



INDIA'S ROLE IN UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS A LEGACY OF SERVICE AND SACRIFICE

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Abstract

Peacekeeping operations have become one of the most important tools used by the United Nations to maintain international peace and security in regions affected by conflict. Since gaining independence in 1947, India has played a significant role in these missions. Over the decades, India has consistently been among the largest contributors of troops and police personnel to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Indian peacekeepers have participated in numerous missions across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, performing duties ranging from maintaining ceasefires to humanitarian assistance and post-conflict reconstruction. This paper examines India's historical involvement in United Nations peacekeeping missions, its major contributions, the role of women peacekeepers, the challenges faced by Indian troops, and the broader implications for India's foreign policy. The study highlights how India's participation has strengthened global peace efforts and reinforced its reputation as a responsible member of the international community.

1. Introduction

The maintenance of international peace and security is one of the primary objectives of the United Nations. Since its establishment in 1945, the organization has developed several mechanisms to prevent and resolve conflicts between states and within countries. Since its inception, UN Peacekeeping has become an effective and valuable tool to help the countries to navigate the challenging path from conflict to peace. India has been the key contributor to global peace and security, with over 2,90,000 peacekeepers serving in more than 50 UN

missions. Currently over 5000 Indian peacekeepers are deployed in 9 active missions, working in challenging conditions to promote international peace.

The UN Peacekeepers, known as Blue Helmets, get their name from the light blue of the United Nations flag. In 1947, the UN decided on this colour because blue symbolizes peace, while red is often linked to war. This light blue shade has since become a symbol of the UN.

Peacekeeping operations are designed to assist countries affected by war or political instability in transitioning toward peaceful and stable societies. These missions often include monitoring ceasefires, protecting civilians, assisting in humanitarian relief, supporting elections, and helping rebuild institutions after conflict.

India has been a leading contributor to these missions since the early years of the United Nations. Indian peacekeepers have served in some of the most complex and dangerous missions in the world. Through its participation, India has demonstrated its commitment to international cooperation and the promotion of global peace.

India's involvement in peacekeeping reflects its broader foreign policy principles, including support for multilateralism, respect for sovereignty, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Over the past years, India has sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers, police officers, and medical personnel to UN missions, earning widespread respect for professionalism, discipline, and humanitarian commitment.

This paper explores the evolution of India's role in UN peacekeeping missions, the nature of its contributions, and the impact of its participation on global peace and international diplomacy.

2. Concept of United Nations Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping is an important instrument used by the United Nations to manage conflicts and promote peace in regions experiencing instability. Although peacekeeping is not explicitly mentioned in the original UN Charter, it has evolved as a practical tool to maintain peace and security.

Peacekeeping missions are typically authorized by the United Nations Security Council, which is responsible for maintaining international peace. These missions are deployed with the consent of the host country and operate under strict guidelines.

Key Principles of UN Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping operations are based on three main principles:

- 1. Consent of the parties involved in the conflict**
- 2. Impartiality and neutrality**

3. **Limited use of force**, mainly for self-defence and protection of civilians

These principles help ensure that peacekeepers operate as neutral actors rather than participants in the conflict.

Objectives of Peacekeeping Missions

UN Peacekeeping missions are deployed to support ceasefires and peace agreements. However, modern peacekeeping has evolved into a multidimensional effort that goes beyond military presence. The main objectives of peacekeeping operations include:

- **Facilitating Political Processes:** Supporting negotiations and governance structures.
- **Protecting civilians:** ensuring the safety of vulnerable populations in conflict zones.
- **Disarmament, Demobilization and reintegration:** Assisting former combatants in transitioning to civilian life.
- **Election Support:** Helping organize and oversee free and fair elections.
- **Human Rights and Rule of Law:** Promoting justice, accountability and governance reforms.

Peacekeeping today often overlaps with Peace-making and peacebuilding. Here I want to make it clear that Peace-making is an agreement where two parties come together and try to find a negotiated settlement and Peacekeeping is maintaining that the negotiated settlement is upheld and Peacebuilding is a long-term process, it's a post conflict agenda where we try to strengthen the national capacities of a region and promote sustainable development.

