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UN Peacekeeping and its Challenges: A Study of India's Contribution

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ABSTRACT

UN peacekeeping has transformed from lightly armed observers to complex and multifaceted activities designed to safeguard civilians and facilitate political processes. This paper analyzes the major issues that modern peacekeeping is facing and the contribution of India which is a long-term participant in UN peacekeeping missions. In this study, I use historical-descriptive methodology along with SWOT analysis. Namely, I reconstruct history of the participation of India based on secondary sources and create a timeline, describe trends in the number of active missions, and systematize findings into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The findings indicate that peacekeeping faces the issues of resource shortage, inadequate mandates, lack of consent from host-states, security concerns, and financial pressures while India provides troops, police personnel, women peacekeepers, and policy-making, incurring significant human losses. This paper suggests that India is a major and credible contributor to UN peacekeeping operations, yet it lacks influence over mandates and should be consulted more frequently.

Keywords: *UN Peacekeeping, India, Troop-Contributing Countries, Mandates, Protection of Civilians, SWOT.*

Introduction

Peacekeeping has been one of the most prominent functions of the United Nations. As early as 1948, there have been many observers deployed to serve under the blue flag, which now number in the hundreds of thousands of military, police, and civilian personnel, and over four thousand of whom have died performing this task (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b). There is a discussion among scholars on whether peacekeeping is effective, but the consensus in academic literature is that peacekeeping deters conflict relapse and keeps violence at bay against civilians (Fortna, 2008; Hultman et al., 2014).

India has been involved in this mission since the 1950s. It provided personnel for operations in Korea, Egypt and Congo and continues to be one of the biggest contributors of UN peacekeeping force today (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-a). The main research question is as follows: what are the challenges facing the United Nations peacekeeping mission, and how have Indians contributed to addressing these challenges? Objectives include identification of the evolution of peacekeeping operations, current challenges in peacekeeping, involvement of Indians in peacekeeping and strengths and weaknesses of India as a peacekeeping force. Section 2 describes the history of the development of peacekeeping operations, Section 3 describes the methodology used, Sections 4 through 6 discuss the analysis, and Sections 7 through 9 analyze the results using the SWOT method.

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Evolution of Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping is not addressed in the UN Charter and is a result of practice. Its initial concept was based on three main principles, which were consent of the parties, impartiality and non-use of force, except for self-defence (Bellamy & Williams, 2010). According to Kenkel (2013), there are five generations of the operations from classical observer missions, multidimensional operations after the end of Cold War, peace enforcement and stabilisation operations. With each new generation, additional tasks of election monitoring, disarming, state-building and protection of civilians were included in the missions.

The experience of failure of the UN in 1990s in Rwanda and Srebrenica revealed the problem of lack of sufficient capacity of the UN troops despite its ambitious mandate. The Brahimi Report in 2000 stated that the mandate of the missions should be clear, credible and appropriately resourced; there should be robust rules of engagement and proper planning (United Nations, 2000). The more recent operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic are mandated to use force to protect civilians. This is called the robust turn (Hunt, 2017). Doyle and Sambanis (2006) find out that missions are most likely to succeed when their mandate is strong and real interest in peace.

The institutional setting is relevant for an analysis of who controls power in peace operations. The Security Council is responsible for approving missions and their mandates, the Secretariat is responsible for planning and conducting peace operations, the budget of peace operations is approved by the General Assembly's Fifth Committee, and troop-contributing states provide the forces to conduct these missions. Different incentives characterize these four groups of actors. The decision-making process belongs to the Security Council members, while troop-contributing states take risks and are not involved in voting on mission mandates.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a historical-descriptive design supplemented with SWOT analysis. Historical aspect identifies the development of the pattern of Indian involvement in peacekeeping based on secondary sources, such as scholarly works and United Nations documents and represents the timeline (see Figure 2). Time periods are approximate as they can be defined differently in different sources, while missions are representative to present diverse experiences of Indian contribution but not exhaustive.

