



USI ANNUAL UN FORUM 2024

#UAUF24

**CHANGING CHARACTER
OF CONFLICTS
CHALLENGES TO PEACE OPERATIONS AND
INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW**

27 - 28 NOVEMBER 2024

UNITED SERVICE INSTITUTION OF INDIA, NEW DELHI

Edited by
**Pradeep Goswami
AK Bardalai
KK Sharma**

About the Monograph

The USI of India has always taken the lead in providing a platform for organising discourse and research in the field of UN peace operations, to put across an Indian perspective on a few crucial attributes of the contemporary challenges faced by UN peace operations. To this end, USI, in collaboration with ICRC and CUNPK, organised a seminar on 'Changing Character of Conflicts: Challenges to Peace Operations and International Humanitarian Law' on 27-28 Nov 2024 at USI, New Delhi. This monograph is a compilation of an extended version of a brief presentation by eminent speakers at the seminar.

About the USI

The USI (<https://www.usiofindia.org>) is India's oldest and premium tri-service think tank founded in 1870, for 'Furtherance of knowledge in the art, science, and literature of the National Security in general and of the Defence Services in particular'. The USI is unique in the sense that it brings strategic community and policymakers on one platform for informed debates and reflection on evolving strategic affairs in a global backdrop.

About the ICRC

The work of the ICRC (<https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are/mandate>) is based on the Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols, its Statutes – and those of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Since 1863, its objective has been protection and assistance for victims of armed conflicts. The ICRC is an impartial, neutral, and independent organisation with a humanitarian mission to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflicts.

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Challenges to Peace
Operations and International
Humanitarian Law**

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Edited by

*Pradeep Goswami, AK Bardalai
and KK Sharma*



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Preface

The United Service Institution (USI) of India has partnered with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to organise joint seminars at the national and international levels on subjects related to international peace and security. The collaborative journey began in 2023 when the USI and ICRC organised the first USI Annual United Nations (UN) Forum 2023 on ‘International Humanitarian Law and Peace Operations’ in Nov 2023. It was followed by a seminar on ‘Protection of Civilians in Modern Conflicts and International Humanitarian Law’ in May 2024 and finally, the USI Annual UN Forum 2024 on ‘Changing Character of Conflicts: Challenges to Peace Operations and International Humanitarian Law’ was conducted on 27 and 28 Nov 2024.

As the UN Peace Operations (UNPOs) are evolving due to an array of unregulated non-state actors and the tendency on the part of sovereign states to flagrantly violate international laws, popular perception of the relevance of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) seems to have also taken a beating. Therefore, to create awareness about the necessity of IHL, the USI is taking the lead in organising discussions in the form of seminars.

Over the years, the security landscape has changed to violent, hybrid, and asymmetric conflicts, placing significant strains on the peace operations and application of the IHL. The new trajectory of the conflicts has posed significant challenges to the policymakers, humanitarian actors, and the uniformed peacekeepers in the conflict zone. An increase in the number of non-state actors, easy availability of advanced weapon systems, new technologies, social media, innovative use of propaganda, and misinformation campaigns have

blurred the lines between combatants and civilians. The principles of neutrality, proportionality, and distinction—fundamental to IHL—are now harder to apply in environments characterised by urban warfare, civilian used as shields, and ambiguous battle lines. Additionally, climate change, resource scarcity, and forced displacement of civilians act as catalysts for new tensions, compounding the difficulty of peace operations and humanitarian interventions. In such settings, peacekeepers are tasked with not only containing violence but also protecting civilians, rebuilding institutions, and facilitating reconciliation—an ever-expanding and complex mandate. In this evolving landscape, recognition has come that women have a very important and contributory role in peace and security.

While human security forms a major component of conflict management, the ability to mitigate suffering and at the same time adherence to humanitarian principles hinge on adapting to new realities without compromising core values. This report offers critical analyses and insights into the changing character of conflicts and their impact on peace operations and IHL. The four sessions of the seminar were followed by interactive discussions, which identified challenges and attempted to suggest new ideas for future peace operations and how IHL can be applied. The seminar had a large participation by the diplomatic community, peacekeepers, serving officers, academicians, and students. This report will serve as a valuable resource for those engaged in the fields of conflict studies, international law, and peace operations.

Finally, we wish to place on record the excellent understanding and cooperation that existed between the USI, ICRC, and Centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK) during the planning and conduct of the seminar.

Contents

Concept Paper	11
About the Participants	16
Day 1	24
1. Opening Session	24
1.1. Welcome Remarks: Maj Gen PK Goswami (Retd), DDG, USI	24
1.2. Opening Address: Maj Gen BK Sharma (Retd), DG, USI	25
1.3. Video Message: Mr Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General, Department of Peace Operations, UN	26
1.4. Keynote Address: Lt Gen Rakesh Kapoor, DCOAS (Information Systems and Coordination)	27
1.5. Special Address:	29
1.5.1. <i>Amb Ruchira Kamboj, India's Former Permanent Representative to the UN</i>	29
1.5.2. <i>Mr Kadir Awol Omar, Head of Regional Delegation for India, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives, ICRC</i>	30
2. Session 1: Changing Character of Armed Conflict	32
2.1. Chair: Maj Gen BK Sharma (Retd) DG, USI	32
2.2. Topics:	33
2.2.1. <i>Evolving Multi-dimensional Conflicts - Trends: Maj Gen Alok Deb (Retd)</i>	33

2.2.2. <i>Impact of Technology on Conflicts:</i> <i>Maj Gen (Dr) Pawan Anand (Retd)</i>	34
2.2.3. <i>Impact of Environmental and Climate Emergencies on Conflicts: Ms Ingvild Brox Brodtkorb</i>	35
2.2.4. <i>IHL and Changing Character of Conflicts:</i> <i>Dr Andrei Kozik</i>	37
3. Session 2: Evolving Conflicts - Challenges to Peace Operations and IHL	39
3.1. Chair: Dr Andrei Kozik	39
3.2. Topics:	39
3.2.1. <i>IHL and Peace Operations: Katherine Stewart</i>	39
3.2.2. <i>Role of UNSC in Making IHL Work:</i> <i>Prof Bharat Desai</i>	41
3.2.3. <i>UN Peace Operations and Future Challenges:</i> <i>Ms Annika Hilding Norberg</i>	42
Day 2	44
4. Plenary Session	44
4.1. Video Message: Mr Alexandre Zhouev, Assistant Secretary General, Rule of Law and Security Institutions, Department of Peace Operation, UN	44
4.2. Opening Address: Amb Asoke Mukerji, India's Former Permanent Representative to the UN	45
4.3. Special Address: Mr Shombi Sharp, UN Resident Coordinator in India	46
5. Session 3: Breakout Sessions	47
5.1. Session 3 (A): Protection of Civilians and Peacekeepers	47
5.1.1. <i>Chair: Maj Gen M P Bhagat (Retd)</i>	47
5.1.2. <i>Threat to Civilians and Peacekeepers in Intra-State Conflicts: Maj Gen (Dr) AK Bardalai (Retd)</i>	48

5.1.3. <i>Institutional Measures to Protect the Protectors: Brig Narender Singh</i>	49
5.1.4. <i>IHL and Protection of Civilians: Ms Meher Dev</i>	50
5.2. Session 3 (B): Climate Change and UN Peace Operations	53
5.2.1. <i>Chair: Lt Gen S Tinaikar (Retd)</i>	53
5.2.2. <i>Climate Change and Security: Indian Perspective: Dr Dhanasree Jayaram</i>	54
5.2.3. <i>Climate-Related Peace and Security Risks: Ms Ingvild Brox Brodtkorb</i>	56
5.3. Session 3 (C): Women in UN Peace Operations - Key to a Lasting Peace	57
5.3.1. <i>Chair: Ms Susan Ferguson</i>	57
5.3.2. <i>Video Message: Ms Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Assistant Secretary-General, Deputy Executive Director, UN Women, New York</i>	58
5.3.3. <i>Role of Women Peacekeepers and Challenges: Col (Dr) KK Sharma (Retd)</i>	58
5.3.4. <i>Advancing Women in Peace and Security - Key UN Enablers: Ms Annika Hilding Norberg</i>	59
5.3.5. <i>Field Experiences of Women Peacekeepers - Maj Navita Kashyap</i>	61
5.3.6. <i>Field Experiences of Women Peacekeepers - Maj Radhika Sen (virtual)</i>	62
6. Session 4: Analysing the Future: Challenges and Future of UN Peace Operations	63
6.1. <i>Opening Remarks by Benoit Pylyser, Director Challenges Forum (virtual)</i>	63
6.2. <i>Chair: Lt Gen JS Lidder (Retd)</i>	64
6.3. <i>Topics:</i>	65
6.3.1. <i>Leveraging Pact of the Future and New Agenda for Peace for Future Peace Operations: Ms Annika Hilding Norberg</i>	65

6.3.2. <i>People-Centric Operations - as a Precursor to Successful Operations:</i> <i>Col (Dr) KK Sharma (Retd)</i>	67
6.3.3. <i>IHL and Conflicts: Restraints and Behaviour:</i> <i>Sandeep Bali</i>	68
7. Closing Session	70
7.1. Valedictory Address: Ms Uma Sekhar, Additional Secretary (L&T), Ministry of External Affairs	71
7.2. Closing Remarks: Lt Gen Satish Nambiar (Retd)	72
7.3. Vote of Thanks: Sandeep Bali, Head of Prevention, ICRC	73
Key Takeaways	74
Endnotes	79
Group Photo	80

Concept Note

General

The endeavour for global peace at the end of the Cold War has largely given way to the current rise in vicious intra-state as well as inter-state conflicts. While the world was grappling with the challenges of unresolved intra-state conflicts, mostly in the African region, the addition of the Ukraine and Gaza wars added a new dimension to the global violence and human suffering. On the other hand, the UN Security Council (UNSC) remains deadlocked due to sharp political polarisation, while the conflicts have expanded in both scope and intensity.

The ongoing conflicts have highlighted disturbing trends of deliberate targeting of civilian population and indiscriminate bombing of civilian social support facilities, leading to large-scale deaths and forced displacement resulting in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. In ongoing conflicts, the operational techniques being applied defy agreed protocols of the IHL with minimal accountability.

Conflict has remained a constant feature of Social Darwinism exhibited in state behaviour. However, traditional drivers have been overridden by emerging disruptive technologies. Apart from cyber, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven advanced and autonomous weapon systems have changed the face of battlespace. The conflicts now involve multi-domains, politics, diplomacy, technology, economy, information, and cognition. The lines between classic war and peace are blurred with a multitude of state and non-state actors at play in a grey-zone environment. Understanding and

addressing these challenges requires a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary approach, as well as reforms in the laws of war, governance architectures, and international institutions. How to foster cooperation in a contested world order is the biggest challenge. Some of the specific issues that merit reflection are laid out in the succeeding paragraphs.

Protection of Civilians (PoC) and International Humanitarian Law

IHL, also known as the law of armed conflict, regulates the behaviour of parties in armed conflicts to limit the effects of the conflict and protect those who are not or no longer taking part in hostilities.¹ Opinions on the interpretation of IHL vary due to the complexity of conflicts involving state and non-state actors, including Private Military Contractors (PMCs).² In this context, PoC requires a comprehensive approach not only in interpretation and application of IHL but also ensuring accountability for violations of IHL.

Accountability of Crime Committed Against Peacekeepers

Accountability for the crimes committed against peacekeepers has emerged as a critical aspect of ensuring the safety and security of personnel deployed in UNPOs. From 2010 to 2023 (13 years), UNPO forces suffered 1,631 fatal casualties as against 2,683 from 1948 to 2009 (61 years). The host government has a particularly important role in investigating, prosecuting, and punishing those responsible for these crimes. UNSC Resolution 2518 (2020) specifically asked host countries to promptly investigate and effectively prosecute those responsible for attacks on United Nations (UN) personnel, and to keep the relevant Troop and Police-Contributing Countries informed of the progress of such investigations and prosecutions.³

Climate Change and Environmental Driven Conflicts

Climate change is transforming and redefining the global security and development landscape as well as both inter and intra-state conflicts.⁴ Conflicts over land, food, and water are increasingly linked to environmental degradation, droughts, and natural disasters. Climate change is also aggravating vulnerabilities like poverty and inequality, and fuelling grievances to increase the risk of insecurity.⁵ Climate change can thus limit the scope for keeping, making, and building peace. Conflicts in the Sahel, where desertification and resource scarcity fuelled armed groups and ethnic violence, are an apt example. The relationships between climate change, peace, and security are multifaceted, and responding to the engendered risks requires comprehensive responses from multilateral international organisations.

