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## EDITORIAL

Bangladesh has maintained a firm commitment to peace, stability and constructive international relations since its independence. This commitment is clearly reflected in its longstanding participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO). Bangladesh began its journey in UN peacekeeping in 1988 with the deployment of the Bangladesh Army. Later, Bangladesh Police joined this endeavour in 1989, followed by the Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force in 1993. This year marks 38 years of Bangladesh's dedicated service to global peacekeeping. Over the decades, Bangladesh has emerged as one of the leading Troops and Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs) to the United Nations. Bangladeshi peacekeepers have earned wide international recognition for their professionalism, operational competence, impartiality, integrity and humanitarian commitment. Their service in diverse and complex mission environments has strengthened Bangladesh's reputation as a trusted and responsible partner in the pursuit of international peace and security. This distinguished record has been built on dedication, resilience and sacrifice. A total of 175 Bangladeshi peacekeepers has made the supreme sacrifice. Besides, 287 have sustained serious injuries in the line of duty so far. Their courage and selfless service remain a solemn testament to Bangladesh's unwavering commitment to uphold global peace, security and stability.

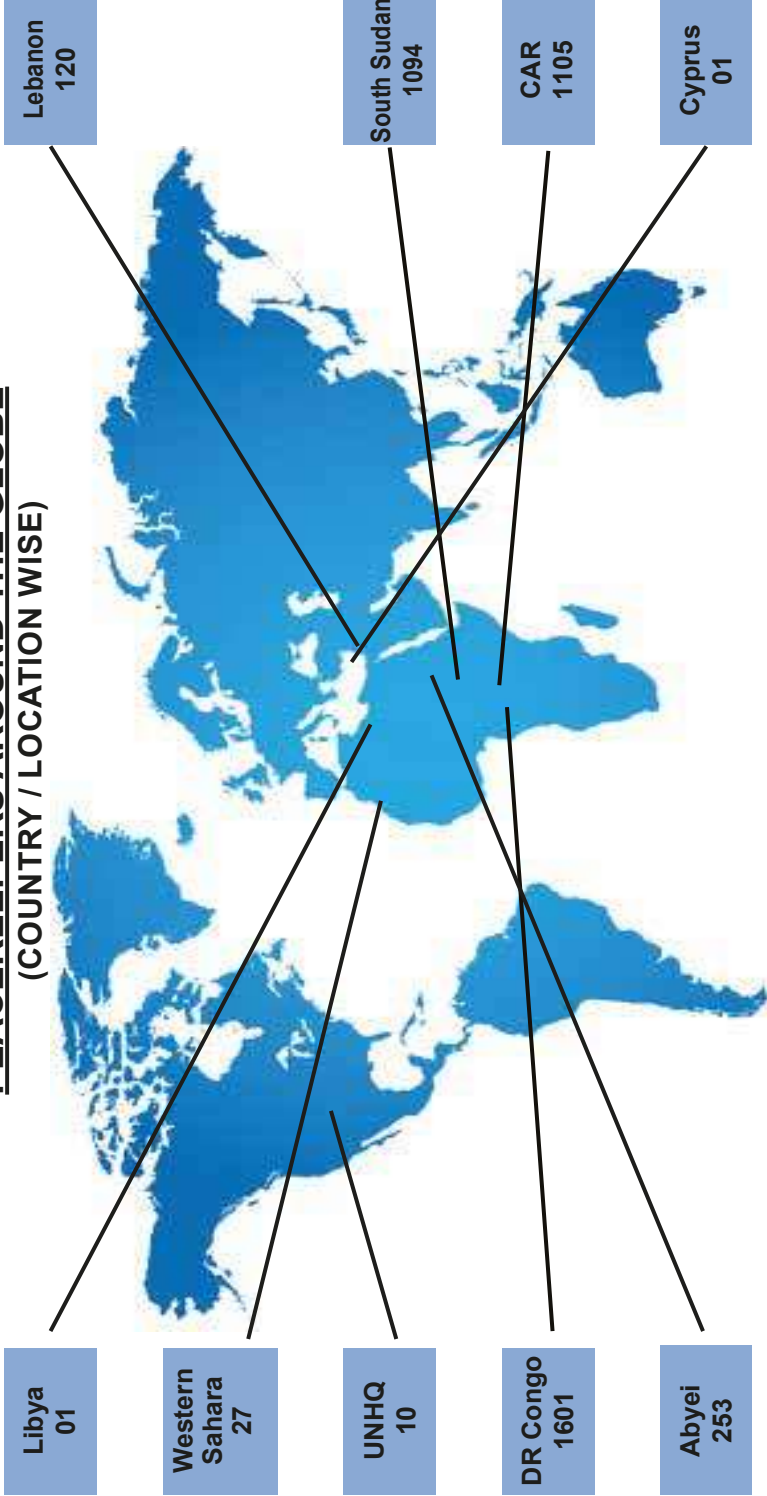
The International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers is observed worldwide every year on 29 May. The day honours the service and contributions of peacekeepers. It also pays tribute to those who have lost their lives or sustained injuries while serving under the UN flag. The official government calendar for 2026 shows that the Eid-ul-Azha holidays continued on 29 May 2026. Therefore, the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers this year is being commemorated on 10 June 2026. To mark this important occasion, the Armed Forces Division, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Bangladesh Police, presents the 12th edition of the *International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers Journal*. This edition examines the contemporary challenges, contributions and achievements of Bangladeshi peacekeepers in United Nations missions. It includes scholarly and practice-oriented articles on operational experiences, key accomplishments and future challenges. The journal also gives due attention to gender mainstreaming and the growing role of women in peacekeeping operations. The contributions in this edition are based on personal experiences, professional reflections and reviews of relevant literature. They offer valuable perspectives on the changing nature of peacekeeping and the complex realities faced by peacekeepers in the field. These articles are expected to enrich understanding, encourage informed discussion and inspire further academic and professional inquiry.

The Board of Editors deserves sincere appreciation for its dedication, professionalism and teamwork. We also extend heartfelt gratitude to all contributing authors for their thoughtful and insightful contributions. Despite their demanding responsibilities, they have generously shared their knowledge, experience and reflections with a wider readership. We look forward to continued cooperation, engagement and support from all stakeholders in our future endeavours.

## **COMPLETED PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS AROUND THE WORLD**

S/N	Country/Location	Name of Mission/Assignment	Total
1.	Afghanistan/Afghanistan-Pakistan	UNAMA/UNSM-UNGOMAP	11
2.	Angola	UNAVEM & UNAVEM III	635
3.	Bosnia	UNMIBH	177
4.	Burundi	BINUB	6
5.	Cambodia	UNAMIC/ UNTAC/UNMLT	1301
6.	Congo	MONUC/MONUSCO	42586
7.	Croatia/East Slovenia	UNTAES	76
8.	East Timor	UNAMET/UNTAET/UNMISSET	2718
9.	Ethiopia / Eritrea	UNMEE	1108
10.	Georgia	UNOMIG	131
11.	Haiti	UNMIH/ MINF/MINUSTAH	5382
12.	Iraq	UNGCI/UNMOVIC	124
13.	Iran	UNIIMOG	31
14.	Ivory Coast	MINUCI/ONUCI/UNOCI	32850
15.	Kosovo	UNMIK	539
16.	Kuwait	UNIKOM	8239
17.	Liberia	UNOMIL/UNMIL	23794
18.	Macedonia	UNPREDEP	7
19.	Mozambique	ONUMOZ	2622
20.	Namibia	UNTAG	85
21.	Rwanda	UNAMIR	1022
22.	Sierra Leone	UNAMSIL/ UNIOSIL	11981
23.	Somalia	UNOSOM-I -II/AMISOM	1973
24.	Sudan	UNMIS	9285
25.	South Sudan	UNMISS	16034
26.	Tajikistan	UNMOT	40
27.	Uganda / Rwanda	UNOMUR	20
28.	Western Sahara	MINURSO	483
29.	Yugoslavia (Former)	UNPROFOR / UNMOP	1584
30.	CAR & Chad	MINURCAT	60
31.	Darfur	UNAMID	8989
32.	Lebanon	UNIFIL	3199
33.	West Africa	UNOWA	2
34.	UNSOA (Nairobi)	UNSOA	1
35.	Syria	UNSMIS	18
36.	Mali	MINUSMA	14801
37.	CAR	MINUSCA	12828
38.	Somalia	UNSOM	7
39.	Office of the African Union	UNOAU	1
40.	Abyei	UNISFA	1650
41.	UNHQ	UNDPO	58
42.	Cyprus	UNFICYP	8
43.	Yemen	UNMHA	6
44.	Sudan	UNITAMS	3
45.	Libya	UNSMIL	1
<b>Grand Total</b>			<b>2,06,476</b>

**CURRENT DEPLOYMENT OF BANGLADESH  
PEACEKEEPERS AROUND THE GLOBE**  
(COUNTRY / LOCATION WISE)



**Total Deployment: 4,212**  
(Updated on 30 April 2026)

**Total Completed Deployment of Bangladeshi  
Peacekeepers-Force Wise**  
**(Updated on 30 April 2026)**

Bangladesh Army	Bangladesh Navy	Bangladesh Air Force	Bangladesh Police	Total
1,67,108	7,756	9,784	21,828	2,06,476

**Supreme Sacrifices for World Peace**  
**(From April 1989 to May 2026)**

Bangladesh Army	Bangladesh Navy	Bangladesh Air Force	Bangladesh Police	Total
138	04	09	24	175

**Summary of Injured Peacekeepers**  
**(From April 1989 to April 2026)**

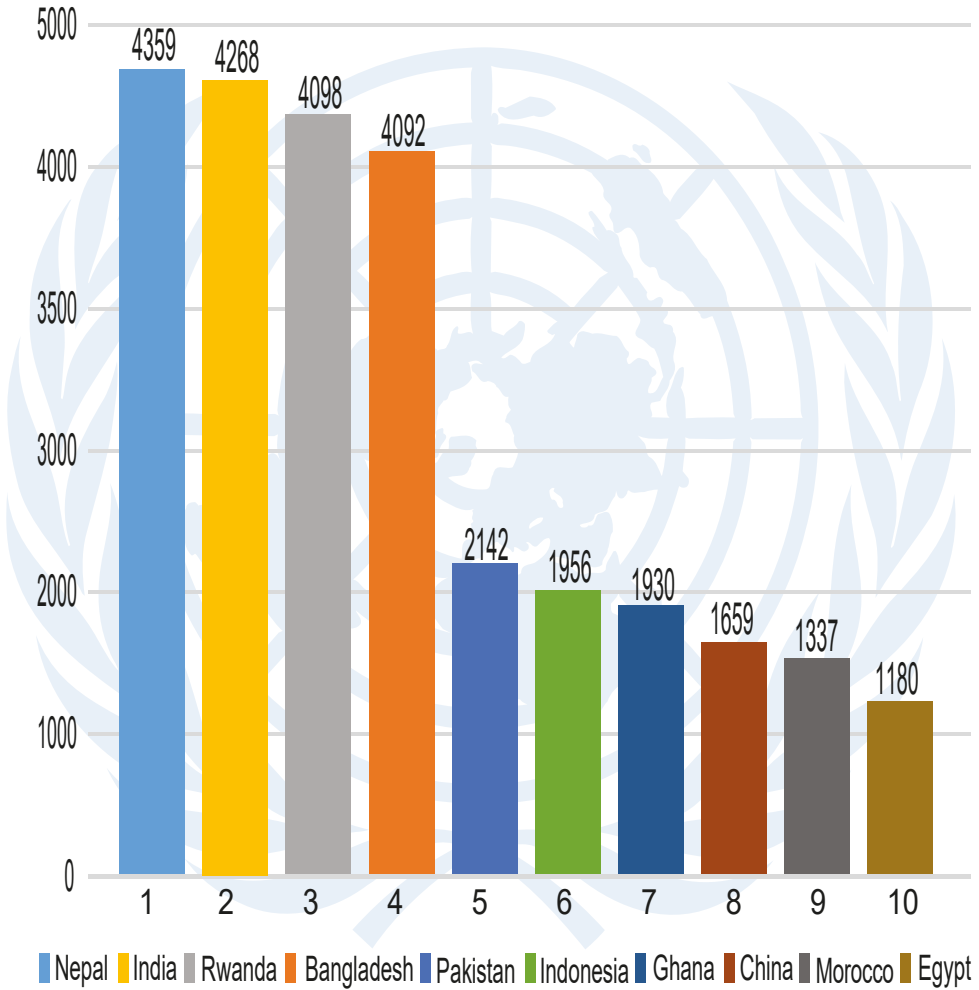
Bangladesh Army	Bangladesh Navy	Bangladesh Air Force	Bangladesh Police	Total
256	09	07	15	287

**Participation of Female Peacekeepers in UN Mission**

S/N	Forces	Participated	Currently Deployed
1	Army	1,755	274
2	Navy	62	7
3	Air Force	160	7
4	Police	1,928	6
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>3,905</b>	<b>294</b>

# **CONTRIBUTIONS TO UN OPERATIONS**

**(Report Date : 31 March 2026)**



**Reference:**

'Troop and police contributors,' available at: United Nations  
<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors> accessed  
on 12 May 2026

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# **Financial Inclusion for Peacebuilding: A Policy Framework for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations**

Md. Mahmudul Alam, PhD

## **Introduction**

The International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers observed every year on 29 May throughout the world honours service and sacrifice, yet it also poses a more challenging question: how can peacekeeping be credible when insecurity is sustained through routine economic exclusion? In the majority of missions, armed groups and local powerbrokers profit from everyday transactions. Checkpoint rents, opaque cash distribution, predatory lending, and restrictive rules that severe market ties all become routine in the conflict. Civilians often navigate an economy of survival in which collecting wages, paying school fees, or sending remittances can trigger theft, extortion, or retaliation. These frictions sit close to core peacekeeping aims: they shape protection outcomes, perceptions of fairness in assistance and the prospects for reintegration and reconciliation.

Financial inclusion is typically viewed as a development objective; in fragile and conflict-prone settings, it can also affect the prospects of peacebuilding. Account ownership has increased globally, but there are still significant numbers of adults who are not in formal finance, and women and the lower-income groups remain underserved.<sup>1</sup> Exclusion is not typically simply a matter of opening an account under conflict and displacement. It is interwoven with poor consumer protection, distrust of the government and the fear of how personal data can be used. Cash-intensive systems make resources visible and available, which may lead to more theft and coercive taxation, and informal credit may make people more dependent on local gatekeepers. In comparison, coercive extraction may be more difficult to maintain when households are paid or given transfers via safer mechanisms, they hold small surpluses and can access credible dispute resolution.

This agenda is important to the host populations and the troops and police-contributing countries. Bangladesh, for example, has been among the leading uniformed contributors in recent years.<sup>2</sup> Yet contribution is not measured only in personnel. It is also manifested in the operational ideas and practices that contribute to dealing with routine drivers of insecurity and facilitating sustainable transitions. With the pressure on peace operations budgets and increasingly demanding demands on demonstrable impact,

strategies that enhance performance and enhance legitimacy should be subject to close examination.

To make the inclusion-peacebuilding link usable for mission planners, this article develops a conceptual framework and maps it onto implementation pathways, standards alignment, and risk controls to coordinate with host authorities and partners. Its contribution is an operational policy architecture that connects micro-level financial mechanisms to outcomes that matter for peace operations. The framework is intended to help decision-makers answer practical questions: What is to be done first? What are the situations when digital channels are safer than cash? What can missions do to assist in creating inclusion without creating parallel systems and undermining local ownership? What are the necessary safeguards to prevent rights harms and diversion?

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Development**

The relationship between economic life and violent conflict is well established and is often discussed on the macro level of growth, distribution and state capacity. A peacekeeping-oriented strategy needs a theory that connects day-to-day financial tensions to actions and attitudes that are pertinent to safeguard civilians and preserve peace. There are four particularly useful theory families.

A first family focuses on grievance and relative deprivation, arguing that perceived unfairness in opportunities can sharpen group boundaries and justify violence.<sup>3</sup> Financial exclusion can become politically salient when it is seen as identity-linked, when access is mediated by biased documentation, or when delivery of aid replicates inequalities. A second family highlights livelihood security and human needs, where stable income and basic services reduce the appeal of armed mobilisation and facilitate social reintegration.<sup>4</sup> In this light, the capacity to stabilise consumption and preserve a small surplus can promote dignity and minimise dependence on hazardous coping mechanisms. A third family is concerned with social capital and institutional trust, demonstrating how cooperative norms and credible institutions reduce uncertainty, enable compliance with rules, and lower the transaction costs of collective action.<sup>5</sup> In peacekeeping environments, trust is usually limited and disputed. In that regard, the perceived fairness and transparency of payment and credit channels may affect the cooperation of communities with local authorities and their involvement in the peace processes.<sup>6</sup> Political economy research on conflict financing also shows how armed actors exploit markets and assistance flows through rent extraction and illicit finance.<sup>7</sup> Inclusion is not, therefore,

benign in itself. Financial channels can be taken over, informally taxed or used to terrorize opponents without protection and control.<sup>8</sup>

Research on financial inclusion introduces mechanisms that relate these theories to practical levers. Households can better distribute risk across distance, enhancing resilience to shocks with reduced transaction costs.<sup>9</sup> There is also some evidence that mobile money may affect poverty and gendered welfare outcomes in situations where adoption is meaningful and safe.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the same digital channels may generate new vulnerabilities in low-governance spaces, such as fraud, surveillance, and coercion at agent points. Aker and Mbiti also point out that the impacts of mobile technology are contingent on the presence of complementary infrastructure, market conditions and institutional arrangements.<sup>11</sup>

Table-1 combines these literatures into design requirements that are significant to mission coordination. It demonstrates that an effective inclusion agenda cannot be narrowed down to more accounts. Different theories point to distinct failure modes. Relative deprivation emphasizes perception and distributional fairness and conflict political economy emphasizes coercion and diversion. Collectively, they suggest that mission-supported inclusion should be selective, sequenced and governance-heavy rather than technology-first.<sup>12</sup>

**Table-1: Core literatures informing architecture requirements**

<b>Literature family</b>	<b>Core constructs</b>	<b>Implication for a peacekeeping-oriented inclusion architecture</b>
Relative deprivation and grievance	Perceived inequality; exclusion; mobilisation	Target access to reduce perceived exclusion across identity lines; communicate eligibility and pricing transparently
Human needs and livelihood security	Basic needs; coping; livelihood stability	Prioritise safe payments and savings that stabilise consumption; link support to livelihood pathways

Financial Inclusion...

Social capital and legitimacy	Trust; compliance; procedural fairness	Embed grievance redress and consumer safeguards; connect inclusion to fair public service delivery
Conflict political economy	Rent extraction; illicit flows; coercion	Anticipate coercion and diversion; map incentives before scaling
Digital finance and inclusion	Transaction costs; risk sharing; account use	Use agent-based and digital payments where feasible; ensure interoperability and gender-inclusive access
Prevention and sustaining peace	Root causes; inclusivity; institution building	Align economic measures with political strategy and local ownership

Source: Author's self-construct

Peacekeeping operations are also faced with neighbouring structures, such as national financial inclusion policies, humanitarian cash transfer systems, and economic reintegration packages of former combatants. They may be technically robust, but they tend to assume a stable government and non-controversial state power, which might not be the case in mission theatres.<sup>13</sup>

Table-2 highlights common constraints and what they imply to mission-oriented design. It explains why the peacekeeping-oriented guidance should be altered, but not copied, the adjacent policy toolkits. Humanitarian cash may secure welfare, but it may also undermine legitimacy when it is not linked to state structures and when the accountability mechanisms are not transparent. Good reforms can be expressed through national strategies, which are usually slow moving compared to mission timelines. A mission-compatible framework thus requires clear sequencing, protection measures, and a transition logic that assists partners to transition off emergency delivery to sustainable, locally owned systems.<sup>14</sup>

**Table-2: Selected empirical frameworks and limitations**

<b>Framework or practice area</b>	<b>Typical design focus</b>	<b>Limitation when transferred to peacekeeping settings</b>	<b>Implication for this article's framework</b>
National financial inclusion strategies	Regulatory reform and market development	Assumes stable settlement and functioning state capacity	Provide coordination steps that respect sovereignty while addressing capacity gaps
Humanitarian cash-based assistance	Rapid delivery and household welfare	Can entrench parallel systems if disconnected from public systems	Emphasise interoperability, transition planning, and accountability to affected people
Economic reintegration packages	Time-bound grants and training	Often fragmented, with weak links to financial ecosystems and consumer protection	Embed sustained access to payments and savings with safeguards and market linkages
Digital identification systems	Identity assurance and service targeting	Risks exclusion, surveillance, and discrimination when governance is weak	Require rights safeguards, data minimisation, and grievance redress
Financial integrity regimes	Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing controls	Rigid rules can exclude low-income users and push activity into informal channels	Use proportional, risk-based approaches that protect inclusion objectives

Source: Author's self-construct

## **Methodology**

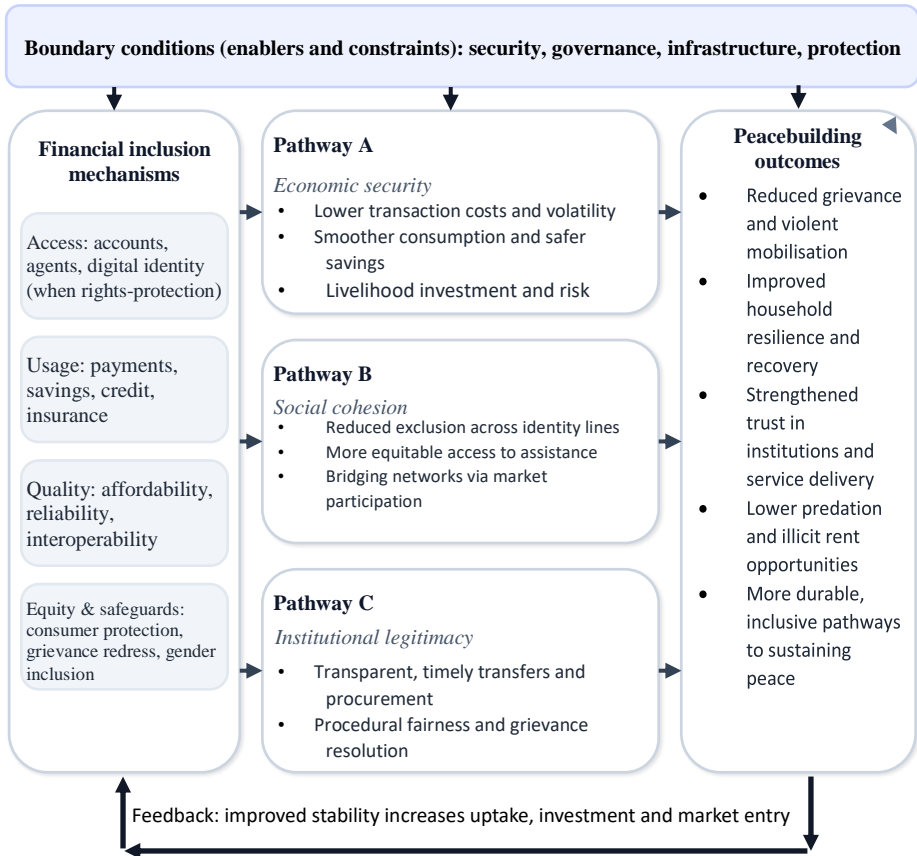
This is a policy-oriented and conceptual article. The analysis is based on an integrative, abductive synthesis methodology which builds a coherent account of mechanisms and boundary conditions, and translates those findings into actionable design aspects. The analysis using conceptual framework is suitable since the goal is to construct a structured system of ideas that can inform practical judgement in complex situations, not to test a single causal hypothesis.<sup>15</sup>

It was done in three steps. First, the concepts were coded into the most relevant to the mission settings mechanism clusters: transaction security, shock management, livelihood investment and trust-building. Second, clusters of mechanisms were mapped to salient peacebuilding outcomes that are relevant to missions: decreased recruitment incentives, increased reintegration viability, increased local dispute resolution and increased legitimacy of public authority. Third, there were specified boundary conditions such as security conditions, provider capacity, connectivity, documentation practices and the risks of protection of data and surveillance. The outcome is a framework that will serve as a planning and coordination tool to missions and their partners.

## **Framework Architecture for Mission-Relevant Financial Inclusion**

The framework is structured in terms of three reinforcing pathways: economic security, social cohesion and institutional legitimacy (Figure 1). Financial inclusion is defined here as sustained access to, and use of, safe and affordable financial services, such as payments, savings, credit, insurance, and remittances, provided through regulated or community-based channels with consumer protection. Peacebuilding is seen as the establishment of conditions that minimise incentives and opportunities to engage in organised violence, enhance the legitimacy of institutions and inclusive political and social settlements.

**Figure-1: Core framework linking financial inclusion to peacebuilding outcomes**



Source: Author's self-construct

**Economic security pathway:** Secure payments and basic savings minimize exposure to theft and extortion and assist households to smooth consumption in the event of a shock. In most of the conflict-affected areas, cash has to be transported over long distances, kept in insecure houses or traded in informal locations that might be held by armed actors. When properly structured, account-based payments can minimize such risks and enhance predictability. This channel is reinforced when transaction costs are reduced, and when households are able to distribute risk across distance, which is reported in the mobile money literature.<sup>9</sup> The most important lesson to apply to mission planning is that safer flows, rather than credit expansion, are the first peacebuilding benefit. Daily life can be stabilised by savings and payments, which can minimise stressors that lead to violence and family breakdown, and can make participation in local markets safer.

**Social cohesion pathway:** Financial channels can either widen divides or bridge them. Inclusion facilitates cohesion where access is considered just across identity lines and where communities are able to transact and cooperate securely in local markets. Inclusion may also be another form of discrimination when it is mediated by factional gatekeepers, or when documentation rules are not applied to the group on the wrong side. This route thus relies on open eligibility criteria, group-sensitive outreach, and complaint mechanisms that are credible to the marginalised groups. This pathway can be facilitated in mission environments through civil affairs and community liaison staff members who convene community consultations on access barriers and facilitate local dispute resolution on payments, wages, and prices.

**Institutional legitimacy pathway:** Public authority gains legitimacy when the services are provided in a predictable manner, fairly and free of corruption. Salaries, local procurement, and social transfers can be made interoperable to minimize leakage and elucidate entitlements. However, legitimacy gains are fragile when privacy is violated or when the providers exploit the consumers. The principles of rights-based digital identification and consumer protection are thus key to this pathway.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the channel is reinforced when the financial channels are linked to the observable increase in services that are important to citizens, such as the prompt payment of wages to public employees or open compensation systems in local grievance procedures.

**Framework-to-pathway synthesis:** A common failure mode in fragile environments is that transfers and livelihood grants do not turn into stable livelihoods due to the inability of recipients to store value safely and transact predictably. This creates a conversion gap between short-term support and longer-term agency, which may generate disappointment and re-grievance. Sequencing is thus a peacebuilding option. Basic savings and payments should generally be given preference over more complex products like credit and insurance and any deepening must be conditional on protection safeguards, market conduct rules and political economy analysis that predict capture. Missions may assist partners in making these sequencing decisions by making sure that programmes are guided by conflict analysis and monitoring incorporates distributional perceptions and protection indicators.

Table-3 converts the framework into sequenced implementation options that correspond to mission stages. This Table considers missions as convenors and De-confliction actors but not service providers, which is in line with local ownership and realistic capacity limits. It has two points of operation.

Sequencing is necessary, as the inclusion deepening is to be conditional on protections and political sensitivity. Missions may provide value by coordinating and deconflicting, such as convening regulators and providers, facilitating safe access, and ensuring that efforts are consistent with mission political strategy and transition plans.

**Table-3: Implementation pathways  
(mission stage, tool, objective, indicator, feasibility)**

<b>Mission stage and domain</b>	<b>Tool or mechanism</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Outcome or indicator (illustrative)</b>	<b>Feasibility notes for peacekeeping coordination</b>
Pre-deployment planning	Conflict-finance mapping with local actors and providers	Identify exclusion drivers and coercion risks	Risk map of access barriers by district and group	High feasibility through analysis and civil affairs with local consultation
Early mission stabilisation	Traceable payments for mission-linked labour and local procurement	Reduce leakage and create predictable income flows	Share of local payments through secure channels; reduced payment disputes	Medium feasibility, depends on providers and host permissions
Community stabilisation	Agent-based access points in safe areas with protection monitoring	Improve access and reduce travel risk	Reduced travel time for deposit and withdrawal; usage by women and displaced persons	Medium feasibility, requires security and connectivity; avoid forced adoption
Reintegration support	Savings-linked reintegration grants with financial capability support	Sustain livelihoods beyond short-term grants	Savings persistence; enterprise survival after six months	Medium feasibility, needs partner delivery and protection-sensitive design

## Financial Inclusion...

Local government recovery	Interoperable social transfers aligned with host systems	Strengthen legitimacy through fair, visible delivery	Timeliness of payments; grievance-resolution rates	Medium to low feasibility, depends on capacity and settlement dynamics
Transition and exit	Capacity support for consumer protection and dispute resolution	Reduce exploitation and sustain trust	Complaint channels functioning; enforcement actions against fraud	Low direct feasibility for missions, higher through development partners

Source: Author's self-construct

Standards alignment is necessary for both credibility and do-no-harm. Table-4 singles out minimum alignment requirements that are handy for partner coordination and programme design. It points out that missions do not need to invent new doctrine to act responsibly. Existing standards give a common 'language' to partners who are driven by different motivations and a sound basis for turning down designs that compromise rights or integrity. Besides, standards are also a tool for cross-mission learning as they allow comparable monitoring of consumer protection, privacy and integrity risks.

**Table-4: Standards and guidance cross-reference**

<b>Standard or guidance area</b>	<b>Relevance to mission settings</b>	<b>Minimum alignment requirement in mission-supported initiatives</b>
Financial integrity with proportionality	Prevent diversion while avoiding exclusion	Risk-based customer due diligence and simplified procedures for low-risk accounts

Digital identification principles	Prevent exclusion and rights harms	Inclusion-by-design, data minimisation, oversight, and grievance redress
Consumer protection for digital finance	Reduce fraud and predatory practices	Transparent pricing, dispute resolution and agent oversight
Preventing violent conflict	Link economic measures to political strategy	Integrate initiatives with prevention and peacebuilding priorities
Sustaining peace policy	Align economic measures with sustaining peace commitments	Local ownership, inclusivity and attention to root causes

Source: Author's self-construct

Risk management is a major aspect in this as well. Coercion, abuse or illicit finance may be directed at financial channels. Table-5 contains a risk assessment table as viewed by a mission. It demonstrates that financial inclusion is not apolitical and the risks include protection, legitimacy, and mission credibility. The mitigation thus involves a concerted effort: security conscious placement of access points, rights protection that minimizes the harm of data abuse and exclusion, and market conduct regulations that minimize fraud and predatory practices. It also needs the clarity of risk ownership, who monitors, who escalates, and who can stop delivery in case of coercion or capture is observed.<sup>17</sup>

**Table-5: Risk assessment matrix for financial inclusion initiatives**

<b>Risk category</b>	<b>How the risk can manifest</b>	<b>Likely harm</b>	<b>Mitigation and control measures</b>
Political capture and exclusion	Elites control access to agents, identity documents, or eligibility lists	Reinforced grievance and legitimacy loss	Group-sensitive access checks, transparency, independent monitoring, community feedback
Coercion and armed-group taxation	Armed actors extort users at deposit and withdrawal points or seize credentials	Increased insecurity and criminal revenue	Safe placement of access points, protection assessments, incident reporting, provider protocols
Data misuse and surveillance	Personal data used for intimidation or discrimination	Rights violations and reduced trust	Data minimisation, consent, oversight, separation of humanitarian and security data
Fraud and consumer abuse	Agent overcharging, scams, opaque fees	Household losses and backlash	Price transparency, grievance redress, agent supervision, public information campaigns
Illicit finance and diversion	Channels used for money laundering or financing of violence	Programme shutdown and reputational damage	Proportional risk management, monitoring by providers, escalation and suspension triggers

Digital divide	Women, rural users, displaced persons lack access or literacy	Widened inequality and exclusion	Assisted onboarding, accessible design, community-based alternatives where needed
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Source: Author's self-construct

## **Discussion**

There are three policy implications for peacekeeping. The first concerns civilian protection: reducing routine economic frictions can lower exposure to theft, extortion and coercive interception. In cash-heavy environments, the payment moment often becomes the exposure moment. If wages, stipends, and other forms of assistance are delivered through channels that reduce handling and the need for travel, the opportunities for theft, interception and informal 'taxation,' will certainly be lower. This rationale aligns with the transaction-cost and risk-sharing mechanisms described in the mobile money literature but at the same time reflects the warning that the effects depend on infrastructure, market conditions and institutional arrangements. The main idea behind this with respect to mission work is that missions shape local economic incentives via procurement and contracted labour, so the design of payment systems has governance implications. Systems that disclose fees, oversee agents, and provide a reasonable means of redress are more likely to secure cooperation and compliance than those that are merely shifting funds from cash to digital. The conflict political economy literature reveals ways in which armed groups extract rents and exploit resource flows. Therefore, not only does convenience matter but so do traceability and safeguards. Lastly, forced adoption is a disaster in a divided setting where exclusion can easily be read through identity lines and entitlement whereas perceived unfairness has a potential of escalating grievances.

The protection rationale becomes clearer by means of a short example at the mission level. Pay day can become a predictable moment of risk in many settings: the workers on contract and community workers are usually paid in cash at pre-determined locations and then head to their market or cash-out locations. In places where groups that are armed and power brokers rely on rent extraction, these routes can become targets for informal 'taxation', intimidation, and selective theft. Switching to mediums by which workers can get money without having to carry huge sums of money around in front of others

## Financial Inclusion...

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will therefore go a long way in not only curbing their exposure but also eliminating complaints that are brought about by arbitrary extraction. Undoubtedly, it is also important to retain the local cash-out option. For missions, its value is also analytical. Clear charges, readily available channels of complaints, and random inspections can increase the number of reports of agent misconduct, coercive capture, or abnormal pricing; these reports can be used to conduct protection analysis, community involvement and partner coordination.

Reintegration is another issue. Short-term assistance is not necessarily followed by stable livelihoods in cases where individuals are unable to save money securely, transact business in a secure way, or have a way of managing typical challenges. Looking at human needs and livelihoods, one can predict this “conversion gap.” Because having a livelihood that is capable of sustaining one’s self and having the means of securing small savings are not only the focus of dignity and coping but are also an essential part of social reintegration. A practical approach to doing it is, prioritizing the reintegration packages in form of payment and savings points that are easily available and secure prior to the launch of more complex products. This sequencing aligns with the broader warning that inclusion in fragile environments should be governance-heavy rather than technology-first. Also important are procedural issues. In cases where eligibility requirements, payment schedule and complaint mechanisms are not clear, allocations can be seen as discriminatory, and relative deprivation and group resentment can be experienced. On the other hand, transparent payment methods, trustworthy grievance procedures, and community-oriented openness can help in building trust and cooperative norms that are the basis of reconciliation.

Transition brings legitimacy into view. Security handover is something that is highlighted, but what most citizens frequently experience is routine administrative performance, and this is what dictates whether authority is considered fair and capable. Hence, from the perspective of standards, payment trustworthiness, complaint handling, and primary consumer protection could be seen as a part of institution-building instead of merely the background functions of the office. The same applies here as well as in other places: environments where governance is very low may use digital means as sites of abuse, for example, fraud, surveillance, or coercion through access points, therefore, it is very important to include safeguards in coordination and monitoring. In practice, missions add value mainly as convenors and deconfliction actors, especially when acting as organizers and mediators who

make it possible for host authorities, regulators, providers, humanitarian and development partners to converge on a set of feasible standards. Compliance with such standards goes hand in hand with the emphasis of prevention and sustaining-peace on local ownership, inclusivity and institution-building as opposed to parallel systems.

For countries that contribute troops and police, the implication is that peacekeeping professionalism can be extended through economic coordination competencies. It is possible to teach features of the local financial systems, ways to signal consumer protection, and methods of tracking conflict-finance in the form of training modules which will equip missions with the necessary skills without changing their mandates. Such competencies are a perfect match, not a rival, to protection and mediation skills, because the former enable the peacekeepers to grasp the economic motives behind local behaviour. Similarly, by hands-on training, peacekeepers can make a contribution to Sustainable Development Goal(SDG)-16 on peace, justice and strong institutions through the use of mission-related mechanisms.

## **Conclusion**

International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers honours those who serve, yet it also asks what forms of service are now required. Financial inclusion is not a substitute for political settlement or protection mandates, but it can be a practical peacebuilding capability when designed with safeguards and sequenced intelligently. The framework developed here shows three pathways through which inclusive financial services can support economic security, social cohesion, and institutional legitimacy, while recognising boundary conditions and risks. By translating these pathways into implementation options, standards alignment, and risk controls, the article offers a mission-compatible approach that strengthens coordination with host authorities and partners. Everyday economic security is not peripheral to sustaining peace. When missions and partners treat payment systems, savings options, and consumer safeguards as part of the peacebuilding environment, they can narrow openings for coercion and strengthen trust. Careful, standards-based coordination can improve the prospects for durable transitions, while remaining clearly secondary to political settlement and protection mandates.

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### Brief Biography



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## **Bangladesh's UN Peacekeeping Legacy: Transforming Operational Presence into Long-Term Bilateral Relations**

Colonel G M Sohag, SGP, afwc, psc

### **Introduction**

Bangladesh (BD) first took part in UN Peacekeeping Operation (UNPKO) in 1988. Back then, not many of us thought that BD would one day be one of the best and most trusted contributors to UNPKO. But over the years, BD peacekeepers have earned respect by being disciplined, patient and committed performers. The blue helmet on a Bangladeshi soldier often makes people feel safe and gives partner forces confidence.

Most studies focus on what has been done in the mission area, such as helping civilians, doing hard work and the size of contingents. Of course these are important, but they don't include that many relationships that start during missions don't end even when the mission ends. Officers who worked together meet again at various training and conferences in some other times and places. Local leaders and partner forces still remember the support received. Some of these personal relationships later become a catalyst for official defence cooperation, training visits, or even trade links. This connection is not discussed enough. Most discussions focus on operations, but the longer effect often goes unnoticed. From experience, peacekeeping does much more than just completing assigned tasks. It shapes how Bangladesh is seen by others.<sup>1</sup> When BD soldiers work with honesty and commitment, people remember it. That memory does not disappear quickly. Over time, it builds a sense of trust. In simple terms, respect grows from conduct, not pressure; an idea closely linked to Joseph Nye's concept of soft power.<sup>2</sup>

In view of the above, this article first narrates the "soft power" theory which comes from earning respect. Then it describes some cases where friendships that started during the mission turned into official cooperation, as well as the hurdles en route to bilateral relations for two countries to work together. Lastly, it provides a few recommendations on how to use its peacekeeping networks to help with long-term diplomatic and development goals.

## Theoretical Foundations of the Study: Soft Power Theory

The Theory of Soft Power propounded by Joseph Nye<sup>3</sup> states that a country can influence others in more ways than just by using force or money. It can also earn respect through its actions, values, and simple human connection. This is something which is seen every day in UNPKO. A soldier's calm voice, an honest handshake, or a small act of kindness can often say more than any official speech.<sup>4</sup>

For many years, BD peacekeepers have been showing this soft side to the war-torn countries or wherever they are deployed. When BD soldiers go on a UNPKO, they not only just do what the UN tells them to do. They also display national traits of patience, discipline and kindness. People in the area have trusted BD troops within days of seeing how treatment is meted out to them. A Bangladeshi doctor caring for a child, engineers repairing roads, soldiers fixing solar lights on the streets of host countries, or a patrol listening respectfully to local elders, etc., although small acts, but they stay in people's hearts for long, even after the mission ends.

Soft power does not bring quick results as shown in Figure-1. It grows slowly, through small and regular actions. These minor efforts shaped Bangladesh's image as a country which can be trusted. Officers from other countries often say they feel comfortable working with Bangladeshi troops for their professionalism and easier approach qualities.<sup>5</sup> These views are not formed only in official meetings, rather they originated from day to day works, shared duties, gossiping beyond office hours and simple chats during the tea or water break. In many situations, this consistent kindness or this peacekeeping legacy develops into significant collaboration with those nations in subsequent years.

**Figure-1: Soft Power Pathway in UN Peacekeeping  
(based on Nye's Theory)**



Source: Author's self-construct

## **Bangladesh's Diplomatic and Economic Ties with Former Host Countries**

Bangladesh's long history of serving in UNPKO has had an impact on relationships with other countries. BD soldiers and officers have been to places where people were trying to put their lives back together over the years. Working with patience, discipline, and kind-heartedness enhanced Bangladesh's image not only on the host nations but also across the world. Subsequently, this goodwill led to new diplomatic talks, training bonds, and even business issues. This is actually the soft power which means that host nations or local communities remember how Bangladeshi peacekeepers acted and that memory helps to work together in the future.<sup>6</sup>

### **Sierra Leone**

**Diplomatic Relations:** The deployment of Bangladeshi peacekeepers in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL; 1999–2005) came at a very sensitive time when the country was emerging from the Civil War. Peacekeeping legacy is recalled not just for what was achieved there but how it was done. As discussed before, apart from the traditional duties, Bangladesh supported small community requirements like refurbishing schools, assisting health care facilities, and helping local institutions etc. These were not large projects but they were noticed and remembered by heart. This connection created goodwill resulting the recognition of Bangla as an honorary language.<sup>7</sup> During his 2003 visit to Dhaka, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone described Bangladesh as a "Brother in Peace," capturing the tone of the relationship. The same period also saw practical cooperation which includes training opportunities from Bangladesh and diplomatic support from Sierra Leone in return, especially in the case of Bangladesh's OIC candidature. It makes a clear lesson that when peacekeeping is carried out with honesty, it can move beyond security and slowly support lasting diplomatic and economic ties.

**Economic Relations:** The goodwill made during the peacekeeping years also created space for economic engagement. Sierra Leone showed interest in learning from Bangladesh's experience in various sectors like agriculture and textiles; and encouraged Bangladeshi businesses to explore opportunities there.<sup>8</sup> Simultaneously, BRAC have started working there for supporting communities through health services, education, and microfinance which added depth to this connection (see Table-1). Bengal Agro Group's investment is the best example of economic cooperation. They built a rubber-processing plant that cost more than \$50 million and began a big organic farming project on 2,300 hectares of land.<sup>9</sup> All of these things have made almost 6,000 jobs for people in the area. Such progress did not happen

suddenly. It became possible because of the trust built earlier by Bangladeshi peacekeepers. The relationship started with simple human contact and later grew into real economic partnership. This is a clear example of how goodwill can turn into long-term businesses and development partnerships.

**Table-1: BRAC's Post-Peacekeeping Development and Soft Power Activities in Sierra Leone**

Sector / Programme Area	Key Activities	Geographical Coverage / Scale	Strategic Relevance to Bangladesh's Peacekeeping Legacy
Health & Community Health Promoters (CHPs)	Training of female community health promoters; door-to-door healthcare; health clubs; sanitation and maternal health awareness	12 districts across Sierra Leone; thousands of beneficiaries	Builds grassroots goodwill and strengthens Bangladesh's image as a humanitarian and development partner
Microfinance & Financial Inclusion	Group loans, small enterprise loans, agricultural credit; women's savings groups	42 branches; ~70,000 clients (mostly women)	Extends socio-economic footprint beyond peacekeeping, enhancing financial inclusion and soft power
Agriculture & Livelihoods	Cassava processing machines, farmer training, livestock and poultry support	Bo, Kenema, Pujehun, Kailahun districts	Promotes food security, value addition and rural development cooperation
Youth Empowerment & TVET (AIM Project)	Life-skills, entrepreneurship, vocational and financial literacy training for adolescent girls and women	Nationwide; thousands of youths trained under Mastercard-funded AIM initiative	Empowers youth and women—projecting Bangladesh's peacebuilding-through-development model
Education & Early Childhood Development (ECD)	Learning centers for children (ages 3–5); radio-based learning during Ebola crisis	Operates dozens of ECD centers; national radio outreach	Enhances Bangladesh's image as an education partner in post-conflict rehabilitation
Gender & Social Welfare Initiatives	Programs to prevent gender-based violence, promote girls' empowerment and support child Ebola survivors	Partnership with Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs	Strengthens Bangladesh's social diplomacy and moral authority in gender inclusion

Source: Author's self-construct

## Ivory Coast

**Diplomatic Relations:** A good number of Bangladeshi peacekeepers were deployed to Ivory Coast under UNOCI for a 14-year duration from 2004 to 2017 during a very crucial time following a 2002 coup attempt and subsequent rebellion which split the country. The appointment of Major General Abdul Hafiz, a Bangladeshi Force Commander in 2010 displayed that the UN trusted Bangladeshi and it also made the Ivorian side respect us more. Bangladeshi peacekeepers did a lot of small but important things to help the villagers, like talking to local leaders, guiding patrols, and fixing small roads. These small things or soft power helped to create an image for keeping the door open for future defence and diplomatic cooperation.<sup>10</sup>

**Economic Relations:** Trade between Bangladesh and Ivory Coast is still limited. But from what we have seen on the ground, the goodwill built during peacekeeping gives us a strong starting point. As they rebuild their country, they need help with education, technical training, small businesses, security sector reform and health care, etc. Bangladesh has useful experience in all of

these areas. A lot of Ivorian officers and officials who worked with BD peacekeepers still have good things to say about Bangladesh. Their positive attitude makes it much easier to talk to them later. The two countries' economic ties are still weak, but the respect and connection that UNOCI built act like a bridge. Over time, this bridge can help with training exchanges, connections between small businesses, and more official visits. Thus peacekeeping often creates this kind of slow but steady bond.<sup>11</sup>

## **Mali**

**Diplomatic Relations:** Bangladesh has been serving in Mali under the MINUSMA since 2014. It is a very tough mission, and many of us who served there know how difficult the conditions can be. As many as 15 Bangladeshi peacekeepers sacrificed their lives in the MINUSMA.<sup>12</sup> But even in those hard days, BD peacekeepers kept themselves calm and did their work with care. BD engineering, logistical and contingent members frequently performed work that directly benefited the local population, such as construction and repairs of roads, organizing medical campaign and supporting villages following miscreant attacks.<sup>13</sup> Malian officers and local leaders noticed this. They often said that Bangladeshi troops were dependable and respectful and this goodwill has stayed with us. In the same note, in 2017, Bangladesh awarded one short-term scholarship to train a few military personnel of Mali at the Defence Services Command and Staff College (DSCSC), Mirpur, Bangladesh.<sup>14</sup> Even in 2025, a Malian officer named Major Massa Souleymane Traore received training at DSCSC (see Figure-2). Bangladesh is now regarded by Mali as a friendly partner, and they spoke well of BD troops in a number of UN and African peace forums. These modest relationships, formed in trying times, now facilitate more extensive diplomatic discussions.

**Economic Relations:** Based on the trust earned through UNPKO at MINUSMA and considering the business potential, PRAN-RFL has already stepped into Mali, and Walton has signed an MOU with Malian Simpara Group to sell electronics like fridges, air coolers and laptops, etc. (see Figure-2). These are small beginnings which can later support practical cooperation in a number of sectors between the two countries. When Bangladeshi peacekeepers are remembered for being honest, disciplined, and helpful, it creates a level of comfort for the host country.<sup>15</sup> That matters. It becomes easier to start a conversation whether it is about trade, investment, or a new project. This is how peacekeeping, if followed up on correctly, can move beyond security and progressively develop into long-term relationships between countries.

**Photo-1: Bangladesh–Mali Engagement: Translating Peacekeeping Ties into Defence and Economic Cooperation**

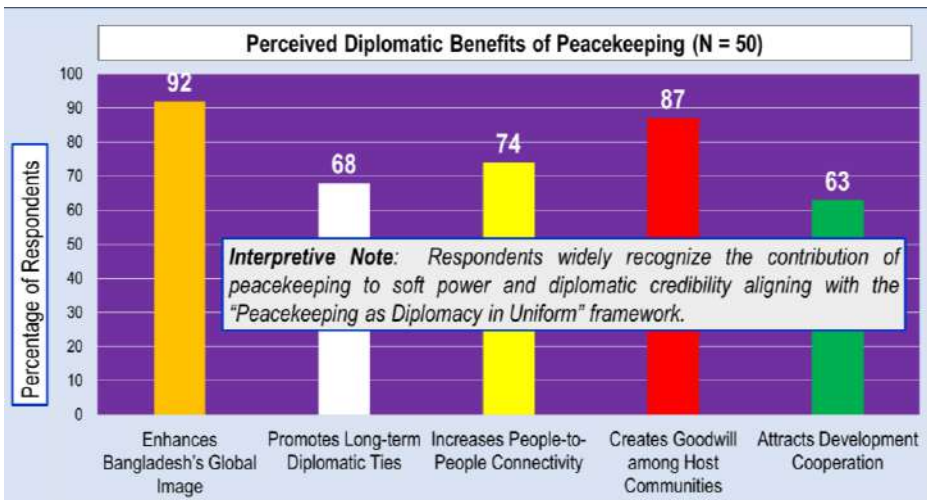


Source: Author's collection

**Analysis of Field Survey Findings**

Figures 3-5 displays a graphical summary of a field survey conducted among 50 Bangladeshi peacekeepers that looked at the perceived diplomatic benefits, institutional difficulties and policy suggestions. Figure-3 shows that 92% of the respondents agree that peacekeeping is a soft power tool that improves Bangladesh's image, and 74% agree that it increases people to people connectivity.

**Figure-2: Diplomatic Impact of Bangladesh's Peacekeeping — Perceptions**

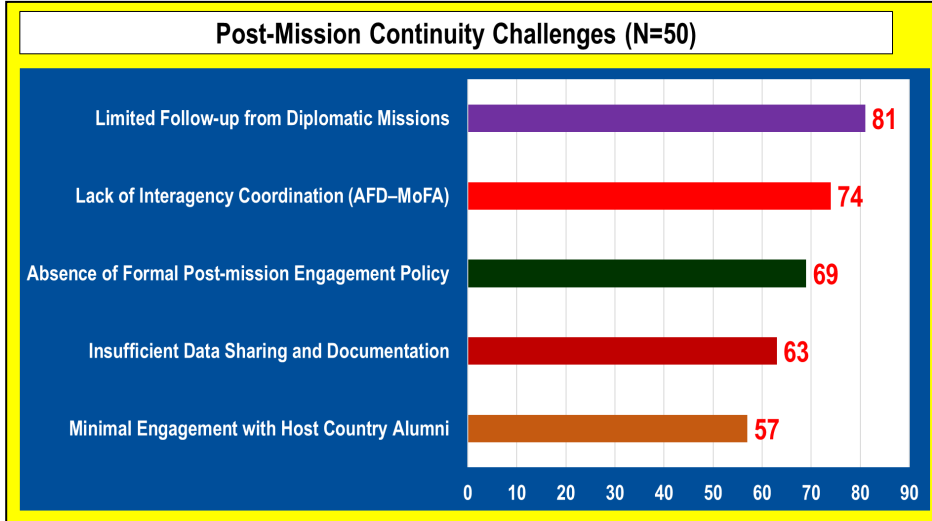


Source: Author's self-construct

On the other hand, Figure-4 shows that there are still institutional barriers, such as limited diplomatic follow-up (81%) and weak interagency

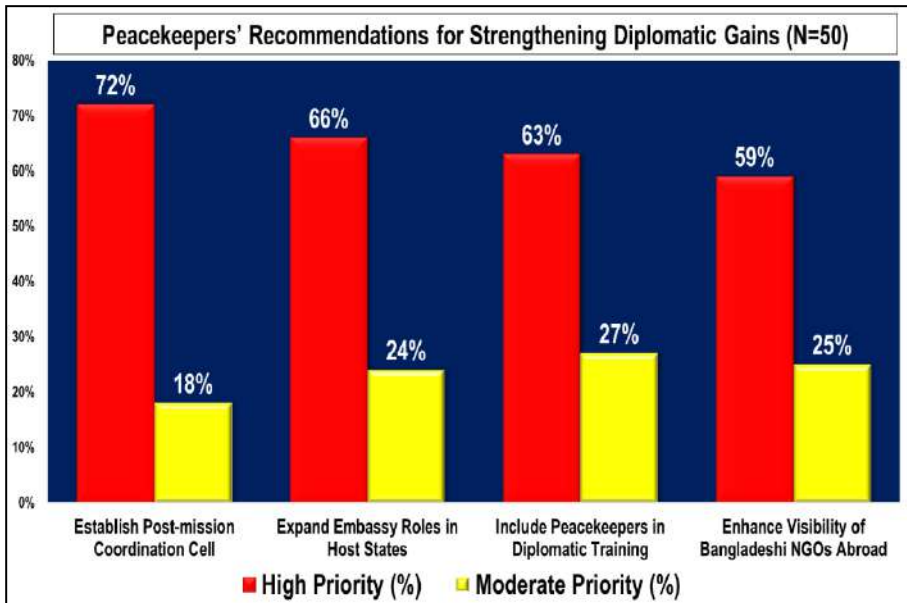
coordination (74%), among others. Figure-5 shows what the respondents suggested: setting up a post-mission coordination cell, getting the embassy more involved, and including peacekeeping experience in diplomatic training, etc.

**Figure-3: Challenges in Turning Peacekeeping into Bilateral Engagement**



Source: Author's self-construct

**Figure-4: Policy Measures to Strengthen Peacekeeping Diplomacy**



Source: Author's self-construct

## Obstacles to Transitioning from Peacekeeping to Bilateral Partnerships

Bangladesh is very well known for its work in UNPKO. People always say nice things about BD soldiers' discipline, patience, and kindness. But even with this good name, many opportunities are still missed. In the subsequent paragraphs the obstacles that make it hard to go from peacekeeping to bilateral partnerships are discussed briefly:-

**Not Having a Plan for What to Do Next:** Bangladeshi peacekeepers do very well during the deployment in UN mission, but once they return home, the bonds start to fade. The reason is not having an organized plan for what to do after a mission ends. Therefore, many chances for training, defence talks and development work are missed. Sometimes it is termed as 'Goodwill Gap,' which means that good relationships don't always lead to long-term cooperation. This demands a coordinated effort by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), the Armed Forces Division (AFD) and other stakeholders.<sup>16</sup>

**Limited Diplomatic Presence:** Limited diplomatic presence of Bangladesh in host countries is yet another issue which prevents peacekeeping expertise to convert into bilateral relationships. She is yet to open embassies in many of the countries where Bangladeshi peacekeepers worked as shown in Table-2. In reality, it becomes very difficult without an embassy or a fixed official existence to stay engaged and find out various opportunities in the host country.

