

# An Indo-African Military and Peacekeeping Partnership

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*This discussion is to identify military-related imperatives and opportunities for India's economic and social engagement with Africa. Besides bringing out its strategic economic importance so vital to India's growth and influence, it highlights two issues that work to India's advantage—China's exploitative model and an anti-colonial movement across Africa. The failure, in general, of UN-led peacekeeping in Africa is studied with some case-studies involving Indian assets. The importance of the military in international diplomacy is discussed as especially relevant to Africa. Some recommendations are made towards enabling an Indian whole-of-government approach.*

**Keywords:** *Strategic Value Africa; China Model; Anti-Colonialism: UNPK Failures; whole-of-government*

## INTRODUCTION

The Indian Prime Minister clearly spelled out India's focus on defence ties with Africa in Kampala, Uganda in 2018. There is clarity now that it is a

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whole-of-government approach that brings together many initiatives such as markets for 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in terms of shared concerns on security and well-being and sustainable long-term support to countries as an alternative to great power exploitation. The canvas is broad, encompassing collaboration on countering piracy and illegal resource extraction, anti-drugs and human trafficking, counter-insurgency and action against terrorism, among others. There is particular focus on Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and a plethora of related maritime activities. All these were amplified in the India–Africa Defence Dialogues (IADD) at the DefExpos held in 2020 and 2022.

This article endeavours to identify military-related imperatives and opportunities to enhance India's economic and social engagement with African nations. It explores issues such as past and current strategic engagements in light of other great powers increasingly fighting for dominance. Economic windows are highlighted in terms of where the Indian military could play a critical supportive role. The legacy and current state of Indian involvement in UN peacekeeping is studied with a specific case-study of aviation in MONUC (UN Mission in DR Congo). It is to highlight the role of airpower in African crises, and therein lies the opportunity for Indian defence sector. Some recommendations are made for an Indian whole-of-nation approach to Africa.

The fundamental premises of the article are: first, about the growing opportunities for India in Africa and the large amount of investment and stakes in these fastest growing economies, and the need to secure these through forces or capabilities in being in the continent.

## AFRICAN STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT

### **A Growing Investment**

India grew to be Africa's fourth largest trade partner (US\$ 89.5 billion in 2021–2022) after the establishment of the India–Africa Forum Summit in 2008.<sup>1</sup> Africa's growing importance to India can be evidenced by the setting up of 18 new Indian missions in 2019, along with a newer Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS) for extension of lines of concessional credit. Though India's US\$ 11 billion line of credit is dwarfed by China's US\$ 126 billion in loans and US\$ 41 billion FDI, the involvement is growing in areas critical to Africa's future that is sustainable energy infrastructure. India is also in partnership with countries like Japan for development initiatives. High population growth, surge in the number of youth and a growing middle

class in Africa is leading to rapid urbanisation and quick industrialisation that needs energy. These are some of the reasons in increase in demand for energy is double that of the global average rate. Renewable energy is a demonstrated expertise of India domestically. It is a niche area that India is focusing on in Africa. For example, the move to hydrogen as a fuel will require electricity generation from renewable sources (solar, wind and water). India is working hard to reduce the cost of renewables, increase efficiency of electrolyzers, and scale up production to make it a cost-effective proposition. India's initiatives such as International Solar Association (ISA) and Green Hydrogen Mission are attractive options. Forty-four of them have joined the ISA and many have evoked interest in hydrogen. Big Indian companies such as National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) and Indian Oil are exploring setting up infrastructure in many of these nations.<sup>2</sup>

The present military engagement of India with African countries may be inadequate. Each country's transactions with India needs to be examined in detail. It is a mixed record. India has many military-to-military ties with some nations for decades that need to be examined for cost-benefit issues. But importantly, the issue of Global South-South trust is vital, and India scores well on this. Non-alignment and African agency is back after the COVID-19 debacle where western selfishness was openly displayed.

Historical bonds, cultural ties and non-alignment legacies can help build a joint-narrative on decolonisation. A non-colonising and non-exploitative Indian track record builds an overarching framework for collaboration. The concept of IOR is a powerful framework in the overall thrust for sovereignty, agency and non-alignment. Of course, this needs to be backed by credible hard-power and capacity to act. India's present limited expeditionary capabilities are a step towards that.

India already has collaboration to develop and use maritime infrastructure with countries such as Mauritius, etc. With the subcontinent's geography jutting out into the Indian Ocean (like a giant aircraft carrier), there is lesser need to permanently base large military assets in Africa. However, listening posts such as training and maintenance support teams deployed across would serve a great purpose in quick reaction procedures. Will India be able to increase its reach in the Indian Ocean meaningfully? Yes, all pointers are in that direction. Developments such as Karwar Base and Andaman & Nicobar Islands point in that direction. Indian out-of-country deployment capacities are quite potent, which will give African nations much confidence.

