

USI Monograph No 1 - 2026



USI ANNUAL UN FORUM

2025

#UAUF25

ADVANCING PEACEKEEPING
AND HUMANITARIAN IMPERATIVE
IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD

23-24 OCTOBER 2025

UNITED SERVICE INSTITUTION OF INDIA, NEW DELHI

Edited by
PK 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 Centre of UN Studies, in collaboration with ICRC and CUNPK, organised a seminar on ‘Advancing Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Imperative in a Fragmented World’ on 23-24 Oct 2025 at USI, New Delhi. This monograph is a compilation of an extended version of a brief presentation by eminent speakers at the seminar.

Advancing Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Imperative in a Fragmented World

Annual UN Forum 2025

**Advancing Peacekeeping and
Humanitarian Imperative in a
Fragmented World**

23 and 24 Oct 2025

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



**United Service institution of India
New Delhi**

Published by

USI of India

First Published in India in 2025

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Price ₹ 350

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Preface

The pursuit of peace and progress cannot end in a few years, in either victory or defeat. The pursuit of peace and progress, with its trials and its errors, its successes and its setbacks, can never be relaxed and never abandoned.

*Dag Hammarskjöld
UNSG, Feb 1954*

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 UN peace operations and maintenance of international laws. 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 November 2023. It was followed by a seminar on ‘Protection of Civilians in Modern Conflicts and International Humanitarian Law’ in May 2024 and the USI Annual UN Forum 2024 on ‘Changing Character of Conflicts: Challenges to Peace Operations and International Humanitarian Law’ in November 2024. The collaboration further organised USI Annual UN Forum 2025 on a very contemporary issue ‘Advancing Peacekeeping and the Humanitarian Imperative in a Fragmented World’, in October 2025.

Growing division, weakening institutions, rising militarisation, and the loss of shared values are putting the global system and humanity at serious risk. In such an evolving complex world, political and financial support for non-military tools such as preventive diplomacy, peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance retain their validity. While the political will for the implementation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) appears to be absent, better holistic conflict management options are needed at this hour. The prevailing environment has far-reaching consequences and is challenging traditional methods of peacekeeping, Protection of Civilians and the effective application of international legal frameworks. In this backdrop, the topic of USI Annual UN Forum 2025 - Advancing Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Imperative in a Fragmented World, was very contemporary, timely and relevant in nature.

Over the years, the global security landscape has changed to violent, hybrid, and asymmetric conflicts, causing significant strains on the peace operations and application of the IHL. Ever-increasing groups of non-state actors, easy availability of advanced weapon systems, new technologies, social media, innovative use of propaganda, and mis (dis/mal) information campaigns have blurred the lines between combatants and civilians. At the same time 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 and youth, have a very important and contributory role in peace and security.

Lasting peace demands addressing the root causes of conflict through dialogue, reconciliation, and equitable governance. Amidst the growing violent conflicts, activities of many non-state actors, and political violence, the diminishing focus on a political process, has alienated various local and civil society interests. These can only be addressed by a political solution, and peace operations are no substitute for politics. Thus, there is an urgent need for political will to ensure respect for, implementation and application of the UN mandate and IHL.

Despite all the criticism, peacekeeping remains the largest and most visible UN activity in the field. Therefore, the UN needs to adapt to the evolving security landscape and respond through missions that are tailored to address the ground realities, guided by strong political strategies and leveraging the tools, capacities and expertise of the UN and member states with strong, and united political support. The UN needs to develop frameworks for building a culture of accountability and compliance for IHL, including

prosecuting those who violate. This is a never-ending process and must continue despite numerous bottlenecks, and monitored with course correction, where required.

To create awareness about the unavoidable necessity of the UN and IHL, the USI has taken the lead in organising discussions on contemporary issues, in the form of seminars. This report offers critical analyses and insights into the - *Advancing Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Imperative in a Fragmented World*. Various 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 in the evolving global security landscape. The seminar had a large participation by the diplomatic community, peacekeepers, serving officers, academicians, and students. This monograph 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.

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Concept Note

Now more than ever, the world needs the United Nations. And the United Nations needs peacekeeping that is fully equipped for today's realities and tomorrow's challenges

António Guterres, UN Secretary-General

Humanity is transiting through a very difficult global context, and stands totally fractious, polarised, helpless, and frustrated with the complex conflicts involving non-State actors, organised crime and climate-driven risks. United Nations (UN) Women Report of 20 Oct 2025 reported over 185 armed conflicts in 2024, which included 61 active conflicts with one or more state parties in action. The report also highlighted that nearly 676 million women lived within 50 kms of the conflicts, considered to be the highest since 1990. Conflicts have become protracted, involving more actors and proxy forces, and making negotiated solutions difficult to achieve. It is ironic that the body entrusted with maintaining international peace and security—the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)—often remains deeply divided, a mute spectator, and largely deadlocked. Despite unprecedented challenges, today UN peace operations remain the largest and most visible UN activity, with more than 60,000 peacekeepers from 115 countries currently serving with 11 missions. Seized by the situation and navigating the challenges, the UN is striving to fulfil its primary role of maintaining peace and security. Amongst others, reduced peacekeeping capacity, financial constraints, rising violence, vulnerability of civilians and blatant disregard for international laws by both state and non-state actors are some of the current key concerns of the UN.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) regulates the conduct of parties in armed conflict by limiting the effects of warfare and protecting those who are not, or are no longer, taking part in hostilities, including civilians and wounded or captured combatants. It is primarily embodied in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols and reflected in customary international law. Even so, the devastating humanitarian consequences of contemporary warfare raise serious questions regarding how parties to such conflicts interpret and apply relevant IHL rule. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), together with Brazil, China, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan and South Africa, has launched a global initiative aimed at galvanising political commitment to IHL, to politically prioritise IHL, reinforce its universal compliance, and address key challenges through clear recommendations.

Over the past 76 years, the 1949 Geneva Conventions—complemented by the broader body of International Humanitarian Law (IHL)—have saved countless lives from the devastating effects of warfare and ensured respect for, and protection of, thousands of detainees and patients. But sadly, parties to armed conflicts have often failed to uphold IHL, more so in the ongoing conflicts. Current conflicts have demonstrated that IHL is essential; however, its protective power remains under constant threat. Non-compliance and deliberate violations are far too common, and too little is done to prevent their recurrence.

Women make up nearly half of the global population, yet they have been traditionally excluded from the realm of peace and security. Along with the youth, their role and contribution to sustainable peace can no longer be overlooked. To empower women and achieve true equality, UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) was adopted in 2000. WPS was further reinforced in 2015 with Resolution 2250 on the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS). WPS and YPS recognised women and youth as crucial actors in building and promoting sustainable peace at the global, national and community levels. These two agendas seek to address a significant gap in the international community's efforts to confront the increasingly complex challenges of preventing conflict and sustaining peaceful and inclusive societies.

The current challenges of unprecedented humanitarian crises have been aggravated due to polarisation in the UNSC and the lack of respect for IHL. Ongoing conflicts in various regions, including Africa, Europe (Ukraine), and Middle East (Gaza, Syria and Yemen) have highlighted distressing trends, such as the bombing of schools and hospitals, conflict related sexual violation, and large-scale forced displacement. Addressing Protection of Civilians (PoC) in modern conflicts requires a comprehensive approach that can balance the exigencies of military necessity and the principle of humanity. Over the past decade, the 'Primacy of Politics' has become a central tenet of UN peace operations. The idea that peacekeeping should be designed and deployed to support political processes was articulated in the 2015 High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations

report and subsequently re-emphasised in the UN's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) and A4P Plus frameworks. The primacy of politics is often understood as applying to formal political processes at the national level, but it is just as relevant to local peace processes, which are critical to consolidate and sustain peace. A recognition of the interrelation between local and national processes and the importance of local dynamics to national ones is important. The UN peace operations have long been involved in supporting local peace processes, and this practice must be at the centre-stage of any peace endeavours.

Conclusion

This forum provided an opportunity for subject matter experts, policymakers, and practitioners to exchange insights, share best practices, and identify innovative solutions to the complex challenges of modern conflicts. The proceedings focused on enhancing peacekeeping, the humanitarian imperative, gender diversity, protection of civilians, and the primacy of politics. By fostering dialogue and collaboration, stakeholders aimed to contribute to a more secure and peaceful world, where the principles of peacekeeping, PoC, and IHL were upheld and respected.

About the Participants

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

Mr Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under Secretary General, Department of Peace Operations, United Nations.

Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit, AVSM, VM, VSM, is the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee at Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff and the President of the United Service Institution of India (USI) Council. He has held several significant field and staff appointments, including command of air bases in the Western and Southern sectors and appointment as Deputy Chief of the Air Staff. A graduate of the National Defence College, New Delhi. He was Commander-in-Chief of Central Air Command prior to assuming present appointment.

Mr Alfonso Verdu Perez is the Head of the Regional Delegation of the ICRC in New Delhi. He transitioned to the ICRC in 2012, having managed humanitarian operations since 2002, with a focus on countries affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence. His notable missions include Colombia, Sudan, Somalia, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, Syria, Israel and the Palestinian territories, and Myanmar. His recent

appointments include serving as Head of Delegation in Sudan during the 2023 conflict, followed by deployment to Egypt in Sep 2024, and his current posting in New Delhi since Aug 2025.

Shri Asoke Mukerji, IFS (Retd), a well-known Indian diplomat, besides holding various important diplomatic assignments, was one of the most successful permanent representatives of India to the UN. During his tenure, he spearheaded the acceptance of the Indian proposal to declare 21 Jun as the International Yoga Day by the UN. He also persuaded the United Nations to launch a Virtual Memorial Wall in 2015 in memory of India's fallen United Nations peacekeepers—the highest among Troop Contributing Countries(TCCs)—and played a key role in the ongoing initiative of the United Nations General Assembly to construct a permanent Memorial Wall for UN Peacekeepers at United Nations 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 his 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.

Lieutenant General J. S. Lidder, UYSM, AVSM (Retd), is an Indian Army veteran who has held several important command and staff appointments at various levels, both in India and abroad. He possesses extensive United Nations experience in both political and military spheres. He served as

Chief of Staff, United Nations Operation in Mozambique from 1994 to 1995 and as Force Commander, United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) from 2005 to 2008. Following his military retirement, he was appointed Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in UNMIS from 2010 to 2011. As the senior-most United Nations diplomat based in Juba, he led UN efforts in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Most notably, the South Sudan Referendum culminated in the birth of the new nation in July 2011. Presently, he is associated with multiple United Nations offices, global think tanks, and training establishments as an expert and mentor.

Shri Kamal Malhotra is a former United Nations Resident Coordinator in Vietnam, Türkiye, and Malaysia. He is currently a Distinguished Visiting Professor at NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, and a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at TEPAV – The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Türkiye.

Major General Pawan Anand, AVSM, PhD (Retd), is Director, USI Centre for Emerging Technology and Atmanirbhar Bharat. He is an Indian Army veteran, with PhD in ‘Indigenisation of India’s Def Industry’, and expertise in geopolitics, geostrategy, AI and cybersecurity. He was a Senior Faculty Member at the National Defence College, and post-retirement, Secretary General of Highway Operators Association in the private sector.

Ms Kanta Singh is the Country Representative of UN Women in India. A seasoned development practitioner, she has over 25 years of experience in designing and managing

programmes focused on women's empowerment and gender equality. Prior to joining UN Women, she served with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). She is a former national volleyball player and a Chevening Gurukul Fellow of the University of Oxford.

Dr Andrei Kozik is the Regional Legal Advisor for South Asia at the ICRC, New Delhi. He joined the ICRC in 2019 as a Regional Legal Coordinator (Adviser) covering Eastern Europe and Asia, with professional engagement related to the Russia–Ukraine conflict and assumed his current assignment in New Delhi in 2024. Prior to joining the ICRC, he taught IHL and information technology law for over 25 years at universities across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. He was Dean of a Faculty of Law and as First Vice-Rector. He was also a member of the Board of Directors of the International Society for Military Law and the Law of War (Brussels) and has co-authored seven books.

Shri SP Saikia is an international law professional with extensive experience in research and legal analysis across peace and security, dispute settlement, and the law of armed conflict. He has previously worked with the DPO of the UN and RRU. He is presently associated with the Office of Legal Services, UNDP and is an incoming global fellow with the UN University Centre for Policy Research, New York.

Major General AK Bardalai, VSM, PhD (Retd), an Indian Army veteran and has held various command and staff assignments at different levels including the command of an infantry division. He was the Commandant of the Indian Military Training Team in Bhutan from Oct 2011 to Jan 2014.

Earlier, he served as a Military Observer in the United Nations Verification Mission in Angola (UNAVEM) in 1991-92 and was the Deputy Head of the Mission and Deputy Force Commander, United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) from 2008 to 2010.

