

Indian Women in Blue Helmets Professionalism in Peacekeeping

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Majority of conflict situations in which the United Nations (UN) intervenes today are complex and as per their mandates, joint efforts of both men and women are required to make the peacekeeping operations as effective as possible. In many instances, maintaining good relations with the civilian population is a prerequisite for effective peacekeeping, as it often implies easy access to information at the grassroots level and increased security for UN personnel and the local population. In local societies where women and their dependents often constitute the majority of the population, it is advantageous to have women in various peacekeeping capacities, as it is easier for female peacekeepers to have a dialogue with local civilians than it is for their male colleagues in the peacebuilding process.

An increased number of female peacekeepers also mitigates the security procedures of body searches of women. This is particularly important with regard to the prevention of smuggling of weapons and explosives. Maintaining a balance between men and women peacekeepers also reduces sexual harassment and violence against women in the conflict region—a problem that has been steadily growing since 1990s. It is a general assumption that an increased number of women peacekeepers would benefit all aspects of the operation as they have a greater variety of experiences to add. The gendered aspects of modern-

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day peacekeeping, combined with gender-blind missions like those to Mozambique, Cambodia, Congo and Mali, have gradually pushed gender to the forefront of the UN system's various departments and units dealing with peace and conflict issues. Women have played various roles in the development of peacekeeping and certain areas of conflict management. The expansion of peacekeeping activities, including humanitarian aid, refugee return, demining, civil police, demobilisation, human rights surveillance, elections and nation-building, direct women's participation in international operations and thereby showcase their effectiveness. Women now have an opportunity to align these new aspects of peacekeeping more closely with gender mainstreaming policies.¹

Not only have some countries adopted feminist orientation in their foreign policy, but many have also begun to implement reforms to make their defence forces more gender-equal. Recent developments in the military have brought gender equality to the fore in international security and political debates. Gender equality is consistently predicted to contribute to peace or end violence and human rights abuses. Promoting gender equality is a step towards ensuring long-term peace around the world.

UN POLICIES ON DEPLOYMENT OF WOMEN POLICE

The United Nations, particularly through its Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), has been encouraging gender equality in conflict-ridden and post-conflict countries for decades. In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), institutionalising the Agenda for Women, Peace and Security (WPS) at the international level. The adoption of the Resolution was the first time UNSC specifically addressed gender issues and women's experiences in conflict and post-conflict situations and also acknowledged women's contribution to conflict resolution and prevention. It is considered a historic milestone by many. The Resolution requires peacekeeping operations (PKOs) to include women in decision-making positions in all aspects of the peacekeeping and peace-building process.² The UN DPKO has taken two approaches to implement gender reforms in PKOs. It has undertaken an ambitious plan to increase the participation of women in their peacekeeping forces in both military and police contingents. In addition to this, it has sought to increase the protection of women by mitigating Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV), including exploitation, abuse and harassment

perpetrated by peacekeepers.³ Gender reforms in peacekeeping missions have been increasingly involved in consulting with and directly assisting domestic institutional reforms. To achieve their goals, UN peacekeeping missions have introduced the concept of 'gender mainstreaming' taking into account how policies affect women and men in operations. The international community has accepted an ambitious effort to address gender inequality in post-conflict security provision. There is tremendous opportunity in this endeavour, but there are also incredible headwinds. Going forward, an understanding of the current state of peacekeeping concerning gender reforms is crucial to make the most of the present opportunity to shape how peacekeeping is implemented and how gender is construed in the security sectors of contributing countries.

Moreover, by understanding the peacekeeping model, which arguably has an institutional comparative advantage in promoting gender equality globally, one can better understand the opportunities and challenges facing broader gender equality initiatives in foreign policy and other areas of international politics. The UN must make determined efforts to increase the numbers of women in PKOs, especially at the senior levels. It is time to rethink how the women, peace and security framework has impacted peacekeeping, gender equality and collective security, drawing lessons from past practices and re-framing gender perspectives.