India should aim to maintain a viable strategy for a win-win situation, as long as its strategy, plans and execution are adaptive under dynamic and

changing geopolitics. A verifiable feedback mechanism with a high-level coordination mechanism is a precondition for this. Defence diplomacy would be an important arm in dealing with nations whose military carries clout in domestic politics. In fact, it could be the mainstay of the renewed partnership with military-ruled countries. However, economics will be the main plank irrespective. Already many training missions are located and planned in countries across such as Namibia, Mauritius and Botswana. Necessary credibility can be built by showcasing them. A central coordinating body is imperative to manage and guide this whole-of-government approach, with even a Minister of State level designation as head. It would send a strong message too.

### AFRICAN OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIA

A 'Great Game' is already on between the US/EU and China in Africa for control or denial of critical resources. These resources are enablers of dominance in a future carbon-free world. The US has realised its act of error in ceding control to China even as late as 2020 when an American firm sold off DRC's largest copper-cobalt mines to a Chinese company. It has now launched a Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) with 13 members including all G-7 nations and the EU.<sup>3</sup> For example, the Lobito Corridor will take copper from Congo and Zambia to Angola's Lobito Port by rail, with the entire infrastructure developed under the MSP partnership. A MoU between US, Zambia and Congo plans to build supply chains to process raw minerals into battery precursors for electric vehicles in both countries.

#### Neo-Colonialism

Chinese commercial bank loans are at an average rate of 5 per cent with no-questions-asked and easy-to-access formats. Based on these, a number of fairy-tale but non-sustainable or completely useless projects mushroomed all over Africa as elsewhere. The Chinese debt-trap has made all African governments wary of this route to prosperity, and more importantly their public aware of the pitfalls. The western loans and aid, especially from the World Bank and IMF, are far more concessional and with far lower rates of interests. In many countries in Africa such as Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, there are cancellations and reversals of policies and agreements on Chinese loans.<sup>4</sup>

China's most attractive feature for poorer nations has been its miraculous story of economic success and in pulling out almost 600 million out of poverty. It is a rise worthy of emulation. On the other hand, its totalitarian

government also appeals to many elites where democracy has not taken firm roots. While the post-COVID-19 events in China have dented this image somewhat, a strong anti-colonial sentiment still provides it support. India's success story offers the alternative and an antithesis to this model. It is far more people-centric and representative, and relatively less corrupt and exploitative.

In September 2024, the UN plans to start the Global Digital Compact aiming for an open, free and secure digital future for all. However, vested agendas, both national and private corporations, will seek to control and dominate this evolution for selfish and self-serving reasons. India's success in digitising its governance and people-empowerment space is an attractive model for aspiring nations. It is another opportunity for India to establish bilateral relationships and partnerships.

A diverse continent of 1.2 billion people in 54 countries cannot be dealt as a single entity or with one template. For example, China's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) outreach as a pure commercial and influence model has only created non-transparent debt-traps, corruption and poorly designed projects. Similarly, western apathy and exploitation are legacies that Africa is only too aware of. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the selfishness of the 'haves' has exacerbated poverty and misery, and put painstaking development efforts back by a decade.

A mushrooming decolonisation movement is a continent-wide expression of indignation and self-respect. It is also fuelled by competing powers that seek to change the world order away from US hegemony. This has the potential for creating people-led movements that will question corrupt elites and militaries that thrive on neo-colonialism by the West or even China. India can bring a different win-win solution to the continent by partnering with suitable countries.

### CONGO-COBALT-CHINA

An example is illustrative of how Chinese engagement in UN Peacekeeping is calibrated for larger strategic moves in geo-economics. The author was witness to this while serving as commanding officer in DR Congo (DRC) in the UN peacekeeping mission (MONUC) beginning 2003. This eye-witness account was in the eastern part of DRC, that is, North and South Kivus so rich in many mineral resources such as cobalt. These are essential elements in batteries and with the increased focus on renewable electrical energy across the world, worth their weight in gold.

With the transition to green energy and a 2050 aim for zero carbon-neutral state, there is a growing demand for minerals such as nickel, copper and cobalt. Africa is abundantly rich in these. For example, as per International Energy Agency (IEA), DRC has almost 45 per cent of the known reserves of cobalt on earth. In 2003, when India sent combat elements including attack helicopters and brigades of troops to MONUC, China deployed only a regiment of engineers of the PLA with a variety of capabilities including earth-moving heavy equipment. It also had surveyors, geologists and deal-makers with an eye on mining.

