

# Peacekeepers Without a Veto: India's Contribution to United Nations Peace Operations and the Politics of Global Security Governance in the Twenty-First Century

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| Dates                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| <b>Summation:</b> 14/08/2026                                                                                                                                                                                        | United Nations peacekeeping is usually told as a story of shared burden in the service of a common good. This paper argues that the story is better read as one of unequal exchange. Since sending a medical unit to Korea in 1950, India has supplied more personnel, absorbed more risk, and sustained its commitment more consistently than almost any other member state, yet it has done so within a system in which the states that pay the largest share of the assessed budget rarely place their own soldiers in harm's way, and the body that authorises and oversees every mission excludes India from permanent membership altogether. Drawing on United Nations data, government statements, and the scholarly literature on burden-sharing and peacekeeping politics, this paper treats India's peacekeeping record not primarily as a calculated instrument of national ascent but as a revealing case study in how the costs and the authority of international security are distributed unevenly between the Global North and the Global South. It traces this asymmetry across personnel numbers, financing, casualties, mandate design, and command structures, and asks what it would take to correct an arrangement in which the states that do the most dying supply the least deciding. It closes by considering what a more equitable peacekeeping order, rather than a more successful Indian diplomacy, would actually require. |
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| <b>Plagiarism Results</b>                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p><b>Keywords:</b> India, United Nations, peacekeeping, burden-sharing, Global South, Security Council reform, troop-contributing countries, political economy of security.</p> <p>"We maintain a strict zero-tolerance policy towards plagiarism. The submitted manuscript has undergone a rigorous plagiarism check. The current report indicates an 8% match across 39 websites, ensuring the uniqueness and integrity of the research work."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is a puzzle at the heart of United Nations peacekeeping that is easy to state and hard to resolve: the states that supply the personnel who patrol, guard, and sometimes die in UN missions are seldom the states that decide where those missions go, what they are asked to do, or when they are allowed to leave. Nowhere is this puzzle more visible than in the case of India, which has participated in more than fifty of the roughly seventy-one peacekeeping operations the UN has ever mounted and has deployed close to 290,000 military and police personnel since 1950, yet holds no permanent seat, and therefore no veto, on the Security Council that authorises and directs the very missions its soldiers serve in. This paper treats that gap not as an unfortunate footnote to an otherwise successful story of Indian diplomacy, but as the central fact to be explained. Rather than ask how peacekeeping has helped India rise, this paper asks what India's experience reveals about how the costs and the authority of international peace and security are actually distributed – and who bears each (Bellamy & Williams, 2021; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-c). The twenty-first century has sharpened this imbalance rather than softened it. Mandates have grown more ambitious and more dangerous, often requiring troops to operate without the consent of every party to a conflict, in environments saturated with non-state armed groups, terrorism, and organised crime. Missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Mali, and the Central African Republic have recorded fatality rates far above those of the lightly armed observer missions of the Cold War era – missions staffed overwhelmingly by personnel from the Global South. At the same time, the wealthier states that fund the bulk of the assessed peacekeeping budget have grown more reluctant to commit their own troops, more inclined to delay or dispute their payments, and more willing to press for mandate changes and drawdowns with limited consultation of the countries whose soldiers actually carry those mandates out. This paper asks three connected questions. First, what exactly has India put into the peacekeeping system since 2000, and on what terms? Second, what has it received back, in institutional voice, financial compensation, and protection from risk? Third, what does the resulting ledger tell us about the wider structure of global security governance, beyond India's own case? (Congressional Research Service, 2024; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b). The argument matters beyond India's own foreign-policy calculations. As the United Nations marked its eightieth anniversary in 2025, several long-running missions, including those in Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, had wound down or begun drawing down under host-government pressure and donor fatigue, even

as new crises in Sudan, the Sahel, and the Middle East generated fresh demand for stabilisation. Major financial contributors in North America and Europe have shown declining appetite for open-ended peacekeeping commitments, while personnel-supplying states from the Global South have continued to keep existing missions functioning. If peacekeeping is treated purely as a diplomatic opportunity that India has skilfully exploited, this asymmetry disappears from view. Treated instead as a structural feature of the system, it becomes the question that any honest account of India's peacekeeping record has to confront (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b; United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2024). This paper draws on publicly available data from the UN Department of Peace Operations, statements from the Government of India and its Permanent Mission to the UN, media coverage of specific deployments, and the academic literature on burden-sharing, troop-contribution politics, and Security Council reform. Because deployment figures are revised monthly, the paper relies on the most recent verifiable data points available at the time of writing. The purpose is not to catalogue India's contribution for its own sake, which has been done elsewhere, but to use that contribution as a lens on a persistent structural imbalance within the UN peace and security system.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Burden-Sharing and the Political Economy of Peacekeeping

