

Role of India in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: A Comprehensive Analysis

Dr. Basanta Nagindrappa Sagar,
Associate Professor,
Department of Political Science
Government College Autonomous
Kalaburagi: 585 105, Karnataka

Abstract:

India has emerged as one of the most significant contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations since the organization's inception. This research paper examines India's substantial and sustained participation in UN peacekeeping missions across multiple decades, analysing the historical evolution, strategic motivations, operational contributions, and the philosophical underpinnings of India's approach to peacekeeping. Through an examination of key missions, troop and police contributions, and India's leadership role in peacekeeping reform initiatives, this paper demonstrates how India has positioned itself as a significant actor in the maintenance of international peace and security. The analysis reveals that India's peacekeeping engagement reflects a complex interplay of strategic interests, diplomatic aspirations, constitutional commitments, and humanitarian imperatives.

Keywords: United Nations, peacekeeping, India, multilateralism, security, military contributions

Introduction:

The United Nations peacekeeping framework, established in 1948 with the deployment of military observers to the Middle East, has evolved into one of the most significant instruments of international conflict management. Peacekeeping operations have transformed from simple observation missions to complex multidimensional endeavours addressing post-conflict stabilization, humanitarian assistance, electoral support, and institutional building. Among the member states that have contributed substantively to this enterprise, India stands out as one of the most consistent and significant participants.

India's engagement with UN peacekeeping reflects a broader commitment to multilateralism and international cooperation that has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy since independence. As the world's largest democracy and a founding member of the United Nations, India has sought to balance its national interests with its perceived responsibility to contribute to global peace and security.

Historical Origin of India's Participation:

The Early Period (1950s-1970s):

India's involvement in UN peacekeeping began almost concurrently with the establishment of the UN's first peacekeeping mission. India's first major contribution came in 1950 when it dispatched military observers to the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), which was established to monitor the ceasefire following the Indo-Pakistani War of 1947-1948. This initial engagement set the precedent for India's long-standing commitment to UN peacekeeping (Singh, 2019).

During the 1950s and 1960s, India contributed personnel to several significant peacekeeping missions. Indian troops participated in the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) during the Suez Crisis in 1956, marking India's first deployment of combat troops to a UN peacekeeping operation. India also contributed to the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) during the early 1960s, one of the most challenging and controversial missions in UN peacekeeping history (Raghavan, 2018).

The Congo Mission proved particularly significant for India's peacekeeping tradition. Indian personnel, including the legendary peacekeeper General K. S. Thimayya, demonstrated exceptional commitment and courage in difficult circumstances. The death of 19 Indian soldiers during the ONUC mission represented one of the highest casualty tolls for a single contributing country during that operation, establishing India's reputation as a willing contributor even in the most dangerous circumstances (Malone & Mukherjee, 2019).

Expansion and Consolidation (1980s-2000s):

India's peacekeeping contributions expanded substantially during the 1980s and 1990s, a period marked by increased demand for UN peacekeeping operations globally. India contributed to missions in places such as Lebanon (UNIFIL), the Golan Heights (UNDOF), Angola (UNAVEM), Cambodia (UNTAC), Somalia (UNOSOM), and the Balkans (UNPROFOR, IFOR, and SFOR). This period saw India emerge as one of the top troop-contributing nations to UN peacekeeping (Jha, 2020).

The 1990s represented a particularly active period for Indian peacekeepers. India contributed approximately 7,000 troops to the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in the former Yugoslavia, making it one of the largest contributors to that challenging mission. Indian

peacekeepers also served in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) and the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH), demonstrating the geographic breadth of India's engagement (Pandey, 2021).

Contemporary Period (2010s-Present):

In recent years, India has continued its substantial contributions to UN peacekeeping while also seeking to enhance its role in shaping peacekeeping policy and doctrine. India has maintained significant deployments in missions such as the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). As of 2023, India remained among the top ten troop-contributing countries to UN peacekeeping operations (United Nations, 2023).

India has also increasingly contributed police personnel to peacekeeping missions, recognizing the evolving nature of peacekeeping operations that require civilian law enforcement expertise alongside military capabilities. Indian police officers have served in various capacities, including as formed police units and individual police mentors in missions across Africa and Asia.