Within a decade, the Chinese ownership and stakes rose from nil to 90 per cent of the sector including complete control of small mining (artisanal cobalt) activities. With similar moves across Africa, for example, Zambian copper mines, China today dominates the commodity market on which the green transition of the world depends upon. However, Africa is pushing back having identified clear neo-colonialist moves. An example is the nationalisation of all artisanal cobalt by the DRC government.<sup>5</sup>

China's control is evidenced by a monopoly over electric vehicle battery supply in the world that includes 80 per cent of refining of raw material, 77 per cent battery production, and 60 per cent component manufacture. One of the reasons for its dominance is a no-rules engagement that ignores issues such as human exploitation and environmental concerns. The western counter of 'building back better' will take time and faces the challenge of hypocrisy. India can propose far credible alternatives based on its own endeavours and success at home.

### FINANCIAL TRAPS

The volumes of China's loans have reduced from a peak of US\$ 25 billion to US\$ 2 billion in 2016 and 2019, respectively. In 2023, the larger questions on sustainability and pay-back capacities in light of the Pandemic and Ukraine conflict loom large. It is clear to Africa that the BRI model incorporated exploitative components such as lucrative surplus capital investments, employment to Chinese workers, a factory to emerging markets, and poor vetting of fairy-tale projects. Except for easily available capital though at exorbitant interest rates, there was little benefit for host countries. While the Chinese owed debt is only 12 per cent of the total US\$ 696 billion, the non-transparent conditions and rates are constitute the exploitative back-breakers.

As per a report, half of Chinese debts in sub-Saharan Africa are hidden from appearing in official records. This is to enable compromised regimes

in these countries to continue borrowing from international financial institutions. Those under IMF scrutiny would not be able to hide these though. China considers data on external finance activities a state secret.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, exploitative clauses in agreements are kept secrets allowing countries to fall into the debt-trap.

China controls an elaborate narrative of anti-colonialism, non-interference in local politics, benign trade, among other issues, through an elaborate network of agents and players. For example, 'United Front' coordination and networking mechanism is tasked to shape perceptions of a far beneficial China compared to an exploitative west. The CCP claims this is independent of the party's influence to give it legitimacy abroad especially among the Chinese diaspora.<sup>7</sup> The claim that it is a government-organised non-governmental organisation is as hypocritical as the west's claim of a fair world order. The clear aim is elite capture and supporting public diplomacy efforts in narrative building.

### INDIAN OPPORTUNITY

Persistent conflicts, military takeovers, financial crises, endemic poverty and forced migrations seem to be the trend in the coming years in Africa unless each nation addresses its main fault lines, and collectively nations counter nefarious designs of outside powers. The coming economic recession in the West and China in particular, is only going to make this a more difficult endeavour. India stands out economically, and by most other indicators, as a beacon of hope and sustainable opportunity. While it cannot match the Chinese cheque-book diplomacy in terms of volumes, the trust quotient is much higher due to demonstrated partnerships. India could provide partnerships that revolve around not just easy capital but encompasses longer-lasting human resource training, digitisation, sustainability and green ventures.

In order to have a longer term sustainable relationship, India needs to identify and target countries that are relatively stable politically, rich in resources, and have a well-settled Indian diaspora, among other things. In the next phase, other volatile countries can be targeted such as Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso. The Great Game between the US, China, EU and Russia needs to be taken note of and catered to in the plan. For example, the EU has already planned US\$ 150 billion as part of its Global Gateway Plan for Africa.<sup>8</sup> India could counter this or partner some of them with better acceptability among Africans.

In January 2023, Burkina Faso demanded a deployed French counterterrorism force to withdraw. In all likelihood, this is to be replaced by the Russian Wagner Group. This has already happened in Mali.<sup>9</sup> Both countries are convinced that a private military company would infringe less on sovereignty as compared to manipulative colonial masters of the past. Similarly, China is sending private armies to protect far-flung assets across the world. Even in Pakistan this very volatile and politically hot issue has been flagged by the Chinese. Is there a requirement for India to look at private security providers as a force-in-being to protect its interests? It also provides a platform for stability to host-nations that have poor capacities to look after their security needs.

### DE-COLONISATION

A popular and growing de-colonisation framework calls for accountability or 'epistemic justice', and need for reparations. This will constrain and put under pressure endeavours by the 'liberal' order in future. Many institutions from the Global South are defending concepts and newer ideas such as Complex Indebtedness, which reframes international relations and world order in terms of justice from past economic and social exploitation.<sup>10</sup> It inherently encompasses complex issues such as white nationalism and south-south cooperation. India's track record in such endeavours may merit it a lead role.