Shri Sandeep Bali, Head of Prevention, ICRC; a veteran from Indian Navy, earlier served as the Deputy Director of NMF. He is an alumnus of International Institute Humanitarian Law, Sanremo, Italy and 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.

Col KK Sharma, PhD (Retd), an Indian Army veteran and was a military observer in UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia, from 1992 to 1993. He was also an active member in planning and writing of the UN Capstone Doctrine on peacekeeping and manuals for trainers in the Office of 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 Centre for UN Peacekeeping under the USI of India. He is PhD in Management from Zurich, Switzerland, and was a Professor and Dean, Business School in Chitkara University.

Brigadier S. Kapoor is a serving Indian Army officer and a former United Nations peacekeeper in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He has also served as the Military Attaché at the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations. He is presently attending the National Defence College

Ms Gunjan Chawla, Legal Advisor of ICRC Regional delegation. In the past, she worked at the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

Ms Meher Dev, Legal Advisor, ICRC. Prior to joining ICRC, she was a Legal Officer for the United Nations in Iraq.

Maj Samar Toor (Retd), an Indian Army Veteran, former Peacekeeper in United Nations Mission in South Sudan. Currently, he is Director and Chief Growth Officer at Zulu Defence Private Limited, specializing in loitering and hovering munition.

Maj Gen PK Goswami, VSM (Retd), an Indian Army veteran, is presently the Director, USI Centre for UN Studies (CUNS). He was a Military Observer with UNAVEM in 1991-92 and Senior Faculty at NDC. He represented NDC, India at 16th ASEAN Regional Forum for Heads of Defence Universities, Colleges and Institutions at Beijing, China in Nov 2012.

DAY 1

Opening Session

Welcome Remarks by Maj Gen PK Goswami, VSM (Retd), Director, USI Centre for UN Studies

Maj Gen PK Goswami (Retd), Director, USI CUNS, opened the forum by welcoming the distinguished speakers, ambassadors, scholars, uniformed peacekeepers, and participants from India and abroad. He introduced this year's theme, 'Advancing Peacekeeping and the Humanitarian Imperative in a Fragmented World', and highlighted that dates of this year's USI Annual UN Forum were selected through the prism of time. 80 years back, on 24 Oct 1945, the UN, officially came into existence. Similarly, the Geneva Conventions were established on 12 August 1949 as the cornerstone of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), aimed at protecting civilians, mitigating the horrors of war, and maintaining international peace and security. But, ever evolving geo-politics, has brought the world back full circle, in an environment as was prevailing in 1940s.

He emphasised that peacekeeping today operates in an increasingly fragmented geopolitical environment defined by contested norms, weaponised narratives, and widening humanitarian crises. He observed that conflicts no longer remain confined to battlefields; rather, they spill into urban spaces, cyberspace, the information domain, and the socio-political fabric of nations. He underlined that the humanitarian imperative has never been more urgent. Civilian suffering has become disproportionate and deliberate, and attacks on peacekeepers and aid workers have increased in frequency and intensity. Major General Goswami highlighted

that peacekeepers today are expected not only to manage ceasefires, but also to navigate mis and disinformation, climate-driven displacement, and fragile political transitions. He emphasised that the future of peacekeeping lies in proactive engagement, anticipatory humanitarian action, and deeper reforms, that strengthen IHL and accountability mechanisms.

He concluded by underscoring that peace cannot be advanced by military capability alone; it requires political will, inclusive dialogue, and multi-stakeholder cooperation. He urged the audience to use the forum to generate actionable outcomes that support the safety, dignity, and rights of affected populations. Reaffirming USI's commitment to peace operations research and capacity-building, he stated that the institution remains a platform for constructive collaboration and informed policy advocacy.

Key takeaways-

- The seminar's central premise: modern peacekeeping operates in a fragmented global environment where humanitarian needs are rising while consensus and cooperation are weakening.
- Future peacekeeping must prioritise civilian protection, anticipatory humanitarian action, and stronger multi-stakeholder collaboration.
- Geopolitics, fragmentation, technological change, and humanitarian challenges are reshaping peacekeeping environments.

- Peacekeeping can remain effective only by aligning operational mandates with humanitarian imperatives and reinforcing global cooperation.

Opening Remarks by Maj Gen BK Sharma, AVSM, SM (Retd), Director General, USI**

Maj Gen BK Sharma, AVSM, SM** (Retd), Director General, USI, opened the Forum by extending a warm welcome to all dignitaries, delegates, and participating organisations, including ICRC, Centre of UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK), members of the diplomatic corps, and partner institutions. He underlined the scale and gravity of contemporary conflicts, noting that ‘Today there are about 130 global conflicts which are raging,’ and according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates, ‘By Apr 2025, an estimated 120.2 million people were internally or externally displaced as refugees or seeking asylum.’ He emphasised that humanity has entered an era characterised by ‘Uncertainty, discontinuity, and disruptions’, driven by geopolitical contestation, a polarised UNSC, climate risks, and unethical use of technology.

Maj Gen Sharma highlighted that the shrinking budgets of the UN, the declining trust in the efficacy of peacekeeping missions, and the blatant violations of humanitarian law by both state and non-state actors, impacting the peacekeeping. He stressed that despite these challenges, there exists “No other alternate system for peacekeeping and peacebuilding except rejuvenation of the UN system”. He advocated for reforms that make peacekeeping more responsive and future-ready, including

digitised and modular missions, integrating political mandates with peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and creating mechanisms for enforcing humanitarian law.

He underscored that peacekeeping remains the UN's most visible instrument of collective and indivisible security, while International Humanitarian Law (IHL) acts as its moral foundation. The theme of the Forum, 'Advancing Peacekeeping and the Humanitarian Imperative in a Fragmented World,' reflects the urgent need to reinforce the synergy between peacekeeping and humanitarian action. Major General Sharma highlighted USIP's role in contributing to the cause of United Nations peacekeeping—from raising the CUNPK, India's global nodal centre for peacekeeping training, to partnerships with global think tanks, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)—the guardian of IHL since 1863—and the Global Alliance for Peace Operations. Together, these initiatives demonstrate the breadth of collaboration required to address emerging challenges.

Outlining the core themes for deliberation, he identified five interlinked priorities: enhancing peacekeeping in a shifting world order, the imperatives of international humanitarian law, protection of civilians, gender diversity in peace and security, and primacy of politics in conflict management. He stressed that protection of civilians must remain central, alongside humanitarian neutrality, local ownership, and ethical use of technology. He also cautioned against 'Technological Colonisation', highlighting concerns surrounding technological sovereignty and data privacy.

Major General Sharma emphasised that political will remains the most essential resource, not only for sustained funding but also for enabling collective action. He informed the participants that this Forum will conclude with the unveiling of latest USI publication ‘75 Years of India’s Contribution to UN Peacekeeping’, a tribute to that legacy of service and sacrifice. Marking 75 years of India’s contribution to UN peacekeeping, he urged participants to view the Forum as both ‘A symposium of ideas and a laboratory for result-oriented transformation.’ He called for renewed energy and purpose: “May your insights and recommendations fuel renewed energy for collective action towards a world where law restrains violence, politics restores peace, and humanity prevails over fragmentation”.

Key Takeaways.

- Urgency of strengthening peacekeeping and humanitarian action amid a fragmented global order marked by 130 conflicts and unprecedented displacement.
- Declining trust in UN peacekeeping, shrinking budgets, violations of IHL, and the rise of unethical technological misuse.
- Centrality of protection of civilians, primacy of politics, gender diversity, and ethical technology use,
- Rejuvenation of the UN system and collective political will to support peace operations.

- Peacekeeping and humanitarian action must reinforce each other to ensure that ‘Humanity prevails over fragmentation’.

**Video Recorded Message by Mr Jean-Pierre Lacroix,
Under Secretary General, Department of Peace
Operations, United Nations**

Mr Jean-Pierre Lacroix expressed his deep appreciation to the USI for convening the Forum and for its long-standing commitment to advancing dialogue on peacekeeping, humanitarian action, and international security. He highlighted the symbolic significance of the day, marking the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations, and noted that the occasion calls for a renewed commitment to the UN Charter’s founding vision—to protect future generations from the scourge of war and to uphold peace, dignity, and justice. Referring to this year’s theme—Advancing Peacekeeping and the Humanitarian Imperative in a Fragmented World, he emphasised that the forum could not be timelier, as the contemporary international system is marked by unprecedented levels of conflict and polarisation.

Mr Lacroix cited data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, noting that the year 2024 witnessed 61 active conflicts, the highest number since 1946. He stressed that civilians have been disproportionately affected, often deliberately targeted, and displaced in record numbers. Against this backdrop, UN peacekeeping continues to remain a lifeline for millions across 11 active operations, where peacekeepers from 115 member states work daily to protect civilians, support political processes, prevent conflict, and enable humanitarian access. He underscored the need to

adapt peacekeeping to a rapidly changing strategic environment shaped by transnational organised crime, digital technologies, and climate-driven insecurity. He emphasised that the protection of civilians will remain the defining measure of UN peacekeeping success, but that sustainable peace ultimately requires political solutions rooted in strong partnerships with regional organisations, host governments, and local communities. Mr Lacroix reiterated that missions must be flexible, tailored, and politically anchored, and that gender parity and the meaningful participation of women in peace and security are not optional but essential for lasting peace. Concluding his remarks, he acknowledged India's remarkable legacy in UN peacekeeping and honoured the Indian peacekeepers who have made the supreme sacrifice in service of global peace.

Key Takeaways.

- UN peacekeeping remains indispensable amid the highest levels of conflict since 1946.
- Need for adaptable, politically anchored missions that prioritise the protection of civilians, uphold humanitarian principles, integrate technology responsibly, and strengthen partnerships,
- Acknowledgement of India's outstanding and sustained contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Keynote Address by Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit, AVSM, VM, VSM, Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee and President USI Council

Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit delivered the keynote address by commending the USI for organising the Annual UN Forum 2025, in partnership with ICRC and CUNPK, on a theme of pressing global relevance. He observed that the world stands at a ‘Defining inflection point in global geopolitics’, where the post-World War II order, built on collective responsibility and humanitarian values, is under tremendous stress. With 61 active conflicts, the highest number since 1946, and nearly a quarter of humanity living in conflict-affected zones, Air Marshal Dixit reiterated that peacekeeping and IHL must adapt to modern realities. He reminded the audience that the United Nations and the Geneva Conventions were conceived to protect civilians and prevent atrocities; however, contemporary conflicts are testing those commitments in unprecedented ways.

He described modern conflict as multi-faceted, borderless, and non-linear, involving state forces, non-state militias, insurgents, terrorist groups, private military companies, and proxy actors. These groups operate across porous borders and deliberately target civilians and essential infrastructure, using hospitals and other civilian facilities as conflict zones and civilians as shields—violations that constitute war crimes. Air Marshal Dixit highlighted humanitarian consequences: prolonged wars that produce cascading crises of displacement, starvation, and trauma,

citing Sudan and Gaza as examples. He affirmed that respect for IHL and the protection of civilians are not optional, but central to the legitimacy of peacekeeping missions.

Air Marshal Dixit reflected on how UN peace operations remain indispensable despite mounting challenges. Peacekeepers prevent violence, secure humanitarian corridors, and stabilise post-conflict societies, as seen in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone. Yet peacekeepers now face new and escalating threats: drones, ambushes, IEDs, and asymmetric targeting of UN forces. Many missions face mandate-resource mismatch, operating without adequate troops, equipment, or funding.

Discussing India's role, he highlighted its long and distinguished peacekeeping record, with over 290,000 personnel having served in more than 50 missions, and more than 5,000 Indian military and police personnel currently deployed. He paid tribute to over 180 Indian peacekeepers who paid the ultimate sacrifice in UN service, emphasising that peacekeeping represents not merely duty, but 'An act of faith and courage in pursuit of the common good'.

Air Marshal Dixit also addressed the centrality of women and youth, referencing UNSC Resolution 1325 and India's pioneering deployment of the first all-female formed police unit in Liberia. Turning to technology, he emphasised that drones, satellite imagery, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based predictive analytics, and telemedicine are reshaping the peacekeeping toolkit, but warned that the absorption of technology must remain 'Demand-driven and human-centred'.

Ultimately, he reinforced a core principle: technology and force cannot substitute for political solutions. Quoting doctrine and UN guidance, he stressed that “The primacy of politics is the cornerstone of sustainable peace”. Diplomacy, negotiation, and inclusive governance must lead, especially in an era when military expenditure rises while investment in diplomacy declines.

