



## United Nations Peacekeeping Paradox

*This editorial is based on “[The world needs blue helmets who act as blue helmets](#)” which was published in *The Hindu* on 23/10/2024. The article highlights the UN's diminished role as a 'bystander' in major conflicts like Ukraine and Gaza, despite having a robust peacekeeping force and past successes in places such as Cambodia and Sierra Leone. Its effectiveness is limited by the veto power of the P5 members in the Security Council, intensifying calls for reform.*

**For Prelims:** [Peacekeeping force](#), [United Nations](#), [United Nations Truce Supervision Organization](#), [UN Security Council](#), [Russia-Ukraine](#), [Israel-Hamas](#), [Cyber attacks](#), [Haiti cholera outbreak](#), [African Union](#), [Indian Women in the UN peacekeeping initiatives](#).

**For Mains:** Factors that have Contributed to the Diminishing Role of Peacekeeping Forces, India's Contribution to Peacekeeping Missions.

Despite its **extensive [peacekeeping force](#)** and successful missions in places like **Cambodia and Sierra Leone**, the **United Nations** now plays a 'bystander' role in key conflicts such as **Ukraine and Gaza**. Its effectiveness is undermined by the veto power held by the **P5 members** of the Security Council. This situation has intensified calls for reform, particularly for **expanding permanent membership to include India**, which would amplify the voice of the global South. Also, enhancing the veto system could lead to more decisive peacekeeping actions.

### What is United Nations Peacekeeping?

- **About:** UN Peacekeeping refers to the **activities carried out by the United Nations (UN) to help maintain or restore international peace** and security in conflict-affected areas.
  - Established to respond to the complex nature of conflicts and to support countries in transition from conflict to peace,
  - UN Peacekeeping operates under the **principles of consent, impartiality, and non-use of force**, except in **self-defense** and defense of the mandate
  - Although the majority of peacekeepers are military or police, approximately **14% are civilians**.
- **Inception and Evolution:** The first UN peacekeeping mission was established in **May 1948** when the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of a small number of military observers to the Middle East.
  - This mission formed the **[United Nations Truce Supervision Organization \(UNTSO\)](#)**, aimed at monitoring the **Armistice Agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbors**.
  - Over the past seven decades, more than **1 million men and women** have served under the UN flag in over **70 peacekeeping operations**.

- Currently, **100,000 military, police, and civilian personnel** from **125 countries** are engaged in **14 active peacekeeping operations**.

- **Achievements (as of 2022):**

- **Conflict Resolution:** UN peacekeepers have successfully resolved conflicts in countries such as **Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone**. Overall, interstate conflicts have **decreased by 40% since 1945**.
- **Humanitarian Aid:** Peacekeepers have protected over **125 million civilians in conflict zones** and facilitated the delivery of humanitarian assistance, supporting refugee returns and resettlement.
- **State Building:** They have supported **democratic elections in over 75 countries** and helped establish functioning government institutions, alongside assisting in security sector reforms and training.