**Table-2: Diplomatic Missions Between Bangladesh and Selected Host Countries**

Country	Bangladesh's Diplomatic Presence	Reciprocal Mission in Bangladesh / Nearest Consulate	Diplomatic Relations Maintained Through
Rwanda	No resident embassy; diplomatic relations managed via Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi.	Rwandan High Commission in New Delhi; Honorary Consulate in Dhaka.	New Delhi; Honorary Consulate in Dhaka
Mali	Honorary Consulate in Bamako.	No Malian embassy in Dhaka; relations managed via Malian Embassy in New Delhi.	New Delhi
Ivory Coast	No resident embassy; diplomatic relations managed via Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi.	Ivorian Embassy in New Delhi.	New Delhi
Sierra Leone	No resident embassy; diplomatic relations managed via Bangladesh High Commission in Abuja, Nigeria.	Sierra Leonean Embassy in Abuja.	Abuja, Nigeria
Liberia	No resident embassy; diplomatic relations managed via Bangladesh High Commission in Abuja, Nigeria.	Liberian Embassy in New Delhi.	Abuja, Nigeria

Source: Author's self-construct

**Goodwill Not Used Properly:** Bangladeshi peacekeepers including the Military Staff Officers, Military Observers and the Contingent members receive genuine respect in all the missions through their easier approach, simple and everyday actions like helping communities in all possible ways. These efforts build real human networks. The problem starts after the mission ends. The goodwill created is rarely used in a practical way. Without regular contact or initiatives, the connection fades over time resulting in a valuable advantage going unused.

**Language Barrier:** In several African areas, French or Arabic is widely used along with local languages. Bangladeshi peacekeepers are sincere and respectful, but deeper communication is not always easy due to this language and cultural barrier. Basic interaction happens, yet full understanding often remains limited. Pre-deployment training covers some language and cultural aspects, but it is usually not enough for long-term engagement. With stronger preparation in this area, BD personnel could build deeper relationships and sustain them even after the mission ends.<sup>17</sup>

**Weak Link Between Peacekeeping and Economic Planning:** A clear gap exists between peacekeeping efforts and national economic planning. While companies like Walton Group and PRAN-RFL Group have entered African markets, these efforts are mostly private in nature. There is no organized method to link the goodwill built during peacekeeping with trade or investment. Consequently, this advantage is not fully used. Because of this, many chances are missed in countries where Bangladesh already has a positive image, such as Mali and Ivory Coast. If a better plan is developed, the respect earned by peacekeepers can be used to build long-term economic partnerships.

**Weak Inter-Agency Coordination:** The lack of coordination within BD institutions may be the major obstacle. Peacekeeping is often considered as only a military job, not as a tool of foreign policy. Because of this, the MoFA, the AFD, and economic agencies do not always work together. If Bangladesh wants to use peacekeeping for long-term diplomatic or economic gain, then this mindset needs to be changed.<sup>18</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Bangladesh has created an illustrious history in UN peacekeeping over the past 40 years. The world has seen what calm professionalism and human values look like. This has increased the military capabilities and enhanced Bangladesh's reputation around the globe. However, the majority of this

achievement is still restricted within the mission area. As BD lack a formal follow-up plan, the connectivity and confidence established frequently disappears when the mission is over.

If Bangladesh can link peacekeeping successes with wider foreign policy and economic goals, it will significantly benefit the country. Turning peacekeeping experience into long-term partnerships can help us build stronger diplomatic ties, increase trade, expand defence collaboration, and create new development opportunities. There is no doubt that peacekeeping has given Bangladesh a strong base. Now, time has come to turn this base into a lasting national advantage with necessary coordination, better planning and teamwork among various stakeholders.

### **Recommendations**

In order to transform Bangladeshi peacekeepers' operational presence across various countries into long-term bilateral relations, following steps are recommended to the appropriate authority concerned:-

**Set up a Dedicated Follow Up Team:** A dedicated mechanism may be established by the MoFA to keep these goodwill, image and relationships alive after missions' end. The AFD, the Ministry of Commerce, and other relevant stakeholders may be part of this team who will track contacts, review ongoing cooperation, and ensure the goodwill built in the field does not fade once peacekeepers return to Bangladesh.

**Strengthen Diplomatic Presence:** Bangladesh may consider opening more embassies or at least consular offices in UN mission hosting countries where strong goodwill already prevails. A permanent presence will allow regular engagement with the government of host countries and with local communities that still remember the peacekeeping contribution.

**Link Peacekeeping Goodwill with Economic Cooperation:** Bangladeshi peacekeepers have already created a positive and reliable image, especially in many of the African countries. Local production is still developing and competition from foreign companies is not very strong in those countries. This creates a practical opening for Bangladeshi businesses to enter early and build lasting partnerships. Hence, the Government of Bangladesh, along with organizations like FBCCI and BGMEA, may take steps such as arranging trade fairs, business visits and joint ventures. These efforts can focus on sectors like health, agriculture, ICT, construction, pharmaceuticals and education etc. If BD can connect peacekeeping goodwill with these economic opportunities in a

planned way, it can move from simple trust to real, long-term cooperation. The key is to follow through, so that trust built in the field continues to shape long-term relations. Table-3 explains the framework for transitioning operational presence into bilateral relations.

**Table-3: Framework for Transitioning Operational Presence into Bilateral Relations**

<b>Short Term (1–2 Years: 2027–2028)</b>			
<b>Ends (Objectives)</b>	<b>Ways (Strategies)</b>	<b>Means (Resources)</b>	<b>Expected Outcomes</b>
Build Institutional Capacity for Post-mission engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create Follow-up Cell</li> <li>Map Mission Countries</li> <li>Form Alumni Networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MoFA / AFD</li> <li>Budget allocation for liaison offices and delegations</li> <li>Peacekeeping veteran's database</li> <li>Embassies in former mission areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formal recognition of peacekeeping legacy as a diplomatic asset</li> <li>Initial structured communication channels with key host nations</li> <li>Consolidated database of operational experience and contacts</li> <li>Improved visibility of Bangladesh as a trusted security partner</li> </ul>
<b>Medium Term (3-5 Years: 2029–2031)</b>			
Expand & Institutionalize Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnership Agreement</li> <li>Training Exchange</li> <li>Doctrine Integration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training institutions (BIPSOT, NDC, DSCSC equivalents)</li> <li>Embassy defence wings</li> <li>Private sector bodies (FBCCI, BGMEA, ICT sector)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long-term bilateral cooperation agreements rooted in peacekeeping trust</li> <li>Increased defense training exports and joint capacity-building programs</li> <li>Political goodwill with former host nations</li> <li>Emergence of Bangladesh as a regional hub for peace operations training</li> </ul>
<b>Long Term (5 + Years: 2032–2036)</b>			
Integrate into Foreign Policy Doctrine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish "Bangladesh Peace Operations &amp; Partnership Institute"</li> <li>Global Partnerships</li> <li>Strategic leadership roles in UN</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Endowment Fund for peace operations diplomacy</li> <li>UN/AU/EU Networks</li> <li>Inter-Ministerial Body</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bangladesh recognized as a global norm-shaper in peace operations</li> <li>Peacekeeping legacy converted into geopolitical and economic influence</li> <li>Diversified bilateral relations anchored in trust from shared missions</li> </ul>

**Peacekeeping Legacy to Strategic Bilateral Relations**

Source: Author's self-construct

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### Brief Biography



**Colonel G M Sohag, SGP, afwc, psc** was commissioned in the Corps of Infantry on 7 June 2000 with the 42 BMA Long Course. His key staff appointments include GSO-3 (Int) and BM of an Infantry Brigade; Deputy Assistant Military Secretary at MS Branch of Army Headquarters; GSO-1 at a Divisional Headquarters; and Private Secretary to the Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP). Besides, he commanded an Infantry Battalion at Chattagram Hill Tracts and later at plain lands. Apart from the mandatory military courses, he completed the UN Staff and Logistics Officer Course in New Delhi, and the Combat Group Commanders' Course in Ahmadnagar, India. Academically, he is a graduate of the Defence Services Command and Staff College and the Armed Forces War Course at National Defence College, achieved Master's degrees from BUP respectively in Defence Studies; and in Security and Development. His international career spans two major United Nations peace operations. As a contingent member of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), he contributed to post-conflict stabilization by supporting disarmament efforts, facilitating humanitarian assistance, securing key installations, and assisting in confidence-building activities among local communities. He later served with distinction under the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), where he was appointed Military Observers' Team Site Leader in the highly volatile Sector North at Kidal. In this role, he oversaw ceasefire monitoring, coordinated field-level engagements with armed groups and local authorities, and provided critical situational reporting that supported the Mission's strategic decision-making. Across these deployments, he demonstrated operational leadership, cultural sensitivity and a strong commitment to the UN's broader mandate of promoting peace, stability, and protection of vulnerable communities in conflict-affected environments. Currently, the officer is serving as the Colonel Staff in a Divisional Headquarters located at northern part of the country.

## **Contribution of Bangladesh Force Marine Unit in Operation Lifeline at South Sudan**

Commander Shah Kamruzzaman, (ND), psc, BN

### **Introduction**

Sudan gained independence on 01 January 1956 as Republic of the Sudan from colonial era of United Kingdom and Egypt. But the joy was short-lived due to immediate tensions between the northern leaders, who were predominantly Muslim and Arab, and the southern population, which were largely Christian and animist. This led to the First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972), even before independence was fully realized. The Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972 ended the conflict temporarily by granting the south autonomy, but peace was not to last. The discovery of oil in the south in the late 1970s renewed interest in the region and reignited conflicts. By 1983, President Jaafar Nimeiri's attempt to impose Sharia law across all of Sudan triggered the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005). The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), led by John Garang, became the voice and army of the south, fighting not just for autonomy but for a more inclusive identity for all marginalized peoples of Sudan.

**Figure-1: Countries around South Sudan**



Source: <https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Sudan>

After more than two decades of warfare and the loss of an estimated two million lives due to fighting and related causes, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in 2005 between the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A. This peace deal ended Africa's longest-running civil war and set a timetable for a referendum on South Sudanese independence. The

referendum took place in January 2011, with an overwhelming 98.83% of South Sudanese voted for independence. On July 9, 2011, South Sudan officially became a sovereign state. South Sudan is bordered by six countries viz. Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR) and Sudan. The joy of independence, however, was soon overshadowed by significant challenges. To stabilize the security situation, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was established on 8 July 2011 by United Nations Security Council Resolution (1996) 2011.<sup>1</sup>

Peacekeeping operation is a unique and dynamic instrument to help the countries torn by conflict and also to create the conditions for lasting peace. The peacekeepers establish peace and monitor peace processes in a post-conflict area and assist ex-combatants in implementing the peace agreement. Such assistance may be put into practice through undertaking various confidence-building measures, electoral support, strengthening the rule of law and other economic/social development. These operations are established and implemented by the UN with the support from member nations. Bangladesh is one of the partners of UN peacekeeping operation and at present is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest Troops Contributing Country (TCC) of UN. Bangladesh Navy (BN) has been involved in UN peacekeeping mission since 1994. A good number of BN personnel have already successfully completed their mission so far.

This paper will highlight about the contribution of Bangladesh Force Marine Unit (BANFMU) in UNMISS which is formed by the Bangladesh Navy (BN) Officers and sailors including the civilian personnel. BANFMU is the lone marine unit of UNMISS who performs an important task in terms of logistics transportation to the isolated Upper Nile state of Malakal as Operation Life Line (OpLL) which is around 945 km away from UN compound following the White Nile River from South to North.

### **Background of UNMISS**

On 8 July 2011, the UN Security Council voted for resolution number 1996 to establish UNMISS. The next day, South Sudan became an independent state i.e. 9 July 2011. UNMISS was primarily tasked to consolidate peace and security in South Sudan, and help the government to develop the necessary state building capacity to govern effectively and democratically. The mission was originally created in 2011 with 7000 military personnel and 900 civilian police personnel. As of July 2025, the total strength of UNMISS is 18,438 out of which 14,222 military personnel, 1,446 police, and 2,228 civilian workers, as well as small contingents of experts, staff officer and volunteers.<sup>2</sup>

**Photo-1: UNMISS Logo**



Source: <http://gallery.unfsu.org/displayimage.php?pid=53>

Presently, the military deployment is commanded by Lieutenant General Mohan Subramanian as Force Commander from India. UNMISS Headquarter is established in the South Sudanese capital of Juba. As per Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, the peacekeeping mission is concerned with the protection of civilians, and thus is not mandated to engage in protection of South Sudan's territory or the sovereignty of that territory. The stated UNMISS Mandate includes the following:-

Support for peace consolidation and thereby fostering longer-term state building and economic development.

Support the Government of the Republic of South Sudan in exercising its responsibilities for conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution and protect civilians.

Support the Government of the Republic of South Sudan in developing its capacity to provide security, to establish rule of law and to strengthen the security and justice sectors.



Conduct and assist casualty evacuation and medical evacuation.

Assist to protect designated ports and riverine infrastructure.

### **Secondary Tasks**

Limited logistic resupply without contracted civilian vessels.

Provide riverine transport support to other UN pillars.

Provide FP to humanitarian barge operations.

Conduct riverine Search and Rescue (SAR) operations.

Conduct riverine reconnaissance operation for new routes.

### **Area of Responsibility (AOR)**

The AOR of BANFMU is defined by the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The derived version of its AOR is given below:-

**Area of Responsibility:** The UNMISS Force Marine Unit will not have specific movement restrictions applied to its riverine operations on the White Nile and major tributaries. The AOR of the Marine Unit will include all possible navigable waters of River White Nile between Juba and Renk, and the major tributaries within established ranges. For operational control, the following AOs are in effect for marine operations:

**Malakal:** The White Nile and navigable tributaries between Renk and Adok and if required, River Sobat.

**Juba:** The White Nile and navigable tributaries between Adok and Juba and if required, River Bahr El Gazal.<sup>4</sup>

### **Operation Life Line (OpLL)**

UN logistics (ration and fuel) are transported by means of UN contracted barges from Mangalla to Malakal through the River White Nile. Mangalla is located at a distance of 82 km from Juba. BANFMU escorts this convoy of barges from Mangalla to Malakal. A combined AVPD (Autonomous Vessel Protection Detachment) team is formed consisting of incoming and outgoing personnel. The team boards the UN contracted barge convoy. The AVPD team consists of 30 personnel (02 officers and 28 Marines). The new team consisting of 15 personnel (01 officer and 14 Marines) is oriented through the passage (one leg of the voyage Malakal – Mangalla) from the beginning to end. The distance between Mangalla to Malakal is about 938 km. The Channel is narrow having long covered bushes in both banks which pose threat of

miscreants' attack/ambush. Local fishing boats with armed fishermen and small vessels carrying passenger/trade goods with armed civilians at times observed and create confusion about new CP. The presence of sharp river banks and shallow rocky riverbeds creating number of difficulties like grounding, entering wrong channel, flooding of UNMISS barges.<sup>5</sup>

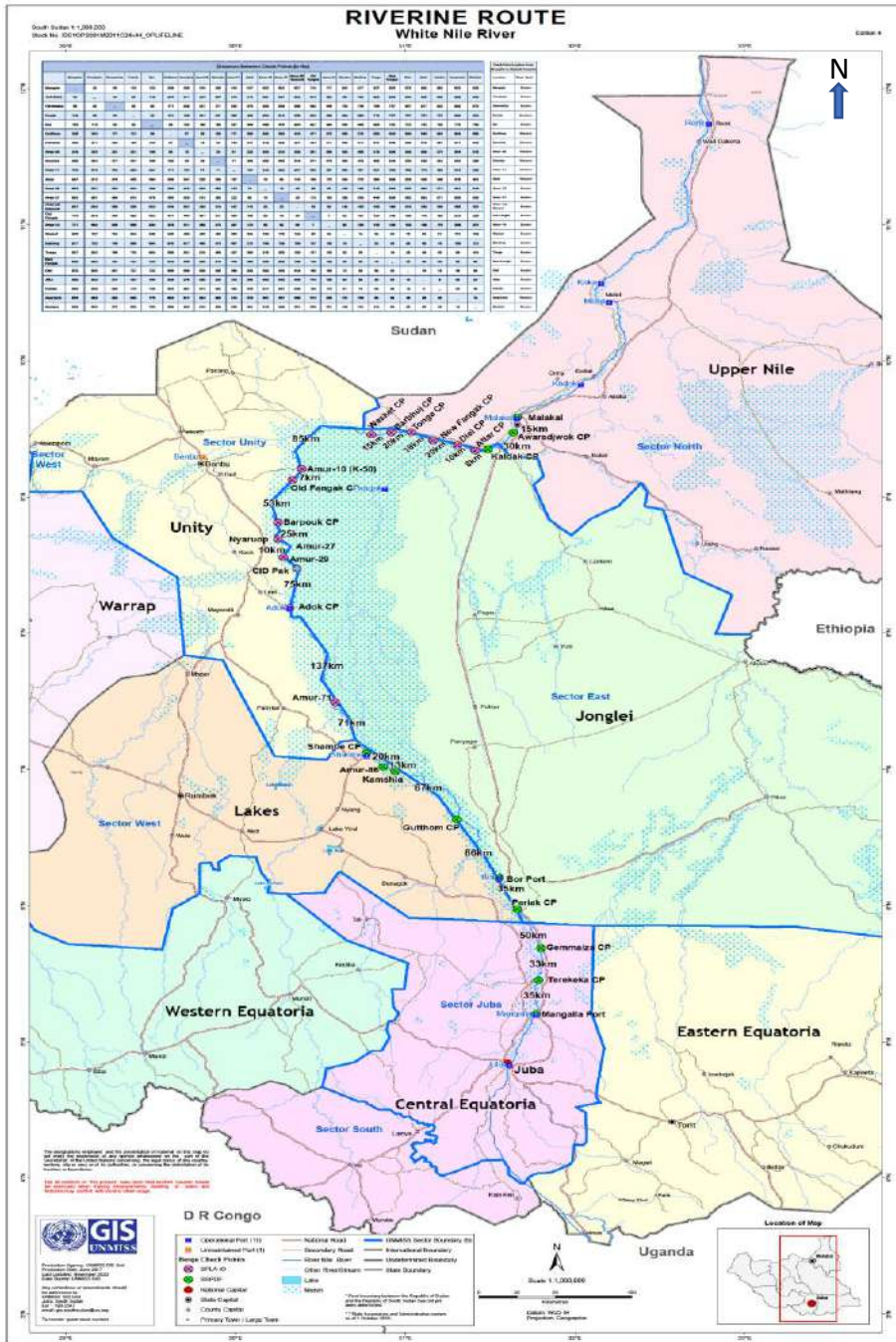
**Photo-2: BANFMU Speed Boats in OpLL**



Source: Author's collection

During the voyage, any assistance from land or river port is unlikely as no riverbank stabilization system exists enroute. There are around 36-46 Check Posts (CP) which are manned by SPLA-IO. Most of the SPLA-IO CPs are manned by irregular force dressed in civil cloths who lacks in adequate training, discipline and oversight. Loose Command and Control (C2), weak control of weapons and ammunition causes further risk to convoy security in terms of man and materials casualty. Force Protection team requires to obtain clearance through negotiation from all the CPs while crossing them throughout the River White Nile. The CP negotiation process is the responsibility of Military Liaison Officers (MLOs). Usually two MLOs remain onboard while the OpLL is ongoing. However, AVPD officers also assist in the CP negotiation process as and when necessary. The AVPD team also provides the Force Protection while loading cargoes at Mangalla and unloading the same at Malakal. All these operational activities are demonstrated to incoming Unit members to be oriented with the operational environment.<sup>6</sup>

Figure-3: River Routes of OpLL along River White Nile

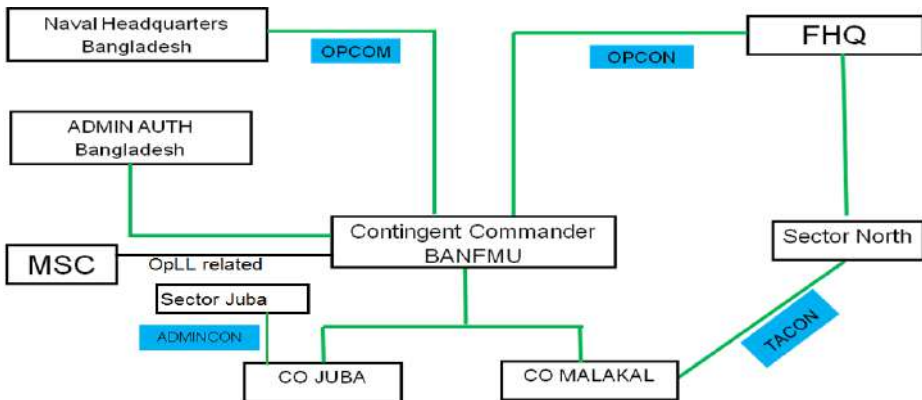


Source: <https://unmiss.unmissions.org>

**Command and Control (C2) Structure of BANFMU**

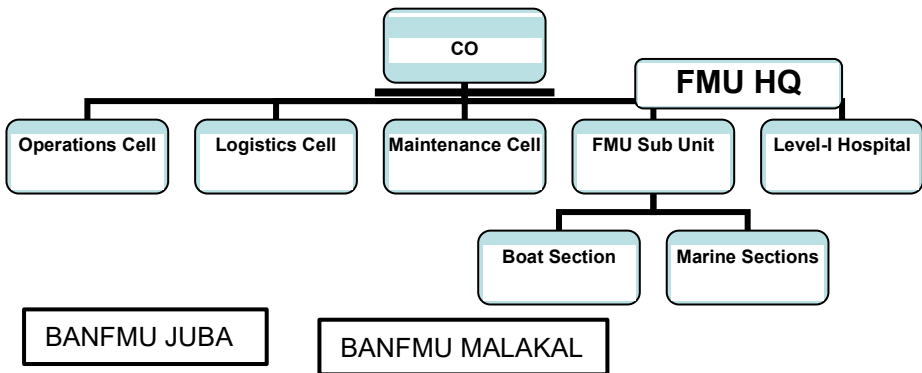
BANFMU operates under the command structure of UNMISS and placed directly under the Operational Control (OPCON) of Force Commander, UNMISS. The peculiarity of BANFMU in terms of operation, is however, relates more closely to the Director Mission Support (DMS) rather than Force Headquarter (FHQ). This is because the logistic barges are being controlled by the Mission Support Center (MSC). Thus, BANFMU maintains coordinated relations with MSC, Operations. In addition, BANFMU Malakal is placed under the Tactical Control (TACON) of Sector Commander (Sector North) to conduct different Riverine Operations within the Sector Area of Responsibility. The C2 structure and Organogram of BANFMU in UNMISS is given below:-

**Figure-4: C2 Structure of BANFMU**



Source: BANFMU Archives

**Figure-5: Organogram of BANFMU**



Source: BANFMU Archives

## **Role of BANFMU in OpLL**

Bangladesh Navy (BN) officers, sailors and civilian personnel are performing a tremendous and arduous job in UNMISS since 2015. The relentless efforts by the Bangladeshis were appreciated by all pillars and the leadership of UNMISS in different occasion and events. Usually, the duration of one OpLL takes around 45 days. However, many a time it depends on the special circumstances where it may cross upto 2 months to complete one OpLL. BN officers and sailors have to travel approximately 1890 km to complete one OpLL along the White Nile River. BANFMU members in OpLL have to remain alert 24/7 for the successful conduct of OpLL. Because, there is every opportunity to endanger the OpLL barge with man-made and natural danger. Sometimes, BANFMU officers and sailors have to negotiate with the villagers to have a safe passage along the route which stretches from South at Mangalla and up to the extreme north at Geiger Port (Figure-3). There are number of Check Posts (CPs) manned by the government and opposition force namely, South Sudan Peoples Defence Force (SSPDF) and South Sudan People's Liberation Army - In Opposition (SPLA-IO). The members of SSPDF and SPLA-IO are very unpredictable. Sometimes the on ground soldiers often do not recognize the authority of central command. BANFMU members undergoing OpLL have to consult with forces very technically and in a submissive way to avoid any hot talk during the CP negotiation process. Last 10 years BANFMU members conducted total 73 OpLL which ultimately ensures uninterrupted logistics supply to the UNMISS personnel deployed in the Upper Nile State of Malakal.<sup>7</sup>

## **Humanitarian Activities Conducted by BANFMU**

BANFMU conducted various activities in terms of Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC), medical campaign and humanitarian engagement in different remote places of South Sudan. It also rendered medical support to the local population on regular basis. Last one year approximate 800 local people from various ethnic groups were rendered medical support from BANFMU medical department. This kind of support creates a huge positive impression and good relationship between the locals and BANFMU.

**Photo-3: Medical Campaign by BANFMU**



Source: BANFMU Archives

BANFMU conducted Malaria Awareness Briefing and provided prophylactic medicine (1500 Mefloquine Tablet) for Malaria prevention in various local areas of South Sudan. Besides, BANFMU has also arranged briefing on life jacket. BANFMU Diving Team demonstrated the use of life jacket to the local people. The diving team also gave necessary directives to prepare the improvised life jacket with cork sheet which is cost effective. Demonstration on the First Aid for drowning patient was also shown to the local people of South Sudan. BANFMU participated in the program for the donation of agriculture tools and seeds in the Upper Nile State Prison by UNMISS in collaboration with Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). BANFMU also donated lot of vegetable seeds and trees amongst the locals.<sup>8</sup>

**Photo-4: Malaria Prevention Campaign**



Source: BANFMU Archives

## **Challenges in OpLL**

**Operational Challenges:** The major operational challenges are as follows:-

Limitations of OpLL control barge as support vessel for BANFMU speed boats (LPCs).

Limited patrol stowage capacity of OpLL control barge for LPCs operation to complete an OpLL.

Maintenance of LPCs for the prolonged operation without local technician and spares support from the local market.

During the dry season the River White Nile becomes very shallow thus hampers the safe navigation for the OpLL barges.

Vulnerability of waterways and navigation of OpLL convoy through the high-threat areas especially the CPs which are under control of SPLA-IO soldiers.

Limitation of reinforcement and CASEAVC, MEDEVAC etc.

Vulnerability of Tristar Base at Mangalla which is used by BANFMU as Temporary Operating Base (TOB) for loading of OpLL.

Vulnerability of Malakal Base due to the isolated location from the UN logistics base.<sup>9</sup>

### **Initiative by BANFMU to Mitigate the Operational Challenges:**

BANFMU has undertaken following efforts to achieve the optimum solution for the challenges and progress further:-

During the monthly evaluation meeting from the user's concern, BANFMU highlighted the defects/lackings of OpLL control barges.

BANFMU devised careful planning, and efforts are being made to precisely predict the requirements of spares for speed boats (LPCs). The procurement processes are undertaken through BD and local vendors of South Sudan.

BANFMU LPCs navigate cautiously to avoid any damage causing from the shallow depth of the River White Nile. Navigation responsibilities of UN contracted barges are lying with the Barge Captain but BANFMU personnel guide them continuously from their long experience of sea service.

While moving through the high threat areas, BANFMU always maintain extra precautions. Sharing of Information (SOI) is issued by FHQ,

signed by Government of South Sudan (GoSS) for movement clearance. United Nation Military Observer (UNMO) Cell and concerned UN pillars carryout liaison with local leaders to reduce the threats.

BANFMU operates along the White Nile River, which is mostly remote zone. Most of the areas do not have any road connectivity, thus it is very difficult for UNMISS to send any reinforcement or CASEVAC in times of crisis. In this regard BANFMU HQ maintains coordination with respective sectors for immediate SAR operation. OpLL convoy always maintains continuous HF and Satphone communication with BANFMU Juba and Malakal unit for guidance and support.

Concern for isolated location of Malakal Base has been raised to UNMISS. BANFMU (Malakal) also seek support for perimeter security from Land based Contingent as and when required.<sup>10</sup>

### **Prospects of BN in UNMISS and South Sudan**

White Nile river plays an important role in the overall economic development of South Sudan, as it flows across the country from North to South and East to West (Fig-5). BN can contribute in the shipbuilding and river port sector of South Sudan immensely in terms of riverine transportation and infrastructure development under joint venture scheme with expert BD nationals in South Sudan as part of technology transfer agreement. Suitable charts for White Nile river may be also be made by Bangladesh Navy Hydrographic and Oceanographic Centre (BNHOC) for the safe and reliable transportation of UNMISS and also to flourish the river based overall economy of South Sudan. As such, Dockyard and Engineering Works Limited (DEW) Narayanganj, Khulna Shipyard (KSY) and Chattogram Dry Dock Limited (CDDL) including Nou Kollan Foundation (NKF) and Marine Fisheries from BD may play a vital role by engaging with the local govt of South Sudan in various sectors like, dredging, river transportation, establishment of river bank infrastructures, port facilities etc. Besides, the garments item in South Sudan market is very costly. The labour cost in South Sudan is very cheap and affordable. As such, BD can contribute greatly in the Ready Made Garments (RMG) sector of South Sudan. Basing on the above, a high level delegation from Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) along with other concerned ministries may visit the concerned officials of South Sudan to build up the business cooperation between these two countries.<sup>11</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Peacekeeping operation is an important campaign of UN to promote peace across the globe. The success of such campaign would therefore guarantee the favourable environment for sustainable development of world economy. At present, UN has been maintaining its largest peacekeeping operation in South Sudan where Bangladesh is one of the Troops Contributing Country (TCC). BN, as a part of the operation, is successfully carrying out the assigned duties to fulfill the UNMISS mandates. The higher officials from UNHQ, UNMISS along with BN visited BANFMU and provided a unique opportunity to know the insight of peacekeeping operation in the area including the on ground challenges which BANFMU encountered last ten years.

BN has deployed its largest contingent in South Sudan since 2015 under the authority of UNMISS leadership. So far, ten BN contingents under the banner of BANFMU have successfully completed their tenure and the eleventh contingent is now on ground to complete their tour of duty (TOD). The UNMISS mandate dictates the BANFMU to undertake one of the most challenging tasks of the mission area such as, escorting a logistics convoy to the most remote northern part of the country. As the lone marine unit of UNMISS it also undertakes other responsibilities on the White Nile River. The White Nile River being the cheapest and easiest means of transportation became a hub for transportation of goods in South Sudan. It is imperative to maintain good order on the river to improve the overall life standard of South Sudanese people.

Participation by BN personnel in OpLL signifies an important role for the overall logistics transportation of UNMISS. BN contingent deployed in UNMISS are performing extraordinary service to maintain the continuation of logistics chain in the northern areas of UNMISS. They are also participating in various humanitarian activities with other pillars of UNMISS. The great contribution of BANFMU is always recognized by the higher officials of UNHQ and UNMISS for their excellent job under OpLL and other domination patrol along the White Nile River from South (Mangalla) to the extreme North (Geiger Port).

## Recommendations

Basing on the above discussions following are recommended:-

BN may continue to select professionally competent officers, sailors and civilian personnel for the deployment of BANFMU as UNMISS members.

As most of the vehicles, speed boats (LPCs) and equipment's are age old, as such phase wise replacement may be catered for the effective OpLL along the White Nile River.

BN may actively consider having strong diplomatic tie with South Sudan Govt officials for the business opportunities in South Sudan especially in the riverine/port infrastructure and ship building sector.

Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and other concerned ministries may maintain a strong liaison with South Sudan officials to build business partnership in Ready-made garments (RMG), agricultural and other concerned sectors between these two countries.

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### **Brief Biography**



**Commander Shah Kamruzzaman, (ND), psc, BN** was commissioned in the Executive Branch of Bangladesh Navy on 20 December 2001. During the last 24 years of his naval career, he served on board various ships of Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Coast Guard ranging from missile boats, fast attack crafts, offshore patrol vessels and missile frigates in different capacities. The officer commanded three warships namely BNS BARKAT, BNS SAGAR and BNS SHAPLA. He also served as Staff Officer (Operations) at Commander Khulna Naval Area and Coast Guard South Zone. He was also appointed as the Executive Officer of BNS ALI HAIDER. The officer completed his UN mission in Ivory Coast and South Sudan as Staff Officer (Duty Cell) and Contingent Operations Officer (COO) respectively. He successfully completed professional courses both at home and abroad. He is a graduate from Defence Services Command and Staff College, Mirpur. Presently he is serving in BCGS KAMARUZZAMAN as the Commanding Officer.

## **Airpower as the Decisive Enabler: Strategic Resilience and Tactical Adaptability of Bangladesh Aviation Transport Unit (BANATU) in MONUSCO**

Group Captain Ahmed Faisal, psc

### **Introduction**

For any United Nations Peacekeeping Operation (UNPKO) to be successful, especially for those that operate in vast regions with inadequate infrastructure like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), it is vital to have reliable and flexible air assets. Due to the vastness of the MONUSCO Area of Operations (AOR) covering thousands of kilometers with difficult terrain in DRC, transportation via land and water becomes cumbersome and susceptible to attacks by hostile elements. In such rugged terrain and challenging operational environment, Bangladesh Aviation Transport Unit (BANATU) started its operation with the robust C-130B aircraft since 2010 in MONUSCO. Since deployment, the lone aircraft of the unit started serving as the strategic lifeline of MONUSCO due to its robustness, flexibility and reliability.

C-130B, the heavy-lift tactical transport aircraft, is unique in providing MONUSCO with the capability of carrying heavy payloads for a sustained period of time along with the ability to operate out of semi-prepared forward airstrips. Having initially started operations from Bunia, BANATU has been instrumental in keeping up with mission requirements by successfully undertaking various missions, including but not limited to transporting cargo/passengers, Quick Reaction Forces (QRF), Dangerous Goods (DG), CASEVAC/MEDEVAC, etc. Rendering such specialized services regularly to MONUSCO soon converted BANATU from air mobility provider to strategic operational enabler.<sup>1</sup>

### **Foundational Contribution: Air Power in Sustenance and Stabilization**

Deployment of BANATU with the C-130B Hercules in MONUSCO in 2010 is an example of serious requirement of heavy lift aircraft for sustenance of UN missions. The Hercules with its robustness and unique characteristics, completely changed the dynamics of logistics and rapid response capabilities in the mission area. It is not merely an auxiliary function, rather a strategic necessity to exercise airpower in a theatre like DRC which is almost as big as Western Europe lacking proper network of roads and facing frequent internal conflicts. Specific points are highlighted as follows:-

**The C-130B-A Strategic Force Multiplier:** One of the most important keys to the success of BANATU basically originates from the capabilities and strength of the C-130B Hercules. Contrary to smaller regional aircrafts, the Hercules is distinguished by its payload capacity, long duration flights and, above all, the capability to land at semi-prepared and short airfields which are commonly found in the eastern part of the DRC. Operational capabilities of the Hercules from semi-prepared or unpaved short airfields enables MONUSCO to deploy its forces at remote isolated Forward Operating Bases (FOB) which would otherwise be a cumbersome and risky affair by road or by chartered commercial flights. Thus, the deployment of the aircraft proves to be a strategic force multiplier across several dimensions as briefly described below:-<sup>2</sup>

**Continuous Logistics Support:** BANATU operates its sole C-130B aircraft to ensure continuous and an uninterrupted logistics support across the mission area. The support includes transportation of food, fuel, vehicles, generators, medicines, tents, construction materials etc. This also involves transportation of engineering equipment and spare parts necessary for servicing the numerous UN vehicles, generators and other equipment deployed on the mission.

**Mobility of Forces:** One of the major tasks of BANATU is troops rotation. Because of its payload capacity and quick changeover time to convert from cargo to troops carrying configuration or vice versa, the aircraft is extensively used for troops transportation across the theatre of operation. This facilitates MONUSCO to remain flexible in planning and ensures rapid deployment of forces whenever necessary.

**Rapid Asset Deployment:** Due to the versatile capabilities of the aircraft and readiness of the unit, the aircraft can be tasked to deploy forces or assets with very short notice. This enables the mission to deploy QRF, engineering units or any other asset quickly to the designated area either to deter the adversary or in quick response to ensure compliance with the mandate for civilian protection.

**Specialized Operations and Tactical Proficiency:** Apart from the unique capabilities of the platform, the members of BANATU have been demonstrating outstanding professionalism in carrying out challenging

and difficult operations. The high standard of training, dedication and adherence to standard procedures enabled the unit to conduct the special operations successfully with maximum safety which are as follows:-<sup>3</sup>

**Dangerous Goods (DG) Transport:** One of the most challenging missions carried out by BANATU is DG transportation. This is a task which not only involves risk but requires specialized training, adherence to International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) regulations, International Air Transport Association (IATA) rules and UN safety guidelines. After elaborate planning and scrutinization, the unit airlifts DGs including military supplies such as rockets, grenades, ammunition, specialized equipment etc. which are essential for mission sustenance in a rebel dominated theatre like DRC.

**CASEVAC and MEDEVAC:** The delivery of reliable CASEVAC and MEDEVAC service is one of the most vital contributions that BANATU offers. It is extremely important to be able to swiftly evacuate seriously injured peacekeepers and severely sick United Nations personnel from remote and difficult locations to advanced medical treatment centres (for instance, Level IV medical centres in Kampala and Kinshasa). The simple existence of such an evacuation option plays a tremendous motivational role for all deployed peacekeeping missions because it guarantees the observance of the Duty of Care principle.

**VIP and High-Value Transport:** This unit is also tasked with carrying out VIP and high-value missions, such as transporting the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Force Commanders, and visiting UN delegations. This is the testament of the trust placed in the professionalism of the unit.

**Pre-Goma Strategic Basing and Force Projection:** The first dispatching of the BANATU to Bunia was due to the United Nations' requirement to service the mission within the unstable Ituri Province. Nevertheless, the strategic decision to move the aircraft to Goma in 2021 was made to enhance its airpower projection capability. Being situated near the hotspots of the conflict in North Kivu (the most resilient point of instabilities in the mission area) and having better airfield facilities, Goma provided a centralized place from where the C-130B could act promptly according to the changing conditions of the situation on the ground in order to carry out the tasks stipulated by the Chapter VII mandates of the mission.<sup>4</sup>

The stable and professional performance of such missions for over ten years contributed to BANATU's position not only as a reliable asset but also as an indispensable strategic resource for MONUSCO and was the base for what would later become crucial in dealing with the crisis of January 2025.

### **The Response to Crisis – Goma Capture & Evacuation Operation**

The operational environment within the DRC is innately volatile; however, the events leading up to the capture of Goma by the M-23 rebels at the end of January 2025 represent a significant and immediate escalation in the situation, going beyond threats into a large-scale conflict. Such a crisis demanded an immediate change in the operational mindset of the UN contingents, especially like BANATU having high-value assets.<sup>5</sup> The BANATU response in the context of this kinetic event represents an important study in deploying air assets in support of Protection of Civilians (POC) operations which is discussed below:-

**The Strategic Shock and Immediate Threat:** Being the logistical center of the MONUSCO operations in the highly turbulent region of North Kivu, Goma became the pivotal point of the operation for the whole Eastern DRC mission. Its occupation by the M-23 rebels through a fast and fierce attack became a strategic shock to the mission. Given the speed with which the military attack took place, an emergency situation unfolded in Goma, where not only lives but also infrastructure was taken over, such as the air strip of the city. For BANATU, whose base is the airport of Goma, it had become extremely dangerous since the C-130B airplane is too invaluable to be allowed to fall in the hands of the rebels and the situation on the air strip became too hazardous to stay there.

**The Key Evacuation Task: Saving Innocent Lives:** Prior to the full success of the M-23 takeover of Goma city and the airport, there was a brief moment when evacuation could still be performed. However, under tremendous pressure, BANATU was tasked with its sole available C-130B with a new mission. The task involved the evacuation of 85 civilian staff members of the United Nations and their respective families who included vulnerable individuals such as elderly people and children. This task was no longer one involving just logistical operations but an extension of the UN's protection mandate where Protection of Civilians (POC) was concerned, though it would focus on mission-related civilians.

**Humanitarian and Diplomatic Operations Conducted from Entebbe:** As the city of Goma and its runway were taken over and rendered unusable by the M-23, the C-130B was stationed at Entebbe in Uganda, a distant logistics base away from the active theatre of war. This did not halt BANATU's mission-critical tasks. The unit continued to execute critical humanitarian and diplomatic tasks, demonstrating remarkable flexibility which are shown below:-

**Additional Personnel Extraction:** After being stationed at Entebbe, BANATU conducted several missions from Entebbe to Beni before moving to Kinshasa to rescue UN civilians and their families who were stranded or had found refuge elsewhere than Goma.

**The ICRC-Coordinated Airlift:** A good number of FARDC (DRC Armed Forces) personnel surrendered to UN during the conflict at Goma in January 2025. Once ICRC negotiated with M-23 for their safe passage to Kinshasa, BANATU was tasked to airlift these personnel from Beni to Kinshasa. This was a very sensitive mission considering the security of the surrendered soldiers and neutrality of UN to the different stakeholders. Successful completion of the task by BANATU demonstrated the professionalism and commitment of the unit in achieving the mission mandate. This contributed to the de-escalation process after the conflict.

The crew of BANATU demonstrated their capability to immediately switch to a surge operational tempo from a secondary base by carrying out humanitarian and politically sensitive missions into the region and away from it. This was a testament to the strategic depth offered by the Bangladeshi contingent.<sup>6</sup>

### **Operational Resilience: Sustaining Mission Tempo from Entebbe**

Although the successful evacuation from Goma was a proof of tactical abilities of the UNPKO, this operation brought about a new challenge both at the strategic and operational level. Forced to relocate from its operating base due to security concerns, BANATU had to continue its operation from Entebbe - a regional logistics hub outside the immediate theatre of conflict. This was a necessary move in order to preserve the resources; however, it led to new challenges that were only successfully met by an incredible amount of resilience from the BANATU members which are highlighted below:-<sup>7</sup>

**Strategic Adaptability-The Forced Relocation to Entebbe:** The move of the C-130B to Entebbe was unavoidable from a strategic perspective. The occupation of Goma implied that the airfield could either be under direct enemy control or was compromised and could not be used by the United Nations for its operations. It was not wise to leave the strategically significant and high value aircraft at Goma considering the threat. Although, Entebbe was the best option at the time for relocating the aircraft, it brought new challenges as follows:-

**Extended Flight Duration:** While operating from Entebbe, flight time to different destinations increased causing cut in to the unit's available operational time, increased fuel burn, which required more meticulous crew resource management to adhere

**Layering of Logistics:** A new challenge evolved while operating from Entebbe that involved coordination with Ugandan officials related to customs, immigration, air traffic control etc. thereby involving more layers of logistics. Obtaining cross-border clearance was one aspect that would complicate matters on a daily basis. However, BANATU with its flexibility adapted to the regional logistic set up without compromising its assigned tasks.

**Overcoming Logistical and Operational Constraints:** Being a sophisticated flying machine, the C-130B aircraft requires regular maintenance which involve availability of spares and adequate technical hands. Being away from the Main Operating Base (MOB) Goma, the unit faced tremendous challenges to keep the sole aircraft fly worthy due to the logistical and operational constraints.<sup>8</sup> These are as follows:-

**Maintenance Continuity:** The ability to sustain a high degree of serviceability of the aircraft necessitated significant efforts on the part of the maintenance staff. The parts had to be transported in at times through a broken chain of supply itself hampered by the Goma incident. The successful continuity of the missions, especially the emergency and humanitarian flights, demonstrates the technical capability and resourcefulness of the ground staff.

**Mission Planning Complexity:** Each flight had to be routed around zones of conflict, respect the airspace of several countries, and allow for the much longer flight duration. Crew had to incorporate all these high-level strategic concerns into the flight

plan for each mission. The capability of BANATU to sustain the C-130B operation and conduct missions from a far-flung location in such an environment is a testament to self-reliant professionalism, which is one characteristic that distinguishes elite TCCs in UN operations.

**The Morale and Personnel Problem-Enduring a Long Deployment:**

Maybe the biggest problem that BANATU had to face wasn't a logistical one, but rather a human one. The long period of time spent on the deployment and the operational constraints affected the morale and well-being of the personnel. The standard rotation period for peacekeepers in the UN force is only 12 months, in order to relieve stress and fatigue and maintain a good state of mind and body. But BANATU-14 had to pass a tenure of 23 months due to the operational and logistic issues. The situation was further aggravated due to the lack of opportunities for timely crew changeovers and leave rotation following the Goma crisis.<sup>9</sup>

**Movement Restrictions and Isolation:** With Goma now under control of M-23 rebels and entry restricted, movements of BANATU members were highly curtailed. Rotation of crew and the ability to avail leave to Bangladesh were hampered. BANATU personnel had to undergo significant pressure due to isolation and stress from working in a war zone.

**The Test of Professionalism:** Unlike other deployments, BANATU members had to remain away from family for an extended period of time, which is often the most challenging aspect of peacekeeping, and is a very serious test of loyalty and commitment. Even under such tremendous stress, the members showed outstanding professionalism in embracing and retaining their objectives. This is obviously the result of extensive training, motivation and devotion of the individuals to the mission mandate. The continued operation of BANATU under number of constraints is the testimony of outstanding professionalism and commitment of its members.

**The Final Strategic Pivot: Relocation to Bunia:** During the crisis at Goma, MONUSCO had no other option to move the aircraft from Goma to Entebbe or any other suitable place. However, the mission finally decided to relocate BANATU to Bunia after evaluating the whole situation that evolved due to the crisis. Uncertainty was the main

reason for MONUSCO to reach such a strategic decision. It is still uncertain when the runway at Goma would become operational or when the security situation in the area would stabilize enough for the operation of the strategic air assets. Considering the facilities available at Bunia and in order to sustain a forward presence in Eastern DRC, the UN offered a more stable alternative to relocate to Bunia. The ongoing relocation mission of the unit exhibits another example of the logistical challenges an UN mission needs to experience. For the BANATU, it marks the beginning of a new stage of its existence.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

Since its deployment to MONUSCO in 2010, BANATU has experienced number of operational, logistic and administrative challenges. While delivering outstanding services to MONUSCO in the face of those challenges for more than a decade, the unit has drawn valuable lessons on the way forward for future specialized air missions in the context of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO). During the Goma crisis, while shifting from Goma to Entebbe and operating with lot of constraints by BANATU brings out an important lesson for modern world peacekeepers - “specialized forces are true force multipliers in mission success” which are mentioned below:-<sup>11</sup>

**The Indispensable Value of Dedicated Air Transport Units:** When the theatre of operations is characterized by vast terrain, inadequate transportation means, and enemy non-state actors, the use of dedicated air units is essential not merely as supplementary means of transport, but also as the key enabler of such military operations. In particular, the capabilities of the C-130B aircraft are a testament to the importance of these forces as they were able to perform a number of important tasks including evacuation of casualties and transportation of sensitive cargo and personnel in an environment fraught with danger (CASEVAC, ICRC coordination). The importance of such a specialized force can be expressed in terms other than mere tonnage lifted and passengers carried since their deployment adds a measure of protection to the overall mission. They add to its level of security, Duty of Care for its members and allow mission leadership to coordinate across the battlefield.<sup>12</sup>

**Lessons Learned for UNPKO and Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs):** Since its deployment in 2010 till date, BANATU offers its unique experiences that are significant for the UN as well as for

potential troop contributing countries who wish to leverage their strategic importance as mentioned below:-

**Strategic Basing and Contingency Planning:** The loss of Goma airport forced a sudden move to Entebbe. For UNPKO, the lesson is that there should be pre-negotiations done by the mission regarding contingency plans involving other bases in the area, in case of sudden loss of the host nation base due to military occupation. The mission should prepare itself to operate from another nation's territory, which involves clear political and operational arrangements prior to deployment.<sup>13</sup>

**Investment in Specialization and Niche Capabilities:** BANATU's consistent success is rooted to its unique capability (heavy-lift tactical transport) paired with its ability to accomplish critical missions. TCCs must keep concentrating on their niche capabilities, especially those which address a specific shortage of the UN. This strategy will enable them to operate with a higher intensity of activities, thus gaining strategic advantage in the discussion of UN force generation.<sup>14</sup>

**Tactical Competence and Strategic Motivation:** The ability of unit members to remain highly effective even under extreme personal difficulties is a clear indicator of the quality of their leadership and the kind of preparation received at Bangladesh Air Force. Thus, the effectiveness of the strategy of inculcating a sense of mission and self-reliance becomes clear when it allows the peacekeepers to cope with not only external challenges but extremely harsh logistics conditions of a distant and volatile mission zone.<sup>15</sup>

**Final Assessment-An Enduring Example of Strategic Peacekeeping:** The deployment of BANATU in MONUSCO will undoubtedly be remembered as an example of how strategically useful Bangladesh can be as a prominent Troop Contributing Country. Rather than counting its contribution by the mere number of its forces, this example of troop contribution focuses on bringing about maximum impact through technologically advanced and tactically challenging capabilities. From being stationed in Bunia since 2010, until shifting its MOB to Goma and then being forced to shift even further to Entebbe, this unit has shown time and time again that its members are not only able to operate successfully

in the most dangerous conditions, but they are also able to fulfill their humanitarian and diplomatic mission within the context of the overall political framework of this mission. Finally, evacuating the UN civilian staff from the conflict area at the onset of the M-23 crisis showed yet another function of this unit in saving people's lives when the peace breaks down. The current effort to relocate to Bunia is simply the next chapter in a continuous commitment—a demonstration that Bangladesh remains a resilient and indispensable partner in the global effort to resolve conflict and sustain stability, ensuring that its airpower remains the decisive strategic enabler for peace in the heart of Africa.

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### **Brief Biography**



**Group Captain Ahmed Faisal, psc** was commissioned on 24 December 2001 in GD(P) Branch. He is a 'Cat A' Captain in AN-32 aircraft, 'Cat B' Captain in C-130B aircraft and a 'Cat B' Flying Instructor. In his flying career, he has served in 11 Squadron, 3 Squadron and 101 Special Flying Unit as operational pilot and instructor. He has commanded 3 Squadron as Officer Commanding. In staff appointment, he has served as Deputy Director in Directorate of Air Operations in Air Headquarters. The officer has undergone various professional courses at home and abroad like Flying Instructors' Course from FIS; Aircraft Commander Course from RSAF, KSA; Defence Services Command and Staff Course from DSCSC etc. He has served in United Nations Mission (MONUSCO) in DR Congo as Pilot in Command of C-130B aircraft under Bangladesh Aviation Transport Unit. Currently, the officer is serving in TRADOC BAF.

## **Media Framing in Domestic and Host/International Media: An Analysis of Image, Narrative and Context**

Fatema Islam, Additional Superintendent of Police

### **Introduction**

In 1989, as part of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), the Bangladesh police first took part in a UN peacekeeping mission in Namibia. Since then, its role in UN peacekeeping has grown a lot in both size and scope. By January 2024, more than 21000 police personnel have served in different countries around the globe as peacekeepers.<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh police deployed a female Formed Police Unit in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which was a giant step toward gender-responsive peacekeeping practice. According to the Bangladesh Police data, FPUs worked in missions such as MONUSCO (DR Congo), United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID, Darfur), and United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA, Mali). On the other hand, Individual Police Officers (IPOs) are deployed to advice, mentor, train local police and support institutional reform.<sup>2</sup> As per the reports of the Bangladesh police, over 4,730 individual officers have completed missions as of early 2024. Bangladesh Police highlighted the service of women officers in peacekeeping. As of early 2024, more than 1,803 female police peacekeepers (as FPUs) have completed missions.<sup>3</sup> Bangladesh Police has a long history of serving as a peacekeeping force of the United Nations. This article sets the framework for investigating how the Bangladesh police's contribution is portrayed in both domestic and international media. By combining framing theory and soft-power analysis, this article observes how the Bangladesh Police are represented in the media and why these matters. Here, the media framing serves as both a mirror and a megaphone, because it reflects the institutional behaviour while amplifying certain values or failures to different audiences.

### **Research Problem**

Since 1989, the Bangladesh police have been recognized as a reputed contributor to UN peacekeeping operations. Even though scholarly and media attention regarding this is not adequate. To shape a public perception, media framing plays a vital role. If the media attention is inadequate, public understanding and recognition of the contributions of the Bangladesh police in UN peacekeeping missions will be unexplored. As a result, the performance and professionalism of the Bangladesh police as a peacekeeper may face critical questions.

## **Research Questions**

The study aims to address the following questions:-

How is the Bangladesh Police portrayed in domestic media as UN peacekeepers?

How do host-country and international media portray the Bangladesh Police in UN peacekeeping missions?

How do these media narratives play a strategic role in shaping Bangladesh's soft power and the international reputation of the Bangladesh police?

## **Theoretical Framework**

In 1974, Erving Goffman first introduced framing theory in sociology. He argued that people never experience an event in a neutral form. The mental "frames" interpret what is happening and give meaning to the event. The audience understands the reality that is shaped by the frames. In this sense, frames act like a lens. Later, the framing concept was adopted by journalists to construct meaning for the audience. The media framing selects certain elements of reality and makes them more prominent. As a result, the audience is guided towards the particular interpretation.<sup>4</sup> According to Entman, media frames work in four ways: the definition of the problem, the identification of the causes, the judgment of right and wrong and finally, the suggestion to solve the problem. In terms of UN peacekeeping missions, framing is important because the same activities of the peacekeepers can be interpreted in many ways. The media can present a peacekeeper's service in different ways, such as humanitarian work, national pride, a symbol of international cooperation, or a mere money-generating activity. The audience's judgment regarding the credibility and effectiveness of the UN mission is widely influenced by the interpretation of the media framing. The framing theory may provide a framework for the analysis of the interpretation of the media coverage of the Bangladesh police in the UN peacekeeping mission.

## **Application to Police Peacekeeping**

Police forces are responsible for maintaining order to protect human rights, supporting local police to restore basic services, and rebuilding trust within conflicting communities to safeguard civilians. Their activities are different from those of the armed forces.<sup>5</sup> So, only day-to-day performance analysis cannot determine their effectiveness. The media framing often shapes

the perception of the audience about the ground performance and long-term effectiveness of the peacekeepers.

