

Enhancing the Effectiveness of United Nations Peacekeeping Missions

- *Colonel Chandan Singh Thapa*

Abstract

The primary responsibility of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is to maintain international peace and security. Since the establishment of the UN in 1948, UNSC through UNSC resolutions has pursued this aim by authorizing various peacekeeping missions. When the effectiveness of UN missions is analyzed, it has mixed responses. Some UN missions are considered very successful while some are criticized for their underperformance. The peacekeeping force has to operate in a volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, and highly unpredictable environment with various limitations and constraints. The anti-UN sentiments are observed in some of the missions criticizing its ineffectiveness which has a detrimental effect on the overall credibility of the UN. In this context, the objective of this article is to highlight the challenges of contemporary peacekeeping operations and recommend ways to enhance the effectiveness of peacekeeping forces to deal with prevailing challenges. The article is qualitative and based on secondary data. The personal experience and observation of the author as a peacekeeper in various UN peacekeeping missions in different capacities is also reflected in analyzing the weaknesses and effectiveness of contemporary UN peacekeeping missions. The major findings of this article are that UN missions in Chapter VII and VIII mandate need improvement in multiple facets for the effective implementation of mission mandates like R2P and PoC. The rising anti-UN sentiments in different UN missions and increasing trend by host nations demanding the closure of contemporary UN missions further advocate revitalization in the UN peacekeeping approach.

Keywords

United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, Challenges of Peacekeeping Missions, Mission Mandate, Effectiveness of UN Peacekeeping Missions.

Introduction

United Nations peacekeeping missions officially began with the deployment of UN military observers to the Middle East in 1948. The mission's objective was to keep tabs on the Armistice Agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbors. This operation was later referred to as the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). Since then, the UN has sent out more than 70 peacekeeping missions. Over 3,000 UN peacekeepers from 120 different nations have lost their lives while serving the organization (Our History, n.d.).

The UN changed and expanded its field operations, moving from "traditional" missions that typically involved military troops doing observational tasks to intricate, "multidimensional" businesses. The UN Peacekeeping mission, which was initially designed to address interstate crises, was increasingly being used to address intrastate conflicts and civil wars (Our History," n. d.). 11 peacekeeping missions are now active under the UN flag in various parts of the world. The General Assembly decides on funding for peacekeeping operations (Peacekeeping Operations, 2023).

AMISOM (Somalia) and other regional peacekeeping operations of the African Union are examples of UN peacekeeping operations that fall under Chapter VIII of the UN charter in addition to UN peacekeeping operations which are supported by the UN administratively. (Peacekeeping fact sheet, 2022). Protection of Civilians (PoC) has become one of the principal mandates of contemporary United Nations Peacekeeping missions.

An Analysis of Performance of UN Peacekeeping Mission: Some Case Studies

Three analytical approaches are available to evaluate the effectiveness of UN peace operations: a context analysis, an impact identification process, and an explanatory factor evaluation. Context studies aid in comprehending the setting in which the peace operation seeks to achieve beneficial outcomes. Finding and analyzing effects entails determining if a peace operation if required, eliminates violent episodes, boosts stability, safeguards civilians, lessens gender and sexual-based violence, or creates and nurtures enduring peace. Examining explanatory elements aids in understanding how the peace operation produced benefits (Coning, 2019).

The UN Mission in Libya (UNMIL) is arguably the most effective peacekeeping mission in U.N. history. The mission was operational from 1989–1996 and 1999–2006, respectively, during the first and second Liberian civil conflicts. Over 200,000 people died in these civil conflicts, 500,000 were internally displaced, and 850,000 were made refugees. Between December 2003 and October 2004, UNMIL and other organizations were able to demobilize and disarm 101,496 combatants who were still in the active phase of the war ("Are United Nations' Peacekeepers missions effective?" n.d.).

Another example of a successful United Nations peacekeeping mission is UNTAET and UNMIT in East Timor. East Timor was occupied by Indonesia from 1975 until 1999. An independence vote was overseen by the UN in August 1999. Voters in 78% of the elections chose to secede from Indonesia. After the International Stabilization Force drove out militants and established a stable region, a UN mission named UNTAET was established two months after the referendum. The first presidential election was held by UNTAET in 2002, the same year that East Timor formally attained independence. The International Stabilization Force (ISF) was sent in 2006 to pacify the nation following many political disturbances ("Are United Nations' Peacekeeping missions effective?" n.d.). Additionally, as per the UN claim, there are some peacekeeping

missions like ONUB (Burundi), MINUSTAH (Haiti), and MINUCRAT (CAR and Chad) which did not last for a long duration and successfully disengaged after the completion of the mission mandate. After the termination of MINUCRAT on 31 December 2010, reporting at UNSC, the Secretary-General highly acclaimed MINURCAT as a successful mission immensely contributing to the PoC ("Closure of MINUCRAT,"n.d.). Since the middle of the 1990s, there has been a steady decrease in both the quantity and intensity of armed conflicts globally, mostly due to the increased use of UN "blue helmets (Havard, H., Hultman, L. & Nygard, H.M., 2017).

