

# UN peacekeeping operations: Why India's peacekeepers are sought after

 [www.ibnlive.com/blogs/india/lt-gen-syed-ata-hasnain/un-peacekeeping-operations-why-indias-peacekeepers-are-sought-after-14405-1118834.html](http://www.ibnlive.com/blogs/india/lt-gen-syed-ata-hasnain/un-peacekeeping-operations-why-indias-peacekeepers-are-sought-after-14405-1118834.html)

» »

## About Blogger

A Sherwoodian and a Stephanian, Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM & BAR (Retd) is proud of his educational background as he is of his parentage and his Regiment. A second generation soldier whose father was also a General Officer of the Indian Army, the Hasnain family is fiercely loyal to its Regiment - The Garhwal Rifles. One of Indian Army's highest decorated General Officers, he was awarded honours for command of troops in every command assignment. The Hasnain family has 10 decorations to its credit, the maximum in any military family with the PVSM being awarded both to father and son, one of the rare achievements. The General has exposure to diverse military situations through service in Operation PAWAN (IPKF in Sri Lanka), Operation MEGHDOOT (Siachen Glacier), Eastern Ladakh, Punjab insurgency, Line of Control (J&K) and the North East. Even abroad he was a witness to the horrific situation in the near genocide in Rwanda (Central Africa) as part of United Nations Forces. The crowning glory was his command of 21 Corps (Strike) and 15 Corps (J&K), ending his career as the Military Secretary of the Indian Army where he introduced his famous HR mantra - 'Play Friend Not God'. Now associated with two major Delhi based think tanks Vivekanand International Foundation and Delhi Policy Group, the General brings his musings to the public synthesizing his military experience and strategic outlook to express ideas on a range of issues. He speaks frequently at corporate conferences, international institutions such as the Rajaratnam School of International Studies and the training establishments of the three Services, besides the Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy of Administration, Mussorie, National Academy of Customs Excise & Narcotics, Faridabad.

Posted on: 10:37 AM IST Sep 28, 2015 IST

With Prime Minister having just completed his energetic campaign for India's elevation to the high seat of the UN Security Council (UNSC), we tend to forget the value of the role of the Indian Army in particular to the series of difficult UN peacekeeping missions. This is one of the criteria which are contributing to the inputs as India seeks its rightful place as a permanent member of the UNSC. I have been a proud Indian Peacekeeper and later was deeply involved in selecting and training Indian officers for their role in the UN peacekeeping efforts. I therefore consider it mandatory to highlight not just the quantum of Indian Army's contribution but equally and even more so the quality.

Firstly, a few aspects about what peacekeeping really involves, in layman terms. Mostly it is about keeping warring factions at bay from each other in an internal conflict/civil war; quite literally coming in their way or between them. It can also be all about keeping two nations which are adversaries, at bay. There can be a breakdown of order with the nation no longer able to support itself for a variety of reasons and peacekeepers step in to revive it. The situations can be quite different from each other with the UN peacekeepers either invited to maintain the peace post the signing of an agreement between parties to the conflict or it could be a forced intervention under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. The latter could involve the use of force which is specifically authorized with invocation of Chapter 7 for a given period of time.

The UN missions in Bosnia and in Somalia were under Chapter 7 which calls for peace enforcement. Majority of the missions are under Chapter 6 which envisages only self-protection while undertaking

peacekeeping. This usually involves a mission undertaking demobilization, destruction of military wherewithal, cantoning of the disarmed cadres, their transportation and rehabilitation, finally leading to an electoral process and establishment of a democratically elected government. This is of course the most desirable process but hardly ever will situations follow the chartered course. At different stages there will be allegations and counter allegations, attempts to get more out of concessions granted, or renegade actions by those opposed to the peace process. The mission in Democratic Republic of Congo is now into its 17th year and the mission in South Sudan is headed similarly. There have been some marked successes such as Mozambique and Cambodia and well-marked disasters such as Rwanda where the biggest genocide of civilians took place even with the presence of the UN peacekeepers. Watch the film Hotel Rwanda to get an idea of the sheer enormity of the threats and challenges faced by UN peacekeepers. The most challenging situations are under what UN peacekeepers call Chapter 6.5; when the mandate is under Chapter 6 but the situation warrants robust action under Chapter 7. It is then up to local commanders to decide and later justify. Inaction by the UN in Rwanda led to genocide of 8 lakh victims.



A UN Peacekeeping mission has a Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) as its head, usually a diplomat or a political figure of international repute. The two missions I served, in Mozambique and Rwanda, had an Italian and a Pakistani respectively as the SRSG. There are different departments to include among others, political, military, legal, human rights and civil police (civpol) as also an integrated logistics cell responsible for administration. The military component is under a two or three star General (Force Commander), with a HQ and is usually divided into formed troops (armed units/sub units) and a UN military observer group comprising only officers who operate unarmed as multi-national teams and act as the facilitators and the eyes and ears for the implementation of the mandate which is reviewed every six months or even less by the UNSC.

