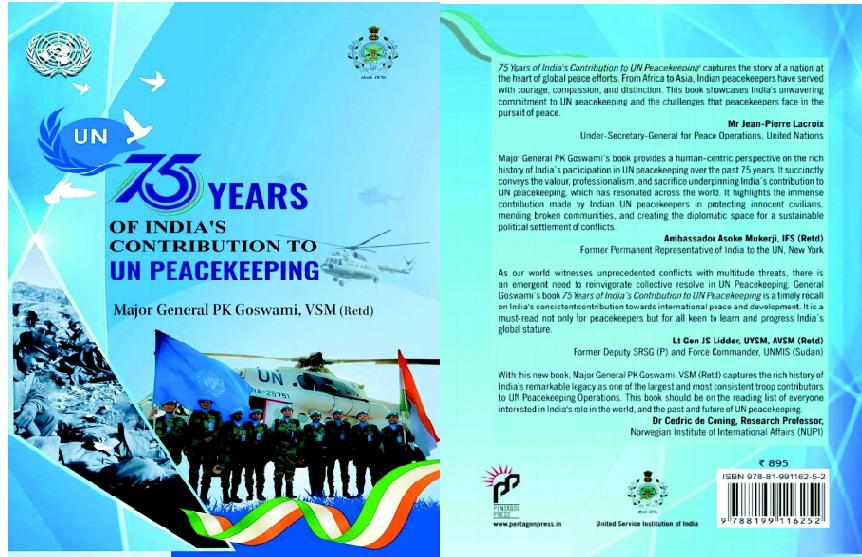


## Review Article 1

# 75 Years of India's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping

Major General PK Goswami, VSM (Retd)



## Introduction

**75 Years of India's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping** written by Major General PK Goswami and published by Pentagon Press captures the essence of India's peacekeeping contributions. It rightfully showcases India's unwavering commitment to the challenges that the peacekeepers face and how they serve distinctively with courage, commitment and compassion.

Over the years, from Korea in 1950 to the last deployment at Abyei in Sudan, India, by far has deployed over 2,90,000 military personnel and nearly 15,500 police personnel across 50 out of 71 Peacekeeping missions which remains one of the largest contributions by any country. The peacekeepers include military personnel, police forces and civilian experts and have played a

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crucial role in conflict resolution, humanitarian assistance and nation building in regions ravaged by war.

Beyond the mission-areas, India has also played a critical role in shaping the doctrines and policies of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations. She has consistently advocated for stronger mandates, better equipped forces and more representative global security architecture. India also continues to call for a reformed and equitable UN Security Council further reflecting its capacities, capabilities and contributions.

### **About the Author**

Major General PK Goswami, VSM (Retd) is the Director Centre for United Nations Studies at the United Service Institution of India. He is also the Chief Coordinator for all activities related to UN and Peacekeeping. As an Army Air Defence officer, he has served across diverse terrains in the country and has held key command, staff, and instructional appointments. He served as a Military Observer with the United Nations Verification Mission in Angola from 1991 to 1992. He has also been Senior Directing Staff at the National Defence College, New Delhi. He regularly conducts and participates in national-level seminars and conferences related to UN peace operations. This is his second book; his first was *India and UN Peacekeeping: Through the Prism of Time*.

### **About the Book**

The Book which has seven Chapters with seven Appendices is a detailed chronicle of India's rich and multi-faceted peace-keeping journey which analyses its impact, challenges and evolving role. It does this admirably by its historical and policy analyses, firsthand accounts and mission insights which provide a comprehensive understanding of India's role in UN peacekeeping operations over the last 75 years.

As one of the founding members of the UN, "India has consistently demonstrated strong commitment through its active cooperation and clear understanding of its obligations to UN activities".

For several decades, India has championed the cause of UN peacekeeping earning global recognition for its focused resolve, impartiality and professionalism of its peacekeepers.

Today, roughly 5,500 Indians are deployed in nine active missions. Over the years, India's peacekeepers have paid a high price as 182 have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. This blend of valour and sacrifice reflects India's traditions (often summarised as *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (The world is one family) in action, aligning its non-violent philosophy with UN values.

Indian women have also been part of the missions since the 1960s, in Congo. India was first country to deploy an all-women contingent for a peacekeeping mission, in 2007 in Liberia. Today women are part of all missions where Indian troops are deployed. More women in peacekeeping means a more effective peacekeeping.