Women in Peace Operations

Women play a crucial role in contributing to peace and security in conflict zones and are today an essential part of peacekeeping forces. Besides, women peacekeepers possess many unique skills, thus playing a positive role in making the peace process more inclusive and potentially reducing crimes against women.⁶ The representation of women in peacekeeping has been low so far. The UN, however, has been gradually increasing the participation of women peacekeepers over a period of time. With an overall goal of 25 per cent, the UN had 19 per cent military experts and staff officers, and nine per cent troops deployed in the field by Jun 2023.⁷ These targets are 25 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively, by the end of 2028.⁸

What is this event looking for?

The discussion, spread over two days, seeks to address the evolving challenges of contemporary conflicts and explore innovative strategies to enhance global peace and uphold the principles of IHL.

- **Changing Character of Conflicts.** Analysing and correlating facets of evolving conflicts with UN peacekeeping and application of IHL.
- **Challenges to Peace Operations and IHL.** Discuss challenges, enhance participants' comprehension, and create awareness about the principles and application of IHL.
- **PoC and Peacekeepers.** Discuss challenges and threats to civilians, the peacekeepers, and other UN components in the field, as well as legal and practical measures to ensure the safety and security of peacekeepers.
- **Climate Change and UNPOs.** Discuss the effects of climate change on societies and ecosystems, peace, and conflict, with particular attention to fight over scarce resources in vulnerable regions.
- **Women in UNPOs.** Discuss the contributions of women in the entire spectrum of peace operations, as well as the challenges. Deliberate on the institutional measures placed by the UN to enhance women's participation.
- **Future Roles and Models of the UNPOs.** Enabling peacekeepers and UN components to discern threats to the PoC mandate, analysis, and effective use of emerging technologies to make peacekeeping effective.
- **Knowledge Sharing.** Sharing experience of the practitioners, academicians, and subject matter experts to encourage multidisciplinary approaches to address contemporary challenges and provide input to the New Agenda for Peace.

Conclusion

The changing character of conflict demands a flexible and adaptive approach from UNPOs. These missions must be equipped to address the multidimensional challenges of contemporary conflicts, focusing not only on the cessation of hostilities but also on long-term peacebuilding and development efforts. The approach must recognise the complex and interconnected nature of contemporary security challenges, humanitarian laws, and measures to implement PoC for sustainable peace.

About the Participants

Major General BK Sharma, AVSM, SM (Retd)** is the Director General of the USI of India, the country's oldest think tank established in 1870. During service, he has tenanted prestigious assignments, including command of a mountain division on the China border and Senior Faculty Member at the National Defence College. He represented his country at the UN as a Military Observer in Central America and has been India's Defence Attaché in Central Asia. He specialises in Strategic Net Assessment methodology, Scenario Building, and Strategic Gaming.

Lieutenant General Rakesh Kapoor, AVSM, VSM is the Deputy Chief of Army Staff (Information Systems and Coordination). General with rich operational experience has held varied staff, Command, and instructional appointments. He is a graduate of the United States Army War College and was an Advisor to Botswana Defence Force. He commanded a Corps in the desert before assuming the present appointment.

Mr Kedir Awol Omar is the Head of the Regional Delegation of the ICRC for India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives. He has decades of operational and regional experience in humanitarian response. He has led various global delegations, ranging from those in conflict settings to humanitarian diplomacy such as Yemen, Sierra Leone, Gaza, Nigeria, Iran, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Kuwait.

Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, IFS (Retd) has had a distinguished diplomatic career marked by numerous first to her credit—all India women's topper of the 1987 Civil Services batch, top

performer of the 1987 batch of the Indian Foreign Service, first female Chief of Protocol at Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), first female Permanent Representative of India to the UN, and first woman from India to preside over the UNSC in Dec 2022. She was also Ambassador of India to Bhutan, South Africa, and Ambassador/Permanent Representative to UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris.

Lieutenant General Satish Nambiar, PVSM, AVSM, VrC (Retd)

is an Indian Army veteran of the 1965 and 1971 wars, a graduate of the Australian Staff College, the first Force Commander and Head of Mission of the UN Forces in the Former Yugoslavia, and former Director of USI. During his tenure as the Director of USI, he established the Indian CUNPK, was appointed as Adviser to the Government of Sri Lanka on the peace process in that country from 2002 to 2003, and was a member of the UN 16-member high-level panel to study global security threats and recommend measures for effective collective action. The General is the recipient of the Indian national award of Padma Bhushan for his contribution to National Security Affairs, besides military decorations.

Ambassador Asoke Mukerji, IFS (Retd), a well-known Indian diplomate, besides holding various important diplomatic assignments, was the most successful permanent representative of India to the UN. During his tenure, he successfully spearheaded the acceptance of the Indian proposal to declare 21 Jun as the International Yoga Day by the UN. He also convinced the UN to launch a Virtual Memorial Wall in memory of India's fallen UN peacekeepers (highest among Troop Contributing Countries [TCCs]) in 2015, and the current initiative of the UN General Assembly to construct a Memorial Wall for UN Peacekeepers in UN Headquarters. Currently, he is a Senior Fellow of the Diplo Foundation established by the governments of Malta and Switzerland, where he teaches diplomacy. His book 'India and the United Nations 1945-2015: A Photo Journey' is among seven

published books, and the first copy of this book was presented by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in Sep 2015.

Ms Uma Sekhar is Additional Secretary and Head of the Legal and Treaties Division in the MEA. She is a career diplomat and has held several important positions—Joint Secretary at MEA, Counsellor to the Permanent Mission of India at the UN, and Director and First Secretary (Legal) Permanent Mission of India to the World Trade Organisation. Recently, she was elected to the Governing Council of the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law for the term 2024-28.

Mr Shombi Sharp is UN Resident Coordinator in India. He has devoted more than 25 years in promoting inclusive and sustainable development internationally. Previously, he held several leadership positions at the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and was the UN Resident Coordinator in Armenia before his present appointment.

Ms Susan Ferguson is the Head of UN Women in India. She is a development practitioner and had a distinguished career in international development spanned by themes of gender equality and social justice. She has been with UN Women since 2017.

Lieutenant General JS Lidder, UYSM, AVSM (Retd) is an Indian Army veteran of the 1971 war, held several important military command and staff appointments at various levels both in India and abroad, and has vast UN experience in both political and military spheres. He was the Chief of Staff in UN Operation in Mozambique from 1994-95 and Force Commander UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) from 2005-08. Post military retirement, he was Deputy SRSG (P), UNMIS from 2010-11. As a senior UN diplomat based at Jumba, he led the UN efforts for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Most importantly, South Sudan Referendum led to the birth of the new nation in Jul 2011.

Presently, he is involved with multiple UN offices, global think tanks, and training establishments as an expert and mentor on UN matters.

Lieutenant General SS Tinaikar, SM, VSM (Retd) is an Indian Army veteran of the elite Parachute Regiment of the Indian Army and has held several important military command and staff appointments at various levels. He has rich UN Peacekeeping experience, having been a Military Observer in UN Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM) III and Chief Operations Officer in UNMIS; before being appointed as Force Commander of UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) during 2019-22.

Major General M P Bhagat, PVSM (Retd) is an Indian Army veteran with vast experience in the UN system and its peace support operations in the mission areas. He is the former Commander of India's UN contingent in Somalia (1993-94). After retirement in 1996, he reverted to the UN as Deputy Military Adviser, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations; and also served in various other capacities as an international Civil Servant, retiring from the UN in 2008.

Major General Alok Deb, SM, VSM (Retd) is an Indian Army veteran, former UN peacekeeper in Lebanon, and Deputy Director General of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. Presently, he is a Distinguished Fellow at the USI of India and a Senior Visiting Fellow at The Peninsula Foundation, Chennai.

Major General (Dr) Pawan Anand, AVSM, (Retd) is Director, Centre for Emerging Technology for Atma Nirbhar Bharat, USI. He is an Indian Army veteran with a PhD in 'Indigenisation of India's Defence Industry', and has expertise in Geopolitics, Geostrategy, AI, and Cybersecurity. Post-retirement, he was Secretary General of Highway Operators Association in the private sector.

Ms Ingvild Brox Brodtkorb is a Research Fellow at Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). Her area of research is Climate, Peace and Security, Peacebuilding, Peace Operations, and Women's Peace and Security. Previously, she served as an intern at the UN World Food Programme, the Permanent Mission of Norway to the UN, as well as the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Dr Andrei Kozik is Regional Legal Advisor for South Asia, ICRC, New Delhi. He joined the ICRC in 2019 as a Regional Legal Coordinator (Adviser) covering Eastern Europe and Asia, working in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and recently joined Delhi. Before joining ICRC, he taught International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Information Technology law at universities in Eastern Europe and Central Asia for 25 years. He served as a dean of the law faculty and first vice-rector. He was also on the Board of Directors of the International Society for Military Law and the Law of War (Brussels) and has co-authored seven books.

Katherine Stewart is Regional Coordinator for Armed and Security Forces Programmes, Regional Delegation, ICRC, Bangkok. An Australian Army veteran, she has served in UN operations in Israel, Syria, and Southern Lebanon; was the military attaché in Iraq and Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon; and retired as Colonel after 33 years of service. Before the present appointment, she was with ICRC, Tokyo.

Professor Bharat Desai is Director, Institute for Advance Studies in International Law, and Professor of International Law, Jawaharlal Nehru University. He is a leading international law scholar, with global scholarly contribution of more than 14 ideational books and 110 research articles. He has been part of the official Indian delegations to various intergovernmental negotiations and consulted by a wide range of global multilateral development agencies.

Ms Annika Hilding Norberg is Head, Peace Operations and Peacebuilding, Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP). She executes education and training, policy-applicable research and

advise, and dialogue and discussion on UN-related issues at GCSP. Her recent publication, co-authored includes Strategic Reflections on the Future of UN Policing, and an Ethernet Passive Optical Network study on the Role, Relevance, and Lessons Learned from UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), presented to Department of Peace Operations (DPO) in May 2024. The USI was also part of this study. Before joining the GCSP, she was the Founding Director of the International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations for 21 years and also served on the Board of Directors for the Peace Operations Training Institute (2010-13). She is the recipient of the Silver Medal of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences for her contributions to strengthening UN peacekeeping.

Major General AK Bardalai, VSM (Retd) is an Indian Army veteran who has held various command and staff assignments at different levels including the command of an infantry division. He was also the Commandant of the Indian Military Training Team in Bhutan during 2011-14. Earlier, he served as a Military Observer in the UNAVEM in 1991-92 and as the Deputy Head of the Mission and Deputy Force Commander of the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon from 2008 to 2010.

Major General PK Goswami, VSM (Retd) is an Indian Army Veteran, presently Deputy Director General, USI and Head of UN Cell. He was a Military Observer with the UNAVEM in 1991-92 and Senior Faculty at the National Defence College, New Delhi. He represented the National Defence College, India, at the 16th Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum for Heads of Defence universities, colleges, and institutions in Beijing, China, in Nov 2012. He is credited with seven monographs on various UN peacekeeping themes, and a book 'The India and UN Peacekeeping: Through the Prism of Time', which was released by Mr Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General, DPO, UN, on 07 Oct 2022 at the USI. He regularly participates in events related to UN peacekeeping, in India and abroad.

Mr Sandeep Bali, Head of Prevention, ICRC, New Delhi, is an Indian Navy veteran, and was earlier the Deputy Director of National Maritime Foundation. He is an alumnus of the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, Sanremo, Italy, and the Indian Society of International Law, Delhi. He specialises in IHL, International Human Rights Law, Law of Armed Conflict at Sea, Maritime Security operations, Humanitarian response to Conflict and Disaster, and new and emerging challenges to IHL.

Colonel (Dr) KK Sharma (Retd) is an Indian Army Veteran and was a military observer in UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia in 1992-93. He was an active member in the planning and writing of the UN Capstone Doctrine on peacekeeping and manuals for trainers in the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, Geneva. He has been associated with the planning cell of peacekeeping operations in Army HQ and was a founding member of the CUNPK under the USI. He has a PhD in Management from Zurich, Switzerland, and was a Professor and Dean, Business School and Global Education Programs at Chitkara University. He has authored the book 'India and the UN Peace Operations: In the Service of Humanity and Global Peace'.

Brigadier Narendra Singh is a serving Indian Army officer. He is a former Sector Commander at South Sudan.

Ms Meher Dev is Legal Advisor, ICRC, New Delhi. Before joining ICRC, she was a Legal Officer for the UN in Iraq.

Dr Dhanasree Jayaram is a Senior Assistant Professor, Centre for Climate Studies, Manipal Academy of Higher Education. She is also a Research Fellow of the Earth System Governance Alliance; a Member of the Climate Security Expert Network; a Non-resident Fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs; a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies; and an Associate at Network for Education and Research on Peace and Sustainability (Hiroshima University). She has authored two books.

Major Navita Kashyap is a serving Indian Army officer and former peacekeeper with UN Interim Security Force for Abyei.

