# India's Contribution towards Technological Development of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

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The Second World War created many apprehensions as the world had not witnessed catastrophe of that scale before. It raised many concerns for global peace, and led to the creation of United Nations (UN) primarily to prevent the world from the scourge of the Third World War. The UN Charter mandates the creation of a peacekeeping force for securing and creating conditions for lasting peace within the states and between the states. Since then, we have witnessed many ups and downs in the global order. There have been times when somehow war of a global scale was prevented. However, the content of conflict from the formation of the UN has fundamentally changed; besides traditional peacekeeping there are new dangers seen today. The technological development itself has changed the way we look at peacekeeping besides the changing approach of 'peace' itself.

If we analyse the role of peacekeepers in the 21st century, then Intra-State conflict, asymmetric warfare, terrorist organisations and their interconnections with organised crime, new generation of weapons, malicious prosecution, freedom of movement and other operational issues are only a few of what peacekeepers tackle on a day-to-day basis at the ground-level operations. Since the Cold War, the nature of United

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Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs) has significantly changed and now most of the operations target peace-building rather than just peacekeeping with more complex set of operations that involve moving deeper into the country.

The evolving functions of the UN peacekeepers has raised security concerns, considering the easy access to emerging technologies available to the aggressors, terrorists and violators in present times. Technologies such as satellite surveillance, real-time monitoring systems, use of big data and Artificial Intelligence in prediction of threats, convergence of multiple sensors to enhance perimeter security are significantly changing the security architecture of the member states. Thus, the new international security scenario demands technological edge of the UN Peacekeeping forces over the conflicting parties, along with robust financial and political support. During India's presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2021, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, in his address to the UNSC's open debate on Technology & Peacekeeping said, '21st-century peacekeeping must be anchored in a strong ecosystem of technology and innovation that can facilitate UN peacekeeping operations in implementing their mandates in complex environments'.

In this regard, 'UNITE-AWARE', a situational awareness software programme has been developed by India in collaboration with the UN to assess real-time threats assessment for the peacekeepers while in operation. Based on modern surveillance technology, the UNITE-AWARE is instrumental in developing tactical and intelligence network for the peacekeepers. This initiative reinforces India's commitment to the UN Peacekeeping Missions (UNPMs) and its global responsibilities.

### Evolution of United Nations' Policy on Digital Peacekeeping

The extensive use of technology in the UNPKOs started in 1960 for the Congo mission (ONUC), which led to the creation of a Military Information and Communication Wing. It started with decoding messages, conducting aerial surveillance, and examining detainees.[1] Subsequently, several changes were made, however for the collection of data and for the development of intelligence network, UN largely relied on respective national contingents.[2]

Further, the UN recognised the need for the technology-based surveillance networks and it was acknowledged by the then UN Secretary-Generals. Dag Hammarskjold and U. Thant acknowledged that the

organisation's inability to provide intelligence and general understanding of the environment in which they operated was one of the hurdles for the safety of the personnel.[3] Willmot states that

> The U.N.'s second Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, viewed the absence of a situational awareness system as a 'serious handicap' and that his successor, Secretary-General U Thant, held the view that the lack of authoritative information, without which the Secretary-General cannot speak … was one of the two 'insuperable obstacles' that he faced during his tenure…[4]

The need for comprehensive information gathering and analysis and the suggestion for the creation of the Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat was also restated in the Brahimi Report in 2000.[5] The existing structures were integrated with the personnel engaged in the situational awareness programme and policy planning related to safety and security. The principal objectives were to support the Secretary-General, UN officials, and troop and police contributing countries in assessing risks in areas where personnel and troops would be deployed. Though the General Assembly officially acknowledged the need for such methods, some member states remained hesitant and sceptical of the capacities that were being developed, which could be seen in their limiting the provisions of material support and expertise towards the creation of the new system.

The Ahtisaari Report of 2003 that was brought out in response to Iraq bombings, underscored the need for a 'dedicated risk and threat assessment unit at Headquarters with dedicated links at the field level' with a 'dedicated 24-hour operations centre'.[6] Some structural changes were made in response to the report. The Department of Safety and Security (DSS) was created to carry out the recommendations of the report. One of the major steps was to institutionalise the Threat and Risk Unit (later Threat and Risk Assessment Service) and round-the-clock Information and Communications Centre.[7]

The UN has worked on its 'Peacekeeping-Intelligence Policy', which has been pivotal to security and safety of the peacekeepers and to minimise collateral damage. The policy's objective was to improve the situational awareness to support the decision-making process and safety of the peacekeepers.[8] This policy was created following the proposals from the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) that was created, later it emphasised on 'more effective intelligence management and significantly increased the analytical capacities'.[9]

