

# AT THE CROSSROADS: INDIA AND THE FUTURE OF UN PEACEKEEPING IN AFRICA

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India's participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) is probably without parallel; it has been one of the largest contributors of peacekeepers and has suffered the most casualties in the process. Indicative of the thrust of UN peacekeeping missions, 80 percent of India's peacekeepers are presently serving in Africa and 70 percent of all casualties have been sustained there. Clearly, based on these statistics, UN missions serve as the bedrock of India's military engagement and assistance to Africa. However, there is a growing debate on the efficacy of these missions and India's benefits from its continued participation. In more ways than one, India and Africa are at crossroads on this issue. Both communities need to move beyond platitudes and engage in a serious, sustained dialogue on India's role in the future security architecture in Africa.

Historically, India has participated in nearly all UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. Most famously, India helped set the trend in "peace enforcement missions" by deploying a sizeable contingent—around 5,000 troops assisted by light bombers, to the United Nations Operations in Congo (ONUC) from 1960 to 1963. This militarized mission ensured the unity of Congo and resulted in the maximum number of casualties suffered by India in any UN operation. The end of the Cold War led to a pronounced increase in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. India contributed to these efforts and was an active participant in almost all missions, sending military observers to Namibia (1989–1991), Angola (1989–1991), Liberia (1993–1997 and since 2007), Congo (since 1999), Ethiopia–Eritrea (since 2000),

Ivory Coast (since 2004) and, more substantially, sending military contingents to Mozambique (1992–1994), Somalia (1993–94), Rwanda (1993–1996), Angola (1995–1999), Sierra Leone (1999–2000), Congo (from 2005 onwards) and Sudan and South Sudan (from 2005 onwards). These military contingents have at times undertaken 'robust' operations bordering on peace enforcement type missions, inflicting and suffering casualties in the process. To support these operations India has also deployed attack and support helicopters, which are always in short supply and are critical to overcome the vast distances in Africa. Tellingly, there was considerable international outcry when India announced that it was withdrawing some of its helicopters for supporting internal security missions at home. While the military's deployment is well-known the role of police, including women police officers, and civil affairs specialists assisting in tasks like conduct of elections or other capacity building exercises is no less important. According to some experts therefore India's combined efforts constitute the "backbone" of UN peacekeeping and it is presently engaged in 12 of the 15 active peacekeeping missions.

Understandably, Indian diplomats and military officers play up their contribution to UN peacekeeping. India's claim to a permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) rests, among other factors, to its contribution to UNPKO. During the time that India held the non-permanent seat on the Council from 2011 to 2013, it identified peacekeeping as a key agenda putting forward ideas to enhance its effectiveness. The Indian military has also deeply internalised the ideal

of operating under 'Blue-Helmet' taking considerable pride in the success of its missions. Shaped by years of experience many in the military find it difficult to envisage operating outside India's borders without UN sanction.

In recent times however there has been a growing debate about India's continued role in peacekeeping operations. Many question the benefits accruing to India from its considerable investment of manpower and military resources. Highlighting the "poorly equipped, mandated and governed operations" characterising UN peacekeeping, Nitin Pai and Sushant Singh argue in *The Indian Express* that continued participation is not commensurate to the results—either through obtaining a seat on the UNSC or in obtaining "great power status". Moreover, observing that peacekeeping is mostly carried out by troops from developing countries, they argue that keeping such company means that India "cannot be taken seriously as a standalone great power at the UN." A final source of criticism has been the bad publicity that has been generated by instances of sexual misconduct and corruption allegedly committed by some Indian peacekeepers and allegations that it failed to adequately protect civilians. Not all these criticisms are valid, especially the notion of what defines a 'great power', however they provide an opportunity to debate the future of UN peacekeeping and India's role in Africa.

Paradoxically aspects of this debate—specifically regarding the efficacy of UN peacekeeping—resonate in some African countries. The failures of UN peacekeeping operations in the 1990's most visibly in Somalia and Rwanda, led to a reduction in the number of missions and a loss of confidence. There was a feeling that the UN had abdicated its role and this, according to Kwesi Aning and Festus K. Abyn, created "a sense of African solidarity in finding African solutions to African problems." These sentiments led the African Union (AU), a fifty-four country group comprising all African states, except Morocco, to deploy 64,000 peacekeepers since 2004 in numerous mis-

sions on the continent including Central African Republic, Nigeria, Darfur and Somalia. Its current mission in Somalia, called AMISOM, comprises 22,000 peacekeepers and is engaged in intense combat with the Al Qaeda linked Al-Shabaab group. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a bloc of fifteen countries, has also undertaken peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau. Significantly however these missions are funded almost entirely by donors like the UN, EU or the US and only 2.3 percent of the AU peacekeeping budget comes from its member states.

These developments suggest that the future of UN peacekeeping in Africa is at a crossroads. On the one hand are wealthy western countries that fund but do not commit their troops to peacekeeping missions. They are increasingly unhappy with the rising costs of UN peacekeeping—it current budget of \$9 billion is the largest ever. In addition they have raised questions on the ability, and commitment, of peacekeepers to saving civilian lives—pushing forward the idea of robust, peace enforcement missions. Troop contributing non-African countries, mainly from South Asia and South America, among others, however deny this is the case and instead argue that they are not adequately consulted when the missions are being formulated. African countries, which also constitute the bulk manpower, are caught in the middle—financially dependent upon 'developed countries' while requiring additional manpower, resources and support from 'developing countries' to bolster their capabilities.

The Third India Africa Forum Summit in October 2015 offers an opportunity to deliberate upon some of these issues to further strengthen security cooperation. Towards that end there are three main recommendations flowing from this analysis. First, India and Africa need to embark on a serious discussion on the future of UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. This needs to take head on the criticism levelled against it—failure to protect civilians,

or allegations of misbehaviour and corruption. Most importantly it should focus on steps to increase the overall effectiveness of peace-keeping missions and explore opportunities for conflict resolution and termination.

Second, India should consider scaling up its security assistance to African countries. In the previous Africa India Forum Summit in Addis Ababa in 2011, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced a contribution of \$2 million towards AMISOM. This should be increased by a considerable degree, especially since this mission is involved in intense combat operations. In addition, India has deployed military training teams in Botswana, Zambia, Lesotho and Seychelles. Such relationships should be enhanced and offered to other countries who express an interest. India's help could be crucial and cost-effective in imparting specialised skill-set like helicopter flying, casualty evacuation, medical training, etc. India can also offer items for defence trade—like radio sets, military vehicles and other ordnance stores.

Finally, India and Africa should shed their perceived reticence to discuss security issues and establish a high level defence dialogue. By

all appearances India's existing defence dialogues with African countries are on a bilateral basis. This is understandable as different African countries have varying perceptions on security. However, lately there has been a gradual turn towards multilateral security engagements. As discussed earlier the AU and ECOWAS are slowly emerging as serious actors. Acknowledging this development and in its effort to support these institutions, India should offer to hold a defence dialogue with these organisations. These dialogues could focus on role of regional associations, capacity building and the overall security architecture. In the long run, the historical model of peace-keeping in Africa—funded by the West and manned largely by Asian countries – is unsustainable. While the budget for UN peacekeeping is currently at a record high, this level of financial support is not assured. India's efforts in peacekeeping have thus far been remarkable but it is now perhaps time to transition to an 'African owned-African led' solution. Gradually reducing its peacekeeping responsibilities therefore may be for the best—and might have the added advantage of eventually enhancing India-Africa relations.