

UN Peacekeeping Operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Lessons Learnt and the Future of UN Peacekeeping

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The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has seen conflict and violence ever since its independence, for varied reasons. The main causes are its abundant and ill-managed natural resources, lack of institutions, ethnic issues, lack of state authority and undisciplined and ill-trained national security forces. Taking note of the conflict, the humanitarian situation and the threat to international peace and security, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), from time to time, has authorised the deployment of peacekeeping missions to help maintain territorial integrity, stabilise the situation and assist in nation-building. In this respect, for the first time in the history of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping, a Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) for peace enforcement was authorised by the UNSC, to protect civilians under eminent threat and to bring peace and stability to the country. This article describes the long history of UN peacekeeping in the DRC to highlight how peacekeeping has evolved over the years to meet the challenges encountered. It examines the issues of use of force, the role and effectiveness of the FIB and the need for institution-building. The aim is to draw some useful lessons to improve effectiveness of UN peacekeeping. Due to global recession and adverse economic effects of Covid-19, it is unlikely that the UNSC will allot more funds and resources for peacekeeping. A change in approach for managing conflicts by the international community should therefore be expected.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has a long history of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping since it achieved independence from Belgium on 30 June 1960. The country is known as a laboratory of UN peacekeeping as it has faced varied and myriad challenges from time to time. It has been through many shades of peacekeeping operations, from a passive observation mission to an offensive peace enforcement mission. The first UN peacekeeping mission, United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC), was established in July 1960 on DRC obtaining independence, for ensuring the withdrawal of Belgian forces, assisting the host government in maintaining law and order and for providing technical assistance. Later, as the situation changed, its mandate was modified to include: maintenance of the territorial integrity; political independence of the Congo; and prevention of civil war. Vide Resolution 169 (1961) of 24 November 1961, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorised ONUC to take vigorous action, including the use of requisite measure of force, if necessary, to fulfil its mandate. During the peak of hostilities between September 1961 and December 1962, ONUC transitioned from a peacekeeping to a potent military force. It engaged in several offensive actions against secessionist and mercenary forces. At its peak, the UN forces numbered nearly 20,000 military personnel from over two dozen countries, led largely by India, Ireland and Sweden. Following the reintegration of Katanga in February 1963, ONUC was gradually phased out and civilian aid was increased; this became the single-largest assistance effort by the UN at that time. The UN personnel were entirely withdrawn from the DRC by 30 June 1964.

India was then the largest troop contributor in the DRC. Two infantry brigades from India comprising around 12,000 personnel, assisted by six Indian Air Force light bombers, conducted operations in what turned out to be an extremely dangerous UN peacekeeping operation. The Indian peacekeepers undertook a number of robust military operations, in which 39 personnel laid down their lives. In an action against the rebels in Katanga, Captain Gurbachan Singh Salaria displayed exemplary courage and made supreme sacrifice for which he was posthumously awarded India's highest gallantry award, the Param

Vir Chakra. Ambassador Rajeshwar Dayal who was the Head of the UN Operation in the Congo from September 1960 to May 1961 too played a notable role at the political level to diffuse the conflict.¹ Even during the Sino-India Conflict in 1962, the Indian peacekeepers were not withdrawn from the Congo. They continued to fight the secessionist forces in Katanga in southern Congo.

Elections were held in Congo in March/April 1965, following which Mobutu launched a bloodless coup. He promised political and economic stability, supported by the United States (US) and some Western countries. Gradually, Mobutu consolidated his control in the Congo. In 1967, to demonstrate his legitimacy, he created a party, 'Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution' (MPR), which, until 1990, was the nation's only legal political party under Mobutu's new constitution. Despite initial successes, by the time of its disestablishment, Mobutu's rule was characterised by widespread cronyism, corruption and economic mismanagement.