He concluded with a call to collective moral responsibility: “Protecting lives is not a subsidiary task, but a moral imperative”. He urged a renewed commitment to multilateralism, humanitarian law, and the conscience of global peacekeeping: With innovation, collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to humanitarian principles, we can navigate these complexities.

Key Takeaways.

- Contemporary conflicts have become increasingly complex, borderless, and multi-actor, driven by state and non-state entities, proxy warfare, and the deliberate targeting of civilians.
- IHL and the protection of civilians are under intense strain, making their reinforcement essential to maintaining the legitimacy of peacekeeping operations.
- Despite mandate–resource gaps, asymmetric threats, and protracted humanitarian crises, peacekeeping continues to rely on principled engagement.

- India's longstanding commitment to collective security is noteworthy, with over 2,90,000 personnel deployed since the 1950s, including pioneering women contingents.
- Technology such as drones, satellite imagery, AI, and telemedicine can enhance mission effectiveness.
- Diplomacy and political solutions must remain central, as the humanitarian imperative in peacekeeping is not peripheral but fundamental.

Special Address by Mr Alfonso Verdu Perez, Head of Regional Delegation, ICRC, New Delhi

Mr Alfonso Verdu Pérez opened his address by expressing appreciation to the United Service Institution of India and the CUNPK for convening a timely forum on peacekeeping and humanitarian concerns. He highlighted the stark escalation of global conflicts, noting that in 1999, the ICRC had recorded approximately 20 conflicts worldwide, while today the number has risen to 132. He emphasised that violations of IHL are more widespread and blatant than ever before, driven not only by the scale of violence but by the absence of political will to prevent harm to civilians. Drawing a historical trajectory, he noted that similar moments of crisis had previously catalysed legal advances, including the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Additional Protocols, both born from global recognition that 'Even wars must have limits'. He underscored that the ICRC's message is rooted not in idealism, but in operational reality, the organisation works

in the harshest conflict environments, from Somalia to Myanmar, Gaza, Sudan, and beyond.

He informed the audience that, in response to the current crisis of compliance, the ICRC and Switzerland—along with Brazil, China, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan, and South Africa—have launched the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Support for IHL (2024), now supported by more than 130 countries. The objective is not to draft new treaties, but to compel states to treat IHL as a political priority and to strengthen its implementation and accountability. Alongside diplomatic mobilisation, the ICRC is also engaging in seven technical work streams involving states, focusing on issues such as protection of hospitals, civilian infrastructure, and preventing violations. He illustrated the operational link between IHL and peace by citing the ICRC's role in Sudan (2023), where it facilitated neutral humanitarian discussions between warring parties, creating space for ceasefire negotiations. He further highlighted that peacekeeping mandates have expanded beyond observation roles, requiring increased use of force and creating legal complexities, reinforcing the need for IHL compliance and structured engagement between peacekeeping missions, states, and the ICRC. Concluding, he acknowledged India's longstanding contribution to peacekeeping and recalled historical collaboration, including the 1971 Indo-Pakistan conflict, when India facilitated the repatriation of over 70,000 individuals with ICRC support. He emphasised that respecting IHL is not about legal obligation alone, but about protecting dignity and humanity in war.

Key Takeaway-

- The world is witnessing an unprecedented escalation of armed conflicts, not due to a failure of international law but due to a severe crisis of compliance with IHL.
- A global initiative launched by the ICRC and Switzerland, is now supported by more than 130 countries, aimed at mobilising political will to place IHL at the centre of state behaviour and conflict response.
- As peacekeeping mandates evolve and the use of force increases, integrating international humanitarian law into mission planning, training, and joint operations becomes essential.
- India has a long-standing humanitarian leadership in peacekeeping, demonstrating that where political will exists, IHL can be translated into real protection for civilians and preservation of human dignity.

Session 1: Enhancing Peacekeeping in a Shifting World Order

Chair: Lieutenant General JS Lidder (Retd), Former Force Commander and subsequently Deputy SRSg, UNMIS, Sudan.

Lt Gen JS Lidder opened the session by noting that peacekeeping today operates in a rapidly shifting world order marked by geopolitical polarisation, multidimensional conflicts, and eroding respect for international norms. He observed that peacekeepers are increasingly deployed into environments where political consensus is weak, humanitarian access is contested, and operational mandates are often ambiguous or under-resourced. He stressed that strengthening peacekeeping requires more than reforming mandates, it demands political courage, coherence amongst international actors, and an honest assessment of evolving threats. He encouraged the speakers and participants to critically examine whether current peacekeeping models remain fit for purpose, particularly in the face of asymmetric violence, misinformation, and emerging technologies.

Strategic Challenges in a Contested Multilateral Environment by Major General AK Bardalai, VSM, PhD (Retd), Former Deputy Head of Mission (HoM) and Deputy Force Commander, UNIFIL

Major General AK Bardalai traced the origins of the present multilateral order to the post-Second World War period, emphasising that the UN Charter emerged from the political vision of global leaders but was structurally anchored in the Westphalian system and sovereignty-based international law. Over time, however, the system evolved into what he

described as a ‘Hypocritical world order’, where power and decision-making remained dominated by the Permanent Five (P5) rather than by collective multilateral responsibility. The dominance of Western-led institutions (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) and the concentration of veto power, he argued, allowed selective manipulation of global politics, supporting conflicts, influencing regime change, and undermining genuine peacekeeping efforts. This concentration of power has constrained the UN’s capacity to maintain peace, as decisions depend less on the UN’s mandate and more on whether P5 interests are served.

He noted that peacekeeping missions often begin without addressing the structural drivers of conflict. When peace agreements are not inclusive or fail to account for identity politics, they collapse, as seen in Rwanda (United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda) and Angola (UNAVEM), where a lack of political reconciliation triggered renewed violence. Major General Bardalai stressed that peacekeeping success depends on political primacy, not just military intervention. He illustrated this using the metaphor of a train on a steep incline requiring a ‘Banker engine’; political leadership is the primary locomotive, but military leadership must be prepared to step in temporarily if the political process falters. He cited Somalia and South Sudan to illustrate how political incoherence or weak mission leadership has undermined civilian protection, while the Sierra Leone operation demonstrated that political and military synergy can produce results even in crisis situations.

The speaker argued that missions become ineffective when TCCs participate only when it aligns with their strategic interests, and when P5 politics delays or weakens peacekeeping mandates. He stressed that unresolved conflicts persist when root causes are ignored, as in the Middle East, where peacekeeping continues without addressing core political questions such as the Palestinian issue. Nonetheless, he highlighted that multilateralism still offers avenues of influence: historical movements such as Bandung and the emergence of the grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa symbolise the Global South's resistance to entrenched power hierarchies. He asserted that meaningful reform of peacekeeping and the UN system requires collective action from Global South countries, especially those that contribute the most troops, to weaken economic and institutional dominance of the P5 and revive the spirit of equitable multilateralism.

Evolving Conflicts and Implications for Peacekeeping by Lieutenant General JS Lidder (Retd), Former Force Commander and subsequently Deputy SRS, UNMIS, Sudan

Lieutenant General JS Lidder reasoned that the UN peacekeeping system faces a relevance crisis. Peacekeeping missions are increasingly unable to deliver on their mandates, and the UN's legitimacy is eroding as conflicts intensify and violations of international law become routine. While mandates grow in ambition, resources remain insufficient and scattered, creating a widening expectation gap between what

missions are tasked to achieve and what they can realistically deliver.

The central challenge he noted, is the evolving nature of conflict. Modern wars are hybrid, information-driven, and shaped by political ambiguities and heightened violence triggered by non-state actors amongst others. Peacekeepers also frequently deploy without an accurate assessment of risk, leading to strategic and operational misalignments between expectations in New York and realities in the field

There is a need to strengthen ground performance. Peacekeeping is Peacekeeping—and there is no need to recoin new terminologies which only adds confusion in the field for practical operationalisations.

Lt Gen Lidder highlighted the emerging challenge in host nation attitudes, who increasingly question and reject peacekeeping missions. The withdrawals from Mali and Sudan are not merely political developments; they symbolise a deeper crisis in credibility and local acceptance. There must be a fundamental shift in the UN's operating culture, where peacekeepers are accepted as facilitators and supporters - and not preachers and controllers.

Emphasising 'Boots on the ground' capability, he cautioned against technology enslavement. Overreliance on remote surveillance, secure bases, and digital infrastructure creates a false sense of security at the cost of physical manoeuvre and mental mobility. Peacekeepers must maintain physical contact with communities, patrol proactively, and manage information narratives authentically for the credibility.

Finally, Lt Gen Lidder underscored that the decisive factor in mission success is leadership. Across different missions and conflict intensities, the final outcomes have been shaped by one central factor—competent and effective leadership. Transforming leadership is need of the hour—monitoring, and adapting as per developing political, security and humanitarian situations.

Operational and Tactical Dilemmas in Peacekeeping by Major Samar Toor (Retd), Former Peacekeeper, South Sudan.

Maj Samar Toor shared a first-hand account of the operational and tactical dilemmas faced by UNMISS. He began by underscoring the harsh realities of peacekeeping in active conflict zones, where peacekeepers operate amid civilian massacres, decapitated bodies, and the constant threat of armed retaliation. Unlike conventional military operations, UN peacekeepers enter environments where the distinction between friend and adversary collapses rapidly. He explained that the most fundamental challenge is ‘Identification of Friend or Foe’, as both government forces and rebel fighters negotiate with the UN at different times, blurring lines of loyalty and intent.

He highlighted how assumptions about state authority often fail in fragile contexts. Reflecting upon one case study, he narrated how within 72 hours of rebel advancement, government forces abandoned the city of Malakal, South Sudan, leaving peacekeepers solely responsible for civilian protection. The UN bases rapidly became sanctuaries of last resort, sheltering thousands of

civilians and even combatants from both sides. What began as protection duties quickly evolved into managing internal violence, tribal conflict, and severe humanitarian crises inside the camp. With tribes such as the Dinka and the Nuer entering the same protected space, peacekeepers were compelled to maintain law and order, prevent targeted killings, and confront situations that went far beyond military training. Major Toor described the compounded pressures that arise when peacekeepers must choose between rules of engagement and moral responsibility. He recalled the moments when the UN staff had to prevent imminent massacres within the camp, sometimes requiring the breaking of standard operating procedures to save lives. The situation presented was of scarcity of resources, water, food, sanitation, medical supplies, escalated tensions, with children and civilians struggling for basic survival. Medical teams trained for trauma had to deliver babies under emergency conditions, without prior preparation, illustrating how peacekeeping extends into humanitarian and community support roles.

He emphasised that even in the face of provocation, peacekeepers must exercise extreme restraint. Armed rebels routinely tested peacekeepers by advancing unarmed or by deploying child soldiers at night, deliberately exploiting accountability gaps for human rights violations. The mandate prevents engagement unless there is direct threat to life, compelling peacekeepers to hold fire under circumstances where any misstep could escalate violence. He explained that negotiations, rather than force, ultimately preserved lives and enabled safe evacuation of troops, despite fatalities and

injuries. In his words, firing a weapon is easy; it is restraint under pressure that truly defines peacekeeping.

Maj Toor concluded that the success of peacekeeping does not lie in firepower but in judgement, restraint, and negotiation. He stressed that operational readiness must include evacuation planning, robust communication networks, medical preparedness, and leadership capable of making independent moral decisions under extreme uncertainty. His experience illustrated that peacekeeping demands not just strategic capability, but human empathy during chaos.

Reimagining UN Peacekeeping: Structural Reform and Political Renewal by Shri Kamal Malhotra, former UN Resident Coordinator

Shri Kamal Malhotra emphasised that while the UN peacekeeping is frequently critiqued, the world must not lose sight of what the UN personnel undertake daily in some of the most dangerous environments in the world. In 2024, UN agencies protected and assisted more than 123 million displaced persons, while the World Food Program delivered food support to over 153 million people across 120 countries. More than 76,000 peacekeepers serve on missions worldwide, demonstrating that beyond political debate, peacekeeping remains a lifeline for millions. He highlighted that despite the unprecedented surge in armed conflicts, the highest since the Second World War, the UN remains the only institution positioned to respond at this scale. However, its peace and security architecture has been weakened, bypassed, and undermined by major powers. Shri Malhotra pointed to

recent illegal invasions and conflicts, arguing that the UN's peace and security mechanisms, including those related to nuclear non-proliferation, are no longer functioning as intended because powerful states choose to ignore or manipulate the international rule of law.

He argued that the future of peacekeeping requires transforming crisis into opportunity through structural reinvention. The current UN security pillar is fragmented across overlapping mandates, offices, and missions, resulting in inefficiencies and slow response. Drawing from the Secretary-General's UN80 report, Malhotra outlined seven critical reform areas aimed at creating a unified and coherent peace and security system. These include integrating all peace and security functions under a single organisational structure, simplifying mandates through a unified mandate registry, reducing institutional overlap between peace operations and political affairs, and delegating civilian mandates to specialised UN agencies instead of overburdening peacekeeping missions.

