

An Analysis of the Future of United Nations Peacekeeping and India's Continued Participation

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PREAMBLE

As it evolved over the years, UN peacekeeping became an extraordinary art that called for the *use of the military personnel not to wage war but to prevent fighting* between belligerents. To ensure the maintenance of cease-fires, and to provide a measure of stability in an area of conflict while negotiations were conducted. To that extent, it is important to distinguish between the concept of 'collective security' and peacekeeping in the international environment. Whereas 'collective security' is a punitive process designed to be carried out with some degree of discrimination, but not necessarily impartially, 'UN peacekeeping' is intended to be politically impartial and essentially non-coercive. Hence peacekeeping was, and has always been, based on a triad of principles that give it legitimacy, as well as credibility; namely, consent of the parties to the conflict, impartiality of the peacekeepers, and the use of force by lightly armed peacekeepers only in self-defence.

The premise then being that violence in inter-state and intra-state conflict can be controlled without resort to the use of force or enforcement measures. Needless to say, there are many theorists, and one may dare say, a few practitioners, who are of the view that force needs to be met with force. An objective analysis of the history of conflicts

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would probably reveal that the use of force and enforcement measures, particularly in internal conflicts, tend to prolong the conflict rather than resolve it speedily. This is not however, to suggest that the use of force is to be ruled out altogether. In certain circumstances, use of force may well be called for as a catalyst for peaceful resolution. An observation attributed to Al Capone the notorious Chicago gangster (in the early 20th century) though probably not quite the appropriate authority to be quoted in context of UN peacekeeping, is entirely relevant in today's circumstances: 'You can get a lot more done with a kind word when you have a gun in your hand, than with a kind word alone'.

BASIC PARAMETERS THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED

Any meaningful discussion on the planning and conduct of United Nations peace operations into the future needs to focus on the following basic parameters:

- Should *consent of parties to the conflict* remain the cardinal principle of UN peacekeeping? The Brahimi Panel Report (submitted at the commencement of the 21st century) recommended it should; and, to those of us who have been involved with this activity, there appears to be no reason to suggest otherwise; and subsequent reports on the subject also strongly reiterate the principle. A useful modification suggested by a former USG DPKO Jean-Marie Guehenno was: that 'consent of *at least the major parties to the conflict*' could be the criterion.
- Impartiality is another cardinal principle that must NOT be discarded if UNPKO is to continue to have credibility and legitimacy. This is of course under severe strain in many missions where 'blue helmets' are deployed in support of Government forces that have questionable authority and even less credibility. In many instances, Government forces are as culpable if not more so, in targeting civilian population.
- The third cardinal principle of 'minimum use of force by blue helmets only in self defence' has already been largely replaced in recent years by mandates providing for Chapter VII provisions authorising the use of force by UN peacekeepers for the 'protection of civilians'. Whereas this is a legitimate task that should be undertaken by UN forces when required, they must: firstly, be equipped to do so; and secondly, do so without taking sides. Implying that they should act not only against 'rebel' forces, but also if necessary,

against Govt forces that are violating the terms of the agreement arrived at.

Noting that the United Nations was not organised to handle peacekeeping operations on a large scale without substantial reorganisation of its capacity, a major recommendation the Brahimi Panel made with some emphasis, was that it should not be tasked to go everywhere. Notwithstanding the best intentions, there can be little doubt that the UN has serious limitations.

The UN does not and should not, have an 'enemy' against whom it needs to prosecute 'offensive operations'. Where enforcement action is required against a state that has violated international norms, the UN Charter clearly suggests that 'multi-national' operations under Chapter VII be undertaken. And these are, without doubt, combat operations, NOT peacekeeping operations. Which is what the Mali operation should have been; notwithstanding all the unpleasant connotations that go with it. It may be revealing for the reader to see the list of troop contributors to the Mali mission (MINUSMA).