## What Factors have Contributed to the Diminishing Role of Peacekeeping Forces?

- **Power Politics and Veto Exploitation:** The increasing polarization among P5 members has led to **frequent use of veto power, particularly in critical situations**.
  - Since 2011, **Russia has used its veto 19 times**, with 14 focused on Syria with remaining vetoes addressed **Ukraine, Srebrenica, Yemen, and Venezuela**.
  - In **2023**, the United States vetoed a **UN Security Council** resolution calling for "**humanitarian pauses**" to provide aid to millions in Gaza.
  - This deadlock prevents timely deployment of peacekeepers when they are most needed, as seen in both current conflicts (**Russia-Ukraine** and **Israel-Hamas**) where many civilians have lost lives.
  - The **politicization of peacekeeping decisions** has transformed the UNSC from a **peace enforcer to a debate forum**.
- **Resource Constraints and Funding Challenges:** Peacekeeping missions face severe funding shortfalls. If this trend persists, the United Nations will run out of funds to sustain its peacekeeping operations, which involve around **100,000 troops in 14 global hotspots**.
  - Major powers' reluctance to increase funding has led to understaffed missions. For instance, **UNIFIL in Lebanon** operates with limited resources despite increased tensions.
  - This financial strain compromises the effectiveness and morale of peacekeeping forces.
- **Changing Nature of Conflicts:** Modern conflicts involve complex **urban warfare, cyber elements, and non-state actors**, which traditional peacekeeping isn't equipped to handle.
  - The Gaza conflict exemplifies this, where **traditional buffer-zone peacekeeping approaches are inadequate for urban combat situations**.
  - Similarly, in **Ukraine**, the **hybrid warfare involving cyber attacks** and information warfare presents challenges beyond conventional peacekeeping capabilities.
  - This evolution of warfare requires new approaches that current UN mandates and training do not address.
- **Sovereignty Concerns and Host State Resistance:** There's growing **resistance from host nations against UN peacekeeping presence**, viewing it as interference in internal affairs.
  - **Sudan's rejection of UNAMID, Mali's forced withdrawal of MINUSMA, and Democratic Republic of Congo's push for MONUSCO's exit** demonstrate this trend.
  - These premature exits often leave civilian populations vulnerable and negate years of stabilization efforts, as seen in Mali where violence nearly peaked after MINUSMA's withdrawal.
- **Credibility Crisis and Past Failures:** Historical failures continue to haunt UN peacekeeping's reputation.
  - The **inability to prevent genocides in Rwanda** and **Srebrenica**, coupled with recent inaction in contemporary conflicts, has eroded global confidence.
  - Sexual exploitation scandals involving peacekeepers and **instances of disease transmission (Haiti cholera outbreak)** have further damaged credibility, making host nations and local populations skeptical of UN presence.
- **Emerging Regional Alternatives:** Regional organizations are increasingly taking lead roles in peacekeeping operations.
  - The **African Union's peace operations in Somalia (ATMIS)**, and Arab League's growing

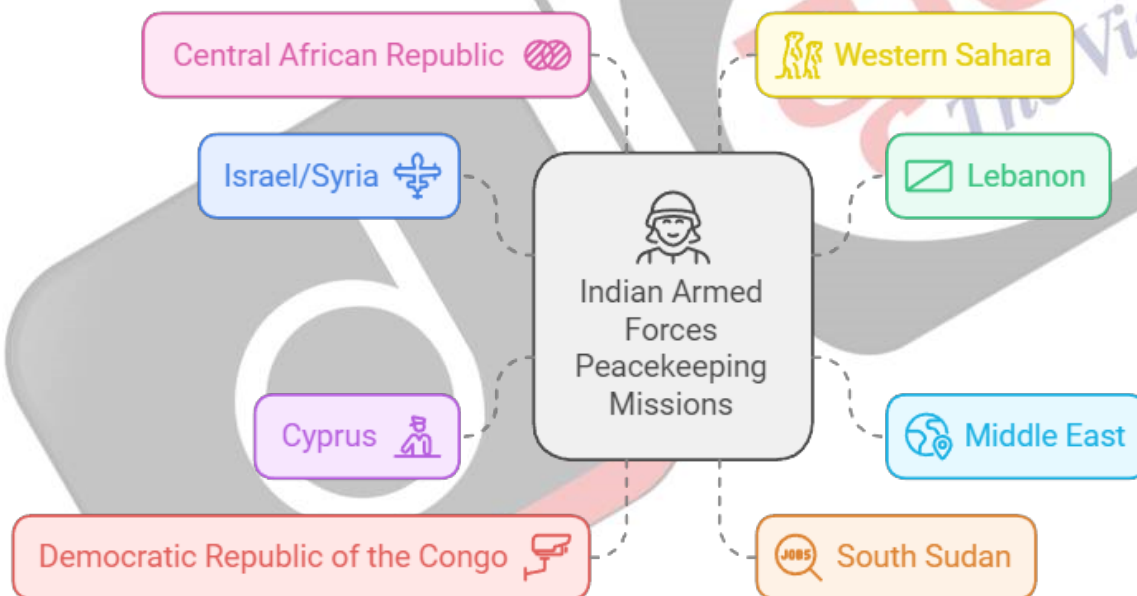
role in regional disputes show a shift toward regional solutions.