### **Soft Power and Image Projection**

The idea of soft power and framing in the media is closely connected. A country can influence other nations by projecting a positive image based on its values, culture, and reputation rather than by using force or coercion through soft power.<sup>6</sup> Participation of the Bangladesh police in UN peacekeeping has become an important part of the reputation of Bangladesh. Moreover, serving in the combat mission area under the UN creates a positive image of the Bangladesh police in terms of responsibility and professionalism as well.<sup>7</sup>

### **Methodology**

This study uses a mixed-methodology, which combines both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis shows that the different types of news formats and journalistic styles appear in both domestic and international or host-country media. The result identifies the general patterns of the topic and the clear differences between the two media types.

The qualitative study focuses on the meaning and interpretation of the news content. It suggests how the media describes the contribution of the Bangladesh Police in UN peacekeeping missions. It also includes the various kinds of narratives used by the media. The aim of the study is to understand the underlying messages and the story construction.

**Data Collection:** 50 news contents published between January 1, 2013, and October 31, 2025, are analyzed in this study. These contents are grouped into two main categories for comparison: a) Domestic media, b) Host/International media.

30 news contents from Bangladeshi domestic media are studied. The researcher collected 30 news content of the specified time from some reputed and widely circulated newspapers and online news media, such as the *Prothom Alo*, *Daily Star*, *Jugantor*, *Business Standard*, *Somoy*, Bangladesh police news portal, *Bdnews24.com*, etc. These news sources have a large follower base, circulation, and regular publication about the UN mission.

The researcher collected 20 articles from the media of the countries where the Bangladesh police served as peacekeepers, such as *The Daily Observer* in Liberia, *The Citizen* in South Sudan, and Radio Okapi in the

Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition to that, some reports from the reputed international platforms such as Reuters, UN News, and analytical organizations like Grey Dynamics were also collected to provide a broader global connection. The researcher searched the relevant contents using some keywords, like 'Bangladesh Police peacekeepers,' 'UN mission,' and 'Formed Police Unit,' and specific mission names, such as MONUSCO, MINUSMA, and UNAMID, etc. The researcher only included content that clearly refers to the Bangladesh police in the UN peacekeeping mission in the dataset. The dataset covers features, interviews, analysis and editorials.

**Data Analysis:** The researcher conducted a quantitative study to understand the genre and journalistic style used in the contents. Additionally, the researcher conducted a qualitative study to find out the theme and deeper patterns of the contents. All the themes, metaphors, and wording are critically analyzed to realize the frame of the content.

### Quantitative Analysis

**Genre Distribution:** The author studied a total of 50 news items, 30 from Bangladeshi media outlets and 20 from host/international outlets. This provides a clear comparative basis for understanding the difference in the frequency of the news genre.

**Table-1: Frequency of the News Genre**

Type of Media	No of the News Article	No of Analysis	Total
Domestic	24 (79%)	6	30
Host/International	17 (85%)	3	20

Source: Author's self-construct

Table-1 shows that 79% of the studied content from domestic sources was traditional news articles. They emphasize national pride in peacekeeping activities. For example, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha's report titled 'UN police chief praises Bangladesh police for maintaining world peace,' published on September 3, 2022, used a tone of global recognition of the role of the Bangladesh police in the UN peacekeeping mission. Here, 85% of the studied content of the host or international sources was news articles. Host/International media portrays the role of Bangladesh police in UN peacekeeping mission, emphasizing gender inclusion, leadership and humanitarian impact rather than national pride. For example, Grey Dynamics'

article 'The Bangladeshi Formed Police Unit (FPU): An Overview' (May 23, 2024) highlights the competence and adaptability of the Bangladesh police in volatile regions like Mali. Similarly, UN News of 2 December, 2022 recognized Bangladesh's contributions within three decades of global peacekeeping evolution. Articles on UN news portals highlighted the service, sacrifice, and solidarity of the Bangladesh police in the UN mission. The large percentage of news articles published in both domestic and international/host media indicates institutional journalism dependency, where the news depends only on what the institutions communicate. It lacks investigative engagement.

Compared to the news articles, the newspaper published very few news analyses containing the evaluation of the contribution of the Bangladesh police in different UN missions over the decades. UN news published an analysis titled 'Bangladesh: Three decades of service and sacrifice in UN peacekeeping' on 2 December, 2022, which critically evaluated the overall performance of the Bangladesh police in the UN peacekeeping mission.

**Journalistic Style:** In this section, the researcher examines the journalistic styles applied in the framing of news coverage. Traditional journalism focuses on answering the basic 'four Ws'- what, where, when and who. On the other hand, interpretive journalism moves beyond mere description and fact-based reporting to explore the underlying driving factor of an event.<sup>8</sup> This approach involves a journalist's analytical engagement with the causes, motives and implications of an occurrence. A news story containing interpretation, evaluation, or contextual explanation of an issue is categorized as interpretive journalism. Conversely, a report presenting information directly, containing the factual details of the occurrence, and including statements or event descriptions without additional analysis, is classified as descriptive journalism.

**Table 2: Journalistic Style**

Type of Media	Descriptive	Analytical	Total
Domestic	28 (94%)	2	30
Host/International	16 (80%)	4	20

Source: Author's self-construct

Here, the domestic media demonstrated a strong descriptive orientation. 28 of 30 articles are descriptive in nature. In contrast, among the 20 studied articles of host/international media, 16 were descriptive, and 4

employed an analytical frame. For example, a review headed 'Bangladesh's Leadership in UN Peace Operations: Why Is It Indispensable,' published on 22 June, 2023, in *Eurasia Review*, provided an analytical review of the contribution of the Bangladesh police in terms of leadership, discipline and professionalism. This difference in journalistic style indicates that the domestic media publish mostly descriptive news, whereas international media engage in evaluative or interpretive analysis more frequently.

### Qualitative Thematic Analysis

**Prestige and Recognition:** Several news articles of domestic media highlight the participation of the Bangladesh police in UN peacekeeping missions as an indicator of national pride and positive global image of the country. Headlines such as 'Police role in UN peacekeeping missions brightens Bangladesh's image' published by Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha on May 28, 2025, spotlight the positive image for the country. News content headed 'Women police in Congo awarded UN peace medal' published in Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha on May 28, 2025, on January 15, 2023, observes Bangladesh police as the carrier of national identity to international conflict zones who return with recognition and an award. However, most of the domestic media tend to publish news about the deployment ceremonies, official departures, or medal receptions instead of the outcomes of peacekeepers' work on the ground.

**Gender Inclusion as Modernity Symbol:** Domestic media often spotlights the female participation of the Bangladesh police in UN peacekeeping missions. Contents with a headline 'Bangladesh Police Women Contingent receives UN peace medal' published in *The Daily Star* on 17 January, 2025, combine two ideas, gender inclusion and international recognition.<sup>9</sup> The news frame highlights the size, achievement, and success of women police as an indicator of modernity, equality, and international acceptance. On the other hand, the international/host media frame the context in a different way. They emphasize the role, challenge and experience of the female peacekeepers in upholding UN values and supporting local communities. The article with a headline 'Daring to be different: One woman's journey ... serving others' describes a female police officer as a role model for contributing to change, resilience and trust-building in a combat zone.<sup>10</sup>

**Operational Service & Humanitarian Work:** Some articles of domestic media outlets publish various news about the activities of the Bangladeshi peacekeepers. For example, medical camps in DR Congo by BANFPU 2 expose their humanitarian work. However, these articles are only

descriptive in nature; no long-term impact is analyzed. The official news portal of the Bangladesh police often shares the humanitarian activities of the peacekeepers in UN missions. Compared to these, the host/international media shows a clearer picture of the operational activities and humanitarian work of them. For example, the UN news portal published detailed medical outreach efforts of the FPU of Mali, noting that 213 patients received treatment for various conditions, including diabetes and high blood pressure. This frame portrays the Bangladesh police as an active contributor to the impactful humanitarian work in the conflict zone.

**Capacity Constraints & Policy Challenges:** Both the domestic and host/international media address some structural challenges of the UN peacekeeping mission. Many articles in recent months cover issues like reduced funding, mission downsizing, and changes in mission priorities. For example, a *Business Standard* report from 15 October, 2025, discusses the return of Bangladesh Police contingents due to mission downsizing.<sup>11</sup>

### **Interpretation**

The study compares the appearance of the Bangladesh police as a contributor to the UN peacekeeping mission between domestic and host/international media. The differences reflect the numerous interpretations of the same motion. Domestic media presents the participation of the Bangladesh police in UN peacekeeping from a linear standpoint. The media frame depicts the Bangladeshi police as flag bearers of the country on the global stage. However, the descriptive media frame mostly focuses on events like deployments, awards, and official commendations. Consequently, the audience of the domestic media sees peacekeeping missions as a national success. The underlying challenges, risk factors and struggles remain in the dark. In contrast, the host/international media frame focuses on the peacekeepers' performance. They report on the detailed activities of the Bangladesh police as peacekeepers on the ground, including their work with local communities, responses to challenging situations, and adherence to UN standards. Even though descriptive reporting is also prevalent in international media, it tends to include more analytical content than domestic media. Peacekeepers of Bangladesh gain the credibility of their work through recognition. When the media positively shapes public perceptions of the legitimacy of peacekeepers' service, trust in their operations is enhanced, thereby increasing the overall credibility of peacekeeping activities. In contrast, the host/international media tangibly evaluates the peacekeepers' work. They underscore the impact of the outstanding performance of their service in the

mission area. Therefore, domestic media builds internal support and confidence, while international media shapes the country's global image. The two perspectives are neither contradictory nor closely aligned. It may create a gap in the understanding of the audiences of two distinct media. When domestic media only show the symbolic success, the audience misses the real challenge or scenario of the mission. Conversely, the audience of the host/international media overlooks the institutional capacity, such as prior mission experience, training systems of the peacekeepers. In terms of a soft power perspective, a strong alignment of these two narratives can help Bangladesh to gain consistent international credibility and trust. The findings suggest that better alignment of these two narratives would enhance understanding of the Bangladesh Police's peacekeeping mission. Domestic media may incorporate more field experiences, while host/international media may focus on maintaining a balanced image of Bangladesh Police peacekeeping works at both domestic and global levels.

### **Limitations and Future Research Pathways**

The study is not beyond its limitations. The codes were determined based on the headlines and the text only. The deeper contextual meaning was not analyzed. The researcher faced a language barrier while collecting news from the host media. Future research may address these limitations by conducting interviews with journalists, peacekeepers and local community members. The future researcher may include translated non-English sources to enrich the dataset.

### **Conclusion**

The study illustrates clear differences in the media representation of the role of the Bangladesh Police in the UN peacekeeping mission. Within the country, participation in UN peacekeeping is viewed as an achievement and a source of international recognition. In host/international media focus is on the operational performance, community engagement and gender inclusion. Both viewpoints are important. However, the gap between them can lead to certain limitations. The Bangladesh Police may benefit from integrating these narratives. A balanced approach that highlights both achievements and operational realities would allow for a deeper appreciation of the peacekeepers in home and abroad. The domestic media may include more field-level reporting and operational challenges to create a more complete and accurate picture. By promoting the contribution of the Bangladesh police in UN peacekeeping mission through proper media framing, Bangladesh can strengthen its soft power. Human-centered storytelling, visual reporting,

mission-based journalism facilitation, and constant international visibility are necessary to convert Bangladesh's peacekeeping contribution into an international influence.

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### Brief Biography



**Fatema Islam, Additional Superintendent of Police**, joined Bangladesh Police as an ASP with 30 BCS cadre in 2012. She served as Assistant Commissioner of Finance, Traffic, Crime Division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Additional SP of Patuakhali and Barguna district of Criminal Investigation Department, Additional SP (ASP Probationers' training) of Bangladesh Police Academy, Deputy Director of Police Staff College Bangladesh, Operational Commander of Special Security and Protection Battalion 2, Platoon Commander of UN Peacekeeping Mission in DR Congo (MONUSCO). She obtained her BBA and MBA from the Department of Finance and Banking, University of Dhaka respectively, MSS in Police Science from the Faculty of Law, University of Rajshahi, and MA in International Security and Terrorism from University of Nottingham, UK. She was awarded with strengthening Scholarship from the Ministry of Public Administration, GOB, and IGPs Exemplary Good Services Badge. She has to her credit a number of publications in recognised journals at both home and abroad. At present, she is serving as Additional SP (Admin and Finance) in Faridpur District Police.

## **Current Trends of Downsizing Forces from United Nations Missions: Impact and Scopes for BD**

Colonel Md Shafiqul Islam, PBGMS, afwc, psc, MPhil

### **Introduction**

Bangladesh (BD) is one of the highest Troops-Contributing Countries (TCC) in the United Nations (UN) mission, and its role in the mission area is praiseworthy. BD started her journey under the blue helmet in the UN Peace-Keeping Operation (PKO) in 1988. BD Armed Forces' (BD AF) contribution in the UN PKO is well recognized by the UN and other countries of the world. BD has gained significant experience and developed sufficient expertise in the PKOs. However, despite the huge contribution of BD AF in the mission area, downsizing of forces from the UN mission is on the rise due to many reasons. Slashing of forces from UN missions is driven by a combination of severe financial shortfalls, asymmetric warfare, shifts in the political landscape, ethnic tensions, terrorism, cyber threats, etc.

In conjunction with above reasons, due to the severe financial crisis in the UN PKO, almost 1400 BD Troops are likely to be repatriated shortly. The UN has decided to pull out these peacekeepers from various missions as part of an emergency plan due to budget cut caused by the financial crisis. In this regard, the Office of Military Affairs (OMA) under the UN Department of Peace Operations has sent a letter to BD's permanent mission in New York. The letter of 14 October 2025 mentioned the decision to reduce the peacekeepers. Not only the budget cut, rather other reasons like terrorist activities in the mission area, political unrest, ethnic tensions are also contributing to reduce the forces from the UN missions. However, amidst this force reduction, there are scopes for BD AF to look for other options like deployment gang Suppression Force (GSF) in Haiti, exploring the Middle-East, investment in Africa with skilled manpower, etc.

At this backdrop, it's imminent that if the trends of force reduction continue, then BD AF may have to face lots of challenges in the near future. As such, this paper will initially highlight the historical perspective of UN deployment which will be followed by current reasons to reduce the forces then it will focus some impacts and scopes for BD to overcome this challenge.

## Historical Perspective

The journey of the peacekeepers of BD commenced by sending fifteen peacekeepers to the UN Iraq-Iran military observer group mission (UNIIMOG). Later, the BD Navy and the BD Air Force commenced their UN PKO journey in 1993. BD AF has always displayed her positive response spontaneously to the UN call for setting global peace and provided her forces when asked for. So long, BD has successfully accomplished sixty-three UN missions in forty countries as displayed in the following Map-1:-

**Map-1: Overall Placement of BD Troops**



Source:[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_United\\_Nations\\_peacekeeping\\_missions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_Nations_peacekeeping_missions)

At present, 6359 UN peacekeepers from BD Army, Navy and Air Force are deployed in various missions. Out of this, more than 5500 personnel from BD Army are deployed in various contingents or as Staff Officers/Military Observers. BD Navy has deployed its ships and water-crafts in UNIFIL (Lebanon) and UNMISS (South Sudan). The Air Force has deployed its helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft in MONUSCO (DR Congo). Summary of total deployment is shown below in Table-1:- <sup>3</sup>

**Table-1: Mission deployment strength**

Country	Mission	Army	Navy	Air Force	Total
DR Congo	MONUSCO	1355	14	373	1742
Lebanon	UNIFIL	0	115	1	116
South Sudan	UNMISS	1414	203	03	1620
Sudan (Darfur)	UNAMID	353	01	02	356
Western Sahara	MINURSO	23	00	03	26
Mali	MINUSMA	1322	04	113	1439
CAR	MINUSCA	1044	06	03	1053
USA (New York)	UNHQ	06	01	00	07
Total		5517	344	498	6359

Source: <https://afd.gov.bd/> or <https://afd.portal.gov.bd/>

**Force Reduction from Various Missions**

Almost 1,400 BD troops from various UN missions will be back by mid-2026 due to severe budget cut by donor countries, especially the US, which has reduced funding globally. BD's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York, along with other missions, was informed about the matter by the UN Department of Peace Operations. During the UN General Assembly in September, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres directed all missions to identify expenditure cuts amounting to 15 percent of their annual budgets which will result BD to lose 25 percent of peacekeepers from various mission areas.

## Current Trends of...

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However, this ratio varies slightly. For example, Nepalese peacekeepers will face 27 percent and those in Rwanda 31 percent job losses." According to the Armed Forces Division, so far, BD has completed 63 peacekeeping missions in around 43 countries successfully where almost two lakh members of the BD AF have taken part in various missions. Around 6,000 peacekeepers are currently deployed in 10 countries. Alongside the force reduction, in the last three decades until 2022, 165 BD troops died and 258 suffered injuries in the line of duty.

### **Case Study**

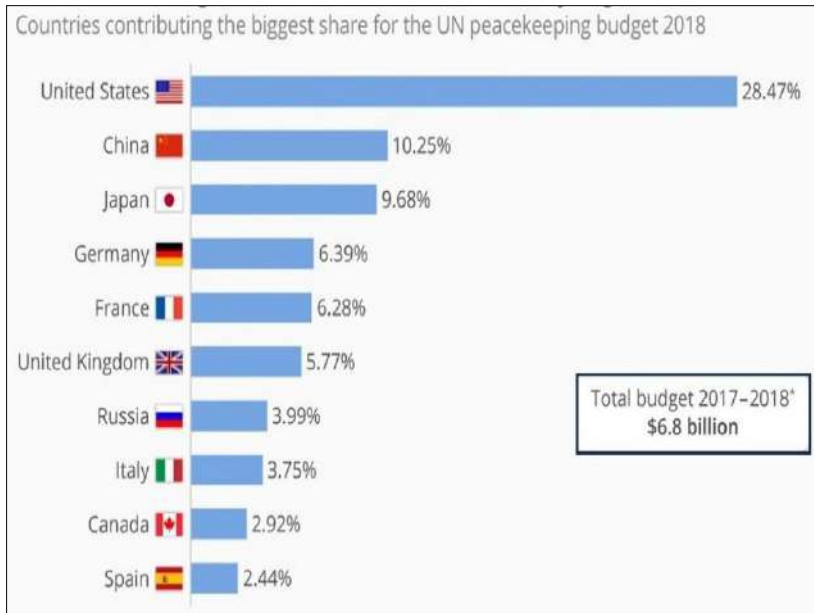
Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) played a vital role in stabilizing the security situation over there. By establishing temporary operational bases (TOB) and regular conduct of patrols, it was possible to ensure the Protection of Civilian (POC). It has facilitated to complete the several local peace agreements. MINUSMA has also played a significant role by creating socio-economic opportunities for local communities, yet by the end of December 2023, peacekeepers left Mali, completing the Mission's drawdown as mandated by the UNSC. It proves that no mission is permanent despite its performance in the international environment.

### **Reasons of Force Reduction**

There are numerous challenges for force reduction. Major reasons are budget cut, risky security environment, geopolitical instability, language and cultural barriers, etc. However, these challenges may vary in different missions while discharging PKO. Some of these reasons are directly responsible for force reduction while some are indirectly. These are briefly discussed below:-

**Massive Cuts in the Budget Field:** On 15 October 2025, UN News reported that a major financing crisis is threatening to impair UN peacekeeping efforts worldwide. It may have to scale back patrols, liquidate field offices, and repatriate thousands of blue helmets due to delayed payments from Member States. The UN Secretary-General has instructed all missions to find ways to save expenses equivalent to 15% of their yearly budgets. This will result in a roughly 25% reduction of BD personnel. The UN's regular budget for 2026 would be \$3.238 billion under the updated plan, a decrease of \$577 million, or 15.1%, from 2025. Approximately 2,681 positions would be eliminated, representing an 18.8% decrease from current levels.

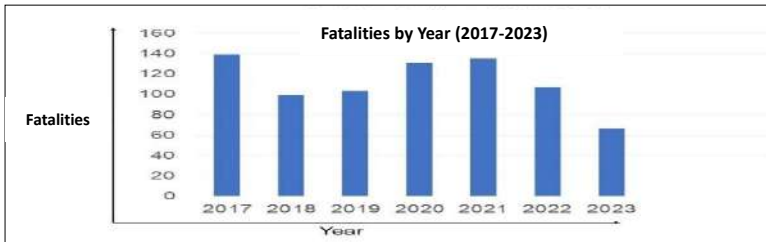
**Chart-1: Bill Contributed by Donor Countries**



Source: <https://www.statista.com/chart/14003/countries-contributing-the-biggest-share-for-un-peacekeeping>

**Risky Security Environment:** Contingents need to function in a dangerous, complicated, and perhaps asymmetrical environment. The contingents had to adapt rapidly, deploying a combination of cutting-edge technology, strategic intelligence, and tactical expertise to keep one step ahead of their foes. The contingents must deal with the realities of casualties in the form of KIA (killed in action), WIA (wounded in action), etc. notwithstanding adaptive efforts. Each loss serves as a sad reminder of the continuous challenges peacekeepers confront in safeguarding peace and stability amidst challenging conditions. Presently, due to the drone attack in South Sudan, the fatal loss of six peacekeepers of BD is one of the burning examples to create fear about the mission area environment which will ultimately result in reducing the force for PKO.

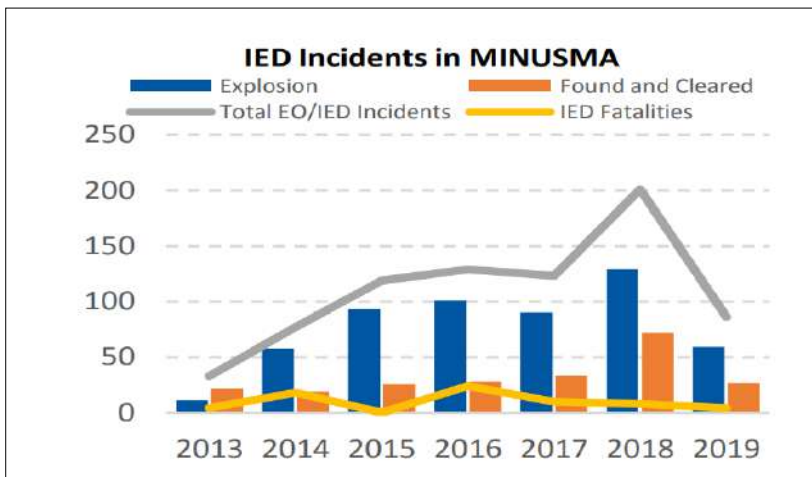
**Chart-2: Risky UN mission Environment**



Source: <https://www.tbsnews.net/infograph/numbers/countries-most-peacekeeper-fatalities-un-missions-1312186>

**Asymmetric and Other Threats:** It becomes a complex affair when there are asymmetric threats, terrorism, and varied unconventional threats available. The worldwide security environment was altered by intra-state wars, the spread of weapons, an increase in ethnic violence, and the increasing involvement of non-state actors. Despite the Secretary-General’s and the HIPPO report’s agreement that UN peacekeeping operations were not intended to combat terrorism, the majority of terrorist-affected nations host UN peace operations. Peacekeepers in Mali and Central Africa frequently deal with suicidal attacks and threats from improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Proper countermeasures are required for the protection of forces or else all these threats will also contribute to reduce the forces from UN PKO. Year-wise (from 2013 to 2019) IED (Improved Explosive Device) incidents in Mali are given below:-

**Chart-3: IED Incident in MINUSMA**



Source: IED incidents in MINUSMA

**Language Barrier:** Languages of different ongoing missions are different which pose barriers for the peacekeepers to work or provide required service to the mission area. At present, there are six official and working languages in the various missions: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library published *Multilingualism at the United Nations* on February 21, 2023, International Mother Language Day.<sup>8</sup> The publication details the evolution of multilingualism from a founding principle to a core value of the Organization. So, it's very important to learn the language of that particular mission otherwise, it acts as a barrier for peacekeepers. Mission languages of different ongoing missions in Africa are shown below:-

**Table 2: Mission Language**

Serial	Mission	Country	Language
1.	MINURCAT	Chad, Central African Republic	French, Arabic
2.	UNAMID	Darfur	Arabic, English
3.	UNMIS	Sudan	Arabic, English
4.	UNOCI	Ivory Coast	French
5.	UNMIL	Liberia	English
6.	MONUC	Congo	French
7.	UNMEE	Ethiopia and Eritrea	Arabic, Italian
8.	MINURSO	Western Sahara	Spanish, Arabic

Source: Author's self-construct

## Impacts

UN budget cuts force BD to repatriate peacekeepers, impacting income and global image. However, it may create opportunities for domestic security reform, enhance defense diplomacy, and leverage peacekeeping experience for new development/ security roles, requiring strategic planning to turn challenges (like job loss, funding gaps) into strengths (like self-reliance, specialized training for new roles). Some of the impacts are as follows:-

**Economic Strain:** Due to a 15% reduction in the global UN peacekeeping budget, approximately 1,300 to 1,400 BDi peacekeepers are expected to be sent back by mid-2026. BD will be

devoid of getting foreign currency which will put pressure to boost both individual and national economic growth.

**Peacekeepers Repatriation:** As one of the world's top troop-contributing countries, troops' repatriations will reduce the foreign currency earnings, and BD is likely to have less influence in the mission areas. Peacekeepers' repatriation will act "counterproductive" at a time when BD is facing economic pressures like high inflation and slowing GDP growth.

**Diplomatic Setback:** Troops' repatriation and budget cut will expose potential diplomatic weaknesses and reduce BD's visibility in global security.

### **Humanitarian Crisis in Refugee Camps**

Since Rohingya Refugees are getting a fund \$12.5 per person from the UN so, budget cut from this will also have some impacts as mentioned below:-

**Massive Food Insecurity:** Monthly food vouchers for nearly one million Rohingya refugees were slashed from **\$12.50 to just \$6.00** per person. This has led to a 27% surge in severe acute malnutrition among children as of early 2025.

**Education Shutdown:** UNICEF and partners were forced to suspend over **6,400 learning centres** in June 2025, leaving approximately 300,000 children without access to education.

**Protective Services Gutted:** Services addressing gender-based violence were reduced by half, and child protection funding dropped by 36%. This has led to increased risks of child marriage, child labour and human trafficking.

**Infrastructure Risks:** Budget cuts to community-led maintenance programs have left camps vulnerable to landslides and flooding during the monsoon season due to unrepaired walkways and drains.

### **Public Health and Maternal Care**

UN agencies like WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA warned that funding cuts are undermining progress in maternal health. Clinics have reduced services for safe childbirth and essential medicines. Reduced funding for water and sanitation (WASH) programs has increased the risk of cholera and dengue outbreaks in overcrowded settings.

## **Scopes and Opportunities for BD**

**Looking for New Options:** BD needs to look for new options as said by the current state minister. For example, Haiti's Gang Suppression Force (GSF) is a UN-authorized multinational mission, approved in late 2025, to combat escalating gang violence by neutralizing gangs, securing infrastructure, and supporting the Haitian National Police (HNP). Like Haiti, BD may plan to explore Africa and Middle-East to send more troops for both military and non-military projects. BD needs to pivot from being primarily a large troop contributor to a leader in development innovation, climate action, governance reform, etc., showcasing its commitment to global stability through non-military means, as highlighted by the UN's own Strategic Cooperation Framework.

**Strengthening Domestic Stability:** Focus shifts to internal governance, social protection, and economic reforms (like e-GP system, digital payments) to build resilience against global shocks.

**Investing in Self-Sufficiency:** Leveraging the military's technical skills (engineering, logistics) for internal infrastructure and specialized training, making units more self-reliant and creating opportunities to send them abroad in an appropriate time and space.

**Deepening Development Partnerships:** Working closely with World Bank/IMF on economic reforms and poverty reduction to gain support for development goals (SDGs).

**Diversifying Global Roles:** Emphasizing diplomacy on climate change, migration, human rights, and sustainable development to maintain relevance beyond peacekeeping.

**Advocating for Reform:** Pushing the UN for balanced nationality representation and adequate funding for future missions when budgets recover.

**Capacity Building and Specialization:** Investing in training for future high-tech or specialized UN roles like cyber, logistics, intelligence, etc., so that any opportunity is found, BD can send its troops then & then.

**Strategic Re-evaluation:** Developing a national strategy to utilize the positive peacekeeping image for economic diplomacy.

## **SWOT Analysis of the Issue:**

### **Strength**

- One of the highest TCC.
- Availability of qualified officers and men.
- Mission experience officers and men are available.
- Positive reputation of BD AF in UN missions.

### **Weaknesses**

- Lack of diplomatic effort.
- Lack of projection of our capability.
- Absence of skill in other UN languages and technical aspects.
- Lack of diplomacy in the UN environment.

### **Opportunities**

- PKOs are still taking place.
- More military options like GSF and non-military opportunities to be explored.
- As one of the highest TCC BD may ask for more troops in the mission area and officers in the UN HQ.
- Opportunities to be found for the employment of female officers/ soldiers.

### **Threats**

- Lack of financial contribution by the Donor Countries.
- Number of other contenders/ countries.
- Lack of skilled manpower.
- Mission exposure of other officers and men of different nations.

**Facts from the SWOT Analysis:** It is found that though BD has experienced officers and men available but scopes are reduced for UN mission due to budget cut by the donor countries. However, using the positive image, experience of serving UN missions for long and looking for new options both in military and non-military aspects, BD may occupy some new missions in the coming days.

## **Conclusion**

BD began its participation in UN PKO in 1988. Today, BD is one of the highest troop-contributing countries. The UN Iraq-Iran military observation group mission (UNIIMOG) received fifteen peacekeepers from BD to begin their journey under the flag of Blue Helmet. Then, in 1993, the BD Air Force and the BD Navy set out under the UN's auspices. Although BD AF has consistently provided her forces in response to the UN's appeal to strengthen world peace, some repatriations are occurring as a result of UN mission budget cuts.

On October 15, 2025, it was reported in the UN News that a serious lack of budget is endangering UN peacekeeping efforts around the world. Due to Member State funding delays, it will reduce patrols, shut down field offices, and repatriate thousands of blue helmets. In order to reduce BD personnel by about 25%, the UN Secretary-General has instructed all missions to find cost-cutting measures equivalent to 15% of their yearly budgets. The UN's regular budget for 2026 would be \$3.238 billion under the updated proposal, which would be \$577 million less than 2025's or 15.1% less. It will result in the repatriation of almost 1400 peacekeepers of BD.

UN budget cuts will impact BD in many folds. Impacts like economic strain, peacekeepers' repatriation, diplomatic setback, humanitarian crisis in refugee camps, and their massive food insecurity, education shutdown, protective services gutted, infrastructure risks, public health, and maternal care, etc. will affect BD very diversely. However, it may create opportunities for domestic security reform, enhance defense diplomacy, and leverage peacekeeping experience for new development/ security roles, requiring strategic planning to turn challenges (like job loss, funding gaps) into strengths (like self-reliance, specialized training for new roles).

To overcome the issue BD should look for new options like sending troops in Haiti for GSF, exploring Africa, Middle-East for military and non-military engagements. BD needs to pivot from being primarily a large troop contributor to a leader in development innovation, climate action, governance reform, etc., showcasing its commitment to global stability through non-military means. Strengthening domestic stability, investing in self-sufficiency, deepening development partnerships, diversifying global roles, capacity building and specialization, strategic re-evaluation, etc.

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### **Brief Biography**



**Colonel Md Shafiqul Islam** was commissioned on 17th June 2001 in the Corps of Infantry with 44th BMA Long Course and joined 44 E Bengal (9 BIR). Besides commanding 7 BIR, he was Second-in-command of 7 BIR, served 27 BIR as Company Commander. He was the Brigade Major of an Infantry Brigade. He was Instructor Class-B in the School of Infantry and Tactics. He served as Platoon Commander in Bangladesh Military Academy. He also served as GSO-1 in AHQ and GSO-1 (Operations) in 24 Infantry Division. Beside mandatory courses, he has done Company Commanders Course in China and Observer Course in India. He is a graduate of Defence Services Command and Staff College, Mirpur. National Defence College, Mirpur. Under Blue Helmet, he participated in two Peacekeeping Missions; as a Contingent Member in Ivory Coast and as a Staff Officer in Congo. He received the Prestigious Sword of Honour, Osmani Gold Medal and Dr. Muhammad Qudrat-e-Khuda Gold Medal from BMA. At present, he is serving as Col Staff, Military Operations Directorate, General Staff Branch, Army Headquarters.

## **Bangladesh Navy in UNIFIL-MTF: Strategic Role in Middle East Collective Security**

Commander M Monzurul Islam, (TAS), NUP, awc, afwc, psc, BN

### **Introduction**

The role of multilateral naval peacekeeping operations has become indispensable as global maritime trade and security face growing challenges. The challenges are emanating from various sources like geopolitical instability, piracy, terrorism, and organized transnational crime.<sup>1</sup> The movement of over 90% of global trade is becoming critical in the maritime domain due to the prevailing and forceable challenges which is making the overall maritime security increasingly contested and vulnerable. This situation is more volatile particularly in strategically sensitive regions like the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup> The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) Maritime Task Force (MTF) was established in 2006 under UN Security Council Resolution 1701. This mission remains the only naval peacekeeping mission in the world mandated and operated directly by the United Nations (UN).<sup>3</sup> The core responsibilities of this mission include supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Navy in preventing the unauthorized entry of arms and related materials by sea. Accomplishing these responsibilities ensure enhancing maritime situational awareness and contributing to Lebanon's maritime security capacity building as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Bangladesh is one of the top troop-contributing countries for long time to UN peacekeeping missions globally. Bangladesh supports the UN mandate and initiatives taken by UN in UNIFIL especially sending naval platforms to support maritime security initiatives in the Mediterranean. The Bangladesh Navy (BN) has emerged as a consistent and capable contributor to the UNIFIL-MTF since 2010 Mediterranean sea where a complex operational environment prevails.<sup>5</sup> Deployment of naval assets by BN including frigates, corvettes at sea, and trained personnel at the UNIFIL Headquarters highlights its growing and continuing commitment to UN responsibilities and to international maritime security.<sup>6</sup> This commitment and sacrifice of BN through force contribution also exemplifies the principles of South-South cooperation in the Middle Eastern region. This particularly reflects Bangladesh's devotion to act as a responsible maritime stakeholder in foreign waters and in a bigger arena of global peace. BN's role within the MTF is more than a symbolic presence, rather a strategic necessity to support global responsibilities. This is reinforcing the collective security in the Levant and enabling multilateral deterrence against maritime

threats. Such contribution of BN beyond own territory affirms Bangladesh's capacity to contribute meaningfully to peace beyond its regional boundaries and spreading its influence as a rising maritime nation.

The paper aims to critically assess the future of the UNIFIL-MTF as a unique naval peacekeeping initiative, and to evaluate the strategic role of the BN within the mandated framework of UNIFIL.

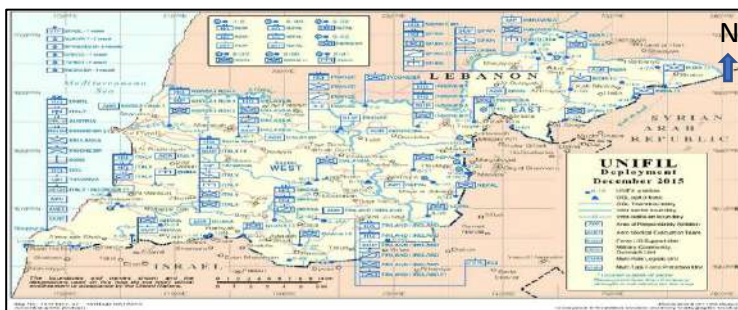
### UNIFIL MTF: A Unique Naval Peacekeeping Endeavour

Established in 2006 following UN Security Council Resolution 1701, the UNIFIL MTF is the first and only naval operation under UN command. UNIFIL MTF is deployed to prevent the unauthorized entry of arms or related materials into Lebanon by sea.<sup>7</sup> The naval assets also assist the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Navy in monitoring territorial waters of Lebanon and building maritime security capabilities of LAF Navy.<sup>8</sup> This unique construct makes UNIFIL MTF a benchmark for future naval peacekeeping initiatives, bridging the gap between traditional peacekeeping and maritime domain enforcement.

### Why is UNIFIL required?

UNIFIL remains essential because it is the only sustained, internationally mandated buffer between the Israel-Lebanon parties along the Blue Line and south of the Litani, an area that repeatedly tips from tension into open fire. The Security Council's core mandate (UNSCR 1701, 2006) tasks UNIFIL to monitor cessation of hostilities, support the LAF deployment, and assist the Government of Lebanon in preventing the entry of arms without its consent; recurring annual renewals (most recently UNSCR 2749 in Aug 2024) confirm the Council's judgment that the risk of escalation persists.<sup>9</sup>

Figure-1: UNIFIL Area of Responsibility



Source: <https://www.researchgate.net/figure/UNIFIL-Deployment-Source-UN>

Operationally, UNIFIL's 10,509 peacekeepers from 47 countries (as of 1 Aug 2025) provide daily patrolling, observation, de-escalation through tripartite liaison, and incident reporting that neither party can credibly perform alone without signaling partiality.<sup>10</sup> The mission's MTF the UN's only naval peacekeeping component backs the LAF Navy in coastal surveillance, hailing/screening traffic, air surveillance, and SAR, closing a key vector for arms flows by sea. Even historic data show scale: over 122,000 vessels hailed and 16,000+ referred to Lebanese authorities (cumulative on UNIFIL's MTF page).<sup>11</sup>

Geopolitically, the force underwrites a fragile stability that affects regional energy and trade. The 2022 Israel-Lebanon maritime boundary deal opened space for gas exploration in Karish/Qana; without relative calm on land and at sea, international operators cannot sustain activity, and escalation risk rises for the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>12</sup> Recent ceasefire dynamics since late 2024 remain brittle, with sporadic incidents even in 2025, underscoring the continued need for an on-scene neutral stabilizer.<sup>13</sup>

**Table-1: UNIFIL at a Glance**

Bangladesh – 119	Italy – 1,193	Spain – 660	Nepal – 877	Ghana – 876	Malaysia – 830
Indonesia – 1,256	France – 747	China – 484	Ireland – 348	Republic of Korea – 280	Poland – 208
Tanzania – 125	Finland – 229	Peru – 1	Nigeria – 2	Cyprus – 2	Croatia – 1
Cambodia – 186	India – 903	Hungary – 16	Mongolia – 4	Guatemala – 2	Estonia – 1
Sri Lanka – 127	Greece – 183	Brazil – 12	Colombia – 1	Zambia – 2	Fiji – 1
Austria – 166	Turkiye – 89	Malta – 9	Kenya – 3	Armenia – 1	Kazakhstan – 3
Germany – 225	Serbia – 182	Latvia – 3	Brunei – 29	UK – 2	Malawi – 2
El Salvador – 52	Uruguay – 1	Netherlands – 1	Sierra Leone – 3	Republic of North Macedonia – 1	

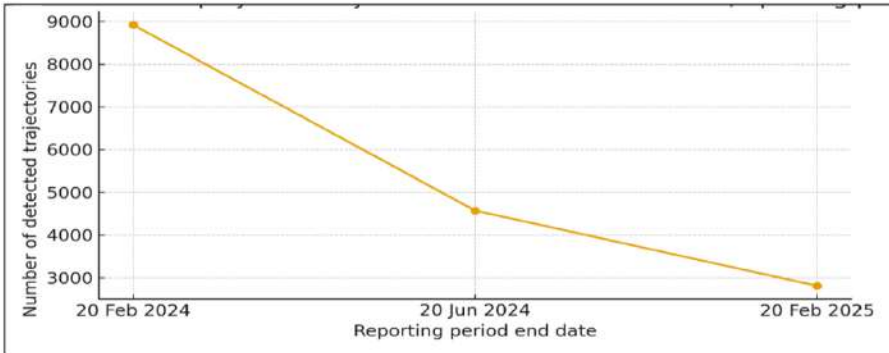
Source: UNIFIL Official Website

### **Why Will the Future Strategic Environment in the Mediterranean Hinge on UNIFIL?**

Three interlocking trends make UNIFIL disproportionately influential for the Levant/East Med security picture which are briefly discussed below:-

**Border-zone deterrence and de-confliction:** The 2024 cessation-of-hostilities understandings reduced large-scale fire, but incidents in 2025 show how quickly miscalculation can resume. UNIFIL’s patrols, sensors, and liaison mechanisms are the standing channel that helps parties verify facts, contain incidents, and avoid spirals. If UNIFIL weakens or exits, the buffer collapses and both sides face “use-or-lose” signaling pressures.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure-2: 2024-2025 incident trend line along the blue line**



Source: Based on Implementation of Security Council Resolution No. 1701 (2006) during the period from 21 October 2024 to 20 February 2025

**Maritime stability and energy security:** The 2022 maritime deal created economic incentives for de-escalation (Qana/Karish). Exploration, insurance and maritime traffic all assume a minimum security baseline. Persistent MTF presence reassures commercial actors and complicates illicit maritime resupply that could reignite a wider conflict, thereby affecting regional gas output, shipping premiums and investor risk.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure-3: East Mediterranean gas infrastructure with disputed/settled lines**



Source: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/06092025-eastern-mediterranean-energy-profile-analysis/>

**State capacity and sovereignty in South Lebanon:** Security Council reports repeatedly stress the LAF as the only legitimate armed force south of the Litani; UNIFIL's assistance (training, joint ops, logistics) is the practical bridge until the LAF can sustain full responsibility. In 2025 the Council again called for increased international assistance to the LAF, implicitly relying on UNIFIL's framework to channel it. Absent UNIFIL, external influence networks would likely expand, hardening proxy dynamics.<sup>16</sup>

### **Geopolitical Significance of the Levant and Eastern Mediterranean**

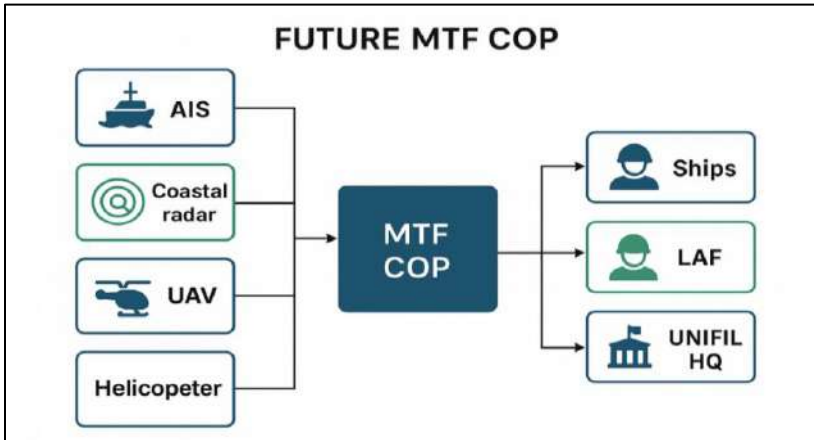
The Levant and Eastern Mediterranean region hold significant geopolitical importance due to its proximity to key global maritime chokepoints, notably the Suez Canal and Bab el-Mandeb Strait.<sup>17</sup> The Suez Canal alone handles nearly 12% of global trade and approximately 30% of global container traffic. This emphasizes its pivotal role in the uninterrupted flow of goods, oil, and strategic commodities between Europe, Asia and the Middle East.<sup>18</sup> The ongoing political instability in nearby countries such as Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and Israel, compounded by non-state actor activities creates unstable maritime domain especially for the trade routes which faces different maritime threats. Therefore, disruptions in these sea lanes of communications could reverberate negative impact across the global economy, affecting supply chains, energy markets and security dynamics.

The Eastern Mediterranean region is also vulnerable to transnational security threats including arms trafficking, narcotics smuggling, human trafficking, and maritime terrorism.<sup>19</sup> These threats are compounded by the limited naval capabilities of many littoral states of this region. There is also a significant presence of foreign warships very occasionally with competing strategic interests. Therefore, in this volatile maritime environment, a consistent and neutral presence of maritime forces such as the UNIFIL-MTF becomes essential. This presence would deter illicit activities and maintain a comprehensive Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). In this regard, BN's participation in UNIFIL-MTF contributes directly to these counter efforts and becomes one of the strategic partners of the littoral states of Eastern Mediterranean. Needless to mention that BN personnels' professionalism, neutrality and operational capability reinforce the credibility of the UNIFIL mission. It also helps reducing risks of maritime escalation in a region already fraught with geopolitical tension.

## How to Reform UNIFIL for the MTF?

Capability and process upgrades should remain at the core of UNIFIL's MTF reform. Persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and a common operating picture (COP) can be achieved by fusing AIS, coastal radar, and MTF air surveillance into a live system accessible to UNIFIL, the LAF Navy and willing maritime contributors.

**Figure-4: MTF Common Operating Picture**



Source: Author's self-construct

Regular Periodic Capability and Readiness Days (PICARD) type interoperability drills should be institutionalized on a quarterly basis, as exemplified by the five-ship exercise off Naqoura in May 2025. Multi-year naval commitments are equally important; 24-36 month rotation MoUs with contributors such as Brazil, Germany, Italy, Indonesia, and Türkiye would ensure smoother handovers and at least five hulls consistently on station. In addition, the comprehensive MTF Manual can serve as standardized doctrine for communications, equipment fit, Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs).

Moreover, operational integration with the LAF Navy should also be expanded for facilitating establishment of effective and professional naval forces. In order to achieve that establishing joint screening cells at the Beirut Naval Operations Center would allow MTF and LAF teams to work side by side. This will accelerate referral decisions for "hailed" vessels and reducing false identities and embargoed goods arrival to the Lebanese ports. Historically, the MTF has hailed approximately 122,821 vessels and referred 16,344 to Lebanese authorities, indicating a need for more streamlined coordination. Beyond day-to-day patrols, contingency planning must be strengthened through pre-agreed surge packages, such as one helicopter detachment and

one fast offshore patrol vessel (OPV) for emergencies. These would be critical in responding to port explosions, mass-casualty events, or oil spills, lessons drawn directly from the 2020 Beirut blast when MTF ships were involved in response. Meanwhile, sustained capacity-building for the LAF Navy remains vital, through expanded ship-rider programs, joint visit-board-search-seizure (VBSS) training, and maintenance mentorship tied to donor equipment pipelines, as repeatedly flagged by the Security Council.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure-5: UNIFIL 5-ship exercise for interoperability**



Source: <https://unifil.unmissions.org/unifil-ships-demonstrate-interoperability-joint-drill-naqoura-coast>

Finally, pragmatic policy and financing mechanisms must evolve to ensure resilience for smooth and sustained maritime operations, especially in the areas under UNIFIL. For this, a mixed “assessed-plus” funding model would preserve the core MTF budget through assessed peacekeeping dues. In addition, adding a voluntary trust fund earmarked for Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), spare parts of the ships, and fuel support for continued naval patrols would be necessary, which would ensure the sustained maritime operations by the naval platforms in case of any hostilities takes place in the region. This would protect operational tempo from fluctuations in single-donor contributions, a recurring issue in UNIFIL’s financing. Moreover, freedom of movement (FOM) for the deployed platforms should be reinforced in mandate language, reaffirming that MTF components do not require prior authorization for carrying out maritime patrols to ease out the deployment of naval assets. Furthermore, UNIFIL should coordinate regularly with the Government of Lebanon for the effective deployment results while upholding these deployment authorities. This approach helps the UN mission minimize

political blockages within the host nations and maintain operational effectiveness and tempo in the land, maritime and air domains.

**How will the Mandate of UNIFIL be Modified?**

For UNIFIL to remain effective in a rapidly evolving regional security environment, targeted mandate refinements are required to fulfill the dynamic security or humanitarian requirements, not a wholesale rewrite, but precise adjustments to align the mission’s purpose, operational approach, and available tools. For this, application of the strategy making framework of Ends (objectives to achieve), Ways (methods to achieve them), and Means (resources/tools required) help clarify how each refinement would improve UNIFIL’s ability to fulfill its core mandate under UNSCR 1701 and subsequent renewals.

**1. Codify Maritime - Land Fusion**

Ends	Ways	Means
Establish a single, integrated situational picture to strengthen early warning and deter arms smuggling across land and sea.	Mandate formal integration of MTF intelligence (AIS data, vessel hails, maritime patrols) into UNIFIL land operations and Tripartite liaison mechanisms.	Data fusion platforms, liaison officers trained in maritime - land coordination, and secure communication links across MTF, ground contingents and LAF.

**2. Strengthen Support to the LAF Navy**

Ends	Ways	Means
Build LAF Navy into a credible sovereign actor capable of sustaining maritime security along the Lebanese coast.	Elevate UNIFIL’s role from passive “support” to active “advise, train, and equip” in coordination with donors, linked to measurable benchmarks.	Dedicated training detachments, donor-provided equipment (patrol craft, boarding gear) and joint patrol schedules south of Sidon.

### 3. Clarify Freedom of Movement (FOM) & Community Engagement

Ends	Ways	Means
Ensure UNIFIL's operational effectiveness while minimizing friction with host-state authorities and local communities.	Retain language affirming UNIFIL's right to patrol without prior authorization, while committing to transparent coordination and community outreach to reduce misunderstandings.	Legal reaffirmation in UNSCR renewals, local liaison cells, Arabic-speaking community engagement officers, and regular reporting to the Council on FOM incidents.

### 4. Introduce Crisis-Response Tasking

Ends	Ways	Means
Enable UNIFIL to provide immediate humanitarian and security support during catastrophic incidents in Lebanon.	Insert contingency clauses into the mandate that allow rapid re-tasking of MTF assets for crises (e.g., explosions, oil spills, displacement events) with streamlined notification procedures.	Pre-designated helicopters, OPVs, medevac teams, and rapid-response SOPs modeled on lessons from the 2020 Beirut blast, and from practical experience on the maritime operations in the Mediterranean.

### 5. Mandate Review Cadence

Ends	Ways	Means
Improved adaptability and operational readiness of UNIFIL to shifting security dynamics along the Blue Line and Lebanese littoral.	Require semi-annual Secretary-General reporting on maritime interdiction and incident trends instead of the current annual rhythm, allowing more dynamic Council oversight and regular situational analysis.	Analytical staff in UNIFIL HQ, UN field intelligence resources, and reporting formats tailored to capture data from both land and maritime domains including personnel deployed for observer mission.

Rotation Period	Name	Crew Size	Maintenance Cycle	Estimated Cost / Notes
24 months (dual-ship rotation)	BNS OSMAN, BNS MADHUMATI, BNS ALI HAIDER, BNS NIRMUL, BNS BIJOY BNS Sangram	~100–120 sailors per rotation	Not specified in sources	Not specified in sources

**How Bangladesh can be a Strategic Partner via UNIFIL in the Middle East Crisis?**

Bangladesh already plays a visible role in UNIFIL-MTF (continuous since 2010). Platforms have included BNS OSMAN, MADHUMATI, ALI HAIDER, NIRMUL, BIJOY and currently BNS SANGRAM (Type 056), with ~100–120 sailors typically per rotation, and Bangladeshi staff officers in mission HQ. This track record puts Bangladesh among the few non-regional, non-NATO navies with long-duration Mediterranean patrol experience under UN colours.

**Figure-6: BNS OSMAN in UNIFIL**



Source: <https://alchetron.com/BNS-Osman>

## **Bangladesh Navy's Operational Contribution and Strategic Value in UNIFIL**

The BN joined UNIFIL MTF in 2010, becoming the first South Asian navy to do so.<sup>22</sup> Over the years, it has consistently deployed frigates and corvettes, such as BNS OSMAN (presently decommissioned from BN), BNS ALI HAIDER, and BNS SANGRAM (presently deployed in UNIFIL), that participated in Maritime Surveillance, Maritimer Interdiction Operations, and Naval Boarding Operations alongside other counterparts from Brazil, Germany, Greece, Indonesia and Turkiye.<sup>23</sup>

BN personnel have earned international acclaim for their discipline, professionalism, and adherence to UN protocols. Their ability to work in diverse multinational environments while integrating seamlessly into complex naval operations underscores their operational maturity and global readiness. The command participation of the UNIFIL MTF by a Bangladeshi senior naval officers further illustrates the trust and leadership capacity Bangladesh brings to the mission.

### **South-South Cooperation and Multilateralism**

Bangladesh is one of the key partners in the UN system to maintain multilateralism in solving global peace issues. As such, Bangladesh's sustained involvement in UNIFIL-MTF is a pragmatic example for the Mediterranean regions especially in the South-South cooperation. This is a model of global partnership among developing countries in the Global South. In this peacekeeping operation, Bangladesh extends its commitment to maritime domain awareness and collective maritime security. This is a holistic approach to overall peace support operations while maintaining a cooperative engagement with the littoral states.<sup>24</sup> As one of the world's top troop contributing countries to the UN peacekeeping missions this participation reflects Bangladesh's broader foreign policy goals of "friendship to all malice to none" while maintain peace, harmony and strategic partnership through strong diplomacy. In doing so, Bangladesh strengthens and exemplify the multilateral character of the UN and bridges the civil-military split through active naval diplomacy.

Furthermore, Bangladesh's naval deployments focus on building operational synergy with other regional and NATO navies. This enhances naval and multinational interoperability and provide valuable exposure for its personnel in multinational environments.<sup>25</sup> Through its proactive contributions to UNIFIL-MTF, Bangladesh not only reinforces peace in a complex yet

important region but also elevates its own strategic partnership and diplomatic credibility on the global sphere.

## **Why Should UN Maintain Number of BN Platforms in UNIFIL-MTF?**

### **Force Generation Stability and Predictability**

Force generation is one of the important facets to maintain a peacekeeping force, however, it is more challenging once it comes to the context of naval forces. One of the UNIFIL's challenges has been maintaining a steady number of naval contributors under MTF. Few partner states of UNIFIL-MTF sometimes rotate out due to different agendas. Whereas, a non-regional, politically neutral country like Bangladesh provides continuous force-generation stability to maintain sustained maritime operations at the Mediterranean. Committing number of ships by BN reduces operational gaps in the maritime security aspects to support LAF Navy and also ensuring the unwanted situation is not escalating in the maritime front. These facilitate the UNIFIL Headquarters to plan naval patrol patterns, interdiction coverage, and training schedules with the LAF Navy. This predictability is extremely valuable to the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), which often faces last-minute shortfalls to maintain effective forces in right time in right place.

### **Neutral Credibility and Balanced Optics**

As UNIFIL is politically sensitive mission in the Eastern Mediterranean region, therefore, if there is only NATO/European navies' presence and domination, then accusations of bias may surface from regional actors. Thus, Bangladesh, as a large Muslim-majority, non-aligned state with strong peacekeeping credentials, provides optical balance. BN ships, not just one token contribution, show real weight in maritime operations and in the bigger political situation. This basically bolsters the UN's claim of neutrality and will give a message to the world that "the world's largest troop contributor also provides a substantial naval contingent," thereby enhances legitimacy.