He further stressed the need for a centralised gender and peacebuilding architecture, greater use of AI and anticipatory analytics, and a streamlined budget system ensuring accountability and faster programme delivery. Each reform is technically ready, he argued, what is missing is not diagnosis or solutions, but political will and budgetary commitment. Mr Malhotra concluded that the world cannot afford to abandon multilateralism; if the UN did not exist, it would have to be invented again. The challenge is not

recognising the necessity of reform, but acting on it before the multilateral order becomes irreversibly weakened.

Closing Remarks of Session 1: Lt Gen JS Lidder (Retd), Former Force Commander and subsequently Deputy SRSG, UNMIS, Sudan.

Lt Gen JS Lidder closed the session by emphasising that future peacekeeping must move beyond traditional structures and adopt agile, adaptive, and technology-enabled approaches. He noted that fragmented mandates, siloed institutional thinking, and limited political commitment continue to constrain peace operations from achieving meaningful impact on the ground. He stressed that without strategic coherence between political processes, humanitarian action, and peacebuilding efforts, peacekeeping risks becoming reactive rather than transformative. Underscoring the urgency of reform, he stated that credible peacekeeping requires innovation, accountability, and shared responsibility among member states. He concluded that peacekeeping would remain relevant only if the global community demonstrates the collective political will to modernise it in line with contemporary security challenges.

Key Takeaways Session 1: Enhancing Peacekeeping in a Shifting World Order

- Session 1 examined how peacekeeping must evolve amidst intensifying conflicts, geopolitical fragmentation, and a growing crisis of compliance with IHL.

- Today's conflicts are increasingly complex, involving state and non-state actors, proxy warfare, hybrid threats, and deliberate targeting of civilians.
- IHL remains robust, yet its implementation is eroding, prompting a global initiative to mobilise political will and reinforce the protection of civilians within peacekeeping missions.
- Peacekeeping mandates continue to expand without matching resources, exposing missions to asymmetric threats and prolonged humanitarian crises.
- Technology, such as drones, satellite imagery, and anticipatory analytics, can strengthen peacekeeping, but political solutions and diplomacy remain fundamental to achieving sustainable peace.
- There is a need for structural reforms within the UN peace and security architecture, including unified mandates, streamlined leadership, better coordination across peacekeeping and peacebuilding entities, and stronger accountability mechanisms.
- The session concluded with an urgent call to reaffirm collective commitment to IHL, adapt peacekeeping to modern conflict environments, and revitalise the UN system to remain effective in a shifting global order.

Session 2: IHL and the Humanitarian Imperative for Peace and Security

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

Dr. Andrei Kozik, Regional Legal Advisor for South Asia at the ICRC, began the session by expressing his gratitude to General Goswami and all the participants for being present. 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 were evident in many aspects today. He highlighted the relevance of the session's topic, which focused on evolving conflict challenges, peace operations, and international humanitarian law.

Dr. Kozik concluded his opening remarks by thanking everyone once again for their presence.

Modern Technologies in Warfare and Humanitarian Implications by Maj Gen Pawan Anand, AVSM, PhD (Retd), Director, CETANB, USI

Maj Gen Pawan Anand began by situating the audience in a conflict environment that has changed more in the past two decades than in the preceding hundred years. Warfare today is defined by a dense infusion of technologies, AI and machine learning, autonomous systems such as drones and swarms, cyber operations, electromagnetic and space capabilities, hypersonic missiles, advanced sensing, directed-energy weapons, deepfakes, synthetic media, and quantum-enabled tools. These technologies, many of them dual-use, have made the battlefield faster, more decentralised, and more

ambiguous. Decision cycles have compressed to seconds, the ‘fog of war’ has thickened, and the line between combatant and non-combatant blurred. Now speed, autonomy, and ambiguity define modern conflict, and technology is transforming the battlefield in real time.

The speaker emphasised that while these technologies improve precision and protect peacekeepers through remote monitoring and robotics, they simultaneously create profound humanitarian dilemmas. Autonomous and remotely operated systems complicate attribution and accountability; cyber operations can paralyse critical infrastructure and directly affect civilian populations; and information warfare, using deepfakes and synthetic media, targets perceptions rather than territory. Humanitarian actors now confront data-privacy risks, digital exclusion, and the weaponisation of commercial technologies. Excessive automation risks removing ‘the empathy factor’ from humanitarian decision-making. These developments strain core principles of IHL - distinction, proportionality, and precaution.

Maj Gen Pawan cautioned against efforts to rewrite IHL entirely. Instead, he argued for reinterpretation, not reinvention: “The challenge is not to rewrite the laws of war, but to ensure that humanity remains within those laws.”

Reinterpretation allows IHL to remain rooted in universal humanitarian values while providing clarity for new technologies through human-in-the-loop requirements, strengthened review processes, and new standards of evidence and attribution. He concluded by noting that

technology already shapes humanitarian action, shifting from reactive aid delivery to anticipatory, data-driven intervention, yet innovation must remain anchored in dignity and human oversight. “Innovation must continue, but never at the cost of humanity.”

Applying IHL to New Technologies of Warfare by Ms Gunjan Chawla, Legal Advisor, ICRC Regional delegation, New Delhi

Ms. Gunjan Chawla opened her address by posing a fundamental question: should IHL, drafted in 1949, be reinvented or simply reinterpreted to regulate emerging technologies? She argued firmly that the legitimacy of IHL stems from its technology-neutral principles - distinction, proportionality, and precautions, which apply irrespective of whether a weapon is kinetic, digital, or autonomous. Quoting the International Court of Justice, she noted that IHL governs “the weapons of yesterday, the weapons of today, and the weapons of tomorrow.” The challenge, she emphasised, is not that IHL is outdated but that the world is facing a ‘crisis of compliance.’ The core issue is political will, not legal insufficiency.

To illustrate the continued relevance of IHL, she discussed cyber operations as an evolving domain of conflict. Cyber warfare today extends beyond espionage or data theft to include disabling hospitals, nuclear facilities, and energy grids. Such disruptions, even without physical destruction, can have severe humanitarian consequences. Ms. Chawla explained that the ICRC considers cyber operations that impair the functionality of systems, even without physical

damage, to constitute ‘Attacks’ under IHL, thereby triggering obligations of distinction, proportionality, and precautions. She highlighted attribution and dual-use civilian–military infrastructure as major challenges, noting the position taken by the ICRC that ‘Data is an object’ and is therefore protected under IHL. She stressed that the debate has shifted from whether IHL applies to cyber operations to how it applies in practice.

Ms. Chawla then examined autonomous weapon systems, warning that the increasing automation of military decision-making risks degrading meaningful human control. With decision-making loops now operating at machine speed, commanders may be forced into situations where they merely endorse choices already made by algorithms. She cautioned that autonomous systems may struggle to distinguish between combatants and civilians, or even, as she pointed out, between a toy gun and a real firearm. She described it as ‘An affront to human dignity for a person’s life or death to be decided by a machine’. The ICRC, she noted, takes a graded approach: unpredictable or anti-personnel autonomous weapons should be prohibited, while all remaining systems must be regulated with strict limits on human-machine interaction, permissible targeting, and operational contexts.

She concluded by reinforcing that there are legal, ethical, and humanitarian concerns. While existing IHL does set limits on autonomous weapon systems, it does not yet have all the answers, which is why she recommends that the international community move towards adopting a new legally binding instrument that prohibits and regulates these

weapon systems in a graded, proportional manner. While reinterpretation of existing law may suffice for cyber operations, autonomous weapons introduce novel ethical, legal, and humanitarian risks that exceed the capacity of the current legal framework. The session ended with a strong reminder that technological advancements cannot be allowed to outpace humanity: the moral responsibility to protect civilians remains constant, regardless of how warfare evolves.

IHL as a Political Priority by Dr Andrei Kozik, Regional Legal Advisor for South Asia, ICRC

Dr Andrei Kozik delivered a thought-provoking address on the political salience of IHL, framing his intervention around two fundamental questions that underpin contemporary global debates: Is IHL respected today? And is IHL still relevant? He argued that regardless of whether one answers ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, the intersection of these two questions exposes a deeper crisis, a crisis not of legal adequacy, but of compliance and political will. According to him, IHL’s relevance is not diminished by emerging technologies; instead, the challenge lies in the unwillingness of parties to uphold the obligations they themselves promised to respect.

He explained that while modern technologies, cyber operations, data manipulation, autonomous systems, have introduced unprecedented complexities, they do not, by themselves, justify abandoning or rewriting the Geneva Conventions. Despite evolving forms of conflict, the foundational principles of IHL remain robust and technology-neutral. The issue, he stressed, is not the inadequacy of the rules but a growing trend toward selective

interpretation. On one extreme, parties engage in ‘permissive interpretation’, twisting legal provisions to justify conduct that causes humanitarian harm. On the other, actors refuse to interpret the rules at all, claiming unconditional compliance without dialogue or accountability. Both behaviours undermine the spirit of IHL and weaken mechanisms designed to influence behaviour during conflict.

To emphasise that IHL is not merely a legal instrument but a codification of hard-earned best practices, Dr Kozik narrated a historical lesson from the Napoleonic wars. In the early 19th Century, opposing forces placed medical units visibly on the front lines and mutually respected their location, allowing wounded soldiers to be evacuated and treated. Decades later, this informal practice was forgotten; medical units were pushed far from the battlefield for protection, and logistical realities made evacuation nearly impossible. Mortality rates surged dramatically, not due to increased brutality, but because a vital humanitarian norm had eroded. For Dr. Kozik, this story illustrates why IHL matters: rules are not theoretical constraints but safeguards against foreseeable humanitarian catastrophe. When ignored, the consequences surface not only for ‘the enemy’ but also for one’s own forces, civilians, and national reputation.

He further underscored that respecting IHL is a political commitment, explicitly articulated in Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions, which obligates States to ‘respect and ensure respect’ for IHL. This promise requires consistent action: training armed forces, integrating IHL into military planning and drills, and fostering a culture that

recognises long-term humanitarian consequences. The problem, he asked candidly, is why States, despite having made this universal promise, no longer demonstrate the same urgency or integrity in fulfilling it.

In response to this erosion of commitment, Dr. Kozik highlighted the Global Initiative on Strengthening Respect for IHL, launched collaboratively by a group of States and the ICRC. The initiative seeks to rekindle collective political ownership of IHL by creating seven focused workstreams, including protection of civilians, safeguarding hospitals, integrating IHL into national commissions, and addressing the legal implications of technologies such as cyber operations. The initiative culminates next year in a high-level international conference on humanity and peace, representing a renewed attempt to bring IHL back into the centre of political conversation.

He concluded by posing an open challenge to policymakers, academics, and practitioners: despite possessing stronger legal frameworks and more advanced technology than earlier generations, today's compliance with IHL appears weaker. Where did the global community lose its way? And more importantly, how can political actors be encouraged to reclaim their promise to protect human dignity during conflict? He left the audience with a call to action, to engage actively, raise their voices when violations occur, and resist silence, because silence itself undermines protection.

Closing Remarks Session 2: Dr Andrei Kozik, Regional Legal Advisor for South Asia, ICRC

Dr. Andrei Kozik concluded the session by expressing his gratitude once again. He remarked that they had the privilege of engaging with fantastic experts that day. Dr. Kozik thanked the participants for their presence and for their insightful questions, emphasising that it had been a pleasure to be part of the session. He encouraged everyone to join him in applauding the experts and recognising their invaluable work.

Key Takeaways Session 2: IHL and the Humanitarian Imperative for Peace and Security

- The session examined why respect for IHL is eroding in contemporary conflicts, despite its universal acceptance.
- The core rules already exist and remain fully applicable, even with the emergence of cyber operations, autonomous systems, and data-driven warfare.
- The real crisis lies in political will, not legal gaps.
- Some actors manipulate IHL through selective or permissive interpretation to justify harmful actions, while others refuse interpretation altogether, claiming compliance without transparency or accountability.
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Session 2: IHL and the Humanitarian Imperative for Peace and Security

- IHL is not merely a legal framework, but a repository of best practices built from hard-earned lessons of past wars; abandoning these norms creates long-term strategic, humanitarian, and reputational consequences for all parties, including one's own armed forces.
- There is a need for political commitment, institutional training, and operational integration of IHL rather than treating it as a symbolic or paperwork exercise.
- A global initiative seeks to reignite state responsibility towards IHL compliance, revive the promise to 'respect and ensure respect,' and create sustained dialogue on preventing violations across emerging domains such as cyber, protection of civilians, hospitals, and peace operations.
- The speakers collectively concluded that the primary challenge is not the relevance of IHL, but the declining willingness of states to uphold what they have already pledged.

