

Issues and Challenges in Modern Peace Operations

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Abstract

In the last decade, there have been fundamental changes in the nature, form and variety of peace operations. In fact, the very coining of a new term, 'Peace Operations' (PO), as distinct from the earlier 'Peacekeeping Operations' (PKOs), illustrates a new degree of diversity and complexity in these operations. India has been, and continues to be, a major player in UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs). It has participated in 41 of the 59 UN Missions established so far and has contributed more than 70,000 personnel. India has a current deployment of over 4,000 personnel in 8 of the 16 ongoing peacekeeping operations. This is likely to increase substantially in 2005 with the induction of additional Indian troops in the UN missions in Congo and Sudan. The objective of this paper is to delineate the nature of change in modern peacekeeping operations, identify the current trends and look at future issues and challenges, including some inferences and implications for India.

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Characterising the Changes in Modern Peace Operations

Effective and efficient UN peace operations are essential to building peace and security in failing or failed states. The UN member-states have a responsibility to support peace operations and reform them adequately to meet the needs of post-conflict situation. In an analytical construct, one can identify six broad categories of change in peace operations in the post-Cold War period:

- *Change in Nature of Conflict*

Most of the conflicts in the post-Cold War world are intra-state or internal in nature, rather than inter-state. During the 11-year post-Cold War period (1990-2000), there were 56 major armed conflicts out of which 53 were internal conflicts, i.e., the issue concerned control over the government or territory of one

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state¹ as witnessed in Somalia, Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Liberia. Recent studies indicate that this trend continues. In 2003, there were 19 major armed conflicts, out of which 17 were intra-state conflicts and only two were conflicts between countries.² Some of these intra-state conflicts may have a transnational or regional dimension, both in terms of the genesis and fallout of the conflicts, such as involvement of neighbouring states in the conflict, displacement of refugees, transit across borders by rebel forces and armed groups, and illicit trade in natural resources and weapons.

- *Change in Nature of Threat*

Traditionally, inter-state wars were fought between organised military forces of states. However, in the more complex internal wars of today, the protagonists are often a diverse set of antagonistic groups including non-state actors, militias and rebel groups whose objective could be control over governmental power or territory. Thus, with a multiplicity of highly motivated groups perceiving their vital interests at stake, and with all sides having access to funds and increasingly lethal weapons, combatants have both the will and capacity to continue to fight. The tendency of these groups to divide into factions further compounds the enormous challenges in resolving such conflicts. Most ongoing conflicts have proved difficult to end, with studies revealing that the majority have lasted for seven years or more.

- *Change in Nature of POs*

In response to the changed nature of contemporary conflicts, traditional blue-helmet UN peacekeeping essentially mandated to monitor ceasefire between two states has transformed into 'Complex Peace Operations' aimed at bringing peace between warring parties within the state. With the recognition that conflicts are likely to recur in the absence of a long-term effort aimed at sustainable political, economic and social reconstruction, peace operations are increasingly tasked with wide-ranging *multi-dimensional mandates* involving these elements. Contemporary mandates include traditional peacekeeping functions but also new elements such as Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of warring groups, provision of humanitarian relief, assistance in post-conflict reconstruction including 'Quick Impact Projects', facilitation of elections, peacebuilding through training and development of indigenous institutions, establishment of the Rule of Law chain, and occasionally even providing transitional administration, i.e., running a country as in Kosovo and East Timor. With such a wide-ranging mandate, peace operations are no longer exclusively military-led. A *multiplicity of actors* are involved in modern POs – NGOs, humanitarian agencies, police, civilian administrators, legal, electoral and constitutional experts, and even private military companies.

- *Change in Nature of Mandate*

There is a gradual recognition that peacekeeping is different from peace enforcement, which is often undertaken by ‘coalitions of the willing’. However, there is also an acknowledgement that given the complexity of present-day conflicts, and the painstaking efforts involved in arriving at peace agreements, timely and robust interventions are critical to prevent the unravelling of peace agreements by ‘spoilers’ and non-state actors. Modern POs (especially in Africa), therefore, are increasingly armed with Chapter VII mandates, providing a robust mandate to carry out the various dimensions of the mission and protect civilians. On the ground, this translates into larger troops, robust rules of engagement, deterrence capabilities in the form of attack helicopters, ‘over-the-horizon’ forces and special forces. This trend is illustrated by the fact that out of the 16 UNPKOs that were underway in early 2005, seven were in Africa; of these, six were Chapter VII operations (United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea or UNMEE was the only one under Chapter VI). In this sense, the perceived distinction between ‘peacekeeping’ operations (Chapter VI) and ‘peace enforcement’ operations (Chapter VII) is blurring. The need for such substantive resources has been increasingly challenging UN capabilities and has contributed to the UN seeking recourse to regional organisations and other arrangements for peacekeeping.