The Indian External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar used an apt word, 'Liberal Fundamentalism' to describe this hypocrisy. It is a vicious curtain over neo-colonialism and perpetuating western dominance. Its pursuit has caused countless misery, death and destruction of stable societies such as Iraq, Syria and Libya. The old 'white man's burden' seems to have worn new clothes. No wonder that scholars like Amitav Acharya write, '...However, there is little question that the emergence of racism as a scientific, profitable, offensive, geopolitical and normative basis for organizing world order came only with the rise of European global dominance, which began in the sixteenth century CE and morphed into the era of American primacy after the Second World War.'<sup>11</sup>

The de-colonisation claims, extending from reparations to climate justice, will keep increasing in scope and scale as time goes by, and many issues will converge increasing the divide between Global North and South. Increasingly, the South will question the validity of the 'world order' framed on man-made hierarchy and double standards.<sup>12</sup> The liberal order



centred on the individual, a structured trade order that is exploitative, and democratic values that keep changing, will sooner than later be discarded by the South.<sup>13</sup> Social stratification is in reality based on factors such as race, gender, class, geography, among others. It was always evident that this order was based on an irrational and illogical set of values when seen through a humanity prism.

As Stephen D. Krasner put across in his seminal work, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, logics of appropriateness and of consequences are at odds. Therefore, western espoused principles of egalitarianism and meritocratic justice on which the legitimacy of the liberal order is premised, is hypocrisy glaring at the South.<sup>14</sup> This is only amplified by the recent fiasco in Afghanistan where democratic Afghans were left at the mercy of the Taliban, or the case of refugees fleeing to Britain being shipped to Rwanda.

### UNPK: A FAILED MODEL

At a meeting of a Special Committee on UN peacekeeping of the UN General Assembly on 21 February 2023, the Indian Permanent Representative found it appropriate to suggest winding up 'age-old' peacekeeping missions, and the imperative to evolve exit strategies from them.<sup>15</sup> Most UN staffers would oppose this since it is their employment. Most local leadership of parties to the conflict are dependent on the continued presence of the UN to sustain the patronage, as well as offer financial support in dollars. The UN also provides a fig leaf to cover the agendas of big and small powers. Only the military and deployed police units with limited tenures face the actual downsides of such stretched missions.

Over seven decades of a professional and unbiased approach to UN peacekeeping (UNPK) has given India a 'Guru' status at large. But it has on many occasions come at a heavy cost, e.g., loss of 159 lives while protecting vulnerable civilians from the wrath of war. However, conflict and strife persist and put a question mark over the whole concept of UNPK. This article mainly advocates a change in tack in the form of an India–Africa peacekeeping partnership along with other economic and social engagements between the two entities. It explores the ample win-win windows of opportunity that lie ahead. Africa can and must manage its own peace, and must be helped by genuinely concerned nations to do so. Unlike Western agenda-driven aid or even the debt-trap diplomacy of China, India can offer a better model to train, equip and advise African nations and the African Union in sustaining peace in the continent.

### AN ENVIABLE LEGACY OF COMMITMENT

As mandates and scope of peacekeeping evolved over the decades, India was part of the experimentation of peace-making, peace-keeping and peace-building, among others. They gained a credible reputation of being adaptive peacekeepers as the uncertainty on ground encompassed newer challenges such as proliferation of non-state actors, disruptive tactics and technology. Even the COVID-19 Pandemic could not stop this adaptability. For example, 1,40,000 UN field personnel were fully vaccinated in 2021 along with setting up specialised hospitals for healthcare in UNMISS in South Sudan and MONUSCO in DR Congo.

India's belief in UNPK is why in 51 missions so far, more than 2,50,000 blue helmets have served with pride. Some of these missions are: Congo (ONUC 1960–64), Angola (UNAVEM 1989–1991 and UNTAG 1989–90), Mozambique (ONUMOZ 1993–95), Somalia (UNSOM II 1993–94), Rwanda (1994–96), Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL 1999–2000), DR Congo (starting 2003), Ethiopia Eritrea (2000–08) and Sudan UNMIS (starting 2006). Peacekeeping personnel were also deployed in Liberia (since April 2007) and Ivory Coast (since April 2004).