The UNSC passed a ground-breaking resolution on women, peace and security for all member states to encourage women on UN peace missions to focus on participation, protection, relief and resolution. Since Resolution 1325 has been passed, awareness of gender implications of conflict and the importance of women in peace missions has increased. It is important at the community engagement level to reach women in the community, raise concerns to peacekeepers and allow them to break cultural barriers. Women's participation in peacekeeping is also necessary at the political and operational levels. In recent years, women's participation in PKOs has increased. In 2020, the United Nations Peacekeeping Day marked the 20th anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' and celebrated the important role women play in maintaining peace.⁴

Female peacekeepers improve the ability of PKOs to safeguard people, particularly women and children. Their presence raises awareness and sensitivity to their unique demands and problems. The presence of female peacekeepers is not always threatening or offensive to the communities they serve. Female peacekeepers also have practical advantages in that

they may interact with women at checkpoints and develop stronger contacts with local women's groups.

**INDIAN WOMEN IN UN PEACEKEEPING MISSION:
PROFESSIONALISM IN ACTION**

In support of UN peacekeeping endeavours, the Indian forces have contributed outstanding force commanders, elite military contingents, including Mahila battalions, impartial observers and dedicated staff personnel. International forces and organisations have widely appreciated their devotion to duty and excellent performance.

On 31 January 2007, the first All-Female Formed Police Unit 1 (FFPU 1) was deployed to the United Nations Mission in Liberia Peacekeeping (UNMIL). The headline in the Indian national media read, 'The Ladies from India Have Landed in Liberia',⁵ and welcomed the initiative by declaring 'CRPF's Mahila Battalion a hit in Liberia'.⁶ The Mahila Battalion is the world's only women wing of a paramilitary force and part of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the world largest paramilitary police force. The CRPF's first Mahila battalion, the 88(M) Battalion, was formed in 1986, with its headquarters in Delhi. Following its training in March 1987, the 88(M) Battalion received recognition for its involvement in helping in the Meerut riots and later with the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka. The paramilitary force currently has six Mahila battalions.⁷ India is the first country with female police to help promote gender equality in peacebuilding in Liberia and peacekeeping in the world. This was later followed by Bangladesh, Mongolia, Ghana, Sweden, etc. The unit consists of 105 female peacekeepers recruited from India's CRPF. A female Commandant CO is in charge of the contingent. The first group has been recognised by the UN and media reports, and a rotation system has been introduced to replace quotas each year. India was the first country to send an all-female delegation to form a police unit in Liberia. The immediate impact when the female peacekeeping force arrived was increased reporting of sexual violence, which was widespread across Liberia during the civil war. And having increased reporting of these crimes inevitably led to a decrease in the occurrences of the crimes, which happened within 60 days of the arrival of Indian formed police unit (FPU). Since their arrival in 2007, the women peacekeepers have been tasked to provide security, VIP escorts and additional assistance to Liberia National Police and other national security agents. In addition to these essential security functions, the FPU has been instrumental in winning

hearts and minds by providing self-defence training for the youth and young women, hosting computer training classes and staging temporary medical camps for citizens with little or no access to healthcare. These women peacekeepers are trained in crowd control, weapons handling, human rights, UN policies and communication skills for a versatile peacekeeping operation. The contingents are already experienced as they serve in conflict and sensitive areas in India. The contingents are highly professional, competent and ready to tackle conflict-related situations. When they pick up their weapons and ready themselves for operations in Liberia, the women are no less than their male counterparts.

