

Robust Peacekeeping Operations, Rapid Deployment Capability for the UN : An Indian Perspective

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Following the end of the Cold War, there have been an increasing number of conflicts of ethnic and religious character resulting in the disintegration of states and a general condition of uncertainty and instability in several regions. Armed terrorism across international frontiers constitutes a serious new threat to peace and security. It has become even more dangerous with the possibility of terrorists gaining access to Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Even so, many of the conflicts and tensions now prevailing in different regions of the world could have been anticipated and their aggravation prevented through timely diplomatic action under the aegis of the UN. It has, therefore, become imperative to enable the UN system through appropriate machinery of collective action to anticipate potential conflict situations and to initiate suitable preventive measures.

We are passing through a decisive stage in the history of the international system. Though the threat of war between great states or nuclear confrontation between the erstwhile Soviet Union and the USA are well behind us and in fact fading in our memory, new and diverse constellation of threats, some clear and present, others only dimly perceived, test our resolve and question the validity of our existing mechanisms. Developments at the international level over the last three and a half years have exposed deep divisions within the membership of the United Nations over our fundamental policies on peace and security. They included debates on how best to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and combat the spread of international terrorism, the criteria for the use of force and the role of the Security Council, the effectiveness of unilateral versus multilateral responses to security, the notion of preventive war, and the place of the United Nations in a world with a single super power.

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

There is a unanimous view that meeting the challenges of today's threats means getting serious about prevention. The consequences of allowing threats to spread or become active are simply too severe. And in that context there is no difference of opinion that development has to be the first line of response for a collective security mechanism that takes prevention seriously. Preventing wars *within states and between them* is in the collective interest of all of us. If the international community is to do better in the future in this context, the UN will need real improvements in its capacity for preventive diplomacy, mediation and conflict management. The international community needs to make genuine and concerted efforts to protect democratic governments from unconstitutional overthrow, and for protection of minority rights. The trends towards expediency in this regard must be reversed. And there is a need to work collectively to find new ways of regulating the management of natural resources, competition for which often fuels conflict.

The use of force should only be considered after all other options have been exhausted. And the fact that force can be legally used does not always mean that it should be used. In this context, the mechanism of preventive deployment would appear to be a useful tool. Even so, there can be little argument that prevention sometimes fails. And when that happens, threats will have to be met by military means. The UN Charter provides a clear framework for the use of force. States have an inherent right to self-defence, enshrined in Article 51. Long-established customary international law makes it clear that states can take military action as long as the threatened attack is imminent, no other means would deflect it,

and the action is proportionate. Equally, Chapter VII of the UN Charter provides the international community represented by the Security Council, with the authority to deal with situations where military force needs to be applied against an errant state that resorts to aggression against another member state.

The aspect that merits attention is that notwithstanding the fact that the recommendations of the High Level Panel (HLP) on this issue have not been endorsed in the outcome document adopted at the recent UN summit in New York, it would be advisable for us in India to factor such a contingency into future deliberations and planning. Personally, I am convinced that the international community will almost definitely be faced with situations that call for preventive use of force, sooner rather than later. It may, therefore, be prudent for the establishment and the strategic community in India to apply itself to the merits and de-merits of such use of force. Should there be consensus that there is need to plan for such contingencies, some mechanisms would need to be formulated for consultation, coordination, joint training, and so on with the USA, European Union (EU), Russia, Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), African Union (AU), Japan, and may be even China.

There continues to be much discussion and deliberation on the aspect of the 'responsibility to protect' in context of the fact that state sovereignty is still very important, particularly to the developing countries that have emerged from colonial rule not too long back. Notwithstanding all the developments at the global level, the concept of state sovereignty remains at the root of the international system. Even so, there is some consensus that in this day and age, such sovereignty cannot be absolute. The emerging norm of a collective responsibility to protect civilians from large-scale violence has been endorsed: a responsibility that lies first and foremost with national authorities. When a state fails to protect its civilians or is incapable of doing so, the international community would appear to have a responsibility to act, through humanitarian operations, monitoring missions, and diplomatic pressure; and with force if necessary as a *very last resort*. And in the case of conflict or the use of force, this also implies a clear international containment to rebuild shattered societies.