### UNPK CHARTER AND MANDATES

The United Nations Charter mainly aims to 'maintain international peace and security.'<sup>16</sup> While Chapter VI of the Charter is about peaceful settlement of disputes, it is Chapter VII which allows 'resort to the use of armed force should this mode fail'.<sup>17</sup> It is clearly about 'waging war when international peace and security is under serious threat'.<sup>18</sup> As per General Satish Nambiar, peacekeeping is an 'invention of the United Nations Secretary General and the Secretariat, and evolved as a non-coercive instrument of conflict control, at a time when Cold War constraints precluded the use of the more forceful steps permitted by the Charter'.<sup>19</sup>

By itself, mediating between heavily armed opponents is a difficult proposition. But with the very nature of conflict evolving rapidly, some noticeable trends include: larger involvement of para-militaries, non-state actors and irregulars; higher civilian casualties and destabilisation; newer tasks such as demobilisation, national reconciliation processes and state-building; and broader support to humanitarian aid missions, including protection of 'safe areas' and escort of relief convoys.

## INDIA'S DEMONSTRATED VALUE-ADDITION

Indian contingents in Africa have been able to conduct themselves well mainly due to domestic experiences and evolution of counter-insurgency doctrines from them. Winning the hearts and minds of the local population is the core of conflict-management strategies, which encompasses aid to civic authorities, gender sensitivity, cultural and contextual understanding, and a humane approach to controlling violence to a degree. An example is the contingent of 125 all-women team of the Central Reserve Police Force to Liberia in 2007, which encouraged local women to join for police duties.

India endorsed, supported and helped in funding an African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) in 2015. It is an African Union (AU) initiative that initially raised a standby force of 25,000 armed peacekeepers. India is perceived as a safe partner in most quarters especially when compared to the debt-trap diplomacy of China or western agenda-driven aid. India's Prime Minister enunciated this in his address in 2018 to the Ugandan Parliament.<sup>20</sup> The AU is running a number of peace interventions on its own or in partnership with other groupings such as EU. For instance, missions in Somalia and Southern African Development Community's counter-insurgency deployment in Mozambique are proactively stabilising the situation.

India too has a number of capacity-building programmes in Africa, one of which is a partnership with the US focusing on a train-the-trainer model. India holds an annual UN Peacekeeping Course for African Partners (UNPCAP-III) and a field military exercise (Afindex-19) with 17 African nations. This experience has brought out the utility of coalitions that could be more responsive, effective and robust rather than an urgent bunching of soldiers with differing abilities and motivations. A unique professional Indian contribution has been its aviation assets and their employment in low-intensity conflicts typical of Africa. This is examined in a little detail as a case study to bring out the opportunities ahead.

After the debacle in Sierra Leone, India had well understood the pitfalls of a robust approach with combat aviation. The macro-lessons were:

- The aviation peacekeeping assets were kept only as a reacting force, thereby ceding the initiative to the rebels. Cumbersome bureaucratic processes meant the UN was always a few steps behind in the situation.
- Lack of aviation assets, both in terms of quality and quantity in a crisis. For example, night-fighting abilities and force-protection of aviation assets were lacking.

When responding to the emergency call of the UN Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with the acronym of MONUSCO, India demanded that these issues be addressed as a starting point. As a result, all Indian aviation assets in the Kivus (Eastern DRC) between 2003 and 2008 were fully capable of day/night/bad weather operations. Very capable force-protection elements formed part of the contingent deployed.

### CASE STUDY DRC

The situation in DRC had become dire for MONUC in terms of civilian protection and its own viability in DRC. What ought to have been envisaged and countered by adequate deployment was caught in bureaucratic wrangles till too late. While the armed brigades from South Asia were still a year from deployment, an Indian aviation unit with attack and heavy utility helicopters was deployed in a matter of months. And it was this deployment of state of art aviation assets along with armed brigades that stabilised DRC in a decade of Chapter VII deployment.<sup>21</sup>

### CHALLENGES TO THE MANDATE

The fundamental challenge to the mandate was a 'lack of clear distinction lines between actors, existence of multiple armed groups with varying goals and culture, criminalisation of politics for greed and profit, wide-ranging strategies of various actors and targeting of civilians as a norm of the conflict rather than an exception'.<sup>22</sup> A cauldron of Blue Helmets (UN peacekeepers) from multiple nations with different training standards and preparedness, and no interoperability experience only increased the difficulties of integrated operations.