Major Radhika Sen, a serving Indian Army officer and former Peacekeeper with UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), was the Engagement Platoon Commander to the Indian Rapid Deployed Battalion in the central sector of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). She is the recipient of the UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award for 2023.

Day 1

Opening Session

1.1. Welcome Remarks - Maj Gen PK Goswami (Retd), Deputy Director General, USI

Maj Gen PK Goswami, Deputy Director General, USI, welcomed all the distinguished guests and participants to the event. He spoke about the importance of the forum and introduced the theme of the day.

Modern conflicts have transformed significantly, becoming increasingly urbanised, asymmetric, and protracted. This evolution, driven by technological advances and shifting geopolitical dynamics, has created unprecedented challenges for peacekeeping operations, IHL, and PoC. This necessitates innovative strategies and urgent reforms in peacekeeping frameworks to address emerging threats.

IHL traditionally regulates the conduct of war and ensures civilian protection, is being increasingly disregarded in modern conflicts. This undermines the safety and security of non-combatants and peacekeepers and UN employees alike. The evolving nature of conflicts necessitates a reformed IHL framework that aligns with the contemporary realities to ensure the protection of vulnerable populations and the efficacy of peacekeeping efforts.

Added to this is the threat of climate change to global security, acting as a 'Crisis Multiplier'. Its impact is evident in extreme weather events, resource scarcity, and environmental degradation, which exacerbate societal vulnerabilities and fuel migration. Fragile

communities face heightened risks of exploitation by organised crime and extremist groups. Thus, addressing climate-induced vulnerabilities is essential for maintaining global peace and security. The role of women in peace and security remains underutilised despite international commitments to improve their participation. Women peacekeepers bring a unique perspective and skill set that can significantly enhance peacebuilding efforts, but barriers to their participation remain. Removing these barriers is critical for realising the full potential of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery.

The forum, focusing on ‘Changing Character of Conflicts, Challenges to Peace Operations, and International Humanitarian Law’, highlights the urgency of addressing these challenges. It emphasises the need for collaborative dialogue, innovative strategies, and actionable reforms to tackle the multifaceted nature of contemporary warfare and safeguard global security.

1.2. Opening Remarks - Maj Gen BK Sharma (Retd), Director General, USI

Maj Gen BK Sharma, Director General, USI, opened the seminar by addressing the evolving and multifaceted nature of global conflicts. He said, “We are indeed living in perilous times, defined by contested multi-polarity and almost dysfunctional multilateralism”.

He highlighted the grim realities of modern warfare, highlighting that 32 countries are engaged in conflicts, affecting approximately 195 million people. He pointed to the devastating human costs, including massive displacement, civilian casualties, and the destruction of infrastructure, in places like Afghanistan, Ukraine, Gaza, and South Sudan. There is also an increasing involvement of non-state actors and private military groups like the Wagner Group, which have complicated peacekeeping operations.

Emerging challenges, such as the misuse of AI, the proliferation of autonomous weapons, and climate change, were identified as critical threats. He called for reforms in IHL, which is increasingly violated by state and non-state actors alike. He also highlighted the paralysis of the UNSC, whose internal divisions and veto power constraints have rendered it ineffective.

The speaker advocated a comprehensive review of UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPOs), including mandate formulation, integration of advanced technologies, and stronger collaboration with regional organisations and civil society groups. He highlighted India's unwavering support for the UN peacekeeping and its role in advocating for reforms within the UN framework, particularly regarding the UNSC and the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions.

In his closing remarks, Maj Gen Sharma called for urgent and pragmatic changes to address these pressing challenges, stating, "The UNSC, the very custodian of global peace, is, I think, traumatised and paralysed and is incapable of enforcing Geneva Conventions and other international rulings".

1.3. Video recorded message - Mr Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under Secretary General, Department of Peace Operation, UN

Mr Lacroix expressed his gratitude to the USI for its dedication to advancing defense and security dialogues, particularly around UN peacekeeping. He acknowledged the USI as a critical partner in fostering discussions on pressing global challenges. Mr Lacroix highlighted two significant milestones in 2024—the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which form the foundation of IHL and represent a global commitment to reducing human suffering during conflicts, and the 25th anniversary of the PoC mandate, a pivotal aspect of UN peacekeeping dedicated to safeguarding vulnerable populations in complex security environments.

There are rising challenges, such as the rise in global armed conflicts, where civilians are being deliberately targeted, often as part of military or political strategies leading to mass casualties. Mr Lacroix emphasised the need for UN peacekeeping to evolve in response to the complex and shifting dynamics of modern conflicts. Key areas such as transnational organised crime, climate change, and digital technological framework required greater focus. Mr Lacroix emphasised the need for UN peacekeeping to strengthen its capacity to address emerging challenges through three core strategies—enhancing the understanding of contemporary threats by integrating regional expertise, technology, and intelligence sharing; building capabilities by investing in infrastructure, resources, and training; and strengthening partnerships with regional and international organisations to pool expertise and resources for more effective peacekeeping.

Paying homage to Indian peacekeepers who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving under the UN flag, he acknowledged their invaluable contributions to global peace and security and commended India's exceptional role in supporting UN peacekeeping efforts, recognising its long-standing commitment to providing personnel, resources, and expertise.

1.4. Keynote Address - Lt Gen Rakesh Kapoor, Deputy Chief of Army Staff (Information Systems & Coordination)

Lt Gen Kapoor commenced his keynote address by complimenting the USI for selecting a highly relevant and contemporary topic on the changing character of conflicts and the challenges faced by peacekeepers today. He also mentioned that his address would offer a practitioner's viewpoint, focusing on the experiences of troops deployed in peacekeeping missions.

He highlighted the pervasive nature of conflicts, with 92 ongoing conflicts worldwide involving 56 countries. He identified three key attributes of conflicts: their enduring nature, the profound human impact, and inherent unpredictability. He described modern conflicts as multilevel, involving full-scale wars, grey zone conflicts, and hybrid warfare, and multidomain, as these conflicts now span across traditional domains like land, sea, and air, as well as emerging domains such as space, cyberspace, and the information sphere.

Lt Gen Kapoor traced historical significance of technology in warfare, from the Bronze Age to modern Information Age, emphasising its epoch role to redefine conflicts. Urbanisation has also shaped modern conflicts, with combat increasingly targeting densely populated urban spaces. He noted that modern warfare increasingly blurs the distinction between combatants and civilians. He described how, in today's conflicts, a combatant could be someone sitting at a computer, causing more damage than a soldier on the ground. This presents new challenges in distinguishing between legitimate targets and civilians.

Lt Gen Kapoor also discussed the growing intersection of climate change and conflict, highlighting how resource competition, migration, and displacement caused by climate change will shape future military operations and peacekeeping efforts.

Turning to India's peacekeeping approach, he highlighted essential key measures adopted by India such as cultural sensitivity, training, integrating women in peace-building efforts, and ensuring adherence to IHL. He highlighted India's pioneering role in deploying the first all women contingent in Liberia in 2007 and emphasised that women play an important role as opinion makers in peace processes. He stressed on these continued efforts, to enhance community outreach and build trust in mission areas. He underlined the importance of co-deployment with partner nations, sharing best practices, and remaining adaptable in a rapidly changing conflict landscape. He reaffirmed India's commitment to global peacekeeping and international law.

1.5. Special Address

1.5.1. Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, India's Former Permanent Representative to the UN

Amb Kamboj began by discussing how peacekeeping missions have evolved from ceasefire monitoring to include nationbuilding, election support, economic recovery, addressing root causes of conflict, and protecting civilians. However, these expanded mandates introduce ambiguity and require clearer roles and more resources. There is a chronic underfunding of peacekeeping missions, especially in regions like South Sudan, Sudan, and Mali, which hinders their success. Economically stronger countries contribute disproportionately to the funding of peacekeeping operations, while countries with fewer resources bear a larger share of the operational burden. This disparity in financial contributions creates an imbalance in peacekeeping capacity and impacts the overall effectiveness of missions.

The Amb emphasised the growing risks faced by peacekeepers and highlighted that over 300 peacekeepers have lost their lives in recent years due to these dangers. She used the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) as an example of one of the most hazardous peacekeeping assignments, where peacekeepers face frequent attacks, including suicide bombings and ambushes. She stressed that ensuring their safety is a collective responsibility, with lessons from past incidents helping improve preparedness.

The rise of non-state actors and asymmetric warfare poses new challenges for peacekeepers. She proposed the integration of advanced technologies, such as drones, satellites, and AI-powered analytics, to enhance peacekeeping efforts.

Amb Kamboj criticised the political polarisation within the UNSC, which hinders effective action, citing Syria as an example. She called for urgent reform of the Council, especially the veto system. The veto system has become an obstacle to any effective

action and, instead of being a tool for consensus, it is often used for political gain at the expense of peace and security.

This is accompanied by an urgent need for accountability within peacekeeping operations. She pointed out that instances of misconduct, such as sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers, severely damage the reputation of peacekeeping forces and undermine their effectiveness. She highlighted India's commitment to professionalism and ethical conduct in peacekeeping, highlighting that Indian peacekeepers have an exceptional track record of adhering to the highest standards of discipline.

She called for stronger international cooperation, particularly in intelligence sharing and resource coordination. Additionally, she emphasised the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration, involving the UN, regional organisations, and civil society, to enhance peacebuilding efforts.

Amb Kamboj advocated the inclusion of women and youth in peacebuilding, citing Liberia as an example where women played a key role in peace efforts. She highlighted India's pioneering contributions, including the first to deploy an all-women peacekeeping force to Liberia in 2007 and a female peacekeeping platoon in Abyei in 2023. There is a need for collective commitment from all nations to address the evolving challenges of peacekeeping. This, she said, requires focus, collaboration, and swift adaptation to increasingly complex situations.

1.5.2. Mr Kedir Awol Omar, Head of Regional Delegation, ICRC

Mr Omar discussed a particularly difficult global situation for peace, highlighted by ongoing armed conflicts in regions like the Middle East, Ukraine, and Sudan, affecting millions of lives. He stressed the increasing difficulty of ensuring adherence to IHL, particularly as conflicts become more complex and volatile. Despite the growing challenges, the world must reassert its commitment

to the respect and application of IHL, which serves as a crucial safeguard for humanity and builds trust among conflicting parties, facilitating peace. He said, “Upholding the respect and ensure respect of IHL in these volatile and changing character of conflicts has continued to become challenging and testing”. IHL also brings opportunities to build trust between adversaries, such as collaboration across frontlines that is necessary to account for the missing, separated, and dead, and to return them to their families often unlocks further dialogue and fosters peace negotiations when both parties agree.

Today, peacekeeping missions face significant challenges in ensuring compliance with IHL, particularly when supporting joint operations and engaging with local authorities. He acknowledged India’s substantial contribution to UNPOs, being one of the top three troop contributors, and highlighted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) collaboration with India’s CUNPK in providing IHL training.

The year 2024 marks the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the 160th anniversary of the first Geneva Convention, underscoring the ongoing relevance of IHL. He expressed hope for increased international participation in this initiative and recognised the leadership of the USI and CUNPK in fostering discussions on civilian protection. On 27 Sep 2024, Brazil, China, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan, South Africa, and the ICRC launched a global initiative to promote political commitment to IHL. The initiative aims to make IHL a priority at global, regional, and domestic levels, refocus discussions on the need for its universal and consistent application, and address challenges like preventing violations of rules of conduct in armed conflicts. Mr Omar expressed hope for more countries to join in this effort and thanked the USI and CUNPK for organising discussions on civilian protection. He also wished success to the participants and welcomed international guests to New Delhi.

Session 1: Changing Character of Armed Conflicts

2.1. Chair: Maj Gen BK Sharma (Retd), Director General, USI

Maj Gen Sharma began by highlighting how multi-domain warfare is becoming increasingly complicated, and has become the 'New Normal'. There has been a failure to connect the dots and diagnose the character of this new dimension of warfare, especially in terms of its impact and responses, whether by conventional militaries, UN peacekeeping forces, or asymmetric warfare. Modern technology, including mobile devices and homemade drones, has had significant impacts. For example, in the Red Sea, these technologies have disrupted trade, with strategic implications for the global economy.

Another major tool for warfare is economic sanctions, resulting in unprecedented human suffering as these sanctions deprive people of necessities like medicine, healthcare, and basic living essentials. Added to these are the effects of climate change and environmental degradation, which further exacerbate conflict. Migration and disputes over resource control, fuelled by climate change, complicate the challenges faced by UN peacekeepers on the ground. Maj Gen Sharma agreed to previous cautions regarding the need for a global response to climate change.