3. Historical Background of India's Participation

India has a long and distinguished history of serving in UN peacekeeping, dating back to its participation in the UN operation in Korea in the 1953, where Indian forces participated in medical assistance and prisoner-of-war repatriation efforts. This marked the beginning of India's long tradition of contributing to UN peacekeeping operations.

In the 1960s, India played a significant role in the United Nations Operation in the Congo, which was one of the largest and most challenging peacekeeping missions at that time. Indian troops were involved in restoring order during a period of political instability and armed conflict in the Congo. India's commitment to non-violence, enshrined in its philosophy and championed by Mahatma Gandhi, aligns with the UN's approach to promote global peace. This commitment stems from India's ancient principle of "VasudhaivaKutumbakam" (the whole world is my family), which emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of peaceful coexistence.

Over the decades, India's participation expanded significantly. Indian troops have served in numerous missions across Africa, the Middle East, and other parts of the world. By contributing personnel, equipment, and expertise, India has become one of the most reliable partners in international peacekeeping.

4. Major UN Peacekeeping Missions with Indian Participation

Indian peacekeepers have served in more than 50 peacekeeping missions across different continents. Their participation has been particularly significant in Africa and the Middle East. The nine UN peacekeeping missions where the Indian Armed Forces were involved as of May 2024 in Golan Heights, Lebanon, Middle East, Cyprus, Democratic Republic Of Congo, South Sudan, Abyei, Central African Republic Western Sahara

Congo Mission (1960-64)

The United Nations Operation in the Congo was one of the earliest large-scale peacekeeping missions in which India played a major role. Indian forces helped restore stability after the Congo gained independence and faced internal conflict.

Lebanon Mission (1998-Present)

India has also contributed troops to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. The mission aims to monitor the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon and maintain stability in the region.

Sierra Leone Mission (1999-2001)

Indian forces played a crucial role in the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone during the civil war in the country. Indian troops helped disarm rebel groups and restore peace.

Democratic Republic of Congo Mission (2010-present)

Another major mission involving India is the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Indian troops have been actively involved in protecting civilians and maintaining stability in conflict-affected areas.

South Sudan Mission (2005-Present)

India also contributes to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, where Indian peacekeepers assist in protecting civilians and providing humanitarian assistance in one of the world's newest nations.

These missions highlight the global reach and impact of India's peacekeeping contributions. These deployments reflect India's unwavering commitment to global peace and stability. India has been a leader in strengthening UN, host nations, and Partner nations through capacity building efforts. Committed to supporting UN initiatives, India has provided highly

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adaptable peacekeeping units, advanced training, logistical support, and technological upgrades while promoting gender parity in peacekeeping forces.

To ensure the efficiency and sustainability of Indian contingents in UN missions, the Indian Army has deployed state-of-the-art, indigenously manufactured equipment and vehicles. Built-in India, these advanced systems have proven their resilience in the toughest terrains, harshest climates and most challenging operational conditions, reinforcing India's commitment to global peacekeeping.

5. Contributions of Indian Peacekeepers

Indian peacekeepers have made diverse contributions in UN missions. Their responsibilities extend beyond military duties and include humanitarian and development activities.

Military Contributions

Indian soldiers help maintain ceasefires, patrol conflict zones, and protect civilians from violence. Their presence helps create a secure environment that allows peace agreements to be implemented.

Medical Assistance

Indian medical teams have provided healthcare services to thousands of civilians in conflict zones. Field hospitals set up by Indian troops often treat both peacekeepers and local residents.

Engineering and Infrastructure

Indian engineers assist in repairing roads, bridges, and public infrastructure damaged by conflict. This helps restore economic activity and improve living conditions.

Humanitarian Support

Indian peacekeepers frequently distribute food, water, and essential supplies to communities affected by war.

Training and Capacity Building

Indian personnel also train local police and military forces, helping countries develop their own security institutions.

6. Role of Women in Indian Peacekeeping

India has been a pioneer in promoting the role of women in peacekeeping operations. Women play a crucial role in conflict resolution, community engagement and peacebuilding, often gaining better access to local populations, particularly women and children. Their presence also helps prevent sexual violence, builds trust within communities and fosters more inclusive and sustainable peace processes.