After the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, some of the Rwandese Hutus who were involved in the genocide fled to eastern DRC (North and South Kivu provinces), a region primarily inhabited by ethnic Tutsis. In 1997, there was a rebellion, aided by Rwanda and Uganda, against President Mobutu, led by Laurent Désiré Kabila, who later became the President of the DRC. Subsequently, the Kabila government too faced a rebellion in the Kivu region that was led by the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), again with support from Rwanda and Uganda. The rebels seized large areas of the country, in particular in the eastern region. The UNSC called for ceasefire and the withdrawal of foreign forces. This led to the signing of Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in July 1999 between the DRC and five regional states—Angola, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe.²

Following the signing of the Lusaka Agreement, the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) was established by UNSC Resolution 1279 of 30 November 1999, with an initial mandate as an observation and liaison mission to facilitate the implementation of the agreement. Later, MONUC was mandated to supervise the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and was assigned related multiple, additional tasks. The MONUC was placed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to facilitate protection of civilians under imminent threat of physical violence and to contribute to the improvement of the security situation robustly. It was also required

to facilitate transition towards the organisation of credible elections. It needs to be noted that MONUC, which started as an observation mission, evolved to become an integrated Chapter VII peacekeeping mission for protection of civilians.³

UNITED NATIONS ORGANISATION STABILISATION MISSION IN
THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (MONUSCO):
A NEW PHASE OF UN PEACEKEEPING

In 2009–10, there were differences of opinion between the UN and the Congolese government regarding the security situation in the country. The national government leadership, contrary to the views of UN, felt that the security situation had greatly improved and wanted the mission to start closing down and withdraw by mid-2011. The UN was of the view that withdrawal of the forces should be contingent on improved security situation and restoration of state authority in most of the regions of the DRC, especially eastern DRC. In May 2010, after much discussion, the UNSC decided to transform MONUC into MONUSCO, a stabilisation force, and reduced 2,000 peacekeepers. It was also decided to set up a joint assessment team to review the security situation from time to time. The national government consented to this arrangement. This was a new phase of UN peacekeeping wherein the emphasis was on protection of civilians and peace-building.⁴

The MONUSCO military and the national army (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo [FARDC]) conducted a number of joint operations against various armed groups, particularly the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and Mai-Mai groups. The MONUSCO also provided support to the FARDC to undertake operations against the armed groups independently, strictly in accordance with the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP). The security situation in eastern DRC started improving slowly but steadily. General elections were held in the DRC in November 2011 and Joseph Kabila was re-elected as the President. The MONUSCO assisted the National Election Commission (CENI) of DRC by providing technical and logistic support on a required basis in the conduct of elections in 2011. The elections, however, were badly organised and conducted. Dates had to be extended at the last minute as, in some cases, the ballot boxes did not reach the polling booths in time. The MONUSCO was only playing a supportive role; it had no control over the logistics plan formulated by CENI/national authorities. Many

international organisations, such as the European Union, expressed concern about the transparency and creditability of the elections. Further, Human Rights Watch brought out that electoral violence between 26 November and 28 November 2011 had left at least 18 civilians dead and 100 seriously wounded. The majority of those killed were shot dead by the Republican Guard soldiers in Kinshasa. Some civilians were also killed and wounded during clashes between rival political parties, attacks by armed groups, as well as in mob violence.⁵

Post the 2011 elections, President Kabila tried to consolidate power in the east and made a shift in his military policy. He tried to arrest Bosco Ntaganda (former military chief of staff of the National Congress for the Defence of the People [CNDP]). This led to mutiny in the FARDC among the ex-CNDP elements and the creation of March 23 Movement (M23). The M23 received support from Rwanda and Uganda.⁶ Actions of M23 added to the existing humanitarian crisis in the region as their activities resulted in large-scale displacement of population and gross human right violations. The MONUSCO and the FARDC initially worked together and evolved plans to stop M23 from advancing towards Goma, the capital of North Kivu province. However, as the situation unfolded, it became evident that the FARDC leadership lacked the will to resist M23. This was a demotivating factor for MONUSCO uniformed peacekeepers who were trying to do their best to prevent further advance of M23. The Chief of Army Staff of FARDC, Major General Amisi, deserted his troops in North Kivu prior to the entry of M23 in Goma. He was later, on 22 November 2011, suspended by President Kabila due to his alleged role in arms sales to rebel groups in the eastern part of the country.⁷