In this geopolitical context, there is a severe lack of respect for IHL. IHL, once considered a key aspect of regulating warfare, has been reduced to being a buzzword rather than a tool for enforcement; where state actors, who are part of the UN system, are themselves violating IHL. He highlighted examples of the ongoing war in Ukraine and conflicts in West Asia and how they demonstrate blatant transgressions of territorial borders and IHL by state actors. This raises the question of where the global community is heading regarding the relevance and efficacy of IHL.

2.2. Topics

2.2.1. Evolving Multi-dimensional Conflicts - Trends - Maj Gen Alok Deb (Retd), Distinguished Fellow, USI

Maj Gen Deb began by referencing a study by Jan Bremberg, who listed 266 conflicts that took place between 1900 and 2022, starting with the Boxer Rebellion in China (1900) and ending with the Russo-Ukraine War in 2022. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, the number of state-based conflicts increased dramatically from 31 in 2010 to 56 in 2022. This rise in conflicts indicates a worrying trend, with wars becoming more frequent and widespread.

He discussed traditional drivers of conflict, including resource competition, territorial disputes, religious and ethnic tensions, and geopolitical competition. These drivers have been consistent throughout history, often leading to protracted wars. He identified current key drivers of conflict, including economic extremism in unstable regions like Pakistan and Bangladesh, transnational crime involving Rohingya refugees and the Arakan Army, and climate change, which fuels migration, resource scarcity, and resource-based conflicts. The discussion emphasised the growing importance of large-scale combat and multi-domain operations, which now encompass land, sea, air, cyber, and space, as demonstrated in the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza. The 'Democratisation of Warfare' highlights how technology enables non-state actors, like Hamas and Boko Haram, to challenge states. Non-state actors, including PMCs and cartels, also escalate territorial and cross-border conflicts.

The discussion focused on the evolving role of technology in modern warfare, particularly through cyber-attacks and advanced weaponry. It highlighted how mass technologies like drones and precision-guided munitions, such as the AI-enabled drones supplied by Germany to Ukraine, have made conflicts more lethal and

precise while reducing costs. The integration of AI in weapons systems promises faster, more accurate decisions but raises concerns about balancing AI's objectivity with human judgment. The role of AI in nuclear systems was also discussed, noting the risks associated with its increasing use in military applications.

The evolving nature of warfare necessitates updates in UN peacekeeping strategies. Maj Gen Deb advocated updating the 2008 Capstone Doctrine and suggested a Peacebuilding Architecture Review in 2025 to address evolving conflicts and peacekeeping challenges.

2.2.2. Impact of Technology on Conflicts - Maj Gen (Dr) Pawan Anand (Retd), Director, CETANB, USI

Maj Gen Anand highlighted that cyber threats have become increasingly sophisticated and are evolving with advancements in technology. These threats are often routed via proxies, which makes tracking the origin of attacks complex. The complexity of cyber warfare is exacerbated by the anonymity of online actors. This challenges accountability and makes cyber-attack tracing difficult.

The cyber domain is now central to modern conflict, involving governments, militaries, and individuals, with accountability remaining a key challenge. Advancements in 5G and upcoming 6G technologies boost military efficiency but heighten cyber vulnerabilities for both military and civilian systems. Additionally, the use of AI in cyber warfare presents both a defensive and offensive capability, making cybersecurity more complex. AI plays a critical role in modern military systems, with its applications becoming ever more intricate and sophisticated. AI helps in predictive analytics, and improves decision making and precision targeting, thereby, reducing collateral damage in combat situations. However, vulnerabilities like hallucinations and data poisoning pose significant risks, especially in highstakes scenarios such as military contexts. AI-driven 'Loiter Ammunition' is used by 34 countries across the

globe, underscoring ethical concerns about autonomous weapons and accountability in case of malfunctions or errors.

Space has become another highly contested domain in modern warfare. Maj Gen Anand noted that space-based communication links are vulnerable to cyber-attacks, which can even disrupt the control of military satellites. These vulnerabilities could lead to the takeover of satellites, or the introduction of terror satellites, which could alter the balance of power in space. Anti-satellite capabilities are now part of the arsenals of several nations, and space warfare will become more intricate as countries deploy advanced technologies to counter each other's satellites, which has direct implications for operations on land, sea, and air.

He argued that the UN must adapt to these emerging threats with greater agility and flexibility, something the UN has historically struggled with. The framework of peacekeeping and international security will be needed to accommodate the rapid advancements in cyber and military technology. Maj Gen Anand stressed that the UN must monitor technological advancements of both state and non-state actors, to help multilateral organisations prepare for the next phase of warfare, one that increasingly relies on technology and innovation.

2.2.3. Impact of Environmental and Climate Emergencies on Conflicts – Ms Ingvild Brox Brodtkorb, Research Fellow, NUPI

Ms Brodtkorb explained the indirect relationship between climate change and conflict. She acknowledged that while the effects of climate change and environmental degradation are rarely the primary cause of conflicts, understanding how climate risks interact with peace and security is crucial. This knowledge is essential for local, regional, and international actors to appropriately address sources of insecurity and to prevent instability and conflict.

She highlighted that the links between climate, peace, and security are complex and shaped by socio-political, economic, and environmental factors. Climate risks to peace are not inevitable, and much depends on human agency and response. The human agency plays a crucial role in shaping community responses to climate impacts.

Climate change disproportionately affects livelihoods that rely on natural resources, such as pastoralism, agriculture, and fishing. In the countries that host UNPOs, these livelihoods are particularly vulnerable. Climate-related hazards, including floods, droughts, and heatwaves, disrupt these livelihoods and worsen conditions for communities that lack resilient alternatives due to poverty, conflict, or weak governance structures.

Climate-induced displacement fuels conflict, with approximately 20 million people forced to migrate annually due to climate factors (UNHCR, 2024). In Iraq, rural populations displaced by climate-driven livelihood loss have moved to urban areas with inadequate infrastructure and lack of social services, worsening socio-economic conditions and pushing some to join armed groups for economic opportunities. Similarly, in regions like the northern Central African Republic, armed groups exploit pastoral communities, imposing illegal grazing fees in exchange for security, which is deepening tensions between farmers and herders and undermining social cohesion and dispute resolution mechanisms. Climate change significantly contributes to regional insecurity, as seen in areas like the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel, where droughts and land degradation force migration and intensify resource conflicts.

Efforts to find alternative livelihoods and promote dialogue, such as peace talks in Iraq and peacekeeping operations in South Sudan and Somalia, show how climate change can also serve as a unifying force for collaboration and conflict prevention. These efforts highlight the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses both environmental challenges and the resulting social and political tensions.

2.2.4. IHL and Changing Character of Conflicts - Dr Andrei Kozik, Regional Legal Advisor for South Asia, ICRC

Dr Kozik emphasised that IHL is a balance between military necessity and humanity. He pointed out that this balance is not just a product of lawyers and politicians but is shaped by the acting generals as well, who often make decisions that directly affect the battlefield. The objective thus is not only to win a war but to win it in a way that aligns with humanitarian principles and avoids unnecessary suffering, not contributing to the victory. He stressed that the application of IHL ensures that humanity is not lost amid the intense objectives of achieving military victories. This is critical because it allows for the safeguarding of humanity even when wars are being fought.

Dr Kozik acknowledged that modern battlefields present unique challenges that necessitate both—ensuring better respect for IHL and contributing to its progressive development. These challenges include new forms of warfare and tactics that were not foreseen at the time the rules were established, such as drone warfare and Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS). He highlighted 2020 as a key year in which drone warfare became more prominent and caused concern about the emotional and psychological detachment of soldiers from the consequences of their actions.

The use of explosive weapons in urban warfare raises significant concerns about civilian harm, reiterating the importance of the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution in IHL. Commanders must weigh the military advantage of an attack against potential civilian harm, requiring accurate intelligence and careful planning. Proportionality ensures that military actions minimise harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Dr Kozik discussed the rise of AWS, which pose unique challenges on the battlefield. These weapons, designed to make independent decisions, have raised numerous concerns regarding their reliability and ethical implications. He expressed concern about the unpredictability and lack of accountability inherent in

AWS, particularly when it could harm civilians. In addition to ethical considerations, he pointed out that although human soldiers often make mistakes in warfare, the error rate in autonomous systems theoretically might be lower. However, this reduction in error rate could still lead to many civilian casualties because mass employment of autonomous weapons could result in many more mistakes than human soldiers.

Dr Kozik shared a poignant family story from the German occupation of Belarus in 1941, illustrating the human element in warfare. During the German occupation of Belarus in 1941, civilians were lined up for execution in retaliation for resistance activities. A German soldier, possibly of Polish descent, showed compassion by secretly advising a grandmother and her children to escape. Dr Kozik argued that an AWS, lacking human intuition, would have blindly executed orders, potentially resulting in a war crime. He underlined that the position of the ICRC is not to oppose any development of AWS, but that from the ICRC's perspective, all unpredictable AWS should be expressly ruled out as well as those targeting human beings. Highlighting the critical role of the ICRC, he praised its discreet efforts in promoting adherence to IHL and training armed forces to ensure humane practices in conflict. This underscores the necessity of balancing technological progress with ethical considerations to preserve human dignity in warfare.

Session 2: Evolving Conflicts - Challenges to Peace Operations and International Humanitarian Law

3.1. Chair: Dr Andrei Kozik, Regional Legal Advisor for South Asia, ICRC

Dr Kozik began the session by expressing his gratitude to Maj Gen Goswami and all the participants. He remarked that it was a pleasant continuation of the forum and conveyed his honour in sharing the stage with such outstanding professionals. Dr Kozik noted that the challenges surrounding IHL are evident in many aspects today. He highlighted the relevance of the session's topic, which focused on evolving conflict challenges, peace operations, and IHL.

3.2. Topics

3.2.1. International Humanitarian Law and Peace Operations - Katherine Stewart, FAS Coordinator, ICRC, Bangkok

Ms Stewart appreciated the opportunity to speak on the critical subject of IHL and its role in peace operations. She shared her extensive career journey, spanning over three decades, during which she has worked in diverse operational peace missions. Her unique perspective stems from having served both in uniform as a military professional and later as a representative of the ICRC. This dual insight allows her to address peace operations from both operational and humanitarian standpoints.

Ms Stewart made a clear distinction between peace operations and peacekeeping, terms that are often mistakenly used interchangeably. While peacekeeping refers to a specific subset of operations, peace operations encompass a wider array, including peace enforcement, stabilisation missions, and monitoring activities.

She reiterated the crucial role of IHL as the legal framework that governs armed conflicts. It serves as a set of rules designed to protect those not actively involved in combat and to regulate the conduct of hostilities. She argued that violations of IHL—whether intentional or unintentional—should not lead to disillusionment with its framework. Instead, these violations highlight the need for stronger advocacy, better education, and more robust accountability mechanisms.

Ms Stewart stressed the critical importance of states taking responsibility for training their military, police, and civilian personnel on the principles of IHL. Without adequate preparation, personnel cannot effectively apply IHL in complex operational settings. Training must go beyond theoretical knowledge and include scenario-based practical applications that reflect the realities of contemporary peace operations. She highlighted the need for states to integrate IHL into their domestic legal systems to not only ensure alignment with international norms but also address critiques that IHL is a Western-centric framework.

The ICRC's 2024 Challenges Report outlines seven obstacles to implementing IHL. Ms Stewart emphasised key issues, including violations undermining principles of proportionality and precaution, state responsibilities to ratify treaties and integrate IHL into legal frameworks, and declining public awareness of IHL. The ICRC engages diverse actors, linking IHL with local norms and fostering trust between militaries and civilians to support peacebuilding efforts.

Ms Stewart contrasted her military service's physical protection with the symbolic and legal power of the Red Cross emblem, embodying neutrality and impartiality under the Geneva Conventions. She highlighted widespread public misconceptions about the ICRC's role and IHL, emphasising the need for focused education to address these misunderstandings. She emphasised strengthening state commitment to IHL, enhancing public education, promoting accountability, and leveraging IHL

mechanisms for peace and humanitarian efforts. She concluded that IHL is vital for enabling and protecting humanitarian actions in conflict, acting as a bridge to peace.

3.2.2. Role of the United Nations Security Council in Making International Humanitarian Law Work – Professor Bharat Desai, Director, Institute for Advance Studies in International Law, and Prof of International Law, JNU

According to Prof Desai, repeated discussions at the UNSC over 24 years, and briefing by the UN Secretary-General and head of peacekeeping operations, yet the question remains: Who will bridge the gap? The UNSC is often criticised for its failure to take action in crises, such as in Rwanda (1994) and the Israel-Gaza conflict, where it struggled to even call for a ceasefire.

Out of the 11 UNPOs, two are funded directly by the UN's main budget, while the others are funded through peacekeeping budget. These facts are to be taken in the context of how peacekeepers from countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Indonesia now make up most of the peacekeeping forces, with Western countries contributing much less.