Descriptive aspect includes trends in number of active operations to show how peacekeeping environment has evolved (see Figure 1). Figures are approximate and rounded up according to UN Peacekeeping (n.d.-c). Analytical aspect arranges the findings in SWOT matrix (see Table 1). SWOT stands for structured classification of strengths and weaknesses (internal factors) as well as opportunities and threats (external factors) and can be helpful in providing a brief description of qualitative data for decision-making process. The drawbacks of SWOT approach are its descriptive nature and subjectivity of classification. Primary data was not collected for this research.

Contemporary Challenges of Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping operations have to operate under challenging circumstances. As illustrated by Figure 1 below, the number of operations has reduced from a maximum of sixteen to eleven due to the conclusion of missions and political opposition.

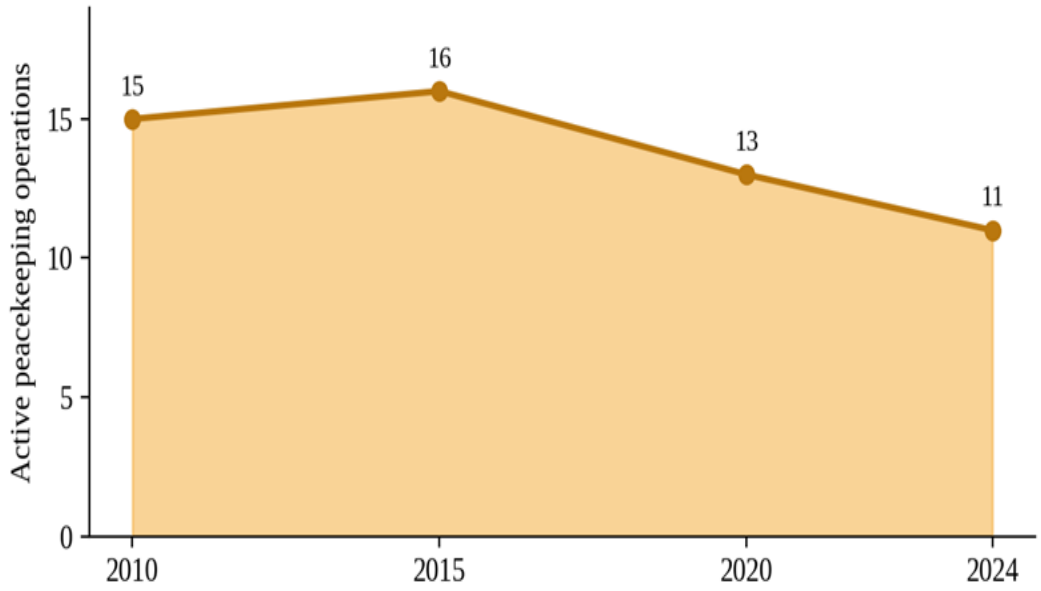


Figure 1: Number of active UN peacekeeping operations (approximate).

Source: Author's compilation based on United Nations Peacekeeping (n.d.-c).

Four issues arise. The first issue is the discrepancy between mandate and capability. Missions are expected to ensure civilian protection in wide areas with scarce manpower, tools, and information, just like in the Brahimi report (United Nations, 2000). Second is host-state consent. Governments in Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo have demanded withdrawal of missions, while the mission in Mali was terminated in 2023. Consent is one of the most fundamental aspects of peacekeeping, and yet, it can be used to constrain or terminate missions where they are necessary. Third is security. More and more peacekeepers are becoming targets of attack, and according to Karlsrud (2015), enforcement mandates have turned the organisation into a belligerent, at least partially, which has implications for both impartiality and security.

The fourth is financial and political pressure. Financial contributions are based on assessments from member states, and any delay creates difficulties for planning and reimbursement to troop contributing states. In addition to the above-mentioned structural issues, there are issues related to discipline, such as sexual exploitation and abuse of peacekeepers. As it was stated by Bove & Ruggeri (2016), the mission structure is also an important factor, as it may affect the protection of civilians. Contributing troops take both operational and reputational risks.

