

India and Capability Building of UN Peace Operations

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Abstract

India has been in the lead in troop participation in some of the most difficult peace operations. Despite its contribution and the supreme sacrifices made, India and many other countries, who are the major contributors, have not received their rightful place in the United Nations (UN). On the other hand, important policy decisions are always made by the permanent members of the Security Council and a few other influential nations. Earlier, India was among only a few Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) whose participation in peacekeeping was considered crucial for the success of the mission. With the increase in the number of TCCs from the Global South participating in UN peace operations, India seems to have lost its leverage. Therefore, the question that arises is what else can be or should be done by India beyond troops' participation, to get recognition for its decades-long contribution to UN peace operations.¹

Introduction

Angry over the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)'s failure to stem violence in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the local population attacked the UN compound on 25 July 2022, resulting in the death of three UN peacekeepers, at least five civilians, and some 50 wounded. According to media reports, the local population in the troubled eastern region of DRC was mad over MONUSCO's failure to protect the civilians who suffer the most amidst the rebel armed groups' turf war. The protest

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coincides with the resurgence of the M23 group which was targeted by the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in 2013.² Russo calls it the crisis of confidence and crisis of legitimacy of the UN among the local population.³ Dayal reported this as a crisis of consent by the local population.⁴ UN peace operations in DRC, South Sudan, Mali, and the Central African Republic are a few of the current missions that have been under the radar for the plight of the local population and their perception of the peacekeeping missions as failing in its duty. This story, however, is not new. UN peacekeeping has been often criticised for its failure in several past missions. The UN had undertaken several studies seeking to reform the way peacekeeping is conducted to make it more effective. The Report of the Panel (commonly known as Brahimi Report) and Report of the Independent High-Level Panel on Peace Operations are the landmark reports of the past few decades.⁵ Amongst others, both these reports recommended rigorous reforms of UN peacekeeping. There can be several reasons why peace operations either succeed or fail.⁶ These are known to the Secretary-General, the senior officials of the secretariat, and the member states. The organisational constraints of the UN that paralyse the Security Council in taking a crucial decision, on either preventing a conflict or finding the appropriate tool for halting and preventing to spread the conflict, also hinder peacekeeping reform.⁷

With 193 members, the UN is the world's largest multinational and multi-polar organisation. In the tug of war between multipolarity and multi-nationality, because of the way the UN Charter was formulated, multipolarity comes out as the winner. As for peacekeeping, the decision taken by the Permanent Five (P5) members that rule the multipolarity organ generally is not always the best. The mandate is decided following the traditional Pen Holder system of the Security Council and the budget allocation falls short directly impacting the mission.⁸ Besides, those who make policy decisions and can make a difference, rarely participate in difficult peacekeeping operations. Currently, out of 12 peace operations, the most dangerous and complex missions are in Africa and TCCs that participate in these missions are from the Global South.⁹ Therefore, the recommendations for reform, unless in the interest of the powerful nations, will be consigned to the UN archive.

However, despite the lack of consensus among the P5 members, there has been some progress in making peacekeeping

more effective. For example, mandates are now stronger, and the peacekeepers are also better equipped and well-trained. There is also a move to engage the TCCs as part of the consultation process while the missions are on their way. But, the peacekeeping missions not being able to come up to the expected standard seems to be the common view of everyone. Hence, the question arises, what else can be done to enhance the peacekeeping missions' ability to return peace to the conflict zone and reduce unnecessary bloodshed. The answer is to build the capacity and capability of peacekeeping for better performance.

Capacity and Capability Building

Capacity and capability, even though distinct, are interrelated and confusing. According to Fishel, "capacity is a capability that is sustained over time; a capability is a function of equipment, personnel, support, information, and doctrine."¹⁰ It is however, difficult to state which comes first. For example, International Peace Institute (IPI) white paper submitted that capacity building and training partnerships can produce institutional capabilities.¹¹ The basic difference, therefore, is that capacity is measurable in terms of volume and quantity and is explained in terms of how much is available or how much is required. On the other hand, the capability is somewhat abstract working towards the competence of the organisation. When seen in the context of the performance of the military, the number of soldiers, equipment, and supporting infrastructure etc, fall in the category of capacity. Accordingly, how a military outfit can contribute towards enhanced performance will be the capability. To avoid confusion, this article uses both capacity and capability interchangeably.