The UNSC's inaction has led to repeated humanitarian violations and a lack of accountability. The arrest warrants against Vladimir Putin and the Israeli leadership by the International Criminal Court highlight the growing focus on international accountability, despite some countries' refusal to cooperate. He discussed how countries often violate the UN Charter in the name of the right to self-defense.

He emphasised the double standards in the international community, particularly regarding the selective enforcement of international law. The UNSC's use of veto power to block resolutions, such as those calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, has shown its selective approach to peace and security. The UNSC's mandate for peacekeeping operations is determined by the interests of its five permanent members, who hold veto power. At the same time,

the UNSC's inadequate response and failure to strengthen peacekeeping operations often result in unnecessary casualties and a lack of deterrence. Prof Desai highlighted the ICC's growing role in holding leaders accountable for crimes against humanity. Such lack of enforcement enables impunity and undermines trust in the UN's peacekeeping role.

3.3.3. United Nations Peace Operations and Future Challenges – Ms Annika Hilding Norberg, Head Peace Operations and Peacebuilding, GCSP

Ms Annika Hilding Norberg began her intervention by welcoming the timely focus of the seminar on the need to strengthen IHL and International Human Rights Law (IHRL), two critical instruments in the pursuit of peace and for the protection and perseverance of human dignity in the current age of significant turbulence and trial.

Ms Annika briefly outlined some of the current and emerging key challenges for peace operations and upholding IHL and IHRL. The lines between combatants and civilians are getting blurred, and actors at various levels are increasingly disregarding IHL and IHRL. In the absence of accountability, the need to protect civilians and uphold UN principles gets complicated. However, she argued that the applicability of IHL in contemporary conflicts is still relevant.

Hence, Ms Annika underlined the need to revisit and reinforce the importance of the principles of peacekeeping (impartiality, consent, non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate) with emphasis on success factors and building flexibility so that peace operations can adapt to the evolving conflicts and at the same time, can promote IHL and IHRL. She stated that peace operations, IHL and IHRL are closely interlinked and interdependent for mission success.

The New Agenda for Peace identified Trust, Universality, and Solidarity as the core values that are central to promoting and developing, peaceful, and inclusive societies. These values are also the foundation of IHL and lie at the centre of UNPOs. The peacekeeping principles are what guide the missions and support to uphold IHL. However, the focus has been exclusively on the three principles, with little attention to the enablers and the prerequisites for their success. The success factors: legitimacy, credibility, and local and national ownership were spelt out in the Capstone Doctrine for Peacekeeping in 2008. Besides, when IHL is upheld, it helps the mission to find better acceptability among the local population and the host state.

Ms Annika also made the point that future peace operations must be more proactive and seek to prioritise prevention over reactive measures. In the topic of new and emerging technologies—specifically cyber security and AI—she called for an increased focus on building the capacity of peacekeepers to adapt to these new realities. She also noted the growing role of non-Western countries in shaping the future of UN peacekeeping. She shared an example from the GCSP Global Innovation Day, where the three winning projects focused on AI came from Tunisia, the Philippines, and a joint Israeli Palestinian collaboration—none from western countries.

Ms Annika emphasised the importance of developing and exercising adaptive leadership in support of future peace operations. She highlighted that peacekeepers will need the ability to embrace ambiguity and navigate complexities while maintaining their commitment to IHL and IHRL. She underscored the need for experimentation and innovation, self-correction, and self-learning, and to be able to lead with integrity and empathy for peace operations to be effective in the rapidly evolving security environment.

Day 2

Plenary Session

4.1. Video recorded message – Mr Alexandre Zhouev, Assistant Secretary-General, Rule of Law and Security Institutions, Department of Peace Operations, UN

Mr Zhouev, in his video message, expressed his gratitude to the USI for conducting this important, relevant, and timely event. He underscored the critical importance of strengthening peace operations to address the complexities of evolving conflicts, safeguard civilians, and foster sustainable global peace because the continued rise in conflict-related deaths in 2023 reached the highest level in this century. In this respect, he highlighted the five recommendations of UN Secretary-General for the New Agenda for Peace, and the vision of the rule of law—a key foundation for sustainable peace and security. He emphasised the pressing need for adequate and predictable funding, particularly for African Union-led peace operations, to enhance their capacity to address regional challenges with greater effectiveness.

He also highlighted the significance of collaboration between international and regional organisations, stressing that a unified approach is essential to tackle emerging threats to peace and security. He said, “Strengthening peace operations is essential in addressing evolving conflicts, protecting civilians, and fostering sustainable global peace”. He conveyed an urgent call to prioritise

innovative strategies and reinforce collective efforts to ensure impactful, inclusive, and sustainable peacekeeping initiatives in an increasingly interconnected world.

4.2. Opening Address - Ambassador Asoke Mukerji, India's Former Permanent Representative to the UN

Amb Mukerji began his address by stressing the pressing need for reforms in the UN, drawing from his experience as India's Permanent Representative to the UN. He emphasised the importance of the UN Charter, which underpins international peace and security but is inconsistently applied. He questioned why member states have not implemented Article 109 of the Charter, which mandates a UN Charter review conference.

He revisited the historical context of the veto, referencing Ramaswamy Mudaliar's vision of it as a temporary privilege while recording India's opposition to the veto. Amb Mukerji also criticised the veto, arguing that it fosters inequality among member states and undermines the principles of the UN. He warned that without timely reforms, the UN risks losing relevance in addressing modern global challenges. Amb Mukerji also pointed out outdated provisions in the UN structure, such as the Trusteeship Council, which became redundant after 1994. He argued with examples for the need for reforming the way UN peacekeeping mandates are drawn up by the UNSC without taking inputs from TCCs.

To conclude, Amb Mukerji advocated urgent reforms to create a more inclusive UN that reflects contemporary geopolitical realities, preserves equality in decision making, and addresses structural inefficiencies, thereby, aligning the organisation with the current global challenges.

4.3. Special Address - Mr Shombi Sharp, UN Resident Coordinator in India

Mr Sharp emphasised the evolving complexities of modern conflicts, driven by geopolitical and technological divides, and underscored the need for updated peacekeeping strategies to address challenges like hybrid and cyber threats.

Peacekeeping, which he called a revolutionary concept, has evolved since its inception in 1948. Despite limited resources and challenges, the peacekeepers have saved countless lives. He stated that currently 76,000 personnel are deployed globally, tackling threats from modern armed groups equipped with advanced technologies like AI and drones. However, there are limited funds available for the same as the peacekeeping budget is just 0.3 per cent of global military spending and less than the budget of the New York City Police Department, adversely affecting its efficacy.

Recognising India's contributions, he lauded its leadership as one of the largest troop contributors, with over 6,000 personnel currently deployed, including 142 women. He commended initiatives like India's first all women peacekeeping unit in Liberia and paid tribute to the 179 Indian peacekeepers who have died in service including Naik Dhananjay Kumar Singh, who was recently awarded Dag Hammarskjöld Medal posthumously. He also stressed the transformative role of women in peacekeeping, highlighting Major Radhika Sen's recognition as UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year 2023. He praised India's support for global strategies, such as supplying Armoured Personnel Carriers to South Sudan and advancing South-South cooperation.

Looking ahead, there is a need for realistic and adaptive peacekeeping mandates, as outlined in the Secretary-General's Agenda for Peace, and he emphasised the importance of the Pact for the Future in reimagining frameworks. He concluded by stressing the critical role of youth in shaping global peace and security, encouraging young attendees to actively participate in peace efforts.

Session 3: Breakout Sessions

5.1. Session 3 (A): Protection of Civilians and Peacekeepers

5.1.1. Chair: Maj Gen MP Bhagat (Retd), Former Commander of India's UN contingent in Somalia and Deputy Military Adviser, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UN

Maj Gen MP Bhagat (Retd) opened the session by addressing the critical challenges in peacekeeping, highlighting the disparity between limited peacekeeping forces and the vast populations needing protection. He critiqued the global discourse on peacekeeping, noting its focus on semantics over action. He argued that the UN alone cannot resolve these issues and called for collective responsibility, stating, "Solutions lie in the hands of proactive individuals and nations". He highlighted how peacekeeping missions, especially in resource-rich regions like Congo, often serve the economic interests of powerful nations rather than local populations. He urged African nations to take responsibility for safeguarding their resources.

Reflecting on India's contributions, particularly in the 1993 Somalia mission, Maj Gen Bhagat praised India's resilience and adaptability, asserting, "No one can do meaningful peacekeeping better than Indians", given its historical experiences and unique perspective. He highlighted alarming statistics: today 180 million women and children are in conflict zones and 120 million displaced individuals. He questioned who would reintegrate these populations, underscoring the immense humanitarian challenge. While acknowledging the UN's resources, he pointed at the lack of political will, stating, "The UN is short not on ability or funds but on will, and that is the harsh reality". He called for decisive, practical efforts over diplomatic posturing to ensure peacekeeping missions protect vulnerable populations and foster sustainable peace.

5.1.2. Threat to Civilians and Peacekeepers in Intra-State Conflicts - Maj Gen (Dr) AK Bardalai (Retd), Former Deputy Head of Mission and Deputy Force Commander, UNFIL

Maj Gen (Dr) AK Bardalai (Retd) delivered a nuanced analysis of the challenges in interpreting peacekeeping mandates, addressing operational constraints, and highlighting the role of leadership in UN peacekeeping missions. One of the primary challenges identified was the ambiguity in peacekeeping mandates. He noted that unclear mandates often lead to operational delays and reduced effectiveness, undermining civilian protection efforts. He cited the MINUSMA as an example where such ambiguity hindered mission success.

The implementation of the 2023 PoC policy was another area of concern. While the policy is robust, its inconsistent interpretation by TCCs poses significant challenges. Maj Gen Bardalai also addressed the impact of national caveats and dual command structures on mission effectiveness. Restrictions imposed by TCCs and dual command structures compromise mission flexibility and decision-making, as seen during the 2008 Kiwanja massacre in the DRC. Leadership, emerged as a central theme in his analysis, and he stressed the importance of strong mission leadership, contrasting failures in Rwanda and Bosnia with exemplary actions by Nordic commanders in Bosnia, who protected civilians under fire.

To enhance the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping, he proposed several recommendations. He called for mandates that are precise to prevent misinterpretation, training programs that empower peacekeepers to prioritise civilian safety, and the appointment of leaders with the vision and commitment to drive mission objectives. Additionally, he advocated for minimising national caveats to improve operational agility and maintaining transparency through documented peacekeeping actions to address criticism and accountability.

Maj Gen Bardalai concluded that despite challenges, determined leadership and welltrained contingents can effectively protect civilians. The UN is as effective as the member states want it, and in a similar way, the UNPOs can be as effective as the TCCs want them to be.

5.1.3. Institutional Measures to Protect the Protectors - Brig Narendra Singh, Former Regional Commander, South Sudan

Brigadier Narendra Singh delivered a comprehensive presentation focusing on the vital issue of safeguarding peacekeepers, emphasising the physical protection of UN personnel, including military, police, and civilians. He drew attention to the alarming rise in violence against peacekeepers, noting that in the past five years, 74 peacekeepers from 20 countries have lost their lives. This troubling trend was particularly evident in missions such as MINUSMA and MONUSCA, where the operational risks are among the highest. He highlighted India's significant contributions as one of the largest TCCs to the UN missions, with 179 casualties over the years—an enduring testament to the sacrifices made by Indian personnel.

He discussed the issue of accountability for crimes against peacekeepers, referencing UNSC Resolution 2589, adopted in Aug 2021 during India's presidency. The resolution emphasises the need for robust mechanisms to prosecute crimes against peacekeepers. However, he pointed out that host countries often lack either the political will or the necessary resources to bring perpetrators to justice, creating a persistent gap in accountability.

Brig Narendra elaborated on the operational challenges peacekeepers face, particularly stemming from their dependence on the host country's consent. While peacekeeping operations are guided by three core principles—consent of parties, impartiality, and non use of force except in self-defence—he acknowledged the complexities in applying these principles in practice.

He highlighted several structural inefficiencies that impede mission success such as ambiguous mandates, restricted night time patrols, and security measures that prioritise avoiding casualties over pro-active PoC. He also noted that advanced technologies for crime recording, intelligence gathering, and real-time monitoring remain underutilised. Additionally, peacekeeping missions often lack the cultural sensitivity needed to foster trust and cooperation with host populations.

He recommended several measures to enhance the effectiveness of UNPOs. He emphasised the importance of clear, concise mandates to reduce ambiguity and prioritise civilian protection, alongside robust accountability mechanisms to address crimes against peacekeepers. Dynamic patrolling strategies, including night operations, should be introduced, complemented by the integration of advanced technologies for intelligence and real time threat monitoring. Brig Narendra also called for greater cohesion among civilians, police, and military. He underscored the importance of equipping host states with resources, training, and political support to reduce local resistance and improve their capacity to protect both civilians and peacekeepers. Finally, he highlighted the importance of strategic communication with all stakeholders to build trust, cooperation, and support for mission objectives.