CREDIBILITY OF UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

The credibility and success of UN peacekeeping operations in the past, can be attributed to the following factors, all of which are under severe strain at present:

- **Legitimacy:** being somewhat compromised by deployment of missions without the consent of *at least the major parties* to the conflict. The question that arises is whether the Security Council as constituted at present has the legitimacy or the credibility to mandate intervention operations in conflict-ridden societies. I think not. Hence the warring parties do not take the UN seriously.
- **Burden sharing:** is now a myth because the developed world has distanced itself from participation in UNPKO except to the extent of garnering senior positions in command or headquarters staff; a serious infirmity that needs to be addressed. The irony is that there is no effort to even provide 'state-of-the-art' equipment resources that could assist in the effective conduct of operations.
- **Relative flexibility:** now being stretched because of the number of missions and the tasks peacekeepers are increasingly being called upon to perform; ranging from peacekeeping to peace-making to peace building.

PEACEBUILDING ACTIVITIES

The Brahimi Panel had clearly identified that activities like reintegrating former combatants into civilian society, strengthening the rule of law mechanisms including police and judicial oversight, improving respect for human rights through the monitoring, education and investigation of past and existing abuses, providing technical assistance for democratic development, promoting resolution and reconciliation techniques, and restoration of state infrastructure, etc., fall under the umbrella of *peace-building activities*. And in recognition of that fact, the High Level Panel set up by Kofi Annan in 2003 had recommended the setting up of a Peace Building Commission. However, what has happened since, with the recommendations of the Horta Panel is that peace-building is now included as part of the mandate for UN peacekeepers. As a consequence, peacekeeping missions are tasked to take on more than they are mandated, trained and equipped for, and remain in the mission area till eternity, as it were.

POLITICAL SUPPORT

This has always been a major issue, more for the inadequacy of support than for the support extended:

- Major players particularly the P5 and other members of the Sec Co, must ensure sustained political support to a mission that is deployed. If that is not forthcoming, the mission should be wound up.
- Major players including the P5 should avoid interfering themselves and prevent interference in the mission area by other actors, particularly neighbours; this can be effected through political pressure, sanctions, withholding aid, etc.

'ROBUST' PEACEKEEPING

As briefly mentioned earlier, most missions are being deployed with mandates that provide for the use of force; increasingly referred to as 'robust' peacekeeping. There can be little difference of opinion that the concept accords with the reality of the ground situation today. However, there is a need to be clear about the interpretation of the term, and what it implies at the operational level:

- How 'robust' is robust? How far do the peacekeepers go in pursuance of such a mandate? Do 'blue helmets' actually engage in combat?

Would they be dealing with an 'enemy'? In this context it may be useful to recall the combat operations undertaken by 'blue helmeted' ONUC forces in the early 1960s against foreign mercenaries and secessionist forces led by Moïse Tshombe in the Congo, in which the Indian brigade had a stellar role to play; and note the fatal casualties then suffered.

- It is imperative that the peacekeeping forces are reminded they would be dealing with 'spoilers'; usually rebel forces, but on occasions, this could even be 'government forces'.
- Hence much discretion is required; for which clear rules of engagement must be enunciated. And incorporated in training by building on the experience of peacekeepers that have been through situations that called for the use of force.
- It probably needs no elaboration that not all troop contributors would be comfortable with the concept (Given the fact that even in combat deployments like the ISAF in Afghanistan, contingents from many participant countries were keen to avoid deployment in areas where there could be fighting). The point that can be made with some emphasis, is that troop contributors should be apprised of the possible rules of engagement prior to making forces available, and be made aware of the fact that their troops could well be engaged in combat operations that entail inflicting casualties as also accepting casualties.
- A serious inadequacy of the UN system as currently structured is that the HQ in New York does not have the authority or capacity to provide 'strategic' direction in combat situations that call for the use of force. Whether this could be remedied by the Security Council if it would address the recommendation of the 2005 World Summit to consider reform of the Military Staff Committee, is a matter for some deliberation, particularly by troop contributor countries.
- Use of force is not a panacea for all the problems in mission areas. Experiences of combat operations undertaken in Iraq and Afghanistan, clearly suggest that the use of force has to be complemented and supplemented by political efforts for reconciliation and by peace-building activity for restoration of governance, infrastructure, rule of law mechanisms, etc. In fact, the use of force by peacekeepers should be limited to actions required to be taken for the 'protection of civilians'.