On 20 November 2012, M23 entered Goma. The FARDC did not put up any resistance. Rather, the withdrawing FARDC personnel carried out grave human rights violations, including rapes. The MONUSCO was criticised for not doing enough to prevent M23 from taking Goma.⁸ The fact that the UN peacekeepers not only prevented human rights violations in Goma by M23 by proactively patrolling the area, and also prevented collateral damage that would have definitely occurred due to fighting in built-up area went unnoticed by the media. Only bad stories were played up as MONUSCO did not communicate well with the media. Both at the tactical and operational level; MONUSCO should have planned for this contingency and evolved a strategic communication

strategy to counter the negative image of the peacekeepers. Thus, much good done by the uniformed peacekeepers went unnoticed.

On 24 February 2013, leaders of 11 African nations signed a peace, security and cooperation agreement designed to bring peace and stability to the area.⁹ This led to the creation of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), under the aegis of the UN, with troops being contributed by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries. It marked a different (aggressive) phase in UN peacekeeping as the MONUSCO (FIB) was given an unprecedented offensive mandate and drones.

FIB

The concept of the FIB evolved in a series of International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) meetings held in 2012. These meetings conceived that there should be a reinforcing brigade, composed of entirely African countries, to address the concerns and instability arising due to M23 in the region. Though the African countries were willing to contribute troops, the African Union (AU) looked up to the UN for funding. This provided an opportunity to the UNSC to define a desirable mandate for the FIB.

The UNSC, vide Resolution 2098 (2013), authorised the creation of its first-ever 'offensive' combat force, intended to carry out targeted operations to 'neutralize and disarm' M23 as well as other Congolese rebels and foreign armed groups, in the strife-riven eastern DRC, on an exceptional basis and without creating a precedent or any prejudice to the agreed principles of peacekeeping. The UNSC tasked the FIB to carry out offensive operations, either unilaterally or jointly with the Congolese Armed Forces, in a robust, highly mobile and versatile manner.¹⁰ The FIB comprised three infantry battalions, one each from Tanzania, South Africa and Malawi; one artillery; and one special forces and reconnaissance company. The brigade was placed under command of the MONUSCO Force Commander. Thus, MONUSCO was converted from a peacekeeping mission to a peace enforcement mission.

The UN, by its peace enforcement mandate to a peacekeeping mission, entered a new territory. The Congolese government welcomed the decision as they felt that it would help protect the country's territorial integrity and foster peace and stability. The government badly needed a military tool to check the activities of M23, which had gained an upper hand in the east. However, there was no clear exit strategy for the brigade.

The extension of the FIB mandate beyond one year was to be decided based on its performance and on the DRC making sufficient progress in implementing the peace and security framework for the region, adopted on 24 February 2013.¹¹ Currently, the FIB still exists in the DRC and has not been de-inducted as yet.

Preliminary work on the creation of the FIB started sometime in early March 2013, but it became operational only in July–August 2013 due to bureaucratic UN systems. The FIB, along with the FARDC, carried out a number of successful military operations against M23. Simultaneously, the UN put political pressure on DRC's neighbours to not support M23. Thus, apart from infighting in M23, the military operations carried out by the FIB and the hectic political activity that went on behind the scenes led to the disintegration of M23. The FARDC too deserves credit as the operations against M23 were carried out by disciplined and well-trained troops.