Brig Narendra concluded by underscoring the necessity of addressing these issues through reforms that would ultimately not only reduce risks to peacekeepers, but also significantly enhance the overall effectiveness and credibility of UN missions globally.

5.1.4. International Humanitarian Law and Protection of Civilians – Ms Meher Dev, Legal Advisor, ICRC, New Delhi

Ms Meher Dev began by acknowledging the foundational statement made earlier in the session by Maj Gen Bhagat, who emphasised that the protection of civilians is a fundamental aspect of humanity—yet we continue to fail to address it adequately. Echoing these

sentiments, she noted that Amb Mukerji and representatives from the DPO at the UN headquarters had also underscored the importance of civilian protection.

Ms Meher then outlined her presentation, which covered four main topics under the framework of IHL related to the PoC. She began by reviewing the legal framework of IHL, emphasising its evolution, particularly after the atrocities of the World Wars, which prompted the creation of the Geneva Convention of 1949 and its additional protocols. These developments marked a significant shift from focusing solely on combatants to extending protection to civilians.

She highlighted how the prevention of harm to civilians is not limited to times of active conflict but is a continuum extending from peacetime through the onset of conflict, during hostilities, and post-conflict recovery. She stressed the importance of educating all parties, including civilians, about IHL during peacetime. Humanitarian organisations, such as the ICRC, play a pivotal role in disseminating this knowledge and engaging in dialogues, which are far more effective before chaos ensues.

Discussing the onset of conflict, she elaborated on the rights of protected people to leave conflict zones and the obligation of parties to facilitate their safe repatriation. She also provided examples of how the ICRC aids in this process, such as issuing emergency travel documents and coordinating with authorities. Finally, Ms Meher also touched upon the Geneva Convention's provisions for creating hospital and safety zones to protect vulnerable groups like the elderly, expectant mothers, and children.

Emphasising the importance of establishing mechanisms like the National Information Bureaus during peacetime to record the movements and needs of civilians during armed conflicts, Ms Meher argued that such mechanisms are vital for ensuring the protection of children, a particularly vulnerable group. She advocated for sub-bureaus dedicated to children's welfare, tracking their education, family status, and reintegration needs.

Ms Meher revisited key principles of IHL: distinction, proportionality, and precaution to explain that these principles obligate parties to distinguish between combatants and civilians, avoid disproportionate harm to civilian populations, and take precautions to minimise civilian casualties. She provided concrete examples, such as the careful selection of weaponry and advanced warnings to civilian populations in conflict zones.

Ms Meher also addressed the protections afforded to civilian hospitals and detainees, underscoring fundamental guarantees like the right to medical care and protection from torture or sexual violence. She placed particular emphasis on the plight of children separated from their families and called for measures to ensure their maintenance, education, and religious freedom, even in the chaos of war.

The speaker highlighted the ongoing role of IHL post-conflict in addressing issues like family reunification and missing people. She noted that such efforts could serve as a foundation for broader peace negotiations, bridging gaps between conflicting parties.

Ms Meher discussed the contemporary challenges to civilian protection, including urban warfare, which complicates the application of IHL principles due to the intermingling of civilian and military targets. She also aptly raised concerns about emerging technologies like AWS and their limitations in adhering to the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution in the absence of human judgment and mercy.

Finally, she addressed the role of UN peacekeepers, emphasising their responsibility to protect humanitarian workers and healthcare facilities. Peacekeepers, she noted, are often the most informed about the needs of displaced populations and can provide critical data to aid states and humanitarian organisations in their efforts.

5.2. Session 3: (B) Climate Change and UN Peace Operations

5.2.1. Chair: Lt Gen S Tinaikar (Retd), Former Force Commander, UNMISS (South Sudan)

Lt Gen S Tinaikar stated that Climate change is real. It is a ‘Code red for humanity’, and every region is affected. 2024 has been a masterclass in climate destruction: biodiversity destroyed in sweltering seas, workers collapsing in insufferable heat, floods tearing through communities, and drought ravaging crops. All these disasters are supercharged by human made climate change. Between 2010 and 2020, human mortality from floods, droughts, and storms was 15 times higher in highly vulnerable regions, accounting for 3.3 to 3.6 billion people.

Transhumance⁹ is a source of conflict between farmers and cattle herders, which is only getting worse today. Floods and drought in South Sudan have deepened food insecurity, with the state experiencing a perpetual humanitarian emergency. The Middle East and North African regions are set to be exposed to higher temperatures and frequent droughts aggravating ongoing conflicts. Leading think tanks have concluded that climate change is rarely a direct cause of conflict. However, there is ample evidence that it is a risk multiplier, amplifying underlying vulnerabilities and compounding existing grievances while also severely impacting the ability to address climate and disaster risk.

The UNSC has been engaged with the peace and security implications of climate change since 2007. In Jul 2011, an open debate concluded with a presidential statement that expressed concern that possible adverse effects of climate change may, in the long run, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security. The UNSC has requested governments to conduct climate related security risk assessments and develop risk management strategies.

A consensus in the form of a UNSC Resolution has not materialised. But concerted joint efforts are addressing the situation, which is rather grim already. The Climate Security Mechanism of the UN is one such prominent joint initiative between the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the UNDP, the UN Environment Program, and the DPO. Since 2018, it has sought to analyse linkages between climate change, peace, and security and advance appropriate solutions. Climate, Peace, and Security Advisors are now deployed in UN field missions and sub-regional organisations. The advisor in South Sudan has increased UNMISS' ability to factor climate-related security risks through the development of a climate-sensitive database, peace dialogues to mitigate conflict exacerbated by climate change, and coordination with the UN country team. In West Africa and the Sahel, the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel is deepening its partnership with Economic Community of West African States to inform conflict-sensitive climate adaptation plans.

The transborder impacts of climate change highlight how environmental challenges strain peacekeeping mandates. Though not their primary cause, climate risks exacerbate conflict and governance issues. Addressing this requires strong research and collaboration among governments, peacekeepers, and policymakers to integrate climate considerations into conflict resolution and build resilience in vulnerable regions.

5.2.2. Climate Change and Security: Indian Perspective - Dr Dhanasree Jayaram, Manipal Academy of Higher Education

Dr Jayaram presented an Indian perspective, explaining India's resistance to include climate change on the UNSC agenda. India has resisted discussing climate change in the UNSC due to several factors. A primary concern is the potential weaponisation of climate change, as there is a fear that the UNSC could prioritise security

concerns over global cooperation and development. India maintains that climate change should be discussed in other forums, avoiding its possible exploitation for geopolitical purposes.

One of India's significant concerns is the issue of transboundary rivers, many of which originate from the Tibetan Plateau and are shared with neighbouring countries, including China. India faces challenges regarding the lack of cooperation and the absence of transparency from China, which does not share critical data related to these rivers. This geopolitical tension is further exacerbated by the growing military presence and infrastructure buildup in the Himalayan region, which also faces the impact of climate change, such as glacial melting, landslides, and environmental fragility.

The changing climate is also affecting the Indian Ocean which has serious implications for livelihoods, especially in coastal areas, and is likely to lead to increased migration and displacement. India's approach to climate change does not frame it strictly as a national security issue but adopts informal measures to address it as a security concern. The Indian Armed Forces are involved in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, such as their support to Turkey during the earthquake. Additionally, India's investment in solar energy and participation in multilateral initiatives like the International Solar Alliance reflects its approach to climate security.

However, the lack of a unified resolution on climate security in the UNSC highlights the challenges in moving forward on this issue at the global level. India advocates for addressing the injustices in access to resources. Addressing these inequities is seen as vital for both climate action and security. In sum, India's climate security approach is development-oriented, focused on regional cooperation, and mindful of the geopolitical dynamics that influence global climate discussions.

5.2.3. Climate-Related Peace and Security Risks – Ms Ingvild Brox Brodtkorb, Research Fellow, NUPI

Ms Ingvild Brox Brodtkorb stated that climate related events significantly affect the operations of the UN, particularly in peacekeeping missions. For example, flooding can prevent peacekeepers from reaching vulnerable communities, hindering their ability to deliver critical aid and maintain peace. While climate change is rarely the primary driver of conflict, it exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and can undermine fragile peace processes. This makes it essential for UNPOs to integrate climate related peace and security risks into their frameworks to address the complexities of local conflicts.

The UNMISS, for example, has developed frameworks such as flood task forces and joint contingency plans to address specific climate-related risks. These efforts are also seen in other missions, like the mission in Central Africa, which created integrated action plans to mitigate climate related challenges, such as resource competition due to transhumance. Transhumance corridors are one example of how the UN has sought to manage climate-induced migration and resource scarcity, preventing conflict.

In addition to this, support by regional organisations is essential. Local governments need support in adapting to climate change. This includes working with local communities to develop strategies for climate resilience and reducing the potential for conflict over scarce resources. Tackling climate change in peacekeeping operations is a complex, multifaceted challenge that cannot be solved by peacekeepers alone. To conclude, a comprehensive approach, involving multiple actors and coordinated efforts, at both the local and global levels, is needed. The UN could focus on enhancing this synergy, creating more integrated and cohesive responses to climate related security risks.

5.3 Session 3 (C): Women in UN Peace Operations – Key to a Lasting Peace

5.3.1. Chair – Ms Susan Ferguson, Country Representative, UN Women India

Ms Susan Ferguson, UN Women's Country Representative in India, outlined the organisation's mission to empower women globally, especially in conflict and post-conflict scenarios. She emphasised that women's active participation in peacekeeping and decision making is essential for achieving sustainable peace.

She amplified women's unique ability to build trust within communities and foster cooperation, especially in patriarchal societies. Studies show peace agreements are more likely to succeed when women are involved, underscoring the need for gender sensitive approaches in peace operations. Despite some progress, with women now comprising 5 to 6 per cent of peacekeepers, she stressed the gap to parity and called for increased recruitment, training, and support. India's significant contributions were lauded, particularly its leadership in deploying women peacekeepers in challenging environments like Liberia and South Sudan. Ferguson highlighted India's initiatives, such as the Indian Women Peacekeepers' Deployment Program, as a model for other nations.

She addressed ongoing challenges, including cultural stereotypes and resistance to women's leadership, urging stronger policies to ensure women's participation across all levels of peacekeeping. She finally concluded by advocating for moving beyond tokenism, ensuring women have the resources and opportunities to lead in peacekeeping, and emphasised the transformative impact of their leadership in fostering inclusive, durable peace.

5.3.2. Video Message: Ms Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Assistant Secretary-General, Deputy Executive Director, UN Women, New York

Ms Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, the Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, praised India for the remarkable strides it has made in advancing gender equality, noting that these achievements are deeply rooted in the country's rich cultural heritage. She emphasised that initiatives such as 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' (Save the Daughters, Educate the Daughters) serve as powerful symbols of progress, demonstrating India's unwavering commitment to empowering women and girls, and advancing women's rights. Ms Gumbonzvanda pointed out that these efforts reflect the spirit of the UN's overarching mission for action, which seeks to create a world where gender equality is a reality.

She further encouraged India to maintain its active engagement and to continue playing a leading role on the global stage in advancing the cause of gender equality. She expressed confidence that India's leadership and contributions would inspire other nations to accelerate their efforts in creating inclusive and equitable societies for all.

5.3.3. Role of Women Peacekeepers and Challenges - Col (Dr) KK Sharma (Retd), Visiting Fellow, USI

Col (Dr) KK Sharma discussed the evolving role of women peacekeepers, emphasising their critical contribution to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Drawing from his army experience, he asserted that women's inclusion in peacekeeping is no longer debatable but essential, stating, "Women peacekeepers break barriers and build peace with resilience and leadership in conflict zones, paving the way for more inclusive and lasting solutions". The UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000) had urged all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all UN peace and security efforts. The thrust of more women in UNPOs is following UNSC Resolution 1325.

Col Sharma highlighted that women peacekeepers bring unique qualities such as empathy and collaborative skills, enabling them to navigate cultural sensitivities and engage effectively with local communities. Their presence fosters trust, enhances security, and addresses gender-based violence, contributing to more inclusive and sustainable peace processes. He underscored that women peacekeepers are not just agents of peace but also catalysts for long term stability.

He acknowledged the UN DPO's focus on gender mainstreaming, calling it imperative for sustainable peace. He cited the increasing participation of women in peacekeeping, with women comprising about 8 per cent of military personnel in Aug 2024. India has been following the mandate of more women in peace operations. Out of 5,400 peacekeepers deployed presently, includes 150 women as in Aug 2024. Two Indian women officers have been nominated as the UN Gender Advocates of the year in 2018 and 2023.