Session 3: Protection of Civilians: Responsibilities and Dilemmas

Chair: Maj Gen AK Bardalai, VSM, PhD (Retd), Former Deputy HoM and Deputy Force Commander, UNIFIL

Maj Gen AK Bardalai opened the session by underscoring that the protection of civilians remains the most visible measure of a peacekeeping mission's legitimacy and credibility. He noted that today's operational environments are increasingly complex, where peacekeepers face blurred frontlines, non-state armed groups, competing political interests, and deliberate targeting of civilian populations. In these conditions, peacekeepers are expected not only to protect but also to anticipate threats — often with insufficient resources and ambiguous mandates. He highlighted that the dilemmas of protection are not only operational but also ethical and strategic: When should peacekeepers intervene, and what risks are acceptable? Setting the tone for the discussion, he called for a deeper reflection on doctrine, capability, and political clarity, reminding participants that the protection of civilians is not a procedural task, but a core humanitarian obligation.

Responsibility of Host Nation, Operational Realities and Dilemmas in Protection of Civilians by Maj Gen AK Bardalai, VSM, PhD (Retd), Former Deputy HoM and Deputy Force Commander, UNIFIL

Maj Gen A K Bardalai delivered a detailed and experience-grounded reflection on the operational and ethical complexities involved in protecting civilians during UN peace operations. He explained that the expectation placed on peacekeepers has expanded dramatically, from monitoring

ceasefires to actively preventing violence against civilians in volatile, asymmetrical environments. Protection, he emphasised, now includes safeguarding access to essential services, maintaining dignity, and ensuring that vulnerable communities are not exploited by conflict actors. Yet these expectations are rarely matched with corresponding resources, political support, or clear guidance.

He highlighted that mandate ambiguity remains one of the most persistent operational obstacles. Peacekeepers are often instructed to ‘Protect civilians using all necessary means,’ but without specifying thresholds for the use of force, permissible action within sovereign domestic spaces, or mechanisms for intelligence gathering. Maj Gen Bardalai underscored that peacekeepers do not operate in abstract humanitarian space, they operate within a sovereign state. Without the host government’s cooperation, even basic movement becomes restricted. When civilians are at immediate risk, peacekeepers face the impossible choice between violating their mandate or failing those they are tasked to protect.

Maj Gen Bardalai also spoke about the blurred distinction between combatants and civilians, particularly in asymmetrical and urban warfare, where non-state armed groups embed themselves within civilian populations. This phenomenon, he explained, not only increases civilian casualties but strategically leverages peacekeeping norms as a shield. He stressed that while IHL requires distinction, proportionality, and precaution, applying these principles on the ground requires real-time decision-making with

incomplete information. Modern conflicts, amplified by misinformation, propaganda, and deliberate manipulation of humanitarian narratives, create conditions where peacekeepers are judged harshly regardless of the decision taken.

He drew attention to the increasing accountability burden placed upon peacekeepers. With smartphones, social media, and instantaneous media dissemination, every action or non-action is globally scrutinised. Yet the public rarely sees the constraints peacekeepers operate under, political pressure, institutional bureaucracy, and the lack of operational enablers such as situational intelligence or rapid mobility. According to Maj Gen Bardalai, peacekeepers today face an unprecedented paradox: they must act decisively to protect civilians, but also defensively to protect the legitimacy of the mission and the image of the UN. This dual pressure often leads to hesitation or delayed action, which can cost lives.

In his final remarks, he argued that there is an urgent need to redesign peacekeeping mandates and operational tools, grounded in realism rather than idealism. Training must incorporate scenario-based operational decision-making; mandates must be sequenced and prioritised; and peacekeepers should be equipped with adequate technology, strategic intelligence, and rapid deployment capability. He concluded that protecting civilians is not merely a procedural task, it is a moral responsibility, a test of UN legitimacy, and the ultimate measure of peacekeeping effectiveness.

Vitiated consent and the Status of Forces Agreements by Shri SP Saikia, International Law Professional; formerly with DPO, UN and RRU, Government of India

Shri SP Saikia opened by situating the discussion within the three founding principles of the UN peacekeeping, consent of the parties, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defence or in defence of the mandate and then turned to the legal architecture that underpins those principles: the Status of Forces Agreement (SoFA). He explained that SoFAs provide the basic legal basis for operations on the ground, affording UN personnel privileges, immunities and a measure of criminal jurisdiction protection, while also specifying host-state obligations such as freedom of movement, facilities, tax exemptions, and mutual assistance for investigations. The model SoFA drafted in the 1990s remains the common starting point for missions, but Saikia stressed that the model was not intended to be a permanent template for every context and that many missions continue to operate on unamended 1990 drafts, with consequential legal and operational gaps.

Shri Saikia then defined and analysed the core problem of vitiated consent: host-state consent that is formally given but effectively withheld, coerced, qualified or manipulated. Vitiated consent, he argued, can be hard to detect because host states rarely revoke agreements outright; instead, they quietly obstruct operations through visa delays, denial of access, restrictions on movement, withholding of airspace, or tacit support to non-state actors. He illustrated the point with concrete examples: repeated visa delays that frustrated

investigations in Sudan; patrols denied to UNIFIL units in southern Lebanon; and systematic non-cooperation that hampered African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur. Such patterns do not merely inconvenience missions, they fundamentally impede the fulfilment of mandates, especially PoC, and can produce a cascading loss of operational effectiveness and legitimacy.

A central consequence of vitiated consent, Saikia argued, is the dual crisis that emerges at the intersection of IHL and the protective status of peacekeepers. On the one hand, ambiguous consent undermines a mission's ability to protect civilians and to secure safe humanitarian access. On the other, it places peacekeepers at legal and operational risk because the protective legal regime that SoFAs aim to provide can be rendered meaningless if the host states obstruct or subsequently reinterpret the status of forces. He cited the Force Intervention Brigade in United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to show how novel or enforcement-oriented components, created under Chapter VII, can fall into legal grey zones when their status is not reflected adequately in bilateral SoFAs; confusion about who is engaged and which component is exposed to risk creates accountability vacuums and operational uncertainty.

Shri Saikia emphasised that modern missions also face a profound norm-and-capacity mismatch: the 1990 SoFA model predates the proliferation of categories now essential to missions, UN Volunteers, civilian contractors, private contractors and novel policing components, and it therefore

fails to address current realities. He warned that the failure to update these instruments compounds problems of attribution, criminal jurisdiction and accountability: troop-contributing states retain primary jurisdiction over their personnel, yet mission-level gaps in investigations, repatriation and prosecution corrode local trust and damage the UN's reputation, especially where allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse emerge. 'Weakness kills our people', he observed, noting that failures to secure host-state cooperation have direct human costs for both civilians and contributing contingents.

Turning to remedies, Saikia argued that purely legal fixes are insufficient without political engagement, but nonetheless recommended concrete legal and procedural steps. He called for a systematic review and modernisation of SoFA templates for 2025, the adoption of mission-specific SoFAs that reflect current categories of personnel and operational tasks, clearer clauses on access and facilities, expedited visa and judicial-cooperation mechanisms, and explicit articulation of obligations that protect peacekeepers while enabling the effective conduct of PoC tasks. He also urged improved transparency down the chain of command so that municipal and local officials understand the status and role of UN personnel, reducing risk of misidentification, and for calibrated accountability mechanisms that preserve political space for negotiation while ensuring minimum standards of state responsibility. In sum, he framed vitiated consent not merely as a legal anomaly but as a political-operational problem that demands updated instruments,

political will and practical measures to safeguard both civilians and those sent to protect them.

Use of Technology for Protection of Civilians by Brig S Kapoor, former peacekeeper at Congo and the Military Attache to the Permanent Mission of India to UN

Brig S Kapoor began by outlining the evolution of technology within UN peacekeeping and its link to the modern PoC mandate. He traced peacekeeping's transformation from manpower-heavy deployments to technology-enabled operations, emphasising that shrinking budgets and reduced troop presence necessitated alternative means of maintaining situational awareness and responsiveness. After the failures at Rwanda and Srebrenica, PoC became central to UN mandates, supported by UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1265 (1999) and 1296 (2000). Speaker highlighted that with asymmetric threats, complex mandates and heightened accountability frameworks, peacekeeping environments have changed dramatically. In this context, technology has altered how peacekeepers engage with threats, enabling them to operate proactively rather than reactively. As he noted, "You don't need many boots on the ground when you have eyes in the air."

He then explored the suite of technologies now integrated into PoC tasks: unarmed drones, satellite imagery, mobile early-warning networks, digital communication systems, AI-based predictive analytics, biometric tools, and the real-time coordination platform 'Unite Aware' introduced by India in 2021. Drones, first deployed in the DRC in 2013, allowed real-time monitoring of militant movement, border

areas, and terrain. AI-enabled predictive analysis, combined with satellite imagery and geospatial tools, supports faster decision-making and helps prevent ambushes on peacekeepers and civilians. He highlighted data showing a downward trend in peacekeeper casualties after the integration of UAVs and AI, underscoring technology's impact: early warning systems, community alert networks, and counter IED by pairing of drones with convoys have saved lives. Case studies from the DRC illustrated how technology enabled rapid civilian rescue, tracking of militant groups, and protection of internally displaced populations. 'Earlier, we reacted after civilians informed us,' he remarked, 'today, technology enables us to anticipate, not just respond.'

Brig Kapoor concluded by outlining the challenges, training gaps among troop-contributing countries, legal and ethical concerns, and uneven host-state permissions for UAV use. He highlighted that although overall UN peacekeeping budgets have decreased, allocations for communication and technology have continued to rise, signalling a structural shift. He emphasised that future peacekeeping requires technology to be embedded in mandates, mission planning, and training frameworks, supported by UN initiatives such as A4P and A4P+. He proposed that India should leverage its technological ecosystem to evolve from a troop-contributing country to a technology-contributing country, partnering with Defence Research and Development Organisation, startups, and defence innovators. He closed by stressing that technology must enhance and not replace peacekeepers, ensuring that mission responsiveness, civilian safety, and accountability remain paramount.

Closing Remarks Session 3: Maj Gen AK Bardalai, VSM, PhD (Retd), Former Deputy HoM and Deputy Force Commander, UNIFIL

Maj Gen AK Bardalai closed the session by affirming that protecting civilians demands more than presence, it requires preparedness, proactive engagement, and sustained political backing. He highlighted that missions continue to face dilemmas when mandates lack clarity or when peacekeepers are expected to act without adequate intelligence, mobility, or force posture. He stressed that protection cannot be treated as an ad-hoc activity; it must be anchored in training, early warning systems, community engagement, and coordination across civilian, military, and humanitarian actors. He concluded that the credibility of peacekeeping ultimately depends on the ability to protect those most at risk, and that peace operations must ensure that mandates are realistic, adequately resourced, and decision-making guided by responsibility rather than caution.

Key Takeaways Session 3: Protection of Civilians: Responsibilities and Dilemmas

- This session examined the evolving challenges of protecting civilians in contemporary peace operations, where peacekeepers increasingly operate in volatile environments marked by asymmetric threats, weak state structures, and blurred distinctions between combatants and civilians.

Advancing Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Imperative in a Fragmented World

- PoC is no longer a peripheral or aspirational task, it has become the central benchmark of mission success.
- Peacekeepers must balance protection mandates with operational constraints, legal obligations, and the fundamental principles of consent, impartiality, and minimum use of force.
- Absence of political will, unclear mandates, and the lack of coherence between humanitarian, military, and political objectives often weaken mission outcomes.
- The dilemma of how far peacekeepers can intervene, especially when civilian harm is imminent but political authorisation is lacking, is a persistent ethical and operational challenge.
- Peacekeeping is shifting from troop-centric operations to technology-enabled civilian protection.
- The use of satellite imagery, drones, AI-based predictive analytics, biometric verification, digital early warning networks, and integrated situational awareness platforms has reshaped threat detection, assessment, and follow up actions.
- Technology enables missions to be proactive rather than reactive, strengthens accountability, and reduces the risk to both civilians and peacekeepers.
- Significant obstacles remain, such as training gaps, legal and ethical concerns, host-state restrictions

on UAV deployment, and uneven access to digital infrastructure.

- Despite reduced mission budgets, investment in technology has steadily increased, signalling a structural transition in UN peacekeeping.
- Effective civilian protection requires clearer mandates, political backing, technological integration, and improved coordination between military, humanitarian, and local actors, reaffirming that protecting civilians is not only a military task but a shared humanitarian responsibility.

