

United Nations Peacekeeping Challenge: The Importance of the Integrated Approach, edited by Anna Powles, Negar Partow and Nick Nelson, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015, pp. 281, £65.00

*A.K. Bardalai**

The nature of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations has evolved considerably since 1948. Most contemporary conflict zones are full of violence, resulting in a large number of civilian casualties. So much so, that even the peacekeepers have now become major targets of violence and asymmetric threats. The complex environment in which these operations are conducted today is far more varied than ever before, and therefore to cope with it, peacekeeping organisations bring together disparate configurations of civilians, troops from armed forces and police under a unified political leadership. Military components, drawn from different countries, bring to the table a wide range of experience, capabilities and capacities. However, this diversity imposes significant challenges to integration, coherence and operational performance. The military component, which is primarily responsible to create a secure environment, is generally seen as not doing much to safeguard the lives of innocent civilians. Seized with this reality, a number of studies have already taken place to find ways to address these challenges. *The United Nations Peacekeeping Challenge: The Importance of the Integrated Approach*

* Major General A.K. Bardalai is an Indian Army Veteran, who served in Angola as a UN Military Observer, was the Director of UN peacekeeping operations in the Indian Army HQs (New Delhi) and was the Deputy Head of the Mission and Deputy Force Commander of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

ISSN 0976-1004 print

© 2016 Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

Journal of Defence Studies, Vol. 10, No. 4, October–December 2016, pp. 79–86



has attempted to highlight some of the common challenges and take the discourse on these challenges beyond the current debate. It does so by advancing three critical themes:

1. Our duty of care towards the men and women who serve as peacekeepers; the need to recognise the psychological impact of peacekeeping in the twenty-first century; and support research and development of treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
2. Conflicting requirement of non-combat-related tasks placed on the troop-contributing countries (TCC) and inability of the UN to fulfil numerous demands of governance and developmental tasks in the fragile and conflict-affected environment.
3. The critical need to build the capacity of the peacekeeping forces to protect civilians and themselves.

To advance the argument, the edited book has been divided into four parts: 'Advancing Unity of Effort'; 'The Challenges for Land Forces'; 'Duty of Care: Saving Soldiers'; and 'Challenges in Sharing the Peace Operations Space'. The contributing authors range from academicians, former senior policymakers who served in the UN Headquarters (HQs), former uniformed peacekeepers to experts. Narration of personal experiences by some of the authors has helped to better understand the challenges. It is always a challenge to find continuity or linkage in the articles of an edited book. While academicians have been able to identify and analyse the problem in depth and in detail, those who have served in field were able to substantiate the arguments of the scholars (without any linkage though) with their personal experiences in field. The major takeaway from the book is the examination and analysis of the challenges faced by those involved in UN peacekeeping operations/missions. The notable ones are: importance of unity of effort; critical challenges when it comes to protecting innocent civilians; mismatch between task and resources; inadequate capacity to implement mandate; varying interpretation of rules of engagement; problem of safety and security of peacekeepers; impact of PTSD on the peacekeepers; and difficulty to achieve integration amongst different stakeholders in the mission area.

Significance of unity of effort, and obstacles and challenges that hinder unity of effort, between uniformed peacekeepers and civilian staff both at strategic and operational levels has come out well. Some authors have highlighted these challenges by drawing examples even from non-

UN peacekeeping operations/missions like in Afghanistan and Mali. Even though there has not been any UN peacekeeping operation/mission in Afghanistan and Mali, challenges remain the same. The international community, whether it is represented in the form of UN peacekeeping mission or any other assistance, always aims to safeguard innocent lives from the scourge of conflict. It is merely the method of application that varies. In this regard, examples that have been cited have helped to better understand the challenges posed in various theatres/zones of conflict worldwide.

The importance of understanding the role played by local populations in conflict management is one of the main focuses in a part of the book. Local population is the centre of gravity in peacekeeping operations/missions. Building relationships with the local populations is a core necessity, which requires a good understanding of the root cause of the conflict; therefore, there is a need to be sensitive to local culture and tradition. This not only helps to find better acceptability but also provides security to the peacekeepers.

There was a time when Blue Helmets were known as angels of peace and flying a blue flag used to instil confidence among the populace. Today, the Blue Helmets themselves, including the ones in uniform, have become targets of violence. Accordingly, safety and security of peacekeepers has become the foremost concern of all the heads of the missions. Underlining this, one author has provided a detailed description and drawbacks of the existing security mechanism (which is applicable only to civilian staff members), and also challenges of overlapping responsibility of providing security to both uniformed peacekeepers and civilian security staff members.