After the defeat of M23, the FIB did not seriously engage with other armed groups, such as the FDLR and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF); on the contrary, it suffered casualties due to attacks on its bases. On 7 December 2017, 14 Tanzanian peacekeepers were killed and about 50 peacekeepers were injured in an attack on MONUSCO base in Beni territory of North Kivu.¹² On 3 September 2018, two South African peacekeepers were wounded in an attack, again by ADF. Subsequently, in a combined operation by the FIB and the FARDC that went wrong, six Malawian peacekeepers and one Tanzanian were killed.¹³ The FIB, thereafter, started playing a more supportive role to the FARDC, in terms of joint planning, patrolling and sharing intelligence, rather than undertaking active operations jointly or on its own against the armed groups.¹⁴

The FIB's induction into MONUSCO had raised expectations. The combined operations by the FIB and the FARDC were expected to bring about peace and stability to the unstable east. Unfortunately, the security situation in the DRC has not improved much in spite of the existence of the FIB for over eight years. In December 2021, it was estimated that as a result of ongoing hostilities, around 27 million Congolese were in need of humanitarian assistance and more than 5 million had been displaced. About 9,98,000 refugees from the DRC were in other African countries; and about 5,15,000 refugees were in the DRC itself.¹⁵ There has also been a steady rise in violence and death toll amongst the civilians mainly due to the armed groups, in particular ADF. This has provoked protests and

anger against MONUSCO. An audit and analysis as to why MONUSCO has fallen short of expectations in spite of unprecedented robust mandate will throw up some good lessons. This should be done in light of the fact that MONUSCO's peacekeepers were already authorised to use military force to protect civilians under imminent threat and restore peace under the existing Chapter VII mandate, with rules of engagement that allowed them to conduct offensive operations to protect civilians.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in UN Peacekeeping

At about the same time as the creation of the FIB, the UN Headquarters (HQ) inducted UAVs for the first time for peacekeeping in MONUSCO in 2013. These UAVs are deployed to track rebel movements, monitor road conditions and provide intelligence to help protect Congolese against grave human right violations and mass rapes. The cost of the UAVs for the UN is more than US\$ 13 million annually. They are provided by Selex ES, an Italian company, and its American subsidiary, Selex Galileo, provides most of the personnel.¹⁶

The UAVs have assisted the peacekeepers in protecting civilians by providing real-time picture of situations as they develop on the ground. The peacekeepers can, thus, act more quickly and decisively. The use of UAVs also enhances the security of peacekeepers as they can get prior warning of armed groups' activity that may threaten their safety. These UAVs definitely offer good value for money provided peacekeepers also have the necessary will, mobility and agility to act on the given information. There has been some resistance towards the induction and use of high-tech equipment in peacekeeping missions from some member states. The fear is that these are intrusive and impinge on the sovereignty. Also, they could possibly be used to collect much more intelligence than required for peacekeeping operations. These fears need to be dispelled by way of introducing checks and balances.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN PEACE OPERATIONS

Employment of technology in UN peacekeeping has a force multiplier effect. With the help of technology, the peacekeepers can better protect civilians, take proactive and effective steps against spoilers of peace, and also be better supported logistically. Effective communication using latest technology facilitates exchange of information, both up and down the chain of command and laterally. It is an operational necessity. Modern means of communication and Internet access are also needed

not only to facilitate command and control but also to enhance mission support. Technology can also be used to enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers, especially of those deployed in remote, difficult and not easily accessible areas. It needs to be noted that technology by itself cannot do away with the need of human presence in the right place at the right time. It should, therefore, not be an excuse to reduce the number of peacekeepers in a mission. Technology can also be used to reduce a mission's environmental footprint and streamline the logistic support in the mission area by way of use of solar/wind power to generate electricity, particularly in remote and underdeveloped areas where there is heavy reliance on diesel generators as prime source of energy. In addition, it can be useful in providing adequate and timely medical support.

For exploitation of technology in UN peacekeeping, there has to be political will, shift in organisational culture and strengthened partnership with and between the members states, especially the host nations. Utmost transparency is needed for information gathering and sharing, especially with benevolent stakeholders. Furthermore, strong procedural safeguards and effective oversight mechanisms have to be put in place to prevent misuse of technology, ensure cyber security and build confidence among various stakeholders.