There is some disquiet in developing societies that perceive this as yet another attempt by the more powerful members of the

developed world to impose their value systems on the weaker states. In extreme cases even to the extent of threatening use of force to put pressure on what are seen as uncooperative governments in developing states, and to enable use of force to effect regime change. Some reassurance is, therefore, necessary. And in any case, the criteria need to be not only seen as genuine and objective, but effected after detailed consultation and coordination.

Here again, there is need for us in India to deliberate on whether or not we should be part of such processes. In which case we should evolve mechanisms for consultation, coordination, joint training and so on with like minded countries and regional organisations. I am of the view that we should be pro-active on this aspect as we may well be called upon to take the lead role in the immediate and extended neighbourhood.

Deploying military capacities for peacekeeping and enforcement has proved to be a valuable tool in ending wars and helping to secure states in their aftermath. But the total global supply of available peacekeepers is running dangerously low. From indications available today, just to do an adequate job of keeping the peace in existing conflicts would require almost doubling the number of peacekeepers around the world. Developed states have particular responsibilities to do more to transfuse their armies into units suitable for deployment to peace operations. And if we are to meet the challenges ahead, more states will have to place contingents on stand-by for the UN purposes, and air transport and other strategic lift capacities to assist peace operations. There is no greater legitimacy for the use of military forces, and for that matter, civilian police, than for the maintenance of international peace and security. It should, therefore, be a matter of honour and privilege for countries to provide forces for such peace missions. However, the practical experience in this context is invariably rather dismal. The inordinate delay in the arrival of troops in the mission area is always a most frustrating feature of the missions that are being set up. It is in recognition of this basic inadequacy that rapid deployment forces like the Nordic Sherbrig, the European Union Rapid Deployment Force, the proposed sub-regional rapid deployment capability of the African Union, and so on have been, or are being, considered.

One of the measures instituted by the United Nations to overcome this inadequacy is the earmarking of "stand by" forces by member states. This is most commendable and needs to be pursued with vigour. As on date, this arrangement apparently provides for about 100,000 personnel pledged by about 75 member states. However, it is a moot point whether such "stand by" forces would, in fact, be available immediately on demand. The Rwandan experience indicates that political expediency and domestic compulsions will invariably dictate the responses of member states. Therefore, while the arrangement must stand, it would be pragmatic to work on the assumption that forces under this arrangement can only be put together in a certain time frame; namely about three to six months or so. And that too, subject to political acceptance by member states. To expect forces any earlier is unrealistic under current conditions.

There is little need to stress the point that a military force of modest dimensions (together with police and other civil affairs and humanitarian aid personnel) inserted into a conflict zone as soon as some semblance of agreement between belligerents is negotiated, can achieve much more in terms of implementation of the terms of the agreement, than a much larger force introduced three to six months later. During which period, the political situation within the affected country can change dramatically, hostilities may well have resumed, and the ground situation much changed reducing the chances of peaceful resolution. If that is so, inhibitions about having a suitably organised, structured and equipped force that is readily available when required, would seem to be misplaced. In context of ready availability of forces for United Nations peace operations it would appear that the only real answer for meeting crisis situations that call for speedy deployment of military forces, civilian police, and some civil affairs and humanitarian aid personnel for the maintenance of international peace and security, is to raise and maintain a Standing United Nations Rapid Deployment Force.

During the deliberations of the High Level Panel, I had suggested that we recommend the creation of such a force. Whereas there was support from a few members of the Panel and general endorsement of the concept in principle, a number of members felt that such a proposal was unlikely to receive general endorsement of member states of the UN on grounds of costs of establishing and supporting such a force, as also on grounds of

political acceptance of the idea. I find these postulations quite unconvincing. In my view, reluctance to endorsement of such a concept particularly by the more powerful countries of the developed world is primarily because they would not like to see their own influence and ability to manipulate events diluted by the provision of such ready capability to the United Nations. To that extent, I am of the opinion that much of the talk about strengthening the UN and making it more effective is rhetoric and symbolism. The point I make is probably underscored by the fact that the developed world has shown increasing reluctance over the last few years to providing militia personnel for the UN peace operations particularly in difficult missions in Africa. Governments of developed countries of the Western world seem to prefer making available their well-equipped and trained forces to North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) or EU sponsored interventions even in missions outside their area of operations, to complement the UN operations rather than being part of such operations, on grounds that they provide the required muscle.