- These organizations often have **better local understanding and faster deployment capabilities**, though they may lack UN's resources and international legitimacy.
- **Technology and Capability Gaps:** Most UN peacekeeping forces lack modern military technology and surveillance capabilities crucial for contemporary conflicts.
  - While private military companies and national armies deploy drones, AI-enabled systems, and advanced communications,
  - UN forces often operate with **basic equipment**. The inability to effectively monitor **cease-fire violations in tech-enabled conflicts** (as seen in Ukraine) demonstrates this technological disadvantage.
- **Lack of Political Will for Reform:** Despite numerous proposals for reforming UN peacekeeping, including the **2015 HIPPO report recommendations**, implementation remains slow.
  - The proposed expansion of the **Security Council to include nations like India (contributing 5,700 peacekeepers)** and reforms in veto power remain stalled.
  - This **institutional inertia** prevents adaptation to new challenges and maintains outdated operational models.

## What is India's Contribution to Peacekeeping Missions?

- **Historical Leadership and Personnel Contribution:** India has been the largest **cumulative contributor of UN peacekeepers**, with more than **2,53,000 troops**, one of the largest numbers from any country, **participating in more than 49 missions**.
  - **160 Indian Army soldiers** have made the supreme sacrifice to ensure peace across the globe.
  - Indian Armed Forces are deployed across many countries in peacekeeping missions:

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- **Technical and Medical Expertise:** Indian peacekeepers have established themselves as technical experts across missions, particularly in medical support.
  - India has mobilized efforts to assemble two teams of medical specialists to be deployed in the **Hospitals at the UN Missions in DR Congo** and **South Sudan**.
  - India contributed **two engineering companies**, a headquarters company, a logistics company, staff officers, and military observers to the **ONUMOZ mission in Mozambique (1992-94)**.
- **Specialized Military Capabilities:** India has provided specialized units like attack helicopters, transport aircraft, and engineering companies.
  - **Indian Aviation Contingent-I (IAC-I)** was inducted at **Goma (with four Mi-25 attack helicopters and five Mi-17 utility helicopters)** in 2003 providing critical air support.
  - India's signal units have established and maintained communication networks in various

missions.

- **Training and Capacity Building:** The **Centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK) in New Delhi** has a track record of having more than 67,000 personnel who have participated in 37 out of the 56 U.N. peacekeeping missions.
  - India has been **pioneering pre-deployment training**, especially in areas like sexual exploitation and abuse prevention, having trained 100% of its personnel in these aspects.
- **Policy Contributions and Reforms:** India has been instrumental in shaping UN peacekeeping policies, particularly through its **presence in the C-34 (Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations)**.
  - The country has consistently pushed for **greater representation of troop-contributing countries in decision-making processes**, leading to improved consultation mechanisms.
- **Women in Peacekeeping:** India has deployed **Female Engagement Teams (FETs)** in **Democratic Republic of Congo and Abyei (the second-largest Indian women contingent after Liberia)**.
  - India has also deployed women military police in **Golan Heights** and women Staff Officers/Military Observers in various missions.
  - **Major Radhika Sen** has been selected to be awarded with **“Military Gender Advocate of the Year 2023”** by the **UN Headquarters**, which is a testament to the positive contribution of the [Indian Women in the UN peacekeeping initiatives](#).
- **Humanitarian Assistance and Community Engagement:** Indian peacekeepers have excelled in community engagement and quick impact projects.
  - Approximately **1,160 Indian troops in South Sudan** are also involved in rehabilitating roads and enhancing the capacity of local communities.
  - Despite being a developing country, India has consistently contributed to the **UN Peacebuilding Fund**.
  - Additionally, India shipped out 200,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccines in 2021 to **inoculate UN blue helmets** serving in peacekeeping missions, demonstrating its **commitment to peacekeepers' health and safety**.