- *Changes in Structure of POs*

Instead of responding to all conflict theatres with classic UN blue helmet PKOs, the UN has been following a flexible ‘menu approach’ and tailoring its response on an *ad hoc* basis to the resources available in a particular situation. Since the 1990s, in more than 16 instances, the UN has responded with ‘hybrid operations’ involving a non-UN element such as a bilateral force, a multinational force (MNF) under a lead country, regional and sub-regional organisations or a ‘coalition of the willing’. The fact that no two such operations are identical is reflective of the creative flexibility demonstrated by the UN in launching POs.³

- *Change in Nature of Authorisation*

There have also been varying forms of UN authorisation for POs. Apart from the UN-led and UN-mandated blue-helmet UNPKOs, multinational forces have been established with or without UN authorisation in the last decade. For instance, there have been *UN mandated multinational forces* which have been led and funded by a country or a coalition but with a clear expression of support and mandate by the UNSC (for example, the coalition forces’ operation in the 1991 Gulf War); there have been *UN authorised multinational forces* wherein a non-UN operation by a multinational force is authorised *ab initio* or retroactively

through a UNSC resolution (as is the case of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and more recently in the case of the MNF in Iraq). There are also MNF operations outside the ambit of the United Nations such as the *multinational non-UN operation* with rotational command in Sinai in Egypt.

It is evident from the above analysis that there are multi-faceted changes in peacekeeping and contemporary peace operations have evolved significantly from blue-helmet UNPKOs. There is, therefore, an imperative need to identify the main trends in the change and their implications from an Indian perspective.

Current Trends in Peace Operations

Surge in UN Peace Operations

The rise in UN peacekeeping which began in 1999 and 2000 with the launching of UN missions in Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia-Eritrea and Congo, has continued with an almost unprecedented increase in numbers in 2004. New operations have been established in Liberia, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire and Haiti; a major expansion of operations in Congo is underway and a sizeable new mission is anticipated in Sudan. The total number of peacekeepers is likely to go up to 70,000 in 2005. With continuing challenges to the consolidation of peace processes in ongoing missions and the likely eruption of new trouble spots in the world, the present scale of peace operations is unlikely to diminish. The demand for PKOs could be further accentuated by what is referred to as the 'CNN factor', i.e., the unrelenting media focus on humanitarian emergencies engendered by conflicts, and the subsequent pressure on the UN and the international community 'to do something' and to 'act quickly'.

Resource Constraints

With the number and scope of PKOs approaching their highest levels ever, the UN's capacities are stretched thin. The new generation of peace operations are resource-intensive and costly, requiring a larger scale of men and material as also expensive niche capabilities such as helicopters, special forces and maritime capabilities. Major financial contributors like Japan and the US are reluctant to fund expensive POs with no viable exit strategy in sight and demand that such missions be wound up or downsized (recent examples being downsizing of the mission in Ethiopia-Eritrea, closure of missions in Sierra Leone, Cyprus and review of operations in Western Sahara). As regards troops, with 35 per cent of the troops coming from contributors in South Asia and 80 per cent being contributed

by the top 20 contributors from the developing world, the capacity of those who have both the will and ability to contribute troops, is also being increasingly challenged. The UN is likely to resolve this mismatch between growing demand and limited financial and manpower resources by increasingly resorting to ‘hybrid operations’ in the place of UN-led blue helmet operations.

Nature of Hybrid Operations

The involvement of the non-UN element (MNF/regional/bilateral force) in modern ‘hybrid’ POs could either be short-term or long-term. In the short-term, they are increasingly filling up a key UN lacuna by providing the ‘quick reaction capability’ and ‘over-the-horizon force’ for POs. These are deployed either at the beginning of a new mission where the non-UN force quickly steps in to stem a conflict (since the UN takes a longer time to deploy troops) or in the midst of an ongoing mission when an ‘over the horizon force’ intervenes robustly to counter an eruption of conflict and restore normalcy. In the first category, these timely short-term interventions are usually followed by a long-term UN blue-helmet peace operation. Some recent examples are the US-supported Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) forces followed by United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL); African Union troops in Burundi subsequently re-hatted as ONUB; US-led Multinational Emergency Force followed by MINUSTAH in Haiti; and French-led Licorne troops replaced by ECOWAS forces and eventually followed up by the establishment of MINUCI in Cote d’Ivoire. Recent examples of interventions in ongoing missions are the EU’s Operation Artemis in Bunia, Congo in September 2003 and the French intervention in Cote d’Ivoire where ‘over-the horizon’ forces carried out a specific mandate in a limited time-frame.