LESSONS LEARNT

Much has happened in the DRC since the first UN peacekeeping mission was inducted into the country in 1960. Many challenges have been encountered by the peacekeepers in this process; also, some useful lessons have emerged. As the political scene, nature of conflict and modus operandi of armed groups changes, additional challenges will be encountered. The UN peacekeeping has to constantly evolve to keep pace with these. Some of the important lessons drawn from UN's involvement in DRC are discussed next.

Use of Force

Minimum use of force except in self-defence has been the core principle of traditional UN peacekeeping. However, in contemporary UN peacekeeping, there is a shift in this regard. Demand is for more and more robust actions by peacekeepers against the spoilers, including proactive aggressive targeted operations. The case in point is the creation of the FIB in 2013 by the UNSC, with an extremely robust mandate and necessary wherewithal in terms of artillery, special forces and UAVs, to

carry out targeted offensive operations in a highly mobile and versatile manner. In spite of this additional potent resource, in the year 2020, according to the UN Joint Human Rights Office, an estimated 2,487 civilians were killed by armed groups in eastern DRC and an additional 1,043 civilians, including 233 women and 52 children, were killed in the first nine months of 2021.¹⁷ Therefore, only 'use of force' and authorisation of wherewithal to do so does not solve the problem. Along with use of force, the underlining causes of the conflict, such as issues of land access, resource allocation and poor governance, should also have been addressed in the DRC at the political level.

Hence, for peace to be restored by a UN peacekeeping mission, apart from robust military operations at the strategic level, basic causes of the conflict need to be addressed. Also, there has to be a credible disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and repatriation programme to encourage the armed groups to permanently lay down their arms. Many troop-contributing countries (TCCs) have highlighted that robust peacekeeping and use of force cannot substitute the need for addressing the underlying causes of the conflict on a priority basis. The TCCs, at the highest political level back home, have to be taken on board on issues of use of force; otherwise, there is reluctance to do so. Further, for the credibility of the mission, it must be strictly ensured that 'force' is only used for protection of civilians and to create a secure environment for other UN agencies to carry out their tasks. As the 'centre of gravity' is the local population and the credibility of the mission depends on how well the civilians are protected, the TCCs must act proactively and not hold back when it comes to protection of civilians.

National Ownership

There has to be national ownership of the host for UN peacekeeping objectives to be achieved. Primary responsibility to protect the civilians and build institutions is that of the host government. To be able to deliver on these fronts, the peacekeepers have to build confidence and rapport with the host government, as well as key national and international stakeholders. This is easier said than done as there are differences in the perceptions and opinions of various stakeholders, and sometimes ulterior motives are at play. The peacekeepers, rather than being neutral, have to observe the cardinal principle of 'impartiality'. Impartiality means not taking the side of any of the stakeholders and doing what is right, whereas neutrality broadly implies closing one's eyes to whatever is

happening. Adhering to the principle of impartiality brings credibility to UN peacekeeping.

Peacekeeping and Peace-building

The nature of conflict in DRC is predominately intra-state, with armed groups illegally exploiting the natural resources and preying on the population. Peacekeepers, in such a conflict environment, need to assist the host government in restoring state authority. Further, peacekeeping missions should encourage and build capacities of the host government. Security sector reforms, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration/disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement, and building an effective correction system must be given due emphasis and priority. It is also essential to provide the required resources, including financial support. All efforts must be made to reintegrate the surrendered members of the armed groups into the society and provide them a decent livelihood, else they get recycled back into the armed groups. It is only then that peace and stability can return to the country and the region on a long-term basis.

Coordination between Civil and Military Components and Other UN Agencies

Though much has been achieved by having integrated peacekeeping missions and by creating Joint Operation Centre (JOC), Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC), etc., more needs to be done with respect to coordination and understanding the functioning of various components of the mission for better results. Military peacekeepers, due to frequent turnover, lack continuity more often than not, they do not have complete understanding of the local culture, and also some TCCs are handicapped by not knowing the local language. Better coordination and understanding between the civilian and military components can help in overcoming these shortcomings. Thus, uniformed peacekeepers need to have a greater understanding of the functioning of the civilian components and other UN agencies. The civilian components too need to be educated about the ethos, functioning and challenges of the uniformed peacekeepers.