However, Col Sharma also highlighted challenges faced by women peacekeepers, such as gender bias, security risks, and inadequate facilities. He stressed the need for stronger support systems, including gender sensitive training and protective measures, to ensure women's safety and effectiveness in conflict zones.

5.3.4. Advancing Women in Peace and Security - Key United Nations Enablers – Ms Annika Hilding Norberg, Head, Peace Operations and Peacebuilding, GCSP

Ms Annika Hilding Norberg discussed how women bring unique perspectives and enable more inclusive, effective, and impactful conflict resolution, peacebuilding and peace operations. She underscored the importance of walking the talk, continuous action and reflection on how to best advance women's roles in an evolving and increasingly challenging peace and security environment. She called for celebrating milestones and learning from progress while maintaining a focus on strengthening gender equality across the peace and security sector in general and in peace operations.

She noted that there is a marked improvement in the participation of women peacekeepers. In particular, UN Policing had already met its gender parity goals for 2025 as set out in the Gender Parity Strategy—20 per cent. This was partly due to the dedicated leadership, and professional development initiatives the Police Division had pursued, including the UN Women Police Commander Cadre Female Professional Development Program, UN Military Observers courses for female officers, the UN Police Commanders Course 2023 hosted in Switzerland, which for the first time had parity in police commanders attending.

India's leadership in promoting gender equality in peacekeeping was highlighted as a global example of walking the talk. Ms Annika commended India for taking the lead in deploying the very first all-female Formed Police Unit in 2007. Over the following decade, it made a significant impact through the UN Mission in Liberia. Inspired by the role models provided by the Indian women peacekeepers, a considerable increase is seen in Liberian women joining the security sector and police force. Over the years, Indian female peacekeepers have regularly been recognised for their outstanding service. The most recent recipient of the UN Military Gender Advocate Award for the Year 2023, is Major Radhika Sen, a fellow panellist in the seminar.

Yet, much is yet to be done. Ms Annika advocated greater efforts to recruit and integrate women into all roles in peacekeeping. She acknowledged the persistent barriers to integrating gender perspectives in peacekeeping, such as overall under representation in senior leadership positions and systemic resistance to change. It was important for the UN to recruit women, but equally critical that member states put forward their very best candidates. To optimise the quality of peace operations, there is a need to tap into the full range of human resources expertise (not just 50 per cent, i.e., only men) in our plans, programs and priorities.

She stressed the need for ongoing innovation and adaptation to overcome these challenges. Peace agreements are 35 per cent more likely to last when women are involved. She advocated empowering women at all levels of peacemaking and peace operations, emphasising women's contributions to addressing community needs and fostering long-term stability.

She concluded with a call to action, urging continued investment in gender equality as a principle integral to strengthening peace operations. The journey requires unwavering commitment and sustained efforts from the international community. Addressing the youth in particular, women and men, she encouraged them to be confident, to develop adaptive leadership and a growth mentality for peace.

5.3.5. Field Experiences of Women Peacekeepers - Maj Navita Kashyap, Former Peacekeeper, UNISFA (Abyei)

Maj Navita Kashyap reflected on her trail blazing journey as one of the first women peacekeepers in Abyei, initially deployed as the sole woman in the mission. She described the challenges and empowerment of this experience, noting the growth in women's representation as over 30 women were eventually deployed—a milestone that underscored the growing recognition of women in peacekeeping.

She emphasised that women's inclusion in peacekeeping should no longer require justification. She stated that their presence, particularly in diverse roles like interpreters, significantly enhances operational effectiveness. She underscored the importance of empowering local women in conflict zones, advocating for their active participation in post conflict rebuilding and decision making. She observed that empowering these women is vital for achieving lasting peace and formulating inclusive policies. Maj Navita shared touching anecdotes from Abyei, including a local woman naming her child 'Baby Navita' in her honour—a moment she described as deeply emotional and a testament to the bond she built with the community.

She highlighted a campaign by Amul in Jan 2023, featuring the tagline 'Ab Ye Peace', which celebrated women peacekeepers' deployment in Abyei and symbolised their contributions to peace. Concluding her talk, Maj Kashyap reflected on the profound emotional and psychological impact women peacekeepers have on communities, noting that they inspire trust, hope, and recovery in conflict affected regions. She stressed the need to build institutions differently to fully integrate women's contributions into peace processes.

5.3.6. Field Experiences of Women Peacekeepers - Maj Radhika Sen, Former Peacekeeper, MONUSCO (Virtual)

Maj Radhika Sen, recipient of the UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award (2023), shared her insights on the critical role of women in peacekeeping during a virtual session. She highlighted the transformative impact of female peacekeepers, noting their unique ability to foster deeper community engagement.

Maj Sen reflected on the challenges and rewards of serving in conflict zones, emphasising that women peacekeepers bring a more empathetic and comprehensive approach to peace and security. She explained that women peacekeepers are vital in building trust, particularly in engaging with vulnerable local women and children, which contributes to more sustainable peace outcomes.

She underscored the importance of diversity in peacekeeping teams, noting that equal representation of men and women brings varied perspectives, making peace operations more effective and meaningful. Maj Sen highlighted that peacebuilding is not just a political or military process but a deeply social one that requires women's involvement at all levels of decision making.

Maj Sen concluded by noting that women peacekeepers are not only symbols of gender equality but also protectors and advocates for local communities, especially vulnerable groups. Their presence reassures women and children, providing safety and hope. She stressed that women's roles as cultural liaisons and role models often lead to more effective conflict resolution and long term peace.

Session 4: Analysing the Future: Challenges and Future of United Nations Peace Operations

6.1. Opening Remarks – Mr Benoit Pylyser, Director, Challenges Forum (Virtual)

Mr Benoit Pylyser highlighted the paradox facing international peace operations, noting that while the world has experienced the highest levels of war and conflict since 1946, the number of peace operations is declining. He stressed that this decline is concerning, as it undermines multilateralism and puts populations at risk.

Peace operations remain essential for global peace and security. He called for adapting peace operations to address current and emerging threats, making them more flexible and responsive. He pointed out that the UN has not launched any significant new peacekeeping operations in the last decade, with many existing missions, including those in Mali and the DRC, either shut down or closing. This is occurring amid escalating geopolitical tensions, complex conflicts, and global threats like climate change.

Mr Pylyser noted that increasing geopolitical divisions complicate international conflict resolution. He warned that the premature closure of peace operations often leads to increased violence and instability. He called for a corrective approach to adapt peace operations to new threats, stressing the need for shared accountability between peace operations, the UNSC, and host countries. He also highlighted the importance of exploring innovative ways to collaborate with host nations. He emphasised the critical role of global peace operations infrastructure, including trained personnel, crisis managers, and partnerships with organisations like the African Union and European Union. Maintaining this infrastructure requires coordinated efforts from UN member states and regional partners.

He acknowledged that while international conflict management is difficult, learning from failures and adapting to evolving challenges is crucial. He concluded by reiterating that international conflict management requires determination, resilience, and a commitment in shaping a peaceful future, and there are no shortcuts to peace and no guarantees for success.

6.2. Chair: Lt Gen JS Lidder (Retd), Former Force Commander, UNMIS and Deputy SRSG (P), Sudan

Lt Gen JS Lidder, chairing the session, emphasised the importance of addressing the future of UNPOs, focusing on the evolving nature of conflicts, challenges to peacekeeping, and implications for international law. He began by quoting the UN Secretary General's statement that the world is at an 'Inflexion Point', underscoring the critical global challenges threatening peace and stability. He underscored that when our world faces catastrophic consequences, it is humanity and nations that suffer the most.

Lt Gen Lidder affirmed that UN peacekeeping remains our sole legitimate tool for implementing international peace and security, despite all criticisms. He pointed out that though the UNPOs have faced scrutiny, many have made significant contributions to global peace. He also mentioned the UN's New Agenda for Peace, announced in Jul 2023 brings renewed hope, but requires harmonisation with the 'Hard reality check' on peacekeeping performances.

He highlighted the limitations of robust peace operations, especially in counter-terrorism, noting how expanding mandates in places like Mali and the Eastern DRC, supported by regional forces, have exacerbated conflicts rather than resolve. Efforts are being made to empower regional responses, such as the South African Development Community-led force in the DRC under UNSC Resolution 2746. He acknowledged the advantage of region-led initiatives but cautioned against challenges in coordination and compliance.

Lt Gen Lidder posed several critical questions over the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping; the need for institutionalising UN frameworks for mandate convergence and accountability, how the UN can strengthen host nation ownership, and what measures the UN can take to mitigate violence and ensure accountability. He concluded by stressing the need for innovation and adaptation in peace operations, emphasising that effective peacekeeping requires collaboration, adaptation, and a focus on both short-term stability and long-term peacebuilding.

6.3. Topics

6.3.1. Leveraging Pact of the Future and New Agenda for Peace for Future Peace Operations – Ms Annika Hilding Norberg, Head Peace Operations and Peacebuilding, GCSP

Ms Annika Hilding Norberg discussed the rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape, including recent transformative events; COVID 19 Pandemic, the collapse of the international mission in Afghanistan, the invasion of Ukraine, a series of military coups in Africa, and the outbreak of the Hamas-Israel conflict spreading into a regional war across the Middle East, to mention a few. The impact of these game-changing developments, powered by new technologies and accelerated by the outcomes of the ‘Super elections year’ was considerable. Consequently, it was high time to reassess our fundamental understanding of the context and new realities that can impact the definition of peace operations, our assumptions and what the changing landscape of actors means for future missions and operations.

To address the unfolding peace and security challenges, the UN member states adopted a Pact for the Future in Sep 2024. Ms Annika stressed the importance of not only the Pact of the Future but also its annexes, the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration for Future Generations, advocating for a holistic reading and

implementation of the interlinking documents. The New Agenda for Peace's Action 21 'We will adapt peace operations to better respond to existing challenges and new realities', while critical, did not encompass all key elements relevant to strengthening peace operations. For example, leveraging peace operations through enhancing Women, Peace, and Security and Climate Security was not included in the peace operations section, but covered in other chapters of the Pact. They remain key components of strengthening peace operations.

Ms Annika suggested that Action 21 did not include so many new ideas or recommendations. The main action point was a request to the UN Secretary-General to 'Undertake a review on the future of all forms of UNPOs, taking into account lessons learned from previous and ongoing reform processes, and provide strategic and action-oriented recommendations for the consideration of member states on how the UN toolbox can be adapted to meet evolving needs, to allow for more agile, tailored responses to existing, emerging and future challenges'. Pact Action 21 recognised peace operations to encompass both peacekeeping and special political missions. It emphasised the need to strengthen UN and regional partnerships, particularly with the African Union. Additionally, the Pact puts an indicative heightened focus on the health of peacekeepers—their mental health, in particular.

Ms Annika welcomed the recently launched Independent Study on Future Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities which was presented in the USI Panel Discussion by Professor Ai Kiara Hunt. The study was timely, and innovative and presented new thinking and functional models of peacekeeping. The endorsement by the study of a proposal to establish a Centre of Excellence for (uniformed and civilian) observers to generate a cadre of specialised personnel who are prepared for rapid deployment was particularly welcomed (from the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network study on the Role, Relevance, Function, and Utility of UNTSO—What Lessons for the Future, which was jointly conducted by the GCSP, NUPI, and the USI of India).

Referring to the USI Challenges Project Seminar in 2002 Report, she drew attention to the proposal by Lt Gen Satish Nambiar on the need to establish a UN Peace Force. It was not ripe for action in 2002. However, given the intense geopolitical changes currently underway and at a time when great powers might be less inclined to pursue (and pay for) more expensive peace operations, such a proposal could again come to fruition.

Ms Annika concluded by emphasising the need for adaptive leadership, systemic reform, and unified political support for current and future peace operations. She made a call for purpose-driven leadership, advocating developing a mindset and competencies to navigate the complexities of modern peace operations. She encouraged experimentation and innovation, collective learning and collaboration, and leadership that demonstrated integrity and empathy. Adaptive leadership would be central to achieving sustainable peace and security in the future.

6.3.2. People-Centric Operations - as a Precursor to Successful Operations - Col (Dr) KK Sharma (Retd), Visiting Fellow, USI

Col (Dr) KK Sharma highlighted the need to shift the focus of UNPOs from predominantly state-centric approaches to bottom up, mission specific, and civilian focused strategies that prioritise the PoC and address their fundamental needs. Most of the UNPOs remain largely state-centric, supporting the host states from their security threats. This needs to change to the primary focus of people centrality. This requires addressing the complex interplay of factors such as tribal conflicts, climate insecurity, underdevelopment, and localised violence.