### **Operational Redundancy for a Thin Force**

The UNIFIL-MTF maintains about 5 to 6 ships on station in a single period, but that's across the entire Lebanese coast (~225 km), which is significantly large. Losing even one vessel to maintenance remarkably reduces coverage. If BN maintains at least two ships, UN planners in the UNIFIL-MTF headquarters can enjoy redundancy. This would ensure that the patrol tempo is not disrupted if another nation temporarily pulls a ship for any reasons.

Moreover, this is operationally critical as the arms-interdiction mandate requires persistent sea presence by the potential capable naval platforms.

### **Training and Capacity Building with LAF Navy**

The UN Security Council repeatedly stresses that UNIFIL’s mandate includes helping the LAF build capacity. BN’s presence with two platforms would allow one ship to be dedicated at times to LAF Navy’s capacity-building missions such as ship-rider programs, VBSS training, SAR drills, while the other one can be in continuous patrols. For UNHQ, this duality is ideal: it strengthens host-state sovereignty while maintaining operational tempo and working with strategic partners.

### **Leadership and Burden-Sharing**

The naval operations usually come with different tasks to perform. As such, the UNIFIL-MTF needs ships not just for patrols, but also for command roles as Tactical Commander at sea. With two ships, Bangladesh could rotate command billets more frequently, sparing overstretched other navies who are performing the tactical command missions. This demonstrates burden-sharing at a time with other stakeholders, when UN is asking emerging contributors from Asia and Latin America to shoulder more leadership in peace operations especially in the Middle Eastern Region.

### **Cost Efficiency for UN**

Two naval ships deployed from a single contributor nation is administratively cheaper for UN. This deployment from a single contributing nation would share logistics hubs and crew reliefs. The UNHQ often struggles with cost ceilings; where BN’s scaled deployment provides “two for one” efficiency while considering logistics and sustainment.

**Table 2: Cost/efficiency comparison highlighting UN benefit**

Factor	1 Ship	2 Ships
Operational Coverage	Reduced during maintenance	Continuous patrol; redundancy
Force Stability	Potential gaps	Steady, predictable presence

LAF Training	Limited	One ship trains while other patrols
Leadership	Limited command roles	Rotate Tactical Commander roles
Cost Efficiency	Single logistics	Shared logistics; lower overhead
Neutrality & Optics	Minimal visibility	Substantial presence

Source: Author's self-construct

**Soft Power Projection and Naval Diplomacy:** Bangladesh has consistently ranked among the top troop-contributing countries to UN peacekeeping operations. This is demonstrating an enduring commitment of Bangladesh to international peace and security.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in the prevailing global standing to the maritime domain, the BN plays a crucial role in peacekeeping to support the UN mandates in the countries having maritime connections. Hence, the participation in the UNIFIL-MTF is a classic example of Bangladesh's continued engagement with the UN. Participation in UNIFIL-MTF significantly enhances BN's strategic profile and credibility in broader maritime domain. This deployment is not merely a symbolic gesture; it represents Bangladesh's ability to project soft power through naval and historic gun boat diplomacy. The participation in the maritime task forces provides BN with invaluable experience in multinational interoperability, operational coordination, and maritime situational awareness as BN platforms are operating in concert with NATO navies and regional stakeholders. These experiences refine the BN's capabilities for future engagements in the national and international arena, whether in peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance missions, or regional maritime security engagements.

**Figure-7: BNS SANGRAM exercising with UNIFIL partners**



Source: <https://afd.gov.bd/photos/image/1422>

Furthermore, such long-term deployments in international waters provide exposure to many combat readiness scopes. For example, operational logistics, sustained operations overseas, and readiness to work with partner navies are few of the important aspects a professional navy must achieve.<sup>27</sup> BN's presence in an UN-mandated task force also enhances its strategic and global reach performing the duties managing set of criticalities remaining thousands of miles away from home ports. This contributes to global stability far beyond the country's immediate maritime boundaries. This presence carries significant soft power dividends beyond hard military power. It underscores Bangladesh's image as a responsible international actor committed to global maritime cooperative security frameworks and global peace.<sup>28</sup> As such, the deployment of BN platforms in the UNIFIL and the role is being performed contributes to the strengthening of bilateral and multilateral ties, particularly with Mediterranean littoral states. It also opens up opportunities for capacity-building, training exchanges, and naval diplomacy remaining at the broader framework of military diplomacy. Thus, considering Bangladesh's maritime interests in the Bay of Bengal, the BN's participation in peacekeeping operations becomes essential. This certainly enhances strategic visibility, naval professionalism, and diplomatic influence in the extra regional affairs. BN's involvement in missions like UNIFIL is not only a reflection of the country's significant role in UN peacekeeping but also a strategic avenue for expanding its maritime footprint in the global arena.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

Bangladesh is increasingly leveraging its naval capabilities to support peace and security in strategically important regions globally being one of the top troop-contributing nations to the UN.<sup>30</sup> BN's engagement in the UNIFIL-MTF is remarkably appreciated by all the stakeholders in the UNIFIL for long time. The commitment of BN goes far beyond routine peacekeeping mission under the UN umbrella rather it is the strategic partnership for achieving global peace. It reflects a maturing operating capability through pragmatic maritime strategies and an evolving global outlook in the maritime arena. The presence of BN assets in the Eastern Mediterranean is not merely symbolic; it is a strategic commitment to uphold international norms, collective maritime security, and the UN Charter in one of the world's most contested maritime theaters.

In these days, naval forces in UN operations are more evident and significantly important. As the world is witnessing multipolar competition and transnational challenges such as trafficking, arms smuggling, and maritime terrorism, the importance of naval forces' employment is becoming demanding, especially in the Mediterranean region.<sup>31</sup> Thus, BN's sustained deployment under UNIFIL-MTF demonstrates its readiness to operate in complex multinational maritime environment. This contribution of BN reinforces maritime rule of law. It also strengthens global partnerships through collective and cooperative security with different partner nations both from littorals of the Mediterranean and from extra regional nations. This commitment and active participation also demonstrate Bangladesh as a responsible maritime stakeholder. Certainly, this is an example of promoting global peace and security and thus willing to extend its contributions beyond regional waters.

BN's continued contribution and presence in UN peacekeeping missions in all the dimensions and domains, particularly in maritime contexts as exemplified in UNIFIL-MTF, reinforces the country's long-standing peace-centric foreign engagement.<sup>32</sup> It strengthens Bangladesh's strategic foresightedness to global engagement. BN's participation in UNIFIL-MTF also enhances naval professionalism and offers a platform for soft power projection through humanitarian support and naval diplomacy. It highlights BN's vision of a future-ready navy who is capable, credible and globally engaged in supporting both national interests and global peace.

## **Recommendations**

**Sustain and Expand Participation:** Bangladesh Navy should continue to participate in UNIFIL MTF and should include more capable platforms within UNIFIL MTF along with explore expansion into other naval peacekeeping missions if and when mandated.

**Enhance Interoperability:** The participating unit/ units of BN should do regular combined drills with partner navies to boost operational alignment and facilitate better command coordination under UN directives.

**Invest in Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA):** BN should assist in enhancing technological integration (radar, satellite, ISR platforms) with the Lebanese Navy in building long-term MDA which can help both UNIFIL MTF and promote better Bangladesh - Lebanon defence diplomacy.

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### Brief Biography



**Commander M Monzurul Islam, (TAS), NUP, awc, afwc, psc, BN** was commissioned on 21 December 2002 in the Executive Branch of Bangladesh Navy. He has served in number of BN ships and establishments including State of the Art ship “BNS KHALID BIN WALID,” and in Bangladesh Coast Guard. He accomplished Ships Diving Course in Bangladesh and Malaysia securing first position in both the courses, UDT/SEAL Commando course in South Korea, Comprehensive Security Response Course in the USA, Army Commando Course, Torpedo Anti-Submarine Course from BNS ISSA KHAN obtaining first position. He is a graduate of DSCSC, Mirpur and did 2<sup>nd</sup> Staff course from China. The officer did Armed Forces War Course obtaining first position amongst all Naval Course Members and recipient of Best Individual Research Paper Award (First Position) in AFWC 2023. He obtained “awc” graduating from US Army War College. He has achieved Master of Science in Military Studies and Masters of Social Science in Security and Development from Bangladesh University of Professionals, Masters in Military Command and Military Science, Naval Command College, China and Masters in Strategic Studies, US Army War College, USA. He is the pioneer Jump Master and Free Faller officer of BN. His language expertise over English, Chinese, Korean, French, Arabic and Hindi make him competent for international arena. He served as Instructor in School of SWADS and Centre, Directing Staff at the Junior Staff Training Institute and Directing Staff at the Defence Services Command and Staff College. He commanded BNS ADOMYA, BNS SHAPLA and BNS DURJOY and UN Mission in Lebanon. He was awarded with “Nau Utkorsha Padak (NUP)” in 2017 for his excellence in the service. Presently he is the Executive Officer of BNS PROTTOY.

## **Flying for Peace: Bangladesh Armed Utility Helicopter Unit (BANAUHU) in MONUSCO**

Colonel Sheikh Muhammad Anowarul Haque Sumon, psc,

### **Introduction**

Bangladesh (BD) has always been a committed and trusted member of United Nations (UN) right from its independence in 1971, the nation cherished veneration towards peace and humanity. Ever since the nation became the 136<sup>th</sup> member of UN on 17 September 1974, Bangladesh has grown steadily in its international engagements, increasingly contributing to global peace, humanitarian action and collective security. Active participation of Bangladesh in UN peacekeeping operation missions are the most prominent and respected expression of the nation's commitment to global peace. Bangladesh deployed its first peacekeepers in 1988 to the United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG) mission to monitor the armistice between Iran and Iraq. The journey started with a humble deployment of 15 military observers of Bangladesh Army. Since then the nation has never stepped back, rather it has enriched its experience and expanded the deployment of peacekeepers. Over the decades, it has consistently ranked among the world's top troop-contributing countries.<sup>1</sup>

Peacekeepers of Bangladesh are recognized for their unwavering professionalism, commitment, resilience, discipline and ability to operate in high-risk environments. Near 0.2 million Bangladeshi peacekeepers have proudly served over 63 missions/operations in over 43 countries, including places like Cyprus, Rwanda, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Mali, Ivory Coast, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR), Lebanon and Darfur.<sup>2</sup> Their involvement in peacekeeping operations is inspired by international responsibility as well as by Bangladesh's constitutional principles of peace, diplomacy, and human rights. As a nation Bangladesh promotes and upholds the interest of global peace and humanity. This commitment to peace guides her to push beyond limits towards in preparation and deployment of peacekeepers as per the need of operational demand.

Against this backdrop, the deployment of the Bangladesh Armed Utility Helicopter Unit (BANAUHU) in United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO) signifies an important milestone; showcasing Bangladesh's steadfast commitment to support UN peacekeeping efforts. It has been a challenge for Bangladesh to prove her evolving capability to provide high-value aviation assets to UN missions and reinforcing its

reputation as a reliable partner in global security. Bangladesh responded to the call of UN to deploy such a Helicopter unit which demanded Bangladesh Army to extend its capacity and capability way beyond classical extent. The mission mandated task, the terrain, the weather, the threat situation, the asset capability- all were challenging for the newly formed unit. Yet the commitment was unfaltering. Bangladesh Army rose to the challenge, overcome all limitations and prepared BANAUHU in time to strengthen the arms of MONUSCO.

So far Bangladesh Army had the experience of contributing in Infantry, Engineers and Logistics roles. Bangladesh did not have any prepared Armed Helicopters to deploy in UN. Therefore, the deployment of an Armed Helicopter Unit marked a significant step forward. This was Bangladesh Army's first aviation deployment under the UN Blue Helmet, making it a flagship representation of the country's peacekeeping commitment.

### **Mandate of MONUSCO and Core Tasks of BANAUHU**

**MONUSCO Core Mandate:** MONUSCO operates under the Chapter VII mandate. The core mandate is centered on Protection of Civilians (POC), deference of armed groups, support to the stabilization of eastern DRC. Key Mandate Areas are as follows:-

**Protection of Civilians:** Protect people under imminent threat of violence, including humanitarian workers and rights defenders, as a core task.

**Stabilization:** Assist the DRC government in restoring state authority, security sector reform (SSR), and stabilizing the country, especially in volatile eastern regions.

**Rule of Law:** Strengthen judicial and military justice systems to fight impunity, support prosecutions and promote human rights.

**Security Sector Reform:** Help reform the military (FARDC) and police to improve their capacity to protect the population.

**Stabilization Programs:** Support the DDRCS (Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Reintegration and Stabilization) program.

**BANAUHU Mandated Priority Tasks:** The BANAUHU deployed to MONUSCO with the following:-

Three Mi-171Sh armed utility helicopters

Equipped with 7 x 7.62mm MG/LMG weapons configuration

Pilots trained in NVG flights in tactical operations

Engineers capable of field-level maintenance under UN standards

Trained gunners/crew chiefs for self-protection missions

**Photo-1: Air Gunner and Pilot of BANAUHU**



Source: Author's collection

Being an armed utility helicopter unit BANAUHU had tasks to perform in both armed role and utility role. The priority mandated tasks included but not limited to the following:-<sup>3</sup>

**Armed Role Tasks**

- Fire support to ground troops.
- Armed reconnaissance.
- Armed escort.
- Quick reaction force response.
- Fire support to search and rescue.
- Deterrence (show of force).

**Utility Role Tasks**

- Troop transport insertion and extraction.
- Combat resupply.
- Redeployment of forces.
- Support ground combat operations.
- Extraction Operation.
- Surveillance flights.
- CASEVAC / MEDEVAC.

Emergency logistics support to UN personnel (Civilian and military).

Patrol, observation and monitoring flights.

**BANAUHU's Area of Operation in MONUSCO:** BANAUHU was the only armed helicopter unit of MONUSCO. Mandated to operate all over the MONUSCO area of operation, BANAUHU was based in Goma. Though Goma falls under the Central Sector's operational responsible area, the MONUSCO force headquarters is also stationed in here. Moreover, Goma airport is an international airport.

Goma is the capital as well as most important city on North Kivu province. It is located on the bank of Lake Kivu, and bordering with the very influential neighbour- Rwanda. Historically this part of territory is the most troubled section of MONUSCO. Being the strategic Force Asset, BANAUHU was importantly stationed at Goma as their Main Operating Base. However, the Letter of Assist (LOA) between Bangladesh and UN assigned BANAUHU to operate all over the DRC.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure-1: MONUSCO force deployment map in September 2024**



Source: <https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/monusco-deployment-september-2024>

### Rising Above Challenges in Upholding Global Peace

BANAUHU is already been recognized as Phoenix previously in this paper. The way mythical bird 'Phoenix' rises from ashes and symbolizes

resilience and strength, same is applicable about BANAUHU. Raising BANAUHU is also a typical example of Bangladesh's commitment and dedication to UN peacekeeping.

It is not that Bangladesh Army had helicopters ready to be deployed in UN mission. There was no existence of such armed helicopters unit in the inventory of Bangladesh army. The contingent was formed exclusively to be deployed in UN. Deploying the armed helicopter unit from Bangladesh Army required exceptional dedication, preparation and adaptation. BANAUHU encountered several major challenges both before deployment and after deployment. However, all challenges were mitigated and overcome efficiency and allegiance. BANAUHU came up as an extremely capable and efficient striking air power for MONUSCO. The contingent not only overcame all challenges during its rise, but also it has successfully overcome all hurdles during its operation in the mission area.<sup>5</sup>

### **Pre-Deployment Challenges**

**Aircraft Modification:** MI 171Sh of Bangladesh Army Aviation was neither used as armed version nor was Night Vision Goggle (NVG) supported as per the deployment requirement of UN. However, Bangladesh proved her dedication to support UN peacekeeping operation by quickly attaining the mandated aircraft specification. The dedicated technical team of Bangladesh Army Aviation worked round the clock to complete required modifications for armament attachment and night vision operation. Necessary test flights were conducted by the crews, and compiled certification documents within a stipulated time. UN experts visited BANAUHU before deployment and accepted the helicopters for deployment with satisfaction.

**Logistical Challenges:** Due to the geopolitical realities Russian Mi171Sh helicopters were starving from spares, weapon system and maintenance support. Moreover, airlifting the helicopters to mission area, and UN customs clearance of Entebbe to Goma was challenging. Bangladesh overcame those challenges by forming joint logistics coordination cell. All-out effort was taken to collect necessary spares and logistics support. Meticulous coordination and planning made it possible to transport three helicopters to Entebbe, reassemble those efficiently and fly them to Goma for deployment to MONUSCO.

**Crew Training and Mission Readiness:** The weather, terrain of DRC and helicopter operating pattern of MONUSCO are much different from Bangladesh. Yet no difference could become the barrier to the national dedication towards UN peace effort. To meet UN aviation standards, BANAUHU personnel underwent Night Vision Goggle flight qualification,

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intensive mountain flying training, hostile environment awareness training, live firing with onboard Machine Guns, adverse weather flying etc. Air Gunners were trained in Bangladesh Army only to be deployed in BANAUHU. Bangladesh adopted a mission-specific, enhanced training cycle for BANAUHU crews, which extended beyond usual crew training to include MONUSCO focused tactical scenarios.<sup>6</sup>

### **Post-deployment Challenges**

**Terrain Challenges:** Eastern DRC presents one of the most difficult terrain conditions for helicopter operation. High Mountains, steep valleys, volcanic picks, vast water bodies and dense jungles are the terrain features of North Kivu. All these features restrict availability of emergency landing zone. Presence of live volcano of Mount Nyiragongo creates dust and pebble hazards around Goma and Sake. All these challenges were known to the BANAUHU crews only from text books. However, BANAUHU performed all flying operations within those unique features with utmost professionalism.

**Weather Challenges:** Weather pattern of Eastern DRC also presented the most perplexing situations for helicopter pilots. Unpredictable sudden storms, volcanic ash clouds, high humidity, low visibility after rain, rapid shifting mountain wind- all these were weathers which BANAUHU crews have never experienced before. Tactical and operational helicopter flights within such weather demands the highest of professionalism, situational awareness, dedication and firm control over the machine. Though the challenges were unique, BANAUHU faced all those with valour and versatility, made positive impact in peacekeeping operations of MONUSCO.

**Tactical Threats:** Security situation of North Kivu is the most rickety and treacherous among eastern DRC. This sector hosts numerous armed groups; M23 among them had been most active and dominant during the deployment tenure of BANAUHU. Besides small arms and Rocket-Propelled Grenade (RPG), M23 was reported to be in possession of multi-barrel Surface to Air Rocket Launchers. Due to the active and dominant presence of all those uncontrolled armed groups, most of the air space was under medium to high threat zone. Helicopter flying over such threat zone takes sheer dedication and extreme courage. BANAUHU demonstrated their dedication and courage in all their operational missions in MONUSCO and upheld the mandate of the mission. Even during the most critical situation of Goma being captured by M23, BANAUHU relocated their helicopter to Ituri province, and continued their unwavering support to peacekeeping operation for the Northern Sector of MONUSCO.

**Logistics Challenges:** Due to the tactical and security situations of Goma, BANAUHU faced multiple levels of logistics problem in the mission area. Country Owned Equipment (COE) reached to BANAUHU almost eight months after their deployment. Long and interrupted supply chain delayed most of the helicopter spares shipment. However none of these delays could subdue the dedication of BANAUHU's operational commitment to the peacekeeping. Considerable helicopter damage took place due to unsecured movement of large cargo aircraft in the airport. Even after that BANAUHU with the quick response of Bangladesh repaired all damaged helicopters and continued operational support to MONUSCO. A major logistics setback was faced by BANAUHU when almost all helicopter spares were looted from the Goma Airport during M23 incursion. Yet BANAUHU displayed its sincere professionalism and positive intention to support the peacekeeping operation. BANAUHU relocated the helicopters away from main operating base of Goma, and continued flying operation with remaining spares and logistics resources.

### **Remarkable Mission Conducted by BANAUHU**

BANAUHU has accomplished all the assigned tasks successfully and often responded to the emergency operational requirement of Force Headquarters, MONUSCO. Effort of BANAUHU to accomplish the operational requirements of MONUSCO was highly acknowledged by all concerned. Within less than one year of deployment BANAUHU carried out more than 120 flying sorties; 70 among which were completely operational as per the mandate of MONUSCO. Due to flying mostly over high threat zones all missions were extremely risky and with armed configuration. The missions BANAUHU performed were with unique requirements of armed helicopters and could not be performed by other air assets available with MONUSCO.<sup>7</sup> A comprehensive summary of BANAUHU missions are portrayed below:-

**Table-1: Summary of flying missions conducted by BANAUHU.**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Type of Mission</b>	<b>Number of Sorties</b>	<b>Flying Hours</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1.	Armed Role	13	24:56	
2.	ISR	9	12:17	PINGA, SANJE, SAKE, TCHOMIA
3.	VIP Transportation	4	6:34	

4.	MEDEVAC	4	6:41	
5.	Passenger Transportation	29	79:44	
6.	Cargo Transportation	13	29:40	
7.	Training	24	61:34	11x Familiarization, 6x Night Proficiency, 5x Crew Currency, 2x Night Crew Currency
8.	Miscellaneous	24	34:23	6x Ferry Flight, 8x Ground Run, 4x Positioning flight, 1x Recce flight, 2x Search & Rescue
<b>Total Flying Operation</b>		<b>120</b>	<b>255:49</b>	

Source: Author's self-construct

### Three Remarkable Operations of BANAUHU

BANAUHU achieved remarkable records of successful missions which were impactful for MONUSCO. The MONUSCO mandate is as diverse as Protection of Civilians, Stabilization, Rule of Law, and Security Sector Reform. BANAUHU also conformed to the mandate and performed an assorted range of missions. Among all the missions, three different types- *Tactical*, *Humanitarian* and *Support* missions are being briefly discussed below as examples of diversity and versatility of BANAUHU:-

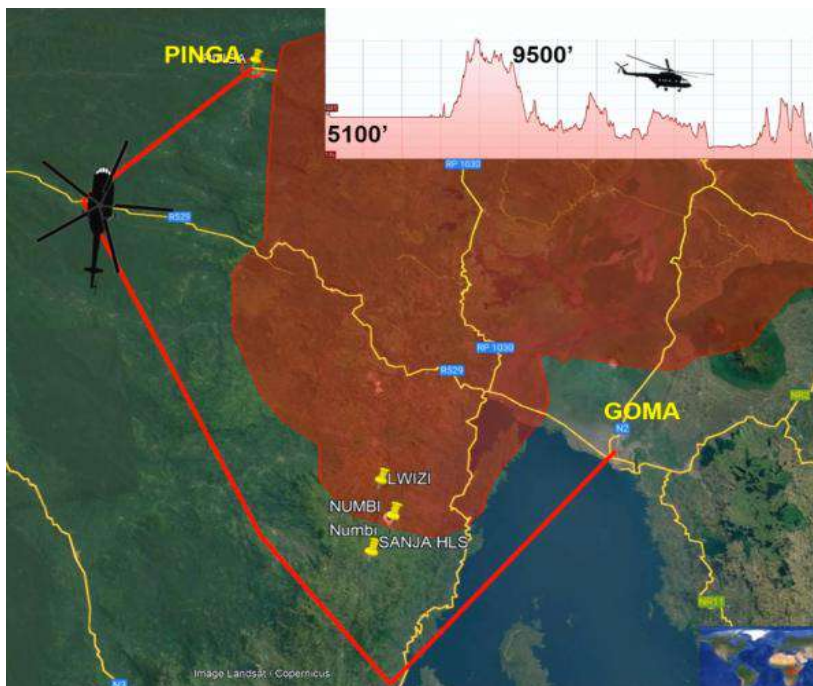
### Reinforcement Support to Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) by 2 × Mi-171Sh in PINGA

**Background:** At the end of December 2025, M23 rebels increased their presence around Pinga. As a result, positions of Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) became vulnerable and required urgent reinforcement. No UN forces were deployed in the area to secure the landing sight, and the helicopter approaches were within enemy weapon range. BANAUHU at GOMA was tasked to conduct heli-landing site recce and conduct troop transport. The rout was over a challenging high altitude mountains of 9500 feet, and distance was 190 nautical mile. The mission aimed to provide armed

escort to South African helicopter, and carry out reinforcement of FARDC position.

**Activities:** Missions were carried from 20-22 December 2025. BANAUHU carried out number of high-altitude reconnaissance flights to identify safe corridors, mark threat locations, and confirm the suitability of the Pinga landing zone. In the execution phase, two helicopters were employed to conduct repeated troop lifts, supply drops, and casualty evacuation. Each sortie included armed recce, rapid landings, engine-on unloading. This operation helped to maintain a continuous air bridge between GOMA and PINGA, delivering troops, ammunition, food, medical kits, and communication equipment. At the same time, BANAUHU also provided armed escort to South African Helicopter in this mission who were carrying troop for reinforcement.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure-2: Route profile of Pinga mission of\_the\_Congo**



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinga,\\_Democratic\\_Republic\\_](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinga,_Democratic_Republic_)

**Challenges:** Operations were conducted entirely within a medium-threat zone due to the presence of RPG-7s, AAMGs, and suspected Man-Portable Air-Defense Systems (MANPADS) around Pinga. The mountainous terrain forced aircraft to fly through narrow approach paths with limited margin for maneuver. Weather changes and the

absence of UN ground support at the landing zone added to operational risk.

**Photo- 2: BANAUHU armed helicopters escorting South African helicopter during Pinga mission**



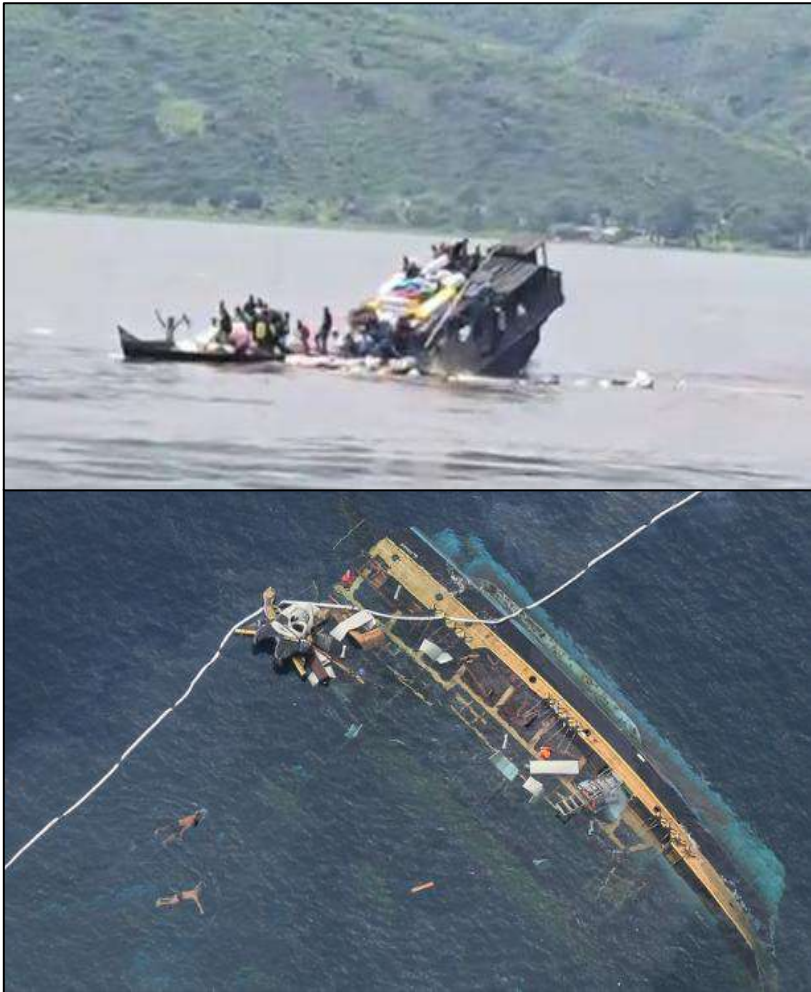
Source: Author's collection

**Operation Achievement:** BANAUHU successfully reinforced Pinga without any incident or casualty. All troop insertion, resupply and medical evacuations were completed as per plan. The rapid response of BANAUHU enabled FARDC to establish a solid defensive foothold, boosting their morale and stabilizing the sector. The mission demonstrated the unit's professionalism, directly contributing to containing the expansion of M23. It was highly praised by Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and UN top officials.

**Emergency Search and Rescue Mission During Lake Kivu Capsize Incident**

**Background:** On 02 October 2024 an overloaded passenger ferry capsized in Lake Kivu, near the port of Kituku. According to provincial officials, at least 78 people drowned. Lake travel was an important lifeline that time due to various activities and road blocks by rebel. Local authorities asked help for search and rescue support. Accordingly, MONUSCO tasked BANAUHU for the immediate search, rescue and recovery mission with two helicopters.

**Photo-3: Capsized ferry in Lake Kivu**



Source: Author's collection

**Activities:** Initially BANAUHU helicopters began air patrols over Lake Kivu, scanning for survivors and debris. Subsequently, the aircraft shifted into full Search and rescue mode; where one Mi-171Sh maintained continuous overhead surveillance and the other conducted winch-rescue operations. Helicopter crews could locate survivors and bodies of victims in the lake. Medical personnel on board started treatment of survivors and handed them over to the ground medical team.

**Photo-4: BANAUHU helicopter flying over Lake Kivu for rescue operation**



Source: Author's collection

**Challenges:** It was a very difficult mission under the traumatic situation. Debris and victims were scattered over a vast area of the lake. It took precise skill and persistence for the pilots and air crews. Low and slow flying over the enormous lake in low visibility and unpredictable weather exposed the helicopters to extreme danger. It was very complex to coordinate with ground operators continuously, rescue victims and respond to continuous calls from survivors. Life of victim and survivors had to be prioritized over risk of own life and helicopters.

**Operation Achievement:** Survivors and dead bodies could be rescued due to the swift response of BANAUHU. Many timely medical evacuation and respectful handling of deceased was possible due to the relentless effort of the BANAUHU. Their persistent patrolling helped to focus and accelerate ground rescue efforts. The operation underscored the critical role of MONUSCO aviation in humanitarian efforts. Through bravery and professionalism, BANAUHU turned a tragedy into a projection of kindness. UN's commitment to human life and protection of civilians was promoted by the mission.

## **Armed Rescue Support to World Food Programme (WFP) Helicopter**

**Background:** On 16 October 2024, a helicopter of World Food Programme (WFP) executed emergency landing at Ibumga, South Kivu due to sudden engine fire. The landing area was within medium threat zone due to the active presence of armed groups. Thereby, the helicopter and the crews were vulnerable on ground, and asked for rescue support from MONUSCO. BANAUHU responded to the call within short notice, and launched two armed helicopters for Search and Rescue operation to the landing site.

**Activities:** It was a combined search and troops insertion mission. Both helicopter flew together through the mountainous terrain maintaining armed over watch and was successful to locate the grounded helicopter. The MI171Sh pair made a synchronized approach to the narrow landing sight and dropped platoon strength of UN troops for landing zone security. One helicopter flew overhead for over watch support, other one landed UN troops to secure the area. Within a short time UN troops could secure and take control over the area for subsequent rescue action.

### **Photo-5: BANAUHU rescue operation of World Food Programme Helicopter**



Source: Author's collection

**Challenges:** The area was an identified medium threat zone with risk of ambush or hostile interference from armed groups. The landing zone was unprepared and surrounded by thick vegetation. Moreover, engine fire of the victim helicopter made the situation more treacherous for BANAUHU helicopters. BANAUHU crews undertook the high intensity

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Search and Rescue mission with very limited intelligence, in a difficult terrain and within very short reaction time.

**Operation Achievement:** All World Food Programme (WFP) personnel could be rescued without any casualty and incident due to the precision, speed and professionalism of BANAUHU. Successful heli-incursion of troops under threat zone could stabilize the ground situation for the rescue operation. High efficiency Search and Rescue, and over watch operation in perilous condition ensured the rescue and security of grounded helicopter and crews. The mission bolstered confidence among UN agencies and demonstrated BANAUHU's vital role in ensuring safety and operational continuity across South Kivu.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

The deployment of BANAUHU in MONUSCO was a predominant indicator of Bangladesh's devotion, dedication and determination in supporting global peacekeeping efforts. Through the deployment of BANAUHU, Bangladesh Army proved the intention of contributing as much as possible in UN peacekeeping operation. It is now established that Bangladesh Army is a trusted partner of UN peacekeeping not only by ground effort, but also in combat air support. The employment of BANAUHU in MONUSCO stands as a powerful symbol of Bangladesh's growing participation in UN peace efforts.

BANAUHU proved that Bangladesh is always ready to go beyond its means, and is always a volunteer to provide supports and efforts in UN peacekeeping. Bangladesh already has achieved one of the top ranking positions as troops contributing nation in UN peace keeping. With the deployment of BANAUHU, this contribution has reached to the next level.

Deploying an armed helicopter unit was not an easy choice for Bangladesh Army, as it is deploying some ground troops. Bangladesh Army Aviation had to mold and stretch their capability to form up the contingent. It was mere dedication and commitment of the nation to UN that guided to prepare the unit from scratches. There had been limitation of resources, manpower, training, equipment, experience etc. Yet all limitation and challenged were overcome with the determination and dedication to global peace.

The deployment of BANAUHU in MONUSCO stands as a powerful symbol of Bangladesh's increasing participation in UN peacekeeping. The contingent performed its task with exceptional professionalism and dedication, despite of complex challenges like terrain, weather, logistics and hostile threats.

BANAUHU enhanced MONUSCO's mobility, protected of civilians, saved lives, and directly contributed in regional stability during the critical phases of the M23 incursion to Goma.

The commitment of Bangladesh to global peace gleams through the valour, benevolence, proficiency and unwavering dedication of its peacekeepers. BANAUHU established a new benchmark for future Army Aviation deployment in UN peacekeeping operations. It also strengthened the place of Bangladesh in UN as a trusted and capable contributor to global peace and security.

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### **Brief Biography**



**Colonel Sheikh Muhammad Anowarul Haque Sumon, psc** was commissioned on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2000 with 43<sup>rd</sup> BMA Long Course in the Corps of Ordnance. As an Ordnance Officer, he has served in Ordnance depot, Comilla and Central Ordnance Depot, Dhaka in various appointments. He is a qualified Ammunition Technical Officer. The author has operational service in Chattogram Hill Tracts (CHT) under 'Operation Uttoron' in Border Guard Battalion (BGB) at Chotohorina, Rangamati. Moreover, he has also served as General Staff Officer-2 of BGB Sector Headquarters, Kushtia. The officer is an operational and VIP rated pilot of Bell 206, Bell 407 and MI 171Sh helicopters. Besides Army Aviation, he has the experience to serve as pilot in Air Wing, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). The author is qualified in Flight Safety Officer Course, and Aircraft Accident Investigation Course from Bangladesh Air Force. He is qualified on Dangerous Goods Regulation (DGR) and Safety Management System (SMS) from Biman Bangladesh Airlines. He has undergone MI 171Sh pilot training course from Russia, and Inventory Control and Management Aspect training on SP Gun NORA B52 from Serbia. He is a graduate of Defence Services Command and Staff College, Mirpur. He obtained Master of Science (MSc) in Military Studies, and Master of Explosive Ordnance (MEO) from Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP). He has also completed Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Royal University of Dhaka. Under Blue Helmet, the author has devoted his service as contingent member in MONUC, Senior Ammunition Technical Officer in UNMISS, and Contingent Commander, Bangladesh Armed Helicopter Unit in MONUSCO. Presently he is serving as Squadron Commander, Rotary Wing in Army Aviation Group.

## **From Security to Trust-Building: Bangladesh Navy's Community Engagement and Mission Legitimacy Under UNMISS**

Commander M Yousuf Ali, (H1), psc, BN

### **Introduction**

In the last ten years, the Bangladesh Navy's UNMISS processes have changed a lot. They have gone from just focusing on security to doing a lot of work that is based on building trust and engaging with the community. The Bangladesh Navy Force Marine Unit (BANFMU) has improved river security, escorted UN supply barges and made it easier for people to move along the White Nile River.

This revolution means that the mission has changed from just providing physical protection to helping people in conflict-affected communities for building relationships. The Bangladesh Navy has taken on more responsibilities in remote, often unstable areas. These include engaging with key leaders, protecting vulnerable groups like women and children, providing medical care and responding to disasters, among other operations. These actions support UNMISS's main goals of protecting civilians and building peace. These forward-looking projects definitely go beyond just planning and logistics. They also include activities that promote mission legitimacy through meaningful human contact, empowering host communities, and building trust between people.<sup>1</sup>

The leaders of the United Nations have always recognized these contributions of BANFMU. The Marine Unit's contributions, such as providing logistical support that allowed them to successfully navigate over a thousand kilometers of river and overcome infrastructure problems, as well as maintaining peace through supply missions, have been accepted as effective and efficient in the operational success of UNMISS. This argument is based on the idea that peacekeeping operations are successful not only because of their strategic planning, but also because of the relationships that peacekeepers build with local communities.

In this context, the present study aims to examine the essential connection between community-based initiatives and enhanced collaboration from local communities in South Sudan. It also wants to explain how the Navy's proactive actions can help make the mission more legitimate by building trust with local communities and making peace more likely. On the other hand, by

adopting the Bangladesh Navy as a model of naval peacekeeping operations, the study offers valuable insights to TCCs on how to enhance the overall effectiveness of peacekeeping operations by institutionalizing trust-building practices through targeted training and gender-sensitive approaches.

### **Trust-Building and Mission Legitimacy: Conceptual Framework**

In modern peacekeeping operations, trust-building and legitimacy of the mission are two interdependent factors that define the level of success of an operation. Legitimacy does not come only from the official recognition of a United Nations mandate, but also from the perceptions of the local communities regarding the fairness, impartiality and commitment of the mission to their well-being. At this juncture, trust forms the core foundation of legitimacy. It is established when there is a display of reliability, empathy, and responsibility by the peacekeeping forces towards the host population.<sup>2</sup>

The experience of BANFMU in carrying out its mandate under UNMISS serves to illustrate this state of affairs. Aside from its main mandate of protecting the waterways of the Nile and providing security to vital convoys of humanitarian aid, BANFMU has also been involved in medical outreach and engagement at grassroots levels and in working with local leadership. This serves to illustrate how actions of care and engagement are able to generate trust and how this, in turn, serves to boost the legitimacy of peacekeeping missions. In fragile states such as South Sudan, it becomes clear from the experience of BANFMU that peacebuilding requires more than just patrolling and protecting; it requires meaningful relationships with the very people it aims to protect.<sup>3</sup>

### **Bangladesh Navy in UNMISS**

**Protecting UNMISS Supply Barges on the NILE:** BANFMU has greatly contributed to the improvement of UNMISS operations through the enhancement of river security, as well as the protection of vulnerable communities. It is composed of 200 personnel, with 12 patrol boats, which enables the safe movement of troops along the Nile River while protecting the convoys of barges that transport food and fuel from Juba to the bases in the north. Since launching independent patrols, BANFMU has carried out nearly 90 missions in a year, extending its presence to remote riverine communities and offering early warning against threats to civilians and humanitarian supplies.

**Photo-1: BANFMU is protecting UNMISS supply barges on the Nile**



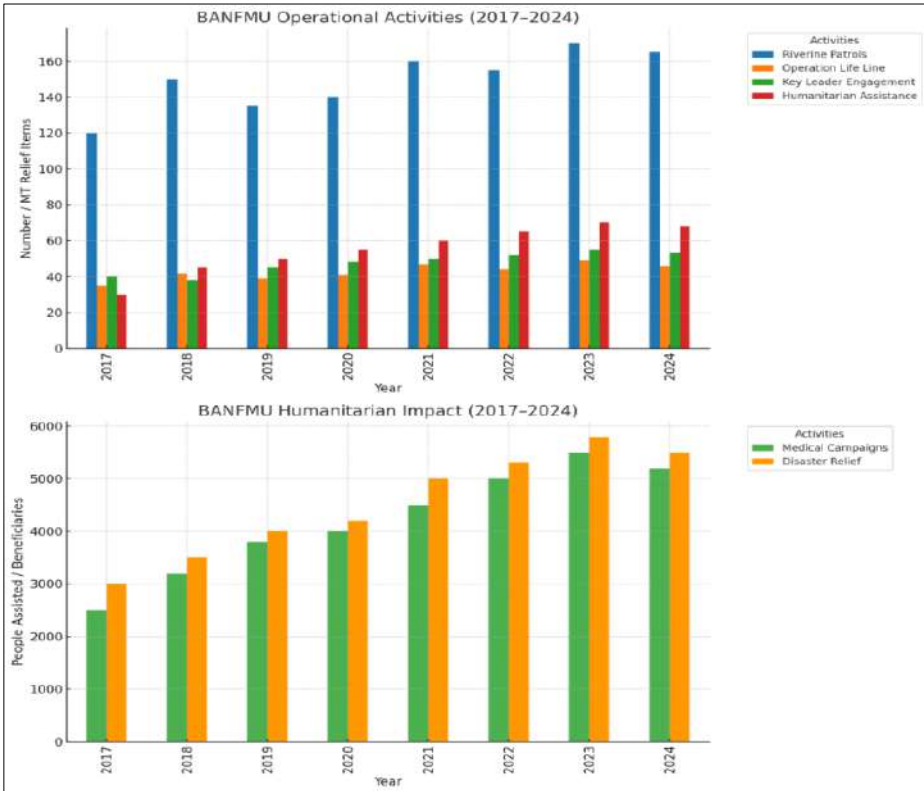
Source: BANFMU-10/ UNMISS

**People-centric activities:** Aside from its core security role, it has also taken a people-centered approach. The medical team in Mangalla attended to over 300 patients in one day, while in Wau, the Navy trained 25 local midwives to combat maternal mortality and enhance security in the region.<sup>4</sup> Such efforts have been recognized globally, most notably in 2024 when 150 Bangladeshi peacekeepers, including 30 women, were awarded UN medals for their efforts. Bangladesh's continued participation in UNMISS is a testament not only to its position as one of the largest contributors of troops to UN peacekeeping operations globally but also its dedication to bridging security operations and humanitarian engagement in volatile regions.<sup>5</sup>

### **Pillars of Community Engagement**

The personnel of the BN regularly interacted with tribal and community leaders to prevent tensions and ensure cooperation from the civilian population. While documentation is scarce, this activity is an example of best practices for peacekeeping operations. The data sheet provided is not only a representation of data but also an indication of BANFMU's operational capability, commitment to their undertakings, dedication to their mission, and engagement with the local population.

**Figure-1: BANFMU Operational and Humanitarian Activities (2017-2024)**



**Source:** United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). (2017–2024). UNMISS Annual Reports and Factsheets. United Nations Peacekeeping. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/unmiss>

**Key Leadership Engagement (KLE):** BANFMU has built important communication bridges by regularly meeting with chiefs, commissioners, religious leaders and representatives from women's groups. These meetings helped to address community concerns and ease tensions between rival groups. These interactions have been very helpful in achieving mission goals by making river navigation safer and encouraging community cooperation during escort and patrol activities. In 2022, BANFMU held over 40 KLE sessions in Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Unity States, which were very helpful in getting food, fuel, and medicine to over half a million people in hard-to-reach areas run by UNMISS. By putting more emphasis on dialogue in their operational framework, BANFMU changed how people in the community saw them from being just armed peacekeepers to being partners in keeping the

peace. This is a clear example of how talking to people is just as important as patrolling in keeping the peace. It shows how a people-centered approach can help maintain peace.<sup>6</sup>

**Photo-3: Key Leadership Engagement (KLE)**



Source: BANFMU-10/UNMISS

**Riverine Patrols & Waterway Security:** Waterways have been a primary mandate of the Bangladesh Navy's Force Marine Unit (BANFMU) under the UNMISS umbrella. Measuring in excess of 1,800 kilometers, the waterways have served as a vital artery to facilitate the flow of humanitarian assistance and the freedom of movement. In a bid to avert conflicts, the BANFMU has a fleet of 12 patrol craft and close to 200 sailors, conducting in excess of 80 patrols along the White Nile and the Sobat rivers. These operations have helped clear the way for humanitarian barges that have carried food, fuel, and medicine to more than 500,000 civilians, as well as provide riverside communities with tangible assurances of safety. BANFMU has shown that making waterways safe can directly lead to more peace on land by turning them into reliable support corridors. Crucially, these patrols also laid the groundwork for meaningful Key Leadership Engagement (KLE), where trust built on security opened space for dialogue with community leaders.<sup>7</sup>

**Photo-4: Riverine Patrols & Waterway Security**



Source: BANFMU-10/UNMISS

**Women and Child Protection:** The Bangladesh Navy Force Marine Unit has been instrumental in protecting women and children, who are the most vulnerable segments of South Sudan's precarious security landscape. The BANFMU peacekeepers carried out over 45 community awareness programs aimed at combating gender-based violence during the 2022-2023 timeframe, with a further 1,200 women and children directly assisted in areas such as gender-based violence education, as well as safe escort operations along vulnerable riverine areas.<sup>8</sup> Not only has BANFMU's continued presence helped to reduce the risks of exploitation and abuse, but also it has fostered community trust of UN peacekeeping operations, thus promoting UNMISS's overarching mandate of protecting civilians.

**Photo-5: BANFMU Peacekeepers Protecting Civilians**



Source: BANFMU-10/UNMISS

**Medical Outreach Programs:** In addition to its security role, BANFMU in UNMISS has had a vital humanitarian role to play through its medical outreach initiatives. For instance, in riverine communities where health services are almost non-existent, BANFMU doctors and medical personnel established medical clinics and emergency medical treatment camps for the local population. Between 2022 and 2023, these medical teams provided medical services to over 7,000 individuals for various medical conditions such as malaria, water-borne diseases and maternal health complications.<sup>9</sup> Medical teams also conducted awareness campaigns on issues such as hygiene, safe drinking water, and preventative health measures to help the local population build their immunity to disease. To the local population living around the White Nile River and the Sobat River, this was their first time availing such treatment from medical professionals and it was an encounter that instilled trust in and gratitude to peacekeepers. BANFMU's provision of healthcare services to support its security role was a clear demonstration that peacekeeping is more than just saving lives—it is about enhancing the quality of life, which is in line with the holistic view of peace as a people-centered concept.<sup>10</sup>

**Photo-6: Medical Campaign by BANFMU at Tonga, South Sudan**



Source: BANFMU-09/UNMISS

**Disaster Response & Humanitarian Assistance:** Also, UNMISS has shown how important BANFMU is as a lifeline for communities in distress. In fact, BANFMU has successfully completed more than 65 humanitarian missions between 2021 and 2024. These missions took place at very important times, such as during floods, fires, and sudden movements of people, when communities were overwhelmed. At critical moments, BANFMU has distributed over 45,000 liters of safe drinking water and 12,000 food packets, ensuring that communities have access to basic survival needs.<sup>11</sup> BANFMU has also provided medical care to over 8,500 people, offering critical care and preventative health services to communities that have limited access to medical care. BANFMU has helped reduce human suffering by giving communities timely help, shelter, and protection. This has sent a strong message to communities that peacekeepers stand with them at their most difficult times. Such humanitarian engagement has significantly reinforced BANFMU's legitimacy and deepened its connection with local communities.<sup>12</sup>

**Photo-7: Disaster Response and Humanitarian Assistance by BANFMU/UNMISS**



Source: BANFMU-10/ UNMISS

**Friendly Football match between BANFMU and Local Youth at Malakal:** The Bangladesh Navy Force Marine Unit, based in Malakal, has gone beyond their traditional roles of patrolling and providing humanitarian support to include activities that promote community engagement, such as friendly football matches.<sup>13</sup> One notable example is the activity that took place on 12 February 2019, where UNMISS and its Child Protection Unit organized a friendly match based on a “red card” theme, aiming to create awareness about the non-recruitment and non-use of child soldiers. The friendly match brought together young people from both the Protection of Civilians site and Malakal town. It was more than just a football game; it was a moment of unity and reconciliation. For many, it became more than just a football game for people. A 12-year-old Aban Akech Awan said, “Playing together gives me hope for a better South Sudan.” It became a symbol of hope and normalcy. Along with its usual duties of patrolling, logistics and providing humanitarian aid, these kinds of activities help build bridges for the peacekeepers and locals. With this, trust is being built and relationship promoted, which create legitimacy for the mission while endorsing the role and responsibilities of the BN.

**Photo-8: Friendly Football match between BANFMU and Local Youth at Malakal**



Source: BANFMU-10/UNMISS

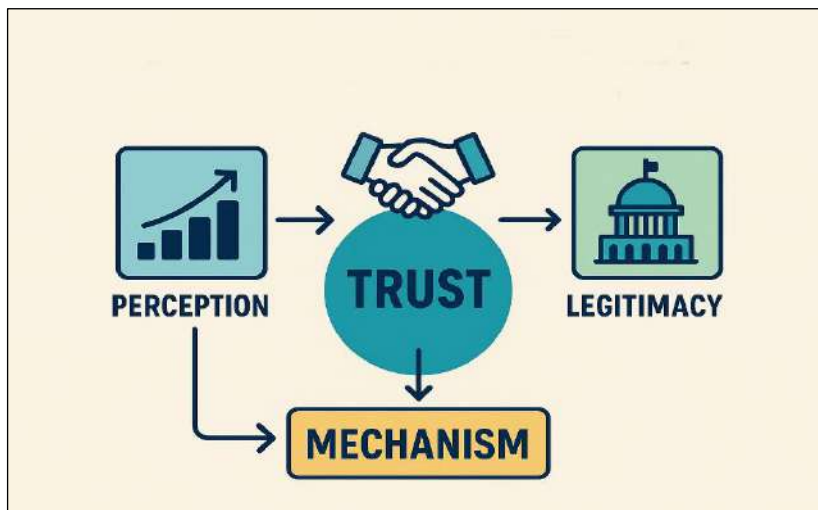
### **Linking Trust to Legitimacy**

In South Sudan's riverine environment, where there is a lot of violence with only a few roads, the BANFMU has become a lifeline for both UNMISS and the host communities. Its activities help to make it more legitimate in three ways:-

**Protection and Mobility (Pragmatic Legitimacy):** Patrols on the river and support for barges keep important supply routes open, bringing food, fuel, and equipment to UN bases and operations. UNMISS reporting records trips of nearly 1,000 kilometers and passing through more than 42 checkpoints to supply the Malakal area—proof of the importance of BANFMU to local communities and UNMISS operations alike.<sup>14</sup>

**Fair and Respectful Engagement (Moral Legitimacy):** By KLE, women and children are safeguarded, medical outreach, and search and rescue operations (such as rescues conducted in 2016, 2017, and 2019), are carried out impartially which brought respect and dignity for the BANFMU. These activities also excel security, foster moral esteem and goodwill.<sup>15</sup>

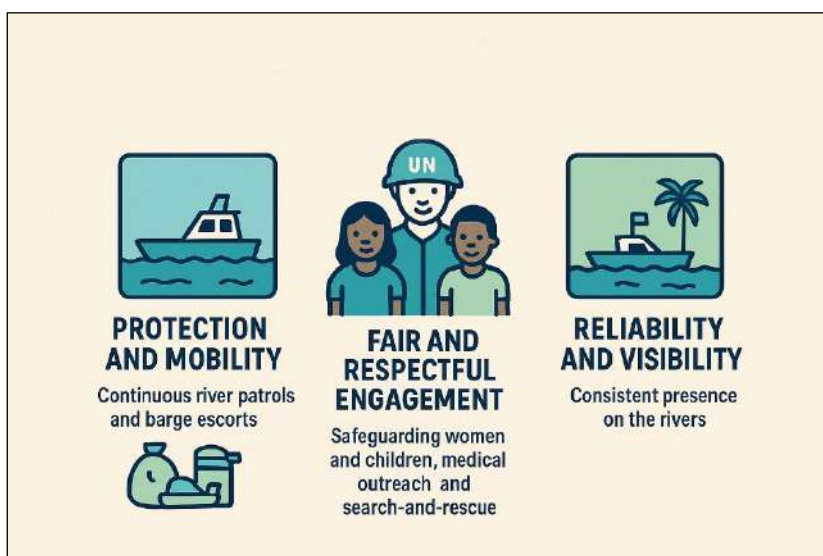
Figure-2: Linking Trust to Legitimacy by BANFMU



Source: Author's self-construct

**Reliability and visibility (Cognitive Legitimacy):** There were 88 independent patrols on the rivers in 2024, which means they were always there. This makes things more predictable. Over time, the communities see BANFMU as a sign of stability.

Figure-3: Cognitive Legitimacy by BANFMU



Source: Author's self-construct

**Photo-9: The BANFMU Mechanism Gallery**

Riverine Patrol for locals awareness



Women and Children



Disaster Response



KLE with Locals



Free Medical Camp



Friendly Football Match  
(UN vs Locals) in Malakal



Source: BANFMU-09-10/UNMISS and Dte of Overseas Naval Op, NHQ

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

**Resources and Operational Constraints:** While BANFMU has made tremendous contributions to the UNMISS, the operations are still limited by a number of constraints. For instance, the limited logistical support and lack of certain key medical supplies, as well as seasonal issues like heavy rains, have been some of the challenges affecting the operations of the BANFMU. For example, in 2023, bad weather and lack of fuel forced the suspension or reduction of 30 riverine patrols and 05 community medical camps.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the emphasis on essential security work, which includes Operation Life Line and involves many communities, poses extreme challenges to personnel and materials. These are sobering facts which highlight the need to ensure that levels of resource support are maintained to ensure that there is a high level of logistical coordination in peace operations, lest they be undermined.