A body of scholarship has examined UN peacekeeping through the lens of burden-sharing: who pays, who serves, and why the two groups so rarely overlap. Bellamy and Williams's edited volume *Providing Peacekeepers*, and their later synthesis *Understanding Peacekeeping*, document how the financial architecture of UN peacekeeping – assessed contributions weighted toward wealthier economies, reimbursement paid to troop contributors at a flat per-soldier rate – has produced a durable division of labour in which a small number of mostly Western economies fund the system while a different, mostly Asian and African, set of states staff it. Their comparative chapters, including Lieutenant General Dipankar Banerjee's contribution on India, situate this division within a wider analytical frame of national interest, institutional incentive, and normative commitment, but the underlying data point in a consistent direction: financial power and operational risk are held by different groups of states almost by design (Bellamy & Williams, 2013, 2021). Quantitative work on the correlates of troop contribution reinforces this picture from a different angle. Passmore's study of democratisation and peacekeeping contribution finds that developing states have used deployments partly to manage domestic civil-military relations, suggesting that personnel-supplying states often have their own internal reasons for accepting a

role the wealthier world has largely vacated. Stojek and Tir's analysis of the correlates of troop contribution finds that reimbursement incentives, alongside trade ties and historical relationships, help explain which states send troops where – a finding that, read against the modest and often delayed reimbursement rates discussed later in this paper, suggests the incentive on offer is considerably weaker than the risk it is meant to offset (Passmore, 2022; Stojek & Tir, 2015).

## 2.2 A Framework for Analysing Unequal Exchange in Peacekeeping

This paper analyses India's peacekeeping record along three axes of asymmetry rather than through the conventional Security Council 'holy trinity' of consent, impartiality, and minimum force, though that doctrinal framework remains relevant to how missions are conducted on the ground (Bellamy & Williams, 2021). The first axis is input asymmetry: the gap between the personnel, risk, and specialised capability a state supplies and the financial contribution it makes, which for India runs strongly in one direction – heavy on personnel and risk, comparatively light on assessed financing relative to its economic weight. The second is institutional asymmetry: the gap between operational contribution and formal decision-making power, most starkly visible in India's exclusion from permanent Security Council membership despite its personnel ranking. The third is distributive asymmetry: the gap between the reimbursement and recognition a contributing state receives and the actual cost, financial and human, that its contribution imposes on it. Realist, liberal institutionalist, and constructivist accounts of why states contribute to peacekeeping – national interest, normative commitment to multilateralism, identity construction through service – remain useful for explaining why India accepts this arrangement, but they should not be mistaken for evidence that the arrangement is balanced (Krishnasamy, 2010). Three categories of possible contribution are worth separating clearly: personnel (troops, police, civilian experts); finance (assessed and voluntary contributions); and leadership or agenda-setting (senior mission and headquarters posts, and influence over Security Council mandate design). The historical pattern is stark: wealthy Western economies have specialised heavily in the second category and, to a real extent, the third, while a comparatively small set of Asian and African states – India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Ghana among them – have specialised almost entirely in the first. India is unusual only in having pushed further than most into the third category as well, producing a disproportionate number of Force Commanders and senior UN officials relative to its share of the assessed budget – an achievement that nonetheless stops well short of the one form of authority, a permanent Security Council seat, that would let India's operational experience translate directly into mandate-setting power (Krishnasamy, 1997, 2010).

It is worth pausing on why this framework, rather than the more familiar strategic-interest account, is the more useful one for understanding India's case. A strategic-interest account treats every honour, every command posting, and every diplomatic conclave as evidence that India's peacekeeping investment is paying off, and in a narrow sense it is: India's international standing on this issue is undeniably higher than that of states which contribute little. But a framework built entirely around India's gains struggles to explain why the gains have plateaued at reputation and operational command while the one institutional prize India has explicitly sought for decades – permanent Security Council membership – remains as distant as ever, or why the financial terms of India's participation have barely moved in real terms across that same period. An unequal-exchange framework does not have this difficulty, because it does not assume the system was designed to reward contribution in the first place; it assumes the system was designed, deliberately or by historical accident, to separate the supply of security labour from the authority to direct it, and asks what follows from that separation. The remainder of this paper tests that assumption against the record.

### **3. HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF AN UNEQUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR (1950–2000)**

The division of labour this paper describes has roots stretching back to the earliest years of UN peacekeeping. India's first contribution, a parachute-trained medical unit sent to Korea between 1950 and 1954, was itself a form of enabling labour rather than command authority: it treated the wounded and helped manage prisoner repatriation through the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission chaired by Lieutenant General K. S. Thimayya, but the decisions establishing the Korean mission and its terms were made elsewhere. The pattern repeated through the 1950s and 1960s: India chaired the International Commissions for Supervision and Control set up under the 1954 Geneva Accords and contributed an infantry battalion to the first UN Emergency Force in Sinai in 1956, supplying capable, self-sufficient units to missions whose mandates were negotiated among the major powers (Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, n.d.; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b). The UN Operation in the Congo between 1960 and 1964 illustrates the asymmetry in its starkest early form. India deployed two infantry brigades, an air force unit, and supporting elements – at one point more troops than any other contributing country – into a mission that combined combat operations with nation-building tasks and cost the lives of several Indian soldiers, in a crisis whose diplomatic terms were set primarily by the Security Council's permanent members and the departing colonial power. Indian commanders led multinational forces through one of the most difficult operations in UN history without corresponding influence over the