Women's forces in India are extremely effective at crowd control and people-to-people communication. But when they landed in Liberia, their first task was to protect the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building, which is also the office of the President of Liberia. Other than that, it is a 24-hour rotation service. In addition, night patrol consisting of mobile and foot patrol is with the Liberian National Police and observer police officers from other countries. Their daily actions include special patrol with the Liberian National Police (LNP) and other UN peacekeepers to some of the most remote, volatile and sensitive parts of the country that have contributed to Liberia's security. Patrolling through the roads of Monrovia, the FPU have shown courage and commitment to the mission. The FPU carries live ammunition, one- and three-way grenades and non-lethal shock batons. Female peacekeepers are physically and mentally fit as there is no differentiation between male and female counterparts in foreign missions. The female personnel perform the same duty as other police units. The only noticeable difference is that the unit is entirely female, and there is no difference in terms of duty. A vital impact of such a mission plan is that Liberian women are getting motivated, and more and more of them are joining the country's police force. Most Liberians agree that it would be nice if female Indian peacekeepers pave the way for more security in Liberia, especially for women and children, with a female touch. Liberians believe that female peacekeepers are not overly aggressive as men. The majority of Liberian police officers are men who need all the help they can get in stamping their authority. Things seem much more under control on the Indian patrolled side of the Liberian capital. Indian female peacekeepers feel that the mission is easy and are content with assignment, and if they help promote opportunities for female candidates Liberia will be benefitted.

SERVICE AND SACRIFICE

Empowering women improves their skills and is necessary for the development of any country. Women have proven to be one of the greatest assets in developing societies. The Indian female officers were welcomed as role models by the then president of Liberia. These female peacekeepers are doing themselves and the country proud by leaving their families and loved ones to serve a nation that is far away from home, a nation like Liberia that is in distress and requires international support and assistance. This is the pinnacle of humanism's manifestation. Another sign of commitment is that the contingent arrived while many Liberians were fleeing the country. There was a major threat of disease that was very hard to defeat and many people had decided to either shy away from coming to Liberia or to pack up and leave the country. The Indian female peacekeepers decided to come and face the challenges at that crucial time. Their bravery and dedication are widely admired. The then President of Liberia and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ellen Johnson Sirleaf hailed the contribution of the Indian women police. She thanked them for inspiring Liberian women, instilling a spirit of professionalism and encouraging them to join the forces protecting the country.

Although the international community has paid increasing attention to the role of women in peace and security through the UNSC's WPS agenda and other related initiatives, a popular suggestion is that there should be less talk and a lot more action. Progress toward more gender-equitable participation in the peace and security realm—particularly in peacekeeping operations—at times has been painfully slow. Within this context, gender mainstreaming has too often been interpreted loosely, differentially or not at all. Furthermore, the dominant gender-neutral approach to peacekeeping can sometimes worsen women's position or marginalise important political discussions and actions needed to improve women's status. This curiosity has sparked the Indian FPU's emergence as a unique idea, policy and practice that contributes a broader and more nuanced approach than many typical efforts of gender mainstreaming or implementing the UN's WPS agenda in peacekeeping and nation-building.⁸

The addition of all-female FPUs represents a change in how PKOs are carried out. Peacekeeping missions now include a broader mission to address issues ranging from institutionalisation to human rights and gender equality. The deployment of India's all-female FPU was a

significant step forward in bringing gender equality, women's participation and rights to the forefront of international politics, including PKOs.

In one of the policing operations in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, a huge security operation was conducted. Soon a suburb was surrounded and searched for weapons and drugs. The team was a mix of the local police, UN advisors and something entirely new, a group of Indian policewomen in charge of security. The operation was successful with not a single shot fired. One Indian female peacekeeper explained why the FFPU has been so successful 'Men lose their temper, but women rarely do'. When the female personnel work for the peace process, this compassion of women is very helpful. Before the FFPU's arrival, a series of food-for-aid scandals had damaged the UN's reputation in Liberia. The Indian women police unit is helping to repair some of the damage. They are motivating Liberian women to join the national police. 'Before they arrived, only 112 Liberian women had signed up for the police force', said one female officer. Within three weeks, the number increased to 360. These Liberian women will still have a high status after the peacekeepers leave, and women who are victims of gender-based crime will have someone to whom they can report it. For a nation with a female president, the first female president in Africa, it is complementary to have the Indian FFPU go in. It helps push a positive trend towards women's empowerment on the African continent. With almost two decades of combat experience as a female battalion in India with frequent and difficult operations, the personnel have great confidence and insight in the task given.