Nonetheless, there have been promising results from previous peacekeeping missions. In particular, Fortna (2008) demonstrates that peacekeepers greatly decrease the possibility of the failure of a ceasefire that would escalate back to war. Also, Howard (2008) states that peacekeeping operations succeed only when they are impartial, consent-based, and have the ability to gain the trust of locals. Hultman et al. (2014) reveal that greater deployment of military and police forces correlates with decreased numbers of casualties among civilians despite an ongoing conflict. Thus, the task lies not in proving that peacekeeping works, but in providing conditions for its work.

India's Contribution to Peacekeeping

The participation of India ranks amongst the oldest of any country. The members of India were involved in the Korean conflict as part of the medical team as well as custodian team, and India participated in the very first large-scale UN mission in the Middle East as well as in Congo during the sixties (Krishnasamy, 2001). Figure 2 illustrates some of the many missions of India for more than seven decades.

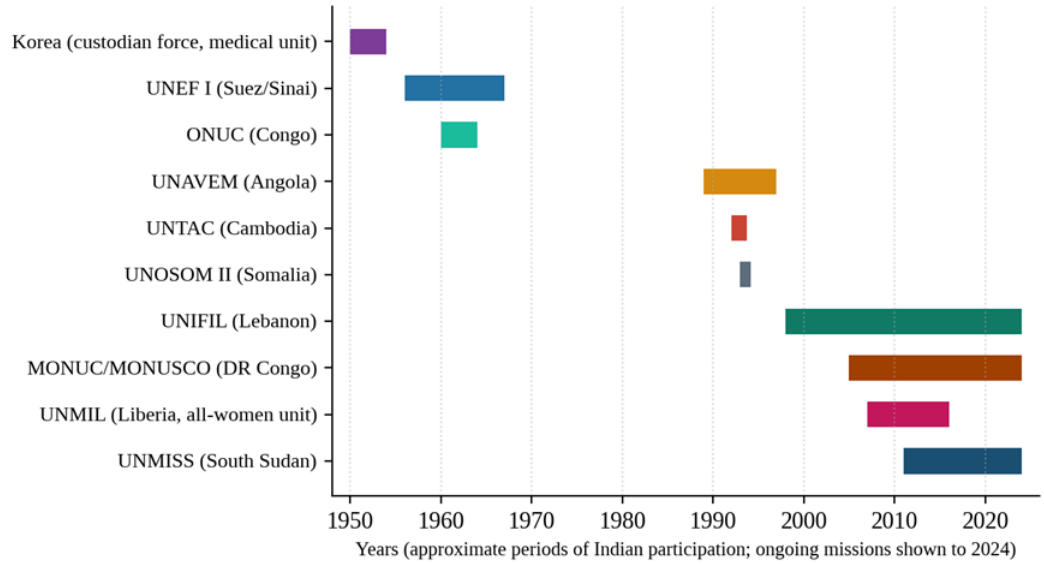


Figure 2: Selected Indian Deployments in UN Peacekeeping Operations (Approximate Periods)

Source: Author's compilation from Krishnasamy (2001) and United Nations Peacekeeping (n.d.-a).

Both elements of continuity and change have been present in the evolution of the timeline. Early peacekeeping operations were predominantly undertaken in an interstate environment under traditional mandates. In the post-Cold War period, India has been involved in multidimensional peacekeeping in Angola, Cambodia, and Somalia, as well as in prolonged peacekeeping missions in Lebanon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan. India has been involved in most of the missions created, has contributed over 250,000 personnel, and has lost more than 170 peacekeepers, being among the countries that have suffered the highest number of casualties (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b). The numbers provided above are based on United Nations reports and are approximations.

The more recent instances of deployment show how serious India is about the commitment. In the case of South Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo, Indian battalions are tasked with civilian protection and securing of the lines of communications in areas with weak state control. In Lebanon, Indian contingents are a part of the ongoing mission along the border with Israel monitoring ceasefire and supporting the Lebanese Army (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-a). In all cases, the contingent is comprised of infantry, engineers, medical corps, and aviation/logistics units.