TCCs in Mandate Formulation

The TCCs should be consulted, including at the level of UNSC, at the time of mandate formulation. The countries must be made to feel

that they own the mandate, otherwise they tend to interpret it in their own way. The TCCs also know the situation on the ground better than most, as they are in regular touch with the developments. Based on their practical experience, they can advise on what needs to be done. On their part, the TCCs must know, and accept in advance, the terms and conditions under which they committed their troops and be informed/prepared to accept changes as the situation evolves. It is only then the best implementation and execution of the mandate is possible.¹⁸

Strategic Communications

Mandate with a whole array of tasks raises expectations both internally and externally. Strategic communications in any mission, especially an integrated peacekeeping mission such as the MONUSCO, are extremely important to manage expectations and therefore, it has to be an integral part of the overall political strategy. Missions need to address the domestic, regional and international audiences by formulating narratives and messages which sell well for each of them. These have to be truthful, credible, based on ground-level evidence and transmitted through credible means. Missions need to regularly monitor, evaluate and modify their strategic communications. Presently, there is a significant penetration of social media and increased use of smartphones and electronic media. These pose additional operational and reputational risks for the peacekeeping missions since they can be exploited by the armed groups and other stakeholders to shape political perceptions, undermine UN peacekeeping and even mobilise violence against UN personnel. While there has been considerable progress in UN peacekeeping missions in this regard, there is a need to have a coherent and systematic strategy communications policy which is well planned and executed.

FIB Model for Peace Enforcement

The FIB, despite an aggressive mandate and required wherewithal, has failed to neutralise the armed groups and meaningfully contribute towards long-term peace and stability. Its contribution has been more like a band-aid applied to an injury to provide immediate, temporary relief. It was authorised with the intent to defeat all the armed groups targeting civilians, and also to keep them away from the population centres. However, civilians and UN peacekeepers continue to be targeted from time to time. Thus, in over eight years of existence, except for defeating M23, the FIB has not delivered on other fronts.

Some questions, such as ‘has it diminished the image of the UN as impartial actor?’, ‘has it escalated the threat to UN peacekeepers?’ and ‘has it detracted the resources to find an early political solution’, need to be answered. Also, the reasons why previously deployed peacekeepers, already armed with a robust mandate under Chapter VII, failed to deliver need to be studied. These studies, if carried out impartially with the involvement of TCCs, are likely to throw up useful lessons for UN peacekeeping. Further, they will help to examine if the FIB model can be applied in future peacekeeping and if so, with what changes/modifications. According to the author, the TCCs, irrespective of the fact that there is a robust mandate and resources provided, will only deliver if there is a clear-cut directive from the national capitals. In addition, there is need for dedicated and committed leadership, both at political and military level, who are willing to take risks for a good cause and who believe that their actions will contribute to long-lasting peace. ‘Political primacy’ stands out. It is, once again, important to emphasise that lasting and sustainable peace can only be achieved through political solutions and not through military engagements alone.

Intelligence

Actionable and timely intelligence is necessary for uniformed peacekeepers to react in time and be in the right place at the right time. The JMAC does provide lot of information but no actionable inputs. The UAVs and use of technology is a step in the right direction, but there is a need for human intelligence too. This can only happen if there is goodwill for and confidence in UN peacekeepers in the minds of the local population. For this, the peacekeepers need to win the hearts and minds of the population in their area of responsibility. ‘Quick impact projects’ executed by uniformed peacekeepers are of great help to win over the confidence and support of the locals.