Drawing on India's rich history in peacekeeping operations, Col Sharma shared compelling examples of how Indian contingents have prioritised local communities. Indian Army units practice people-centric activities in their station of postings, hence are adept at this. In Congo (2021), Indian peacekeepers from the Infantry

Battalion were first responders during a volcanic eruption, saving thousands of lives. In South Sudan and the DRC, Indian medical personnel provided critical support during the Ebola and COVID-19 crises, while Indian engineers repaired flood-damaged infrastructure, safeguarding civilians. These examples underscore the ethos of Indian peacekeeping, which combines humanitarian assistance, local engagement, and capacity building to achieve sustainable peace.

He outlined several core principles of a people-centric approach to peacekeeping, such as engaging with local communities, investing in social capital, and strengthening institutions, addressing fundamental needs such as security, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities, and empowering women. He cited studies that show missions incorporating local inputs and building trust tend to achieve more sustainable outcomes.

He also highlighted the importance of focusing on long-term developmental agendas, aligning with sustainable development goals like those outlined in the African Union's Agenda 2063. He concluded by underscoring the evolving role of peacekeeping operations in addressing the most pressing issues faced by local populations. Drawing from India's legacy and global practices, he called for a paradigm shift to make peacekeeping truly people centric, ensuring that operations are not only effective but also sustainable in the long term.

6.3.3. IHL and Conflicts: Restraints and Behaviour - Mr Sandeep Bali, Head of Prevention, ICRC

Mr Sandeep Bali presented a compelling discussion on the challenges and evolving dynamics of IHL in modern conflicts. Reflecting on the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and 160 years since the founding of the ICRC, he acknowledged the universal endorsement of IHL. Highlighting the violations of IHL by parties to the conflict, he expressed grave concern over the trend

of parties attempting to justify these violations or deny their occurrence outright, noting the alarming portrayal of unlawful acts as compliant behaviour.

He highlighted that the contemporary conflict landscape has become increasingly complex, with 120 ongoing armed conflicts worldwide, many of which are prolonged and involve a growing number of non-state armed groups. This proliferation of actors introduces significant challenges to ensuring compliance with IHL.

Mr Bali introduced two landmark studies that examined the psychological and social factors influencing combatants' actions in conflict zones and understanding the norms of restraint within armed groups and how organisational structure, community influence, and social norms shape compliance with IHL. He suggested that incorporating the key findings of the studies can help better integration of structured state forces and IHL in their doctrines and training.

Mr Bali emphasised that achieving better compliance with IHL requires a multifaceted approach. This includes integrating IHL into doctrines, education, and practical mechanisms across all levels of armed forces, as well as engaging a broad range of stakeholders such as academics, political leaders, and communities to foster a culture of restraint. Recognising the influence of local norms in shaping behaviour, especially within decentralised groups, is the key. Additionally, high-level advocacy is essential to encourage international organisations and states to prioritise IHL adherence in operational mandates and policymaking.

Mr Bali concluded with a poignant reflection on the thin line between discipline and unchecked violence in war. Quoting a powerful ICRC publication, he noted that discipline, not compassion, often restrains combatants from committing atrocities. Mr Bali reaffirmed the ICRC's commitment to fostering restraint and protecting civilian populations, stressing that these studies provide valuable insights for shaping future efforts in humanitarian

law and peacekeeping operations. He urged for collective action to bridge the gap between knowledge and behaviour, ensuring that the principles of IHL remain at the forefront of global conflict resolution.

Closing Session

7.1. Valedictory Address - Ms Uma Sekhar, Additional secretary (Legal and Treaties), Ministry of External Affairs

Ms Uma Sekhar, Additional Secretary (Legal and Treaties) at the MEA, delivered the valedictory address, expressing gratitude to the organisers and participants of the conference on 'Changing Character of Conflicts: Challenges to Peace Operations and International Humanitarian Law'. She emphasised the theme's relevance amidst the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

Ms Sekhar highlighted the transformation of modern conflicts, characterised by irregular warfare, non-state actors, and technological advancements like drones and cyber warfare. These changes, she noted, create complex challenges for peacekeepers, including asymmetric warfare and mandates to protect civilians amid evolving threats like terrorism. She called for attention to gender dynamics, advocating for better training for women in peacekeeping roles to prevent violence and exploitation.

She also addressed legal questions surrounding peacekeeping operations in active conflict zones and emphasised ongoing efforts to align IHL principles with emerging technologies. Reflecting on India's contributions, she lauded its deployment of over 2,50,000 troops in 50 missions and initiatives to promote accountability for crimes against peacekeepers.

Ms Sekhar concluded by reaffirming India's commitment to peacekeeping and expressed hope that the forum's deliberations would drive research and solutions to modern challenges.

7.2. Closing Remarks - Lt Gen Satish Nambiar (Retd), Former Force Commander and Head of Mission, UNPROFOR

In his closing remarks, Lt Gen Satish Nambiar pointed out the ‘Hypocrisy of the international community’ and called for further discussions to address it. While acknowledging the relevance of climate change to conflicts, he pointed out the lack of global consensus, especially between developed and developing nations. He cautioned against prematurely mandating environmental considerations in UN peacekeeping but noted Indian Army’s initiatives in ecological responsibility.

He emphasised women’s vital contributions in trust building but highlighted gaps in representation, especially at the combat level in developing nations. He stressed the need for broader integration of women in operational roles. He called for clear mandates, adequate resources, and political backing to support civilian protection, highlighting past successes of Indian contingents but warning of potential costs, including casualties.

Lt Gen Nambiar argued peacebuilding responsibilities should remain with specialised agencies, supported by peacekeepers when necessary. He also stressed the ICRC’s neutrality as essential in conflict zones. Regarding the role of the UN, he described its current state as bleak and inefficient, advocating for radical reforms while affirming its irreplaceable role in global governance.

7.3. Vote of Thanks – Mr Sandeep Bali, Head of Prevention, ICRC

Mr Sandeep Bali extended a warm vote of thanks to all attendees, speakers, and organisers. He began by addressing distinguished dignitaries, esteemed speakers, ICRC colleagues, delegates, and participants, both present and online, and expressed his gratitude on behalf of Mr Kedir Awol Omar, Head of the ICRC Regional Delegation.

He conveyed sincere appreciation to Lt Gen Kapoor, Amb Ruchira Kamboj, Maj Gen Sharma, and Mr Kadir Awol Omar for gracing the inaugural ceremony and sharing their vision. Special thanks were extended to Ms Uma Sekhar for delivering the valedictory address and Lt Gen Nambiar for his closing remarks.

He offered heartfelt gratitude to the exceptional speakers and facilitators who generously shared their on ground experiences, enriching the discussions and enhancing knowledge on the themes addressed.

He thanked Maj Gen BK Sharma for his continuous guidance, Maj Gen PK Goswami for steering the USI partnership, and the participants for their excellent questions and active engagement. He recognised the collaborative efforts of the USI, ICRC, and the CUNPK, extending special thanks to the USI and CUNPK teams, as well as his ICRC colleagues—Dr Andrei Kozik, Katherine Stewart, Mr Sunil, Ms Meher Dev, and Mr Ashish Bhatia—for their diligence and support.

He assured the participants that all questions and challenges raised during the seminar would be compiled and shared, expressing confidence that the discussions would inspire practical solutions to humanitarian challenges.

In closing, Mr Bali thanked all contributors, including those he may have inadvertently missed, and wished everyone success in their future endeavours. He concluded with warm regards.

Key Takeaways

Changing Character of Conflicts

- The character of war, influenced by evolving geopolitics, asymmetric strategies, and emerging technology, is constantly changing.
- Amongst the drivers of conflict, geopolitical contestation remains the most prominent as it derives directly from national policy and vision.
- Easy access to technology and weaponisation of information has ensured that all parties have equal access to means of inflicting violence – kinetic and non-kinetic, traditional, and non-traditional.
- Innovative use of technology has synergised the effect of sensors, automation, and precision weaponry.
- Nations must ensure that the space domain does not become a subset of hybrid war in future conflicts.
- Emerging cyber risks, including sophisticated disinformation campaigns affect modern warfare.
- The weaponisation of AI and the risks associated with autonomous weapons must be addressed on priority.
- The climate threats are contextual and often aggravate existing vulnerabilities.
- Climate induced environmental changes exacerbate social tensions through resource scarcity, migration patterns, and population displacement.

- There is a global failure to protect civilians in armed conflicts and the dehumanising effects of modern warfare technologies like drones and autonomous weapons.
- The evolving nature of conflict presents new challenges for IHL in both applicability and enforcement.

Challenges to Peace Operations and International Humanitarian Law

- Conflicts now often involve terrorists, armed groups and criminals equipped with modern weaponry, compounded by the weaponisation of digital tools—misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech.
- There is a crucial need for states to ratify core IHL treaties and adopt national implementation measures.
- The application of IHL faces significant challenges in both inter-state and intra-state conflicts due to evolving warfare technologies, the rise of non-state actors, and complex geopolitical dynamics.
- The dysfunctionality of the UNSC, in the face of current security challenges, presents a real danger to international peace and security.
- The UNPOs function on trust, universality, and solidarity, and successful operations depend on legitimacy, adaptability, and national ownership.
- Challenges to the UNPOs can be met with an adaptive, empathy-driven leadership approach, highlighting the necessity of competence, commitment, and nuanced interpersonal skills.
- There is a need for strengthening international legal frameworks, enhancing technological capabilities for UNPO missions, promoting diverse leadership, and developing more flexible, context-sensitive intervention strategies.

Protection of Civilians and Peacekeepers

- It is the responsibility of the states that are in conflict and the moral obligation of the peacekeepers to protect civilians.
- By addressing threats to both the PoC and peacekeepers, through strategic, operational, and diplomatic means, peacekeeping missions can be more effective in achieving their goals and contributing to long term peace and stability.
- Local perceptions of peacekeepers are crucial to a mission's success. When peacekeepers fail to protect civilians, the entire mission's legitimacy is undermined.
- Strengthening legal frameworks, international cooperation, and enforcement mechanisms are crucial in the ongoing effort to uphold IHL and ensure accountability for grave violations.
- International laws provide legal authority to the peacekeepers to protect civilians by using any means, including the use of force.
- Regardless of whether the peacekeeping missions are explicitly authorised to protect civilians or not, PoC is inherent in the mandate.
- Promoting accountability for crimes against peacekeepers is critical for countries hosting UNPOs to bring the perpetrators of the crimes to justice as per international obligations. For this, the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2589 (2021) is indispensable.
- Protection should be dealt with through a multitiered approach and the critical importance of training and preparedness.
- While enforcing IHL is a challenge, regular discussions on the subject help increase awareness and build international public opinion to bear upon those who disregard IHL.

Climate Change and United Nations Peace Operations

- There is a complex relationship between climate change and conflict, while climate may not directly cause conflicts, its security implications are undeniable.

- The impacts of climate change are far reaching and multi-dimensional, influencing various sectors of society.
- Climate challenges affect mission logistics, mobility, and access to communities, fundamentally altering peacekeeping approaches from long term solutions to immediate short term measures.
- The peace and security risks related to climate change are complex and interwoven with other socioeconomic, political, and environmental factors.
- Resource scarcity, water stress, and agricultural impact may lead to mass migration and displacement of people.

Women in United Nations Peace Operations

- Since the introduction of UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000), which recognises the importance of involving women in peace and security issues, there has been an increased focus on gender issues across the UN deployments. Women are contributing to the entire spectrum of UNPOs, in all kinds of environments.
- Unconscious bias remains an issue against women and many jobs are still allocated to women based on stereotypical gender norms.
- Discrimination by several TCCs against women in their armed forces is one of the reasons for the low percentage of women in peacekeeping missions.
- Female engagement teams are critical in building trust and act as role models for local communities.

Analysing the Future: Challenges and Future of United Nations Peace Operations

- To adapt successfully, the UN will need to embrace reforms that support flexibility, leverage technology, and promote inclusive, community-centered peacekeeping models.

- The UNPO need a bottom up approach, with emphasis on human security and community engagement over state centric models.
- A people centric mission prioritises building trust and rapport with local populations, which can reduce hostility toward peacekeepers, enhance cooperation, and minimise local resistance.
- The IHL principles are essential in moderating behaviour, reducing civilian suffering, and establishing norms that guide combatants and military forces.

Endnotes

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Group Photo



About the Editors



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is an Indian Army veteran. He was a Military Observer in the United Nations (UN) Verification Mission in Angola in 1991-92 and was later appointed as the Deputy Head of the Mission and Deputy Force Commander of UN Interim Forces in Lebanon from 2008 to 2010. He holds a PhD from Tilburg University, the Netherlands, for his thesis on UN Peace Operations. Presently, he is a Distinguished Fellow at the United Service Institution of India (USI), New Delhi.



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The United Service Institution of India was founded in 1870 by a soldier scholar, Colonel (later Major General) Sir Charles MacGregor for the 'Furtherance of interest and knowledge in the art, science, and literature of the Defence Services'. The present Director General of the USI is Major General BK Sharma, AVSM, SM** (Retd).



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