USE OF FORCE FOR PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

Protection of civilians has become a mandated task for most UN peacekeeping missions; and rightly so. However, a task with many ramifications that must be clearly understood. There is a great deal that can be stated on the subject, but for the purpose of this analysis, a few points that we may usefully bear in mind while evolving responses to the current problems of UN peacekeeping could be made.

As briefly referred to earlier, use of force for protection of innocent civilians, and for implementation of the mission mandate was first resorted to in ONUC in the early 1960s. India had a brigade group in that mission and this was used to launch *combat operations* against mercenaries and Katangese rebels led by Moise Tshombe. In the process, and in achieving success, the Indian contingent suffered a number of fatalities (36) and many more injured. Hence this is not a new concept or phenomenon. But it needs to be carefully calibrated and located within a credible political framework both locally and internationally. This invariably poses problems because of inadequate political support to missions that are set up. Regional players, as also the major powers, pursue their own agenda that in many cases do not necessarily complement the mission mandate.

The use of force means appropriate resources must be available. In almost all UN missions deployed today this is wanting because those who have the resources, both in terms of trained manpower and equipment, are not participating in UN peacekeeping operations. If UN peacekeeping is to remain effective, the developed world must return to the commitment. And this should go beyond the present arrangement of seeking positions in senior management and command, to provision of 'boots on the ground' and equipment resources.

The connotations of the use of force must be clearly understood by Security Council members who mandate it, the staff at UN HQ, and by troop contributors; and the concept imaginatively evolved. Peacekeepers must be mentally and physically attuned to the fact that the use of force will mean inflicting casualties on belligerents. And that casualties may well be incurred by members of the force itself.

In this context, senior leadership and command and control aspects assume added significance. To ensure that junior leaders and personnel in the field are not made 'scapegoats' when the mission is asked to account for casualties that may be caused to belligerents who seek to target innocent civilians including women and children. In that context whereas 'protection of civilians' is fine, how is 'protection of peacekeepers'

against human right activists and belligerents that exploit the situation, to be ensured. This is a command responsibility that will need particular focus.

STANDING UN CAPABILITY

The need for a standing capability at UN HQ has been recognised in so far as civilian police is concerned. Given the increasing requirement for use of force in intra-state conflict situations, it is time to seriously consider the setting up of a more comprehensive *standing UN capability* comprising: military personnel, including observers; civilian police; civil affairs personnel; human rights personnel; rule of law experts, etc. Put together by selection of volunteers on deputation from members states for fixed term contracts of two to three years; who must revert to members states without exceptions or extensions. Such a force would obviously be located, equipped and trained under UN auspices and be available in full or in part for immediate deployment into a mission area as soon as the Security Council takes a decision to that effect. And after replacement by a force assembled in the normal course, revert to 'reserve' status for reinforcement of existing missions in an emergent situation, or fresh deployment.

The added value of such an arrangement is that of military advice to the Security Council when required; and provision of advice on training to troop contributors on reversion of personnel to their home countries.

ABSENCE OF EXIT STRATEGIES

As things stand, it would seem that once a UN peacekeeping mission is set up, it carries on into eternity. This, from the point of view of practitioners with whom one has had occasion to interact, is largely due to the vested interests of the various players in the political arena, within the UN system and in mission area. Other than the military, and possibly the civilian police, who have fixed tenures of six months to one year, others have little motivation to see the termination of the mission. They would be out of a job! This applies to much of the international UN staff as well as to locally employed staff. Equally, local leadership of at least some of the parties to the conflict, are dependent on the continued presence of the UN to sustain the patronage they can provide to ostensibly boost the economy as well as to ensure retention of their status. Some regional and even global players need the UN in place to

deflect adverse criticism of their inadequacies, or for manipulations of the local situation in pursuance of their own interests.