**Table-1: UNMISS Activities**

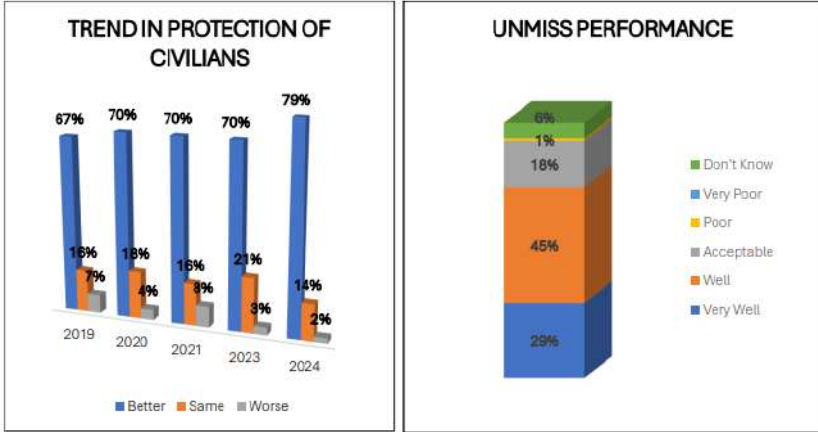
Activity	Planned (2023)	Actual (2023)	Shortfall
Riverine Patrols	120	90	30
Medical Camps	20	15	5
Humanitarian Missions	25	22	3

Source: UNMISS Field Activity Report, 2024

**Neutrality vs Expectations:** Neutrality is still at the heart of UN peacekeeping operations, but at the same time, local communities in areas affected by conflicts have come to expect that, apart from being neutral, peacekeepers must also provide assistance. In South Sudan, for instance, the latest results from the UNMISS Perception Survey conducted between April and May 2024 revealed that 79 percent of local communities perceive that the UN mission has helped improve their protection, while 88 percent acknowledged its role in promoting and advancing human rights. The above results, therefore, illustrate

that local communities have expanded expectations from peacekeepers, who must not only be neutral but also assist them.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure-4: Trend in Protection of Civilians and UN acceptance in UNMISS**



Source: United Nations Mission in South Sudan Perception Survey 2024

**Security Risks:** Peacekeeping operations in South Sudan, obviously, take place in an environment where there is not a single day that passes without risks. There are armed clashes, ambushes and attacks on convoys on a daily basis. There were violations and abuses of international human rights as highlighted in the Annual Brief on Violence Affecting Civilians, January - December 2024, which are shown below:-

**Figure-5: Violation and Abuses of International Human Rights**



Source: Annual brief on Violence Affecting Civilians (January to December 2024)

The above data have shown the security risks in operating in South Sudan are high. For BANFMU contingents, the security challenges are deeply felt when the riverine patrols are engaged under small arms fire along the Nile River, and during convoy escorting under 'Operation Life Line.' To effectively address the situation, there are demands to engage the communities and to access the areas while also sustaining the security to protect the personnel and the mission credibility.

**An Integrated Approach Works Best:** This experience of BANFMU indicated that security measures by themselves were insufficient to sustain peacekeeping operations effectively. For effectiveness to be sustained in peacekeeping operations, security measures must be supplemented with community engagement measures that foster trust between peacekeepers and local communities. This is in line with the general concept of procedural justice in which fairness and respect foster cooperation and trust with peacekeeping forces so that effectiveness and legitimacy of peacekeeping operations can be sustained.

## **Policy & Operational Recommendations**

**Pre-Deployment Training:** Training before being sent out is important for Peacekeepers as they have to deal with tough and, sometimes, unpredictable situations in volatile states. The Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training (BIPSOT) trains Bangladeshi soldiers before they depart for any mission. The soldiers get intensive training that allows them to be compassionate and professional as they carry out their tasks. Such training is not theoretical but leads to better key leadership engagement (KLE), better medical outreach programs to vulnerable groups, and better integration of gender-sensitive approaches into their operations. All these contribute to peacekeepers gaining the confidence and legitimacy of UN operations.<sup>18</sup>

**Gender-Sensitive Capacities:** The development of gender-sensitive skills is no longer an afterthought but an integral part of successful peacekeeping operations. Female peacekeepers have been known to establish trust with women and vulnerable groups at a faster rate. This helps establish lines of communication that might otherwise be shut. Take UNMISS, for instance. In this operation, female engagement teams have been instrumental in addressing issues such as sexual violence and assisting displaced women in protection camps. Female

engagement teams have helped make space for community interaction. It is observed that missions with higher female participation have better community cooperation and protection outcomes. This indicates that there is a real need to increase these female engagement teams in various operations.<sup>19</sup>

**Enhance Riverine Capabilities:** Riverine capabilities are essential for UN peacekeeping operations in countries such as South Sudan. This is because rivers provide the main arteries for movement and access to communities across the country. It is not just a matter of patrolling the waterways. Equipping UN forces with advanced surveillance equipment such as UAVs and hydrographic equipment, as well as civil-military equipment such as landing zones and medical facilities, can really make a big difference to UN forces' security and the UN's humanitarian efforts. One such great example can be cited from the Bangladesh Navy's operations under UNMISS. In 2023 alone, the BANFMU conducted more than 90 riverine patrols across the country. Many of these patrols provided much-needed medical assistance and humanitarian aid to remote communities.<sup>20</sup>

**Improve Civil-Humanitarian Coordination:** Fruitful collaboration and coordination between peace forces and humanitarian agencies are necessary for ensuring security and gaining the trust and cooperation of the locals for assistance. Especially in unstable environments such as South Sudan, joint planning and implementation between UNMISS forces and UN agencies/local populations have created more effective assistance delivery and gained more trust from the locals. For example, in 2023, joint escorts facilitated the safe passage of more than 200 humanitarian convoys, enabling the delivery of food and relief items to 1.4 million people who reside in remote and conflict-affected areas. Active participation of the Bangladesh forces in such operations demonstrates the significance of civil-military collaboration for enhancing UN humanitarian commitments to vulnerable populations.<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusion

The contribution of the Bangladesh Navy in UNMISS shows how peacekeeping styles have changed in recent times and how they have moved beyond just providing security. Today, it is not just about providing security; it is about building trust, fostering relationships and seeking legitimacy among the locals. By showing off KLE, boat patrol in the Nile waters, medical campaign, women and children's health and disaster response, BANFMU has moved beyond just protecting and securing lives. It has shown that peace cannot be achieved by protecting alone; it requires more from it. By winning the hearts

and minds of people and keeping them in trust, legitimacy of UN's mission can be established.

The Navy's extensive community engagement and other human activities have boosted UNMISS's legitimacy in South Sudan. Ensuring the safety of food and water supplies in the provision of flood relief and vital medical aid has made a significant impact on the lives of the people in South Sudan. Upholding fairness, impartiality, and respect to the people of South Sudan at all times, BANFMU exemplifies the concept of Procedural Justice. Thus, the people of South Sudan have welcomed peacekeepers as partners rather than guardians.

Ultimately, the experience of BANFMU illustrates the unique capacity of the naval peacekeepers to serve both security and community needs in a fragile context. The Bangladesh Navy is making UNMISS more than just a peacekeeping force by combining its regular operational duties with humanitarian work. They are turning them into a friend force for the people. This experience also taught another important lesson that any future peacekeeping mission could use. Bangladesh is working to make UNMISS known as a world leader in UN peacekeeping by continuing this multi-faceted approach.

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### **Brief Biography**



**Commander M Yousuf Ali, (H1), psc, BN** was commissioned in Executive Branch of Bangladesh Navy on 08 July 2007. During the last 19 years of his naval career, he served on board various ships and establishments of Bangladesh Navy in different capacities. The officer commanded two naval ships namely BNS TALLASHI and BNS CHITRA. He also served as Staff Officer (Hydrography) at Naval Headquarters, Officer in Charge of BN Hydrographic School, at BNS ISSA KHAN and Deputy Chief Hydrographer (Ops & Trg), at BN Chief Hydrographer Organization. The officer completed his UN mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) as contingent member. He successfully completed professional courses both at home and abroad. He is a graduate from Defence Services Command and Staff College, Mirpur. He also completed Masters in Social Science and Security Studies from Bangladesh University of Professionals. He is a specialist hydrographer and completed CAT A Hydrography course from National Institute of Hydrography, GOA, INDIA and achieved Post Graduate Diploma in Hydrography from GOA University, INDIA. In addition, he did 'Oceanography Principles and Applications' course at NOAMI, Dhaka. Presently he is serving as Deputy Director Hydrography at Naval Headquarters.

## **Bangladesh at the Forefront of Peacekeeping: Contributions, Outcomes and Contemporary Challenges**

Lieutenant Colonel G M Mamunur Rashid, psc, G+

### **Introduction**

Bangladesh (BD), is one of the leading contributors of the UNPKO and renowned across the world for displaying hope, endurance and empathy for humanity. The country itself has a long history of struggle and fight against oppression and emerged as an independent nation in 1971. Within 3 years of independence, BD joined as a member of UN on 17 September 1974. BD peacekeepers successfully carried out the noble duty of international peace and security in some of the most volatile and dangerous environments. The role of UN peacekeeping has evolved from peace-observer to peace-builder, later peace-enforcement due to changes in the nature of conflicts. In the earlier stages, conflicts were inter-state, but over the period, these conflicts have become more of intra-state and asymmetric. As the nature of UN mandates changed over time, the scope of contribution for BD also diversified.

The outcome of participating in UN missions is profound. The experiences of UN missions help to enhance leadership skills of the potential leaders. Working in the global forum with different countries boost up the capacity of the troops as well as their morale. The global image of BD has also increased, leading to stronger global ties. It increase earning of foreign currency as well. On the other hand, the challenges faced in the peace process are enormous. The operation environment in the mission area, adverse terrain, disrupted logistic supply and cultural barriers are few of the challenges. Despite these daunting challenges, BD troops effectively performed their duties, even in the face of death. The sacrifices made by BD peacekeepers enabled peace in many war-torn countries. As the challenges are evolving, the adaptation process and preparations are also high demanding. At this backdrop, this paper is an endeavour to highlight the contributions, outcome and challenges to find a few recommendations in light of the changing mission dynamics.

### **Literature Review**

The current UNPKO are running in a highly multidimensional and complex global security environment. Several recent studies shows that conflicts have become hybrid in nature, often combined with civil unrest,

insurgency, and fragile socio-political dynamics.<sup>1</sup> As a result, UNPKO mandates are also evolving. Scholars highlight that these changes are rooted in the liberal peace building and human security approach, which emphasizes democratic governance, rule of law, post-conflict institutional reconstruction, the safety and dignity of individuals and communities over territorial security.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, normative frameworks such as the Protection of Civilians (PoC), the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and Action for Peace Plus (A4P+) have become central pillars guiding contemporary peacekeeping mandates. UNPKO has therefore transformed from traditional ceasefire monitoring to multidimensional peace building operations aimed at sustainable peace.

Implementing these mandates, Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) play important roles, and BD is one of the largest troop-contributing nations. Recent reports show that BD has contributed through civilian protection, humanitarian assistance, infrastructure development, institutional reconstruction, medical support, and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, studies do not sufficiently show the positive impacts these contributions have on BD.

Recent reports indicate that BD faces persistent constraints, including mandate–resource mismatches, logistical limitations, asymmetric threats such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), and cultural and communication barriers.<sup>4</sup> Geopolitical tensions among UN Security Council members, particularly the United States, Russia and China, create further mandate ambiguity, resulting delayed resource distribution, bureaucracy and selective implementation.

Some of the UN related papers have discussed the contributions and challenges in isolation but did not explain the outcome from its contributions. Therefore, there is a scope of discussing the modern day challenges along with the roles and contributions as well as its impacts on BD.

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative approach to examine BD's evolving roles, contributions, outcome and challenges in UNPKO. Primary data were gathered through interviews, focused group discussion and personal observations, while secondary data were obtained from books, official UN reports, journals, Armed Forces publications, government press releases, and credible news outlets. The collected data were thematically analysed to identify patterns in operational contributions and challenges.

## **Discussion**

### **Evolving Engagement of BD in UNPKO**

BD started its UNPKO in 1988 with UNIIMOG assignment. A group of 15 officers were sent to this assignment. The primary role of BD in this mission was to monitor and help in implementing the 'Armistice Agreement' between Iran and Iraq. BD acted as military observer and provided logistical support to the mission. However, over the period, the role and contribution scope has shifted with the changing security dynamics.<sup>5</sup> The whole tenure can be summarized in following time period based on the nature and pattern of UN Missions:-

Before the Year 2000: Establishing UNPKO Footprints.

From Year 2000 to 2009: Recognition, Expansion and High-Risk Operations.

From 2010 to 2019: Complex Conflicts and Counterterrorism.

From 2020 to Present: Peacekeeping to Peace-enforcement.

### **Contributions of BD as Peacekeeper**

According to the *International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers Journal* published in May 2025, BD troops have completed 44 missions and are currently active in 10 UNPKO assignments across five countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. BD has 5,677 personnel deployed in those missions. The country currently ranks 3rd globally and 2nd among South-Asian countries for its contributions to peacekeeping efforts in terms of troops.<sup>6</sup> BD possesses the glory of ranking top in the list as well. The contribution of BD troops is so vast and glorious that it is difficult to narrate in black and white within limited words. However, some of these are briefly discussed in subsequent paragraphs:-

**Protection of Civilians and Refugee Assistance:** On the basis of humanitarian aspects, the most priority work, and most mentionable contribution of the UN troops is to protect the vulnerable and affected civilians.<sup>7</sup> It is always found that the women and children are the worst sufferer in the time of a crisis situation. BD troops deployed in UN have successfully built safe areas for people at risk in the affected areas. An example would be the genocide in Rwanda. It is also worth noting the name of some missions such as United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH), United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); United

Nation Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). In fact, this particular contribution is applicable for all the mission areas.

**Photo-1: BD Peacekeepers in Darfur Mission Area**



Source: UNPK mission archives

**Peace Stabilization and Further Conflict Prevention:** Ensuring peace in the volatile region is an arduous and daunting task. The second Secretary General of UN Dag Hammarskjold (1905-1961) remarked, “Peacekeeping is not the job of soldiers, but only soldiers can do it.” BD troops in the UN mission has certainly proved his words. United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) is one of the glorious examples where BD troops got success in establishing peace by helping in the political process. BD worked in many other dangerous missions and maintained the same glory. Operation BEPKA-2 in CAR against the rebel UPC is another example.<sup>8</sup> Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast are also in the list where a large number of BD forces have worked relentlessly to stabilize peace.

**Photo-2: BD Peacekeepers in CAR Mission Area**



Source: UNPK mission archives

**Medical Support and Special Assistance to the Women, Children and Elders:** BD Contingents displayed unwavering commitments in this field in different mission areas. They rendered medical support to the remote places where the regular government facilities are unavailable. They used to supply clean water with emergency food to starved children and women. A notable example of this would be the MINUSAMA mission in Mali, where they provided health services and basic food and drinkable water in remote areas of Kidal and Gao. The female engagement team of BD in DRC under the MONUSCO used to regularly visit IDP camps.<sup>9</sup> As a result, sexual abuse among women and children decreased. In Rwanda and South Sudan, BD troops ensured emergency relief and medical care for refugees.

**Photo-3: Free Medical Campaign at MONUSCO**



Source: UNPK mission archives

**Photo-4: Free Health Campaign at UNISFA**



Source: UNPK mission archives

**Nation-Building and Infrastructure Development:** BD has a good name and fame in not only humanitarian field, but also in nation building by constructing roads, bridges, schools and so on. BD contingents constructed 54 km road in Sierra Leone. For different humanitarian contribution of BD troops, President of Sierra Leone, in the year of 2002, declared Bengali to be an official language of their country. BD troops also worked hard to build medical facilities, provide books, IDP camps and rehabilitation centres. As part of nation building, Engineer contingent in Liberia under UNMIL trained the 1st engineer company of the Liberian Armed Forces. Besides, BD forces provided security to other country forces while constructing roads and other infrastructures. Another event that demonstrate nation building effort is reinforcing law and order, reforming police, assisting the judicial system and facilitating economic reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina under the UNMIBH mission.<sup>10</sup>

**Photo-5: BD Peacekeepers Helping in Nation-Building**



Source: UNPK mission archives

**Photo-6: BD Troops Providing Security to an Engineer Team of Peru**



Source: UNPK mission archives

**Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration (DDR) and Logistic Support:** DDR is another significant program for the peace process that BD troops has contributed in different missions. At a practical level, BD helped retired combatants and child soldiers in rehabilitation process. It is worth recalling how BD managed disarming militias and armed clans under the MONUSCO mission. At the same time, BD also helped eliminate mine threats in many missions. They provided training to unemployed youths and helped them to make livelihoods and reintegration into society. BD also established agricultural projects to facilitate employment opportunities for former combatants in Sierra Leone.<sup>11</sup> Beside DDR programs, BD actively supported these UN missions by supplying logistics. Force commander of UN missions in South Sudan praised BD Navy contingent for its outstanding contribution.

### **Impacts/Outcome of UN Peacekeeping on Bangladesh**

The practical impact of participating in UNPKO on BD is very positive. It has direct impact on the capacity building of both the leaders and the led. UN missions are conducted in the most volatile regions of the world. Such engagements increase skills like crisis management, refugee handling, situation analysis, diplomacy, and decision making.<sup>12</sup> Leaders can experience practical challenges in the mission environment, which boost their resilience and enhance leadership skills.

BD is widely known in the world for three good reasons. Those are- 1) BD Cricket team, 2) BD employees working on foreign soil and 3) UN mission. There is no denying of the fact that participating in the UN mission as one of the largest TCC, is obviously a matter of pride and it can work as a diplomatic tool in the time of need. It has created a positive image of BD troops in the global forum and boosted up the morale.

The country is directly and indirectly benefitted by foreign currency earned by the peacekeepers individually as well as from the arms and equipment deployed in the UN missions. According to the latest report, BD has earned Tk 27,941 crore from its peacekeeping missions since the 2000-01 fiscal year.<sup>13</sup>

Successful participation in the UN forum can promote multinational military cooperation. UN missions encourages the developed and modern military to conduct joint exercises and cooperate in the military field. Even it can open new opportunities, as we observe the recent bilateral defence agreement

with Qatar regarding the deployment of 800 BD troops. It may be mentioned that, BD troops have been deployed in Kuwait under 'Operation Kuwait Punorgothon' (OKP) since 1991.

Due to the evolving geo-political and security reasons, the contemporary missions are facing more security challenges which demand modern weapons and equipment. Designated TCCs have to fulfill the given requirements of weapons and equipment. As such, we see the deployment of armoured personnel carriers (APC), helicopter units, engineer construction units, medical units, formed police units with APCs and so on. Troops are regularly trained on those weapons and equipment in the mission areas. Even the troops can experience other modern countries military hardware and technology at the mission area, which makes the troops more confident, and experienced.

### Contemporary Challenges and Constraints

Where there is military operation, there must be a lot of challenges, for which military is deployed. Few of the challenges in the evolving security dynamics are as follows:-

**High Operational and Security Risks:** Armed groups in contested regions do not follow traditional rules of engagement, and they are usually supported by different powerful actors. It is increasing the risk and recent use of UAVs and cyber intelligence to attack BD troops in Sudan is a worrying example of it. The cost of global peace is very high for BD. So far, total 174 BD peacekeepers have sacrificed their lives while serving for global peace.<sup>14</sup>

### Photo-7: Heroic Sacrifice by BD Peacekeepers in Abeyi, Sudan



Source: UNPK mission archives

**Photo-8: Heroic sacrifice by BD Peacekeepers in Mali**



Source: UNPK mission archives

**Complex and Adverse Political Dynamics:** The geo-political environment of the mission state is as complicated as it is adverse to the peacekeepers. BD troops often need to deal within political pressures from different factions, local rebels, and governments while remaining neutral to all the stakeholders.<sup>15</sup> Junta-led Mali government demanded the withdrawal of UN troops in 2022. Such situations arose in other countries as well, when host governments find the neutral UN role to be a political threat for them. These complex political settings affect the operational effectiveness. Again, hostile domestic power centres and strong external involvement by regional and international actors have significantly shaped the conflict dynamics, limiting the operational output of UN missions.

**Inadequate and Disruptive logistic Support:** Peacekeepers work in very dangerous and risky situations. To work in such situations, they require appropriate weapons, proper equipment and timely logistical support. But ground reality is different. Providing timely logistics, technical, and transportation support become challenging because of volatile situations, and difficult terrains. In many cases, it has been seen that local gangs and rebels attack on UN convoys, plant mines, create road blocks etc. The recent drone attack on Abeyi base in Sudan is an example of this issue.<sup>16</sup>

**Photo-9: BD Camp at Abeyi, Sudan after Drone Attack by Rebels**



Source: UNPK mission archives

**Photo-10: Showing Respect to the Deceased at the Drone Attack**



Source: UNPK mission archives

**Cultural and Communication Barriers:** It is no wonder that communication and cultural barriers are major problems that peacekeepers face. Many African nations are French-speaking, but most of the BD personnel do not know or understand French. Again, there are cultural gaps, which can also affect their morale and in turn can hamper mission effectiveness.

**Adverse Terrain and Demography:** UN missions are usually conducted in the most dangerous regions where the terrain is adverse and challenging. There are deserts like Western Sahara and Mali, again there are dense forests like Congo and Ivory Coast. Lack of drinking water, sanitization system, non-availability of daily commodities are very common in most of the mission areas. Absence of local governance further add to

the problem. Due to the influence of different ethnic group, local people possess a kind of mistrust on the UN troops, which make it further difficult to perform their role.<sup>17</sup>

**Photo-11: Adverse Terrain and Hostility from Locals in UNPK**



Source: UNPK mission archives

**Mandate–Resource Mismatch and Financial Constraints:** UN Security Council assigns mandates and tasks which are politically driven, and complicated. But often these ambitious mandates do not match with the resources they need. More importantly, troops contributing to these missions often lack advanced technologies and necessary intelligence support. Appropriate policy and budgetary constraint are the main reasons for such challenges. Due to budgetary constraint, UN missions are also getting downsized, making operations more difficult.<sup>18</sup> For example, Mali is a big country where only 14666 uniformed troops were deployed as of 31 December 2022. Ultimately a vacuum was felt in the northern part which was mostly controlled by the rebels. In Ivory Coast also, the number of troops available in Abidjan after the election of 2010 was felt less than the necessity.

**Recommendations for BD in Future UNPKO**

**Capacity Enhancement:** There is no alternative of training. Appropriate training can overcome most of the challenges mentioned above. Training should address the current nature of conflicts in UNPKO. This includes cultural sensitivity, language learning, crisis management, conflict resolution, cyber security, and protection from UAV attacks.<sup>19</sup> At the academic level, the training centre should encourage research and development to enrich and update training and policies. BD forces can also benefit from joint training exercises with foreign partners like the UN and NATO.

**Promoting Civil and Female Participation in UNPKO:** There are many higher level posts for the civilians at the policy planning level. Though BD is contributing well as TCC, but there remains scope to push the eligible civilians in the civil sectors of UN. There are many high skilled professionals in BD. Civil participation in specialized sectors, such as information technology, administration, engineering, healthcare, election processes, and other civil affairs will increase BD's diplomatic influence. Again, UN always stands for the gender equality. UNPKO focus on women engagement in particular sectors like gender based violation, giving assistance to children, and women. Therefore, BD should focus on to the employment of its civil professionals in different sectors and increase the participation of female troops.

**Leveraging Modern Technology for Effective Peacekeeping:** Contemporary UN missions demand modern technology for the security of civilian as well as for its own personnels. As such, BD should start modernizing its military technology to remain at per with other TCCs. BD should incorporate drones for surveillance and combat zone monitoring. Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Artificial Intelligence (AI), advanced data analytics, and 5G networks can be incorporated where applicable.<sup>20</sup> These technologies will be useful in mission planning and decision-making.

**Increasing Budget and Intelligence Capabilities:** BD should work hard to pursue the United Nations Security Council for increasing mission budgets and resources. Otherwise, troops will not be encouraged to take the challenges. On the other hand, intelligence is a very important tools for the success of any operation. But, UN doesn't have any covert intelligence unit. It depends on the reports of UN observers and staffs. Therefore, these two aspects may be given focus at the appropriate level. In today's world, it is important to increase capability to exert influence. BD needs to focus on improving its capability in international think tank and the military domain.<sup>21</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The role of BD troops is recognised and praised globally on many international platforms. BD has protected civilians and assisted refugees. BD also prevented genocide and sexual violence against women and children, cleared landmines, developed infrastructure such as bridges, schools, and medical clinics, strengthened local institutions, ensured political processes

such as elections, conducted DDR programs, and more. Over time, taking part in these missions has helped BD to increase its reputation on the global platform. It has also increased its diplomatic influence. Experiences from these missions improved leadership and professional skills. Beyond this, BD also gains foreign currency that helps in national development. Importantly, BD armed forces become familiar with different military technologies, which ultimately help in the modernization of the military as well as building military cooperation with other nations.

It is important to understand that achieving all these accomplishments has not been easy for BD. In reality, BD peacekeepers have to deal with various limitations. These limitations include difficult terrain, complicated political situations, sudden guerrilla attacks and open hostility from local groups. Beyond these security threats, there are other barriers, namely cultural and communication barriers, limited budgets, and weak logistical and technical support.

It becomes clear that BD and the UN collectively need to address the challenges. The UN should increase budget and technical support for their missions. Mission mandates need to be practical, not overly ambitious. The UN should also provide cultural and language training to troops. BD also needs to focus on increasing its civilian participation in UN missions. An area that needs to be prioritised is the training institution, and it needs to be strengthened with modern military technologies and curriculum. BD also needs to increase its joint military exercises with foreign forces. It is no wonder that conflicts will evolve with time, but for building peace, the UN and TCCs like BD must work together to resolve challenges and make UNPKO more effective for a better and peaceful world in the future.

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### **Brief Biography**



**Lieutenant Colonel G M Mamunur Rashid, psc, G+** was commissioned in the Corps of Artillery on 27 December 2001 with 45<sup>th</sup> BMA Long Course. In his military profession, he has served in five Units, including commanding an Air Defence Regiment. His other mentionable service experience includes Grade-3 Staff Officer and Brigade Major of an Independent Air Defence Brigade, Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter Master General of an Infantry Brigade, and Senior Instructor Gunnery in the School of Artillery. Under Blue Helmet, he took part in peacekeeping operations as a Contingent Member in Ivory Coast (UNOCI) and as a Military Analyst in the Joint Mission Analysis Center in Mali (MINUSMA). Apart from mandatory courses, he has attended the Missile Battery Commander Course in China and the Certificate on Terrorism Studies from the University of St Andrews, Scotland. He is a graduate of Defence Services Command and Staff College, Mirpur and Artillery Centre and School, Halishahar under the Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP). Presently, the officer is serving in National Defence College as a Senior Research Fellow.

# **Drone Threats in UNISFA: A Call to Enhance Defensive Strategies within the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Emphasising Bangladesh's Preparedness as a Troops-Contributing Country**

Lieutenant Colonel Moidul Haider Chowdhury, psc

## **Introduction**

Since 1948, United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs) have had a significant role in creating peace globally.<sup>1</sup> UNPKO has evolved from providing simple observation functions to today's complex tasks in fragile or conflict-affected regions. Presently, peacekeepers conduct their work in areas characterized by insecurity that is fluid and uncertain.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to previous decades when peacekeepers were primarily threatened by traditional adversaries, today many peacekeepers encounter asymmetric threats from non-state actors. Examples of such threats include ambushes, Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) and indirect fire. Recognizing these threats represent a different kind of risk than those encountered previously, the UN acknowledges that these threats challenge existing methods of protecting forces.<sup>3</sup> More recently, new technologies have further increased the complexity of peacekeeping. For instance, commercial off-the-shelf drones are being used for reconnaissance and/or attack purposes. Since drones can act independently from a considerable distance from the target, they provide significantly less time for response.<sup>4</sup>

The recent drone attack against Bangladeshi contingents in the UNISFA illustrates the evolving threat landscape. On one hand, the fact that the drone attack occurred in a mission that was not considered to be at high risk for such types of attacks indicates that even missions that are not perceived as being at high risk can experience new forms of threats. Additionally, the drone attack raised questions about whether current defensive measures are sufficient to protect against these new types of threats.<sup>5</sup>

Bangladesh is among the largest Troops-Contributing Countries (TCC) participating in UN peacekeeping efforts. Bangladeshi contingents are highly regarded for their professional and disciplined approach to conducting peacekeeping activities.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, one of the primary responsibilities of UN peacekeeping missions is to ensure personnel safety. The recent drone attack against Bangladeshi contingents in UNISFA demonstrates

shortcomings in force protection and creates opportunities to consider practical ways to strengthen defences within UN peacekeeping missions and for TCCs.

This article provides an examination of the implications posed by drone related threats to peacekeeping operations. First, it highlights vulnerabilities demonstrated during the recent drone attack against Bangladeshi contingents in UNISFA. Second, it identifies potential solutions to strengthen defensive capabilities within the United Nations and for TCCs.

### **Research Methodology**

A qualitative research approach was taken for this research. Relevant UN documents and reports, as well as UN Security Council Resolutions regarding peacekeeping operations and force protection were reviewed. Important documents included the Capstone Doctrine, the HIPPO report and the Cruz Report. Also, a case study of the recent drone attacks on Bangladeshi contingent that were deployed with UNISFA under a UN mandate, was conducted. Gaps were found in the ability to detect threats, protect personnel and prepare to respond to potential future attacks. Similarities were also noted between those experiences at other UN peace keeping missions. All sources used in this research are public domain or open-source data to ensure both objectivity and reliability.

### **Operational Environment of UNISFA**

UNISFA was established in 2011 as part of a UN Security Council mandate. In addition to its role in maintaining peace in the Abyei Area (which sits between Sudan and South Sudan),<sup>7</sup> it also continues to monitor local conditions for ongoing political tensions, border disputes; and weakness in government authority.<sup>8</sup>

In this environment, there are numerous obstacles to the operation of UNISFA. Infrastructure is limited in quality and quantity; communications networks are inadequate; and terrain difficulties limit the ease with which units can move around the region; utilize logistical resources and respond quickly to developing situations. As a result, UN peacekeepers frequently rely upon fixed bases, established resupply routes etc., to sustain themselves throughout the duration of their deployment.<sup>9</sup>

The Bangladeshi contingents have a significant role in supporting the mission. Their role is to watch over the flash point boundary (border) between Sudan and South Sudan; facilitate humanitarian access; and assist with

civilian aid, humanitarian protection and assistance in Abyie.<sup>10</sup> To accomplish their tasks, the peacekeeping forces require an operational logistics base or 'depot' that can provide them with centrally located supplies and equipment for all troops. They will need a continuous flow of personnel and supplies to support this mission. The logistics arrangements needed to successfully complete the mission are crucial to its success but also form predictable patterns.

The mission is not typically seen as a high-intensity conflict area. Significant threats are posed by armed groups and there could be sudden escalations.<sup>11</sup> Security challenges will increase due to the application of new technology by non-state actors.<sup>12</sup>

In these environments, fixed installations are at risk. Most ground-based conventional security systems are primarily developed for countering ground-based threats. Such systems do not provide an adequate response to aerial threats such as drones.<sup>13</sup>

This is illustrated by the recent incident where a UNISFA base was attacked with drones. UNISFA operates in a mixed environment that includes logistics, environmental limitations, and new security challenges. As such, the current defensive arrangements need to be reviewed and practical options identified.

### **Case Study: Drone Attack on Bangladeshi Contingents in UNISFA**

Peacekeeping missions operated under the auspices of the UN frequently encounter threats. Some examples of these threats include: small arms fire, ambushes, and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).<sup>14</sup> Among these, IEDs have been a significant threat to UN peacekeeping forces over the last twenty years. For example, during UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), IED attacks were responsible for numerous casualties and hindered troop movements.<sup>15</sup> As such, these threats were primarily ground-based. The peacekeeping forces responded by developing tactics that included clearing routes, establishing protocol for convoys, specialized training and wearing personal protective equipment. This experience determined that peacekeeping operations must remain adaptable to emerging asymmetric threats.

The recent drone attack on Bangladeshi peacekeepers represents a paradigm shift from ground-based threats to air-based threats.<sup>16</sup> Drones can target stationary sites without requiring roads or patrol routes, whereas IEDs

require access to roads or patrol routes to function effectively. Therefore, it is essential to reducing predictability and making bases and supporting assets more vulnerable.

The drone attack took place inside the operational area of UNISFA. Small drones targeted an operational location of Bangladeshi peacekeepers. Some of the peacekeepers were killed, some were severely injured, and some of the infrastructure was damaged during the attacks. It is clear that drones will have an even bigger effect on the mission. However, due to limited reporting availability, additional details cannot be provided.<sup>17</sup>

The modus operandi employed by the attackers indicates they had previously observed the area, established a plan, and executed their attack. Drones are typically used initially for reconnaissance purposes and subsequently for targeting. Attackers identify key assets such as housing areas, logistics centres, fuel depots, or parking lots. Once identified these assets can be precisely targeted via drone attack. Drones operate in an elevated position relative to traditional security measures making them difficult to visually observe. Additionally, drones do not follow traditional perimeter defence systems. As a result, drones provide little warning time for defenders and severely limit the effectiveness of pre-existing defensive arrangements.<sup>18</sup>

This modus operandi is consistent with observations made regarding drone employment in the Russia-Ukraine war. In the conflict, drones have been extensively employed for reconnaissance purposes as well as sustained strike operations. Target areas have included rear echelon units, logistics nodes, energy systems, transportation infrastructure etc. According to data obtained early in 2026 drone use has become routine, widespread and continues today.<sup>19</sup> This indicates areas outside of direct contact with enemy forces are not automatically protected from aerial threats.

Additionally, the UNISFA incident demonstrates a significant deficiency in detection capabilities. The main objective of peacekeeper bases is to detect threats on land. To achieve this goal, observation posts, patrols and physical barriers are employed. None of these systems are capable of detecting small aerial platforms. Historically, even well-equipped military forces have found it challenging to detect and react to inexpensive drones. This is particularly true when these drones are repeated or used in large quantities.<sup>20</sup>

Another weakness is that peacekeeping forces commonly locate storage facilities for equipment, fuel and other supplies in centralized

locations. Although this strategy facilitates operational efficiency it also provides valuable targets for drone operators. Similar disruptions were experienced by forces operating in Ukraine due to drone attacks on logistical and supply facilities.<sup>21</sup> Peacekeeping forces operating in UNISFA also face similar vulnerabilities in terms of overhead protection.

Finally, the incident revealed gaps in training and preparation. Peacekeeping personnel generally receive training for responding to ground-based threats such as IEDs and ambushes. While continued relevance of this training is acknowledged; currently there is minimal emphasis placed on aerial threats. Consequently, peacekeeper reactions to drone attacks may not be immediate or well-coordinated. Previous experiences with IEDs clearly indicate that peacekeeping operations must continually evolve in response to unique threats.<sup>22</sup> A similar technique is necessary to create countermeasures against drone threats.

Additional lessons learned from the US-Israel War with Iran demonstrate the changing dynamics of drone warfare. On 8 April, 2024 Iran conducted a massive attack employing approximately 170 drones and missiles.<sup>23</sup> The most relevant lesson learned from this event is both the scale and manner in which low-cost systems were employed simultaneously to overwhelm defences. Even though multiple low-cost systems would likely be intercepted by defender systems a few can still successfully impact intended targets causing disruption.

Another important factor is cost inequality. The IED threat demonstrates how inexpensive explosives could put at risk expensive vehicles or convoys.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, this same level of risk will apply to drones; with low-cost aerial systems able to pose a danger to valuable infrastructure, logistics hubs or base facilities. Thus, a weak actor will have the ability to generate out-of-proportion operational pressure.

**Table-1: Comparative Pattern of Earlier and Emerging Threats in UNPKO (up to 1 March 2026)**

Dimension	IED Threat (Earlier UNPKO)	UNISFA Incident	Russia-Ukraine War (beginning 24 February, 2024)	Iran-US & Israel War (beginning 28 February, 2026)	Implication
<b>Use</b>	Ground-based explosives on routes. <sup>25</sup>	Drone strike on fixed site. <sup>26</sup>	Reconnaissance and strike on infrastructure. <sup>27</sup>	Mass drone and missile attacks. <sup>28</sup>	Shift from ground to air
<b>Target</b>	Convoys and patrol routes. <sup>29</sup>	Bases and logistics areas. <sup>30</sup>	Supply, energy and transport nodes. <sup>31</sup>	Military and strategic sites. <sup>32</sup>	Rear areas now vulnerable
<b>Detection</b>	Difficult before detonation. <sup>33</sup>	Limited aerial detection capability. <sup>34</sup>	Large-scale drone use, over 5,000 UAVs in a single month in 2025. <sup>35</sup>	Around 170 drones used in a single operation in 2024. <sup>36</sup>	Need for aerial early warning
<b>Effect</b>	Disrupt movement and cause casualties <sup>37</sup>	Reduced warning and bypass of perimeter security. <sup>38</sup>	Persistent strikes on logistics and infrastructure systems <sup>39</sup>	Pressure through volume and coordinated attack. <sup>40</sup>	Defence must expand beyond routes
<b>Cost</b>	Low-cost threat against high-value vehicles. <sup>41</sup>	Low-cost drone against base facilities. <sup>42</sup>	Low-cost drones used repeatedly against costly infrastructure. <sup>43</sup>	Low-cost mass systems used to create strategic pressure. <sup>44</sup>	Cost imbalance favours attacker
<b>Adaptation</b>	Route clearance and IED drills. <sup>45</sup>	Need for drone awareness and base protection. <sup>46</sup>	Continuous adaptation and dispersal measures <sup>47</sup>	Planning for saturation attacks. <sup>48</sup>	Doctrine and training must evolve

Source: Author's self-construct

As presented above in Table-1, the UNISFA incident represents only one part of a larger trend in threats. For example, ground-based asymmetric threats such as IEDs were very prevalent prior to this. Today, however, these types of threats are transitioning into the air. This process expands the exposure of static installations while reducing the reaction time for the defender.

### **Identified Gaps/Gap Analysis**

The recent drone attack on Bangladeshi contingents serving in UNISFA demonstrated key gaps in peacekeeping.<sup>49</sup> These gaps were identified previously. Several of these same gaps were recognized in previous UN missions during the IED threat period.<sup>50</sup> However, the threat posed by drones has revealed these vulnerabilities in a more apparent and more complex way.

**Gap in Detection and Early Warning Systems:** The first significant gap was related to detection and early warning. While most UN peacekeeping bases were originally designed to identify and warn of threats approaching from the ground via observation posts, patrols, and other forms of barrier protection, these methods are ineffective when dealing with small aerial platforms.<sup>51</sup>

Recent conflict data indicates that large quantities of low-cost drones can be employed repeatedly. An example of this is the thousands of Shahed drones that were used by Russian forces during their campaign against Ukrainian forces in 2025. The continuous nature of the attacks into early 2026 indicates that aerial threats are becoming a normal aspect of the operational environment.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, detection systems must begin treating aerial threats as routine features of the operational environment.

**Gap in Protecting Infrastructure:** The second gap pertains to protecting infrastructure. Centralized storage of fuel, vehicles, and equipment is necessary for efficient operations, but also creates attractive targets.<sup>53</sup> Previously, IED threats primarily impacted movement along routes and convoy routes. Drones can now impact fixed installations directly without having to rely on ground-based attacks. Absent overhead protection or effective dispersion strategies, individual strikes can have a detrimental effect on critical assets. Therefore, even those missions that are generally considered relatively stable can face increased risks due to increased vulnerability.<sup>54</sup>

**Gap in Training and Readiness:** The third gap is associated with training and readiness. UN peacekeepers have developed extensive experience in responding to ambushes, IEDs, and indirect fire.<sup>55</sup> However, they have not had adequate experience or training related to drone-related threats. Therefore, there is often little to no standard procedure established by UN missions regarding aerial warnings, sheltering or protection procedures for critical installations. Consequently, responses to drone attacks may be either delayed or poorly coordinated. Poor coordination during a response to an incident diminishes effectiveness.<sup>56</sup>

**Gap in Evolutionary Doctrinal and Policy Frameworks:** Another area where the UN faces challenges is adapting doctrine and policy frameworks to meet evolving threats. Although UN reports such as HIPPO and Cruz Report indicate that improving the security of peacekeepers is essential for success, development of guidelines for addressing drone-related threats remains a work-in-progress.<sup>57</sup>

Additionally, lessons learned from high-threat missions do not always get disseminated throughout all UNPKO missions. Therefore, some missions develop more quickly than others. Ultimately, this results in uneven preparedness among different UNPKO missions. Therefore, a uniform framework that provides direction to all UNPKO missions would be beneficial.<sup>58</sup>

**Gap in Coordination and Information Sharing:** Coordination and information sharing among peacekeeping missions are inadequate. Peacekeeping missions operate mostly independently, without sufficient intelligence gathering capabilities to share relevant information on emerging threats.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, when new threats emerge such as drone usage, the information does not arrive timely enough to allow for situational awareness, thus limiting the effectiveness to preventatively respond to the new threats. The UN requires additional mechanisms for coordinating efforts for addressing this issue.<sup>60</sup>

**Gap in Capability and Resources:** Finally, the most obvious gap exists in capabilities and resources. Most peacekeeping missions lack the appropriate systems to identify and counteract drones.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, due to the low cost and widespread availability of drones, there is a significant cost advantage for those using drones to threaten others; i.e., less than \$10,000 for a single drone. On the other hand, defensive systems capable of

countering drones require significantly more advanced and resource intensive systems.<sup>62</sup>

### **Emerging and future threats**

**Increasing Size and Persistence of Drone Usage:** As seen in the Russia-Ukraine war, drone usage is increasing by both scale and frequency. In fact, by early 2026 tens of thousands of drones were being used in attacks. Some attacks involved hundreds of drones simultaneously.<sup>63</sup> The aerial threat is now consistent and not merely an occasional occurrence.

**Use of Drone Swarms and Saturation Tactics:** Another area of concern is the potential use of drone swarms. Multiple drones can be deployed at the same time to overwhelm defence systems. As an example, approximately 170 drones were deployed in simultaneous attacks against Israel in the Iran-Israel conflict.<sup>64</sup> Although multiple drones can be successfully engaged by defences, some drones can still successfully strike their intended target. This creates increased pressure on already limited defensive resources.

**Rapidly Evolving Technology and Adaptation:** Drone technology is rapidly advancing. Newer drone systems possess improved navigation, greater range, and resistance to electronic interference. Some newer drone systems offer limited human involvement. These advancements make it more difficult to detect and engage drones. Drone systems are now used to conduct real-time targeting in combat situations. This enhances their precision.<sup>65</sup>

**Widespread Availability and Cost Advantage:** Drones are widely available and relatively inexpensive. They can be manufactured or modified with minimal financial investment. Conversely, detection and engagement systems for drones are significantly more expensive and limited. This creates a financial disparity favouring those who utilize drones to threaten others. Examples of this trend have emerged in recent conflicts.<sup>66</sup>

**Continuous Surveillance and Targeting:** Drones are becoming increasingly employed for persistent surveillance of enemy positions. Drones continuously monitor base layouts, supply routes, and daily activities allowing adversaries to gather extensive amounts of intelligence prior to conducting attacks. This type of surveillance creates an enduring vulnerability for peacekeeping missions.<sup>67</sup>

**Cyber Warfare and Electronic Threats:** Drone operations are frequently conducted concurrently with cyber warfare and electronic warfare

operations. Communication networks, Global Positioning System (GPS) signals, and various forms of surveillance can be disrupted or compromised. Examples of this exist in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, where disruptions caused by electronic interference impacted both navigation and communication systems impacting situational awareness, speed of reaction during operational activities, etc.<sup>68</sup>

**Unidentified Evolving Threats:** Potential future threats may consist of technologies currently unknown. These could potentially include sophisticated autonomous systems, cyber-physical attacks, or novel coordination techniques. Due to rapid technological advancements, peacekeeping operations must remain flexible and prepared for unexpected developments.<sup>69</sup>

### **Implications for UN & Bangladesh**

**Implications for the UN:** Recent conflicts demonstrate that threats to UN forces are no longer confined to the ground level. For instance, in the Russia – Ukraine conflict, drone attacks often targeted infrastructure located in the rear echelons.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, these attacks sometimes included hundreds of drones. The result was that even support bases became frequent targets.

Consequently, UN missions must improve their current early warning systems which primarily focus on ground-based threats. Simple, flexible measures for detecting air threats must be developed for inclusion in standard planning procedures for each mission based upon its unique environment.<sup>71</sup>

Existing UN documentation provides broad guidance applicable to drone related risks; however, UN doctrine and guidance require revisions for application to specific scenarios involving drone threats. UN doctrine/guidance may establish a common framework outlining the scope of awareness/identification/response options/drills/protection of critical assets for all UN missions. Share lessons learned from high-risk environments across all deployments to ensure consistency in preparation to face similar high-risk situations.<sup>72</sup>

Additionally, infrastructure development will be a crucial factor. The centralized locations for storing fuel, vehicles and equipment increase the exposure of the team members to potential threats. As such, greater dispersal of these items as well as some form of overhead protection would be beneficial. Early warning systems would help protect against drone strikes. These are feasible and could be put in place without requiring large-scale modifications to structures.<sup>73</sup>

**Implications for Bangladesh as a TCC:** To accommodate the increasing risk environment, Bangladesh needs to revise how it prepares troops and trains them. Pre-deployment training must include instruction about recognizing and responding to drones (for both surveillance and attack).<sup>74</sup>

Troops must be aware of new trends such as drone swarms and constant monitoring. There were instances recently where numerous drones applied pressure to defensive capabilities.<sup>75</sup>

Documenting lessons learned by UNISFA and sharing them among units is vital. Documented lessons provide an advantage in terms of preparedness and decreased time to act upon deployments.<sup>76</sup>

At the policy level, Bangladesh may contribute to creating common standards for force protection within the UN system. As a leading troop contributor, Bangladesh has influence over establishing common standards.<sup>77</sup>

**Operational & Strategic Considerations:** Both immediate & long-term, the implications of emerging threats are significant. Scale and sophistication of drone usage are expected to grow; cyber and electronic interference can impede communications & navigation systems. Decreasing situational awareness and complicating responses are two effects of such advancements.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, both the UN and Bangladesh may take a proactive approach. Preparation cannot solely rely on previous experiences. Future risks and uncertainties may be considered when preparing. An approach that provides balance maintains effectiveness in mission operations while providing protective measures for peacekeepers.<sup>79</sup>

## **Recommendations**

**Establish Reliable Methods of Early Warning & Detection:** UN missions may establish simple yet reliable means to detect aerial threats. Visual scanning, acoustic alerts and basic radar when available, are examples of layered methods that may be employed.<sup>80</sup> Recent conflicts have proven that drone attacks can occur with hundreds of drones. Therefore, continuous early warnings are required and cannot be limited to certain durations.<sup>81</sup>

**Increase Protective Measures Around Critical Infrastructure:** Peacekeeping base locations may minimize exposure of critical assets. Disperse fuel, vehicles and equipment to prevent storage in one area. Use local materials to add basic overhead protection. Assess camp designs for

predictability.<sup>82</sup> These actions do not require additional funding or extensive planning and can be rapidly implemented.

**Modify Training & Response Protocols:** Training personnel should consist of clearly defined procedures to respond to drone threats. When a drone is identified, personnel should know what actions to take i.e., seeking shelter, protecting equipment & maintaining communications. Include multiple drone-related scenarios in training exercises; the conflict example referenced above demonstrates this necessity.<sup>83</sup> Regular refresher training should be conducted during deployment.

**Review Doctrine & Operational Guidance:** The UN's doctrine may be revised to include specific guidelines regarding drone threats including detection, response & protection of infrastructure. Standardized procedures may be developed for each mission to employ a consistent method of addressing the issue. Lessons from high-threat missions may be disseminated throughout all deployments.<sup>84</sup>

**Enhance Information Exchange:** A mechanism for the exchange of threat information between UN Headquarters & individual missions is required. Reports regarding drone activities may be disseminated expeditiously to enhance situational awareness & enable other missions to plan accordingly.<sup>85</sup>

**Address Capability Shortfalls:** Practical & cost-effective solutions should be adopted by missions to address drone threats. Although some missions may not require sophisticated technology, a minimum level of capability is essential. Mission emphasis should be placed on minimizing vulnerabilities versus reliance on intercept mechanisms.<sup>86</sup>

**Enhance Preparedness of Bangladesh:** Bangladesh may incorporate drone awareness into pre-deployment training for troops deployed under UN auspices. Documentation of lessons learned from recent incidents may be compiled and disseminated to units. Bangladesh may also participate in UN initiatives toward developing practical standards for force protection.<sup>87</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The recent incident involving a drone strike on Bangladeshi contingents in UNISFA represents a definitive escalation of aerial threats facing UN peacekeeping missions. While missions had focused on ground-based threats such as ambushes and IEDs for many years, peacekeepers adapted their training, equipment, and procedures in response to those

threats. However, this situation indicates that threats are becoming increasingly airborne.

As stated earlier, historical precedent exists in regard to the emergence of aerial threats as demonstrated by recent conflicts e.g., the Russia-Ukraine War (beginning 24 February, 2024) where drones have played a pivotal role targeting infrastructure and supporting systems with some attacks utilizing hundreds of drones in a singular event. Similarly, in the US-Israel War with Iran (beginning 28 February, 2026), drones were utilized effectively against even highly fortified defence systems. Drone threats are projected to continue to evolve; they may also become increasingly sophisticated.

In line with this broader trend, the UNISFA incident highlights how even a relatively stable mission can be subject to entirely new types of risk. This incident has shown that there is a gap in terms of detecting potential attacks, protecting UNISFA's physical infrastructure, providing relevant training and coordinating among units. Although the visibility of this gap was apparent at the time when UNISFA faced an IED threat, it is now more important than ever due to the increasing threat from aerial-based weapons.

It is essential for the UN to take immediate action that is timely and practical. As such, the UN may update its overall defensive posture. Additionally, the UN may utilize lessons learned from this operation to apply them universally throughout other UNPKO. Bangladesh as one of the leading contributors to UNPKO will need to improve their own preparation and training in order to support continued safe and effective participation by their troops in UNPKO.

A proactive approach will be required by UNPKO for the threat to it (and its operations) to change over time; this will require that UNPKO remains adaptable and flexible so that it can maintain operationally effective as well as safely protect peacekeeping forces on future missions.

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### Brief Biography



**Lieutenant Colonel Moidul Haider Chowdhury, psc**, was commissioned on 24 December 2003 with 49th BMA Long Course in the Corps of Infantry. He is a graduate from Defence Services Command and Staff College. He served in different infantry regiments and served as Staff Officer of Army Headquarters and Armed Forces Division. He has commanded 38 East Bengal Regiment. In the field of peacekeeping, he has served as Grade-2 Staff Officer, of Overseas Operations Directorate, Bangladesh Army Headquarters. He has completed Master of Science in Military Studies from Bangladesh University of Professionals. He has to his credit some research-based articles published in recognized journals. At present, he is serving as Grade-1 Staff Officer, (Protocol and Ceremony), Civil Military Relations Directorate in Armed Forces Division.

## **Institutionalising Lessons from United Nations Peace Operations for Capability Development of the Bangladesh Armed Forces**

Lieutenant Colonel Md Arif Hossain, afwc, psc, G

### **Introduction**

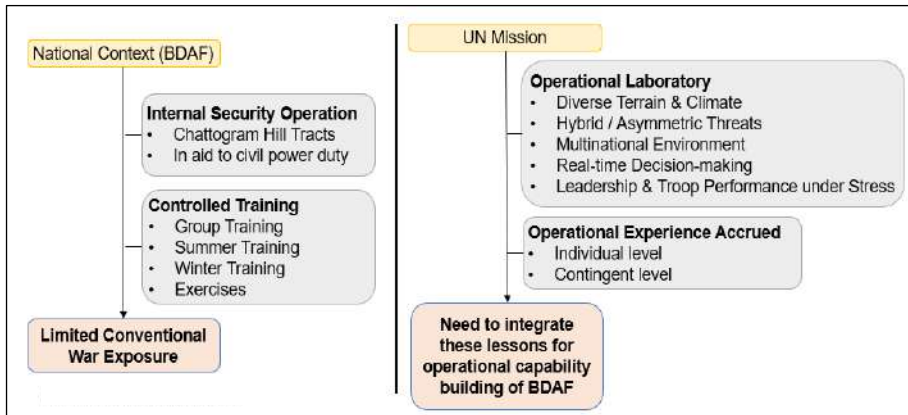
In the case of Bangladesh, the United Nations Peace Operations (UNPO) is a defence diplomatic pillar. There are operators of continuous presence in Bangladesh Armed Forces (BDAF) in the UN missions in Africa and the Middle East since 1988. The neo-liberal commitment has placed Bangladesh in the tier of the top troop-contributing nation across the globe.<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh is currently becoming a Trusted Brand in the field of peacekeeping. It should be mentioned that UNPO is no longer restricted to observing a ceasefire. They have also changed to ceasefire observation to multidimensional robust engagements. They are now adapting their force protection, coordination across civilian and humanitarian actors, and engagement with non-state armed groups.<sup>2</sup> These missions now increasingly resemble modern conflict patterns- hybrid threats, nonlinear engagements, and minor operational tactics. This evolution demands adaptability and quick decision-making under restrictive rules of engagement.

In the domestic context, the BDAF have limited exposure to conventional warfare. Operational experience is mainly shaped by internal security roles. Near-real-time engagements occur in the Chattogram Hill Tracts operations, including live-fire exchange. Most of the combat readiness is developed through simulated training – Group Training, Summer Training, Annual Winter Training, exercises, etc. UN missions, therefore, provide a rare Operational Laboratory, where personnel can be tested and adapted across varied terrain, climate and threat environments. However, in the absence of structured mechanisms for experience sharing and institutional integration, much of this learning remains confined to the individual or contingent level, limiting its contribution to capability development. Capability development of the BDAF refers to the enhancement of the conceptual, physical and moral components of fighting power to ensure operational effectiveness.

While existing studies have explored ways of drawing lessons from peacekeeping experience, this article concentrates on the institutionalisation of those lessons; specifically, how operational insights from the UNPO are captured, organised and reused to strengthen national military capability. It

argues that the UNPO values are unlimited through its participation to ensure that mission experience is transformed into defence capability. Based on this, the article examines the intersection between UNPO and modern warfare, evaluates the main capability accumulations, and offers viable solutions that can be implemented to enhance training and capability development systems with lessons learnt.

**Figure-1: The UNPO as an operational laboratory for BDAF**



Source: Author's self-construct

### UNPO and Modern Warfare: Converging Trends and Capability Implications

**UNPO Evolution and Changing Capability Requirement:** In the past few years, the demands imposed on the UNPO work have become more operationally challenging, and its forces have to work at high risks. Nowadays, more than three quarters of UN missions are pursued in Chapter VII. It no longer sanctions the employment of force in the peculiar defensive action but in the manifestation of host-state weakness and endemic violence. Modern-day missions such as Mali, the CAR and the DRC are finding themselves in an environment where they are not doing post-conflict stabilisation but sustained insecurity.<sup>3</sup> The operational environment of the UN is highly similar to the modern warfare with its hybrid threats. An analysis by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2018 shows that more than 60% of peacekeeper fatalities in the past decade resulted from asymmetric attacks. To address these challenges, surveillance assets, integrated C2, and data-driven reporting and network-centric operations are practiced in the UNPO. These opportunities are difficult to replicate in domestic training.