The UNGA's Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) also echoed the same initiatives.[10] Peacekeeping with intelligence was thus described as 'a critical enabler to permit missions to operate safely and effectively' with a three-fold aim: to 'support a common operational picture, to provide early warning of imminent threats, and to identify risks and opportunities'.[11] All of this was meant to enhance the awareness of the ground situation to work accordingly in a given state of affairs.[12]

## India's Technological Innovations to UN Peacekeeping

India has been one of the largest contributors to the UN Peacekeeping Missions, and its immense contribution in the UNPKOs qualifies its recognition as 'the sword arm of the UN'.[13] It has also been instrumental in devising methods to keep security of peacekeepers to a maximum level.[14] However, India's contribution has always remained under-appreciated and ill-documented. Moreover, India's contribution to the UNPKOs has been debated in providing diplomatic and military support, aid and troops.[15] In fact, the largest human casualties of the serving peacekeepers on duty is from India.[16] Syed Akbaruddin, former Ambassador of India to the UN, asserted that India's aim to serve in the UN peacekeeping mission 'is to keep incentivizing change, institutionalizing best practices and placing a premium on innovation'.[17] However, its technological innovations and support to UNPKOs remains under-examined.

During its UNSC presidency in 2021, India played an initiative-taking role to curate and adopt two crucial documents. First, it got drafted a document on 'Accountability of Crimes against UN Peacekeepers' that has been adopted unanimously through the UNSC Resolution 2589.[18] This was aimed to bring perpetrators of violence to the rulebook through appropriate legal mechanisms. Second, to provide requisite technical capabilities to facilitate operations in 'complex political and security environments and face asymmetric threats'.[19] To implement this mandate, India has signed an agreement titled 'Partnership for Technology in Peacekeeping' with the UN for capacity-building, training, and assisting the UNPMs in the domain of technological needs such as the intelligence, communications, computers, and surveillance and reconnaissance.[20]

UNITE-AWARE, a situational awareness programme developed in collaboration with UN, shows India's commitment and attitude towards digital peacekeeping. This platform provides holistic view of the entire peacekeeping operation including satellite-based monitoring. In this way, the UN peacekeepers predominantly

use satellite data and other open-access sources to suffice their requirements. Given India's track-record in space technology and its peaceful uses, it has proposed to collaborate with the UN through ISRO for developing Small Satellites (SmSats) which could be used in peacekeeping missions. These efforts would definitely change the way UN has been operating. India will also provide US$ 1.64 million to develop this situational awareness technology in future. Currently, India in partnership with the UN is set to roll-out the UNITE-AWARE platform initially in four UN Peacekeeping Missions—MINUSMA (Mali), UNMISS (South Sudan), UNFICYP (Cyprus) and AMISOM (Somalia).[21]

The UNITE AWARE is an important step-forward for securing a peaceful and just world order. It empowers the UN peacekeepers to deal with the challenges and geopolitical realities of the 21st century. This initiative has been consistent with India's ideational contributions and power to shape the future agenda on issues pertaining to peacekeeping and international security. It is a tech platform to assess real-time threats based on modern surveillance and information technology, thereby enhancing security of the peacekeeping forces along with ensuring operational accountability and transparency. It is certainly a revolutionary initiative to monitor, coordinate and visualise UNPKOs on a real-time basis. However, it needs more political will of the member states to implement the mandate effectively.

During India's presidency in 2021, a ministerial-level discussion on technology and peacekeeping was convened; the deliberations were focused on India's four-point framework to adopt technological advancement for combating the contemporary threats. First, using cheap, easily available and operationally effective technologies. Second, to find out early warning and intelligence information gathering systems for real-time threat assessment. Third, to develop technological innovation system and regular feedback loop. Fourth and most importantly, it proposed to develop system for capacity-building and constant training to peacekeepers for adopting and mastering over the introduced technologies. These concerns were unanimously adopted as India's 'presidential statement on peacekeeping operations'.[22]

## Conclusion

Since the foundation of the UN, India has been committed to the UN peacekeeping operations, and has been involved in all the major initiatives

although it was a newly de-colonised country and had its own priorities. This shows the attitude of India towards world peace. Since the Cold War there were many difficult times when the world was on the verge of a third World War and still India continued to serve the interests of humanity. With the end of the Cold War, we witnessed a change in the approach of UN and accordingly the very context and meaning of the peacebuilding operations was expanded. India has remained an indispensable partner with men in uniform and its evolving peacekeeping technologies.

India's recent initiative and historical contribution highlights its role and attitude towards building a new peaceful world order. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has reiterated this in several meetings and emphasised the need to strengthen the UN to ensure a peaceful global order. The UNITE-AWARE is a step taken in that direction. Considering that the functions of the UN would continue to evolve in the coming decades, digital peacekeeping and artificial intelligence will be crucial to tackle the technological advancements noticed in modus operandi of many terrorist organisations.

## Notes

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