TRAINING STANDARDS

All of us who have had the privilege of heading peacekeeping missions are aware of huge variations in training standards of military and police units and personnel deputed by member states. This inadequacy obviously needs careful attention and has received the attention of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York in recent years. Besides using the expertise available to develop realistic training modules and practices, it is a matter of some satisfaction that DPKO is reaching out to countries and sub-regions to exploit the practical experience and established competence that exists. To that end, more effective use of the capacity available in the various UN peacekeeping centres around the world would serve the system well. Together with more delegation of authority to mission heads, this would reduce staffing at UN HQ, effect economy, and add to efficiency.

ASPECTS FOR CONSIDERATION AND DELIBERATION

In addition to political, military and financial challenges, there is need to evaluate the challenges of 'a vision of PKO in the 21st century, evolve a realistic doctrine, and garner the support of the developed world'. It needs to be stressed that member states, and more particularly the P5, curb the urge to try and remedy everything that is wrong in the world with UN PKO. It is imperative that we are modest about what UN PKO can achieve. It is for deliberation whether aspects like climate change, economy, transnational crime, terrorism, etc., are for PKO missions.

We must be clear whether 'peace-building' in the complete sense is a task for a peacekeeping mission; probably not. In which case, PKO missions must be given limited responsibilities in this regard; and even so on a temporary basis. To be handed over at the earliest opportunity to others who are better equipped and more competent in that field. That must then form the basis of an 'exit' strategy, which must be benchmarked.

Review interpretation of the triad of principles of UNPKO; particularly aspects of 'consent' and 'use of force' in context of the fact that the top priority for missions in the future will largely be 'protection of civilian populations' affected by intra-state conflict situations.

Develop a clear understanding of what 'use of force' and 'robust peacekeeping' imply. Also what happens when 'host authorities' are part of the problem? Furthermore robust PKO that implies the use of force requires UN HQ and Security Council support; in terms of political backing and resources. Mission leadership must then be encouraged to exercise their leadership and authority to produce results in the field.

Given the fact that there will be increasing demands for deployment of civilian police in peacekeeping missions, it would be useful to carry out a more detailed evaluation of their role, in particular that of 'formed police units'. The aspect of the transition of civilian police personnel from 'peacekeeping' to 'peace-building' within mission areas probably merits greater analysis.

It would appear that it is time to accord serious consideration of the proposal for the establishment of a standing UN force that would enable immediate setting up of missions, and for use as reinforcements when required. It is also time to implement the concept of 'in-theatre' reserves for assistance to adjacent missions.

INDIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS AND CONTINUED PARTICIPATION

India's spontaneous and unreserved participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations over the years, has demonstrated clearly India's commitment to the objectives set out in the United Nations Charter. Not in terms of rhetoric and symbolism, but in real and practical terms, even to the extent of accepting casualties to personnel. This commitment has been acknowledged by the international community, successive Secretaries General and the United Nations Secretariat. But even more significantly, the effectiveness of such participation and commitment to United Nations peacekeeping efforts has drawn respect and praise from fellow military-men of other countries and many others that have served jointly with our commanders, observers and contingents, in various parts of the world. Hence, the image of the Indian Armed Forces and Police in the international arena is that of highly competent and well-trained professionals.

It is important to emphasise that much of our participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations relates to national security interests. Participation in the Korean and Cambodian operations demonstrated our stake in the stability of East and South East Asia. Our vital interests in West Asia, both in terms of energy requirements and our historical

connections, were more than adequately reflected in participation in the United Nations peacekeeping operations undertaken in the Gaza Strip and Sinai, Iran/Iraq, Iraq/Kuwait, Lebanon and Yemen. Our geo-strategic interests in the stability and well-being of the newly emerged states of Africa, has been demonstrated by our contributions and participation in the operations in the Congo, Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia/Eritrea. India has the unique distinction of having participated in every UN peacekeeping operation in Africa to date, except the Mali mission.