Besides troops, India has regularly contributed senior leadership to UN peace missions, including three Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, one Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, 15 Heads of Mission and Force Commanders, two Divisional Commanders, and nine Deputy Heads of Mission and Deputy Force Commanders, along with several Police Commissioners in various UN operations. In addition, India has provided two Military Advisers, two Police Advisers—including one woman—and two Deputy Military Advisers to the UN Secretary-General. There was also an instance when the Secretary-General wrote directly to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru requesting Ambassador Rajeshwar Dayal's services for the Congo mission.

India has adhered to the principles of non-violence and peaceful dispute resolution through dialogue and mediation which remain the central tenants of its foreign policy. Thus, the author writes that "India's contribution to UN peacekeeping is not merely a calculated engagement but a reflection of its civilisational and cultural values, ethical foreign policy and commitment to global peace and security aimed at fostering harmony, cooperation and a stable international order".

It is, therefore, evident that India's contribution is both sought and valued by the UN, due to its dedication and professionalism of its soldiers. The acceptability of Indian troops, by diverse communities in war-torn countries, lies in its deeply rooted social, cultural, and religious ethos.

This remarkable heritage is deeply ingrained in the Indian character and reflected in Indian troops and police personnel serving in the missions abroad. As a result, Indian peacekeepers quickly understand and respect different cultures, and effectively connect with local populations wherever they are deployed. This helps in building trust, leading to greater acceptance, and maintaining peace in conflict areas, resulting in effective peacekeeping.

Crucial themes in the book include leadership under fire, dedicated diplomacy, and the protection of civilians. For example, Captain Gurbachan Singh Salaria led a small platoon against Katangese rebels in Congo in 1961 and was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra, India's highest military honour—he remains the only Indian to receive this decoration while serving on a UN mission.

Presently, Indian units often provide vital humanitarian aid. This year, Indian medical teams ran an outreach clinic in South Sudan that treated over 300 displaced people. Likewise, India operates a Level-III UN hospital in Goma, DR Congo, whose humanitarian outreach aided Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (Congolese army) and civilians and was praised by the UN's Special Representative for its professionalism.

In the Chapter on the Way Forward the author has stated that India's strength lies in its capacity to undertake peacekeeping operations in any terrain, social milieu, or adverse situations, and then sustaining such operations across the globe for prolonged periods. He further states that India's future peacekeeping approach should enhance its global standing and diplomatic influence by linking peacekeeping activities to its wider foreign policy objectives. For instance, the recently conducted Chiefs Conclave of UN Troop Contributing Countries in Delhi in Oct this year.

The appendices in the book provide valuable facts and data on India's contributions, including details of senior Army leadership such as then Major General (later General) KS Thimayya, who served as Chairman of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission. They also list the personnel who laid down their lives in UN service and those honoured for their contributions, including Lieutenant Colonel AC Rangaraj and Major NB Banerjee of the Army Medical Corps, among the five Maha Vir Chakra

awardees. In addition, the appendices feature vintage newspaper cuttings from international publications and a sonnet written by Brian Urquhart, the Executive Secretary to the Secretary-General, in Dec 1976 on the farewell of Major General Dewan Prem Chand from Cyprus, capturing his remarkable service.

### **Conclusion**

The book undoubtedly provides a human centric perspective on the rich history of India's participation in UN peacekeeping over the last 75 years and succinctly conveys the professionalism, valour and sacrifice underpinning India's contribution. Written at a time of unprecedented armed conflicts raging worldwide with peacekeeping forces facing multiple challenges – from proxy wars and terrorism to climate-driven crises the book reminds readers that strong multilateral resolve is essential.

The Blue Helmets play a vital role in preserving peace. India's remarkable and distinguished legacy as one of the largest troop contributors is admirable which not only reflects the growing global stature of India but also its commitment to uphold the values enshrined in the UN Charter. India's role has gone far beyond providing manpower: it has often led peace-enforcement efforts, protected civilians, and extended humanitarian aid under fire.

The book is undoubtedly a must read for those interested in learning about India's consistent commitment and principled approach to global peace and its pivotal role in upholding the vision of a just world order. In an era of evolving security threats India's continued engagement will be critical in strengthening peace keeping mechanisms, promoting stability and upholding the vision of collective security as it marks 75 years of its peacekeeping legacy.

**Major General Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd)**