In 2007, India deployed the first all-female police unit to the United Nations Mission in Liberia. This unit played a significant role in maintaining law and order and supporting local communities.

The presence of women peacekeepers has several benefits:

- Improved interaction with women and children in conflict zones
- Increased trust between peacekeepers and local communities
- Encouragement for local women to join security forces
- Role models for change
- Advancing gender equality
- Diverse leadership and decision-making

Indian women peacekeepers have also participated in medical services, community outreach programs, and training initiatives. While progress has been made, achieving true gender balance requires stronger commitments from countries worldwide. As the UN continues to push for change, increasing women's presence in peacekeeping is not just about numbers it's about creating more effective, inclusive, and lasting peace.

7. Challenges Faced by Indian Peacekeepers

Despite their achievements, Indian peacekeepers face several challenges while serving in international missions.

Security Risks

Peacekeepers often operate in dangerous environments where armed groups are active.

Harsh Living Conditions

Many missions are located in remote areas with difficult terrain, limited infrastructure, and extreme weather conditions.

Political Complexities

Peacekeeping missions sometimes involve complicated political situations where peace agreements are fragile.

Resource Constraints

Limited equipment and logistical challenges can make operations difficult.

Despite these challenges, Indian troops continue to perform their duties with dedication and professionalism.

8. Recognition and Achievements

India's contributions to peacekeeping have been widely recognized by the international community. Indian peacekeepers have received numerous awards and commendations for bravery and service.

Many Indian soldiers have sacrificed their lives while serving under the UN flag. Their dedication reflects India's commitment to global peace and humanitarian values.

India remains one of the largest contributors of troops and police personnel to UN peacekeeping operations.

9. Importance for India's Foreign Policy

Participation in peacekeeping missions supports India's foreign policy objectives.

First, it demonstrates India's commitment to international cooperation and multilateral diplomacy. Second, it enhances India's reputation as a responsible global power.

India's active involvement also strengthens its claim for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Peacekeeping allows India to build diplomatic relationships with many countries and contribute to global stability.

10. Future of India's Role in Peacekeeping

The nature of global conflicts is changing, and peacekeeping missions are becoming more complex. India will likely continue to play an important role in these operations.

Future priorities may include:

- Increasing the participation of women peacekeepers
- Enhancing training and technology for peacekeeping missions
- Strengthening cooperation with other countries and international organizations

India's long experience in peacekeeping positions it as a leader in shaping the future of international peace operations.

11. Conclusion

Apart from the challenges and restraints, what remains crucial and fundamental to explain the success and failure of these operations is the superpower. game during the Cold War and the post-Cold War period. The primacy of national interests of the superpower has become the rules, nuances and norms of the ongoing world politics and UN peacekeeping operations. In the calculation of the national interests of the great powers, the concern for peace in the world has always found a secondary place. The very fact that the international system is an anarchical system in the sense that it is characterised by the absence of an overarching world

government has seriously affected the ability and strength of United Nations peacekeeping operations. The dominance of super powers in the Security Council and non-democratic rules India has been one of the most committed contributors to United Nations peacekeeping missions for more than seven decades. Through its military personnel, police officers, and humanitarian workers, India has helped maintain peace and stability in many conflict-affected regions.

Indian peacekeepers have earned a strong reputation for professionalism, courage, and compassion. Their contributions extend beyond military duties to include humanitarian assistance, infrastructure development, and community support.

Despite facing numerous challenges, India continues to play a vital role in international peacekeeping efforts. Its participation reflects a broader commitment to global peace, cooperation, and responsible international leadership.

As the world continues to face new security challenges, India's experience and dedication will remain essential for the success of future peacekeeping missions. As Dr. S Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of India rightly said "At the heart of our foreign policy lies a commitment to peacekeeping-rooted in dialogue, diplomacy and cooperation. Guided by the philosophy of "VasudhaivaKutumbakam," the belief that the world is one family, India will continue to contribute meaningfully to the cause of UN peacekeeping.

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