

Training and Preparedness to Mitigate Risks faced by Peacekeepers

The world is witnessing armed conflicts with interlocking threats, manifesting in persisting violence, having catastrophic consequences for people and societies. Contemporary United Nations Peace Operations (UNPOs) operate in environments of ever-challenging political instability and sectarian violence. Additionally, there is a disturbing trend of growing host nation resistance and denial of sovereign rights.

A combination of targeted physical violence, climate emergencies and technology weaponisation are posing unprecedented threats to peacekeepers. Recognising the evolving challenges in conflict environments, the international community has collectively committed to take active and concerted measures to address the rise in peacekeeping fatalities and enhance safety and security in the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) Declaration.

Establishing and maintaining a secure environment is a strategic responsibility, led by the Senior Mission Leadership Team. While the military component provides environmental security, the safety and security framework is coordinated by the Department of Safety and Security.

Attaining political stability lies at the heart of UN peacekeeping. The design and deployment of UNPOs should be in concert with international and regional partners with host nations as leads. Proactive conflict prevention approach helps to stay ahead of the narrative, with grounded mediation conducted by teams of civil affairs, military observers and UN police.

The peace operations need to adopt a robust posture along with dynamic manoeuvring. Situational awareness and critical thought help to challenge the narrative and innovate responses. Technology should be used to force-multiply mandate effectiveness; however, human-centric approach to peacekeeping must be predominant. UN's joint structures are to be maximised for an integrated approach to information management, operational coordination, humanitarian assistance and logistical support.

Whenever the operational situation permits, every reasonable effort has to be made to resolve a potentially hostile confrontation by means other than the physical intervention to include strategic foresight, local mediation and skilful use of a deterrent posture. Notwithstanding, when criticality demands the force can be used with operational guidance under the provisions of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), ensuring minimum collateral damage and protecting those not part of the conflict cycle.

As peacekeepers, one is a facilitator to the peace process, and the pivotal role must remain with the host nation and its populations. Institutionalised working arrangements and consultative networks need to be developed in the entire range of peace-making, peacekeeping and peacebuilding spectrum. There is a need to communicate regularly in an evidence-based two-way traffic.

The success of a peace operation is largely dependent on the capability of peacekeepers to deliver, which results from comprehensively developed training. Training is a function of command, which makes leaders responsible and accountable for individual skills and operational preparedness. With the introduction of asymmetric and

cyber threats, it is necessary that militaries train realistically for high intensity peace operations, with thrust on countering unconventional and unpredictable threats.

Our conventional peacekeeping mindset of operating in the classical strategic-operational-tactical hierarchical construct has to change. This calls for an attitudinal shift towards field delegation, empowering our junior leaders to think strategic and take time-critical decisions. Inaction has to be curbed and honest mistakes accepted as part of the learning curve.

The training on IHL requires peacekeepers to ensure that relevant rules and principles of IHL are disseminated, understood and complied with - not only by UN personnel but all forces operating in the mission's zone of responsibility. Effective leadership must ensure proportionate response with minimum losses.

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