Dimensions of India's Contributions:

Military Personnel:

India's primary contribution to UN peacekeeping has been through the deployment of military personnel in various capacities. Indian peacekeepers have served as military observers, staff officers, and troops in formed units. The Indian military's professional capabilities, discipline, and experience have made Indian contingents highly valued components of UN missions (Singh, 2019).

Indian Army units deployed to UN missions have typically included infantry battalions, engineering companies, medical units, and logistic support elements. These units have been deployed in some of the most challenging environments, including conflict zones in Africa, the Middle East, and the Balkans. The Indian military's emphasis on self-sufficiency in logistics and its experience in operating in difficult terrain and climate conditions have proven valuable assets in peacekeeping contexts (Raghavan, 2018).

Police Personnel:

Beyond military contributions, India has also contributed substantial numbers of police personnel to UN peacekeeping missions. Indian police officers have served in various roles, including individual police advisors, members of formed police units, and specialists in areas such as border security and counter-terrorism. The deployment of Indian Central Armed Police Forces, including the Border Security Force (BSF) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), to UN missions has added a distinct dimension to India's contributions (Jha, 2020).

Equipment and Resources:

India's contributions to UN peacekeeping have not been limited to personnel. India has also provided significant equipment and resources to UN missions. This has included the provision of military hardware, vehicles, communication equipment, and medical supplies. India's willingness to deploy its own equipment, rather than relying solely on UN-provided resources, has demonstrated India's commitment to effective peacekeeping (Pandey, 2021).

The Indian Army's engineering capabilities have been particularly valuable in peacekeeping contexts. Indian engineer battalions have constructed and maintained infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and accommodation facilities, in mission areas. Medical units have provided healthcare to local populations and peacekeepers alike, demonstrating the humanitarian dimensions of peacekeeping engagement (Malone & Mukherjee, 2019).

India has increasingly sought to play a leadership role in shaping UN peacekeeping policy and doctrine. Indian officials and diplomats have actively participated in discussions regarding peacekeeping reform, advocating for enhanced capabilities, improved mandate clarity, and greater attention to the security of peacekeepers (Malone & Mukherjee, 2019).

India has been particularly vocal in advocating for the safety and security of peacekeepers, a concern that reflects its substantial personnel investments in peacekeeping operations. Indian representatives have pressed for improved equipment, enhanced training, and stronger rules of engagement to protect peacekeepers operating in dangerous environments (Singh, 2019).

India has sought to enhance its peacekeeping capabilities through the development of specialized units and training programs. The Indian Army has established a dedicated Peacekeeping

Wing to coordinate and support its peacekeeping engagements. India has also developed formed police units specifically designed for UN peacekeeping deployments, demonstrating its commitment to adapting capabilities to evolving peacekeeping requirements (Raghavan, 2018).

India has used its peacekeeping engagement to foster regional cooperation and partnerships. Joint training exercises with other troop-contributing countries, particularly from the Global South, have helped build interoperability and shared understanding of peacekeeping challenges. India's hosting of the Peacekeeping Summit in 2018 demonstrated its leadership ambitions in the peacekeeping domain (Jha, 2020).

Conclusion:

India's role in United Nations peacekeeping operations represents one of the most sustained and substantial contributions by any member state to the UN's peace and security architecture. From the earliest missions in the 1950s to contemporary operations in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, India has demonstrated consistent commitment to international peacekeeping despite significant costs and risks.

This analysis reveals that India's peacekeeping engagement reflects a complex interplay of strategic interests, diplomatic aspirations, humanitarian commitments, and military professional considerations. The philosophical underpinnings of India's foreign policy, emphasizing multilateralism and international cooperation, have provided the foundation for this sustained engagement.

To conclude, India's journey in UN peacekeeping offers important lessons for understanding the dynamics of multilateral security cooperation and the role of emerging powers in global governance institutions. As the international community continues to grapple with complex security challenges, India's experience provides a model of sustained engagement that merits careful study and consideration.

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