political framework within which that operation unfolded, an experience Indian strategic commentators still cite as the formative lesson behind the country's doctrine of restraint and mandate discipline – a doctrine adopted, notably, by the side supplying the labour rather than the side writing the mandate (Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, n.d.; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b). Across the following decades, India's contributions to missions in Angola, Mozambique, Somalia, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia followed the same underlying arrangement: substantial personnel commitment, real operational risk – the UNOSOM II experience in Somalia offered an early, costly lesson in the dangers of robust Chapter VII mandates – and no proportional increase in institutional standing. By the century's end, India had built dedicated peacekeeping training infrastructure, including the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in New Delhi, that let it professionalise its role as a labour supplier even as its formal voice within the UN's security architecture remained unchanged. It is worth noting what this infrastructure represents: a state investing in its capacity to keep supplying the input the system rewards least, because the alternative – supplying less and mattering less – offered no better path to the institutional voice it actually sought (Business Standard, 2025; Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, n.d.; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b) (see Figure 1).

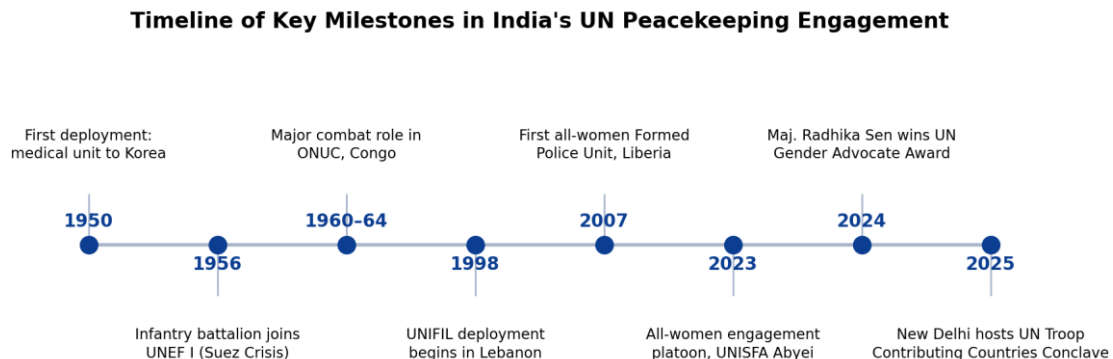


Figure 1: Timeline of key milestones in India's UN peacekeeping engagement, 1950–2025, read here as a timeline of sustained input rather than of rising institutional reward. (Source: compiled by the author from UN Peacekeeping, UN News, and Government of India sources).

## 4. THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY LEDGER: WHAT INDIA GIVES, WHAT IT GETS

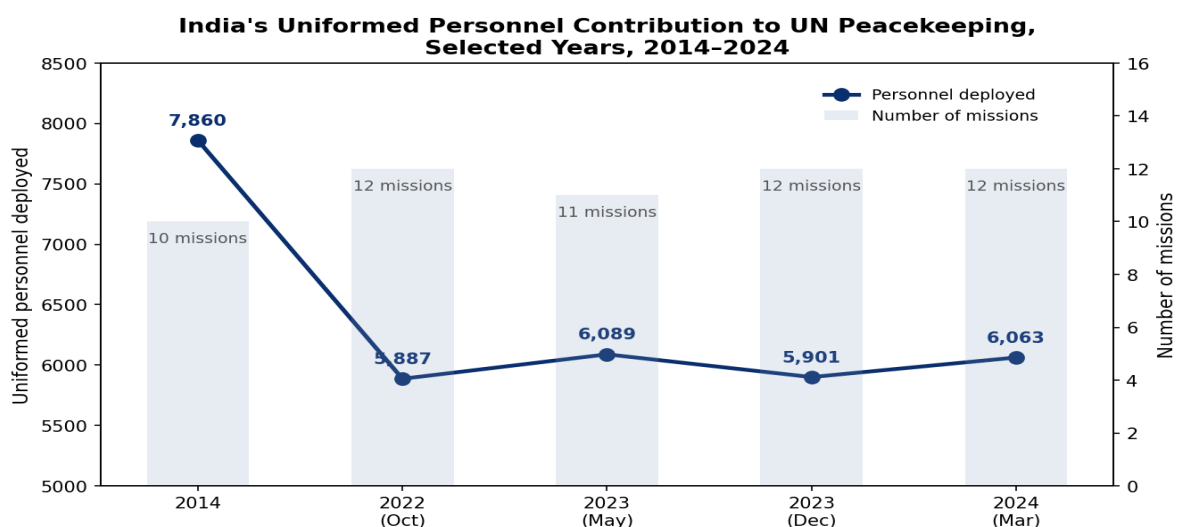
### 4.1 Scale of Contribution Versus Scale of Say