In the case of the involvement of non-UN elements in longer term operations, there is a ‘partnership’ between the UN and non-UN elements, where the two usually perform distinct functions under separate, but coordinated commands. The UN component frequently provides the civilian-humanitarian-peacebuilding dimension, while the non-UN element constitutes the military arm of the mission. For instance, in Kosovo, the UN (along with EU, OSCE, UNHCR) provides the civilian and police dimensions, while NATO provides the military arm under a separate but coordinated command. Similarly, in Afghanistan, UNAMA looks after the civilian element while ISAF (under NATO command) provides the military dimension (The US-led Operation Enduring Freedom is a combat operation under a different command).

UN Partnership with Regional and Sub-Regional Organisations

The focus in the UN and internationally is on building the capacities of the non-UN elements, especially regional and sub-regional organisations (particularly, in Africa), and an increasing emphasis on UN partnership with these organisations. The UN-EU Joint Declaration of 2003 and the UN-AU Institutional Relationship, declared after the Security Council meeting in Nairobi on November 19, 2004, are two concrete examples of this trend. The emphasis is on a 'partnership approach' wherein the UN retains its central lead and responsibility and imparts legitimacy, with the regional organisations carrying out the major tasks on the ground.

UNPKOs Mostly in Africa?

If EU, NATO and OSCE who are already players in peacekeeping are likely to take charge of peacekeeping, in Europe and also undertake 'out of area' operations wherever they perceive a strategic stake, will this mean that UN-led peace operations will increasingly be limited to Africa? It is relevant to note here that out of the 16 UN peacekeeping operations that were underway in January 2005, seven were in Africa, including the two largest ones, i.e., in Congo and Liberia, where around 50,000 of the total 64,000 troops were deployed.

Focus on African Capacity-Building

Given that peace and security in Africa will essentially be regarded as the UN's responsibility, there will be continuing emphasis on building African capacities through the African Union (AU) and sub-regional organisations. Some of the recent examples of this focus are the adoption by the United States, of the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) programme and earmarking of over 80 per cent of the US\$660 million fund for Africa; the establishment of a 250 million euro EU Peace Facility Fund for Africa, and the G8 commitment to train and equip about 75,000 troops worldwide by 2010, with a focus on building African capabilities. The 53-member AU decided in 2002 to set up an African Standby Force comprising five sub-regional standby forces capable of rapidly launching simple PKOs in the continent by 2005 and complex POs by 2010. In February 2004, 13 East African countries announced the establishment of the Eastern Africa Standby Brigade (EASBRIG), comprising about 4,500 troops, 1,000 police and civilians available to the African Standby Force.⁴ The recent involvement of African regional and sub-regional organisations in Liberia, Burundi, Somalia, Cote d'Ivoire and Sudan underline this trend. However, African capacity-building aimed at self-reliance in peacekeeping will continue to face several

challenges such as availability of sustained financing, quality training and equipment, integration of different command structures and languages.

Other Related Trends

Accent on Rapid Deployment

With the realisation that a robust and timely intervention can avert humanitarian catastrophes and longer and more expensive future interventions, the UN has been laying a great deal of emphasis on rapid deployment of troops in the early phase of missions. With the UN Standby Arrangement System (UNSAS) and the On-Call List system having failed to ensure deployment within the compressed timelines required, the UN is increasingly focusing on streamlining mechanisms to ensure rapid deployment of troops and equipment. The recent initiative wherein countries are called upon to earmark Strategic Reserve Forces for pre-identified missions and for induction at short notice is an effort in this direction.

Focus on Rule of Law Aspect

There is a growing realisation that unless the building blocks of sustainable peace, law and order are put in place, a uni-dimensional military peacekeeping approach will only amount to symptomatic conflict containment. This, in turn, has led to an emphasis on creating a viable Rule of Law chain involving an accountable and effective policing system, a credible judiciary and a functioning penal system. The role of police personnel in POs is therefore acquiring greater salience.

Integrated Approach to POs

With a multitude of actors being involved in complex POs with the common objective of achieving a viable end-state, the focus both at the UN headquarters and in the field is on greater interagency coordination in planning, training and operation. Since many of the conflicts are transnational in nature and have destabilising effects on the larger region, this principle is also being extended to greater cooperation between various UNPKOs in the region in order to concertedly deal with the regional dimensions of the conflict.

Safety and Security of UN and Associated Personnel

The perception of the UN, in some parts of the world, as a partner in advancing a Western-dominated agenda such as the global war against terrorism and non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, has adversely impacted on the

perceived credibility and neutrality of the UN, and has, in turn, made the UN and its associated personnel, the targets of attack. UN personnel are increasingly vulnerable in complex POs where various parties to the conflict view the UN as unhelpful to their cause and the local population sees the UN as ineffective in averting outbreaks of violence and resolving the basic issues in the conflict. Recent attacks on the UN in diverse theatres like Kosovo, Congo, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Iraq and Afghanistan underline this alarming trend. There is consequently, growing concern and focus on the issue of safety and security of UN and associated personnel, with the UN undertaking efforts to streamline security management both at the UN headquarters and in the field.