**Comparison of UNPO Trends with Modern Warfare:** Global conflict monitoring organization indicated that non-state armed groups were

responsible for over 70% of organised violence events worldwide between 2019–2022. It reflects a shift away from traditional state-on-state warfare.<sup>4</sup> Modern conflict is shaped by ambiguity, information contestation, and population-centric dynamics. Robust missions impose similar demands requiring adaptive command and quick decision-making ability. For the BDAF, this provides direct battle-seasoning lessons, i.e. near to war scenario. A functional comparison between UN missions and war scenarios is shown in Table 1 below:-

**Table-1: Functional comparison between UNPO roles and battlefield roles**

<b>UNPO Role</b>	<b>Typical UN Tasks</b>	<b>Equivalent Battlefield Role</b>
Area Domination	Patrolling, presence	Area control & denial
Convoy Security	Escort of logistics & aid	Protection of LOCs
Intelligence-led Patrols	Information collection & analysis	Reconnaissance & ISR
Camp/Base Defence	Perimeter security, QRF	Company Defence
Civil–Military Coordination	Engagement with civilians/NGOs	Stability & consolidation operations

Source: Author's self-construct

### **BDAF in UNPO: An Experience Snapshot**

Bangladesh's peacekeeping engagement is sustained and broad. As of April 2025, Bangladesh deployed 6,359 uniformed personnel, as shown below in Table -2 :-

**Table-2: Deployment of BD Uniformed personnel**

SL #	Country	UN Mission	Army	Navy	Air Force	Total
1	DR Congo	MONUSCO	1,355	14	373	<b>1,742</b>
2	Lebanon	UNIFIL	0	115	1	<b>116</b>
3	South Sudan	UNMISS	1,414	203	3	<b>1,620</b>
4	Sudan (Darfur)	UNAMID	353	1	2	<b>356</b>
5	Western Sahara	MINURSO	23	0	3	<b>26</b>
6	Mali	MINUSMA	1,322	4	113	<b>1,439</b>
7	CAR	MINUSCA	1,044	6	3	<b>1,053</b>
8	USA (New York)	UNHQ	6	1	0	<b>7</b>
<b>Total (UNPO)</b>			<b>5,517</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>6,359</b>

Source: <https://afd.gov.bd/> or <https://afd.portal.gov.bd/>

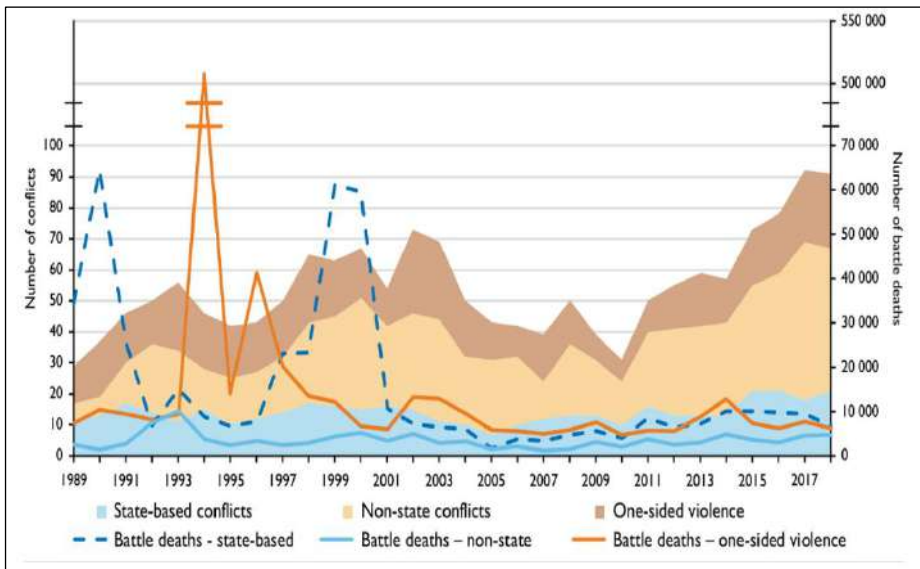
Bangladesh is in the list of three countries that contribute the highest number of troops. The force has been involved in 60+ missions and it has experiences of various settings. Infantry battalions, engineers, aviation, medical units, formed police, and staff officers at sector and mission headquarters are all contained in the BDAF contribution list. In recent missions, more than 40% of Bangladeshi force has already been deployed in more dangerous places under solid mandates with operations of FOB defence, convoy security, and civilian protection.<sup>5</sup> This variety of functions enhances real world learning on the subject of jointness, interoperability and continued operations in high-risk locations. This experience snapshot would make the UNPO a source of practical exposure of operation in the BDAF.

### **The major capability acquisitions at UNPO**

**Operational Efficiency of BDAF Staff:** By continuously involving itself in peace operations of the UN, the BDAF has been able to establish operational effectiveness in land, water and air domains. The air crews are given high-altitudes, run-down runways and sandstorms, which the units of Bangladesh Air Force tend to operate in, which further offer aircrew prowess. Bangladesh Navy has acquired efficiency in river security, maritime security, radar use, convoy protection and adoption of unmanned systems. The Bangladesh Army

contingents have become more effective in mechanised mobility, engineering support, EOD/IEDD operations and the deployment of UAS. The adaptability has improved due to exposure to hybrid environments with neither linear nor network-centric nature, and this has made a direct contribution to improved operational performance.<sup>6</sup> Bangladeshi peacekeepers have been exposed to a broad range of threat environments due to the variety of conflict types that they have experienced in their African missions which include state based conflicts as well as non-state and one-sided conflicts. This complexity of operations has in turn added directly to the adaptability and cross-domain operational capabilities of the BDAF personnel as shown in Figure 2. Taken together, these efficiencies result in the fact that the BDAF is capable of using forces credibly at the operational level.

**Figure-2: Evolution of Conflict Types in Africa Relevant to UN Peace Operation**

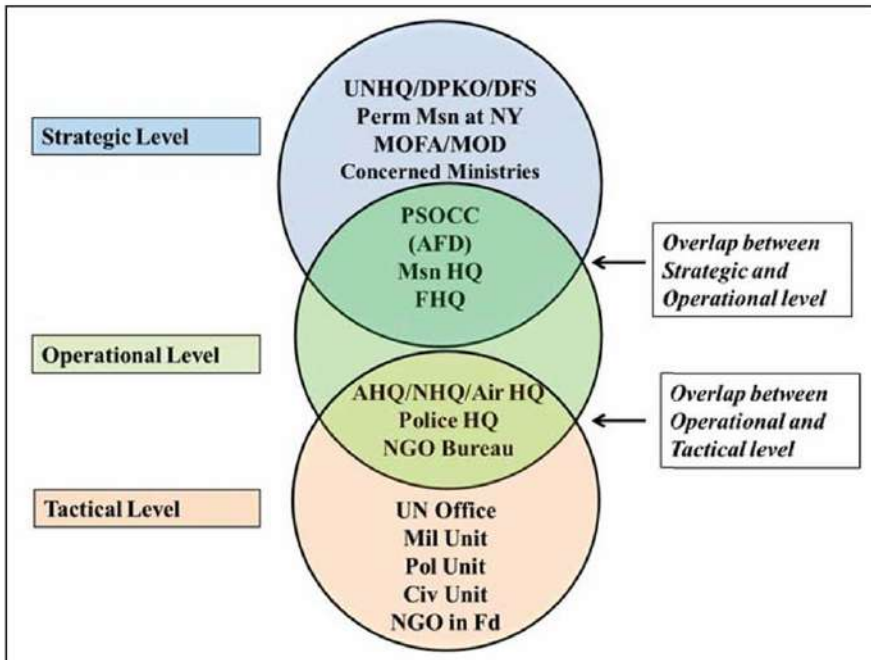


Source: <http://www.prio.org/publicatiuon/12112> (2019)

**Leadership:** The UNPO also subjects peacekeepers to leadership at strategic, operational, as well as tactical levels. There are mission headquarters, sector commands and field units in which officers are represented in Figure-3. They are guided by dynamic uncertainties, multinational coordination and threat-mix environment. This multi-tiered exposure inculcates anti-hurly-burly leadership and resolution power in the state of a lack of foreseeability. The work experience with the UNHQ, mission leadership and the work with the field unit staffs will reinforce the operational level of understanding. These leadership characteristics are directly carried into

national operative planning as well as the crisis response in case of situational requirements.

**Figure-3: Level of involved bodies in UN Peace Operation**



Source: Adapted from Hossain, 2015

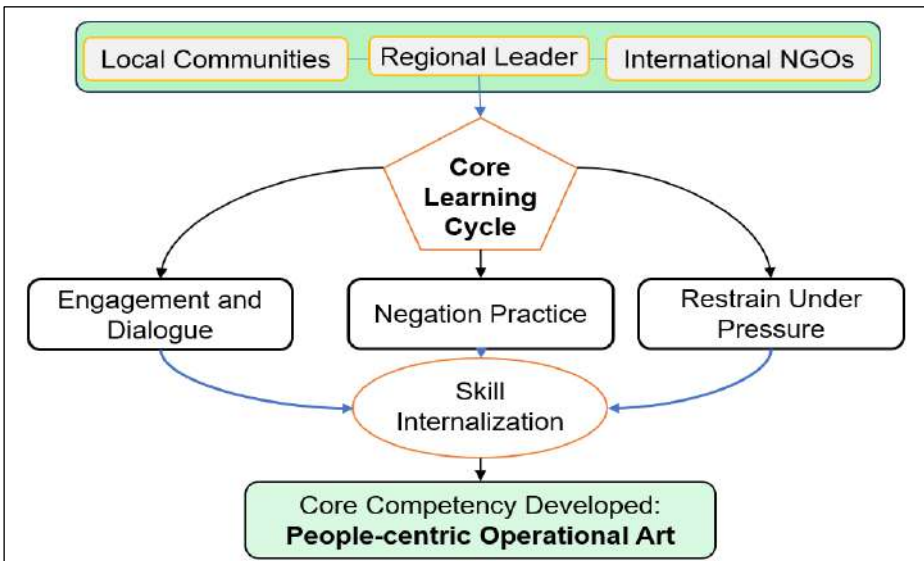
**Jointness and Interoperability:** An environment, joint/combined, is used in carrying out UNPO. The interoperability is established by world-class planning processes, multinational coordination, and shared protocols of communication between the Force HQ and the UNHQ. Joint planning skills can be enhanced, and there can be better coordination between manoeuvre and support through aviation operating under multinational working environments. In the case of Bangladesh, the experience improves the collective thinking as it helps to plan the defence in future.

**Logistics, Engineering and Medical Capability:** Self-sufficiency and enduring maintenance is needed in a battlefield. In the UN, the engineering units would acquire practical experience in infrastructure support, camp setting up as well as mobility work with limited resources. The expeditionary systems are designed in medical units, such as outreach to local populations, which strengthen planning and crisis response practices. Bangladeshi engineers and medical factors are most often used as specialised contributors - which points to consistency and competence.<sup>7</sup>

**Civil-Military Interaction, Negotiation and Professional Discipline:**

The modern UN missions keep the BDAF staff in prolonged contact with civilians, the government and humanitarian agencies. This kind of involvement forces the peacekeepers to use negotiation, restraint, and conflict de-escalation instead of force, which enhances effective human capacities in civil-military coordination, thus supporting good leadership abilities. The competencies are increasingly becoming relevant in highly populated and politically charged working environments. Simultaneously, compliance with the UN reporting and safety regulations contributes to the disciplined approach to procedures and strengthens an operational culture as a professional one.<sup>8</sup> Institutional awareness of capability deficiencies is refined by exposure to contemporary systems of command, reporting, and monitoring as well, playing a role in making the discussion of future force development more informed.

**Figure-4: Civil-military interaction in UN Mission**



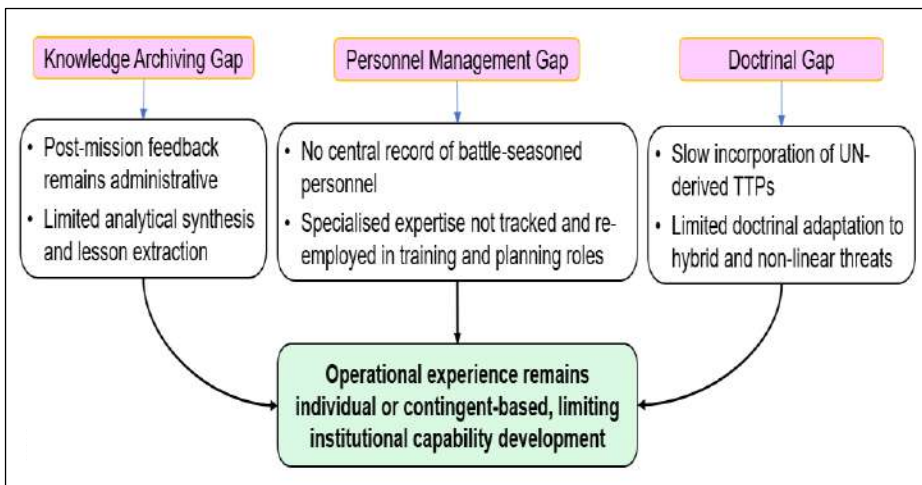
Source: Author's self-construct

**UN Peacekeeping Experience Absorption Gaps in the Institution:**

With the established operational competence and international credibility through the participation of the UN, the outstanding predicament is the institutionalisation of accumulated experience into the development of doctrines, training and capability. The BDAF research has a gap in institutional utilisation of the mission experience

in spite of significant involvement in the UNPO as shown above in Figure-4. Bangladeshi contingents regularly undertake almost warfare-related work which includes IEDD/EOD, convoy and force protection, intelligence-driven operations, unknown-terrain logistics, air-and river-borne operations, and civil-military interactions. These actions are done mostly within Chapter VII requirements. The Bangladesh situation is, however, rather administrative, with little synthesis of analysis to generate training development or capability planning through post-mission feedback and reporting mechanisms.

**Figure-5: Gaps in Institutional Absorption of UN Peacekeeping Experience in BDAF**



Source: Author's self-construct

There is another gap in personnel management. The databases of combat-seasoned human resources and their expertise specialisation are not organized. Consequently, tacit operational knowledge fades away when the units go back to Bangladesh after UN missions. Specialists in the field of working with APC/IFVs, IEDD/EOD, engineering, aviation, and maritime security are thus not strategically utilized in instructional training or planning designations in which they may be able to make an institutional difference. At the doctrinal tier, the tactics and battle, procedures are slow to assume practices of the UN-derived intelligence-led patrolling, mobility protection, integration of the UAS and strengthened camp security, even though they are relevant in the hybrid and non-linear threat settings.<sup>9</sup>

**The Experience Album Concept: Experience, Knowledge, Conservation and Reuse:** The experience of operations, unless maintained

deliberately, has the tendency to go away due to personnel changes as well as unit changes. Based on this fact, the proposal of an 'Experience Album' can be used in the UN peace operations. Similar to an album, where photographs can be stored and organised, the Experience Album is simply an ordered store of operational exposure moving images of tasks accomplished, environments engaged with, leadership issues met, and solutions developed in the course of deployments to the UN. The operation context presented in each 'experience image' could be the protection of a convoy in a situation when there is an asymmetric threat, the patrolling of intelligence-based actions, or the use of high-tech equipment. When similar or comparable tasks arise in future operations, relevant templates can be retrieved from the album, allowing prior experience to form planning, training, and execution. Properly categorised and institutionalised, the Experience Album transforms individual memory into collective organisational knowledge, enabling systematic reuse of UNPO experience for capability development of the BDAF. The experience album concept is graphically illustrated in Figure-6.

**Figure-6: The 'Experience Album' Concept: Preserving and Reusing Operational Knowledge**



Source: Author's self-construct

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## **Strategies to Utilise UN Peacekeeping Lessons for Capability Development of BDAF**

**Establish a Structured Lesson-to-Capability Architecture:** The BDAF should incorporate and institutionalise a small, permanent feedback mechanism within existing structures to convert UNPO experience into capability inputs, rather than event-based reporting. The focus must be on extracting recurring operational patterns of ground-level experiences with direct implications for practical decision-making, logistics resilience, interoperability and survivability. International assessments indicate that without such a dedicated synthesis, fewer than 30% of operational lessons influence doctrine or training reform.<sup>10</sup> This mechanism should function as a bridge between operational exposure and institutional decision-making.

**Integrate UN Experience into Doctrine and Operational Concepts:** Peacekeeping-derived insights should be embedded within existing operational and functional doctrines, not treated as mission-specific knowledge. Doctrinal updates should incorporate lessons on operating among civilians, joint coordination, protected mobility, and intelligence-led patrolling under political constraint. This ensures refinement of the modern operational concept into both national defences and special operations.

**Align Training and Education with Enduring Operational Competencies:** UN operational experiences must be systematically translated into professional military education across the BDAF. While pre-deployment training is well developed, broader utilisation requires institutionalising UN mission case studies in arms and services schools and staff colleges. Outputs from the BIPSOT should be formally linked to service training institutions to disseminate learning beyond deploying contingents. Relevant directorates and service institutions should integrate validated lessons into curricula.

**Maximise Career Management in order to preserve Operational Knowledge:** The UNPO experience should be identified as a strategic capability asset by the human resource management. Tacit knowledge would be transferred systematically through deliberate placement of mission-experienced staff to training, doctrinal and planning roles. According to empirical studies, less than 40 percent of the tacit operational knowledge is retained in organisations unless the latter has a mechanism of re-employment of former employees.<sup>11</sup> This selective placement would increase institutional learning without extra structure load.

**Link Operational Experience to the Modernisation and Capability Development:** The UNPO should be incorporated in force development by

means of the banal findings. Work experience in multinational systems and other extreme environmental factors give an observer an insight into the areas of vulnerability in the form of capabilities. The BDAF must give priority to dual-use capabilities, communications, mobility, medical support, engineering assets, situational awareness, and UAS, which increase national defence preparedness and development of expertise. The method prevents the associative capability drift of peacekeeping and enhances the overall fighting strength.

**Table-3: Alignment of Institutional Gaps with Capability Development Strategies**

<b>Identified Gap</b>	<b>Manifestation in BDAF</b>	<b>Aligned Strategy</b>	<b>Capability Outcome</b>
Knowledge Archiving Gap	Post-mission feedback is largely administrative; limited analytical synthesis	Establish a structured lesson-to-capability architecture	Systematic conversion of UN operational experience into institutional knowledge
Personnel Management Gap	No central record of battle-seasoned personnel; specialised expertise not deliberately reused	Optimise career management to retain operational knowledge	Retention and multiplication of tacit operational expertise across the force
Doctrinal Gap	Slow absorption of UN-derived TTPs; limited adaptation to hybrid-centric operations	Integrate UN experience into doctrine and operational concepts	Doctrinal relevance to modern, non-linear, and hybrid conflict environments
Training & Education Gap	Learning remains mission-specific; limited dissemination beyond deploying contingents	Align training and education with enduring operational competencies	Institutionalisation of leadership, negotiation, ISR, and civil–military skills

Source: Author's self-construct

## Conclusion

Bangladeshi contingents have worked in an environment which varied over successive deployments in response to asymmetric threats, political limitations as well as multinational command implementations. Many years of service in DIME operations have added to the formation of a judgment of the leader, a flexibility in operations, combined employment, and competence in functions as circumstances grow to play out of a reality more and more consistent with the realities of modern war.

Simultaneously, this paper emphasizes that operational exposure, in itself, cannot ensure long-term improvement in the national military capability. The capability of mission experience to be translated in institutional practice is the strategic value of UN peacekeeping. Currently, a great deal of learning associated with UN deployments is still scattered at the individual or contingent tier.

The constraints of analytic lesson processing, battalion war veteran troops, institutional adaptation of doctrine and reinforcement of the feedback into force development mechanisms diminish the long term institutional effects of the protracted nature of peacekeeping involvement of Bangladesh. Peace operations of the UN ought to be seen as not just a post facto duty, but a permanent wellspring of learning about operations. Peacekeeping experience can act as a viable capability enhancer when carefully collected and absorbed mission-derived knowledge is maintained with the target being core defence tasks. This would strengthen the level of preparedness during war, near-war and peace time contingencies, as well as supporting Bangladesh's reputation as a useful and reliable ally in promoting international peace and security.

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**Brief Biography**

**Lieutenant Colonel Md Arif Hossain, afwc, psc, G, Artillery**, was commissioned in the Regiment of Artillery on 28 June 2004 with 50<sup>th</sup> BMA Long Course. He attended various courses at home and abroad. The officer graduated from Defence Services Command and Staff College and National Defence College, Bangladesh. He achieved Master's degrees in Military Science, Military Studies and Security and Development from BUP. He completed the Senior Command Course at Army War College, MHOW, India, in 2021. He also completed the International Defence Management Course 24-1 and graduated from the Defence Research Management Institute, California, USA. He served as Brigade Major of 72 Infantry Brigade. He also served in Army Training and Doctrine Command as General Staff Officer Grade-1 in 2022-23. The officer served twice as an Instructor in the Artillery Centre and School. He commanded 19 Medium Regiment Artillery. As a peacekeeper, he served in Liberia as a contingent member and a Military Observer in the Central African Republic. He visited 24 countries in Asia and Africa besides the USA, Russia, China, India, France, Spain and Netherlands. The officer has three publications to his credit. Currently, he is serving in the Personnel Service Directorate at Army Headquarters.

## **UN Peacekeeping at a Crossroads: UN Budget Reductions and Implications for Bangladesh**

Lieutenant Colonel Md Mamunur Rahman Siddiqui, afwc, psc

### **Introduction**

Since 1948, United Nations peacekeeping forces have evolved as an important actor in maintaining global peace, safeguarding the affected population, ensuring stability in conflict areas and initiating sustainable peace processes.<sup>1</sup> From its inception, the UN peacekeepers have served as the guardians of peace and stability across many regions of the world. However, credibility of the UN peacekeeping process is often questioned due to its reduced effectiveness under few contexts. On many occasions, UN missions are failing to restore sustained peace. Even though, UN peacekeeping missions are still considered as the last resort and source of hope for many distressed communities.

Presently, UN peacekeeping activities are severely affected by the non-availability of adequate financial supports.<sup>2</sup> UN is facing a budget deficit of more than USD 2 billion from the required budget. The situation has enforced around 15% budget cut and 25% reduction of UN force deployments in 2025.<sup>3</sup> This single decision is likely to have severe consequences on the overall UN peacekeeping process and specially contributing countries like Bangladesh.<sup>4</sup> As one of the leading UN troops contributors, Bangladesh has earned its credibility with professionalism and supreme sacrifice of 168 fallen peacekeepers in 63 UN missions since 1989.<sup>5</sup> For Bangladesh, UN mission participation is a means of projecting her soft power and recognition of her contribution towards world peace.

Financial crisis in UN peacekeeping is not simply a budgetary issue. The problem has been mostly generated from the UN's structural and functional factors. Now, the reduction of budget means there will be scarcity of resources to perform the mission mandates. Ultimately, this will create gap between people's expectation from UN and actual effectiveness of UN forces. As such, for the top contributing countries like Bangladesh merits special attention to reassess its present state and formulate strategy to ensure how best Bangladesh can adapt to the present realities. At this backdrop, this article will initially access the severity of the UN budget cut problem followed by identification of the implications for Bangladesh. Last but not the least, this article will make an attempt to formulation a broad strategy for Bangladesh which will ensure relevancy of our participation in UN peacekeeping missions.

**UN Budget Cut Issue through the Lens of Evolution of Peacekeeping Missions:** The significance of the UN budget cut problem can be well explained by examining closely the evolution of UN peacekeeping mission which explain the transformation of UN role from its early stage:

**1st Generation – Classical Peacekeeping (1948–late 1980s):** The first generation peacekeeping forces mostly operated in the low intensity conflict areas. The role of peacekeeping forces was to monitor the ceasefire between two belligerents where both belligerents already agreed upon some terms and conditions. Examples are UNTSO and UNFICYP. Due to the nature of the UN role, the requirements of UN budget were comparatively less as this model was not based on intense operational activities to ensure peace.<sup>6</sup>

**2nd Generation – Multidimensional Peacekeeping (Late 1980s–1990s):** The 2<sup>nd</sup> generation peacekeeping missions performed beyond the typical military activities like patrolling for protection of the civilian. These multidimensional missions also had the mandates to ensure peaceful conduct of election, disarmament process, provide support to the local government etc. Examples are UNTAG and UNTAC. The expectation of locals from the UN missions has been raised further since the successful conduct of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation mission which ultimately demanded higher budget needs.<sup>7</sup>

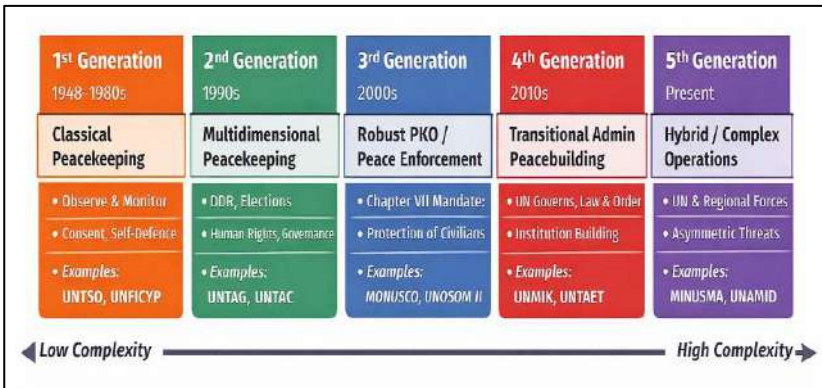
**3rd Generation –Peace Enforcement (Mid-1990s onwards):** The third-generation mission mandates emphasize on a robust peacekeeping posture under the Security Council's Chapter VII.<sup>8</sup> Concept of the mission is based on the protection of civilians through peace enforcement rather than performing only an observatory role. These missions were often conducted under complicated security situation which demanded intense operational activities like MONUSCO and UNOSOM II. In order to maintain this robust posture of UN forces, UN budget requirements were further intensified to meet the operational needs.

**4th Generation – Peace Building & Transitional Administration (Late 1990s–2010s):** The concept of 4<sup>th</sup> generation was developed due to the absence of proper governance systems in the host country. As such, UN mission had to perform some of the governmental functions to ensure sustained peace. The mission concept allowed many security sector reform activities to strengthen the major institutions of the government. These missions also needed intense

civil-military integration to achieve the mission mandates. Examples are UNTAET (Timor-Leste) and UNMIK (Kosovo). These types of missions were also heavily depended on higher financial supports.<sup>9</sup>

**5th Generation – Hybrid and Complex Missions (2010s–present):** Fifth-generation missions operate amid asymmetric threats, fragile consent, and political complexity.<sup>10</sup> These missions are undertaken under multidimensional security threats where a number of armed groups operate and the host nation’s consent is also disputed.<sup>11</sup> The major characteristics are fragile political situation, involvement of private military companies like the Wagner group, information warfare, the use of IEDs, where it is very difficult to identify the threat centre of gravity. Examples are MINUSCA and MINUSMA. The armed groups remain heavily equipped, so the risk level is very high. Such, 5<sup>th</sup> generation integrated missions are highly dependent on civil-military integration, intense mobility, efficient intelligence agencies and dynamic leadership. So, mission efficacy is directly connected to strong financial support.

**Figure-1: Evolution of UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO)**



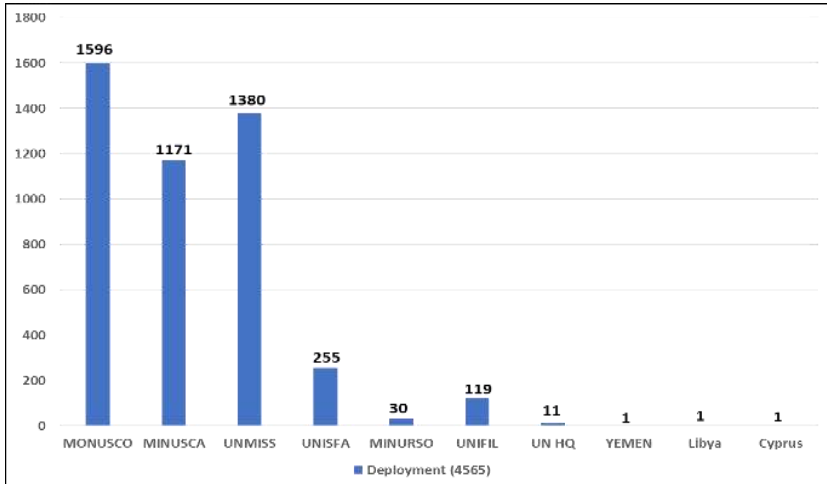
Source: Author’s self-construct

**Where Does Bangladesh Stand in the Fifth Generation Peacekeeping Missions?**

The journey of peacekeeping has begun with the traditional monitory role and has now transformed into a hybrid and complex mission environment. These days, Bangladesh mostly operates in fifth-generation security environments where the situation is extremely volatile, asymmetric threat conditions and the host nation’s consent is not clear. The 5<sup>th</sup> generation missions require high level of technological skills and specialized capabilities

over numerical contributions. At present, Bangladeshi force deployments are mostly quantity-focused. Despite achieving required competences, professionalism and low national caveats, Bangladesh is yet to perform to its desired expectations.<sup>12</sup> As such, for retaining relevancy in the 5<sup>th</sup> generation mission environment, Bangladesh must emphasize becoming quality-based contributor over quantity.

**Figure-2: Current Deployments of Bangladeshi Peacekeeping Forces**



Source: United Nations peacekeeping, 2026.<sup>13</sup>

**Increasing Complexity vs Declining Resources:** In the present days, UN peacekeeping missions, operational complexities are increasing but the resources are shrinking. The operations in an asymmetric threat environment are mostly resource-driven as armed groups are highly equipped with lethal weapons. So, force protection measures are getting costlier than before, like sophisticated IED Jammers, air-supported logistic supply chain system, etc. The UN budget cut therefore, has a disproportionately damaging effect because modern missions are highly resource-dependent.<sup>14</sup> The growing gap between mandate and means reduces effectiveness, increases risk to peacekeepers and weakens credibility. Earlier, financial cuts affected comfort and operational tempo; today, they affect survival, performance, and legitimacy. This imbalance has become a critical structural challenge for contemporary peace operations.

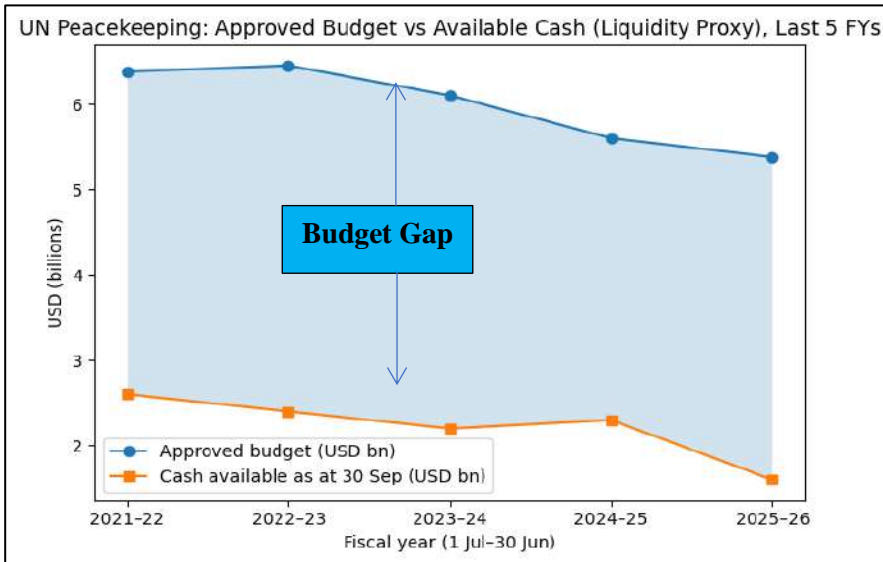
**Table-1: Increasing Complexity vs Declining Resources in UN Peacekeeping**

Dimension	Increasing Complexity (Operational Demand)	Declining Resources (Operational Means)	Results
Threat Environment	• Terrorism, armed groups, asymmetric warfare	Reduced force density	Higher casualty risk
Mandate	• Protection of Civilians, stabilization, political support	Limited manpower and mobility	Mandate becomes unrealistic
Terrain and Area of Operation	• Larger and more dispersed areas	Fewer bases and patrols	Reduced presence and deterrence
Information Domain	• Disinformation, hostile narratives	Weak Information Operation capability	Loss of credibility
Force Protection	• Need for ISR, hardened bases, mobility	Fewer assets, delayed logistics	Increased vulnerability
Command Complexity	• Civil–military–political integration	Lack of specialized staff	Slower and weaker decisions
Local Expectations	• Demand for security and protection	Reduced delivery capacity	Frustration and hostility

Source: Author’s self-construct

**Structural Drivers of UN Budget Cuts Issue**

**Financial Shortfall:** UN peacekeeping operations are increasingly constrained by a severe financial deficit. For the 2025–26 cycle, the approved peacekeeping budget was approximately USD 5.38 billion, yet by mid-2025, the funding gap exceeded USD 2 billion, representing more than 35% of the total budget.<sup>15</sup> This shortfall has increasingly compelled the Department of Peace Operations to impose expenditure reductions of around 15% across missions, which, due to repatriation costs and compressed timelines, effectively results in an estimated 25% reduction in uniformed and civilian personnel. Under such circumstances, the operational implications are obvious and visible. Chief of UN Peacekeeping Jean-Pierre Lacroix has recognized the crisis as more daunting than ever.<sup>16</sup> Analyzing the United Nations Secretary General’s reports and the approved Peacekeeping budget, the year-wise liquidity shortfall is highlighted below:-

**Figure-3: 5 FYs Approved UN Peacekeeping Budget vs Available Budget**

Source: United Nations Secretary-General Reports and UN General Assembly budget documents<sup>17-22</sup>

**Political Dynamics of Donor States:** The crisis is clearly not purely financial; it is equally political. Peacekeeping funding is heavily dependent on a small group of contributors. The United States alone accounts for approximately 26–27% of assessed contributions, followed by China (15–18%) and Japan (around 8%).<sup>23</sup> According to the Secretary-General's Report as of September 2025, about USD 3.7 billion peacekeeping budget was still unpaid by donors. This amount comprised approximately \$3.2 billion owed for active missions and USD 483 million for closed missions.<sup>24</sup> The major donor states argue that UN funding is failing to contribute effectively in resolving conflicts as per the mission mandates. As such, countries like the USA are focusing on selective funding rather than collective funding. Most of the major contributors are suffering from domestic political disagreements, the rise of strong nationalism, and moving away from multilateral engagements. So, UN funding is facing challenges under the new political dynamics of the major contributors.

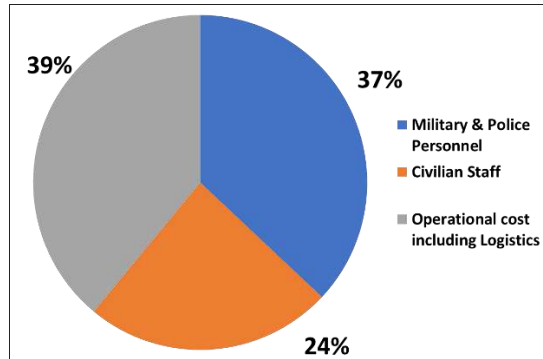
**Table-2: Top 10 UN Peacekeeping Fund Providers (FY 2024–2025)**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Member State</b>	<b>Share of Assessed PKO Budget</b>
1	United States	26.95%
2	China	18.69%
3	Japan	8.03%
4	Germany	6.11%
5	United Kingdom	5.36%
6	France	5.29%
7	Italy	3.19%
8	Canada	2.63%
9	Republic of Korea	2.57%
10	Russian Federation	2.29%

Source: United Nations General Assembly, A/79/318/Add.1.<sup>25</sup>

**Structural Weakness in the Funding Mechanism:** Besides the new political dynamics, there are structural weaknesses in the UN funding mechanism. Due to a faulty funding system, more countries are becoming defaulters, and the UN enforcement regulations are not very effective against these violations. Such a phenomenon also encourages other state for delay payment. The problem is further aggravated by bureaucratic barriers, inefficient fund distribution and duplication of efforts. Despite the UN budget being only 0.5% of global military expenditure, which is 2.4 trillion yearly, the UN is still struggling to collect the required funds to meet the expectations of people from the UN.<sup>26</sup>

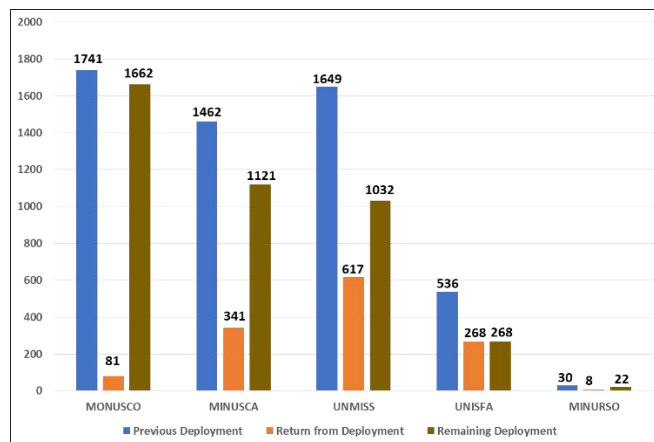
**Figure-4: UN Peacekeeping Budget Expenditure as per Categories**



Source: K.P, Coleman, 2014.<sup>27</sup>

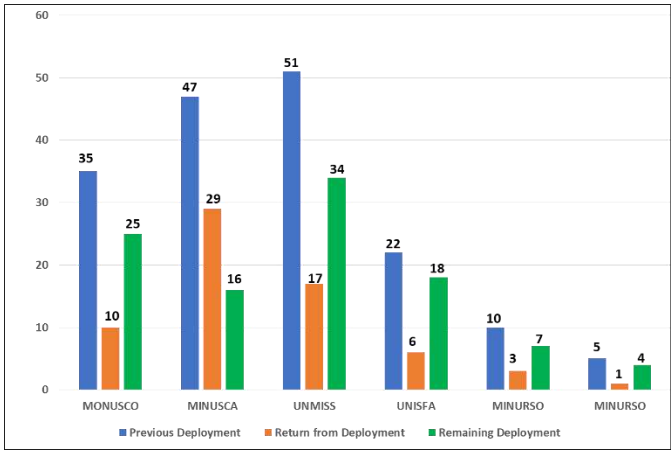
**Downsizing of Bangladeshi UN Peacekeepers:** In late 2025, the UN initiated a significant reduction of 13,000 to 14,000 peacekeepers across multiple missions as part of an emergency cost-cutting response. As a result, over 1,300 Bangladeshi peacekeepers are being withdrawn from five key missions.<sup>28</sup> Even, the UN has also ordered the repatriation of Bangladesh's last remaining police contingent, from the DR Congo, which had deployed recently. Altogether, these adjustments are part of a broader move to cut nearly 25 % of uniformed personnel globally. It is reshaping Bangladesh's footprint in UN operations and reducing its operational presence in key UN missions.

**Figure-5: Downsizing of Bangladesh UN Contingents from Contemporary UN Missions**



Source: *Daily Sun*, 2025.<sup>29</sup>

**Figure-6: Downsizing of Bangladeshi MSO and MILOB from Contemporary UN Missions**



Source: Armed Forces Division (AFD), Foreign Affairs and Protocol Section, official deployment data, 2026.<sup>30</sup>

### Operational Impacts on Bangladesh Peacekeeping Missions

Financial retrenchment directly translates into operational impacts in the field. As of late 2025, Bangladesh remained one of the top troop-contributing countries, with deployments in high risk areas such as DR Congo, South Sudan, Central African Republic and Abyei.<sup>31</sup> The operational impact can be analyzed under five key operational dimensions which are as follows:-

**Reduced Force to Space Ratio:** One of the significant implications of UN budget cut is the reduced force strength against the same operational area. Success of a UN mission depends on its effective operational activities especially in the form of area dominance. The reduction of UN forces has resulted lower force to space ratio which means UN forces operations will be less effective than before. This will create security vacuum as there be will lower deterrence effect by the reduced UN deployments.<sup>32</sup>

**Vulnerability of Local Population:** Success of any mission depends on the degree of protection of the civilian that can be achieved by the UN forces because this is the most important role of any UN forces. The financial crisis of UN has widened the gap between desired role of U N forces and their capabilities.<sup>33</sup> The local population will be more exposed to the threats as there will be reduced operational activities by UN forces. Bangladeshi contingents may loss local support and

credibility if they fail to ensure the protection of the civilians. So, reduced capability will ultimately make the locals more vulnerable.

**Mobility and Logistics Constraints:** Mobility and logistics, particularly air assets and sustainment, are among the first capabilities to suffer under budget constraints, increasing vulnerabilities in asymmetric environments.<sup>34</sup> The payments for contingent-owned equipment claims could not be settled since 2023 and even as of September 2025.<sup>35</sup> Under retrenchment, the operational impact becomes sharper: fewer air sorties, delayed resupply, reduced operational reach and a growing tendency towards static postures. For UN forces, reduced mobility means less area dominance, weaker force posture and higher vulnerability.

**Vulnerability of UN Forces:** UN budget cuts not only expose the vulnerability of the local population but also make the UN forces equally threatened. With the reduced UN forces, there will be limited operational activities. As a result, the hostile armed groups will gain initiative from the security vacuum. Now, UN camps need to be guarded with less number of forces against the likely threats. The recent deadly drone attack on the Bangladeshi UN camp at Kadugli, Sudan, exposes such vulnerability, where the camp was recently downsized due to budget cuts.<sup>36</sup>

**Intelligence and Command and Control Weakness Becomes More Exposed:** The intelligence collection system and command and control are the two most recognized weaknesses of any UN mission. Lack of timely intelligence and an ambiguous command and control mechanism of UN forces directly connected to the reaction of forces during any emergency. These two structural weaknesses are more exposed under the budget cuts issue. Research shows that a lack of adequate intelligence and timely decision-making capability reduces the operational effectiveness of UN forces, making them more vulnerable to any hostile attack and undermining their most important mandate which is the protection of civilians.<sup>37</sup>

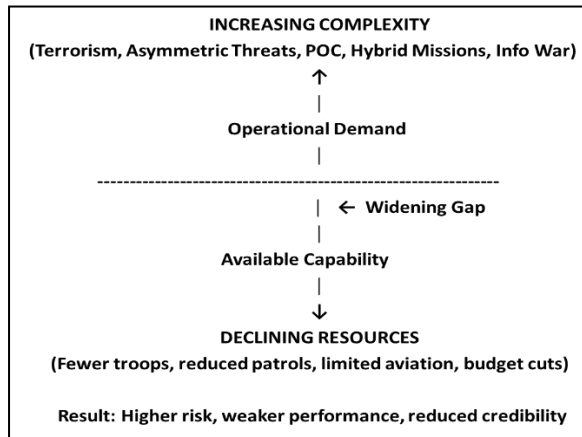
### Strategic Impacts for Bangladesh

Beyond the operational impacts of the UN budget cuts, there are also long-term strategic impacts. These strategic impacts will have far-reaching consequences on Bangladesh's strategy on UN peacekeeping mission participation. The significant strategic impacts are highlighted below:-

**Declining Influence of Bangladesh's Defence Diplomacy:** Our vibrant participation in the UN peacekeeping mission has been considered as the most effective tool of our defence diplomacy. Our peacekeeping forces are globally recognized as a professional and disciplined UN force, which creates a positive image about the Bangladeshi Peacekeepers. For this credibility, some countries even desire to deploy their UN forces in collaboration with our peacekeepers. Besides, it involves multinational UN exercises with Bangladeshi Peacekeepers. Under budget cut circumstances, our UN participation will be highly affected in terms of numerical contribution and risk of losing UN leadership appointments.<sup>38</sup> As a result, Bangladesh's influence on UN policy matters will be reduced significantly. Ultimately, it will affect our diplomatic manoeuvre space through defence diplomacy.

**Shrinking of Professional Development Opportunities:** For more than three decades, UN missions have created significant opportunities for the Bangladesh Armed Forces' professional development.<sup>39</sup> The complex security environment of UN missions can replicate excellent learning environment for our military personnel, which is difficult to imitate domestically. The experiences of the UN multinational operational deployments play a vital role in grooming our military leaders and other personnel. In this context, less UN force deployment means a shrinking of exposure to the multidimensional operational environment, and this limitation can never be compensated with theoretical knowledge as the development of a soldier's cognitive domain needs operational experiences.<sup>40</sup> So, the UN financial crisis will affect our professional development, which has long-term consequences.

**Possibility of Losing Credibility due to Mandate vs Capability Gap:** Bangladesh's global acceptance has been built through our supreme sacrifice, dedication and professionalism under the blue helmet. However, the UN budget cuts have widened the gap between the mandate and capability. Under such conditions, there are possibilities of mission failure.<sup>41</sup> When a Bangladeshi contingent fails to ensure the most important mandate which is protection of civilians, due to reduced operational efficacy, Bangladesh may receive global criticism. This will damage our reputation internationally, which has been built with years of hard work and sacrifice. So, such reputational risk will have strategic impacts.

**Figure-7: Mandate vs Capability Gaps**

Source: Author's self-construct

**Strategic Impact of Losing Peacekeeper:** Bangladesh's positive reputation in the peacekeeping missions comes with a high cost. From 1989 to December 2025, we have lost 174 peacekeepers and received 278 injured personnel.<sup>42</sup> The statistics show the high operational risk factor that is always prevailing in all the missions. However, with the UN fund crisis, such risk level has been intensified further because of reduced operational effectiveness against the growing security threats. The return of body bags and injured personnel from the mission area has a significant strategic impact as it has psychological effects on the members of the Armed Forces. Besides, public perception about our Armed Forces also develops negatively.

**Dynamic Transition towards Specialized Capabilities:** The present UN peacekeeping force structure is undergoing a structural shift from the traditional one. At present, the UN is struggling to maintain numerically heavy contingents due to funding crisis. As such, the future UN contingents will be more responsive and adaptive, smaller, specialized capability-based and cost effective which can respond better to any situation.<sup>43</sup> The specialized capability driven high value assets are like aviation, special forces, EOD, engineering, UAV, ISR, cyber, highly mobile and specialized medical units, etc. In coming days, UN will focus on effect based specialized contingents which can compensate the need of budget heavy larger generalized force structures.

## **Options for Bangladesh under Budget Cuts Context**

Few of the options are highlighted below to formulate a broad strategy which will keep our UN participation relevant to the present context:

**Option-1: Quality-based Approach (From Quantity to Capability):** Instead of competing for top troop contributor by sending generalized contingents time has come to concentrate on becoming a value based contributor. The specialized units can be cost effective as they need fewer troops but having greater impacts.

**Option-2: Enhanced Institutional Influence through Leadership:** Despite being the top troop contributor, our participation in the UN senior leadership appointments is very limited. Our reputation in the domain of UN peacekeeping can be leveraged to secure more UN leadership positions. Influence of UN senior leadership position can compensate the influence which we are trying to achieve through only force participation. This will ensure stronger institutional influence through leadership positions.

**Option-3: Transformation from Collective Engagement to Selective Engagement:** To remain relevant under the UN budget crisis realities, Bangladesh should gradually adopt a policy of selective engagements instead of collective engagements. Bangladesh should select UN missions which are strategically significant for us. Participation of Bangladesh must add value to its global influence, conform to its national interests and remain within the capability of its forces. For such approach, Bangladesh may also consider multinational engagement beyond UN peacekeeping mission.

## **Implementation Strategy for Bangladesh**

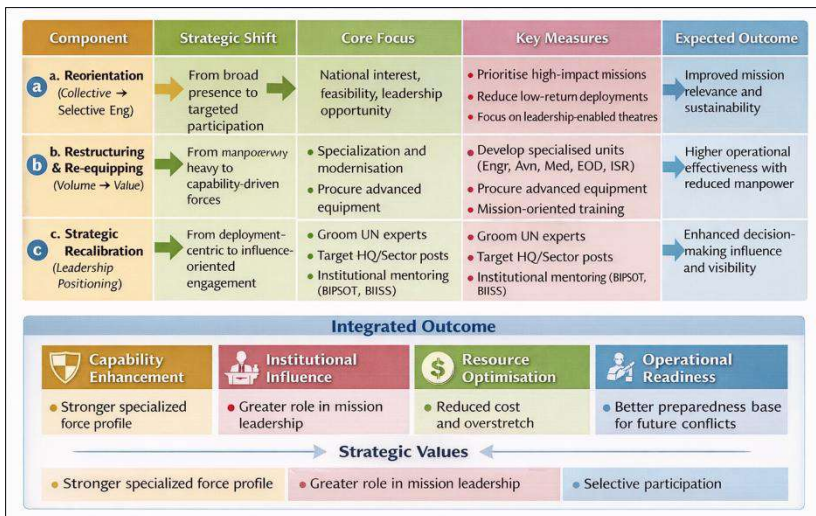
**Reorientation (Collective to Selective Engagement):** Missions should be selected through a thorough evaluation process where selection criteria should be focus on value added engagement rather than mere participation. Think tank organization can contribute in evaluating the engagement offers based on own capabilities.

**Restructuring and Re-equipping (Volume-based to Value-Based Contribution):** Bangladesh should focus on developing specialized capabilities for achieving specific effects. The force structuring and its equipment must be cost effective which can add more value than a larger unit based on volume of force. However, such approach needs specialized units, equipment and training.

**Strategic Recalibration (Influence through Leadership Positioning):** Bangladesh should adopt a long term strategy to prepare its experts for the UN senior leadership appointments. For this, we need specialized training institutions and research centers to groom our leaders through an organized structure. Institutes like BIPSOT, BIIS can play an important role in implementing this strategy.

**Multinational Engagement beyond UN Peacekeeping:** Due to the UN financial crisis, scopes for UN force participation are reducing significantly. However, such phenomenon has created new opportunities of force participation beyond blue helmet. Multinational force deployment like Haiti Gang Suppression Force can create new opportunity for Bangladesh. However, such participation must be vetted through a thorough evaluation process.

**Figure-8: Operational Framework for Bangladesh's Adaptation Strategy**



Source: Author's self-construct

**Conclusion**

Today, the UN peacekeeping process is standing at a juncture with multiple complexities created by declining multilateralism, political realignment and UN budget constraints. In the present global context, UN peacekeeping missions are struggling to earn its credibility and becoming less effective than before. Moreover, the UN budget cut process has further aggravated the challenges of UN. Now, UN forces are less effective and agile due to its reduced

operational effectiveness. As such, troops contributing nations are trying to reassess their approach for remaining relevant.

Implications of UN budget cuts are more significant for Bangladesh. There are both short term operational and long term strategic implications. As a whole, the UN financial crisis is making our UN forces less effective due to reduced strength and resources. With such challenges, reputation of our forces can be severely affected as there is a growing gap between expectations and capabilities. To maintain relevancy of our force, Bangladesh must realign its strategy from volume based generalized participation towards value based selective participation. Besides, Bangladesh should also develop its leadership who can secure UN leadership positions. Such approach will ensure our influence in the UN policy and decision making level. The success of our UN peacekeeping forces is largely depending on our adaptability to the changing UN mission environment.

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### **Brief Biography**



**Lieutenant Colonel Md Mamunur Rahman Siddiqui, afwc, psc, AC** was commissioned on 28 June 2004 with 50 BMA Long Course. He served in various Armoured Regiments namely 4 Horse, 7 Horse and 12 Lancers. Apart from the regimental appointments, he served as an ADC to General Officer Commanding, 19 Infantry Division. As an Instructor, he served as a Platoon and Term Commander at Bangladesh Military Academy. He served as a Brigade Major at 93 Armoured Brigade and Grade-1 Staff Officer (Training) at National Defence College. He also commanded 4 Horse. He participated in the UN mission as a contingent member in Liberia (UNMIL) and as Military Staff Officer in Mali (MINUSMA). He attended a number of courses both at home and abroad. Apart from the mandatory courses, he attended Basic Para Course, Potential Platoon Commander Course and Technical Officers Course in Pakistan. He is a graduate of Defence Services Command and Staff College, Mirpur and has obtained MSc in Defence Studies from Bangladesh University of Professionals. Besides, he is a graduate of Army Command and Staff College, Nepal and obtained Masters in Strategy Studies from Tribhuvan University, Nepal. He has also completed Armed Forces War Course from National Defence College, Mirpur and obtained MSc in Security and Development Studies. Presently, he is serving as the Grade-1 Staff Officer at Armed Forces Division.

## **Artificial Intelligence and Evolution of UN Peace Operations: Opportunities and Challenges for Bangladesh**

Lieutenant Colonel Md Wadud Ullah Chowdhury, afwc, psc, Inf

### **Introduction**

United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Operations are ongoing a significant transformation driven by the change in conflict scenario, complex mandate and technological advancement. This transformation is not only technological, but also institutional, ethical and strategic in nature. Today's UN peace operations environments are characterized by hybrid threats, misinformation, disinformation, drones and cyber activities. Increased use of drones by non-state actors has exposed the peacekeepers to asymmetric threats. On 13 December 2025, six Bangladeshi peacekeepers have sacrificed their lives due to a drone attack of an armed group on a UN base of the UN Interim Force for Abyei (UNISFA) in Sudan whose photos are shown below in Photo-1. These non-state actors or armed groups extensively use digital platforms to gain support and execute their narratives. Traditional UN peace operation tools rely mostly on observation and physical presence. But such tools are inadequate in present days. Peacekeeping missions now face complex decision cycles and uncertainty. Thereby, peace missions need faster analysis, effective situational awareness and quick responses. UN has identified this shift and has positioned the digital transformation at the top of peacekeeping reform.<sup>1</sup>

**Photo-1: Six Bangladeshi Peacekeepers Martyred in Drone Attack in Abyei, Sudan**



Source: *The Business Standard*, 14 December 2025

Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as the fundamental enabler within the UN digital transformation. AI systems can assist in surveillance, early warning as well as operational decision-making. Various AI tools can handle large volumes of data which human analysts can't. These capabilities of AI tools are strengthening UN peacekeeping missions to shift from reactive responses to proactive actions. AI instruments like Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise (SAGE) platform and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) exhibit how AI upholds data-driven UN peacekeeping operations.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, these AI technologies introduce ethical and legal risks which demand clear guidance and effective supervision. However, UN allows adoption of AI within a defined model that emphasises human control, accountability and ethical limit.<sup>3</sup> Thus, AI acts as a force multiplier for adaptation rather than a standalone solution in modern days.