In a post-conflict scenario in Liberia, having female peacekeepers who are competent, trained on sophisticated weapons, professional and with an inherent quality of compassion and being caring gives them the advantage of implementing successful peacekeeping and humanitarian aid assistance programmes. A female unit is the best option. But there is another very significant reason why the UN has deployed an entirely female unit in Liberia. For many years, the UN has had a big problem with UN personnel abusing women. In Liberia, many cases of sexual abuse existed. This, among other things, is where the Indian female unit helped bring in a change. Female peacekeepers are part of huge UN operations. Many other peacekeepers tried to keep peace in a country so destroyed by war that almost nothing was working. The women bear arms in Monrovia's capital to educate the local police and other local units.

The UN wants a significant proportion of the future police force to be female, and things have begun to move in the right direction with the arrival of Indian female peacekeepers. Before they came to Liberia, it was hard to find women police recruits. There was lots of publicity about the FFPU and within three weeks of their arrival, Liberian women recruits started coming in. The objective of making these Indian women as role models was made and this impacted Liberian women.

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

Besides the armed operation, the Indian FPU also conducted medical camps. It is a way of building confidence. One such medical camp was held on 28 February 2009 at Congo Town, Monrovia, Liberia. The female peacekeepers went beyond their call of duty by providing medical assistance to hundreds of needy people in a community where few medical facilities existed. During the one-day clinic, female doctors from the Indian FPU treated over 200 patients, most of them women. These female doctors have treated patients with a variety of common ailments since the medical camp, including respiratory tract infections, malaria and typhoid. Liberian women could freely interact with Indian women doctors about their reproductive health concerns. The medical camp is a kind of gel well with the local community. Apart from forming bonds with the community, the medical camp fills a gap in a city with an underdeveloped healthcare system. In a country recovering from war, the Indian FFPU proves that security forces can be a real force for good.

A team of 22 Indian women peacekeepers were also deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), focusing on working with the most-affected victims of conflict, the women and children. On 29 May 2020, the Secretary-General of the UN honoured Indian Army Major Suman Gawani at the United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Awards. She was a military observer serving in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in 2019. She supervised more than 20 military observers for conflict-related sexual assault in South Sudan and ensured that each mission had a female military observer. She trained South Sudanese government forces and contributed towards developing a conflict-related sexual violence response plan.⁹ Following the footsteps of the all-female FPU, many other countries also started sending female peacekeepers to South Sudan in 2015 to help keep the peace and offer protection to women and girls displaced by the armed conflict. But the

work was challenging and demanding for these brave women who found themselves far away from home in a foreign country.

Nevertheless, necessary assistance to the local inhabitants is provided as a part of the job. Moreover, female peacekeepers are pushing the boundaries and boosting the potential.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The contribution of women peacemakers is valuable in everything from community engagement to important missionary work. Every effort is needed to reaffirm the important role of women in conflict prevention and resolution in peacebuilding and peacekeeping. The presence of more women as leaders, military and police officers and decision-makers as soldiers in the field only leads to better protection of the community, especially the rights and security of women and girls. Peace lasts longer when women appear and participate in the peace process.

Over 2,40,000 Indian peacekeepers have served under the UN flag in more than 70 peacekeeping operations. Indian forces are currently deployed in 8 out of 13 peacekeeping missions. They are waging peace in the most dangerous countries of the world, battling new threats and new challenges, saving millions of lives and making a difference in the lives of the local communities. The journey covers thousands of miles of terrain across four continents. Peacekeeping of the past was based on ceasefires. This is not happening nowadays; the deployed peacekeepers must be prepared to fight. Indian peacekeepers are an example of commitment to the UN Charter. They lost their lives while protecting, not in combat, which is the best example of professionalism. Indian troops, by nature, are a people's army; they know how to reach out to people.

