

UN Peacekeeping Operations: Relevance and Indian Contribution?

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General

The recent Israeli shelling outside UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) camp for refugees in Rafah has once again highlighted helplessness of UN to deal with complex security situations like in the Middle East and Ukraine. There have been debates in various think tanks and academia globally, whether the UN is effective enough to handle such complexities or otherwise. The volatile situation in the Middle East and Ukraine once again brings to focus that various countries react to a crisis situation as per their own national interest; hence there is a need for an effective global recognisable organisation, which could be seen as a neutral body to broker peace in such complex situations. Although Peacekeeping Operations were never envisaged in the original UN charter, these have got evolved as the flagship activity consuming bulk of the UN budget. Since 1948, UN Peacekeepers have undertaken 69 field missions.¹ Currently, there are approximately 98,755 personnel serving on 17 peacekeeping operations led by UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO), in four continents, with an annual budget of \$7.83 bn. This represents a nine fold increase since 1999. A total of 122 countries have contributed military and police personnel to UN peacekeeping. India continues to maintain its commitment in assisting UN in the maintenance of international peace and security, and continues to participate in large numbers in the peacekeeping missions; hence a cost benefit analysis of the scale of Indian participation is worth consideration.

Relevance of UN Peacekeeping/Peacebuilding in Global Context

It is a matter of fact that there is no other alternative organisation, with as much recognition and membership of various countries, which has stood the test of time and has a large number of missions of various kinds to its credit, for global role. UN peacekeeping is not as costly as it appears to be, as it costs only 0.4 per cent of world military expenditure, despite being the second largest deployed military force in the world. Bulk of the peacekeeping missions are in areas, where there are bright chances of conflict arising again. The fact that there has been no third world war, and no recognisable cold war in the recent past, some credit for it should also go to the UN as well, although a number of scholars would relate it to a large number of other factors, including cases where regional organisations like Organisation of African Unity (OAU) have brokered peace, and the UN has carried out only monitoring role. The idea of global policing by the US or regional policing by the Regional powers is a very dangerous option marred by individual agendas of these countries. Hence, the relevance of UN exists, however her future roles can be debated in light of various limitations of Peacekeeping Missions like; limited mandate, conflicting interests of member countries, lack of identifiable parties/viable political process in affected areas, financial and resource constraints etc.

Today a large number of countries are facing asymmetric threats and are trying to contain/combat these on stand-alone mode, despite acknowledging that such problems (especially terrorism) have regional and international linkages. The problem is more acute for certain nations, who do suffer from such problems, but do not have adequate resources and instruments of state power to fight the same. Thus, there is a need for the UN to take initiative and convince the member states to formulate a global strategy to fight these threats and concerns, which would entail political and diplomatic actions, and enhancing the scope of peacekeeping operations to include stronger and wider mandate. Although it is understood that the UN should not 'bite more than what it can chew' but it is high time that the international community sensitises itself to future challenges to peace, and make global effort to address these global concerns, with global deliberations in a synergised manner.

In the past, the majority of the UN's attempts to strengthen its mission and organisational effectiveness have been hampered by its own members, due to lack of political will to adhere to the body's action agenda. For example, the ineffective deployments of peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) and Sudan (UNMIS)² was caused due to lack of will on the part of a large number of UN members to provide well trained troops to ensure effectiveness of the operations. Thus, the relevance of UN is well established; however it's strengthening to be an effective actor needs generation of the political will amongst the member states.

Relevance of UN Peacekeeping Operations in Indian Context

India has a proud history and stands committed in assisting UN in the maintenance of international peace and security right from the time of its Independence in 1947 (UN was established on 24 Oct 1945). India has contributed, the largest number of troops from any country, exceeding 170,000 troops,³ a significant number of police personnel, participated in more than 43 missions. India has also provided eminent hierarchy in DPKO and continues to provide eminent Force Commanders for various UN missions. India has so far, provided one Military Adviser, one Police Adviser, one Deputy Military Adviser, 14 Force Commanders, and numerous Police Commissioners in various UN missions. The first all women contingent in peacekeeping mission, a Police Unit from India, was deployed in 2007 to the UN Operation in Liberia (UNMIL). Indian representatives also worked on the 'High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change' of the Peacebuilding Commission, and India was reappointed thrice into Organisational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Currently, in 2014 India is the third largest troop contributor country with 7,860 personnel deployed with ten UN peacekeeping missions including 995 police personnel. The high standards of performance maintained consistently by the Indian troops and policemen deployed on UN missions, under challenging circumstances have won them high regard worldwide. Recently, Indian Peacekeepers were lauded by the UN for their efforts in preventing carnage in the South Sudan conflict, which resulted in the supreme sacrifice by two Indian soldiers. While serving under the blue flag, 156 gallant Indian soldiers have made the supreme sacrifice to bring peace and harmony to the world so far.⁴ Our gallant soldiers have been conferred with one Param Vir Chakra, six Mahavir Chakra, Two Kirti Chakra, 20 Vir Chakra, nine Shaurya Chakra, four Yudh Seva Medal, and numerous other awards in UN Missions⁵ so far.

Why Should India Contribute Troops to Peacekeeping Missions to the Extent it has done so far?