India's contribution to UN peacekeeping in the twenty-first century has remained remarkably steady even as overall demand for peacekeepers has fluctuated. According to UN Department of Peace Operations data, India had 5,901 military personnel deployed as of December 2023, ranking first among all troop-contributing countries on that measure, and remained the single largest overall contributor of uniformed personnel in 2024, across twelve missions. March 2024 figures place India's total uniformed contribution – troops, formed police, individual police, staff officers, and military experts combined – at 6,063 personnel, putting it in close competition with Nepal, Bangladesh, and Rwanda. Set this scale against the other side of the ledger: not one of these top personnel-contributing states holds a permanent Security Council seat, while every state that does hold one contributes only a small fraction of the uniformed personnel deployed worldwide. The 290,000 personnel India has deployed cumulatively since 1948 have not purchased a single vote's worth of additional formal authority over how future missions are designed (Goswami, 2025; United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2024; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-c).

#### Key data point: personnel supplied versus formal authority held (31 March 2024)

- India supplied 6,063 uniformed personnel, 16.5 percent of the combined total fielded by the nine leading contributors that month – yet holds no vote on the Security Council body that authorises the missions those personnel serve in.
- All nine of the leading personnel contributors that month – Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Rwanda, Pakistan, Indonesia, Ghana, China, and Morocco – were Asian or African states; among the Security Council's five permanent members, only China appears on that list.
- France, the United Kingdom, and the United States – three of the five states holding a permanent veto over every peacekeeping mandate – do not appear among the top personnel contributors at all.
- This inverse relationship between who supplies personnel and who holds authority is the structural core of the asymmetry this paper examines.



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*Figure 3: India's uniformed personnel contribution to UN peacekeeping, selected years, 2014–2024 – a decade of stable supply against an unchanged institutional position. (Source: compiled from UN Peacekeeping data, SIPRI, and Indian government statements.)*

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## 4.2 A Decade of Steady Supply, Static Reward

Figure 3 traces India's personnel numbers from 2014 through early 2024. What stands out is not volatility but constancy: after a decline from 7,860 in 2014, deployment has held in a narrow band of roughly 5,900 to 6,100 personnel across eleven or twelve missions every year since, even as several major missions elsewhere have closed or drawn down. Consistency of supply of this kind is precisely the behaviour a rational, self-interested contributor would avoid if the terms of exchange were unfavourable and adjustable; that India has instead sustained it for a decade suggests either that the non-material returns – reputation, training, solidarity – are judged sufficient compensation, or that the alternative of reduced participation is judged to cost India even the limited standing it currently holds. Either reading points to the same underlying imbalance: the terms of India's participation are not something India alone can renegotiate.

## 4.3 The Specialised Labour India Provides

Beyond raw numbers, India supplies precisely the categories of capability that UN missions chronically struggle to source elsewhere: complete, self-sufficient infantry battalions with organic logistics, engineering, and medical support. India has also supplied a disproportionate share of the system's senior operational leadership – fourteen Force Commanders, two Military Advisers, one Deputy Military Adviser, two Police Advisers including Kiran Bedi, and numerous Police Commissioners – without this leadership footprint converting into a Security Council voice of any kind. It is worth being precise about what this leadership actually is: authority over how a given mandate is executed in the field, not authority over what that mandate says. The distinction between operational command and political authorship is, in effect, the distinction this whole paper is about (Kumar, 2025; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b).

## 4.4 Deployment Geography and Risk Exposure

Indian peacekeepers are deployed across three continents: MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNMISS in South Sudan, UNISFA in Abyei, and MINURSO in Western Sahara in sub-Saharan Africa; UNIFIL in Lebanon, UNDOF on the Golan Heights, and UNTSO in the Middle East; and UNMOGIP on India's own border with Pakistan. What unites this



geography is not diplomatic convenience but risk concentration: with the partial exception of UNDOF and MINURSO, these are among the most operationally demanding theatres in the UN system, precisely the missions that wealthier, better-represented member states have been least willing to staff with their own soldiers. India's geographic breadth is therefore also a breadth of exposure, spread across almost every active high-risk theatre the UN currently manages (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b).

#### **4.5 The Financial Underside: Reimbursement Against Assessed Contribution**

India's financial relationship with the peacekeeping system runs in both directions, and the terms are informative. As a contributor, India's assessed contribution to the regular peacekeeping budget has risen with its growing share of global gross national income, and it has made voluntary, non-reimbursable contributions of equipment and training support to other developing troop-contributing countries – in effect, subsidising the system twice over, once through personnel and once through resources it did not have to supply. As a recipient, however, India is reimbursed at the same flat, historically inadequate per-soldier rate paid to every other troop contributor, a rate this paper examines in more detail in Section 7.1. India's hosting of the 2025 New Delhi Conclave of Chiefs of Troop Contributing Countries, at which External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar called for peacekeeping mandates to be set in closer consultation with troop-contributing and host nations, is best understood as an attempt to build collective bargaining power among personnel suppliers precisely because individual bargaining power, within the existing financial architecture, is minimal (Centre for Land Warfare Studies, 2025; Congressional Research Service, 2024; News on Air, 2025c; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-a). One further comparison sharpens the point made throughout this section. India's cumulative peacekeeping deployment since 1948 is often cited, correctly, as a record matched by very few other states; recent tallies put its cumulative police contribution alone at close to a further 15,500 personnel on top of the roughly 290,000 military and police deployed overall. Set against a permanent Security Council seat, which by definition only five states hold and which none of them obtained through decades of accumulated field service, the disproportion is almost total: one form of standing is earned incrementally, mission by mission, casualty by casualty, over three-quarters of a century, while the other was fixed permanently in 1945 and has resisted every subsequent attempt at revision, however well-documented the case for change (Goswami, 2025; United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2024).