The qualitative contribution made by India is no less noteworthy. India has provided senior officers, military observers, engineers, medical teams, and the police force. In 2007, it provided the world's first all-female police contingent in a UN peacekeeping operation in Liberia. The case became a highly discussed one as it demonstrated the positive impact that female peacekeepers may have on community outreach and encouraged local women to join security agencies. Indian contingents have been recognized for their civilian and medical help to the communities where operations take place. In the realm of policymaking, India has promoted the notion that mandate decisions should be made through triangular consultations of the Security Council, the Secretariat, and troop-contributing nations.

India's involvement in the training of troops for peacekeeping operations is another means through which India contributes to peacekeeping. The Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping at New Delhi provides training for Indian as well as foreign military officials on mission planning, civilian protection, and conduct of operations. This ensures that India not only provides troops for peacekeeping but is also involved in the process of standard-setting. This is useful because there is tremendous variation in terms of the training provided by the different countries that contribute troops, and inadequate training by the troops could ruin the credibility of the mission.

Challenges Facing India as a Contributor

The significant participation of India as a troop-contributing country contrasts sharply with its inability to affect decision-making processes. Troop-contributing countries are those that take high risks but do not have the ability to make any input in determining the mandate of missions because of the control of the Security Council over the mandate, in which India lacks permanent membership (Thakur, 2006). This issue breeds dissatisfaction, and has become one of the reasons why India has demanded reform of the Security Council in relation to its peacekeeping efforts.

In terms of deployment, Indian contingents have been sent to areas considered the most dangerous, such as eastern Congo and South Sudan, where they encounter not only armed groups but also poor terrain and infrastructure. The tough mandates associated with such deployments pose serious challenges for countries like India, which prefer missions involving consensus and impartiality (Hunt, 2017). Moreover, India has always preferred sending its troops for missions under the command of the UN and authorized by the Security Council, making India unable to take part in less conventional peacekeeping missions. It is one of the biggest challenges facing Indian policy makers.

The Indian approach to strategy is also marked by a unique strategic culture. In the past, India had been in favor of the UN taking control over the use of force rather than coalitions of states, being concerned about the infringement of sovereignty due to such interventions (Jaishankar, 2020). The mentioned approach means that India is a staunch supporter of the ideas of consent and neutrality; however, at the same time, the mentioned ideas can conflict with the necessary mandate for civilian protection. The mentioned dilemma is not unique to India, but it is particularly obvious due to the size of its contribution to peacekeeping operations and the commitment to civilian protection.

SWOT Assessment of India's Role

Table 1 organises the evidence into a SWOT matrix, with rows colour-coded by category.

Table 1: SWOT matrix of India's Peacekeeping Contribution

Category	India's Role in UN Peacekeeping
Strengths	Seven decades of experience; professional forces; large and diverse contributions; first all-women formed police unit; credibility among developing countries
Weaknesses	Limited influence over mandates; high casualties; dependence on reimbursement; cautious stance on enforcement-heavy missions
Opportunities	Triangular consultation reforms; training partnerships with other contributors; more women peacekeepers; linkage with Council reform
Threats	Declining consent of host states; funding shortfalls; attacks on peacekeepers; erosion of political support for missions

Source: Author's analysis based on secondary sources.

Table 1 shows an SWOT analysis of the Indian contribution to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations, indicating the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of India in its contribution. Some of the strengths of India are more than seven decades of experience in peacekeeping, professionalism of armed forces and the significant and diverse contributions made by India to the international peace and security. India has also shown its commitment to gender inclusion by being the first country to deploy all-women Formed Police Unit in the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Liberia in 2007. Its involvement has made it a credible nation, especially to the developing nations and has helped it in demanding greater participation in the global decision making process. However, there are some weaknesses of India too in this regard. On the other hand, there are several areas where opportunities exist for India's advantage, which include the adoption of reforms within peacekeeping consultation mechanisms, forming training partnerships with other troop contributing countries, involvement of women in peacekeeping operations, and tying its peacekeeping contributions to its claim to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. However, there are some serious threats associated with India's involvement in peacekeeping operations, such as decreasing consent from host countries' governments, financial and funding constraints, attacks on peacekeepers, and political lack of support for certain UN missions. Thus, SWOT analysis reveals that despite the abundance of experience that India possesses in peacekeeping operations, its potential for further development and achievement of certain international goals is highly contingent upon successful diplomacy, peacekeeping innovations, and reforms within the UN Security Council.