The top leadership of MONUC, was mainly from US and European nations, showed a highly bureaucratic approach. It indicated multiple agendas working in divergence. Actual mismanaged crises were there for all peacekeepers to see—Ituri (2003), Bukavu (2004) and Goma in 2006 and 2008. All this as even forecasts of the deteriorating conditions were available. The UN Department of Flight Safety (DFS), a sort of flight regulator, was based on strict civilian-standard rules, which in turn was premised upon personnel safety at the cost of operational imperatives.<sup>23</sup> It was aptly put across by a former Assistant Secretary General of the UN Guehenno, '... since consent and pre-agreed manoeuvre are the bottom-line in an UN operation, there has to be care and due consideration before military units are given any freedom to tactically engage'.<sup>24</sup>

## INDIAN AIRPOWER EMPLOYMENT

Airpower has had a major role in India's struggle against insurgency and other secession movements since independence. While it has been critical in sustenance and mobility of deployed counterinsurgency forces, the real value has been in the support of local governance. The capabilities of pervasive observation and relocating quick reaction forces across a theatre of operations has helped deny core requirements of sanctuaries, finance, combat resources to the insurgents. The experimentation of unified commands in these scenarios has helped India hone an effective whole-of-government approach to such operations.

The MONUC mandate covered the following:<sup>25</sup>

1. Stopping the killing and ending the tragedy of war and conflict.
2. Facilitating political transition leading to free and transparent elections.
3. Working towards the establishment of a rule of law and respect for human rights, which are essential foundations for economic development.
4. Addressing the legacy of war by improving human conditions for sustainable peace.

## CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

The Indian aviation contingent (a dozen medium-lift and attack helicopters each) were tasked for: 'Preventive aerial deployment capacity; Monitoring or supervision over a large area; Surveillance of cantonment areas, demilitarised zones or buffer zones between warring parties; Supporting all processes of peace including disarming and demobilising of the warring factions; Protection and support of humanitarian assistance; Non-combatant evacuation under threat and establishment of protective zones; Support in election-conduct, maintenance of civil order and enforcement of sanctions.'<sup>26</sup> It was a tall order for the few resources; however, with good professional advice by experienced Indian aviators these tasks were met albeit by proper staggering, prioritisation and sequencing.

There were some unique operational constraints in a vast land of unending thick foliage with little human habitation. Not in the least in these were the belligerents with their small arms and rocket-propelled grenades.<sup>27</sup> The mainstay of such low footprint operations by a few thousand peacekeepers was effective deterrence in the form of quick reaction and accountability of violent activities. This was only possible through aviation assets at 24x7 readiness throughout the year.

Importantly, a key ingredient of surprise and proactive deployment was somewhat negated by the UN principles of 'consent and pre-agreed manoeuvres'.<sup>28</sup> However, in a true crisis when the UN staffs were in danger, they allowed a freer hand. For example, on 26 November 2006, just short of Goma in North Kivu, MONUC established a security cordon to halt the advance of some renegade Congolese Brigades. Indian night-attack enabled Mi-35 helicopters tracked the attackers and routed them with cannons and rockets.

### USE OF FORCE: STUDY IN CONTRASTS

There are differences in usage of force and value for African lives by Indian forces and others. It may be because of national experience in handling insurgents where civil control at the macro-level is paramount. This was evident to Africa in quite a stark display of behaviours in 2003. To avoid a genocidal event in Ituri, Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General allowed a France-led European multi-nation force to stabilise the situation. They deployed about 2000 troops and aerial firepower with freedom to shoot wherever violence happened, which they more often did rather than exercise restraint. With no resulting European casualties, it was a successful image-building exercise but did little to solve any fundamental issues on ground.<sup>29</sup>

Not enough boots on ground is a recurring refrain among analysts of UNPK, and unfortunately this is to do with costs. Simon Chesterman claims that wrong lessons were learnt from UN deployments in DR Congo, Somalia and Bosnia that further obfuscated the issue of use of force.<sup>30</sup> After an analysis of UN action in Bosnia and Somalia, Trevor Findlay suggested a revamp of UN doctrines to 'balance effectiveness and own vulnerability'.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, diverging agendas may be at work. This is asserted by Susan Woodward also in her case-study book *Balkan Tragedy*.<sup>32</sup>

### NON-ROBUST INTENT IN UNPK

Chapter VII provisions demand robust response from peacekeepers when the mandate is challenged, and especially when civilian lives are in danger. But the definition of 'robust' is interpreted differently by contingents. Conflict and resultant body bags is abhorred by most. This has been displayed time and again. Without clear rules of engagement or effective standard operating procedures, variable discretion among peacekeepers leads to ambiguity.

Belligerents study and track this and plan their actions accordingly with higher propensity for risk. Indian aviation contingents were exceptional in their robustness as evidenced by the only ones firing on rebels during a crisis, for example, the fall of Bukavu in 2004.