## What Measures can be Adopted to Enhance the Effectiveness of Peacekeeping Missions?

- **Security Council Reform and Decision-Making:** The UNSC needs urgent structural reform, including expansion of permanent membership to **include regional powers like India, Brazil, and South Africa**.
  - Implementation of a **"code of conduct" for veto use** in cases involving mass atrocities or genocide.
  - Introduction of a **weighted voting system for peacekeeping deployment decisions**, reducing P5 paralysis.
  - Creation of a rapid response mechanism for emergency deployment in cases of imminent civilian danger. Establishment of **clear, achievable, and time-bound mandates** for missions with specific exit strategies.
- **Financial and Resource Enhancement:** Implementation of **mandatory funding mechanisms** to prevent delays in member state contributions.
  - Creation of a **dedicated peacekeeping reserve fund for rapid deployment** and emergency situations.
  - Development of **public-private partnerships for mission logistics** and support services.
  - Timely payment of **performance-based financial incentives for troop-contributing countries** (in 2017, the **UN owed India \$55 million for its contributions** to peacekeeping operations, a matter that India expressed concern over).
  - Establishment of **regional peacekeeping equipment hubs** to reduce deployment times and costs.
- **Technological Modernization:** Integration of **AI and machine learning** for threat assessment and early warning systems.
  - Deployment of **advanced surveillance technology** including UAVs and satellite imagery for better situational awareness.
  - Implementation of **blockchain for transparent supply chain management and**

**resource tracking.**

- Enhancement of cybersecurity capabilities to protect mission communications and data. Development of mobile applications for real-time information sharing and civilian protection alerts.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Establishment of **standardized global training centers** with mission-specific simulation capabilities.
  - Implementation of mandatory **cross-cultural and language training for all peacekeepers.**
  - Development of specialized training modules for urban warfare and counter-terrorism operations. Creation of joint training exercises between different troop-contributing countries. Integration of local knowledge and cultural understanding into training programs.
- **Gender Mainstreaming and Inclusion:** Implementation of gender-responsive budgeting in mission planning.
  - Increase in **female peacekeepers' deployment with targeted recruitment strategies.**
  - Creation of specialized gender advisory roles at all mission levels. Development of gender-sensitive protection strategies. Enhancement of women's participation in peace processes.
- **Accountability and Oversight:** Implementation of **zero-tolerance policies for misconduct with swift investigation mechanisms.**
  - Creation of independent oversight bodies for mission performance evaluation. Development of transparent reporting systems for operational effectiveness.
  - Establishment of community feedback mechanisms for mission assessment. Enhancement of internal audit and anti-corruption measures.
- **Regional Partnerships:** Development of **formal partnerships with regional organizations like AU, EU, ASEAN.** Creation of joint rapid response capabilities with regional forces. Implementation of shared logistics and support systems.
  - Development of **comprehensive exit strategies from the mission planning stage.** Implementation of sustainable peace-building initiatives.

## Conclusion:

Despite its extensive peacekeeping force and past successes, the **UN's effectiveness in contemporary conflicts** is hindered by the veto power of the P5 members and resource constraints. To enhance its role, the UN must undergo structural reforms, including **Security Council expansion and financial reforms.** Additionally, it needs to modernize its approach to peacekeeping, adapting to the evolving nature of conflicts and investing in technology.

### Drishti Mains Question:

Examine India's contributions to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and assess their impact on global peace and security.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### Prelims

**Q. The Security Council of UN consists of 5 permanent members, and the remaining 10 members are elected by the General Assembly for a term of (2009)**

- (a) 1 year
- (b) 2 years
- (c) 3 years
- (d) 5 years

**Ans: (b)**

**Mains**

**Q.** Discuss the impediments India is facing in its pursuit of a permanent seat in UN Security Council.  
**(2015)**

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