In context of ready availability of forces for United Nations peace operations, it would appear that the only real answer for meeting crisis situations that call for speedy deployment of military forces, civilian police, and some civil affairs and humanitarian aid personnel for the maintenance of international peace and security, is to raise and maintain a Standing United Nations Rapid Deployment Force based on the following parameters :-

- (a) It would be best if a division size force with a headquarters is raised. However, the minimum appropriate composition in military terms would seem to be about a brigade group.
- (b) In addition to military personnel, it should have a civilian police component, some civil affairs personnel and personnel with experience in humanitarian aid activities.
- (c) It should comprise volunteers from the militaries and police of member states deputed for a fixed tenure of not more than two or three years. Personnel would serve in their individual capacities. Hence, member states would have no liability in regard to their employment or the conditions of service. The political connotations regarding possible casualties to personnel in the conduct of operations would, therefore, not be the same as for such casualties occurring within national contingents.

(d) To preclude the possibility of the force suffering from the infirmities of lack of initiative and accountability perceived within the UN system as it exists today, it is imperative that, no individual in such a force be allowed to serve more than a maximum tenure of three years. They must revert to national duties after the deputation without exception.

Existing variations in training standards, communication problems, command and control aspects and effective coordinated action, are to be addressed by ensuring the following:-

(a) The force be organised, equipped and trained as a single entity under the aegis of the UN and be so located as to be available for immediate deployment in full or in part, when authorised to do so by the Security Council. Reservations about costs, and possible biased utilisation at the behest of the more powerful members of the Security Council, are aspects that need to be resolved in context of the restructuring of the Security Council.

(b) Transportation into the proposed mission area should desirably be provided by those countries in the developed world that have the capability. For which purpose the desired capability should be earmarked and kept in stand-by readiness.

(c) When the members of the force are not deployed in operations they should be deputed to assist in the training of personnel and contingents of member states and provision of advice.

The deployment and employment of such a UN Rapid Deployment Force must be premised on the following conceptual parameters:-

(a) Ability to deploy into a mission area within 15 days of a Security Council decision, which means the commander of the force and some of his staff must be associated with the negotiation and decision making processes. In many ways, practical military advice to the Security Council should be forthcoming from these quarters in addition to inputs from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

(b) Should transportation resources not be forthcoming from those member states that have the capacity, the UN

Secretariat may well be asked to charter resources from private sources on payment.

(c) This UN Rapid Deployment Force or part thereof, must be replaced by a regularly constituted peacekeeping force put together from the "stand-by" capability set apart by member states. In no case should this replacement take more than six months. The elements of the force then revert to earlier "rapid deployment" status.

(d) A few key members of the force, military, civil affairs and humanitarian aid personnel, may well be temporarily left behind for some period of time to assist the regular peacekeeping force components in settling down to the mission tasks.

Notwithstanding all that has been suggested in preceding paragraphs, it may be appropriate to make abundantly clear that the United Nations Rapid Reaction Force as proposed is not intended to be a war fighting apparatus nor is it a private army of the UN Secretary General. Equally, it may be important to make clear that the formation of such a force in no way detracts from the institution of such capability at the regional and sub-regional level; as visualized by the African Union for example. In fact, with some coordination and understanding there could be scope for complementing each other's efforts.

India's contribution to UN peacekeeping is a matter of recorded history and continues to be more than significant even today. Our competence in this very visible arena of UN activity is being recognised even by the USA that is trying hard to understand and come to terms with this form of military and police utilisation. We should exploit this to our advantage not only by continued participation in UN operations but also by offering to assist emerging troop contributors and providing expertise where required. The Department of Peace Keeping Operations (DPKO) is already calling on us to conduct training courses on their behalf. We should readily respond to such requests without reservations and insist on adequate representation at the UN Headquarters and on decision-making mechanisms there. In addition it may be worth our while to keep preferably a division sized force or at least a brigade group strength including the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Indian Navy (IN) elements as a standing force to respond to UN requests without delay when called upon to do so. Such a force could also

be utilised for a regional or sub-regional requirement should such a requirement arise.

I am of the view that India has a vital role to play in establishing regional or sub-regional capability for the conduct of peace operations. Given the situation on the sub-continent it appears unrealistic at the moment to presume that such a role is possible within the framework of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). However, that should not preclude the deployment of Indian forces for the conduct of peace operations within the framework of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) or even the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) should these organisations decide to undertake such responsibilities. It may be useful for our decision makers in the establishment to factor this into their calculations. And in this context the suggestion made earlier in the paper for the earmarking of a division size Rapid Deployment Force may find some resonance.

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