DAY 2

Session 4: Gender Diversity in Peace and Security

Chair: Col KK Sharma, PhD (Retd), Visiting Fellow, USI

Col KK Sharma opened the session by underscoring that gender diversity is not merely an inclusion exercise but an operational necessity in peace and security architecture. He noted that peace operations increasingly intersect with civilian populations in complex environments, making diverse representation, particularly of women, central to credibility, trust-building, and mission effectiveness. Emphasising the evolving expectations from peacekeepers, he highlighted that gender-sensitive approaches enable better situational awareness, improve communication with affected communities, and enhance the protection mechanisms required in volatile settings.

He stressed that international frameworks such as the WPS agenda and UNSCR 1325 have laid a strong normative foundation, yet meaningful participation remains limited by structural barriers, institutional culture, and lack of sustained political backing. By situating gender inclusion as a strategic pillar rather than a peripheral commitment, he stated that peace operations can harness more comprehensive conflict understanding, deepen preventive diplomacy, and strengthen long-term peacebuilding outcomes.

Women, Peace and Security Agenda and its Implementation by Ms Kanta Singh, Country Representative, UN Women, India

Ms Kanta Singh began her address by highlighting the longstanding collaboration between UN Women and the USI of India, particularly in strengthening gender-inclusive approaches to peacekeeping. She underscored that UN Women's mandate is exclusively focused on advancing women's rights and participation across all domains of public life. Noting that this year marks multiple milestones, 80 years of the UN, 15 years of UN Women, and 25 years of UNSCR 1325 (2000), she emphasised that the renewed global focus on the WPS agenda is both timely and necessary. She pointed out that despite decades of normative progress, conflicts worldwide have risen sharply, disproportionately affecting women, young people, and marginalised communities.

Drawing on global data, Ms Singh expressed concern about the stark underrepresentation of women in peace processes and negotiations. She revealed that 84 peace negotiations in 2025 took place without a single woman present at the table, even though women and young people constitute a significant share of those affected by conflict. She stated, "When women are not there, their concerns, their differential impact on them is not shared by men, and rightly so, because if they haven't experienced it, they can't share it." She supported her argument with research that shows peace agreements are 35 per cent more likely to last when women participate, citing examples from Northern Ireland, the Philippines, Colombia, and Liberia.

She highlighted India's leadership in operationalising the WPS agenda, particularly through training female military officers and preparing women peacekeepers for deployment.

She explained that India is currently the only country entrusted with conducting specialised pre-deployment training for women officers, emphasising that community engagement and women's leadership on the ground are crucial for durable peace. Ms Singh also noted that despite increasing military expenditure globally, gender equality remains critically underfunded, citing a rise in defence budgets and an increase in conflict-related harm to women and girls.

In closing, Ms Singh reiterated that women's participation is not symbolic but essential for shaping peace processes that reflect the realities of those most affected by conflict. She emphasised that women must be involved not only as peacekeepers but also as negotiators, mediators, and signatories to peace agreements to ensure that their insights and lived experiences shape lasting peace.

Women in War and Peace: Towards a Holistic Humanitarian Approach by Ms Meher Dev, Legal Advisor, ICRC Regional delegation, New Delhi

Ms Meher Dev opened her presentation by foregrounding a central acknowledgment, war does not affect everyone in the same way. She emphasised that 'One's gender identity plays a key role on how war impacts them.' She highlighted that while the effects of conflict are universal, the burdens borne by women are often distinct and disproportionately severe. Drawing on ICRC field research, she stressed that although sexual violence is commonly perceived as affecting only women and girls, 'sexual violence is something that can impact anybody... male detainees who were subjected to

torture have also reported that they have been subjected to sexual violence.’ She linked this to structural gender inequality, noting that unresolved sexual and gender-based violence creates conditions that hinder long-term stability, stating: ‘where sexual violence is not meaningfully addressed, it leads to lack in sustainable peace.’

She demonstrated how IHL recognises these differentiated impacts and embeds gender-sensitive protections. She reminded the audience that IHL prohibits discrimination based on gender and that the “fundamental rule of IHL is protection of civilians, and that definitely includes women and girls.” She outlined specific protections for women, particularly in contexts of detention: ‘If women are being detained, due regard should be given to their sex’, including access to healthcare, female staff where necessary, and the safeguarding of cultural sensitivities. She also underscored that sexual violence is explicitly prohibited under IHL and “can also rise to the level of war crimes.”

Ms Dev urged military commanders and decision-makers to operationalise gender-sensitive planning. She explained how applying a gender lens requires anticipating indirect civilian harm: “if the military target is located next to a river, which is frequented by women and girls, that should be considered. Can the attack be planned at a time when it is not being frequented by women and girls?” She highlighted practical measures such as ensuring female medical personnel where required, privacy and safety during screening or detention, and ensuring ‘Special consideration... to pregnant women, breastfeeding women, menstruating women’. She

also stressed the importance of involving women's groups in civilian–military coordination, stating that “it's not only men who are the main focal points. Women groups should be involved as well.”

In concluding, Ms Dev demonstrated the strong alignment between IHL and the WPS agenda. She noted that WPS resolutions call on States to ‘respect and implement IHL that protects women and girls,’ to respond to sexual and gender-based violence, and to prosecute war crimes. She highlighted that many States now include IHL obligations within their National Action Plans on WPS, reinforcing compliance and accountability. She closed by reminding the audience: ‘the battlefield is not an equal playing field; it is a gendered terrain.’ The synergy between IHL and WPS, she stressed, lies in the core IHL principle of non-discrimination, protection must not only exist in law but must be “meaningful on the ground for women and girls as well.”

Women and Youth Perspectives from Conflict Management to Conflict Resolution: Practitioners Prospective by Col KK Sharma, PhD (Retd), Visiting Fellow, USI

Col KK Sharma began by underscoring the structural exclusion that continues to define global peace processes. He highlighted that despite the rhetoric of inclusion, ‘Traditional approaches to peace processes have largely been dominated by political elites, military actors, and international mediators.’ Women and youth, he stated, ‘Remain marginalized, despite bearing the brunt of gender-based violence’, and youth are frequently ‘Victims of not only violence, but also recruitment

by armed groups or various private military companies'. Yet, both groups have consistently demonstrated "resilience, creativity, and leadership."

He articulated a critical distinction between conflict management and conflict resolution. Conflict management, he noted, is 'basically managing ceasefires, humanitarian corridors, and third-party negotiations,' but this merely 'freezes a conflict rather than transforming the landscape.' Conflict resolution, by contrast, 'goes deeper to address the root causes, structural, rational, and cultural dimensions,' and requires the 'inclusivity of all women and youth who are affected by it.'

Col Sharma contextualised his argument within normative global frameworks. He referenced UNSCR 1325 on WPS, noting that it established 'a well-defined agenda for women, peace, and security,' later strengthened through nine subsequent resolutions. SDG 5, he added, positioned gender equality as 'a fundamental human right of society.' He also highlighted UNSCR 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), which recognises youth as positive contributors to peace and urges their inclusion in decision-making.

Drawing from data cited earlier in the session, he reiterated that in 2023 'over 64 serious armed conflicts were recorded, and more than 600 million women and girls lived within 50 km of those conflicts.' Women, he noted, 'have lifetime experiences in living through a conflict,' giving them unique insights into community needs, humanitarian response, and reconciliation. Referring to evidence from informal peace

processes, he quoted, ‘out of 38 conflicts, nearly 27 conflicts had women groups actively involved at grassroots levels of peace building.’

Col Sharma then presented concrete case examples of women’s leadership. In Yemen, ‘women negotiated for civilian access to water.’ In Sudan in 2023, ‘49 women-led organisations... created a Sudan Peace Platform.’ He highlighted the Liberia peace movement, where ‘the women of Liberia’s Mass Action for Peace Movement... pressured parties to negotiate,’ and Colombia, where women shaped the 2016 peace accord.

Turning to youth, he noted that ‘nearly 20% of the world population is between the age of 15 to 28,’ and while youth are often portrayed as security risks due to recruitment vulnerabilities, they are simultaneously ‘harbingers of change,’ driving movements around corruption, climate change and political accountability. He cited youth-led uprisings in Indonesia, Madagascar, Nepal and Bangladesh, explaining this because of ‘youth bulges.’

He also highlighted the issue of double exclusion faced by young women, who are marginalised both as women and as youth: ‘They are often considered too young for women-focused initiatives, leaving their specific experiences and contributions overlooked.’ He named young women peace leaders such as Malala Yousafzai, Yilvah Delman, and Miryam Djangala-Fall who have ‘demonstrated the vital role of young women in building peaceful and resilient society.’

Col Sharma addressed barriers to implementation of WPS and YPS, citing findings that persistent challenges include:

- Under-representation of women in security at national level.
- Deeply ingrained stereotypical ways of looking at women's participation.
- The belief that gender inclusion is disadvantageous to men.
- Lack of policies and funding for women's needs, including caregiving.

He shared practical illustrations from the Indian Armed Forces, noting that 'since 2020, women are commanding units,' and that '82 women soldiers joined the Indian Army in 2021.' He cited progress in peacekeeping and recognition of Indian women peacekeepers, including 'Major Suman Gawani in 2019 and Lt. Col. Radhika Sen in 2023.' Referring to Lt. Col. Sen's work in the Democratic Republic of Congo, he highlighted that the 'community alert network engages lakhs of women, people, villages,' making them 'eyes and ears for keeping up with the field.'

He closed with a call for a systemic change: 'Peace needs to be inclusive and requires the participation of every citizen of society, not only the half of it.' He emphasised that both WPS and YPS can only succeed when women and youth are trusted as equal partners, urging 'initiatives at local levels,

bottoms-up approach,' which, he noted, 'has a better chance of success in any conflict scenario.'

Closing Remarks of Session 4: Col KK Sharma, PhD (Retd), Visiting Fellow, USI

In closing remarks, Col KK Sharma emphasised that gender diversity in peace and security must translate into practical outcomes, beyond numerical representation. He noted that the session demonstrated how women's participation leads to improved mission access, enhanced community engagement, and stronger accountability to affected civilians. He pointed out that peacekeeping environments are shifting, requiring operational models that integrate gendered perspectives into planning, decision-making, and evaluation mechanisms.

He concluded by affirming that diversity strengthens operational legitimacy and resilience. Meaningful inclusion, he stated, demands sustained institutional support, leadership accountability, and spaces where women's expertise is valued, not tokenised. He reiterated that achieving genuine gender diversity is both a strategic imperative and a moral obligation, essential for achieving durable and people-centred peace.

Key Takeaways Session 4: Gender Diversity in Peace and Security.

- Gender diversity is not a symbolic addition to peace and security frameworks, but a structural necessity for making them effective.
- Peace processes today remain largely dominated by traditional, security-centric institutions

that overlook the experiences of those most affected by conflict.

- Integrating women into peacekeeping, diplomacy, and security decision-making produces more sustainable outcomes because women's approaches prioritise community well-being, reconciliation, and long-term social stability.
- Evidence shows that when women participate meaningfully in peace negotiations, agreements last longer, are more inclusive, and reflect a broader range of societal needs.
- Meaningful participation requires more than quotas or representation on paper. It demands dismantling institutional biases that limit women's access to leadership, training, resources, and strategic roles in security institutions.
- Structural barriers, such as rigid hierarchies, lack of mentorship, and assumptions about 'who belongs' in national security, continue to restrict women's contributions.
- Peace and security frameworks must evolve to recognise lived experience, empathy, negotiation tact, and community credibility as forms of strategic strength, not weaknesses.
- There is a need for enabling ecosystems that encourage women and underrepresented groups to participate without having to constantly prove legitimacy. This means fostering environments where

diverse voices are not just invited but listened to, where new leadership styles are valued, and where institutions actively measure progress in inclusion.

- The overarching conclusion was - expanding gender diversity is not just a moral imperative, but a capability enhancer. Diverse peace and security leadership results in decisions that are more grounded, more humane, and ultimately more effective in preventing and resolving conflict.

Session 5: Primacy of Politics and Conflict Management

Chair: Ambassador A Mukerji (Retd), Former Permanent Representative of India to UN

Ambassador A. Mukerji opened the session by stating that at the heart of every peace operation lies a simple truth, peace is ultimately a political outcome, not a military or technical one. He emphasised that despite advances in peacekeeping doctrine and capabilities, missions continue to fall short when political processes remain fragmented or lack ownership from key stakeholders. He noted that durable conflict resolution demands sustained diplomacy, trust-building, and inclusive dialogue, where the UN and regional actors work in tandem rather than in silos.