- (a) India has been a consistent propagator of peace everywhere in the world. Participating in such actions demonstrates Indian commitment to peace.
- (b) We need to have strategic footprints in certain areas of the world, where we have strategic/economic/energy/ multilateral interests. We need to tap every possible source of energy to grow. We also need to build confidence of Indian diaspora, working in various parts of the world, affected by disturbances of various kinds. Deployment of peacekeeping troops may be one of the means to do so.
- (c) We can create tremendous goodwill with the parties to the conflict, host nation and the countries with whom our contingents are serving. Our “Quick Impact Projects” to win the hearts and minds of people may further improve our relations with affected countries, furthering military diplomacy.
- (d) If we do not send troops, some of our adversaries can take a lead and send troops in certain areas, which may not be in our strategic interest.
- (e) Few strategists feel that being one of the largest troop contributing country may help in our claim for permanent membership of Security Council. This is a misnomer because not very many permanent members of Security Council have made noticeable contribution as troop contingents, although they do occupy sizeable important appointments in UN staff. No one really appreciates or gauges the claim to permanent membership of Security Council, by virtue of being the largest troop contributing nation.
- (f) Troop contribution to UN does generate certain amount of foreign exchange into Consolidated fund of India, in terms of reimbursement of Certificate of Entitlement (COE), which can be gainfully employed for modernisation of own Armed Forces. The pay and allowances of 7860 troops and reimbursements of equipment is not a sizeable amount, considering the size of Indian economy, and should not influence strategic decisions of India.
- (g) It also gives international exposure to our officers and troops thereby improving professional experience.

Cost of such Contributions for India

The troops deployed for UN peacekeeping role may not be available at a very short notice to deal with any misadventure by any of our adversary in conventional/asymmetric operations in own country. Non availability of troops deployed for UN peacekeeping for conventional/CI operations has corresponding reduction in our deterrence value. India is raising and equipping its Armed Forces at a very heavy cost to meet external as well as internal security challenges. There also exist huge shortages of manpower and equipment to meet our optimum requirements. It, therefore, does not support the argument of sending troops for UN, when Indian Armed Forces themselves have shortages.

The shortage of troops deployed for UN Peacekeeping role, more so in areas with continued deployments, has an adverse impact on increased tenures of various units in counter terrorism operations and high altitude areas within India which indirectly leads to inconvenience to them, by shortening of peace tenures essentially required for training.

While we all are proud of supreme sacrifice of 156 Indian troops and their gallant actions, and the nation has appropriately recognised and rewarded them; but, we need to ask a question to ourselves; is such a sacrifice worth it, especially in areas where no recognisable Indian interest is being served? We need to have a re-look at our policies to convince ourselves whether casualties occurring due to firefight between various terrorist groups at places, where India has no worthwhile interest are really worth it or otherwise? Can we convince the relatives of these martyrs that their son/daughter has sacrificed himself/herself for the motherland?

In most cases Indian contingents have been initially deployed under Chapter VI of the UN charter, but invariably they have to go prepared for undertaking a role under Chapter VII, which involves additional deployment of equipment and resources. In a large number of situations, the approved mandate under Chapter VI has been found to be grossly inadequate to effectively deal with some critical situations, which has resulted in sub optimal employment of full combat potential of our Armed Forces, resulting in poor results, and a criticism of professionalism of Indian Armed Forces, who had to deal with the situation, with one hand tied behind their backs. While the affected population has unrealistic expectations from peacekeepers, the interested parties at times question their impartiality, and in such a condition any awkward incident brings unnecessary criticism to professionalism of the Indian Army.

Conclusion

Since the Second World War UN has proved itself to be a credible global organisation in contributing to world peace, which has no worthwhile alternative, and has a large number of successful missions to its credit. It also has some limitations like inability to effectively curb nuclear proliferation and unilateral military actions by some of its members. It also needs to enhance its role to synergise global fight against terrorism. UN needs willing support of all its members in the interest of world peace.

India is proud of her contribution to the UN for world peace in peacekeeping, as well as peacebuilding efforts, and should continue her support towards that, but a realistic cost benefit analysis should be carried out to analyse the implications, before contributing troops for future peacekeeping missions. India should participate and deploy troops where she has some strategic interest and wants to leave some strategic footprints, besides earning goodwill. In hindsight, there have been many instances, which force the military scholars to think that the troops deployment for peacekeeping and the casualties sustained did not serve any worthwhile strategic interest of India, in many cases. We need to weigh and be sure that the level of strategic interest served by contributing troops for peacekeeping for future missions as and when asked for, justifies taking on casualties, if the need arises. Sending military contingents only for strengthening the claim for a permanent seat in the Security Council or earning foreign exchange is not recommended.

Endnotes

1. UN peacekeeping operations fact sheet 31 May 2014, accessed from <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/bnote.htm> on 28 Jul 2014
2. Weiss, TG Forsythe (2009) 'What's Wrong with the United Nations and How to Fix It', Cambridge : Polity Press.
3. Op. Cit. Factsheet.
4. Statement by Ambassador Asoke K Mukherji, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations at the UNSC Open Debate on "Security Sector Reform : Challenges and Opportunities" on 28 Apr 2014.
5. Indian Army United Nations peacekeeping missions from Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia.
<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/ppbm.pdf>
<http://www.un.int/india/india%20&20un/peacekeeping.pdf>

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