This matrix shows that the comparative advantage of India in terms of experience, professionalism, and credibility is offset by its comparative disadvantage with regard to influence on policy. Potential actions that can be undertaken include consultations reform, further training of other participants, and more women among the peacekeepers. The threats faced by India with regard to peacekeeping in this conflict include the loss of political support for peacekeeping, shortage of funding, and danger to peacekeepers due to lack of peace in these conflicts.

However, not all these elements have equal importance for the matrix. The first among them is the problem of contribution and influence as it affects the motivation of the contributing side. Next in the line of importance is the option of training arrangement as it can be done without any amendments to the UN Charter and would add to the number of qualified contributors. Therefore, policy makers should concentrate their efforts on these two aspects first of all, before going to the tougher structural issues like financing the peacekeeping operations system.

Discussion

The results have to be interpreted judiciously. Figures regarding contributions and casualties are based on summaries that are continually updated, and rankings of contributors fluctuate each year depending on whether the missions are launched, discontinued, or downsized. What matters is not India's exact ranking at any point during the year, but rather the fact that it is consistently ranked among the largest contributors decade after decade. Another indication of institutional learning and political commitment is the adaptability of the contributions to changes in the nature of the mission, ranging from interstate monitoring to complicated missions within fragile states.

Three conclusions can be drawn. First, the practice of peacekeeping remains worthwhile, although it is strained. There is evidence that missions reduce violence and help prevent a relapse into war (Fortna, 2008; Howard, 2008). At the same time, political backing and adequate resources for peacekeeping missions do not always meet the expectations. Second, India's contributions are both significant in quantity and specific in quality. As a result, India has been able to acquire some soft power and moral standing in discussions on the future of the UN. Third, the discrepancy between contribution and influence is the primary structural weakness for India and other major countries.

Some measures that may help reduce this discrepancy include formal consultations with countries contributing troops prior to mandate renewal and drafting. Partnerships aimed at capacity building and training, which India provides by offering training at its peacekeeping training centre in New Delhi, can be broadened to cover the contribution from countries in Africa and Asia. Increased use of technology for both surveillance and medical evacuation will ensure the safety of missions. The last two measures to enhance mission legitimacy would be increased emphasis on the involvement of women in missions and personnel behavior. For academic purposes, one of the next measures to consider would be comparative analysis of the contribution outcomes using mission-level data.

Similarly, there is something to learn from the Indian example for other countries contributing troops, which have the same reservations. Other major contributors like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Rwanda are some examples, and an effort from all of them together can be more effective than a separate protest from each one. Coordination from contributors, together with proper consultation with the Secretariat, can lead to better mandate formulations. The connection between peacekeeping operations and broader UN reform further strengthens the point raised in debates regarding Council reform that those who bear the responsibility should have a voice.

Conclusion

UN peacekeeping operates in a challenging context characterized by inadequate resources, lack of consent, growing insecurity, and financial constraints. India has been a reliable and substantial contributor to the process for more than seventy years, providing soldiers, police officers, commanders, and policymakers, and has made a huge number of casualties. The country's role is legitimate and respected, yet it lacks the ability to affect the way missions are designed proportionate to the sacrifice made. Closer consultations with troop contributing countries, realistic mandates, and sufficient resources will enhance performance in terms of peacekeepers' interests and the interests of people served by them. In this regard, the case of India demonstrates the necessity to make peacekeeping more representative, more responsible, and more relevant to the situation in which it has to be used.

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