieving the intended results.

General Bipin Joshi, who had by then taken over as the Chief of the Army Staff (and incidentally had experience as a young staff officer in the rank of Captain in United Nations Emergency Force in the Gaza Strip and the Sinai in the early 1960s), asked for any suggestions in context of the author's recent experiences. The only recommendation that will be related in context of the current discussions is the one the author made about equipping the contingent. In context of his personal experience in UNPROFOR (where he incidentally did not have any Indian personnel under his command other than one staff officer), he advised the Chief that while we may take note of the list of items of equipment the contingent was expected to take with it, and for which the UN HQ would reimburse costs, we should ensure the contingent was equipped with enough 'muscular' capacity to deal with anyone who dared challenge its authority. As a consequence, the contingent went in not only with its normal complement of personal and support weapons and ammunition but with a troop of tanks, a battery of heavy mortars, and a couple of attack helicopters. In the event, their presence certainly conveyed a message to the local fighters. A bunch of renegade fighters who tried to take on a patrol was given such a lesson that no further attempts were made. As it transpired, the tank troop did not have to fire a single round of tank ammunition, nor did the heavy mortar battery go into action; but their very presence and the message conveyed that they would be used if required was deterrent enough.

The attack helicopters came in handy ironically in a situation that called for providing assistance in extricating elements of the Pakistani contingent that was under attack. Hence, there is no question that should 'spoilers', 'renegades', 'terrorist groups' etc. engage our troops in the course of execution of mission tasks, they must be dealt with as in combat situations; given an option to surrender, or eliminated. Needless to say, this also calls for support to the troops and contingents from the top military and political leadership against the ubiquitous human rights activists.

The author's reservation on the subject is about calls at various forums in recent times for the UN Security Council to mandate deployment of UN peacekeepers to deal with terrorists operating within member states. In my view, should there be a need for the UN to deal with such contingencies, the Security Council should mandate a Chapter VII enforcement operation under

a regional organisation or a lead country; in which case, combat operations using all means at the disposal of member states should be launched against the organisation or group. The problem really is that the powers that have the clout in the international arena including the UN (namely the developed countries that have the trained manpower and state-of-the-art equipment resources) invariably try to avoid having their hands tainted by participating in such interventions, and, hence, try and palm these off to the developing countries to handle under the convenient façade of UN peacekeeping. It is time that countries like India call this bluff.

Deployment of UN Peacekeepers under the R2P Regime

There is an increasing tendency within sections of the international community to try and cloak some interventions, and possibly UN peacekeeping missions, under the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) regime. As someone who was a member of Kofi Annan's High Level Panel that recommended the adoption of the concept in the 2005 World Summit, the author's personal view is quite unambiguous – R2P is not for UN peacekeeping. If there are situations of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity that the international community determines merits action, it is for the Security Council to mandate intervention in terms of Chapter VII of the UN Charter by military forces under the aegis of a regional organisation or under a lead nation. It is not only hypocritical but positively unacceptable that the powerful countries that run things at the UN try and avoid this responsibility by dumping it (as for dealing with terrorism) on the developing world, again under the façade of UN peacekeeping. In rounding off this observation, a quote from a book written by a fellow member on the High Level Panel, and former Foreign Minister of Australia, Gareth Evans – 'The Responsibility to Protect, Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All' – at the Brookings Institution in 2008 is relevant. He states, "The divide between the Western world and the developing countries is somewhat starkly and possibly ironically highlighted by the fact that three major instances where R2P intervention could plausibly have been justified on strong humanitarian grounds, since they protect people seriously at risk from the actions of their own governments, were categorised as intrusions on sovereignty. The first instance was India's action in December 1971 in East Pakistan where large scale genocide and displacement was occasioned by the brutal suppression of

the local population by the national authorities. The second case was Cambodia where Vietnam's actions brought to a halt the atrocities inflicted on the population from 1975 to 1978 by the Khmer Rouge. The third case was Tanzania's overthrow in 1979 of the murderous Idi Amin regime in Uganda. One cannot but cynically conclude that the Western world labelled these instances as aggression because the actions were initiated by developing countries".

Peace-building Being Mandated as a Task for UN Peacekeepers

The decision to make 'peace-building' part of the mandate of UN peacekeepers is a retrograde step because whereas there is little doubt that military personnel are more than capable of undertaking peace-building activities when required, and have done so to great effect on many occasions, it is not a task they should be additionally burdened with. Firstly, they are not trained for it; and secondly, the fact that they move out of the mission area on completion of tenures of six months or a year makes them unsuitable for tasks that require sustained effort over a prolonged period. This is a task for other UN agencies organised for the purpose, and international/regional governmental and non-governmental organisations that have been set up, funded, and mandated for just that sort of work. It was, therefore, with good reason that in defining the elements of peace operations, the Brahimi Panel Report clearly enunciated that "United Nations peace operations entail three principal activities: one - conflict prevention and peace-making; two - peacekeeping; and three - peace-building". And went on to state that "Long term conflict prevention addresses the structural sources of conflict in order to build a solid foundation for peace. Where those foundations are crumbling, conflict prevention attempts to reinforce them, usually in the form of a diplomatic initiative. Such preventive action is, by definition, a low-profile activity; when successful, it may even go unnoticed altogether".

Conclusion

Peace-making addresses conflicts in progress and attempts to bring them to a halt, using the tools of diplomacy and mediation. Peacemakers may be envoys of governments, groups of states, regional organisations or the United Nations, or they may be unofficial and non-governmental groups, as was the case, for example, in the negotiations leading up to a peace accord for

Mozambique. Peace-making may even be the work of a prominent personality, working independently.

Peacekeeping is a 50-year-old enterprise that has evolved rapidly in the past decade from a traditional, primarily military model of observing ceasefires and force separations after inter-State wars, to incorporate a complex model of many elements, military and civilian, working together to maintain peace in the dangerous aftermath of civil wars.

Peace-building is a term of more recent origin that defines activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations, something that is more than just the absence of war. Thus, peace-building includes – but is not limited to – reintegrating former combatants into civilian society; strengthening the rule of law (for example, through training and restructuring of local police, and judicial and penal reform); improving respect for human rights through the monitoring, education and investigation of past and existing abuses; providing technical assistance for democratic development (including electoral assistance and support for free media); and promoting conflict resolution and reconciliation techniques.