As we look forward into the 21st century, there are many of us in India, as also in the international arena, who perceive a more dynamic and significant role for India in the field of international relations, including the maintenance of international peace and security. This obviously means a greater role in the various organs of the United Nations, possibly even as a permanent member of the Security Council. If we are to fulfil such a role with any degree of credibility, it is inescapable that we not only accept the responsibilities that go with such a perceived role, but offer our acknowledged expertise in areas of United Nations activity like peacekeeping. We must exploit our undeniable experience and professionalism in this field, and put it to good use in the maintenance of international peace and security.

In preparing ourselves for such continued participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations in the future, it would be appropriate to take stock of the changes that have taken place in the environment in which such operations are being increasingly mounted in recent years, and the manner in which they are being executed. The end of the Cold War and the euphoria generated by the success of the Gulf War in 1991, resulted in the international community (particularly the dominant Western powers), assuming a greater role in the maintenance of international peace and security. There was therefore a greater demand for United Nations peacekeeping operations. The perceived setbacks suffered by the Organisation in its efforts in Somalia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and inadequacy of response to the situation in Rwanda were not attributable to any deficiency in the performance of peacekeepers. They were occasioned by the confused mandates issued by the Security Council and the lack of political backstopping. Even so, they induced a sense of retrenchment. There is therefore a more measured approach to the subject of UN peacekeeping.

It is important that we take into account the radical changes in the nature of the peacekeeping commitment. United Nations peacekeepers are increasingly being sent to regions where civil-war type situations prevail; where there are no agreements, or if there are, these are rather tenuous, or broken without compunction; where the consent or cooperation of the belligerent parties cannot be relied upon; where constitutional authority does not exist in many cases, or if it does, it has limited authority. In such situations, today's peacekeepers are not only required to keep the warring parties apart to the extent they can, but are increasingly called upon to safeguard humanitarian relief operations, monitor human rights violations, assist in mine clearance, monitor state boundaries or borders, provide civilian police support, assist in rebuilding logistics infrastructure like roads, railways, bridges, and to support electoral processes. In much of this the Indian Army has practical experience based on the conduct of counter insurgency operations in North East India (Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and Assam), Jammu and Kashmir (since 1989), and the Punjab; thus providing our forces with a marked advantage over most other forces from other parts of the world. This was more than amply demonstrated by the performance of our contingents in Cambodia, Somalia, Mozambique, Angola, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. And continues to be demonstrated by the military personnel and civilian police deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Lebanon, and the Golan Heights; as also by military observers and civilian police in other missions as in Liberia, Haiti, Cyprus, Western Sahara, etc.

CONCLUSION

It may be appropriate to conclude with some personal reflections on a couple of important aspects in this context. There is a perception among the troop contributor countries of the developing world to United Nations peacekeeping, that there is reluctance in the militaries of the developed world to participate in United Nations peacekeeping missions on grounds of possible casualties to personnel. This is a perception that needs to be removed if the credibility of United Nations peacekeeping is to be sustained. I have had the great honour and privilege of commanding military personnel from 34 countries of the world (as also a large number of civilian police and international and local civilian staff). The ground experience is that no self-respecting soldier, sailor or airman generally has any reservations whatsoever about participating in a peacekeeping

operation. Provided the mandate is clear and achievable; adequate resources are provided; and he or she is assured that it has the political backing and support of the international community. The very purpose of deputing military personnel into a mission area is that there is an element of danger. Which, because of their training and conditioning, they are reasonably well equipped to handle. If there was no danger, there is no reason why a group of unarmed civilians cannot undertake the task. Having stated that however, it needs to be emphasised that because the military as a well disciplined force, undertakes an allotted mission without questioning the political merits and demerits, a greater responsibility devolves on those who confer the mandate and send the military into a mission area. The problems really arise with the political authorities in the developed world, obsessed as they are with the need to respond to their electoral constituencies.