Bangladesh is one of the top Troops Contributing Countries (TCC) of UN peacekeeping operations. This leading position provides Bangladesh both responsibility and opportunity in shaping the integration of technologies within the peace operations. Peacekeepers of Bangladesh are globally reputed for their exemplary standard of professionalism, discipline and efficiency in engagement with local communities of the mission area. In recent days, peacekeeping missions are becoming more technology driven. Therefore, Bangladeshi peacekeepers need to adapt with it as soon as possible. Because operational effectiveness may decline without timely adaptation.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of this paper is to analyse the role of artificial intelligence in the evolution of UN peacekeeping operations and identify options for Bangladesh. The paper at first highlights the evolution of peace operations. Then after, it identifies the opportunities and challenges related to AI in peace operations, followed by implications for Bangladesh. The paper concludes proposing a few options for Bangladesh to strengthen the preparedness for future AI-enabled UN peace missions.

### **Evolution of UN Peacekeeping Operations in the Era of AI**

Evolution of UN peace operations can be realized through the transformations in mandates, operational tools and the way information is converted into authoritative decisions. Traditional peace missions were focused on observing and reporting. Contemporary peace missions operate in such environments where threat emerge rapidly. At the same time, AI supports a shift from reactive peace operations to protective and data-driven engagement.

**Traditional Peacekeeping to Technology-Driven Peace Operations:** Traditional peacekeeping missions were planned considering

limited aims or objectives. Peacekeepers used to observe ceasefires and maintain buffer zones. Decision making was generally dependent on field observation and reporting. Situational awareness was mostly fragmented.<sup>5</sup> Peace operations became multidimensional since 1990s. Low-cost drones emerged and further changed the threat landscape. Mandates included protection of civilians, supporting political processes and strengthening government establishments. These mandated tasks demand effective coordination and smooth information management. UN launched intelligence supported approaches and coordinated information fusion including activating Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC).

UN peace missions have further enhanced in recent years. Now, peacekeeping missions significantly relies on digital tools, geospatial systems and real-time data. AI tools also support the integration of multiple data sources. It provides early warning and in-depth assessment of various data. This indicates a transition from manual reactive monitoring to anticipatory reactions. Peacekeepers are expected to identify the threats before any violence occurs. Thereby, analysis with the support of AI has become very important to ensure the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping mission.

**AI-Driven Operational Capabilities:** AI assists number of core operational functions of peacekeeping operations in modern days. Predictive analytics supports the peace missions to demonstrate the contemporary risk patterns. It ensures effective early-warning systems and preventive deployment in the risky areas.<sup>6</sup> These capabilities are being governed by the UN data responsibility principles, which ponders on stress proportionality and protection of sensitive information. Analysis of satellite imagery is another important capability. AI-enabled computer vision recognizes alterations in terrain, infrastructure and armed group movements. This improves speed and accuracy. Social media analysing tools use natural language processing to track misinformation, hate speech and mobilisation signals.

UAVs are increasingly more integrated into UN peace operations. These provide persistent observation and access to remote areas. UAVs reduce personnel risk and improve verification of ceasefire violations. AI tools also optimize the logistics by mapping the routes, supply forecast and options of troops deployment. This improves operational efficiency and reduces the peacekeeping budget.<sup>7</sup> Table-1 shows the gradual shift from primitive observation to AI-enabled operations.

**Table-1: Evolution of Technology in UN Peace Operations**

Period	Mandate Orientation	Dominant Technologies
1950s–1980s	Observation-based missions	Radios, binoculars
1990s–2000s	Multidimensional mandates	GPS, basic GIS
2010s	Intelligence-led operations	UAVs, thermal sensors, databases
2020s-present	Data-driven and anticipatory operations	AI analytics, SAGE, OSINT platforms

Source: Author’s Compilation Based on *Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping and Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+)*

**Lessons from AI Usage in Global Conflict Zones:** Contemporary conflicts offer essential lessons for UN peace operations. AI has intensified battlefield intelligence by analysing imagery and verifying OSINT (Open-Source Intelligence) in Ukraine. AI tools also enhance the situational awareness in hazardous mission environments.<sup>8</sup> AI tools assisted in forecasting the humanitarian crises in Syria. AI was used to predict possible displacement, food insecurity and potential violences. Thereby the authority could take required protective measures and humanitarian response.<sup>9</sup>

The SAGE platform integrates geospatial data, UAV feeds and field reports into a single operational representation within peace operations. Drone attacks against UN peacekeepers of various missions including UNISFA in recent days have determined that the absence of integrated UAV detection or counter surveillance capabilities can bring severe consequences. These incidents emphasize on the availability of digital technologies and their coordinated use in various mission areas.

**Opportunities Offered by AI in UN Peace Operations**

AI tools offer number of opportunities for UN peace operations. These opportunities are related to effective awareness and professional competence. AI tools assist the peace missions to process information, take effective decisions and respond timely. Thereby, peacekeepers can go for preventive engagement than that of reactive actions.

**Enhanced Situational Awareness:** Situational vigilance is one of the essential elements for effective peace operations. Recent drone attacks inside UN peacekeeping bases have demonstrated that traditional perimeter security is no longer enough for ensuring situational awareness. Thereby, early warning systems with the capability of identifying aerial threats are essential in present days. Combination of sensors, satellite images and UAV feeds can make a comprehensive depiction of the whole area. This operational portrayal allows the deployed peacekeepers to detect the emerging threats well before.<sup>10</sup> AI tools like early warning systems can detect various indicators of violence like unusual movements of the local population and armed group activities in the field. This can ensure effective planning and timely deployment. Following Table-2 shows different functions of AI tools those enhance situational awareness.

**Table-2: Various Functions of AI Tools in Peace Operations**

<b>AI Tool</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Operational Benefit</b>
<b>Predictive analytics</b>	Identifies risk patterns	Early-warning and prevention
<b>Computer vision</b>	Analyses satellite and UAV imagery	Faster threat detection
<b>Geospatial AI</b>	Maps conflict trends	Improved area control
<b>OSINT analytics</b>	Monitors digital platforms	Detection of misinformation

Source: Author's Synthesis Based on *Data-Driven Peacekeeping and Situational Awareness*, UN DPO, 2021

**Enhanced Operational Efficiency:** AI tools enhance operational effectiveness by making the decision cycles easier. Digital analysis reduces the information assessment time. Mission leadership get the scope to receive timely and organised insights.<sup>11</sup> AI tools also assist in identifying safer patrol routes and formulating better deployment plans. Algorithms can also ponder terrain, risk levels and logistic constraints. Thus, mission leadership can prioritise constrained assets like helicopters, UAVs and medical teams more effectively. Therefore, AI tools enhance mission sustainability and budget effectiveness. Application of AI tools to improve operational efficiency is highlighted in Table-3.

**Table-3: Roles of AI in Operational Efficiency**

<b>Operational Area</b>	<b>AI Application</b>	<b>Efficiency Gain</b>
<b>Decision-making</b>	Automated data analysis	Reduced response time
<b>Patrol planning</b>	Route optimisation algorithms	Lower risk exposure
<b>Logistics</b>	Supply forecasting models	Reduced shortages
<b>Resource management</b>	Priority allocation tools	Better asset utilisation

Source: Author’s self-construct

**Enhanced Protection of Civilians:** POC is an essential mandate of UN peace operations. AI tools strengthen POC by enabling proactive prediction rather than reaction. Predictive models can identify hotspots based on historical occurrences and real time indicators. This lets mission leadership to take effective decision and allows peacekeepers to deploy in risky areas in advance.<sup>12</sup> AI tools also assist in observing various activities of armed groups in mission area. UAVs and satellite imagery can track unusual movements and detect preparations for any kind of conflicts within the area. AI assisted analysis can help in documenting the human rights violations. It also identifies patterns of abuse and assists in reporting the same. These capabilities also boost coordination with humanitarian and human rights actors. When governed responsibly, such capabilities directly enhance mandate implementation rather than altering the foundational principles of peacekeeping. Table-4 shows how AI supports different aspects of civilian protection.

**Table-4: AI Applications Supporting POC**

<b>POC Function</b>	<b>AI Capability</b>	<b>Operational Impact</b>
<b>Violence prediction</b>	Risk modelling	Preventive deployment
<b>Armed group monitoring</b>	UAV and imagery analysis	Threat mitigation
<b>Human rights documentation</b>	Pattern recognition	Evidence-based reporting

Source: Source: Author’s self-construct

**Enhanced Intelligence and Information Fusion:** Modern peace operations generate large volumes of information. AI assists effective fusion of multi-source data. It integrates military, police, civilian, and humanitarian inputs. This reduces information silos within missions.<sup>13</sup> AI supports enhanced military–civil coordination. Shared platforms allow different peace mission components to access the same operational outlook which improves the unity of effort. Thereby, AI-generated models assist in effective strategic planning and prioritising the mandates.

**Leadership Opportunities for Bangladesh:** Use of AI tools create leadership prospects for various TCCs around the globe. Bangladesh can also grab this opportunity by attaining digital peacekeeping capabilities. These digital capabilities will strengthen the value and credibility of the UN peace mission.<sup>14</sup> Bangladesh also has the scope to play a big role in shaping the best practices and promoting the ethical use of AI tools among various TCCs. BIPSOT of Bangladesh has the scope of being the regional hub for digital peacekeeping training including the use of AI which will enhance the leadership influence of Bangladesh in peacekeeping efforts.

### **Challenges Related to AI in Peace Operations**

Besides offering number of operational benefits, AI may also lead to significant risks also. These risks may also affect legitimacy, legality and operational effectiveness. Careless use of AI may undermine mission credibility. Therefore, understanding these challenges and required planning are essential for responsible integration.<sup>15</sup>

**Ethical Risks and Algorithmic Bias:** Generally, AI systems depend on data. If data is incorrect or incomplete, outcomes may be wrong or distorted. Wrong outcome can lead to faulty identification of threats or flawed considerations of civilians as hostile actors. This may result to loss of lives and other serious consequences.<sup>16</sup> Algorithmic bias is another concern. Datasets often duplicate existing inequalities. Discrimination may be created, if these biases are integrated in AI systems. Surveillance based operations may increase further human rights concerns. Persistent surveillance may create intrusion on individual's privacy. It may also develop panic among the locals. These consequences conflict with the UN's principles of consent and impartiality. Decision makers may develop too much confidence in algorithmic outputs, even after caution from professional judgements. This may form psychological distance between human actors and the effects of decision. This distance may risk undermining consent, trustworthiness and perceived impartiality in peace operations environments. Excessive reliance on

Artificial Intelligence..

algorithmic outputs may therefore erode human judgement, accountability and consent, those highlight the legitimacy of UN peace operations.

**Legal Concerns:** Sometimes, use of AI in UN peace operations raises complex legal questions. International Humanitarian Law was designed for human decision making. It gives limited guidance on algorithm supported actions. Determining the responsibility becomes challenging when AI influences operational decisions.<sup>17</sup> If harm occurs, it is unclear who is responsible- the programmer, the operator, the mission, or the UN. This ambiguity creates legal and moral risk. The UN has therefore taken a clear position. The UN's position remains that accountability cannot be delegated to machines, regardless of the level of automation involved. It emphasises the need for meaningful human control over all use of force.

**Cybersecurity Risks and Data Sovereignty:** Extreme dependency on AI tools may generate cybersecurity vulnerabilities. Peace mission systems may be targeted by hacking, data theft or manipulation. Compromised data can mislead decision-makers and expose peacekeepers to danger.<sup>18</sup> Data sovereignty is also a concern. UN peace missions may collect classified information. This includes troop movements, community data, and intelligence assessments. TCCs may hesitate to share data. They fear loss of control or misuse. Table-5 below focuses on potential impact of cybersecurity failures in peace mission:-

**Table-5: Cybersecurity and Data Risks in AI-Enabled Peacekeeping**

<b>Risk Area</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Potential Impact</b>
<b>Cyber intrusion</b>	Hacking of mission systems	Operational disruption
<b>Data leakage</b>	Exposure of sensitive information	Threat to personnel
<b>Data manipulation</b>	Alteration of inputs or outputs	Misguided decisions
<b>Data sovereignty</b>	Loss of national control over data	Reduced cooperation

Source: Author's self-construct

**Digital Split and Technological Inequality:** Adoption of AI is not similar across various UN peace missions. Several peace missions benefit from advanced infrastructure. A few other peacekeeping missions operate in areas with limited connectivity and power supply. Many African theatres lack reliable digital networks. This restricts effective AI deployment. There are also disparities among TCCs. Technologically advanced contributors can field digital capabilities. Less-equipped contributors may struggle to integrate. This may create unequal operational roles.

**Operational Challenges for TCCs:** Integration of AI tools assigns new demands on TCCs. There is a deficiency of specialised peacekeeping personnel trained in data analysis, cyber operations and AI systems. Lack of interoperability is another challenge for the peacekeepers. Multinational UN peacekeeping missions use diverse systems. Financial costs are also matter. Advanced technologies need sustained investment. This creates sustainability concerns for many TCCs. Adoption of AI tool may remain uneven and fragile without support. However, increasing use of UAV/ drones by hostile actors also raises expectations from TCCs. Locals expect that peacekeepers will be deployed in the areas where technological asymmetry exposes personnel to heightened risk.

### **Implications for Bangladesh**

Integration of AI tools into UN peacekeeping operations involves explicit and long-term implications for Bangladesh. The implications may affect conduct of the operations, strategic positioning, training structures and institutional systems. 'Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping', formulated in September 2021, represents an operational stage towards augmenting the POC and empowering further effective mandate implementation utilising digital technologies. Proposals for leveraging technology for uniformed peacekeepers are shown in Figure-2. As one of the largest TCCs, Bangladesh's credibility is closely tied to its ability to adapt. Future missions will increasingly assess contingents on digital competence as well as traditional soldiering skills. Failure to adjust to the changed scenario of peace missions may weaken operational effectiveness and reduce Bangladesh's policy influence within the UN system.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure-1: Leveraging Technology for Uniformed Peacekeepers**

<b>Enhancements to Existing Systems</b>	<b>•Upkeep with evolving requirements, integration</b>
<b>Process Reengineering and Simplification</b>	<b>•Single-source data entry, integration, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning</b>
<b>Piloting Emerging Technologies</b>	<b>•Weaponized UAVs; robotics for counter IED, CubeSat, Open Source Intelligence</b>
<b>Increasing Pre-Deployment Preparedness</b>	<b>•Hybrid training programs, e-learning</b>
<b>Institutionalizing Uniformed Peacekeeper-driven Innovation</b>	<b>•Innovation labs, training</b>
<b>New partnerships / structures</b>	<b>•Regional post-blast labs, hybrid teams, industry-teams</b>

Source: Author's self-construct

**Operational Implications:** AI will substantially redesign how Bangladeshi contingents operate in the field missions. The loss of the lives of six Bangladeshi peacekeepers in Abyei, Sudan, in the recent drone attack underscores the imperative need to integrate drone detection, aerial surveillance and early warning capabilities into contingents deployed in peace missions. Digital tools should become part of daily operational activities which may include situational awareness dashboards, geospatial mapping programs and AI-supported reporting systems. These tools enhance accuracy and reduce response time for the peacekeepers. These also allow commanders to visualise threats more distinctly and allocate forces more effectively. There is an increasing need to integrate AI-enabled intelligence and reconnaissance elements within deployed mission contingents. These elements would evaluate satellite imagery, UAV feeds and open-source data. These inputs can assist the commanders on ground with foretelling assessments avoiding the descriptive reports.<sup>20</sup> The adjustments required for AI-enabled peace missions are exhibited in Table-6.

**Table-6: Operational Adjustments Required for AI-Enabled Peacekeeping**

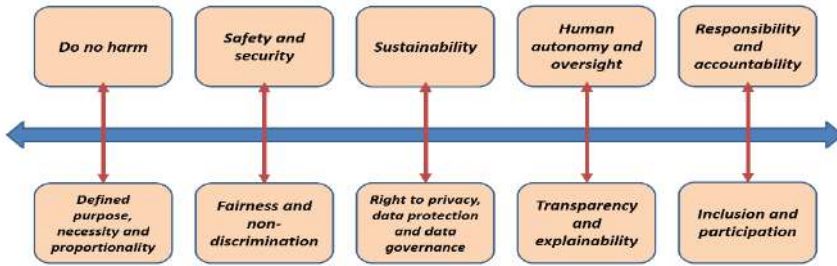
<b>Operational Area</b>	<b>Required Adjustment</b>	<b>Expected Outcome</b>
<b>Situational awareness</b>	Use of AI-supported data platforms	Faster threat detection
<b>Reconnaissance</b>	AI-enabled ISR elements	Improved mission planning
<b>Patrol operations</b>	UAV-supported monitoring	Reduced personnel risk
<b>Reporting</b>	Digital and geospatial tools	Higher information accuracy

Source: Author's self-construct

**Strategic and Policy Implications:** Bangladesh is aligning its peacekeeping stance with recently published UN Digital Transformation Strategy. This orientation will ensure effective alignment with the growing mandates and various operational ideas. This also indicates the effective preparedness of Bangladesh to contribute to future UN peacekeeping operations. As one of the leading TCC, Bangladesh is ready to influence the evolving norms on effective and ethical use of AI tools in UN peace operations.<sup>21</sup> This operational reliability extends Bangladesh a remarkable platform to shape the future peacekeeping environments.

UN General Assembly and Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) provide the stands to assist the ethical use of AI tools. Bangladesh has the scope to enhance the influence on peacekeeping policy discourse. Thereby, AI readiness can boost the operational credibility and diplomatic standing of Bangladesh.<sup>22</sup> Principles for ethical use of AI tools in UN peace operations are portrayed in Figure-2 given below:-

**Figure-2: Principles for the Ethical Use of AI in the UN Peace Operations**



Source: UNIN, *Principles for the Ethical Use of AI in the UN System*, 2022

**Skill Training and Human Resource Development:** AI-enabled peacekeeping missions demand a new skill set for the peacekeepers. They need to be trained on AI literacy, cyber security and GIS tools. Peacekeepers also need to understand how AI tools support the analysis and its limitations as well. This knowledge is important to avoid over reliance on digital automated outputs. A few of the TCCs have given much emphasis on developing the digital capabilities and technical units. As Bangladesh’s strength remains its discipline and operational efficiency, these can be complemented by technical upskilling.

Bangladeshi military institutions like BIPSOT, MIST or DSCSC have the scope to assist in capacity development. Peace operations training curricula should include comprehensive lessons on digital peace operations. Simulation based training can give the scope of learning AI-supported decision making under adverse situations for the commanders of various levels. Training collaboration with technologically advanced nations can enhance the digital learning.<sup>23</sup> Table-7 shows the training priorities for effective AI-enabled peacekeeping.

**Table-7: Training Priorities for AI-Enabled Peacekeeping**

Training Area	Target Group	Purpose
AI literacy	Commanders and staff officers	Informed decision-making
Cyber hygiene	All deployed personnel	Risk reduction
GIS and UAV operations	Intelligence and ISR teams	Situational awareness
Digital ethics	Leadership cadres	Responsible AI use

Source: Author’s self-construct

## Options for Bangladesh

A deliberately thought policy needs to be formulated while integrating AI into UN peacekeeping missions. Bangladesh also needs to follow a structured and phased approach. Consistency of the policies is required to ensure operational efficiency, ethical considerations and enhanced sustainability in peace operations. Therefore, as one of the top TCCs, Bangladesh needs to lead in converting policy reform to practical effects.<sup>24</sup>

**Develop a ‘AI in Peace Operation’ Roadmap:** Bangladesh may prioritise developing a dedicated roadmap for AI in peacekeeping. This AI roadmap must be coordinated with the UN system wide AI governance mechanisms and other UN frameworks. The Digital Transformation Strategy and UNIN ethical principles should also be taken into consideration. This will also reduce uncertainty for planners and training institutions. The roadmap needs to detect priority capabilities like AI supported situational awareness, UAV feeds, geospatial analysis and cyber resistance etc. Table-8 shows how a roadmap can link policy intent with operational capability.

**Table-8: Core Components of ‘AI in Peacekeeping’ Roadmap**

Component	Focus Area	Purpose
Policy alignment	UN frameworks and ethics	Strategic coherence
Capability priorities	AI, UAVs, GIS, cyber	Operational relevance
Human capital	Skills and training	Workforce readiness
Implementation phases	Short to long term	Sustainable adoption

Source: Author’s self-construct

**Strengthen Training Institutions for AI-Era Missions:** Training institutions are vital to AI readiness. Peace operations training curricula should integrate AI modules at different levels. Peacekeepers must comprehend how AI updates decisions and where human judgment remains vital.<sup>25</sup> Simulation-based digital peace operation labs need to be established. These digital labs will be able to expose the peacekeepers to real time scenarios, predictive tools and decision dilemmas by replicating complex mission environments. Centres of excellence like BIPSOT, MIST and DSCSC may be of great use in this aspect. Role of Bangladesh as capacity provider may be further enhanced through regional training cooperation.

**Expand Technological Capabilities in Deployable Units:** Various policy reforms need to be clearly translated to deployable capabilities. Bangladesh needs to expand technical resources within deployed field contingents. These assets may include UAV teams, GIS experts and cyber professionals. These specialists will be able to support the mission leadership with well-thought, timely and effective analysis. Mission compatible digital equipment needs to be procured maintaining the UN technical standards. Interoperability in multinational mission environment also needs to be ensured. This approach lowers maintenance burden and ensures long-term usability. The following Table-9 shows the priority capabilities for deployable Bangladeshi units in UN peace missions.

**Table-9: Required AI-Related Capabilities for Bangladeshi Contingents**

Capability	Role	Operational Benefit
UAV teams	Surveillance and monitoring	Reduced risk exposure
GIS specialists	Spatial analysis	Improved planning
Cyber analysts	Threat detection	System protection
AI-supported reporting	Data integration	Faster decisions

Source: Author's self-construct

**Promote Ethical and Responsible Use of AI:** Ethical governance should complement technological adoption. Bangladesh should formally adopt the UNIN ethical principles. These principles stress transparency, accountability and equality. They also emphasize on acknowledging the human rights.<sup>26</sup> Human-in-the-loop decision-making should be institutionalised. AI outputs must inform decisions, not replace them. Commanders should retain authority and responsibility. Ethical training should be mandatory for leadership cadres. This will reduce misuse and reinforce the legitimacy of the peace mission.

**Enhance Cybersecurity Infrastructure:** Cybersecurity is a foundational requirement for AI-enabled peacekeeping. Bangladesh needs to invest in military-grade encryption for communication systems. Secure data-sharing protocols need to be established with peace missions and partner contingents. These activities will protect the sensitive information.<sup>27</sup> Planned and well thought cyber training needs to be arranged for the peacekeepers. Basic contents on cyber security and threat perception should be included in

the peacekeepers' training. A well thought and effective cyber security posture will be able to protect the peace operations and foster trust within multinational and multidimensional UN peacekeeping missions.

## **Conclusion**

AI is portraying a considerable role in reshaping the UN peacekeeping operation in present days. It is shifting the concepts of determining the threats, planning the peace operations and implementing the mission mandates. Thereby, peace missions are also transferring from observation based early warning to data driven faster engagement. AI tools enable the peacekeeping personal in making proactive and quicker decisions and effective reactions. This change confirms greater modifications in conflict settings and operational requirements. UN's prominence on digital conversion reveals that AI will remain as the pivotal point in peace operations of future days. AI tools offer considerable operational potential. It enhances the protection of civilians in mission area through effective early warning and timely assessment. AI also enhances effectiveness of the peace missions by reducing the hazards of peacekeepers. However, besides the benefits of AI, challenges like ethical risks, legal limitations and cyber security vulnerabilities can't be overlooked. Therefore, without effective precautions, AI may collapse the trust, neutrality and legitimacy.

Use of AI tools has both challenges and benefits. In all cases, AI will influence consistency, leadership and operational effectiveness of peace missions in the coming days. Therefore, as the top TCC, Bangladesh needs to stress on skills, policy and technology. A well thought and effective AI readiness will shape the relevance of Bangladesh in future peace operations. In future days, credibility of TCCs will be assessed not only by the number of peacekeepers deployed on ground, but also by their ability to operate effectively in digital field of peace missions. Recent tragic death of six Bangladeshi peacekeepers in the drone attack in UNISFA serves as an absolute reminder that technological adaptation in peace operations is a matter of operational persistence and mandate credibility. Quick and effective adaptation to AI-enabled peace operations will eventually shape Bangladesh's relevance, credibility and leadership within the evolving architecture of UN peace operations.

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### **Brief Biography**



**Lieutenant Colonel Md Wadud Ullah Chowdhury, afwc, psc, Inf** was commissioned on 28 June 2004 with 50th BMA Long Course. He is a graduate of Defence Services Command and Staff College, Bangladesh and Army Command College, China. He has completed Armed Forces War Course from National Defence College, Bangladesh. He attended Junior Command Course at Army War College, MHOW and earned a Diploma in Junior Level Defence Management from the University of Indore, India. Lieutenant Colonel Wadud holds a Master's in Security and Development, a Master's in Military Studies and a Master's in Business Administration (Executive) from Bangladesh, and a Master's in Military Command from China. He is a distinguished Instructor of Bangladesh Military Academy. He served as Brigade Major of an Infantry Brigade in the South-Eastern region of the country and developed substantial experience in addressing complex refugee-related challenges. He commanded a Mechanized Infantry Battalion. He served under the 'Blue Helmet' twice, both as a contingent member and a military observer. He is currently serving as a Directing Staff at the Defence Services Command and Staff College, Bangladesh.

## **Digital Transformation of Peace Operations: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in United Nations Missions**

Lieutenant Colonel S M Saleh Bin Safi, SGP, psc, BIR

### **Introduction**

Armed conflicts have evolved significantly in the twenty-first century. Contemporary conflicts are more complex, information saturated, which involve non-state militias and insurgents, transnational warfare, electronic warfare and propaganda campaigns. Since the manipulation of social media up to Artificial Intelligence (AI) aided targeting, the face of modern conflict has changed beyond the conventional battlefield framework. To address these dynamic shifts, the United Nations (UN) has taken endeavour to modernize its peace operations through technological breakthroughs. Among these developments, integration of AI into UN missions is the most significant one. Simple AI applications such as predictive analytics and machine learning or natural language processing and computer vision are paving the way towards peacekeeping, peacebuilding and conflict prevention is practised. <sup>1</sup>

The information revolution of peace is the paradigm shift towards collecting, analyzing and taking actions in the conflict situation. UN missions will enhance the situational awareness, force protection, decision making, optimal resource allocation and protection of civilian (PoC) through AI. However, the implementation of AI in peace operations also creates ethical, legal, and political concerns. The primary concerns are particularly regarding data privacy, algorithmic bias, accountability and sovereignty. <sup>2</sup>

This paper first discusses the rapid change in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) in the digital age. Thereafter it examines the operational capabilities of AI in peacekeeping missions. Then it explores the ethical, legal, and strategic risks of unregulated usage of AI. Furthermore, it analyses the structural constraints and disparities faced during implementation. Finally, this paper will end with an endeavour to find ways forward to strengthen AI integration responsibly in UN missions worldwide.

### **Operational Landscape of Ongoing UNPKO**

The UNPKO global operation environment is evolving every often. Although UNPKO in Cyprus, Jammu and Kashmir and Western Sahara remain under guard and observation with small-size and mandate, the UN mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is an example of resource-wonky mission in an unstable

situation. But with the beginning of the war in Syria, the mission of the peacekeeping in Golan should also attract the reevaluation of its competences and resources.

The UN followed immediately after the devastating Liberian Civil War (1989-1997) through the introduction of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). UNMIL was founded in 2003, and it was a monumental undertaking to repair the peace and stability of the nation ravaged by a conflict. Unlike any prior involvement, UNMIL involved itself in supporting the departure of the war and the transition of Liberia to democracy through its well-crafted intensive programme that involved disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes, institution-building checks and balances, and the assistance of democratic elections.<sup>3</sup>

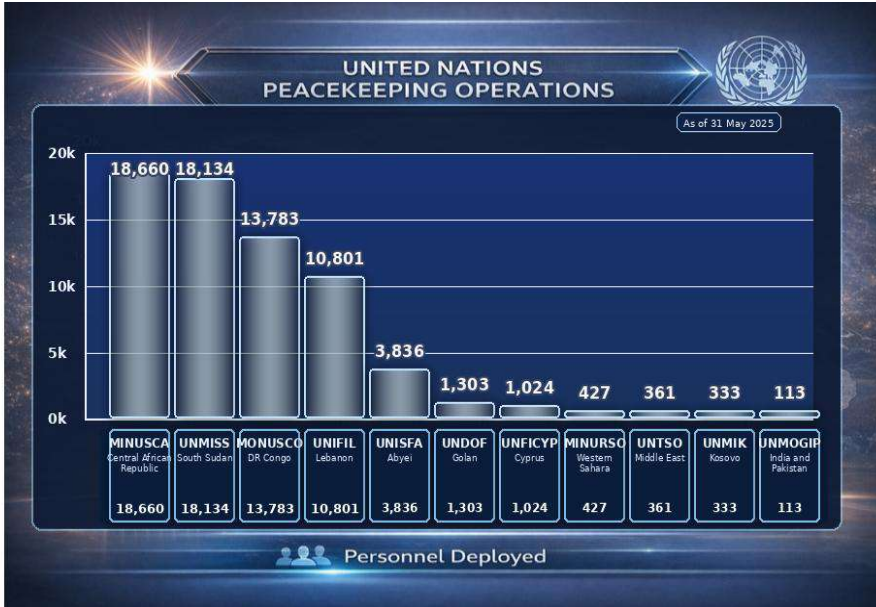
Likewise, a successful story was the case in Timor-Leste as the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) was instrumental in the reconstruction of the country which attracted attention due to its independence fight. The UNTAET was instrumental in establishing a peaceful and thriving Timor-Leste with the close coordination with the local authorities and by interacting with communities. The case of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) proved that well-built mandates and coordination are imperative in post-conflict reconstruction. UNAMSIL, through its holistic peace-building activities, assisted in restoring the state of Sierra Leone and thereby setting in place reconciliation.<sup>4</sup>

The United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) had to deal with the complications of one of the largest conflicts in the world in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). MONUSCO was deployed in the year 2010 and has had to contend with constant security risks, political unrest as well as humanitarian emergencies. This has not stopped great achievements of MONUSCO in ensuring the reduction of violence, political dialogue, and promotion of human rights, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, and the Central African Republic.<sup>5</sup> Deterring and containing violence and securing civilians against every form of asymmetric threat are the critical and challenging roles that a peacekeeper must carry out.

In Sierra Leone, Cote-de-Ivories and Liberia, UNPKO has managed to bring in conducive conditions of sustainable peace there. UNPKO in Darfur, Sudan, and South Sudan is attempting to lessen the aggression against civilians, aid humanitarian undertakings and political settlements are being

introduced. The willingness of the stakeholders is important in the success of these costly and challenging missions.

**Figure-1: Statistics of Peacekeeping Operations**



Source:[https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/06\\_un\\_missions\\_summary\\_of\\_military\\_and\\_police\\_86\\_may\\_2025.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/06_un_missions_summary_of_military_and_police_86_may_2025.pdf)

In South Sudan, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was confronted in a challenging environment of conflicts. The UNMISS deployed in 2011 was meant to provide security to the civilians, assist in humanitarian services and the peace process. However, in spite of the attacks on peacekeepers, ethnic violence, and political instability, UNMISS rendered very important part in assisting the peace process, humanitarian access and vulnerable groups protection.

These case studies point out to various experiences of UN Peacekeeping Operations focusing on its successes and difficulties. Some of the best practises involve widespread peace-building strategies, strong mandates, competency in coordination with the regional actors, and prolonged international assistance. Nonetheless, it is important to consider the constant adaptation and innovation, which can deal with the challenges, including the security threat, political intricacies, and resource limitations, to guarantee the

future relevance of UNPKO as a sphere of ensuring peace and security in the global context.

### **Evolution of UNPKO in the Digital Age**

#### **Move Towards Technology-Facilitated Peacekeeping Operations:**

Ever since the founding of the United Nations on 24 October 1945, the UN has been sending peacekeeping missions to observe ceasefires, support political transitions, and PoC. Physical presence, patrol, negotiation, and human intelligence were some of the major pillars of traditional peacekeeping. In recent years, due to the asymmetrical nature of conflicts and advances in technology, the traditional method has become ineffective. The digitalization trend began with the penetration of satellite imagery, geographic information systems (GIS), and safe communication systems. These tools would then be developed into more sophisticated systems of data in which a high-density of data could be processed in the blink of an eye. The emergence of AI enhanced the pace of this alteration by enabling the recognition of various patterns automatically and predictive modelling, as well as improved data analysis. <sup>6</sup>

**The Institutional Turn to Technology and Innovation:** The contemporary UN missions operate in an environment of rapid information flow and digital communication networks. With technology, almost every area of the organisation has been affected. For example, the digital way of tracking the movements of armed groups by managing pay and allowances has been automated. In 2015, the UN created a panel of technological and innovation experts. In addition, in 2018, the Secretary General issued a plan for new technologies. Subsequently, the Digital Transformation Strategy was published in 2021. These demonstrations represent adaptation on the strategic level of organisations. <sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the armed groups employ social media in the mobilisation of support, propaganda and organisation of attacks. The use of mobile technologies for communicating and reporting the threat depends on the civilian population.

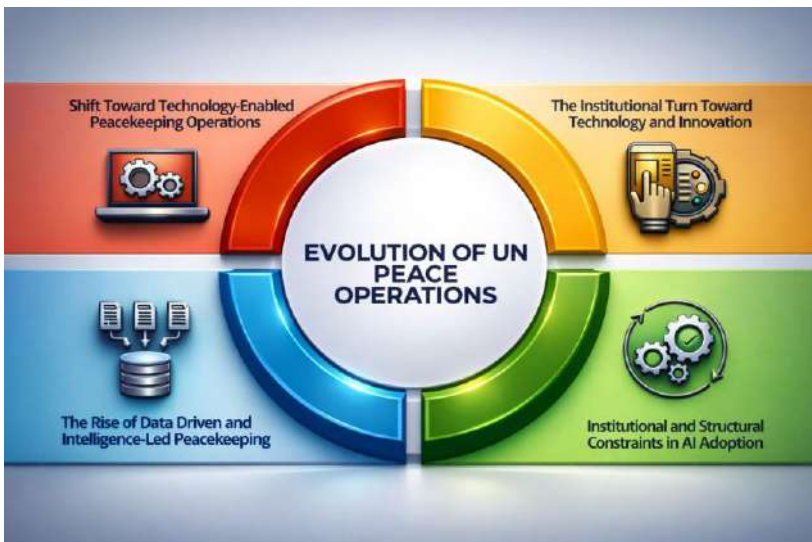
#### **The Emergence of Data-Driven and Intelligence-Led Peacekeeping:**

Intelligence-led and data-driven methods are among the ways in which the digital transformation of UN peace operations can be seen. AI is increasingly backing these methods. The use of early warning systems based on the use of real-time, continuous information gathering and geospatial analytics to improve situational awareness and PoC has been shown in the case of contemporary missions, like the MONUSCO, MINUSCA and MINUSMA. SAGE system deployment in missions is an effective approach to intelligence collection and

machine learning, which has proven successful in the context of disinformation campaigns, mobilisation indicators and surveillance of local sentiment changes.<sup>8</sup>

Predictive conflict modelling also enhances anticipatory decision-making by analysing previous incident data alongside socio-political metrics to predict high-risk areas.<sup>9</sup> These functions tend to be incorporated into information fusion platforms that bring together contributions of military, police and civilian layers into a joint operational image. Consequently, the environment of peacekeeping is slowly transforming into an information-guided, intelligence-dominant mission.

**Figure-2: Evolution of UNPKO in Digital Age**



Source: Author's self-construct

**Bureaucratic and Systems Obstacles to AI adoption:** The structural and institutional basis is required to have a coherent adoption of AI in the missions of UNPKO. Although strategic plans to deploy emerging technologies, including Strategy on New Technologies by the Secretary General and the larger reform agendas of the digital landscape, do the significance of emerging technologies, no single, binding AI governance framework exists in specific reference to peace operations. Rather, leadership is still department-missions clusters. An example is that the missions like the MONUSCO and the UNIFIL have different technological capabilities. This is an indication of poor use of recent technologies within the UN missions. Also, the Troops Contributing Countries (TCC) have unequal technological potential, which results in the

digital divide in training, equipment and analytical skills. Examples include, poor connexions in distant theatres and lack of cybersecurity which limits successful adoption of AI.

### **Operational Capabilities of AI in Peacekeeping Missions**

**AI-Driven Early Warning and Conflict prediction:** The AI systems that will be deployed to operational fields will be able to analyse satellite data, open-source intelligence, reports on incidents created by the UN and social media trends. Patterns of emerging threats can be identified and realized after their analysis. In MONUSCO, the SAGE platform uses a combination of geospatial and social information to predict the number of hotspots. Drone reconnaissance assisted UNPOL to cover the area of 12 hectares within 15 minutes, where the massacre could not be reached.<sup>10</sup> Machine learning models are capable of detecting patterns of growing violence, including trends of hate speech, troop movements, or insufficient resources. The AI systems detect anomalies and warning signs of risks that may be utilized by the mission leadership. As an illustration, sudden spikes in online radicalization or abnormal migration flows may portend future turmoil. Predictive analytics can also allow the UN from transition to preventive diplomacy as opposed to responding to violence by deploying peacekeepers after it has happened.<sup>11</sup> Missionaries can mobilize local actors, negotiate tensions, and strengthen communities against violence before it spiral out of control by using predictive analytics. It is a proactive strategy that goes in line with the increased attention of the UN on the preservation of peace and prevention of conflict. AI models may produce partial and incomplete results in weak-data infrastructure states where there is the threat of data destruction. Therefore, to keep the results of algorithms into perspective and validate them, human supervision is needed.

**Figure-3: Operational Capabilities of AI in Peacekeeping Missions**



Source: Author's self-construct

**Enhancing Situational Awareness Through Data Integration:** Peace operations are highly dependent on situational awareness. Prompt, accurate information can make the difference between preventing violence and responding late in a volatile environment. Artificial intelligence-driven platforms are better at raising situational awareness by aggregating diverse information. Drones and satellite images are using computer vision technology to identify armed activity, infrastructure damage, and camps and hideouts. NLP solutions check the social media and local news to detect new complaints or fake campaigns. Such built-in resource allocations enable mission planners to use resources more effectively. Based on the risk assessment, patrol trips may be optimised. Predictive mapping can be used to identify hotspots where rapid-response units can be deployed to threatened areas. Collaborative digital platforms enable information exchange and collaborative planning. Consequently, AI also plays a role in operational effectiveness and situational awareness.

**Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Assistance:** A major mission of most UN missions is the PoC. AI technologies can provide new tools to emphasize this requirement. For example, predictive models can identify communities at high risk of violence based on past trends and real-time signals. AI aids in resource distribution and needs assessment in the humanitarian context. Satellite images are using machine learning algorithms to estimate population displacement and infrastructure damage. Besides, AI-based logistics systems streamline supply chains, ensuring that food, medicine, and even shelter reach communities in need in the most efficient way possible. These systems enhance the impact of humanitarian interventions by drastically reducing delays and waste. Therefore, a wise use of AI can play a vital role in PoC.<sup>12</sup>

**AI and Gender-Responsive Peacekeeping:** Innovation of gender-sensitive approaches has become part of contemporary UNPKO and is relevant to the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and equal representation of women in the peace processes. Predictive analytics will be able to highlight those areas where women and girls are at risk of violence. Machine learning systems can examine trends in reported cases, geographic susceptibility, and seasonal variation to predict a possible rise in abuse. This will allow prior installation of protective units and awareness initiatives. Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools can also screen for online harassment and gender-based hate speech, which can inform efforts to alleviate emerging threats.<sup>13</sup>

Orchestrated online abuse can be identified and missions can cooperate with local communities and civil society to combat harmful narratives. However, an AI implementation that is gender sensitive would require strong data governance. Data leakage or misuse of data by survivors of gender-based violence ought to be avoided at all costs. Ethical protection is thus of utmost importance.<sup>14</sup>

### Challenges in the Digital Transformation of Peace Operations

**Algorithmic Bias and Misidentification:** Among the greatest operational and ethical risks associated with AI in UNPKO is algorithm bias, which may result in wrong targeting. In AI systems, operation is based on patterns trained on a database. The issue though, is that incomplete, unrepresentative, or biased data sets over time can label an individual or a group of people incorrectly by the system. These distortions are enhanced within conflict environments, where information tends to be disjointed, or politicized. Misclassification as minor as it might be, in peacekeeping missions bound by the UN, can have serious repercussions. False identification is a contravention to the major postulates of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL), namely the notion of distinction and proportionality. As soon as the AI-enhanced system recognizes civilians as combatants or the actions of the terrorists, the movement of the enemy is the staff, it becomes unfriendly to its own credibility of work and even to recognition of its moral right before the war on terror. Therefore, there is a real threat of algorithmic bias in the responsible implementation of AI in peace operations in the UN, unless it is carefully proven, on the basis of datasets of all sorts and when its use is supported by a strong sense of human responsibility.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure-4: Challenges in the Digital Transformation of Peace Operations**



Source: Author's self-construct

**Legal Ambiguity and Accountability Gaps:** AI in UNPKO raises legal uncertainty. Particularly, accountability for decisions influenced or made by automated systems should be established. IHL has consistently placed the responsibility for unlawful acts committed in armed conflict on states and individuals. <sup>16</sup> When a machine-based recommendation causes unintended damage, who bears responsibility is not obvious- be it the software developer, the commanding officer, the nation providing the troops, or the institutional authority that controls the operation. Thus, AI integration will lead to a deep-seated threat to the legitimacy of UNPKO unless strong legal mechanisms and systems of accountability are integrated with it.<sup>17</sup>

**Information Manipulation and Deep Fakes:** Newly developed AI poses a significant strategic threat to UN peace operations by manipulating information, with Deep Fakes and AI generated misinformation among its recent applications. AI driven technologies are now able to produce highly natural-sounding synthetic audio and fake content, and to automatically generate content on social media that could propagate false narratives on a large scale. In missions governed by the UN, legitimacy and the illusion of neutrality are functional resources; attempts to undermine either with falsified information can result in the destruction of the other. <sup>18</sup> When the locals believe fake news, e.g., false charges of bad actions or fake videos of peacekeepers. Additionally, information warfare with AI will be much faster than conventional responses to public affairs, creating a disadvantage in responding to missions that are not digitally monitored and lack counter-disinformation systems. <sup>19</sup> Hence, under these circumstances, lacking reactive measures to identify, counter, and effectively convey information about AI orchestrated misinformation, UNPKO are at risk of engaging in a similar digital battlefield in which legitimacy is as disputable as territory.

**Digital Divide in Field Missions:** The strongest structural constraint of digitization of UNPKO is the digital divide that continues to affect the field operations, particularly in the technologically under-resourced environments. Other similar missions in Sub-Saharan Africa, e.g., the MONUSCO, have been deployed in remote areas where broadband connectivity is limited, the power supply is not reliable and the cloud infrastructure is not present. And without the systems, which are not restricted to analysis at the headquarters level, no high-level technologies can be attained. The AI systems need continuous stream of data, storage and computing resources. It undermines interoperability, slows down the process of making decisions, and minimizes the usefulness of the digitization transformation efforts. Therefore, the

application of AI in UNPKO will never be equal and will not have enough resources to operate until the problem of infrastructural inequalities is addressed.<sup>20</sup>

**Capacity Gaps Among Troop Contributing Countries:** Another factor that makes it difficult to adopt AI in peace operations is the technological literacy and training disparities between the TCCs. The combination of AI-driven data analysis, cybersecurity awareness and algorithmic threat assessment is not always done by highly qualified personnel although some groups use more advanced surveillance technologies, including digital monitoring devices and UAVs. This leads to a derailment to some extent in the analytical competency when missions operate in the jurisdiction of the United Nations. The disparities in each country's technology level are reflected in differences in the operation of different contingents.<sup>21</sup> These differences undermine the coordination and joint planning and can lead to mistrust between more technologically equipped and less equipped contingents.

### **Ways Forward: Strengthening AI Integration Responsibly**

**Establishing a Unified AI Governance Framework:** To ensure successful integration of AI in the UN peace operations, a multi-faceted system architecture of governance must be established to provide flexibility, legal compliance, morality-driven and responsive, and accountability of the institution. The current AI policy in the United Nations is very fragmented, thus creating a legal ambiguity and accountability challenge. The fact that the results of consulting IHL and the respect of the human rights law might be undone by being exposed to the effects of algorithmic bias is a possibility without the presence of regular rules, as well as the risk of unequal use-of-force practices. The absence of responsibility chains and the impossibility of tracking the responsibility in case of operational damage due to AI-assisted decision-making also makes it tricky. A governance system should encourage a kind of highly governed governance incorporating human control criteria, transparency criteria of algorithmic machines, auditing criteria of bias checks, and clear avenues of accountability. Such a framework would diminish the ambiguity in the law, and the danger of compromising the principles of distinction and proportionality, as well as the legitimacy of missions. In this way, harmonised governance is an initial step in minimising ethical risks and moving the concept that AI does not deteriorate it but enhances the normative integrity of UNPKO.<sup>22</sup>

**Investing in Secure Digital Infrastructure:** The AI implementation should be created in a sequential way on a successful digital platform which is

capable of handling, storing and analysing all missions in a safe way. The field operations can be defined by numerous issues associated with the lack of connectivity, the inadequacy of cloud integration, and susceptibility to cyberattacks that aggravates the digital gap and the unreliability of AI applications. Poor infrastructure also exposes people to cyber intrusions and the manipulation of information, such as Deep Fakes and disinformation programs. The analytical accuracy is ensured through the good infrastructure and sensitive information is not misused, which rectifies the technological and strategic weaknesses. Digital infrastructure needs to be improved, therefore, to bypass infrastructural constraints and safeguard peace missions against artificial intelligence threats.<sup>23</sup>

**Figure-5: Investment in the Secure Digital Infrastructure**



Source: Author's self-construct

**Capacity Building and Specialized Training:** The most crucial aspect of the use of AI is the equitable and effective implementation of the new technology in missions, which involves closing the gaps between troop-contributing countries. The lack of equality in the performance at the operational level because of the application of AI and technical knowledge leads to disparities between the results of the algorithm and their wrong interpretation. Absence of necessary training will result in the situation of personnel over-dependence on automated recommendations or even unidentification of system biases, which will raise the chances of misidentification and non-conformity to the law. These would promote the functionality across contingents and reduce inequalities brought about by technological disparity. UN can mitigate the risks of algorithms by investing in

human capital and technology to create responsible and coherent working practices.

**AI Promotion with Human-in-the-Loop Approach:** Human control in the AI-aided decision-making procedure is important to attaining accountability, ethical decision making and the validity of the mission. Issues of legal vagueness and wrong attribution are mostly related to the vagueness and autonomy of some AI systems. The United Nations Secretary General has indicated the necessity of making sure that the issue of lethal decisions is not left in machine hands without oversight. Important decisions that involve surveillance interpretation, threat evaluation, or force prevention, which are vital to judgment and its morality, should be humanly supervised. Algorithms bias can also be corrected by humans to reduce the chances of escalations by automated processes. In recent years, AI governance by humans has blocked the legal responsibility and ethical humanist basis of peacekeeping in the digitally complex environments.<sup>24</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The changing spectrum of UNPKO are indicative of a wider change in the nature of conflict as such. As the most recent technological trend has been to expand data, and the warfare has become technologically mediated, the role of peacekeeping operations has been forced to transform more than the previous troop-based methods to technology-mediated, intelligence-mediated methods. The fact that there are strategic initiatives and reform agendas means that the institution already recognizes digital tools as not some optional functions to enhance its operations, rather it is a need. Nonetheless, this is still an unequal development. The normative adherence to modernization is evident, but the transition between the analogue peacekeeping missions to the digital-mindset missions is still under consideration, which is indicative of the political situation, structural dissimilarity and institutional hesitation.

The AI-based computer-aided prediction of the situation and receivership system, along with the analysis of social media and predictive conflict models, as well as data fusion platforms, contributed to the development of situational awareness that could be leveraged to implement both proactive and preventive actions where needed. There are sophisticated technologies that allow missions to work with a lot of information, identify new threats, and improve the level of protection of civilians. In this respect, AI provides the option to turn peacekeeping to preemptive management of a crisis instead of reactive management. However, its effectiveness depends not just on the complexity of

technological tools, but also the quality of data, human management, and institutional readiness to sustain it.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the peace operations are as well associated with complex ethical, legal and structural problems. Discrimination in algorithms and the purity of international humanitarian norms, but the vagueness of the law will complicate the situation and will not allow one to blame someone who caused harm through the use of AI-assisted decisions. The information campaigns that oppose mission authority and are aided by AI are a parallel battlefield in the informational battlespace. Moreover, the digital divide in the field mission, differences in the capacity of the states involved in the troop, and political consequences on the sovereignty of the data foil a uniform use of the technology. These problems prove that the use of technology requires regulation, equity, and transparency, prior to it being able to ward off the very tenets that peacekeeping is supposed to facilitate.<sup>26</sup>

A coherent governance framework, consistent digital ecosystem, extensive capacity-building, significant human control, and attempts to overcome technological gaps globally are necessary to make sure that AI strengthens and does not disrupt peace operations. To make sure that the future of UNPKO is not determined by the availability of sophisticated algorithms, the choice to implement innovation has to be based on the responsible application of digital transformation, improving the efficiency and dependability of peace operations and, thus, the escalating precariousness of an existing unstable world order.<sup>27</sup>

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### **Brief Biography**



**Lieutenant Colonel S M Saleh Bin Safi, SGP, psc, BIR** was commissioned in 28 Bangladesh Infantry Regiment with 53 BMA Long Course on 20 December 2005. He is a graduate of Defence Service Command and Staff College, Mirpur and Command and Staff College, Quetta, Pakistan. He served in four Infantry Battalions and held all the regimental appointments within his capacity. He commanded 35 Bangladesh Infantry Regiment (Support Battalion) as pioneer Commanding Officer. As staff, he served as ADC to GOC at Headquarters 33 Infantry Division and as Brigade Major of 26 Infantry Brigade. He also served as General Staff Officer, Grade-1 in General Staff Branch, Army Headquarters. He served as Instructor in Tactics Wing of School of Infantry and Tactics and also served as Platoon Commander in Bangladesh Military Academy. Apart from the mandatory courses, he attended Junior Command and Staff Course in Canada. He also had a stint of service as a Guest Directing Staff in Canada. He participated in the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo as Mechanized Platoon Commander and Central African Republic as Military Staff Officer-Chief U1 (Pers) in Force Headquarters, MINUSCA. He was awarded with Sena Gourab Padak (SGP) for rendering remarkable contribution in Operation Uttaran at Chattogram Hill Tracts. Presently, he is serving as Additional Military Assistant to Chief of Army Staff in CAS Secretariat, Army Headquarters.

## **UN Women in Futuristic Conflict Resolution: Strategic Recommendations for the Bangladesh Armed Forces**

Major Muhammad Hasan Chowdhury, psc

### **Introduction**

Over the past few years conflicts have evolved significantly in different parts of the world making it complex, unpredictable and hybrid in nature. The war conflicts are no longer limited to well-defined battlefields and combatants that are regular military units. Rather, they are experienced in political, social, economic, digital and environmental spheres. These forces tend to erase the boundaries between war and peace, fighting and civil population. The state and the non-state actors coexist and employ an array of conventional armaments, a combination of cyber weapons, information manipulation and proxy violence. Such overlapping and interacting dynamics make contemporary conflicts more difficult to predict, control and solve which require approaches that are dynamic, inclusive and responsive to realities on the ground. These changing aspects challenge conventional conflict resolution mechanisms and demand innovative approaches that prioritize prevention, resilience and inclusivity.<sup>1</sup> The contribution of women to peace and security has received international recognition never before in the world. The United Nations Entity of Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, simply named UN Women is at center stage in promoting gender-responsive policies on peace and security around the globe.