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## 5. SPECIALISED CONTRIBUTIONS THAT THE SYSTEM HAS NOT LEARNED TO COMPENSATE

### 5.1 Women Peacekeepers as an Underpriced Capability

India has sent women on UN peacekeeping duty longer than most troop-contributing countries, from the deployment of women medical officers to the Congo in 1960 through the first-ever all-women Formed Police Unit sent to Liberia in 2007, credited with encouraging greater participation by Liberian women in their own security sector. In January 2023, India deployed its largest single unit of women peacekeepers since 2007, an engagement platoon of two officers and twenty-five other ranks attached to the Indian Battalion with UNISFA in Abyei, specialising in outreach to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. This work has earned individual recognition – Major Suman Gawani in 2019 and Major Radhika Sen in 2024 both received the UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award, the latter for establishing Community Alert Networks in North Kivu with MONUSCO – and by early 2025 more than 150 Indian women peacekeepers were serving across six missions, an achievement marked by a February 2025 Conference on Women Peacekeepers from the Global South hosted in New Delhi for thirty-five nations. What this record has not yet produced is a change in the UN's own logistical and financial architecture: the specific accommodation, equipment, and predeployment support that make women's deployment feasible remain something troop-contributing countries like India must largely arrange and fund themselves, rather than a standard the UN system underwrites, even as it praises India's practice as a model for others to follow (Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York, 2023; Press Information Bureau, 2025; Singh & Raj, 2025; United Nations News, 2024).

### 5.2 Medical and Engineering Capacity as a System-Wide Subsidy

Indian contingents have long provided Level II and Level III field hospitals and engineering companies capable of infrastructure repair in extremely difficult terrain – capabilities that UN mission planners describe as 'force multipliers' because they let missions staffed by dozens of unevenly equipped national contingents function as coherent operational forces. In UNIFIL, the Indian contingent's Level II hospital treats not only peacekeepers but local populations. This is, in effect, a subsidy the wider mission and host community receive from India's defence budget rather than from the UN's own assessed resources, and it is a subsidy that does not appear anywhere in the formal accounting of who has 'paid' for a given mission's success (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b).

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### 5.3 Technology and the Double Burden of Modernisation

India has increasingly sought to position its defence industry, under the Atmanirbhar Bharat agenda, as a supplier of the unmanned systems, force-protection equipment, and situational-awareness technology that could reduce fatalities in high-threat missions; the October 2025 Conclave of Chiefs of Troop Contributing Countries in New Delhi devoted a dedicated session to this theme, and the Defence Expo 2025 showcased forty-one indigenous systems built around it (Insights on India, 2025; News on Air, 2025c). Read through the framework of this paper, this push amounts to a double burden: India is being asked, in effect, to fund and develop the safety equipment that a better-resourced, more equitably financed system would have provided centrally. That India has chosen to treat this burden as an opportunity for its defence industry does not change the fact that it is a cost the system's financial architecture has shifted onto a personnel-supplying state rather than absorbed itself. India's own extensive counterinsurgency experience has additionally been repurposed into training curricula at its Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping, now exported to partner countries – a further instance of a personnel-supplying state absorbing a capacity-building function that, in a more balanced system, might be centrally resourced by the UN itself (News on Air, 2025a).

### 5.4 Command Without Authority

Indian generals have served as Force Commanders across a range of missions, shaping troop rotation planning and the day-to-day interpretation of mandates on the ground. This is real influence, but it is bounded influence: it operates entirely downstream of decisions made by the Security Council about whether a mission exists, what it is authorised to do, and how long it continues. The distinction matters because it is often elided in accounts that treat India's command contribution as evidence of institutional standing. Command over execution is not the same as authorship of the mandate being executed, and conflating the two understates how limited India's actual influence over the system remains (Krishnasamy, 2010; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b).

## 6. THE STRUCTURAL ROOTS OF THE IMBALANCE

### 6.1 Underfunded Reimbursement as a Structural Subsidy

The approved peacekeeping budget for 2024–2025 stood at approximately 5.6 billion US dollars, a reduction of roughly 8.2 percent from the previous cycle. Troop- and police-contributing

countries are reimbursed at a standard rate – historically around 1,428 US dollars per soldier per month – that has long failed to track the actual cost of maintaining, equipping, and insuring deployed personnel. Chronic cash-flow problems, driven by the late or partial payment of assessed contributions by some major financial contributors, have periodically delayed even this inadequate reimbursement. The effect is a structural subsidy running from personnel-supplying states to the system as a whole: India and its counterparts absorb the gap between the flat reimbursement rate and the real cost of deployment, effectively financing part of the very missions they are nominally being paid to staff (Congressional Research Service, 2024; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-a).