But there is another view criticizing the UN mission's performance. One of the examples is Somalia where a protracted civil war has raged between opposing clans ever since the Somali rebellion overthrew the country's dictator Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991. Around 500,000 civilians died as a result of the conflict despite of UN mission's existence ("Twelve times the UN has failed the world,"2018). The civil war between the Rwandan Armed Forces and the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which started in 1990 and continued until 1994, was one of the bloodiest ethnic genocides aftermath World War II. Over 800,000 Tutsis were brutally killed and nearly 250,000 women were raped by Hutus in Rwanda in just three months, while UN troops either left the victims unabated or merely watched the horrifying and horrible carnage take place ("Twelve times the UN has failed the world,"2018). The biggest mass murder on European soil since World War II occurred at Srebrenica in July 1995 when Bosnian Serb troops under the direction of retired General Ratko Mladic slaughtered about 8,000 Muslim men and boys despite of UN peacekeepers presence ("Twelve times the UN has failed the world,"2018). These are some of the examples where UN missions were widely criticized due to their underperformance.

Challenges of Current Peacekeeping Missions

Current peacekeeping missions especially with Chapter VII and some with Chapter VIII mandate have to operate in volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous environments. Implementation of PoC and R2P mandates with limited resources and manpower has become a major challenge. When we analyze the current deployment of troops in various peacekeeping missions, limited troops are operating in large areas of responsibility which restricts the operational outreach of the troops to safeguard vulnerable populations.

In recently closed and ongoing UN missions, a large number of armed groups and terrorist organizations with widespread international nexus used to operate against local population and UN troops. According to the UN official report, MINUSMA was one of the most dangerous peace operations for "blue helmets". Since its establishment in 2013, 168 peacekeepers have lost their lives in hostile acts of armed groups and terrorist organizations (Mali: Three UN peacekeepers killed in explosive attack", 2023). This figure shows the intensity of the threat level and complexity of the contemporary mission environment. In addition, peacekeeping is constrained since intervention needs the approval of the host government and other conflicting parties, which makes quick action more challenging (Balakir, 2021).

Ways to Enhance Effectiveness of Peacekeeping Operations

Peacekeeping has been one of the main conflict management tools used by the international community to restore or safeguard peace and security (Salvatore, J.D. & Rugeri, A., 2017). After analyzing the different drawbacks and various challenges discussed, the following ways are suggested to enhance the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping missions.

Command Control and Accountability

The key success of any military approach in peace and security operations lies in an effective command control mechanism. The UN peacekeeping forces are in operational command of their countries whereas they are in operational control of the Force Commander. This aspect has deprived the Force Commander of exercising full command control authority over the peacekeeping forces and their effective mobilization. In some of the critical and risky tasks assigned by the UN Force/Sector headquarters, there is an increased tendency of humble denial citing the national caveats. The TCCs have full authority to withdraw troops notifying UN headquarters at any time. Early withdrawal of Kenyan peacekeepers from UNMISS (2016) as well as British and Swedish peacekeepers from MINUSMA (2023) are some examples. The Command-and-Control authority given to the Force Commander needs to be strengthened to make peacekeeping contingents more accountable and dedicated to the achievement of the mission mandate.

Deployment of Right Sized Troops and Upgradation of Standard

Most of the UN missions are on the ground with inferior strength of the troops. When we see one of the prominent UN missions MONUSCO only 16316 uniformed personnel are operating in huge areas of operational responsibility ("MONUSCO FACT SHEET, 2023"). The story is similar in other UN missions also. The area of Responsibility given to the UN mission is not proportionate to the force ratio particularly in terms of aviation assets and troops to handle the operational requirements and area domination. The command in the UN environment is seriously challenged by this constraint (Pathak, 2023). Hence deployment of appropriate Military/Formed Police Component reviewing the operational requirement of the mission is most important. Force generation needs to be carefully planned to determine the right-sized troops to fulfill the mission mandate. Deployment of inferior-sized troops which are only enough

to carry out logistic operations like convoy movement will adversely affect the credibility of UN missions since other parts of the mission mandate are not properly addressed (Thapa,2023). In order to counter complex threat elements posing insecurity to the local population, the peacekeeping force should be equipped with modern equipment in terms of C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers-Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance). Advanced C4ISR capabilities provide an advantage through situational awareness, knowledge of the adversary and environment, and shortening the time between sensing and response ("What is C4ISR?," 2023). Timely and accurate information about the armed elements and their future actions will assist peacekeepers in proactive action which is the most essential aspect to mitigate the impending threat to the local population by various armed elements and terrorist groups. Tactical and strategic UAVs, Reconnaissance helicopters, and long-range communication equipment are valuable assets to enhance the C4ISR capability of peacekeeping forces.

