

India's Peacekeeping Legacy: From Tradition to Innovation

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) continues to perform an essential function in preserving world peace and security because this globe is entangled in complex conflicts - and at the same time - instability is on the rise. The UN uses Peacekeeping as a tool to ensure peace in war-torn areas where they deploy their personnel for purposes that include post-war reconstruction, safekeeping civilians after conflicts, and monitoring ceasefires. India's participation in international peacekeeping missions started shortly after gaining independence in 1950 when it sent its first contingent to Korea. This initially consisted of a paramedical unit and subsequently custodial staff whose role was to provide medical support and assist in evacuation as well as guard prisoners, respectively. Following the ceasefire, India assumed the chairmanship of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission. Since then, India has participated in 49 out of the 71 UN peacekeeping operations conducted worldwide^[i]. As a founding member of the UN, India has provided over 300,000 troops to various missions till date.

India is no longer just a country that assists in providing health care. It is instead a significant force in engineering, plays a military role and ensures important civil security. When Congo had difficulty in the '60s, Indian soldiers played a significant role in pacification and facilitating the talks of warring blood parties^[ii]. This track record of remarkable achievements is still there today, emphasising its position as a dependable partner committed to global peace. Furthermore, creative approaches like establishing the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK) in New Delhi underscores India's commitment to strengthening international peacekeeping operations via training. The centre provides specialised training to about 13000 personnel annually drawn from different countries globally, including India. There is a strong focus on training in promoting international cooperation in peacekeeping efforts so that the peacekeepers are prepared to face difficult situations. India's commitment towards peaceful conflict resolution, community development and humanitarian relief matches the shifting goals of UN peacekeeping deployments with a particular focus on non-state actors and regional conflicts, which are increasingly common.

Historical Background^[iii]

India's engagement has shifted dramatically since it joined UN peacekeeping mission's years after gaining independence in 1950. Its initial contributions were driven by a commitment to UN values, an act that has seen it become one of the longest-serving participants in global peacekeeping efforts. Some significant tasks that underscore the progress of Indian involvement in maintaining international peace include:

- **Middle East (1956–1967).** Indian infantry battalions served with the UN Emergency Force (UNEF I), which was established in 1956 to maintain peace in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis.

- **Cambodia (1992–93).** Indian soldiers participated in the country's first General Election (conducted freely and fairly). They were part of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which was playing a role in the decline of the Khmer Rouge regime.

- **Somalia (1992–1995).** Despite tough operational challenges, India ensured safe food distribution and facilitated humanitarian assistance during a devastating famine.

- **Rwanda (1993–1994).** Before the genocide, they had Indian troops deployed there who helped ensure peacekeeping and provided essential help to refugees.

- **Angola (1989-1999).** Besides an Infantry Battalion group and an engineer company, India contributed number of military observers and Staff Officers, in various phases of UN Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM). Indian troops contributed immensely in success of this mission.

- **Sierra Leone (1999–2005).** Disarming rebel groups and protecting civilians during the war was a crucial responsibility of Indian soldiers.

- **Liberia (2003–18).** The first all female Formed Police Unit (FPU) from India played a significant role in building confident communities and ensuring security.

These missions serve as a testament to India's dedication to maintaining global peace and security and show how its contributions have changed over time. India has always adjusted to the shifting nature of international wars and peacekeeping requirements, from providing early medical help to taking on entire peacekeeping tasks. This development highlights India's standing as a dependable and creative UN peacekeeping partner.

India's Traditional Approach to Peacekeeping

India has traditionally been content with the UN peacekeeping strategy of monitoring and separation and use of force of deterrence (Krishnasamy, 2010)^[iv]. Early on, Indian peacekeepers looked to monitor ceasefires and deconflict buffering zones to keep the fighting parties away from each other and create an atmosphere conducive to negotiations. It was a way to appease resentments, which frequently turned lengthy deployments into an end rather than a beginning to service adjustments. The coercion strategy focuses on the size of forces and the threat of force to prevent unrest. India has played a significant role in that model, seeking to deter violence by projecting a large military. Nonetheless, this mostly missed the point regarding political and social solutions and did not generate sustainable peace.

Faced with these constraints, India started arguing for change in peacekeeping. Methodologies used in the past could not account for local cultural and historical contexts. Understanding particular local histories and observations became more critical due to India's experience and cultural diversity. Furthermore, India has started to utilise technology to beef up peacekeeping. Each spans a range of solutions that leverage surveillance, communication systems and data analytics to enhance situational awareness and operational efficiency. Secondly, India seeks to develop more understandable and sustainable solutions rooted in local knowledge and integrated with technological advancements, solutions, like R2P (Responsibility to Protect) itself, focus on addressing the root causes of conflict rather than their symptoms.