He highlighted that contemporary conflicts are increasingly shaped by geopolitical competition, weakened multilateral cooperation, and shrinking space for negotiation. In this context, peace operations must shift from reactive crisis-management to proactive political engagement. Stressing the importance of accountability and clarity in mandates, he underscored that missions could succeed only when political strategies drive the design and execution of peacekeeping efforts, not the other way around.

Primacy of politics: Political Solutions to Political Problems by Ambassador a Mukerji (Retd), Former Permanent Representative of India to UN

Amb A. Mukerji opened the final session by grounding the discussion in one fundamental principle, that peacekeeping is not an end, but a means to achieve political settlement. Setting

the tone for the session, he emphasised that the UN Charter, particularly Chapter VI, enshrines the commitment to the ‘peaceful settlement of disputes.’ He noted with concern that today’s global narratives are dominated by militarism, ‘the world speaks more of war, weapons and displacement than of dialogue and political resolution.’ He argued that the essence and the founding idea of peacekeeping lie in creating the space for political solutions, not merely supervising conflict zones.

Tracing the evolution of UN peacekeeping, the speaker divided its history into three phases, beginning with 1948, when the UN first deployed unarmed military observers following the Arab–Israeli conflict. In this context, he recalled how early deployments were meant to ‘supervise ceasefires, prevent escalation, and maintain peace to enable political negotiations.’ He pointed out that India’s involvement dates to these early years, notably through the medical mission sent to Korea in 1950 and later during the Suez Crisis (1956), where Indian contingents were among the first to serve under the UN flag. These experiences shaped what later became the three core principles of peacekeeping, impartiality, consent of the host state, and the use of force strictly in defence of the mandate.

Ambassador Mukerji then highlighted three landmark examples where politics took primacy and peacekeeping successfully enabled a negotiated resolution, Lebanon (1958), Namibia (1979–1990), and Timor-Leste (1999–2005). In Lebanon, UN negotiations persuaded both Syria and Lebanon to reach agreement, leading to the closure of the

mission within six months. Namibia and Timor-Leste became independent nations through UN-assisted political processes, both stories carrying a distinct Indian footprint. The Ambassador quoted Jose Ramos-Horta, Chair of the UN's High-Level Panel on Peace Operations, who said that the mission in Timor-Leste succeeded because it 'had a shelf life, the UN had a date to leave, and the country had a date to lead.' This, he argued, illustrated peacekeeping as a facilitator of state ownership, not perpetual dependency.

Moving to the contemporary geopolitical climate, the Ambassador expressed deep concern about the paralysis of the UN Security Council caused by the veto power of the five permanent members. He argued that the principle of 'great power responsibility', the justification given for the veto in 1945, has now 'shattered.' To demonstrate this breakdown, he cited ongoing conflicts at Ukraine and Gaza, where Security Council resolutions exist but remain unimplemented. 'No one has been held to account,' he noted, pointing to a growing environment of impunity among major powers. As a result, peacekeeping missions are increasingly 'deployed where there is no peace to keep,' leaving troops overburdened and populations unprotected.

In one of the most striking observations of the session, Ambassador Mukerji warned that a vacuum created by the Security Council's inaction is now being filled by military alliances and private military contractors. He referred to North Atlantic Treaty Organization's de facto assumption of authority in Afghanistan and the recent approval of a mandate in Haiti involving non-state armed actors, cautioning

that outsourcing international peace and security ‘poses a dangerous challenge to the integrity of the UN itself.’ He concluded with a call for structural change, for peacekeeping mandates to be decided not solely by the Security Council, but by wider UN member representation. Because, he stressed, this is ‘not merely an institutional debate, it is a human issue.’

Mediation and Negotiation in Peacebuilding by Lt Gen JS Lidder (Retd), Former Force Commander in and subsequently Deputy SRSG, UNMIS, Sudan

Lt Gen JS Lidder delivered a compelling and experiential address, drawing on his extensive leadership roles within the UN missions in Sudan and South Sudan. He expounded on the peace and devolvement continuum, stressing that modern conflicts are no longer linear or segmented into conflict, post-conflict, and peacekeeping phases.

Peacekeepers today operate in a blurred environment where the contemporary peacekeeper is triple-hatted - a peacemaker, a peacekeeper, and a peacebuilder. He advised the host relationships critical to success in sustainable peace emerges where local stakeholders are mainstreamed into entire spectrum of political activity, often with leads.

Reflecting on the birth of South Sudan, a process he helped steer on the ground, Lt Gen Lidder walked the audience through phases of stabilization, transition, and long-term development. He recounted his excellent relations with political leaders including President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar, ironing out their tribal sensitivities for reconciliation and healing. He illustrated how political primacy cannot succeed without political inclusivity and that

is why many peace agreements fall apart, failing to integrate diverse and competing political interests. Mediation is not about aligning with government in power but widening the political arc – to include regional partners, NGOs and communities,

A key part of his address focused on creating a secure environment for outreach. These include Temporary Operating Bases, joint patrolling, and informal community dialogues by physical interactions. UN Radio was to connect with communities in local languages. Mediation requires stepping outside rigid formats and going beyond theoretical ‘Red Lines’. Peacekeepers must be prepared to take moral, political, and personal risks.

Three case studies were drawn from his personal experience—all duly recorded in various USI and CUNPK journals.

- **Flying International Criminal Court (ICC) Indicted Southern Kordofan Wali Ahmed Harun.** He informed the audience that he took the risk of flying, the ICC indicted, Southern Kordofan Wali (governor) Ahmed Haroun to Abyei in 2010 to build bridges with the Misseriya leadership – an act which came under scrutiny in parts of the international community and media. Notwithstanding the objections, our conflict-prevention diplomacy helped to reinforce UNMIS impartiality – as also reach out to multiple voices. Lesson - there are no red lines in political dialogue, and we should not hesitate

to mediate with groups not signatory to the peace agreements.

- **Resolving The Road Block in Abyei.** The Diffra (Abyei)-Aweil (Norther Bahr-el-Ghazal) road, South Sudan, would often be blocked by the Misseriya tribesmen, disrupting economic activity and causing humanitarian deprivation. On one such occasion I decided to drive up to the ambush site. We reached the road block site, which looked a shoddy military work with few branches spread randomly across the road. The interaction got protracted, language and ethnicity being major barriers. On UN's assurance the block got lifted. Few hugs and a hot cup of Sudanese tea had helped lower the temperature.

- **Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) Internal Conflict – Impunity for Rebellious Gen George Athor Deng in Bor.** An unfortunate development during Sudan-2010 elections was rebellion by Gen George Athor Deng in Jonglei - after losing his gubernatorial contest as an independent candidate. Athor was a towering figure of SPLA struggle and popular in Bor. Speaker developed contact with the renegade general through satellite phone and made a sincere effort for reconciliation. Speaker also met President Salva Kirr frequently on the issue – who appeared amenable to a ceasefire. President Kirr even allowed speaker to brief the SPLA security body in rare diplomatic gesture to enable amnesty to Gen Athor.

Sadly, the matter got addressed militarily after my departure.

Lt Gen Lidder narrated these three stories of negotiations complexities in conflict zones. In one striking example, he described flying with ICC indicted Ahmad Harun into Abyei because Harun was the only person capable of influencing the Misseriya tribes to prevent violence, even though the decision sparked international outrage. When questioned, he maintained: ‘You don’t have to break the rules, you must apply them appropriately.’ In another case, while negotiating with rebel Gen George Athor, he challenged President Salva Kiir’s instinct to eliminate Athor militarily, attempting instead to create space for reconciliation. He reminded the audience that peacekeepers must choose humanity over procedure: ‘If you follow rule books that are black and white, don’t go there. But if you are responsible towards humanity, you can take that extra step.’

Lt Gen Lidder concluded with a powerful message about the human essence of peacekeeping: peacekeepers must shed their positional authority, step out of fortified compounds, and go to the community. Walk around, spend a night in the village, dance with them. They will tell you what the true story is. His core thesis was unmistakable, peacebuilding succeeds only when peacekeepers embrace humility, inclusion, and risk in service of local ownership and sustainable peace.

Respect for IHL as a Pathway to Peace by Shri Sandeep Bali, Head of Prevention Programmes, Delegate for relation with Armed & Security Forces, ICRC Regional delegation, New Delhi.

Shri Sandeep Bali emphasised that if the last two days of discussions demonstrated anything, it was that IHL remains relevant and indispensable. He framed IHL not merely as a legal framework, but as a practical pathway toward peace. While peace negotiations, ceasefire agreements, and political settlements may ultimately end conflicts, he argued that respect for humanitarian law is often the first step toward rebuilding trust between warring parties. IHL does not stop wars, he was unequivocal in stating, ‘No law has ever prevented war.’ Instead, it ensures that wars do not descend into unimaginable brutality and that humanity does not get entirely sacrificed during conflict.

He noted that IHL plays an active role even during hostilities by limiting destruction, protecting civilian infrastructure, and ensuring humane treatment of detainees. Compliance with IHL reduces displacement, protects homes, preserves access to food, water, hospitals, schools, and cultural sites, and decreases the collective trauma that otherwise becomes an obstacle to peace. ‘IHL does not make war humane, it simply prevents it from being worse’, he emphasised. By preserving life and infrastructure, IHL lowers the human and economic cost of rebuilding, thereby making the transition to peace less complex and less burdened by hatred and loss.

Bali underscored that respect for IHL can create entry points for dialogue and trust-building. He noted that IHL allows, and even encourages, arrangements such as temporary humanitarian ceasefires, neutral zones, exchange of prisoners of war, family reunification, search for missing persons, and

evacuation of the wounded. These actions may appear small in the broader geopolitical landscape, but they are often the first confidence-building measures that lay the groundwork for peace negotiations. He highlighted how organisations like ICRC act within the IHL framework to engage with all parties to the conflict, escorting detainees home, exchanging information on missing persons, supporting humanitarian demining efforts, and conveying messages to coordinate ceasefires. He pointed to current conflicts, stating that these humanitarian activities are evident in places like Gaza and Ukraine.

Addressing debates around whether IHL ‘Legitimises’ war, he clarified that the law has no role in determining whether parties go to war. It operates only after peace fails, reducing harm until peace can be restored. He also stressed the importance of transitional justice and accountability as part of peacebuilding: while IHL encourages clemency and amnesties for those who participated in hostilities (without committing war crimes), it equally demands prosecution for grave violations, ensuring justice for victims and preventing cycles of impunity. He observed that the protection offered by IHL continues even after conflicts end, detainees must be released or repatriated, missing persons accounted for, unexploded ordnance removed, and families reunited.

In closing, he quoted the ICRC leadership, noting that restraint and peace are companions, not opposites. Every time IHL is applied, humanity is reaffirmed. Compliance with IHL may not end war, but it ensures that when peace comes, there is something left to rebuild with.

Closing Remarks Session 5: Ambassador A Mukerji, Former Permanent Representative of India to UN

In closing, Ambassador Mukerji reaffirmed that the primacy of politics is not a conceptual ideal, it is the defining prerequisite for preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts. He observed that peacekeeping missions often become overstretched and under-resourced when political consensus erodes or when international actors prioritise short-term optics over long-term stability. He reiterated that sustainable peace emerges only when political dialogue remains central, supported by diplomacy, regional partnerships, and consistent application of international law.

He concluded by stressing that the success of UN peace operations depends on collective responsibility. Peacekeeping can only be transformative when political will aligns with operational capability and when all actors commit to negotiating peace rather than managing conflict. Only then can peacekeeping remain relevant in a fractured global landscape and deliver outcomes that restore stability, legitimacy, and hope.

Key Takeaways Primacy of Politics and Conflict Management

- The political will remains the decisive factor in conflict resolution.
- Peace processes are rarely inhibited by an absence of legal frameworks or multilateral tools; rather, they are constrained by competing interests,

asymmetries of power, and the lack of incentives for actors to negotiate.

- Peace cannot be outsourced to military solutions alone and that political leadership must prioritise dialogue, de-escalation, and negotiated settlements over coercive responses.
- Where political coherence exists, institutions, from international organisations to regional mechanisms, can effectively channel diplomacy, manage escalation, and restore stability.
- Adherence to humanitarian norms is not peripheral to political strategy but integral to achieving sustainable peace.
- Respect for IHL reduces civilian harm, preserves social fabric and infrastructure, and prevents conditions that fuel cycles of resentment, displacement, and radicalisation.
- By limiting the destructive toll of conflict, humanitarian principles create an environment in which post-conflict reconstruction, transitional justice, and reconciliation become feasible.
- Compliance with humanitarian obligations also generates small but significant bridges of cooperation during hostilities, such as temporary ceasefires, prisoner exchanges, or humanitarian corridors, which serve as platforms for dialogue and confidence-building.