However, the larger context of ongoing political efforts for reconciliation and peace-building activities of governance restoration, building infrastructure, and establishing rule-of-law mechanisms was not lost to Indian peacekeepers. An absence of any exit strategy of UN missions leads to ambiguity on intractability and longevity of UN missions. It seems to be running mostly on UN civilian leadership's agenda of profiteering and local groups that benefit from them.

#### AFRICA FOR AFRICANS

Western framing of impartiality, neutrality, and consent are increasingly questioned for their validity in Africa besides the ample truth that their 'values-based' assumptions are hypocritical. A growing knowledge base of non-western and African experiences and understanding of conflicts is taking root. African interests can only be protected by Africans themselves, either collectively or nationally. Indian policies need to move on these newer premises. Assisting nations or AU in keeping peace must be done outside the UNPK ambit.

As stated earlier, most mission decision-makers are from western nations with multiple agendas, while the execution is left to troop contributing countries (TCC). An example of an undoable mandate was that in many parts of DRC blue helmets were deployed in support of government forces that had questionable authority and even lesser credibility with local communities. Protection of civilians seems only a slogan in such difficult circumstances. As General Satish Nambiar succinctly puts:

'To suggest that the countries of the Western world prefer to operate under the auspices of NATO because of the "inefficiency or "incompetence" of the UN system is, in my view, hypocrisy of the highest order.'<sup>33</sup>

The General clearly identifies western machination in 'garnering senior command positions in the UN missions that are deployed, or in securing senior military and police staff positions at the headquarters of the missions deployed'. According to him, in 1992–93 every contract for provisioning, maintenance, and other essential functioning was in the hands of the developed world.<sup>34</sup> In other words, they were ploughing back the money that they were putting into UNPK.

The deployment of a peacekeeping mission is only a result of wrangles in the Security Council between the P-5.<sup>35</sup> It explains the confusing and diluted mission aims, mandate and execution. Managing local consent at various levels in the mission area requires understanding of smaller players, spoilers and other forces.<sup>36</sup> Especially in intra-state conflicts with multiple big and small players in context to Africa, this is a must-do for ensuring sustainable peace.<sup>37</sup> It is therefore vital that Africa control the process and aim to execute it with reliable partners like India, even if it means doing at a shoe-string budget. Any mandate must do litmus vetting of capabilities available.<sup>38</sup>

### MILITARY IN DIPLOMACY

Currently, most military representation in diplomatic missions is for supplementary activities to what MEA considers the 'way forward'. It is considered as 'other forms of cooperation', while the requirement in current geo-politics and geo-economics is that the mandate be expanded to a shoulder-to-shoulder functioning with MEA and other agencies. Every facet of diplomacy must be searched for supporting military functions, especially in countries where militaries dominate or play an important role, for example, Africa, SE Asia and our neighbours. In view of the present and likely future national security environment in the next decade, India's defence diplomacy objectives should:

- Support overarching national goals, end-objectives and evidence-based achievements at every step.
- Support long-term intelligence functions for detailed nation- and personality-profiling.
- Support short-, mid- and long-term defence export efforts of Indian companies.
- Explore opportunities of defence engagement that are win-win or outright beneficial for India in the longer term. This must be well-researched and backed by solid analysis.

### DEFENCE–DIPLOMACY FUSION

India has been recognised as a major responder and the nation-to-go when asking for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR). For example, the wide acceptance of the specialised national disaster response forces (NDRF) and temporary transportable military hospitals. Along with pre-palletised loads and long-range aircraft such as C-17s and C-130s, this is seen



in the IOR as the fastest help available. More military officers in diplomatic missions can identify these windows and coordinate the ensuing response.

Similarly, other areas such as Indian defence equipment sales, military training needs and other military-specific issues can be effectively tracked and analysed by such warrior diplomats. A case can be made for a defence-diplomacy fusion as is instituted in all great-power nations.<sup>39</sup> The US' State-Defence Integration Program is an example. All US officers who attend the Indian Staff College spend the next few years tenanting positions in embassies in nations of South Asia giving much-needed continuity to the fusion effort.

Utmost for selection of officers are not just their annual assessments but a far more rigorous vetting of correct cognitive capabilities. The US seems to have a design, for example a military officer does staff college in India, diplomatic assignment in Pakistan, higher command in Bangladesh, and then goes back to an analysis South Asia desk in the USA. For example, in the IAF, only fighter pilots are considered for all DA, AA positions. This robs the effort of diversity and cognitive talent. Besides the learning, trust development and capability demonstration, these must serve as opportunities to drive other selling agendas (def exports, ideas and India's soft power). Training of foreign officers must result in detailed personality etc data, tracking and networking in the future. Those who rise must be actively exploited for national aims.