Armed forces need the adequate capability to achieve their objectives. Even though defined differently, there are three elements common in their definitions. These are *wherewithal*, *the means to overcome temporal and physical challenges*, and *performance standard*. What comprises capability also varies from one organisation to another. The components as depicted by the US and Columbian Army seem more practical to apply in the context of capability development of peace operations. These are doctrine, organisation, training, material and equipment, leadership, personnel, and facilities.¹² Following such an explanation, the strength of the peacekeepers, the standard of their training and

equipment, and the available budget to support the mission can be used to assess the capacity of the mission. Lack of adequate strength and budget are the often-cited reasons to explain mission's failure to deliver on the field. As explained earlier, there can be several causes for failures. Factors like the mandate, absence of a comprehensive peace agreement, failure of the leaders at strategic and operational levels, absence of workable policies, etc. are also equally responsible for UN peacekeeping's failure to contribute effectively. Therefore, it would be logical to conclude that despite having good capacity, a peace operation may not have the capability to deliver because of organisational constraints. At the same time, building the mission's capability within the limited capacity is still possible. Building the capability of the peacekeeping mission is a shared responsibility between the UN HQs and the TCCs. TCCs shifting the onus on the HQs, however, is the current trend. Even then, despite the challenges of the organisations, the major TCCs can contribute to the capacity building of the peacekeeping mission. For example, it is not only the Secretary-General who is obliged to take the initiative to make peace to prevent a conflict. It is the moral duty of the member states to put their best foot forward and contribute towards resolving the conflict. If conflict resolution is not possible, the member states can at least join hands to prevent a conflict from arising and stop the spread of an ongoing conflict. In the following sections, how three components of capability building out of many, – leadership at the strategic level, the role of the TCCs in mandate formulation, and doctrinal development can act as enablers towards capability building of UN peace operations would be discussed.

Capability Building at Strategic and Operational Levels

At the apex level, outside the security council's constraints, the Secretary-General's personality and the initiative that he or she takes can make a difference in the trajectory of a potential conflict or end the ongoing conflict. This is better understood in the context of the Agenda for Peace in 1992, which was introduced by Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992. He underlined the need to use peace-making to remove the source of danger that could produce conflict, engage in peacekeeping to resolve issues that have led to the conflict, and stand by to assist in peacebuilding in different contexts.¹³ And in the largest sense, to address the deepest causes of conflict. It is the art of maintaining a balance between three arms of the

concept of the Agenda for Peace – peace-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Since these three elements are not sequential, they work in tandem in the conflict zone with weight from one arm shifting to another depending on the situation. UN peace operation in Cambodia is an example of maintaining a good balance of this triangle. Peace-making was done by the French, peacekeeping was done by the peacekeepers, and most of the peacebuilding activities were undertaken by Japan, Australia, and France. Therefore, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) is often quoted as a successful mission.

However, the same cannot be stated for most contemporary peace operations. In the present day, drawing examples from the Ukraine conflict, I have alluded in one of my earlier articles to what could have been done (including the use of preventive diplomacy) to prevent Russia from invading Ukraine and what still can be done to end the conflict.¹⁴ The idea of ‘Preventive Diplomacy’ was first articulated by Dag Hammarskjöld in the 1960s and it was officially introduced to the UN as part of the Agenda for Peace in 1992.¹⁵ Besides the Secretary-General, it was, and still is, possible for the other world leaders (who are friends of Russia and Ukraine) to act as enablers for building the capability of the UN and help bring an end to the conflict. This way, being unable to do anything other than adopting a near-unanimous resolution of the General Assembly that condemned Russia for invading Ukraine, the UN would not have been castigated because of the paralysis in the Security Council.¹⁶

In war, there is loss of life and destruction. But to a few, other than economic benefit, it is also an opportunity to take the lead to help return peace even if the real motive may only be in the national interest. There was one year time for the UN (Secretary-General) and the world leaders, when Russia dropped paratroopers near the Ukraine border on 21 February 2021 and until the actual invasion on 24 February 2022, to initiate preventive diplomacy and may even consider preventive deployment to prevent the conflict.¹⁷ Intriguingly, that window was lost. The world kept talking about the invasion much before the actual invasion. A few European leaders tried but, after all, Russia looks at Europe with suspicion. As for non-European nations, Prime Minister Modi told President Putin during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit at Samarkand, in September 2022, that this is not

the era of war but democracy, dialogue, and diplomacy. While such a public position was widely applauded, it could have made much difference had it been done earlier or followed more vigorously. As the Ukraine war seems to be heading for a stalemate, if there is a quest for a larger geo-political role, this is an opportunity for India to be more relevant and find better acceptability at the international level. For example, President Erdogan was the lead negotiator with the UN Secretary-General to persuade Russia to agree to unblock Ukrainian ports to allow grain export.¹⁸ While Turkey may have leverage that is strategically more important to Russia, India's special bond with Russia is something that could have been well exploited.