State of mental health of the soldier impacts the outcome of the battlefield, and also difficult battlefield conditions have a major impact on the mental health of soldiers. At times, this effect continues to linger well past their tours of duty. Unless this is addressed in a timely manner, it will impact subsequent operations. Three chapters have been devoted to advance the argument of the impact of PTSD on uniformed personnel in peacekeeping missions, highlighting the responsibility of organisations to research and develop treatment for the same.

In order to address the complex challenges facing peacekeepers in conflict zones, present-day peacekeeping missions have become multidimensional and multifunctional with peace building at its core. These activities, amongst others, encompass a lot of developmental

activities, which generally remain in the domain of civilian experts. Therefore, in order to make meaningful contribution to restore peace in the conflict zone, there should be a common understanding and will to work in coordination on part of all the stakeholders of the mission. This challenge, one of the biggest in most of the peacekeeping missions, has been appropriately acknowledged and highlighted by majority of the authors across the entire length of the book.

Mismatch between task and resources, lack of well-trained, well-equipped troops, varying interpretation of rules of engagement and unwillingness on part of developed nations to participate in difficult missions are a few other common challenges that have been amply underlined by both academicians and UN experts in field.

The eminent experts have made sincere efforts in putting together some of the important challenges that routinely plague UN peacekeeping operations/missions. However, there are a few other issues which are equally important and should have been deliberated upon. First, since the main title of the book is *The United Nations Peacekeeping Challenge*, terms like 'Peace Support Operations' and 'Peace Operations' have been used even though there is no mention of these terms in the Security Council resolutions authorising the missions in the UN Charter or for that matter, in other official documents of the UN. Even the UN Capstone Doctrine refers only to peacekeeping operations/missions either under UN Chapters VI or VII. There is much confusion over usage of these terms. However, based on historical progress of peacekeeping missions, the term 'Peace Operations' has gradually found acceptance in the UN peacekeeping fraternity. This term includes traditional peacekeeping operations/missions under Chapters VI and VII, peace-building missions, regional peacekeeping operations/missions under Chapter VIII and political missions. There are also terms like 'Hybrid' and 'Stabilisation' missions which have found flavour with the UN in the recent past, even though these too are nothing more than UN peacekeeping operations/missions. For example, United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) is a peacekeeping mission under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The UN peacekeeping operations/missions (whether under Chapters VI, VII or VIII) find legitimacy and acceptance when the three basic principles, that is, consent of the parties, impartiality and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate, are adhered to. It is the general tendency of the developed nations of the West to use the term 'Peace

Support Operations'. It is because many Western nations feel that it is possible to create a secure environment only by use of force and NOT only when it is absolutely necessary. Therefore, use of the term 'Peace Support Operations' gives them enough flexibility to use force at will, without tying them down to the basic principles of peacekeeping of the UN.

Second, it is rather surprising to find an explanation of the difference between terms like 'peace enforcement operations' and 'robust peacekeeping operations' in Chapter 14. Even though this explanation is based on a citation from another publication, the author should have done some research before quoting another author. Use of force is allowed even under Chapter VI. Since most of the policies related to UN peacekeeping are dictated by the powerful nations, it has become their nature to thrust their ideas upon other member states. It is seen that the Western powers are increasingly using new terms and phrases to define peacekeeping operations. These new terms serve to confuse the listener and further their aim—that of advancing their own philosophy on UN peacekeeping.

Third, the authors who have only academic background have been able to identify and analyse some of the challenges in depth and in greater detail. Yet, since these are unsubstantiated by examples from field, they remain merely academic in nature without much benefit to practitioners and peacekeepers in the field. Although a few authors have tried to make up for this shortfall by citing their personal experiences, in some cases it has fallen short of even rhetoric. So much so that in Chapter 1, an author who held a very high-level position in the UN and was alive to the complex challenges of the UN system, failed to come up with a critical analysis and specific recommendations.

Fourth, with changes in the security scenario, ensuring safety and security of UN peacekeepers (both uniformed and civilian) has become the primary responsibility of senior mission leaders. While the military peacekeepers have an edge over the civilians in terms of training and equipment, overindulgence in force protection is counterproductive. For example, peacekeepers attired in full military gear, ever ready to fire back at unknown threats and travelling in high-speed armoured personal carrier through narrow streets of villages are seen as arrogant, and it only serves to further distance the peacekeepers from the locals. This trend, unfortunately, is increasingly common with peacekeepers from the developed nations and more specifically, those from the North Atlantic

Treaty Organization (NATO) countries. On the other hand, those who can identify themselves with the local populations by means of their behaviour, being sensitive to the local culture and traditions with a gentle attitude, find better acceptability in the local society. As for civilian staff, a security mechanism is already in place. Strict adherence to this mechanism, despite its drawbacks, can reduce the chances of avoidable casualty to a great extent. Unfortunately, it is a big challenge to enforce and tie down civilian staff with strict discipline no matter what could the consequences if rules are not followed. For instance, plotting minute-to-minute location state of the civilian members when they are outside the UN compound will help to provide timely assistance at the time of crisis. But enforcing or institutionalising such measures is sometimes seen as an infringement into the personal space. Hence, despite the importance of the latter, education and security awareness must take precedence over provision of other security-related logistic support.