On 14 February 2016, Indian FFPUs 1 and 2 departed from Liberia Robert International Airport after completing their tour of duty. After nine years of service, the female unit leaves behind a lasting legacy in Liberia. It's a legacy of inspiration, encouragement, dedication, service and sacrifice.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Women and girls suffered hugely during the civil war and armed conflict. They have demonstrated resilience by putting their lives on the line to support their families while fighting and striving to resolve community conflicts, including women in uniform and increased women's

involvement in peacekeeping. As agents of peace and security, female peacekeepers must lead the way. Many women are directly experiencing the seriousness of the conflict, so hiring women and enabling them to exercise leadership must be a conscious choice. It is not enough for female peacekeepers to merely be present in numbers, appropriate rank and file must be attained, necessitating the leadership position. It is not enough to increase the number of female peacekeepers. Instead, it's critical to place them in key positions so that the true value of what women do in conflict zones can be revealed. In India's experience, sending female police worldwide was a valuable endeavour. This endeavour has had a lasting impact on host countries and police officers.

More women are needed in key positions; the post must not be preferable to a woman, it must be for a woman. In 1993, women accounted for one per cent of employed uniformed personnel. By 2020, approximately 95,000 female peacekeepers account for 4.8 per cent of military delegations, 10.9 per cent of formed police forces and 34 per cent of government-provided judicial and prison personnel on UN peacekeeping missions. The United Nations Police Division has launched 'the Global Effort' to hire more women police officers for national police services and UN police activities worldwide. The goals for 2028 for women working in military contingents are 15 per cent and 25 per cent for military observers and staff officers, respectively. The 2028 goal for women working in educated police units is 20 per cent, and for individual police officers is 30 per cent.¹⁰ There has been a lot of pressure to include more women in peacekeeping. It is necessary to let people know that peacekeeping environments are not the sort of traditional male environments where everything is dangerous. The most cases, a country is rebuilding and recovering. This remains an ongoing work. Although the UN encourages and advocates the employment of women in a unified position for peacebuilding, member states are responsible for their deployment in police units and the military.¹¹ When equipped with the required capabilities, the UN police provide catalytic support to reform host state police services and other law enforcement institutions. To manage public order situations, protect UN personnel and facilities and conduct high-intensity police operations, the UN police needs foreign police units comprising both men and women with rapid action capabilities. In addition, there is a need for highly qualified women and men police officers with language skills and expertise in community-oriented policing, election security, forensics and investigation, and

police command, operations, administration and capacity building. Policing in peacekeepers is expanding both in numbers and complexity. The goal is to improve both police divisions' effectiveness and efficiency in supporting field missions as well as the efforts to professionalise the work of the police by having proper doctrine policies and guidelines in place and recruiting the best police male and female officers. Females in patrol units can better reach both males and females in the operational area, important access information and provide a more holistic view of security challenges. Female peacekeepers at checkpoints are believed to foster a less-conflicting atmosphere. Member states also need to launch initiatives to address the obstacles to increasing women's participation in peace operations. Peacekeeping activities are based on several UN policies and strategies that enhance women's fulfilment, accountability and implementation of their peace and security obligations.

The civilian side of operations has made significant progress: nearly 30 per cent of all civilian peacekeepers are women, bringing gender parity within reach. They are becoming increasingly prominent, from helping demobilisation and demining, to supporting elections and promoting human rights, to undertaking humanitarian efforts. Women are also fast becoming the face and voice of peacekeeping, playing a key role in informing the local population of their mission's mandates and objectives. Never before has there been a better understanding of the impact that women can have in maintaining peace and security. As more and more female Blue Helmets are seen on the frontline of struggles around the world, other women will be inspired to play a critical role in shaping their future. Men dominate all the armies of the world. Peacekeepers primarily engage with the operation's local population engaged in the mission, but due to a majority of men and an inadequate number of females in peacekeeping activities 50 per cent of the population get missed and critically these 50 are the most affected by conflict. Today's conflict is not about a one-armed group attacking another. Today, conflict is about attacking civilians, and most civilians are women and children. If enough female peacekeepers are not deployed there will be a lack of access to women and children.