Integration of Effort with Host State

The primary responsibility of protecting UN personnel and civilians is of the host country. UN mission and host country should integrate their efforts to protect the local population and achieve the mission mandate. When the host state restricts freedom of movement and freedom of action of the peacekeeping force and sees UN forces with suspicious eye the mission environment becomes more complex. Hence, to establish a harmonious relationship with the host nation, Strategic, Operational, and Tactical engagement at the political as well as military level is required. The political/military/police leaders at different levels need to engage with their respective counterparts of the host nation's security component to gain their trust and confidence and integrate efforts (Thapa, 2023).

Robust peacekeeping with Robust Mindset Peacekeeping Forces

The turn towards more robust peacekeeping came as a response to the failures of United Nations (UN) peacekeepers in the 1990s to hinder mass atrocities, such as in Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operation, 2009, p.21). Robust peacekeeping permits peacekeepers to use tactical force in self-defense and defense of the mandate (including PoC) against certain armed factions in contrast with Peacekeepers principally using deadly force in extreme emergencies and adopting a defensive posture abiding with the basic principle of peacekeeping (Jorgensen, 2023). Depending upon the nature of the threat prevailing in the mission area, strong mandates should be authorized in terms of the use of force for the proactive and effective operational mobilization of the peacekeepers.

Careful Preparation of SUR and its Thorough Implementation

Peacekeeping forces have certain national caveats where certain operational and logistic limitations are stated. In addition, there are certain criteria, operational requirements and capability of the troops stated in the form of Status of Unit Requirement (SUR). The peacekeeping forces must carry out various operational activities in the achievement of the mission mandate as per the provision stated in SUR. Any delay in prompt mobilization and tendency of reluctance in sensitive operational mobilization in PoC and R2P duty can create widespread criticism at national and international levels ultimately degrading the image and credibility of the entire mission and UN. The clarity in SUR and national caveats while deploying a peacekeeping force will avoid such ambiguity in the field. Non-compliance to the legal order of the respective HQ should be held accountable and proceed to the appropriate legal actions within the UN's existing rules and regulations.

Change from Welfare Centric Mindset to an Operational Mindset

One of the biggest problems is that peacekeeping operational units and the individual who are deployed in conflict-ridden areas see their deployment as a welfare opportunity not an operational assignment. This welfare-centric mindset has adversely affected the overall operational output of peacekeeping forces. An operational mindset of peacekeepers could be achievable with extensive training and indoctrination making them realize with real spirit of peacekeeping. Though peacekeepers should be able to use proportionate force to eradicate threat elements proactively, the peacekeepers adhere to the conventional Chapter VI ethos of employing force solely in self-defense (Thapa, 2023). In some missions, the presence of troops to complete any duties assigned by UN Operational headquarters is depressing the morale of other countries' troops and also decreasing the overall capability of UN Operational headquarters (Pathak, 2023). Due to increased risk aversion syndrome in commanders at different levels, they are reluctant to use force even when the use of force in pursuance of mission mandate is demanded because they have a preconceived mentality to face the board of inquiry in the future.

Conclusion

UN Peacekeeping missions are one of the most effective tools of the UNSC to maintain peace, security, and stability in conflict-affected areas. They have immensely contributed to achieving mission mandates including PoC despite many challenges and constraints. Throughout the long history of peace keeping some missions are considered as successful and unsuccessful. Maintenance of peace, security, and stability in conflict-ridden areas under Chapter VII and Chapter VIII is challenging. The success of the peacekeeping missions is affiliated with the trust and credibility of the United Nations globally. Hence new approach as per the threats prevailing in contemporary missions is required to carry out various operational and political activities effectively to achieve the mission mandates. A well-trained, highly equipped, and robust mindset

peacekeeping force with a clear understanding of the mission operational environment and mandate is the necessity of contemporary peacekeeping.

Many UN missions are operating with inferior strength in huge areas of responsibility without significant operational achievement which can be well addressed by deployment of the right-sized force. In addition, the dynamics of the current peacekeeping operation are such that, without full-fledged support from the host government mission can't carry out its responsibilities effectively. Integration of efforts with the host nation's military and civilian component, military and civilian component of the mission, community leaders, and other UN agencies setting common objectives is required for the success of any UN peacekeeping mission. Enhancing the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping missions with a redesigned approach at strategic, operational, and tactical levels addressing the gaps observed in various UN missions is required to maintain the reputation of the UN and curtail rising anti-UN sentiments.

Recommendations

Reviewing the existing gaps in peacekeeping missions, the following are the major recommendations to enhance its effectiveness.

- Upgrading the standard of peacekeeping contingents with logistic and operational standards to cope with technologically sophisticated complex threat factors.
- Force generation with the right-sized force with enough reserves reviewing the mission mandate and area of responsibility.
- Empowering Force Commanders with extensive Command and Control over peacekeeping forces.
- Extensive training and indoctrination of troops to create an operational mindset and avoid risk aversion syndrome.

(Col Chandan Singh Thapa is Graduate of Army Command and staff course Nepal and Defense Services Command and Staff course Bangladesh. He holds Master's degree in pol science, and Strategic Studies from TU Nepal and Masters of science in Military Studies from Bangladesh University of Professional. Currently he is serving as Division head of supervision and exercise division at DGMT, Army HQ, Nepali Army)

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