## 6.2 Casualties as the Human Price of the Arrangement

More than 175 Indian peacekeepers have died in the line of duty since 1948, including losses in UNMISS and, most starkly, the 1960s Congo operation. Individual acts of courage have been recognised – gallantry awards, one Param Vir Chakra, and the UN's own Dag Hammarskjöld Medal awarded posthumously to several Indian personnel in recent years – but recognition of individual sacrifice is a different thing from institutional accountability for the conditions that produced it. No mechanism currently ties rising mission lethality to an automatic strengthening of the rules of engagement, resources, or consultation rights of the states whose soldiers are dying; the human cost of mandate overload, discussed next, is borne entirely on one side of the ledger (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b; United Nations News, 2024).

## 6.3 Mandate Overload as Cost-Shifting

The Security Council's tendency to authorise increasingly ambitious mandates – civilian protection, disarmament, election support, human rights monitoring, stabilisation against armed groups – without a corresponding increase in resources, personnel ceilings, or realistic timelines is often called 'mandate overload' or 'mission creep.' Viewed through this paper's framework, mandate overload is better described as cost-shifting: the Council adds tasks centrally while the troop-contributing country absorbs the resulting operational strain locally. India has been a vocal critic of this dynamic, calling for the Secretary-General's annual peacekeeping reports to move beyond a descriptive template toward an analytical framework that identifies exactly where mandates and resources have fallen out of alignment – in effect, asking the body that authors the imbalance to first admit that it exists (Congressional Research Service, 2024; Krishnasamy, 2010).

## 6.4 Host-State Constraints Compounding the Burden

Host-state consent, the formal precondition for any peacekeeping mission, has grown increasingly conditional and sometimes openly contested. Missions in Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have faced host-government demands for accelerated withdrawal, movement restrictions, and public hostility fuelled by disinformation. These pressures fall on troop-contributing countries directly – India's forces must balance mandate implementation against the risk of damaging the UN's political relationship with the host government – even though the underlying political relationship is negotiated between the UN Secretariat, the Security Council, and the host state, largely without troop-contributing country input (Congressional Research Service, 2024; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b).

### 6.5 Reputational Risk Distributed Unevenly

UN peacekeeping's reputation has suffered from sexual exploitation and abuse scandals involving personnel from several troop-contributing countries. Indian contingents have generally maintained a reputation for discipline, but the reputational damage from any single contingent's misconduct is absorbed by the peacekeeping enterprise as a whole – and, in a further asymmetry, is absorbed disproportionately by the personnel-supplying states whose soldiers are on the ground and visible, rather than by the financially dominant states whose absence from the field insulates them from the same scrutiny. A related risk, disinformation campaigns targeting peacekeeping contingents in several African deployment theatres, again falls on troops physically present rather than on the distant institutions that authorised their presence, requiring India and others to invest in community engagement and public communication simply to protect personnel already carrying the operational load (Congressional Research Service, 2024; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b).

### 6.6 Security Council Exclusion as the Core of the Imbalance

Every asymmetry catalogued above traces back to a single institutional fact: India has no permanent seat, and therefore no veto, on the Security Council body that authorises and directs the missions its soldiers serve in. India's Permanent Representative to the UN has argued that the Council's structure reflects the power realities of 1945 rather than of the twenty-first century and has called for peacekeeping reporting that more analytically addresses the gap between mandates and the Council's own responsibilities. Read in the context of this paper, that call is not simply a request for status; it is a request to close the one gap from which most of the others follow (Centre for Land Warfare Studies, 2025; New Kerala, 2026). Taken together, the six constraints examined in this section – inadequate reimbursement, uncompensated casualties, cost-shifting through

mandate overload, host-state resistance, unevenly distributed reputational risk, and exclusion from the Security Council – do not operate independently of one another. Each reinforces the others. Because India has no seat on the Council, it cannot prevent mandate overload at the point of authorisation and can only protest it afterward. Because reimbursement is inadequate, India's incentive to accept riskier, more demanding mandates in exchange for reputational reward is stronger than it would otherwise be, which in turn makes it easier for the Council to keep authorising demanding mandates without corresponding resources. Because reputational risk falls disproportionately on visible, present contingents, India has additional reason to invest in the kind of disciplined, high-profile conduct that then gets cited, somewhat circularly, as evidence that the current system is working well enough not to need fundamental reform. Understanding the imbalance as a self-reinforcing system, rather than a list of six separate complaints, is essential to understanding why incremental fixes to any one item on the list – a modest reimbursement increase here, a slightly more analytical annual report there – have not been sufficient to shift the underlying arrangement over more than two decades of trying.