The list of the elements that can contribute to the capacity or capability building of UN peacekeeping is not exhaustive. In the short term and at the operational level, the TCCs from Global South, like India, can think of enhancing the contribution of the enabling units like engineering construction units, hospitals, air assets, demining teams etc. and share intelligence. These assets can make an effective contribution towards peacebuilding as well. Even though the combat engineers generally don't undertake humanitarian demining other than operational demining, the TCCs can always encourage their national NGOs who are already working in this field. What's important is that the TCCs can identify such assets, encourage them, and support their cases in UN HQs. Regarding intelligence sharing, gone are the days when the word 'intelligence' was considered taboo. However, for intelligence sharing, the contributing countries will have to build their national capability first. Besides, even non-substantive elements like the mandate and doctrinal development are a few areas, where there is a good scope for the TCCs' contribution to enable the UN peace operations to deliver.

The Mandate and Setting the Stage for Capability Building

Mandate formulation continues to remain in the domain of the P5 members. The mandate always suits the political and strategic interests of the P5. This, however, can change by raising the collective voice of the TCCs (other than the P5) when they are part of the Security Council and forcefully argue their case. For this, the national representatives of the TCCs must be well-informed, and convinced, about the need for their peacekeepers.

To cite an example, one can refer to the structure of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) post-2006 war. One of the mandated tasks of UNIFIL is to, "Assist the Lebanese armed forces in taking steps towards the establishment of the area as South of Litani River free of unauthorised arms other than those of the Government of Lebanon and UNIFIL".¹⁹ It implies that it is the responsibility of the Lebanese Armed Forces to disarm the unauthorised groups and UNIFIL is only in the assistance role. But how does UNIFIL assist unless it is well-equipped and well-armed? A correct interpretation of this task and close consultation between the diplomats and the respective military of the three European TCCs probably would have led to the decision of the Security Council to allow France, Italy, and Spain to be armed with heavy armaments which are rare in the UN. What follows from here is the need for frequent and closer bilateral interactions amongst the uniformed peacekeepers, including former peacekeepers with experience, and the diplomats of the TCCs of the developing world to deliberate subjects of common interests, in addition to the meetings of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping (C-34). Inputs from such interactions between the uniformed peacekeepers and diplomats at multiple levels would strengthen the hands of our permanent representatives at the UN when they flag the case of the TCCs of the Global South. Essentially, it is about the diplomats and the uniformed peacekeepers talking and listening to each other so that our collective voice is heard by the Security Council.

Doctrinal Development

UN has issued policies and guidelines on possibly all kinds of subjects. There are, however, gaps in most of the peacekeeping-related policies. There are ambiguities that impact the outcome of the peace operations. The policies are periodically revised. Member states also participate in their revision or updation. How it is related to capability building is best understood with help of a recent example of the initiative of western nations. Effectiveness of Peace Operation Network (EPON), coordinated by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) besides assessing the effectiveness of peace operations, undertakes theme-based studies and research on peacekeeping. Their two recent studies were based on Climate

Change and the Protection of Civilians and were presented to the UN during EPON Week from 10 to 12 May 2022.²⁰ The quality of research by known academicians from different parts of the world was good. The studies were presented to the UN Secretariat for it to take forward. This is called capability building of UN peace operations based on a regional-specific narrative.