- Peace-building must account for the long arc of recovery: the restoration of trust, institutions, and dignity.
- Sustainable peace is not merely the cessation of hostilities, but the presence of accountability, political inclusion, and avenues for reconciliation.
- The pathway to durable conflict management lies in a convergence of politics, law, and humanitarian imperatives.
- When political leadership is supported by humanitarian restraint and operationalised through credible conflict-management structures, peace is not an abstract aspiration, but a realistic, attainable outcome.

Closing Session

Closing Remarks by Maj Gen BK Sharma (Retd), DG, USI

Maj Gen BK Sharma, delivered the closing remarks, reflecting on the two-day deliberations and expressing deep gratitude to all partner institutions, domain experts, and participants. He quoted Paulo Coelho, “when you want something, the whole universe conspires for it to happen”, linking the sentiment to USI’s renewed commitment to strengthening India’s contributions to UN peacekeeping. He traced the institutional legacy of UN peacekeeping expertise at USI, recalling the historic role played by the organisation beginning with the leadership of Lt Gen Satish Nambiar, former DG. After a hiatus from 2014–2022, he shared how the initiative to revive this expertise began with informal discussions and collective conviction, ultimately bringing together a core faculty comprising senior military leaders and peacekeeping veterans. He acknowledged that the resurgence of USI in this domain was built through collaborative effort, noting that he played ‘the minimum role,’ crediting the Centre for UN Studies, for re-establishing USI as a relevant global hub for peace and IHL.

Reflecting on the geopolitical realities shaping the UN today, Maj Gen Sharma cautioned against diminishing faith in the institution, observing that some great powers attempt to instrumentalise the UN system or reduce its efficacy by restricting funding. He warned that dismissing the UN as ineffective would be a strategic misstep and asserted, ‘there is no substitute to the UN system.’ He highlighted how India’s credibility in peacekeeping, exemplified through the

Sadbhavna model and the ‘hearts-and-minds’ approach, positioned it to take on a larger role in reinforcing the UN’s core mandates. He underscored that the world was looking to India to push for reforms, initiate text-based negotiations, and demand accountability, including greater transparency over the use of veto powers in the Security Council. With reference to recent conflicts, he remarked on the worrying trend of ‘mini-lateralism’ when powerful countries circumvent UN processes whenever outcomes do not align with their interests.

Looking towards the future, he emphasised that UN mandates need to adapt to emerging threats, cyber, cognitive warfare, AI, autonomous weapon systems, and space-based militarisation. In his words, mandates must be more flexible, nimble-footed, and responsive to the needs on ground. He also flagged significant concerns regarding accountability under IHL, noting the absence of effective enforcement mechanisms even when institutions such as the International Court of Justice or the International Criminal Court issue verdicts. As he concluded, Maj Gen Sharma highlighted the unique intellectual ecosystem that exists within USI and India to advance global peace and humanitarian principles. Calling for collective resolve, he affirmed that safeguarding the UN system must be seen as a mission: ‘We need to put our shoulder to the wheel to keep it alive and healthy.’ He closed with optimism, expressing confidence that the momentum generated through this platform would accelerate, before signing off with “Thank you very much and Jai Hind.”

Valedictory Address by Ambassador A Mukerji, Former Permanent Representative of India to UN

Ambassador A. Mukerji delivered the Valedictory Address by situating the session within a meaningful global context, noting that the conference coincided with UN Day, when the UN Charter came into force on 24 October. He highlighted the paradox that despite the symbolic significance of the day, enthusiasm for celebrating the UN has declined worldwide. Drawing attention to the irony of the Security Council discussing the UN Charter under the presidency of a permanent member, he pointed out that such developments reflect deepening contradictions within the international system. He stressed that the retreat of multilateral enthusiasm makes platforms like this annual USI–UN Forum even more critical in reaffirming the value of international cooperation through the UN.

Reflecting on the evolution of the conference itself, he emphasised that USI has successfully placed this event on both the national and international landscape. He credited the expansion of USI's thematic engagement, particularly in the humanitarian pillar and collaboration with ICRC and UN bodies, as a powerful effort to keep UN-centred multilateralism relevant. He noted that the conference must continue annually not merely as a ritual, but as a purposeful intervention to reinforce the relevance of IHL, peacekeeping, and cooperative security.

A key emphasis of Ambassador Mukerji's address was the emerging digital domain. He recalled that when India raised issues around digital governance and cyber challenges

more than a decade ago, there was limited acceptance globally. Today, however, the digital domain has become central to questions of war, peace, deterrence, and governance. Highlighting recent diplomatic achievements, including the adoption of the first UN International Convention on Cybercrime and ongoing negotiations toward a comprehensive global cyber security framework, he stressed that digitisation is no longer a private sector-driven technological space, but a strategic international domain requiring multilateral governance. He underscored that USI is among the first institutions in India to recognise this and should embed digital security and cyber governance firmly within its future agenda.

In concluding, Amb Mukerji turned to a deeper philosophical foundation for India's engagement with global peace. Quoting Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's articulation of 'the unity of mankind', he connected it to India's current global motto, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family). He emphasised that the unique contribution of the USI is not merely doctrinal analysis or strategic evaluation, but its ability to foster collaborative, non-confrontational dialogue centred on the human being rather than geopolitical divides. He closed with the message that the true legacy of this conference is its reaffirmation of humanity, cooperation, and collective responsibility: placing the human being, not state power, at the centre of peace and security.

Vote of Thanks by Shri Sandeep Bali, Head of Prevention Programmes, Delegate for relation with Armed & Security Forces, ICRC Regional delegation, New Delhi

Shri Sandeep Bali delivered the Vote of Thanks. Extending gratitude on behalf of Mr Alfonso Verdu Perez, Head of the Regional Delegation, he warmly acknowledged the presence of distinguished dignitaries, speakers, facilitators, delegates, and participants who attended both physically and online. Bali highlighted that the seminar had been an enriching exchange of perspectives, shaped by experts who brought deep field experience, intellectual rigour, and practical insights into humanitarian action and peace operations.

He expressed special appreciation to senior leadership who guided the symposium's vision, acknowledging the inaugural contributions of Air Marshal Dixit, Maj Gen Sharma, and Mr Alfonso, and recognising Amb Mukerji for delivering the valedictory address. Bali emphasised that the discussions over the two days were not merely academic but grounded in operational realities, adding that the speakers' real-world experience significantly enhanced the collective understanding of contemporary humanitarian and peacekeeping challenges.

Sandeep Bali further conveyed heartfelt gratitude to the Centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK) and the USI, particularly appreciating the support of Colonel Rathore and their respective teams. He underscored the continued guidance of senior leadership, including Maj Gen Sharma and Maj Gen Goswami, in strengthening the collaboration

between USI, CUNPK, and ICRC. Bali noted that the questions and challenges emerging from the seminar would be compiled and shared with all participants to ensure continuity and impact beyond the event. He concluded by expressing confidence that the partnerships forged here will continue to grow and shape global humanitarian discourse, signing off with, “Namaskar and Jai Hind.”

Book Release: 75 Years of India’s Contribution to UN Peacekeeping: Maj Gen PK Goswami, VSM (Retd)

The closing session featured a formal release of the book ‘75 Years of India’s Contribution to UN Peacekeeping’, authored by Maj Gen P.K. Goswami (Retd). The moment served as a significant acknowledgement of India’s legacy as one of the United Nations’ most consistent and committed troop contributors.

Maj Gen AK Bardalai opened the segment by remarking that India’s peacekeeping engagement dates to 1950 with its first mission in Korea. He emphasised that India has been the largest cumulative troop contributor in UN history, yet much of this legacy remains undocumented due to weak institutional record-keeping. While Western nations contribute fewer troops but produce extensive literature, India’s extensive operational experience has not always been translated into accessible archives. He noted that USI has attempted to bridge this gap by producing publications and preserving data, a tradition continued through Maj Gen Goswami’s new book. ‘India’s literary contribution must match its physical contribution,’ he stressed.

Unveiling the book, Maj Gen P.K. Goswami (Retd) shared the journey behind the research. The project originated from two commissioned articles for the Indian Army and the USI Journal in 2024–25, which expanded into a full-scale archival investigation. Using materials from the USI's rich archives, including personal notes, diaries, photographs, de-induction reports of units, and vintage media records, he reconstructed India's role in over 75 years of UN peacekeeping. Notable among these archives was a collection of documents and diaries left behind by Lt Gen Dewan Prem Chand, a legendary Indian peacekeeper.

He explained that the book contains seven chapters and seven appendices, covering:

- Indian Ethos and World Peace
- India's Contribution
- Past UN Peacekeeping Missions
- Ongoing UN Peacekeeping Missions
- Impact on India's Peacekeeping Ethos
- India and UN Peacekeeping: Way Forward

He highlighted the painstaking effort behind verifying names, missions, and casualties through the UN Headquarters' restricted archives and multiple cross-checks with Army Headquarters, reinforcing the academic credibility of the publication. A fully authenticated database of Indian personnel who lost their lives in peacekeeping operations is included as an appendix.

The book concludes with reflections on India's future peacekeeping strategy, linking deployments to diplomatic objectives and global leadership. Gen Goswami acknowledged the guidance of Ambassador Mukerji, Lt Gen Lidder, Maj Gen Bardalai, Col KK Sharma and several UN and Army officials, as well as USI research and editorial teams. The segment ended with applause as the book was formally released.

The ceremony ended with Gen Goswami's acknowledgements to the contributors and institutional partners who supported the Forum. The USI UN Forum 2025 was formally concluded, with an invitation to reconvene the following year.



Book Release



Panellists of USI Annual UN Forum 2025

About the Editors



Major General AK Bardalai, VSM, PhD (Retd) is an Indian Army veteran. He was a Military Observer in the United Nations Verification Mission in Angola in 1991-92 and was later appointed as the Deputy Head of the Mission and Deputy Force Commander of United Nations 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.



Major General PK Goswami, VSM (Retd) is an Indian Army veteran. He was a Military Observer in the United Nations Verification Mission at Angola in 1991-92 and Senior Faculty at the National Defence College, New Delhi. Presently, he is the Head of USI-Centre for United Nations Studies. He is also the chief coordinator for all UN-related issues and events.



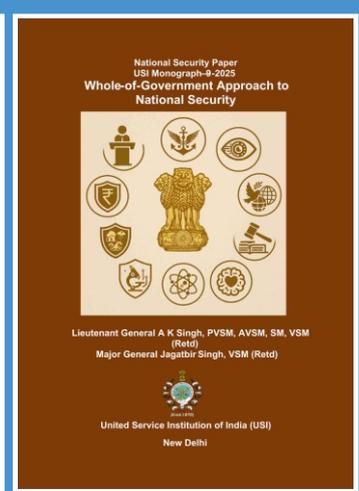
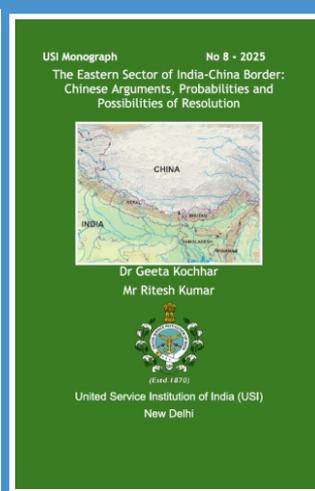
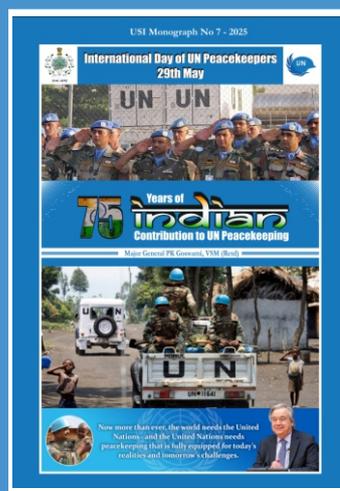
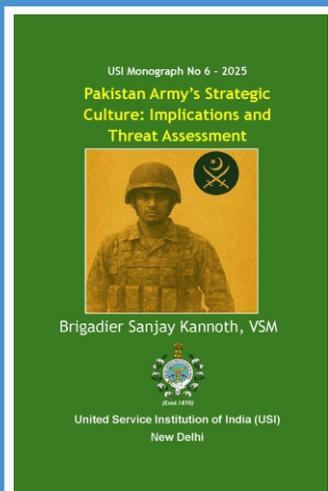
Colonel KK Sharma, PhD (Retd), a Visiting Fellow at the USI, was a Military Observer in the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia. He is an academician, researcher, and trainer in the field. He pursued his doctorate in Management from Swiss Management Center University in Zurich, Switzerland. He was a founding member of the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping under the USI. He was also a Professor and Dean of Business School and Global Education Programs at Chitkara University, Punjab.

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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