## **7. WHAT THE IMBALANCE MEANS: RETHINKING INDIA'S STRATEGIC CALCULUS**

### **7.1 The Limits of Soft Power Without Structural Power**

India's peacekeeping record undeniably functions as soft power, allowing it to present itself as a disciplined, principled contributor to global security that seeks no territorial gain. This reputation resonates with other Global South states and helps India position itself as a bridge-builder in UN forums. But soft power of this kind has a ceiling, and seventy-five years of evidence suggest India has reached it: reputation has translated into praise, into individual honours such as those received by Majors Suman Gawani and Radhika Sen, and into invitations to chair conferences and conclaves, but it has not translated into the one structural change – a permanent Security Council seat – that would convert accumulated goodwill into standing authority. A more sober reading of India's soft-power dividend is that it has been real but bounded, useful for managing India's international image without altering the distribution of power the image is meant to influence (Singh & Raj, 2025; United Nations News, 2024).

### **7.2 Security Council Reform: Necessary but Insufficient**

India's peacekeeping contribution remains central to its case for permanent Security Council membership, and the roughly 290,000 personnel deployed since 1948 supply a form of credibility few other aspirants can match. This case is pursued jointly with the other G4 nations and through outreach to the African Union's Ezulwini Consensus position, within the slow-moving Intergovernmental Negotiations process. Yet the obstacles are structural rather than merely diplomatic: amending the UN Charter requires a two-thirds General Assembly vote and ratification by all five existing permanent members, each holding an effective veto over reform, and India's bid continues to face opposition from China and from the Uniting for Consensus grouping led by Italy and including Pakistan. Even a successful reform, moreover, would only address the institutional axis of the imbalance described in this paper; it would not, on its own, correct the financial and distributive asymmetries examined in Section 7 (Centre for Land Warfare Studies, 2025; New Kerala, 2026).

### 7.3 Defence Diplomacy as Partial Compensation

Sustained peacekeeping engagement does deliver real, if partial, compensation to India in the form of defence diplomacy: rotational deployment gives Indian forces exposure to multinational command structures and interoperability with dozens of national contingents, and the Indian Army's hosting of the October 2025 UN Troop Contributing Countries' Chiefs Conclave, which drew fifteen chiefs and seventeen vice chiefs from thirty-two countries, functioned as a platform for defence-industry promotion and bilateral military diplomacy, including President Droupadi Murmu's reception of visiting chiefs and Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi's bilateral meetings with counterparts from Burundi, Tanzania, Poland, Ethiopia, Nepal, and Uganda. These gains are genuine, but they accrue to India's defence establishment and industry rather than to the structural position of troop-contributing countries within the UN system as a whole – a distinction that matters if the goal is systemic reform rather than national advantage alone (News on Air, 2025b, 2025c).

### 7.4 The Neutrality Trap

India's doctrinal commitment to impartiality and restraint, a legacy of the Congo experience, sits uneasily alongside the argument this paper makes. A state that wishes to draw attention to a structural imbalance without appearing to abandon the neutral, dependable reputation that gives its complaints credibility faces a genuine bind: too pointed a critique of the system risks being read as special pleading, while too muted a critique lets the imbalance persist unnoticed. India's



diplomacy has generally chosen the second path, framing its concerns in the technical language of mandate-resource alignment rather than the more direct language of unequal exchange used in this paper – a choice that may protect India's standing as an impartial peacekeeper but that has also, arguably, slowed recognition of how deep the underlying asymmetry runs (Krishnasamy, 2010; Krishnasamy & Weigold, 2010).

### **7.5 Solidarity Among the Underrepresented: South-South Coalition Potential**

If individual diplomacy has produced limited structural change, collective diplomacy among personnel-supplying states offers a more promising avenue, one this paper's framework points toward directly. Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Rwanda, and Ghana share India's basic position in the ledger: heavy personnel and risk exposure, light institutional voice. India's occasional competitive framing of its standing relative to these states – noting, for instance, when Nepal or Bangladesh has ranked ahead of it in raw personnel numbers – sits in tension with the shared interest all of these states have in renegotiating the terms of the system as a bloc rather than competing for marginally better treatment within an unchanged one. India's hosting of the 2025 Troop Contributing Countries' Chiefs Conclave, drawing more than thirty nations, is significant less as a claim to regional leadership than as an infrastructure for exactly this kind of collective bargaining, if it is used that way consistently rather than episodically (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b). This same logic extends to India's broader Global South diplomacy at the UN General Assembly, the G20, and debates over international financial institution reform and climate finance, where the same basic pattern recurs: developing countries supply the labour, compliance, or exposure that a given global system depends on, while a narrower set of wealthy states retains the deciding vote. Peacekeeping is, in this sense, a particularly clear and well-documented instance of a much wider structural feature of global governance, and India's experience within it has diagnostic value for that wider pattern, not only for India's own standing (Centre for Land Warfare Studies, 2025; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b). Before turning to specific recommendations, it is worth being explicit about the standard against which any proposed fix should be judged. A reform is cosmetic if it improves how the imbalance is perceived without changing its distribution – for instance, a more sympathetically worded annual peacekeeping report that still leaves the reimbursement rate, the Council's composition, and the allocation of reputational risk untouched. A reform is structural if it shifts an actual cost, currently borne by personnel-supplying states, back onto the system as a whole, or if it gives personnel-supplying states a formal, binding role in decisions that currently exclude them. The recommendations that

follow are ordered, deliberately, from the most structural to the most modest, because the temptation in any discussion of this kind is to default to the easiest, least structural fixes first and treat them as sufficient.