Indian defence diplomacy must strategise to counter Chinese and Pak influence in the IOR. Since most nations in this list have dominating militaries, it is important to have an agenda and faith in military-to-military interactions as per a clear objective-driven plan. But, first a national assessment or net-assessment must clarify the road-ahead where embassies and their military components can exercise due flexibility. Each vulnerability and opportunity needs to be analysed and revised as a continuous effort over a long time. This is the reason intelligence gathering and analysis must be core strengths of military diplomats.

## RECOMMENDATION

Having covered the opportunities for India in Africa, and issues that challenge and leverages that allow a way forward, some recommendations are made. Each of these requires detailed study and analysis on how they can be coordinated in a *whole-of-nation* (WoN) approach for a win-win partnership with Africa.

- A strong narrative of a Global South guided by India needs to be enhanced and supported. This is already being done, for example, PM Modi's pitch in G-20 foreign ministers meeting in Delhi on 2 May 2023.
- India must aim for direct partnerships with AU and individual nations of Africa. However, some partnerships with great powers need to be done. India needs to be circumspect in these so that it does not dent its anti-colonial and non-alignment credibility.
- Military exercises with African nations must aim to demonstrate Indian expeditionary capabilities in a non-threatening manner. More importantly, enhanced military presence in Africa will provide a security cover for Indian investments as a force-in-being.
- India needs to completely withdraw from old never-ending UNPK missions that neither serve India's interests nor Africa's stability.
- India needs to plan more engagement and interaction with Africa, collectively and nationally, for bilateral or multilateral help in peacekeeping and stabilising crises. This can be done at a fraction of the cost currently incurred in UNPK. In light of this, many changes need to be made in doctrines, processes and institutions. For example, CUNPK in Delhi must be revamped into a joint one where the training augments the WoN approach. No single institution is allowed to hijack this endeavour, for example, the Indian Army.
- Military diplomacy needs to be the bulwark in many nations of Africa where it suits the context. A number of suggestions have been made in this paper regarding increased representation in foreign missions, selection and employment of officers.
- Private security providers will need to be catered to as investment and involvement in Africa increases. A suggestion is that trained Agniveers who have not been absorbed in the military, though meeting the QRs, may form the nucleus of such units.

### GOING AHEAD

India's outreach to Africa has been declared as a whole-of-government approach. The menu includes offers of Indian-made equipment more suitable to African requirements, professional military advice and training, and an expeditionary capability to help friends in need should be more acceptable to African nations. India can aim for a viable strategy for a win-win situation with an adaptive and credible plan. The 'Great Game' is already on between

the US/EU and China in Africa for control or denial of critical resources. These resources and African markets will define future prosperity, and therefore the imperative to enhance Indian engagement. Defence diplomacy would be an important arm in dealing with nations whose military carries clout in domestic politics.

A mushrooming decolonisation movement is a continent-wide expression of indignation and self-respect. It is also fuelled by competing powers that seek to change the world order away from US hegemony. This has the potential for creating people-led movements that will question corrupt elites and militaries that thrive on neo-colonialism by the west or even China. While India cannot match the Chinese cheque-book diplomacy in terms of volumes, the trust quotient is much higher due to demonstrated partnerships. India could provide partnerships that revolves around not just easy capital but encompasses longer-term human resource training, digitisation and green ventures.

The de-colonisation claims, extending from reparations to climate justice, will keep increasing in scope and scale as time goes by, and many issues will converge increasing the divide between Global North and South. Increasingly, the South will question the validity of the 'world order' framed on man-made hierarchy and double standards.

Indian peacekeeping in Africa over seven decades is a demonstration of an agenda-free, honourable and purposeful contribution while abiding by UN mandates. However, as just a troop contributing country, Indian policy makers have realised the futility of such never-ending, money-guzzling and futile missions. Issues such as mandates, consent and adherence to principles have been reduced to just debates between the P-5.

It has been brought out how India adds substantial value to effectiveness of a peacekeeping mission in Africa. A focus on aviation deployments with a case-study in DRC shows it as a window to increase influence in Africa. Aviation contributes majorly in creating asymmetries where peacekeepers can operate effectively. A detailed discussion on vexing issues such as use of force, robustness and tactical imperatives has been attempted along with key recommendations.

India is already cooperating with the AU and African nations in building regional and local capacities. This clearly suggests a synergetic partnership between the two to help Africa manage its own peace. Bereft of western or Chinese agendas or the highly bureaucratic UN approach, a more effective template is suggested. Accordingly some recommendations have been made.

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