Gender Mainstreaming

From the traditional perspective where women were seen essentially as victims of conflict, there is widespread acknowledgement of the unique contribution that women can make in conflict resolution and conflict management. The UN is making conscious efforts to involve more women both in decision-making and in the field. Issues such as use of child soldiers and HIV/AIDS are also gaining greater urgency in the discourse on peacekeeping.

'Light footprint' in Nation-Building

With the distillation of the UN experience in providing transitional administration in states where the state machinery has collapsed, there is increasing emphasis on a 'light footprint' approach that allows for local ownership and lead in political and other processes of reconstruction. The UN is likely to adopt this approach more often in post-conflict nation-building by adapting political and economic models to suit national ethos and culture.

India and Modern POs

India has traditionally viewed peacekeeping in the classical sense of the term, as an effort to assist in stabilising a conflict situation and facilitating a return to peace and security, with the consent of the states/parties concerned, preferably within a finite, well-defined time-frame and a clear and achievable mandate. With the value India attaches to state sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention in internal affairs, it has believed that any peacekeeping intervention has to be the last resort, after all other means have failed. India has also maintained that peacekeeping should be at the request of the member-states involved; non-

peacekeeping activities such as humanitarian assistance and reconstruction should be distinct from peacekeeping and the operation should be under the command and control of the UN. Consequently, India has insisted that there should be a clear distinction between operations under Chapter VI and enforcement actions under Chapter VII, and has traditionally participated only in Chapter VI UNPKOs.

While these core principles continue to influence India, there is a clear awareness that the principles and practices in peacekeeping have undergone something of a revolution in response to the dramatically changed international environment. The nature of Chapter VII peace enforcement too has undergone a fundamental change from the earlier context of inter-state wars, where it meant coercion over one or more unwilling sides. In contemporary intra-state conflicts, a robust Chapter VII mandate is intended to ensure compliance of all parties concerned with the peace agreement, to deter potential spoilers and protect civilians.

India's participation in PKOs today is therefore, influenced by a number of factors: assessment of national interests in a given situation, the principles of peacekeeping, bilateral relations, regional equations, public perception in the host country, the domestic national sentiment, the viability of the mission, the potential for professional enrichment and exposure to our armed forces, operational issues like command and control, and the risk factor. These are relevant in an overall assessment of India's options in a given situation. The fact that India is in the process of deploying over 3,000 personnel, including 19 helicopters, in a challenging UNPKO in Congo under a Chapter VII mandate and has committed a force of over 3,000 Army, Air Force and police personnel to another complex mission in Sudan, shows the changing contours of our national policy.

India's Capabilities

As one of the few countries in the world to possess a large and highly professional armed force, India has the unique capability to contribute both quantitatively and qualitatively to UN peacekeeping. Its impeccable track record and credentials have made India a sought-after troop contributor. India has the ability to spare significant forces for peacekeeping; it has a cadre of extremely well-trained, highly-disciplined and battleworthy troops that have the capacity to adapt to challenging physical and operational situations. Indian troops come with a long history of peacekeeping experience, are armed with considerable field experience in demanding situations, and since participation in PKOs is viewed as an opportunity, they are motivated to do well and adapt to an international environment. Best of all, our troops excel in 'winning hearts and minds' by making

a human connection with the local populace through their medical services and reconstruction projects – a critical but oft-neglected factor in ensuring the success of a PKO. India is also one of the few countries that possess niche capabilities such as sophisticated aviation units, state-of-the-art equipment and logistic capabilities to support our personnel ably in PKOs. On the police side too, we are again one of the very few countries in the world to have a well-trained cadre of police officers and composite paramilitary contingents to spare for peacekeeping tasks. Our police officers are highly experienced and well-trained in critical PKO tasks, such as unarmed inter-community policing, confidence-building between ethnic groups, riot control and training. Our familiarity with the English language and IT-based skills are added assets in a multinational environment. With its unique capabilities, India is looking at an enhanced profile in peacekeeping, through selective participation in challenging missions where it can play a key role.

Need for a Doctrine?

With this evolution in the Indian approach to peacekeeping, perhaps India needs a doctrine that is reflective of contemporary realities. Any such doctrine paper would need to address issues such as: Why is peacekeeping important to India? To what extent and in what kind of operations should we participate? What would be the factors and processes for decision-making regarding participation? How do we optimise our strengths in this area? What is our policy with regard to the role of regional organisations and their partnership with the UN? Specifically, what is our approach to African capacity-building? Identification of our perspectives on these important trends would outline our vision with regard to India's role in peacekeeping and give a broad direction to India's future engagement in peacekeeping operations.

References/End Notes

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