As the world works together to fight the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, female peacekeepers are on the frontline of UN peacekeeping's response. This includes implementing health and sanitation policies, raising awareness on good hygiene, engaging communities through radio on prevention and countering misinformation and providing additional

assistance to host communities through the donation of supplies and medical check-ups. Female peacekeepers are rising to the current challenges and continue to perform vital peace and security tasks.

CONCLUSION

Women are essential to the success of UN peacekeeping operations around the world. Female staff comprising both combatants and non-combatants play an important role in many PKOs and serve as role models for empowering women in the community. Women play a stabilising role in an unstable region. Women peacekeepers have better access to the community, especially to women and children who are mostly victims of violence and assault. It would be unwise to underestimate the role of female peacekeepers in the mission. Female peacekeepers have demonstrated in all disciplines of peacekeeping that women can, without exception, carry out missions under tough conditions and standards, as demonstrated by the Indian FFPU in Liberia. This deployment has proven more points for Indian peacekeepers regarding quality training, crisis response, weapons handling and conflict resolution. India's peacekeepers excel in service, dedication, sacrifice and courage. The peacekeepers are involved in kinetic operations to nation-building and humanitarian relief measures. This is the versatility of female peacekeepers at the front. The FFPU spotlights the country's symbolic representation of women as an icon of shakti in Liberia. Following the FPU, the UN has made a request to countries to contribute more women to peacekeeping efforts to engage with communities to prevent conflict, promote human rights and contribute to lasting peace. In PKOs, such efforts provide an opportunity to increase the number of women in the military, police and civilian ranks.

Peacekeeping missions can improve gender equality both in and through missions. One approach has been to increase the proportion of female peacekeepers and introduce mostly female civilian gender advisers, units and focal points to improve the quality of the mission. And a more holistic approach, one that favours supporting the norm of equal opportunity through framing; leadership; recruitment and standards; promotion, demotion and discipline; training and professionalism; access and accountability; women's representation and gender mainstreaming should be more fruitful. If successful, attempts to address the challenges that stem from power imbalances in peacekeeping missions will help advance gender equality globally. Security efforts are more effective,

successful and sustainable when women contribute to the prevention and early warning, peace-making, peacekeeping and post-conflict resolution and rebuilding. India's peacekeeping actions illustrate the country's commitment to securing peace, the depth of involvement, the fatalities bravely borne and the hardships endured. Even more important, India continues to use the experience gained to refine its approach to peacekeeping.

Nonetheless, it is a source of pride for India to serve with both male and female peacekeepers in the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission for any operations that have been requested in the past and present. These women and men work in increasingly dangerous operational environments, putting their safety and security at risk. Women and men working together in peacekeeping provide a greater diversity of perspectives and experiences that enhance the missions' work in numerous ways. This allows making better decisions to improve operations and be more effective in all tasks from planning to implementation on a strategic, operational and tactical level and in all ranks and roles. The UN requires engagement platoons with at least 50 women in every infantry battalion, women in command positions in operational roles, particularly at the contingent level, and men and women trained on gender-sensitive conflict analysis. The Indian peacekeepers should also adapt to the tactical need for an agile, mobile and responsive force. It is high time to prepare for a tactical peacekeeper unit that can carry out more proactive operations, establish safety and security in areas without prior military presence and provide reinforcement, especially in areas where civilians are most vulnerable to attacks. For this kind of evolving peacekeeping tactics, rapidly deployable battalions fill security gaps or expel armed groups in areas where civilians are most vulnerable. Ongoing research examines policies, attitudes, experiences, outcomes and norms to better understand larger issues concerning women, gender, peace and security. It is a modest attempt to emphasise the obstacles and possibilities for peacekeeping operations to promote and represent gender equality around the world.

Indian peacekeepers have a track record of supporting peace worldwide for over seven decades. Much of that success is due to adapting and continuing the sacrifice of peacekeepers and battalions that contribute their best and brightest men and women in support of global peace.

NOTES

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