Long-term Political Strategy for Protection of Civilians

In countries such as the DRC, which have seen conflict for a long time, there has to be a political strategy encompassing all facets of protection of civilians, other than just physical security provided by uniformed peacekeepers, such as health, food and employment. Additionally, the peacekeepers not only have to protect the civilians from the armed groups but also from the state forces. This is likely to create serious tensions with the host government. All-inclusive political strategy for

protection of civilians has to be worked out at the mission and UN HQ level with the involvement of the host government. The High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), convened by former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, concluded in 2015 that lasting peace is achieved not through military and technical engagements, but through political solutions. Political solutions should always guide the design and deployment of UN peace operations.¹⁹

INDIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO UN PEACEKEEPING AND FURTHERANCE OF INDIA'S NATIONAL INTERESTS

India is one of the major TCCs to UN's peacekeeping forces. It has contributed more than 2,50,000 troops in 49 UN peacekeeping missions, in which 175 of its peacekeepers laid down their lives.²⁰ India's contribution has been mainly in the DRC/Africa. Apart from providing uniformed peacekeepers, India has also deployed military aircrafts, helicopters and field hospitals in various phases of UN peacekeeping in the DRC. Lately, India has provided 'UNITE Aware', a mobile technology platform of US\$ 1.64 million, to improve the situational awareness of peacekeepers. India, unlike China and some other countries, has not leveraged its large contribution to UN peacekeeping in Africa. The DRC is a country rich in natural resources, but is unable to use these for the benefit of its people for varied reasons, such as poor security situation, lack of resources, infrastructure, technology and the wherewithal to do so. Opportunities exist for India in the fields of railways, hydroelectric power generation, agriculture, mining, health sector, small and medium enterprises sector and automobiles. The Indian government, and also the private sector, must use the opportunity provided by India's unparalleled contribution to UN peacekeeping in the Congo to explore the possibility of getting involved in economic development and institution building in the DRC to the benefit of both of countries. For this, the Indian Embassy in Kinshasa needs to be strengthened and appropriately staffed, which unfortunately is not the case now.

THE FUTURE OF UN PEACEKEEPING

Due to global recession, the US reducing its contribution to the UN peacekeeping budget and financial impact of Covid-19, the UN is likely to have serious financial constraints. As a result, there may be less money available for peacekeeping operations. The MONUSCO and

other peacekeeping missions will thus be under pressure to drawdown. Under such circumstances, the UNSC is unlikely to increase the capacity of existing missions, and will also not be willing to sanction new peacekeeping missions. Instead, it may place heavy reliance on mediation and special political missions, which are much less expensive than the peacekeeping missions, to manage crisis situations. In ongoing missions, with respect to the application of ‘use of force’, it is unlikely that the UNSC will provide additional resources. The peacekeepers will be asked to be innovative and do ‘more with less’. Some doctrines too may undergo change. Peace operations, thus, will continue to evolve, adapt and change in the backdrop of political and financial constraints.

CONCLUSION

The MONUC/MONUSCO was established to protect civilians from violence; facilitate humanitarian access; disarm, demobilise and reintegrate former combatants into society; and undertake peace-building. Both MONUC and MONUSCO, notwithstanding the criticism they received from time to time, have slowly but steadily contributed towards peace and stability both in the DRC and in the region. The situation would have been worse in the absence of the peacekeeping mission. Leila Zerrougui—who has been associated with UN peacekeeping in the DRC as Deputy Special Representative from 2008 to 2012, and later as Special Representative of the Secretary-General in MONUSCO from February 2018 to January 2021—in one of her interviews in October 2019 stated there are ‘new and positive trends’ on the ground which may help to transform the DRC into a stable country. The issue remains whether President Tshisekedi and his government will have the means to embark on long-term much-needed reforms.²¹

Many sections of the population, particularly in eastern Congo, have expressed that it is better to have MONUSCO, for the fear of what could happen if the UN peacekeepers were to leave the country, as they do not have adequate confidence in their government. The UN peacekeeping, therefore, must facilitate in building confidence of the local population in the host government authorities. It is only then the job is well done and peace will last. There also has to be a defined exit policy for the mission that is jointly worked out with the host government, and their commitment for the same has to be taken. For the credibility of the UN as well as financial reasons, missions cannot be allowed to continue in the country endlessly.

Finally, a modern approach to strategic communications is the need of the day. Technology, too, must be exploited to make UN peacekeepers more effective operationally and well supported logistically.

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