Recent Contributions and Innovations[\[v\]](#)

India still ranks highly among some nations offering military service to UN peacekeeping operations. It helps maintain world order and prevents wars. Indian troops have moved from the usual services to new ways of solving modern peacekeeping issues. Indian troops in South Sudan have established medical camps and provided vital medical care to both people and animals in addition to upholding security. India's knowledge of the interdependence of health, stability, and peace is demonstrated by its all-encompassing approach to conflict resolution.

Technology plays an increasingly vital role in India's peacekeeping strategy. Indian engineers have introduced mobile Bailey bridges to improve transportation and logistics in conflict zones, facilitating the movement of people and goods. Acknowledging the increasing risk of cyberattacks in conflict areas, India has put up a novel proposal that seeks to create a framework for member-state collaboration in addressing cyber risks in peacekeeping operations. This proactive strategy shows India's understanding of how warfare is changing and its dedication to taking on new challenges in the field of peacekeeping.

India's influence goes beyond its military strength. The introduction of India's first all-female Formed Police Unit (FPU) in Liberia in 2007 demonstrated the country's commitment to gender equality and social inclusion[\[vi\]](#). These female peacekeepers motivated local women and girls, monitored marketplaces, and fostered trust throughout the community.

India is dedicated to fostering communication and peace among the society. Establishing long-lasting peace and averting the recurrence of war need this people-first strategy. It is a key player in determining the direction of UN peacekeeping missions by fusing military might with humanitarian endeavours and creative solutions.

Challenges and Opportunities[\[vii\]](#)

In a climate of escalating violence in war zones, numerous challenges have plagued UN peacekeeping, and there are now calls, including from India, for a review of the peacekeeping strategy of the Security Council.

- **Unclear Mandates.** UN peacekeeping operations frequently face resource shortages and ambiguous mandates. This might result in "mission creep", a situation where the mission's initial parameters are not met, putting Indian troops at risk and increasing discontent. For example, despite having a sizable force presence, the South Sudan mission (UNMISS) has come under fire for failing to protect people.
- **Justice for Crimes Against Peacekeepers.** Growing terrorist organisations and assaults on peacekeepers have raised the stakes in terms of security. These kinds of attacks have been directed at Indian peacekeepers, and protecting them is a top priority. To address impunity for such atrocities, Ruchira Kamboj (permanent representative of India to the UN) urged the Council to press host countries to put Resolution 2589 of 2021 (focuses on protecting peacekeepers) into action, highlighting the necessity of ensuring justice for peacekeepers who have lost their lives in conflict.
- **Political Tensions.** Some African countries, where a large number of Indian troops are stationed, are concerned about possible neo-colonialism and Western powers' domination in the field of peacekeeping. India must consider these concerns and make sure that, despite its significant contributions, its position aligns with African interests.
- **Lack of Influence.** India's ability to influence peacekeeping missions is restricted due to its status as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. This can be problematic since India could be sent on missions with ambiguous objectives or little funding.

Exploratory Opportunities

India is still dedicated to peacekeeping despite these obstacles. Here are a few potential future scenarios:

- **Better Training.** India can concentrate on preparing its troops for the novel difficulties of intricate operations. This might entail protecting civilians, handling internal problems, and receiving counterterrorism training.

- **Pushing for Reform.** India may push for changes within the UN to guarantee sufficient funding, establish clear mandates, and give nations that provide troops a greater voice in decision-making.
- **Innovating with Technology.** India might investigate the use of drones and other technology developments to increase situational awareness and the efficacy of peacekeeping.
- **Emphasise regional cooperation.** India may collaborate with African countries more closely to address their security concerns and ensure peacekeeping operations suit their requirements. Fostering Partnership: Collaborative efforts facilitate the sharing of resources and expertise, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation and improving the efficacy of UN missions in tackling intricate global issues.

Recommendations:

- Advocate for UN reforms for peacekeeping missions to have stronger mandates and better resources.
- Campaign for greater influence when it comes to decisions in UN peacekeeping missions to have a greater say in Security Council deliberations related to peacekeeping operations.
- Maintain and expand investments in and use of advanced technologies, including drones, surveillance systems and data analytics, to increase situational awareness and operational efficiencies in peacekeeping missions.
- Support and get involved in regional security initiatives that will establish a stable peace in the medium/long term.
- Strategise how to counter terrorism threats against peacekeepers and local populations.

Conclusion:

India's path in UN peacekeeping, from tradition to innovation, demonstrates its steadfast dedication to international peace and security. India has continuously adjusted to the dynamics of global warfare, from its early efforts in Korea to its contemporary employment of advanced technology and promotion of gender equality. India is establishing itself as a critical player in the future of UN peacekeeping missions by leading with a combination of military strength, humanitarian initiatives, and creative solutions.

Endnote

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