So where do India's peacekeepers score over all others and why is there such a demand for them. A couple of examples will illustrate this. In Mozambique in 1994 I was serving at the headquarters (HQ) of the mission at Maputo. It was a lovely city, rebuilding and emerging from the turbulence of a 16 year old civil war. Just across the border was South Africa, similarly moving towards abolition of apartheid. Maputo was a fun city with many NGOs and UN staffers and people wished to travel to Kruger Park and Johannesburg on weekends. In our contingent there was a military police platoon and a clerks platoon. The latter in particular was in great demand because if an office had an Indian Army clerk it was considered a boon. An Indian Army clerk was/is capable of speaking and writing English, reading

all the mail off the computer or the hard copies and sifting both into folders online or physical files for perusal of the officer concerned. He maintains diaries, responds to queries in writing or otherwise, manages registration of all incoming and outgoing mail, moves out to maintain liaison, does travel bookings and maintains accounts meticulously. That leaves just about nothing for the officer to do except take decisions, write memos, draft important agreements or make situation reports. In other words he can apply his mind and be free of office management; that is the greatest enabler in an environment where most UN personnel, up to fairly senior rank, have no office assistants. The reputation of efficiency of the Indian Army clerks went viral very soon and it became routine for me to be stopped in the corridors with a smile and a conversation which revolved around a request for the services of an Indian Army clerk.

In Rwanda, in early 1995 the SRSG was Mr Shahryar Khan of Pakistan (now the President of Pakistan Cricket Board), a wonderful boss to serve with. In a particular conference the eight people who walked up to brief him about military operations across the country were all Indian Army officers. He remarked to me why and how this was possible when almost 30 other nations were represented in the mission. Rwanda was divided into eight operational sectors each with its HQ headed by an officer of rank of Lt Col from eight different countries. All eight sector commanders found the two odd Indians under their command as the worthiest to be handed over responsibility to manage the operations branch. It goes without saying that the operations is the glamor branch requiring close affinity between the commander and the staff and complete trust. So the Indian officers won over their superiors with their professional capability as also their social ability. They could all drive UN cars comfortably (no chauffeurs in UN environment), speak and write flawless English, ensure effective documentation, analyze situations and present options, conduct verbal briefs and work with any form of communications, radio, telephone or computer. Their drafts needed no corrections and they mastered the UN formats in no time. Mr Shahryar Khan complimented my officers and remarked that such standards were not on display in the Pakistan Army contingents and wished to know how these officers were being selected. I gave him my explanation which included much of what was my responsibility as Military Secretary of the Indian Army, much later. Foreign assignments in the Indian Army are the preserve of the very best and the Army follows this meticulously in the selection procedure. For the UN staff and observers no officer can be considered unless he has put in at least a year's service in a turbulent counter insurgency environment or high altitude area. Thereafter to be shortlisted he has to score the right marks in which his performance on training courses and especially career oriented courses has to be high as also his personal qualities and confidential reports. A panel of officers appears before a selection committee of senior officers who essentially discern whether the recorded data of an officer is commensurate to his personality. They also ascertain articulation skills and then decide on nominations which have to be finally confirmed by the Army Chief. In the rarest of rare cases have we ever had mistakes; admittedly there have been a few cases of officers repatriated for misdemeanor/indiscipline but that can be expected in any large selection process.

It is the standard of training of an average Indian Army officer which stands him out; the experience of variety of situations he experiences across diverse terrain and nature of threats steels him. To cement that, all selected personnel are put through a specially designed training package by the Center for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK) at Delhi. Indian logistics officers have also excelled. It is well known that the Integrated Support Services of the UN which puts together the individual logistics components of armed elements, UN agencies and even some NGOs was the brain child of Lt Col Girish Sinha (Retd), an Indian Army officer.



Much has been written about the quantum of India's contribution right from the time of the UN commitment in Korea. There have been outstanding Force Commanders and in terms of valuable lives sacrificed for the UN India's contribution is the highest. The discipline of our troops, their basic training standards and their ability to engage with gritty and dangerous situations even at cost of risk to lives has always been appreciated internationally. There have been a few cases of misdemeanor and these have been strongly dealt with being mindful of the fact that even one negative incident sullies the image so painstakingly built over years of diligent hard work and sacrifice.

One is reminded of Operation Khukri in Sierre Leone executed by one of the finest Gurkha units of the Indian Army, 5/8 Gurkhas; the PVC won by Captain Gurbachan Salaria of 3/1 Gurkhas in 1961 in erstwhile Katanga and the operations in Somalia under Brig (later Maj Gen) Mono Bhagat) in Jun 1993. The latter operation established the quality of Indian operational decision making. The mission (UNOSOM) while under intense challenge from renegade militants in Mogadishu appealed to the Indian Brigade Commander for assistance to secure the airfield with a half squadron of Indian tanks which were till then not operational and still in buildup mode; in fact the Indian contingent was not even full strength. The Indian Commander did not even refer the issue to the Military Operations Directorate in Delhi, as usually mandated, and took his own decision to go ahead with the operations which ensured that the Pakistani squadron of tanks securing the airport could be relieved to assist in breaking the siege of the US embassy in Mogadishu. That one decision by Brig Mono Bhagat got embedded into the minds of the UN and US hierarchy and did more for India's military reputation than many other actions.

Amidst unfortunate and uncalled for canards against the Indian Army in the cyber domain it is necessary to remind the public why its Army is still considered the most professional and why Indian Army personnel stand out for their professionalism and sacrifice. It is not for nothing. The public must continue its faith in the men in uniform. There are none better in the projection of national image. After all it is an army still owned by the Indian people.