## 8. REBALANCING THE LEDGER: RECOMMENDATIONS

If the imbalance identified in this paper is structural rather than incidental, the correctives that matter most are structural too, not merely diplomatic. Reform of the UN's reimbursement mechanism – inflation-adjusted, realistic troop-cost rates, and safeguards that insulate troop-contributing countries from cash-flow disruptions caused by the late payment of assessed contributions – should be pursued as a matter of basic fairness rather than as a bargaining chip in a larger diplomatic game (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-a). Coalitions of troop- and police-contributing countries, using forums such as the Chiefs Conclave India hosted in October 2025, should be built into a standing mechanism for collective bargaining over mandate design, force protection, and reimbursement, rather than convened periodically as a goodwill gesture. Given the rising lethality of contemporary missions, the UN itself – not only individual troop-contributing countries – should bear a greater share of the cost of predeployment training, protective equipment, and surveillance technology, building on but not simply outsourcing to the technology-sharing agenda India articulated at the 2025 New Delhi conclave (News on Air, 2025c; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b). The proven success of India's engagement platoons and all-women contingents argues for the UN to fund the logistical and welfare infrastructure that enables women's participation directly, rather than continuing to rely on individual troop-contributing countries to supply it and then citing the results as evidence of good practice elsewhere. On Security Council reform, India should continue to press its case while being explicit that reform of Council composition, though necessary, addresses only the institutional axis of the imbalance; pragmatic intermediate options, such as extended membership arrangements without immediate veto rights, are worth pursuing as steps rather than substitutes for full structural change (Singh & Raj, 2025; United Nations News, 2024).

Finally, closing the information gap matters in its own right: consolidated, regularly updated public data on deployments, casualties, honours, and the actual cost borne by contributing states relative to what they are reimbursed would make the asymmetry this paper describes visible to scholars, journalists, and the public in something closer to real time, rather than requiring it to be reconstructed, as this paper has done, from scattered UN releases, government statements, and press reporting (Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York, 2023; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b). None of this is an argument against India's continued participation

in UN peacekeeping, nor an implication that the normative and identity-based motives discussed in Section 2.3 are insincere. India's peacekeepers have, by any reasonable measure, done real good in the field: hospitals staffed, convoys protected, ceasefires monitored, and, in the case of engagement platoons such as those deployed to Abyei, forms of community trust built that few other contingents have matched. The argument is narrower and, in a sense, more uncomfortable: that doing really good within an unequal system does not, by itself, correct the system's inequality, and that celebrating the good done can inadvertently substitute for confronting the terms on which it was done. A paper that only tallied India's contribution, without asking what India received in exchange for it, would risk exactly this substitution – treating the size of the contribution as though it were itself an answer to the question of whether the arrangement is fair. It is not; a large contribution made on unequal terms remains a contribution made on unequal terms, however impressive the contribution itself may be.

## **9. CONCLUSION: TOWARD A MORE EQUITABLE PEACEKEEPING ORDER**

Three-quarters of a century after its first deployment to Korea, India remains one of the United Nations' most consistent contributors of uniformed personnel, sustaining thousands of troops, police, and specialised units across a dozen missions on any given day. This paper has argued that the right way to read that record is not primarily as evidence of a successful strategy for national ascent, but as a sustained demonstration of how unevenly the costs and the authority of international peace and security are distributed. India supplies personnel, absorbs casualties, subsidises reimbursement shortfalls, and increasingly funds the technology needed to keep its own soldiers safe; in return it receives reputation, limited command influence, and a diplomatic case for reform that the states holding actual veto power have shown little urgency to accommodate. These are not separate problems to be solved one at a time through better Indian diplomacy. They are facets of a single structural arrangement and treating them as such is the precondition for addressing any of them seriously (United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2024; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b). The deeper story of India and UN peacekeeping in the twenty-first century, then, is not a story about India's rise but about the gap between operational responsibility and institutional authority that peacekeeping makes unusually easy to measure. India supplies the personnel who patrol the buffer zones, staff the field hospitals, and absorb the casualties when missions go wrong, from outside the room where the decisions establishing and shaping those missions are made. Whether that gap closes will depend less on how skilfully India continues to make its case and more on whether the states currently on the other side of the ledger – those that

hold the vote but not the risk – come to see the arrangement as untenable rather than merely convenient. Until then, the experience of India and its fellow personnel-supplying states offer less a guide to individual national strategy than a standing measure of how far the current peacekeeping order remains from the equitable one it claims to represent (Bellamy & Williams, 2021; Goswami, 2025; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b).

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