Fifth, one of the main themes of the book is to argue the case for recognising the necessity of, and support research and development of, treatment for PTSD of the UN peacekeepers. Three chapters have been devoted to advance this argument and are supported by examples from past conflicts. However, no evidence has been given to examine its implications on future peacekeeping operations/missions. The reason for this is simple: unless the soldiers who suffer from PTSD take part in UN peacekeeping operations/missions, it is not possible to prove such a theory. This is the concern of the West and Western nations, who rarely participate in complex peacekeeping operations/missions. For a country like India, whose soldiers regularly face threats similar to those faced in peacekeeping operation areas and which remains busy with such conflicts on almost daily basis, the effect of PTSD is the least concern for participating in UN peacekeeping operations/missions.

Sixth, much has been stated about what has been done and what should be done to achieve better integration between the military and civilian staff members of the mission and other UN agencies working in field. This, however, is more complicated than meets the eye. For, in order to restore peace in the conflict zone, all stakeholders in the peace process, including UN and non-UN members and the experts in field, must work in tandem. This is a complex challenge because of different organisational structures and policy guiding their functioning. In regard to the UN staff members, who are employed in peacekeeping operations/missions, administration is their core competency and they lack any other

substantive skill. Whatever little capability they have is limited to support the operations of the peacekeeping mission. As for the other UN agencies in field, such as United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), they have reasonable substantive skills but are governed by different board of directors with different sources of funding. As such, they are fairly independent in their functioning. Consequently, the UN Secretariat (office of the UN Secretary General) does not have any say in their functioning and employment. In addition, substantive skills to execute important projects like institution building, health care and humanitarian work, and skilled engineers for infrastructure development, etc., are available mainly with non-government agencies. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), who have the expertise and capability, contribute under bilateral arrangement with the host government/nation.

Let alone non-UN agencies, it is very difficult to even bring all UN agencies on board a common platform because of their autonomy and associated difficulties. The most important player in this exercise, however, will be the leader of the mission. The leader must have the ability to coordinate and synergise the activities of all agencies in field. While integration within the mission is possible, it is difficult to achieve the same outside the mission. Further, the present type of heads of missions, or special representatives of the Secretary General of the UN, is, to a great extent, myopic in their strategic vision. Most of them are unable to see beyond the peace agreement, cessation of hostility, democratisation, conduct of election and exit. Moreover, these leaders are generally not acceptable as the unified leaders in the conflict zone even by the other UN agencies in the field. To find a person who meets the qualitative requirement of such leadership demand will remain a big challenge. And those who meet the requirement may not be acceptable because of political compulsions.

Finally, this book seems like a collection of work furthering Western ideas on UN peacekeeping, even though the capable nations of West rarely participate in complex peacekeeping operations/missions. On the other hand, India—one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions—having already suffered more than 160 fatalities, did not find any mention in the book. Further, despite some of the important takeaways, challenges brought out in the book are rather common and already available in the public domain. These challenges are not something that cannot be outwitted. It depends on the person who leads

the mission. But there are other complex challenges, like organisational dysfunction, external involvement in internal affairs, interpretation of mandate and understanding and interpretation of principles of peacekeeping, which are more difficult to address. For instance, in Somalia, there was no legitimate leader to give consent and Mohd Aideed (leader of the belligerent group) never consented to a UN multinational operation. It is only after an Algerian senior diplomat, Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun, was appointed as the leader of UN mission in April 1992 and he could forge a special relationship with Aideed that things started to look brighter. At the behest of Sahnoun, Aideed even agreed to the deployment of 500 UN peacekeepers in Somalia for protection of humanitarian aid convoys. But later, dismissal of Sahnoun and UN's decision to deploy 3,000 peacekeepers without consulting either Sahnoun or Aideed seems to be the turning point of UN peacekeeping mission in Somalia. I expected much more important issues from the conglomeration of so many eminent authors. Despite the best effort, this book will be of limited benefit to readers seeking an insight into the intricacy of UN peacekeeping. The *United Nations Peacekeeping Challenge: The Importance of the Integrated Approach* is only a 'could read' book.