United Nations peace operations are a most useful area for effective and increased military to military co-operation, which if properly orchestrated, could lead to better understanding and appreciation even between personnel of contingents from countries that are otherwise in a state of hostility with each other. There are a number of examples of the understanding and camaraderie built up between otherwise antagonistic armed forces personnel when operating under the United Nations flag. With the nomination of 'stand by' forces by member countries for deployment in United Nations peace operations, the scope for periodic interaction and training increases. This lays the foundation for more effective joint participation in international operations.

Even so, I think the UN as an international organization, has little future unless it undergoes radical overhaul. UN PKO is probably one of the few activities that confers on it some degree of credibility, and is hence being increasingly used by the 'powers-that-be' to serve their vested interests without any direct investment of personnel and equipment. As a springboard for professing to address many of the problems afflicting the international community: from terrorism, to climate change, to genocide, to intervention operations, peace-building, etc. Without of course, committing any 'boots on the ground' as it were; or even 'state-of-the-art' equipment resources.

In my view, while it is fine for research scholars, analysts, theorists, etc. to engage in the application of UN PKO to these esoteric issues in glamorous locations in Europe and the USA, my suggestion to the practitioners in the Indian Armed Forces, Police and the Centre for

United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK), is that they focus on gut issues our commanders and troops are likely to face in the mission areas our forces are deployed in – namely, protection of innocent civilians, women and children; making efforts to bringing warring parties together for resolution of conflict; providing access to basic infrastructure and medical facilities, etc.

In context of this view of mine on the subject, I was happy to note that while speaking in the Security Council at a meeting on the subject on 23 September 2021, Reenat Sandhu, Secretary (West) Ministry of External Affairs, had cautioned, among other things, that addressing climate security in the Security Council is not desirable, warning that ignoring basic principles and practices relating to climate change could disrupt the nature of overall discussion on that extremely important topic. She also warned against building a parallel climate track, saying: ‘To view conflicts in the poorer parts of the world through the prism of climate change will only serve to present a lopsided narrative when the reasons for the conflict are to be found elsewhere.’ She went on to say that the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change clearly states that the effect of climate variability on violence is contested. Highlighting the need to bring the focus back to where it should be, combating climate change, she said India is a leader in climate action and is on track to meet its commitments under the Paris Agreement on climate change, adding that it also has the world’s fastest growing solar energy programme.

I also noted that, at the same meeting, China’s representative similarly warned against ‘sidestepping’ the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, the main international negotiating channels on the issue, emphasizing that the Council lacks the necessary specialized tools and knowledge. *That it should therefore refrain from including climate change in peacekeeping mandates, so as not to diminish the ability of peace operations to deliver on their core tasks.*

In that context therefore my advice for whatever it is worth is, that rather than focusing on seminars, dialogues, and conferences in countries that no longer actively participate in UN PKO, it would be more useful for our practitioners to engage in discussions for evolution of concepts and operational principles with representatives, scholars and analysts from countries that now provide the forces for UN PKO; namely countries like Ethiopia, Rwanda, Bangladesh, Nepal, Egypt, Indonesia, Nigeria, Kenya, etc. And not only evolve relevant operational concepts

and philosophies, but also insist that key command and staff positions at UN DPKO and in mission areas, be held by such contributors.

As we move forward in the 21st century, it is essential that we do not allow the perceived inadequacies of some past operations to cloud our judgement, and swing from one extreme of attempting to undertake too much, to undertaking too little. There is so much the international community can do to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security, and there is no way it can absolve itself of that responsibility. India's past experience and its wealth of talent and expertise in the vital fields of military, police and administrative capabilities confer on it a great advantage in terms of furthering its national interests by active participation in this area of United Nations activity.