Sadly, such initiatives are rare in the case of most TCCs that contribute the most to peace operations. In general, other than the western nations, the culture of intellectual contribution is generally lacking in the case of most TCCs. India is a case in point. To illustrate, for not being able to fully help in return of peace (even though the reasons for such shortcomings are beyond the control of the UN), the peacekeeping mission becomes the first victim of such failure and the target of the media. Besides, since the capable developed member states rarely participate in difficult peace operations, peacekeepers from the Global South are the fall guys. But how the peacekeepers put their lives in the line of fire rarely comes out in the open. For example, during the Israel-Lebanon war of July 2006, only Indian and Ghanaian peacekeepers ventured out to pick up the injured civilians amidst the Israeli shelling of South Lebanon. Likewise, in DRC, in October 2006, Indian peacekeepers launched a heliborne operation and apprehended the Chief of Staff of the militia group Mai Mai.²¹ In South Sudan, when an internal communal clash broke out in Malakal on 18 February 2014, Indian peacekeepers, disregarding their safety, positioned themselves between the armed groups and explained to them that there are better ways to reach an agreement using means other than violence.²² There are many such untold stories of the bravery of Indian peacekeepers. What, however, gets picked up is what the UN could not do. For example, the inaction of the Indian peacekeepers during the Kiwanja massacre in DRC in 2008 was highlighted in the media. Other reports, though, have clarified that in addition to logistical technical constraints, there were only 6000 peacekeepers in North Kivu who were to cover a huge area of roughly one peacekeeper every 60 sq. km. Apart, from having to rely on information from the hostile government forces, the peacekeepers were already tied down to protect a few humanitarian workers.²³ But lack of correct input makes it difficult to provide a counterargument to such bad press and in public debates. Therefore, it will do good for the image of Indian peacekeepers by encouraging academicians and

scholars to bring to the notice of the public the tales of the bravery of Indian peacekeepers in the conflict zones. Besides, it will help to inject the idea of intellectual contribution to UN peacekeeping among Indian academicians.

However, the Security Council resolution on protecting the protectors is a positive development as it was introduced when India held the post of President of the Security Council. One of the reasons for peacekeepers shying away from using force to discharge their moral obligation is the fear of retaliation and the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of violence against peacekeepers. This is discouraging and demotivating. Since 1948, more than one thousand peacekeepers (1091) were killed and more than three thousand (3037) have been injured. Out of these, around a third of fatal casualties (310) and seriously injured (1021) is from 2013 until now. On 18 August 2021, the Security Council adopted resolution 2589.²⁴ This resolution called upon the member states hosting or having hosted UN peacekeeping operations to take all appropriate measures, by their national law and international law, as applicable, to bring to justice the perpetrators of the killing of, and all acts of violence against UN personnel. In notable developments, a Malian court convicted nine individuals (in March 2021) for attacks committed against United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2015. In Lebanon, the court convicted one for kidnapping and killing two Irish peacekeepers that took place as early as April 1980. Overall, there has been substantive progress in investigation and prosecution measures. Even though impunity still prevails, such development is encouraging. Implementation of such a policy entirely depends on the consent and commitment of the host state. Therefore, in care of those host states which are not very supportive of the deployment of peacekeeping for whatever reason may be, translating the commitment into actionable deeds will be full of challenges.

Conclusion

The need to develop the capability of UN peace operations has been the focus of most academic discussions in peacekeeping reforms. Training, capable peacekeepers, adequate strength, advanced technology, and administrative support, the role of UN leadership and the developed nations not participating in complex peace operations generally are the main themes and sub-themes

of such discussions. Capability building is a shared responsibility, and it is time for major troop contributors to peacekeeping like India to invest more in areas other than the troops' contribution. Engaging in peacekeeping training with other TCCs from the Global South is one such platform that can be effectively utilised for the member states to come together. For example, to bridge the gap in the standard of training among the peacekeeping contingents in the complex peace operations in the African region, the Triangular Partnership Project was launched in 2015.²⁵ Besides India, Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and now Bhutan are the other TCCs of the Global South that contribute to some of the most difficult peace operations in Africa. The model of the Triangular Partnership Project can be used as a gateway by these TCCs to launch a similar project. Even if it is not supported by the UN, the exchange of peacekeepers in peacekeeping training would in turn help to align the TCCs' thoughts in creating a stronger collective voice of the Global South. When the diplomats and military agree to talk to each other and cooperate, intellectual contributions like research in peacekeeping, raising the collective voice of the Global South demanding their legitimate right in policy changes too can contribute towards the capability building of peacekeeping beyond troops' contribution. A large percentage of the contribution of uniformed peacekeepers to the increasingly dangerous conflict zones is a leverage of the TCCs from the Global South which many western nations lack. Skilful leveraging of such collective power, even if sometimes questioning the very need for such peace operations, would help them attain their rightful place at the strategic level besides making a meaningful difference to the capability building of UN peace operations. There is already potential in TCC like India. All that is required is to ask, engage, and cooperate to make a difference.

Endnotes

¹ In this article, UN peacekeeping and UN Peace Operations are used interchangeably

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