The launching of UN Women in 2010 and the combination of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda have changed normative frameworks associated with conflict resolution. There is evidence that always demonstrates that peace pursuits that involve women have high chances of yielding lasting and sustainable peace agreement.<sup>2</sup> In the future, conflict resolution is going to be informed by new technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, digital diplomacy and climate modeling. All these contribute to a high potential of more effective and inclusive peacebuilding as well as present new risks that can cripple the stability once they are not adequately addressed. In this article, the author discusses how UN Women is contributing to the development of the futuristic ways of resolving conflicts by closely incorporating gender vision in the new technologies, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and peace operations. It also articulates these changes in the framework of Bangladesh Armed Forces (BAF) and how their increased role in the UN Peacekeeping and regional security is causing them

to be in line with these structures, not a lesson of choice, but an institutional requirement.<sup>3</sup>

### Genesis of UN Women in the Evolving Landscape of Peacekeeping Operations

UN Women has been playing its role in ensuring that peace is created. It works under an umbrella that is generally referred to as the WPS. WPS agenda was the brainchild of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000. The resolution established four interlinked pillars as shown below:-

**Participation:** Women should equally participate in decision making and peace processes.

**Protection:** Women and girls violence prevention.

**Prevention:** Conflict and gender based violence prevention.

**Relief and Recovery:** Gender responsive recovery. UN Women is the driving force of these principles in the UN peacekeeping and UN mediation and development efforts.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure-1: The Four Pillars of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda**



Source: Author's self-construct

## **UN Women: Mandate and Institutional Role**

UN Women was formed in 2010 by the merging of various UN entities that focused their activities on gender equality and enhanced its consistency and effectiveness. UN Women works on various levels in conflict situations.<sup>5</sup>

**Global:** Norm-setting, policy guidance and advocacy at the UN Security Council.

**National:** Supporting the government in implementing National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS.

**Local:** Interactions with civilians and civil society organization empowerment of grassroots women peace builders.

**Figure-2: Various Levels of Working by the UN Women**



Source: Author's self-construct

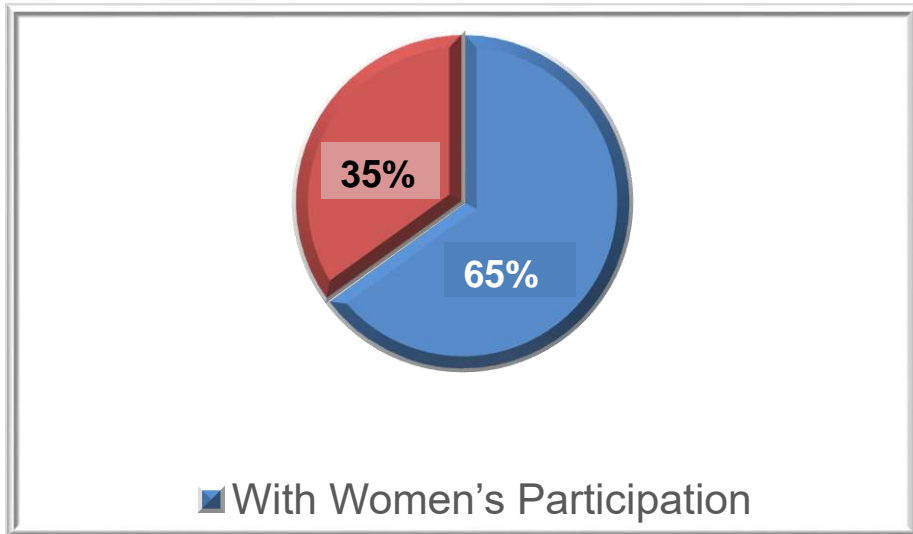
## **UN Women and the Evolution of Conflict Resolution**

The role of UN Women in the process of conflict resolution cuts across the normative, institutional and operational levels. UN Women has an impact on the decisions of the Security Council, peacekeeping mandates and international policy frames in the global platform. At the national level, it helps governments to plan and execute NAP on WPS. It empowers women within the social organizations and community peace builders in the local platforms.<sup>6</sup>

It is revealed through experimental research that, peace accords facilitated by women will have better chances of sustaining longer and solve societal issues. They enlarge peace agendas, which entails power sharing

among elites to education, healthcare, justice and social cohesion. Moreover, the intermediary women are likely to develop trust in separated communities. The diagram below in Figure-3 presents the reliability of Peace Agreements with and without Women Participation.

**Figure-3: Durability of Peace Agreements Based on Women's Participation**



Source: Author's self-construct

### **Barriers to Women's Participation in Conflict Resolution**

Even though there is solid evidence on inclusion of women, several hindrances are still present as shown below:-

**Structural Barriers:** Patriarchal formats and exclusionary politics.

**Security Risks:** Targeted violence against women activists.

**Resource Constraints:** Limited funding for women-led peace initiatives.

**Tokenism:** Inclusion without real decision-making power.

**Figure-4: The Barriers to Women’s Participation in Conflict Resolution**

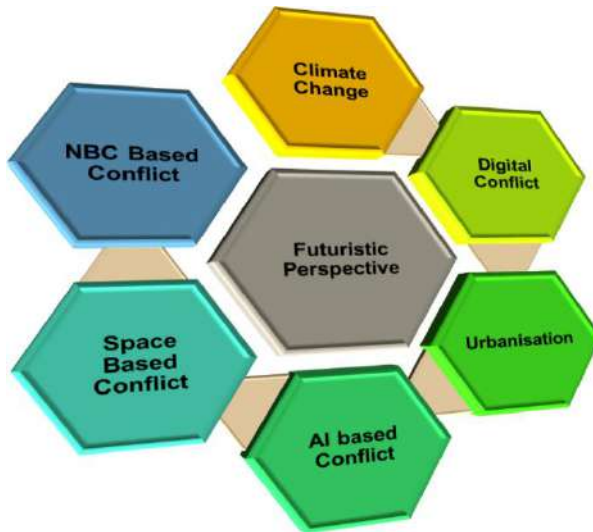


Source: Author’s self-construct

UN Women responds to such difficulties with the help of capacity-building, advocacy, and funding measures, yet the conflicts in the future will demand even more adjustment methods.<sup>7</sup>

### **UN Women in the Changing Nature of Conflict: A Futuristic Perspective**

The influence of non-traditional drivers is also predicted to become increasingly influential in future conflicts. As an example, resource scarcity that results in communal violence due to climate change, Cyber warfare, and online radicalization that results in Digital Conflict, Urbanization, AI based autonomous and predictive weapons, and NBC-based conflict, as shown in the figure:

**Figure-5: The Futuristic Perspective for UN Women**

Source: Author's self-construct

The conflict resolution models required in these dynamics are the anticipatory and not the reactive ones. Gender-sensitive structures of UN Women are capable of improving early warning (EW) mechanisms and preventive diplomacy by incorporating social data which is frequently ignored in the classic security studies.<sup>8</sup>

### **EW Systems as Digital Diplomacy**

Predicting conflict escalation with the use of AI can be done on large datasets. EW systems are more accurate when gender indicators like spikes in gender based violence or service exclusion are incorporated. Warfare and peacebuilding are being transformed by emerging technologies. The new conflict prediction, mediation, and monitoring tools exist in terms of AI, big data analytics, satellite surveillance, and digital communication platforms. Nevertheless, these technologies are also associated with the risk of strengthening the existing inequalities in the case when gender perspectives are not taken into consideration in designing and implementing them.

**Figure-6: Gender- Responsive AI in Conflict EW**

Source: Author's self-construct

The use of gender-responsive information gathering and ethical AI systems in peace and security is an issue that UN Women has been championing. The probability of EW systems is improved with the inclusion of gender-based violence, political participation by women, and the availability of resources. Digital platforms would make participation of women possible in mediation activities despite mobility, security or culture factors. Moreover, Digital diplomacy sites may help women in conflict-related regions to be involved in peace operations remotely and prevent mobility and security issues. UN Women has piloted virtual consultations and digital peace networks, a trend likely to expand in future conflicts, as shown in Table 1 below:-

**Table-1: Example of Gender-Related Data Collection by Functional Components**

<b>Functional Component</b>	<b>Gender-Related Data Points</b>	<b>Rationale for Integrating Gender-Related Data Points</b>
Political and Civil Affairs	The extent and quality of women’s participation in peace and other political processes, or barriers that prevent full and equal participation	Promotes better understanding of women’s role in peacemaking and transitional and long-term governance institutions
Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)	The number and roles of women and girls in armed forces and groups, and how their involvement impact their return and reintegration	Identifies the needs of women and girls involved with armed forces and groups
Police	The quality and extent of protection measures taken to address different forms of SGBV	Monitors the progress of effective policing and the re-establishment of the rule of law
Protection of Civilians	Differences in coping mechanisms and access to resources for women and girls, amongst the host population, the internally displaced	Informs decisions on basic services to be provided, duration of assistance, and specific measures for vulnerable groups

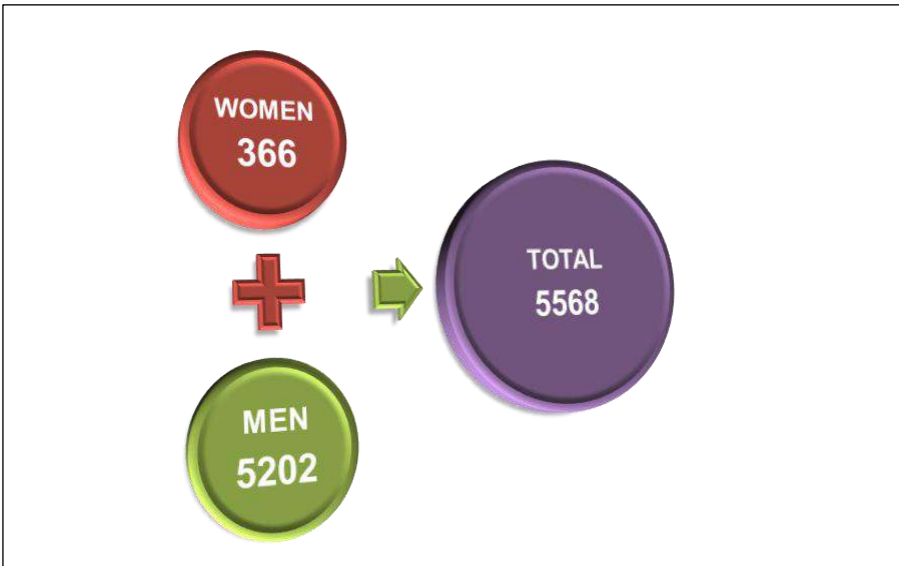
Human Rights	Human rights violations affecting women and girls (nature and extent) and ongoing responses	Provides information on measures needed to address human rights violations and how to provide the services to survivors of violations
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Source:[https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/gewps19respackv7eng\\_digital.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/gewps19respackv7eng_digital.pdf)

### **IHL, WPS and the Modern Battlefield**

The recent advancement in the WPS agenda that has been of immense importance is the focus on its integration with IHL. Although there are normative commitments, traditionally gender views have played a peripheral role in IHL interpretation, military legal advice and operational planning. The Democratic Control of Armed and Security Forces (DCAF) and UN Women WPS and IHL initiative tries to fill in this gap with the involvement of military legal advisors, doctrine developers and operational planners. In order to make the military activity in the future legitimate, the integration of WPS and IHL is needed to guide the operation to be legal and legitimate to the varying effects of violence. Such convergence is directly applicable to armed forces that conduct peacekeeping operations, counterinsurgency operations and hybrid operations. The conflicts would be curbed through the involvement of women to solve these problems. Figure-7 shows the women's involvement of Bangladesh in the UN.

**Figure-7: Personnel under the blue helmet from Bangladesh in 2025**



Source: <https://elsiefund.org/>

**Peacekeeping by UN, Elsie Initiative and Gender Parity**

One of the most evident spheres of WPS principles implementation is still UN peacekeeping. Nevertheless, women are still underrepresented in uniformed services and especially in command and specialized units. Elsie Initiative Fund on Uniformed Women in Peace Operations, which is co-chaired by UN Women, is an important innovation in the effort to overcome structural and institutional obstacles. In the case of the troop-contributing countries, the involvement in the initiative will provide financial and strategic incentives to modernize the force structures and improve the credibility of operations.<sup>9</sup>

As a country with one of the largest troop contribution rates in the world, Bangladesh can easily gain out of this movement and contribute to it. Standardizing national force generation and training and deployment practices to the requirements of Elsie Initiative would enhance the leadership profile of Bangladesh in UN peacekeeping. Table-2 demonstrates the level at which the women involvement in UN in Bangladesh is and can be improved by utilizing the Elsie Initiative.<sup>10</sup>

**Table-2: The state of Bangladeshi women's deployment under the blue helmet**

Mission	Type of Personnel	Women Deployed	Men Deployed	Total Deployed	Women Percentage	Women Required by Target
MINUSCA	Experts on Mission	0	12	12	0.00%	3
	Individual Police	1	5	6	16.67%	2
	Staff Officer	7	28	35	20.00%	8
	Troops	105	1244	1349	7.78%	162
MONUSCO	Experts on Mission	2	4	6	33.33%	1
	Formed Police Units	4	14	18	22.22%	3
	Individual Police	1	1	2	50.00%	0
	Staff Officer	7	21	28	25.00%	6
	Troops	95	1696	1791	5.30%	215
UNFICYP	Staff Officer	1	0	1	100.00%	0
UNIFIL	Staff Officer	0	5	5	0.00%	1
	Troops	0	114	114	0.00%	14
UNISFA	Experts on Mission	3	8	11	27.27%	2
	Staff Officer	0	8	8	0.00%	2
	Troops	22	468	490	4.49%	59
UNMHA	Experts on Mission	0	1	1	0.00%	0
UNMISS	Experts on Mission	2	10	12	16.67%	3
	Individual Police	5	23	28	17.86%	7

Source: <https://elsiefund.org/>

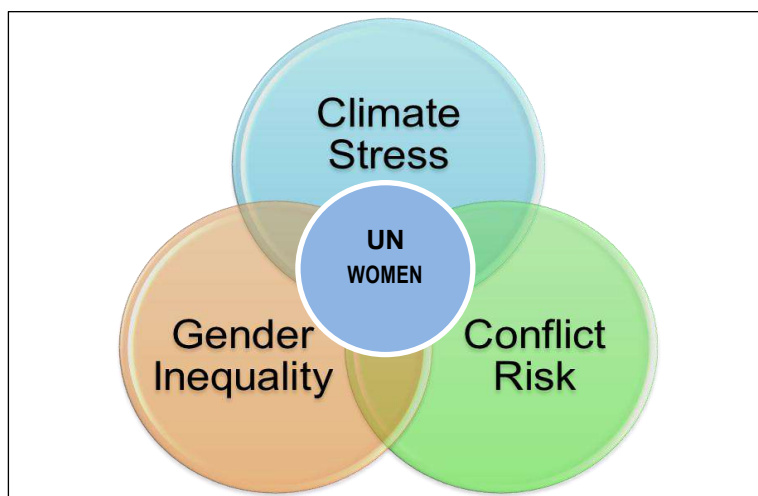
### **The Climate-Gender-Conflict Nexus**

Conflicts emanate from the climate disproportionately affecting women, particularly in agricultural and littoral communities. The climate-induced stresses create social disharmony, massive displacement, and crimes. Women, being half of the population bears important role to fight these crisis.<sup>11</sup> Absence of women to fight these crisis forms an imbalance within this nexus. Therefore, inclusion of women will strengthen the ability to fight gender based violence (GBV). The evolving climate changes and the risk of conflict further prove how climate change works as a multiplier of threat. Lack of accommodation, scarcity of food, and degradation of social security directly influence the political instability, internal displacement and social crimes. All of these combinedly degrade social cohesion and weaken the social structures.

At the edge of climate stress and gender inequality, women are exposed to GBV. This restricts women in the sectors of education, economic activity and community contributions. Similarly, the relation between gender inequality and conflict risk leads women to extreme forms of exploitation, including trafficking and child marriage.

At the epicenter of this nexus, UN Women contributes by training and empowering women as an effective means for establishing peace. This action underlines the incorporation of the strategic value of gender inclusion in climatic based conflict prevention and resolution.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure-8: The Climate-Gender-Conflict Nexus**



Source: Author's self-construct

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**Case Studies: UN Women in Action****Yemen: Informal Inclusion Shaping Formal Peace Processes**

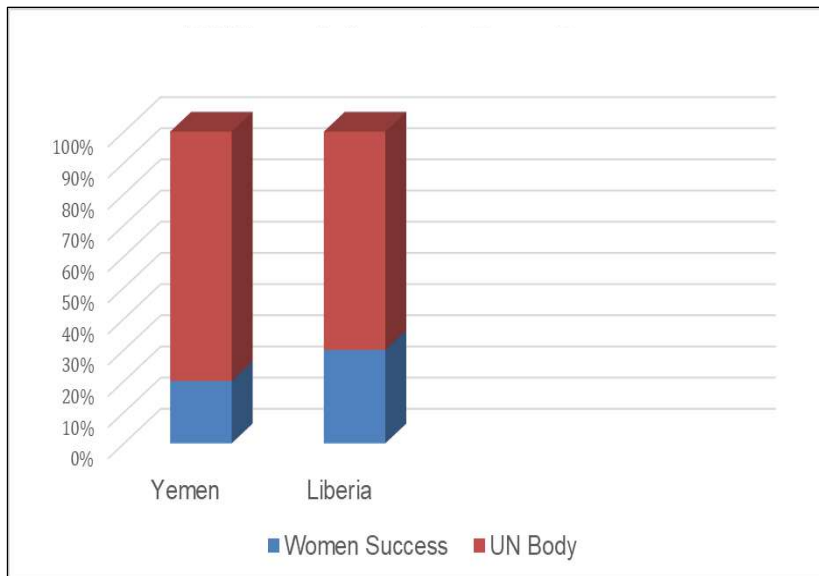
The Yemeni war is one of the most complicated modern humanitarian and political outcries on the background of long-term violence, power division, and competition between the countries of the region. As of 2015, fewer than 5 percent of the participants in the formal peace talks were still women even though they suffer the humanitarian impact of the conflict disproportionately. UN Women responded to this marginalization by ensuring the creation of the Yemen Women Pact of Peace and Security (YWPPS) and other advisory and Consultation structures of women. The platforms have assisted women leaders, associates of the civil society and technical specialists in offering coherent policy feedbacks on ceasefire, humanitarian passages, detainee exchanges and local governmental arrangements.<sup>13</sup>

From 2018 to 2020, the reports indicate that Women mediation, indirect action has influenced more than a fifth of ceasefire and confidence building procedures, especially those that are concerned with humanitarian access, protection of civilians and local dialogue; The Yemeni example is a helpful lesson to the future of conflict resolution strategies: When the limited political space is available, parallel/ advisory UN women-mediated processes can preserve inclusiveness and validity even as they permanently enhance sustainability.<sup>14</sup>

**Liberia: From Grassroots Mobilization to Institutional Reforms**

The example of women and their transformative role in peace processes is one of the most commonly referenced cases of this kind, and it is Liberia. In 1990s and early 2000s, Liberian women formed ethnic and religious grassroots movements, the most famous one being Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace. They were vociferous and wielded influence over the conflict parties through peaceful means that have led to the signing of the Accra Peace Agreement in 2003.<sup>15</sup> During the post-Conflict era, UN Women helped in moving Liberia out of its grassroots activism into institutional participation. Programs to empower female political leaders, to elect politically, gain access to justice and to reform the security sector. With legal reforms, guiding women to power and gender sensitive policy making, women representation in the peacebuilding and governance structures rose to over 305 out of 14 percent at the time of immediate post conflict period.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure-9: Women’s Impact on the Peace Process in Yemen and Liberia**



Source: Author’s self-construct

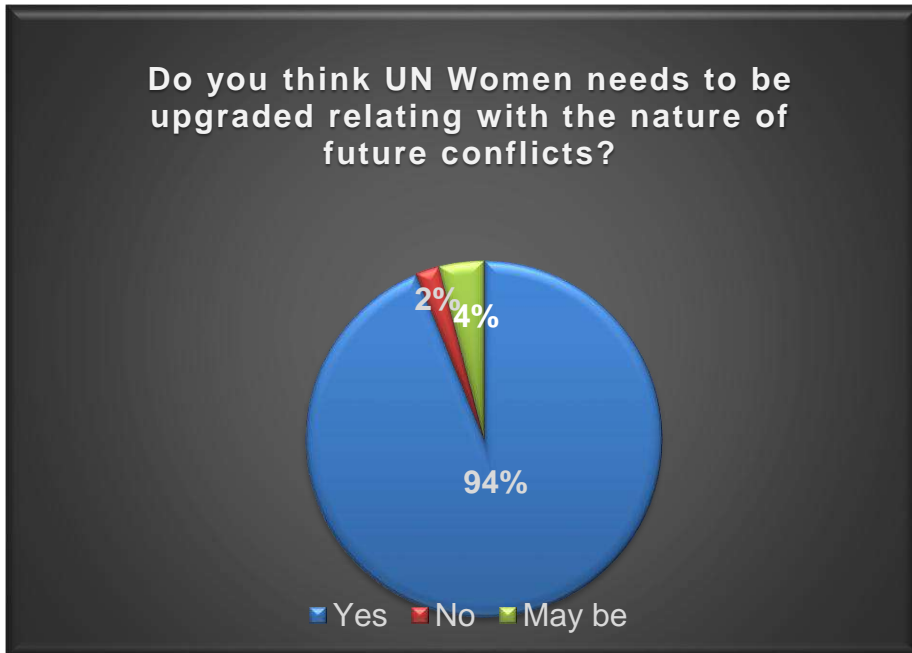
### **Comparative Insights and Relevance of Case Studies for Future Conflicts**

The Yemen case study is a strategic reflection of the significance of involving women in active conflicts. Besides, the case study of Liberia articulates the effects of women involvement in post conflict rehabilitation. The two case studies highlight that women involvement in the peace processes improves the quality, legitimacy and sustainability of the process. These examples can be effectively utilized by women in fighting future trends of warfare.<sup>17</sup>

### **Implications for the Bangladesh Armed Forces (BDAF)**

The BDAF needs to embrace technology based security system. Since Bangladesh is among the largest countries in terms of troop contribution in the UN peacekeeping operation, it should pay more attention to inclusion of women in the changing security dynamics. With the WPS agenda spearheaded by UN Women, the nation needs a cautious and formal answer to the WPS beyond token involvement in the futuristic conflict resolution.<sup>18</sup> The survey also shows the urge to upgrade the training of women of Bangladesh based on futuristic aspects.

**Figure-10: Respondents believe in the upgradation of UN Women for futuristic conflict resolution**



Source: Author's self-construct

First, integration of gender should be restructured in the BDAF as part of operational effectiveness and not an additional social policy. Conflicts in the future where hybrid threats, civilians as the focus, and information warfare will be the main characteristic will need more involvement with the local people. In the case of the BDAF, a premeditated integration of WPS concerns in operational planning, intelligence analysis and mission design would have a direct positive effect on the mission effectiveness and force protection during peacekeeping and stabilization missions.

Second, the implication on doctrine, training and professional military education is heavy. This will involve a combination of WPS principles and the IHL, protection of civilians, and novel technologies in the form of artificial intelligence and data-driven decision-support systems. Such training institutionalization would be encouraged at different levels of career so as to develop a shared culture of operation where gender awareness is seen as part of military professionalism.<sup>19</sup>

Third, there is a need to reevaluate its force generation and personnel management practices. The interaction with the Elise Initiative Fund of

Uniformed Women in Peace Operations offers a systematic way of filling this gap. Barrier assessments that are conducted comprehensively can also be used to establish institutional, cultural, and infrastructural barriers that impede the involvement of women. Overcoming these obstacles by the specific recruitment, career development strategies and deployment policies and family-support systems would not just positively address the gender balance, but also increase the overall quality and credibility of the Bangladeshi contingents sent into the field in the name of the UN.<sup>20</sup>

Fourth, the merging of WPS and IHL has immediate implications on the military legal advisory roles in the BDAF. Incorporation of gender considerations in legal scrutiny, rules of engagement, and operational law counseling enhances reinforcement of the IHL regulatory framework as well as the response to varied effects of war crimes on civilians. In the case of the BAF, the integration strengthens its image as a law-abiding and discipline force, therefore, improving legitimacy on the international and home fronts. With the development of more technologically advanced battlefields in the future and more intensive legal scrutiny of the military, the military will be under an increased expectation of its ability to minimize civilian casualties, accountability and ethical military conduct as shown in the photo.

**Photo-1: Female Engagement Team (FET) of Bangladesh in a peacekeeping activity**



Source: FET-1, BANRDB-2 in DRC 2020 Archives

Fifth, innovative technologies are opening new duties and opportunities of the BDAF. Predictability and situational awareness are enhanced by bringing gender responsive indicators to EW systems and operation. In applying the ethical and inclusive technology, UN Women will indeed improve the innovation accountability of BDAF to utilize the rules and regulations of the UN.

Sixth, global warming is a growing threat to the security of Bangladesh. Disasters of nature, the lack of resources, and dislodgment become more and more the threat multipliers, both at home and especially on the peacekeeping arenas. The inclusion of women in disaster management and humanitarian assistance in BAF will enhance the overall security aspects.

Finally, strategies and diplomatic implications are enhanced by engaging with UN Women and its other organisations. With such an incorporation of the WPS agenda, Bangladesh will be in a better position to be recognized in the UN system and its reputation as a progressive nation will take another level. Moreover, the soft power and leadership will be used to increase alignment with the national foreign policy. Finally, the consequences of UN Women in the futuristic conflict resolution will be reflected in the institutional, operational, and strategic areas of the BDAF.

## **Conclusion**

The changing international security environment has been contesting the traditional approach of state centric conflict resolution. Natural disasters, technological disruption, information warfare and hybrid affect the present and future conflicts. In this dynamic setting, the role of UN Women in the future conflict resolution has been discussed in this article. The WPS agenda has led to the focus on the incorporation of the UN Women into the human security, as well as the long term societal resilience. One of the findings of this analysis is to conclude that the meaningful involvement of women in conflict resolution is not a symbolic or token issue, but a factor of what determines the sustainability of peace. It has been historically established that women-led peace processes are more lasting. Since the future conflicts around will most probably be created on the community level and based on non-conventional causes such as climate stress, misinformation, and women exclusion, the functions of women as intermediaries will be critical. The article also indicates that the use of modern technology is coming out as a formidable tool of minimizing the occurrence of conflict. AI, big data processing, digital platform, and mediation features present extraordinary opportunities in anticipatory peacebuilding. Nevertheless, the current discrepancies threaten to be internalized to these technologies provided that there is no proper use of women in their design and use. Therefore,

Support to gender responsive data, ethical AI, and inclusive digital by UN Women is not a mere idea but also a functional need. Moreover, it is crucial to incorporate the WPS agenda into IHL and DCAF in the current and future conflict situation.

The implication of these findings is deemed to have particularly consequential implications to the BAF. The country owes this to long years of service to the UN Peacekeeping, and this has established it as one of the most active troop contributors to international peace and security. Nevertheless, the maintenance and strengthening of this role in the changing environment of resolving conflicts is conditional on the introduction of an institutional approach. Bangladesh can be a way to follow the path toward the structural barriers, involve of women, and modernization of the peacekeeping practice through the Elsie Initiative Fund. Meanwhile, as climate change is increasingly taking charge of Bangladesh and numerous other locations where its armies are operating. The fact that gender responsive approaches to conflict resolution are increasingly relevant is growing. Through instilling these views, Bangladesh will be very effective in local security and foreign peace missions. The ability to foresee crises, address society in a meaningful way, and merge technological innovation with ethical and legal considerations characterizes futuristic conflict resolution. With the contributions of UN Women, gender equality and working efficiency are proven to be complementary instead of being conflicting targets. The fact that the nature of conflict is slowly changing implies that the involvement of women and gender issues will continue to be not only a sign of progress, but also a determinant to the success of future peace and security endeavours.

### **Recommendations**

To effectively adapt to the requirements of futuristic conflict resolution, the following recommendations are proposed for the BAF:-

- a. The Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operations Training (BIPSOT) must mindfully integrate the WPS agenda into military doctrine, training programs, and operations plans, with the view to how the future of the force should develop.
- b. BAF needs to increase the formal contact with the Elsie Initiative Fund in order to organize the systematic evaluation of institutional obstacles.
- c. Armed Forces Division (AFD) needs to improve the aspect of women integration in the field of IHL and DCAF.

d. The BAF military institutions are supposed to incorporate gender considerations in military AI, decision-support, and information operations to improve the effectiveness of the operations.

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### **Brief Biography**



**Major Muhammad Hasan Chowdhury, psc** was commissioned in the Corps of Infantry on 22 June 2011 with 64 BMA Long Course. As staff he served in all the regimental appointments of an Infantry Battalion. Also he served in the Headquarters 9 Infantry Division as the Aide-de-Camp to General Officer Commanding. He served as Instructor Class-B in School of Infantry and Tactics. In overseas duty he served in the OKP as Logistic officer and interpreter in the State of Kuwait. Over the course of his military career, he has completed all mandatory professional courses. He has also completed the Potential Platoon Commanders' Course from BMA. He is a graduate of the Defence Services Command and Staff College (DSCSC), Mirpur and, obtained Master of Social Science in Security Studies from BUP. Presently he is serving as DAAG in Army Headquarters.

## **From Blue Helmets to National Healers: The Changing Role of Bangladesh in UN's Changing Orientation from Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding Role**

Major Istiak Ibne Hasan, psc, Infantry

### **Introduction**

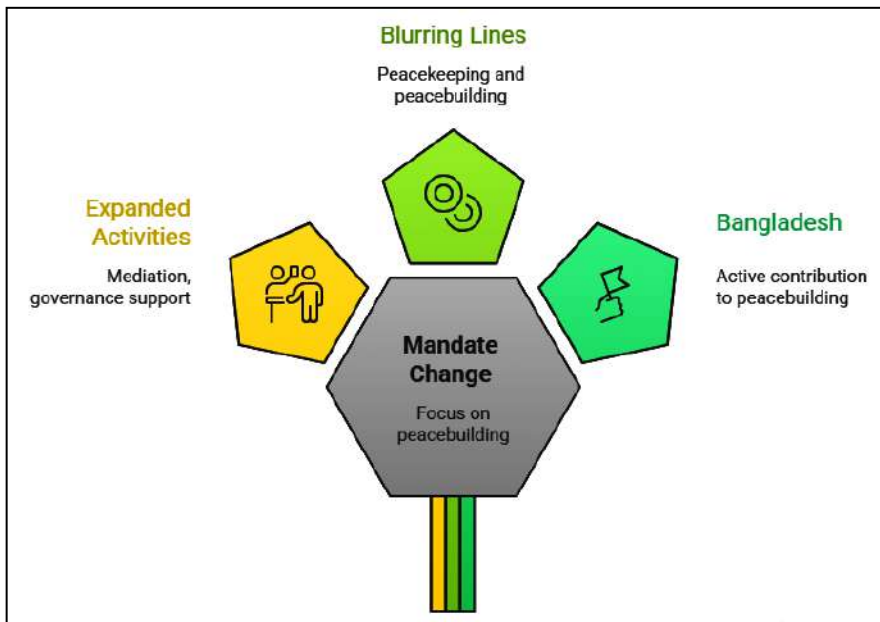
Over the past decade, there has been a sharp change in the mandate and practice in relation to the United Nations (UN) peace operations. Classical peacekeeping, which used to centre on ceasefire, monitoring, and interposition between belligerents, has now been transformed in fragmented intra-state conflict environments, a high number of armed factions, weak state control, and endemic insecurity to the civilian population. According to UN Peacekeeping statistics, about 87 percent of uniformed staff were required to operate under Chapter VII directives in 2023, indicating that operations in unstable and non-consensual environments have increased. Peacekeeping missions have therefore shifted from short-term stabilizing missions to long-term presence, with political, social and even security issues left unresolved.

The strategic evaluation of the UN peacekeeping has always agreed that military stabilization alone cannot achieve sustainable peace. High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) warned that missions not founded on political coherence, local legitimacy, and significant societal interactions would always lose their importance to the communities they are intended to serve.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, peacekeeping operations have shifted away from patrols and presence to involve peacebuilding-focused operations such as political facilitation, governance support, promotion of the rule of law, national reconciliation, and community resilience building which has led to a more artificial demarcation between the roles of peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

The purpose of this article is to give another point of view to the existing UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding discourse by examining how troop contributing states, specifically Bangladesh, can help to facilitate the shift from security-oriented peacekeeping to peacebuilding-oriented engagement. This article makes the case that the changing role of Bangladesh offers an example of how states of these kinds can go beyond the traditional military role to actively contribute to peacebuilding results envisioned by the UN's contemporary peace building mandates. Bangladesh, which has been consistently sending troops and police to UN missions since 1988, and which

is presently one of the UN's most reliable and respected troop and police-contributing states, offers a particularly good case study. Bangladesh will have deployed over 175,000 uniformed persons to 54 different UN missions and have deployed over 6,500 persons to any single mission at any given time by 2024 making Bangladesh one of the top five troop contributors in the world. Bangladeshi contingents are well recognized for their discipline, professionalism and reliability in the field; however, the demands made today by the UN of its troop contributing countries goes far beyond these traditional measures of performance to the effect these contributions have on society.

**Figure-1: Changing Perspective in the UN Peacekeeping Mandates**



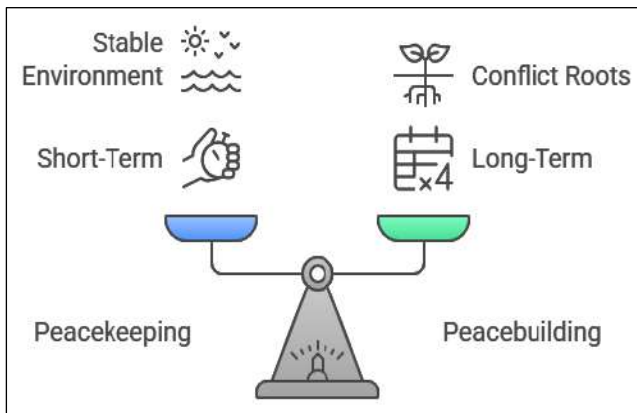
Source: Author's self-construct

Against this background, this article evaluates the changing role that Bangladesh played in the UN's movement towards greater focus on peacebuilding from its previous traditional "blue helmet" peacekeeping role with the UN moving towards what might be described as a new "national healer" role. The context for the article is therefore framed in terms of the policies and operational practices of the UN Peace Operations between 2014 and 2025 - a period during which time the UN has employed significant changes in doctrine and the way in which missions are adapted and learned from in the field.

## **Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding: Difference, Overlap and Contemporary Reality**

Traditionally, there was a clear line of separation from UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding as it was thought to be a sequential process. The main functionality of peacekeeping is to provide a stable environment after conflict by security mechanism, while peacebuilding focuses on conflict's roots and is concerned with governance reform, social reconciliation and long-term sustainable development. The linear model that separated these two different processes is fast becoming less tenable, as many contemporary UN missions are being done in volatile areas where social trust is limited, and institutions are fragile or non-existent. UN studies show that countries emerging out of conflict are at a risk of relapse into conflict by 30-40% within the five-year period, unless the institutional capacity and social cohesion of the country is strengthened.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure-2: Balancing Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding in Modern Missions**

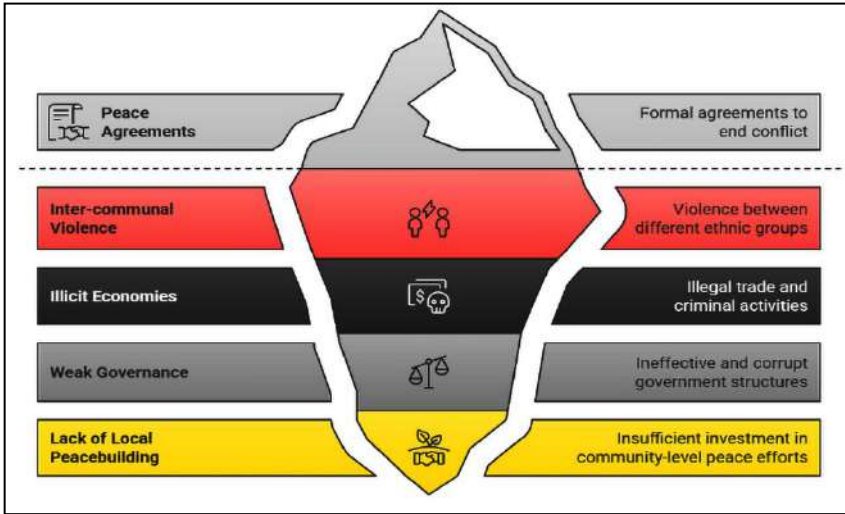


Source: Author's self-construct

Peacekeeping and peacebuilding overlap in those areas where both security and transitional political and social reconstruction must take place simultaneously. For example, despite a peace agreement signed in 2018 according to UNMISS, in South Sudan, it is estimated that around 60% of civilian deaths recorded by the UNMISS between 2020 and 2022 were as a result of inter-communal violence.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Central African Republic has seen similar dynamics, where various armed groups are still breaking, illicit economies survive, and weak governance is still supporting various state issues, irrespective of multiple peace agreements being settled. As a result, it

has become clear that at the elite-level peace agreements do not stabilize a society without simultaneous investments in local peace building capacity.

**Figure-3: Different Facets of Overlapping Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding**



Source: Author's self-construct

At the same time, increasing peacekeeping duties leads to additional difficulties. When stabilization strategies emphasize reducing the kinetic threats they can marginalize inclusive peacebuilding initiatives if there is not a slant between them. A warning from researchers, that the methods of security and seeking to contain may further internalize a sense of exclusion for individuals/communities and apparent weakness for the mission/legitimate in cases where grievances within a local phenomenon and political economies are not properly understood.<sup>4</sup> In such instances, peacekeepers may be perceived as being external enforcers rather than engaged in the peacebuilding process and so undermine the credibility of the mission. Therefore, people-centered approaches related to linking security provision with community-based participation and engagement are needed to ensure that peacekeeping and peacebuilding are well-linked.

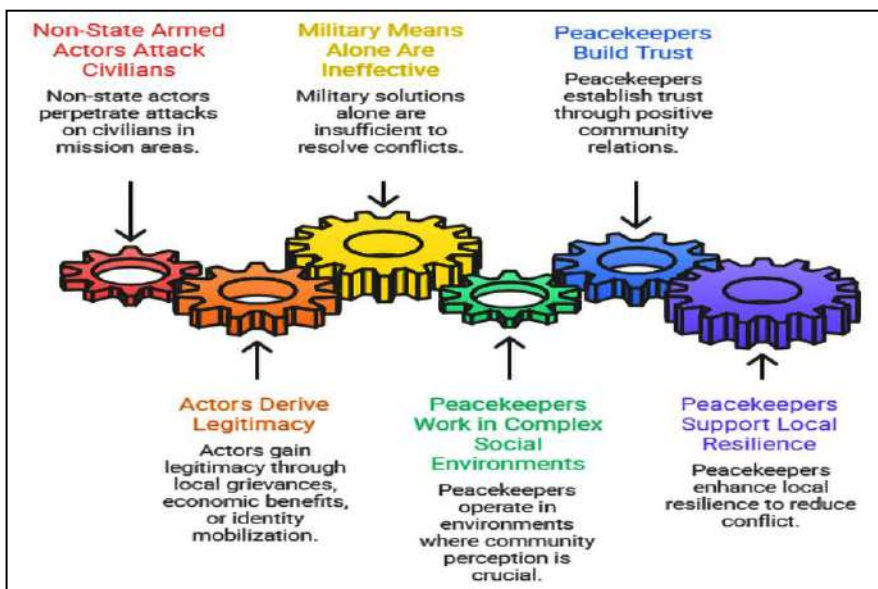
### **The Changing Face of Conflict and Implications for United Nations Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding**

The evolving nature of modern conflict is among the main spur values to the increasing relationship between UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Today's wars are largely intra-state; they are fragmented and driven by political

exclusion, identity grievances and profiting illicit networks. Thus, while the UN peacekeeping missions are being deployed into more hostile environments where no real battlefronts or single identified adversaries exist, most of these missions are being deployed under Chapter VII mandates. As of 2023, around 87 percent of UN peacekeeping lives under the Chapter VII course of action, making it reflect the ongoing violence and governments consenting to host countries.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, UN statistics prove that more than 70 percent of civilian casualties who suffered in the areas of UN peacekeeping missions result from attacks perpetrated by non-state armed actors that do not engage in formal peace negotiations.<sup>6</sup> This is so because the actors derive their legitimacy partly through their relationship to local grievances, their ability to deliver economic benefits, or their capacity to benefit from identity-based mobilization, all of which may rule out the use of military means alone for resolution and are counterproductive when used. Therefore, in this type of environment, peacekeepers work in a complex social environment, in which perception by the community plays a role in the success or failure of the mission. It is with the creation of trust based on positive community relations and a support to local resilience that the chance of heightened distrust or prolonged conflict dynamics can be lessened by peacekeeping missions.

**Figure-4: Overview of Complex UN Peacekeeping Environments**



Source: Author's self-construct

The character of conflict has also changed, with a consequent blurring of the lines between combatant and civilian space, thus causing increased strain upon the UN peacekeepers to exercise their duties in highly populated urban and semi-urban surroundings. Armed groups have become increasingly proficient in how to place themselves among civilian populations to restrict the use of force among UN peacekeepers. Reports by the United Nations suggest that the use of force is severely limited in such environments and both civilian and UN personnel are at great risk. Thus, UN peacekeepers will have to deploy ever more sophisticated methods of intelligence-gathering based on community relations, early warning systems, and civilian cooperation, as ways of implementing their mandates effectively and in an atmosphere that is consistent with restraint and awareness of local cultural sensitivities.

### **UN Policy Reorientation, from HIPPO to Sustaining Peace and Action for Peacekeeping**

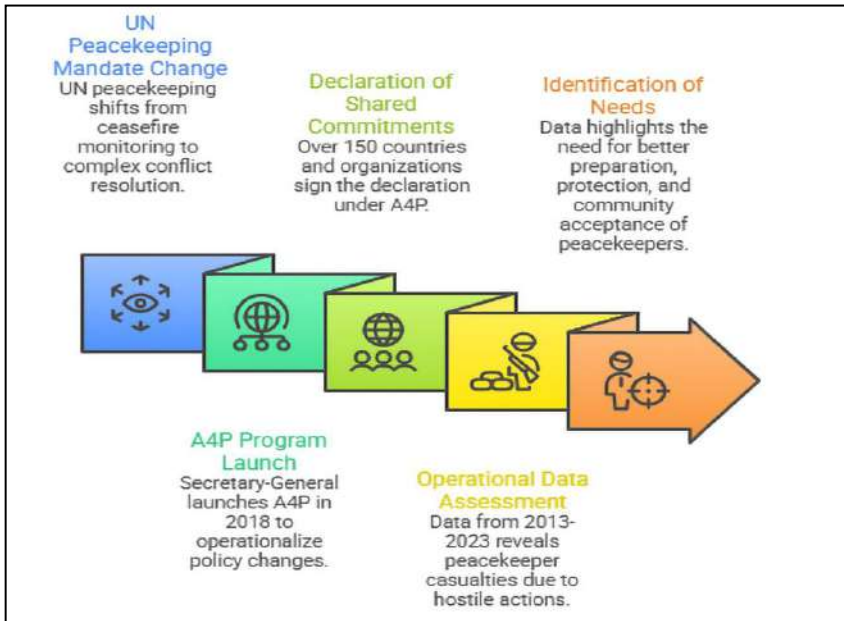
The formal move by the United Nations towards the confluence of the concepts of peacebuilding and peacekeeping in its work was catalyzed by the HIPPO of 2015. Based on their experiences in many missions around the world, HIPPO members discovered that, in recent years, the use of a peace operation has become more and more implanted in areas where the use of force would prove to be insufficient to deliver lasting results.<sup>8</sup> HIPPO have emphasized four key tenets which it believed should guide all future peacekeeping operations including political leadership, partnerships at the regional/local level and people centered protection.

The new model for peacekeeping created by HIPPO was endorsed by two joint General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on sustaining peace in 2016. In these two resolutions, the General Assembly and the Security Council redefined sustaining peace as a comprehensive and inclusive process including not just preventing and achieving crisis resolution/conflict management, but post-conflict recovery. They therefore repudiated the pre-existing assumption that peacebuilding is limited to the post-conflict phase.<sup>9</sup> By defining the goal of sustaining peace as a shared responsibility of UN Member States, the two resolutions imposed greater obligations on Member States in contributing to the goal of sustaining peace. This approach is parallel to the African Union's focus on the continuum between conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution, as manifested in the African Union's African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which although also linking peacebuilding at all stages of conflict cycles, the UN's resolutions had a

different normative departure for the organization that stressed trend towards convergence in international and regional peacebuilding approaches.

The subsequent efforts to implement these policy changes included Action for Peacekeeping (A4P), a program launched by the Secretary-General in 2018, which aims at translating these conceptual changes into operational changes. Until 2024 more than 150 countries and organizations from members to the UN signed the Declaration of Shared Commitments under A4P.<sup>10</sup> The operational changes under A4P were based on an assessment of operational data that had been gathered since 2013 that showed more than 340 UN peacekeepers had lost their lives due to hostile actions in this period. This evidence showed the need of better preparation, protection and the acceptance of the UN peacekeepers by communities in the host countries.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure-5: Subsequent Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) Implementation**



Source: Author's self-construct

### **Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding on the Ground: Lessons of UN Missions**

Peacekeeping and peacebuilding in the field have become ever more interdependent and not just sequentially dependent in the last decade based upon empirical evidence from UN missions. The process of detachment of the MINUSTAH forces in Haiti during 2017 revealed the lack of institutional strength and social cohesion among the population left behind after the end of the mission, then the new security arrangements developed in Haiti could not

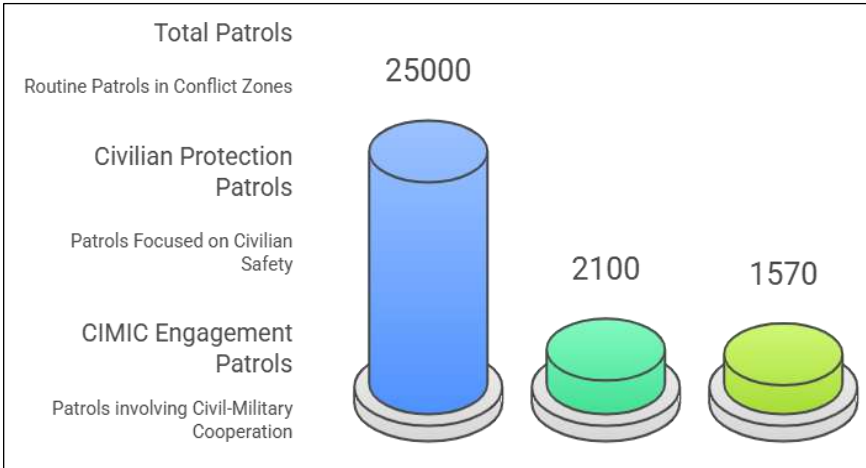
succeed in reducing the re-emergence of gang violence and paralysis of governance. Likewise, in the Central African Republic, the absence of sustained and inclusive reconciliation processes and local economic reintegration mechanism paved the way for an inability to realize the “peace dividend.”

UNMISS’s experience in South Sudan underlines the needs, as well as the complexities of implementing integrated approaches in the effort to achieve sustainable results. UNMISS’s protection of civilians sites were instrumental in saving the lives of hundreds and thousands of people under the most violent periods of the conflict, but the resulting stability that many had hoped would follow didn’t materialize as the conflict continued to be fueled by the country’s deep-seated political divisions and weak government institutions. Recent UN reports suggest that UN missions which combine civilian protection with local processes of dialogue and peace showed more lasting security results than the ones with only a military posture.<sup>12</sup>

A constant lesson that can be discerned throughout all of these experiences is the criticality of local legitimacy. Peacekeeping missions working through traditional leaders, youth groups and women’s organizations often catechize them to their protection efforts, where they are more than likely to have cooperation from parties and shared intelligence from local populations, than those missions with a perceived outside imposition or too dependent on military power. This would indicate that the measurement of the effectiveness of peacekeeping nowadays is dependent on the levels of social confidence within a society, the lack of violence and also the continuity of institutions.

Recent operational data indicate increasing consistencies in peacekeeping practices that are more on the peacebuilding end of the spectrum, when evaluating this at the tactical level. For instance, over the year 2024-2025, the Bangladesh Army patrol patterns for several UN peacekeeping operations in violation zones where widely for UNMISS, MINUSCA, MONUSCO and UNISFA include as routine activities a mix of tasks involving both fighting and protecting the civilians/CIMIC (Civil-Military Cooperation) integration. Over 25,000 patrols were carried out with over 2,100 devoted to protection of civilians and around 1,570 for CIMIC engagement illustrating a sustained contact with local population.<sup>13</sup> By 2025 this symbolizes a mixed form of operations where patrols are both security and confidence building actions, which supports the idea of the effectiveness of peacekeeping being directly linked to the scope of tactical action for broader peace-building purposes.

**Figure-6: Recent Patrol Activities of Bangladesh Army in UN Peacekeeping Operations (2024-2025)**



Source: Author's self-construct

### **The Changing Role of Bangladesh in the Nexus of Peacekeeping-Peacebuilding**

The role of Bangladesh within the UN peacekeeping paradigm as it develops offers a unique example to investigate how troop contributing countries can develop their capacity to respond to a changing paradigm. Since its first deployment in 1988 Bangladesh deployed over 175,000 uniformed personnel to 54 UN missions and has consistently been among the top three contributors. As of 2024, Bangladesh had over 6,500 personnel on UN missions in the world over a total of more than 70 countries, which gives an idea of both the magnitude and the frequency of Bangladesh's commitment to UN peacekeeping.

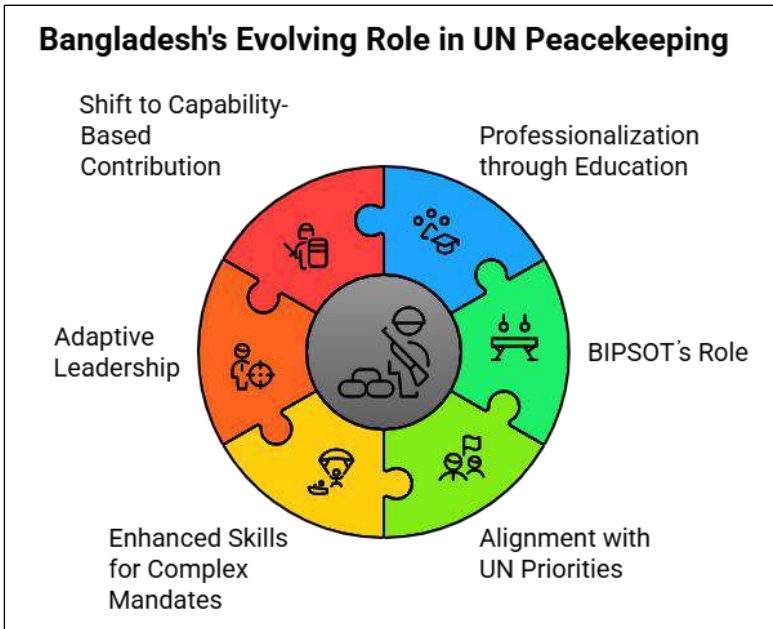
Beyond numbers, contingents from Bangladesh have established their brand of being an efficient unit capable of working with discipline and cultural sensitivity when dealing with local populations. According to reports issued by UN missions, the success of a peace operational depends on the level of engagement of the community by the peacekeepers. Specifically, reports suggest UN missions that create mechanisms to facilitate interactions between peacekeepers and locals experience improvements in early warning systems, increased levels of cooperation from local populations and more effective protection outcomes.<sup>14</sup> On a number of occasions, the Bangladeshi troops and police during their African missions have won recognition for relationship

From Blue Helmets...

building with the local population, improving situational awareness and improving the legitimacy of the UN mission.

Bangladesh's growing contribution to UN peacekeeping is strengthened increasingly through the emphasis it is placing on professionalization through education and training. Institutions like Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operations Training (BIPSOT) have been at the forefront in aligning pre-deployment preparation with UN priorities on protection of the civilian population, human rights and functioning of civilian/military instruments. As a result, Bangladeshi peacekeepers arrive with skills more appropriate to dealing with complex and multidimensional mandates.<sup>15</sup> UN Mission assessments have shown that well-prepared and adaptive leadership is a better way to lead contingents to support peacebuilding goals in the challenging environments. This continued investment in training is a manifestation of Bangladesh's shift from a manpower-based contributor to a capability-based, credible and lasting impact contributor.

**Figure-7: Evolving Role of Bangladesh in UN Peacekeeping**



Source: Author's self-construct.

**Structural Constraints and the Issue of Sustainability of Impact**

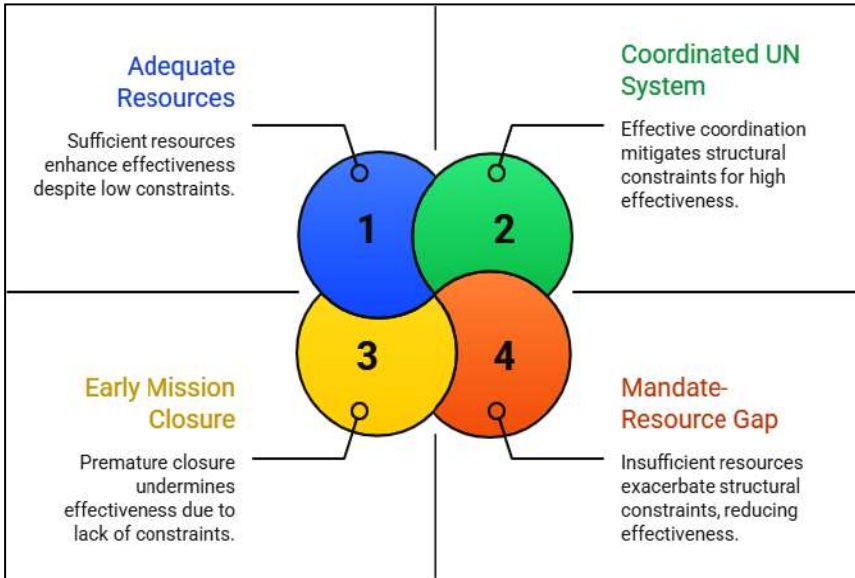
The divide between what peacekeeping has achieved and what it can do in terms of peace-building has come down to issues of structure in most cases. Another challenge which has persistently remained with peacekeeping

efforts is the mandate-resource gap. This gap exists when peacekeeping mandates are increased to include other responsibilities such as governance and peacebuilding, without a corresponding increase in resources such as budget and personnel. For instance, the 2017 UN budget report highlighted that some of the missions, such as the ones in Central African Republic and South Sudan, have had fewer than 60% of recommended resources to carry out new peacebuilding tasks. As a result, missions often are forced to adapt to the immediate needs of security rather than the long-term activities of peacebuilding.

Another structural problem that has led to the limitations of peacekeeping is the way in which missions are moved. Between 2000 and 2020, no fewer than 10 UN peacekeeping missions evanesced or closed, many before local institutions had had time to become sufficiently capable of taking up responsibility.<sup>16</sup> Research looking at the transition process of peacekeeping missions has demonstrated that transitions occurring too early or without sufficient planning results in a security vacuum, which increases conflict and violence.

Finally, there are structural barriers, which are compounded by inadequate coordination within the UN system. Peacekeeping missions sometimes complement humanitarian, development and peacebuilding organizations and involve actual planning with different cycles and funding processes. Assessments of such processes by the UN suggest a poor coordination of the various UN missions, UN Country Teams, and Peacebuilding organizations, can contribute to the loss of continuity especially during drawdown and transition periods.<sup>17</sup> Unless the UN has a coherent plan for coordinating all its agencies and programs in a coherent strategy, it is likely that the security gains achieved through peacekeeping will be undone as soon as missions are reorganized or withdrawn, which limits the long-term peacemaking effectiveness of peacekeeping.

**Figure-8: Overview of Structural Constraints and Peacekeeping Effectiveness**



Source: Author's self-construct

### **Ways Forward: Embedding the Peacebuilding Role of Bangladesh**

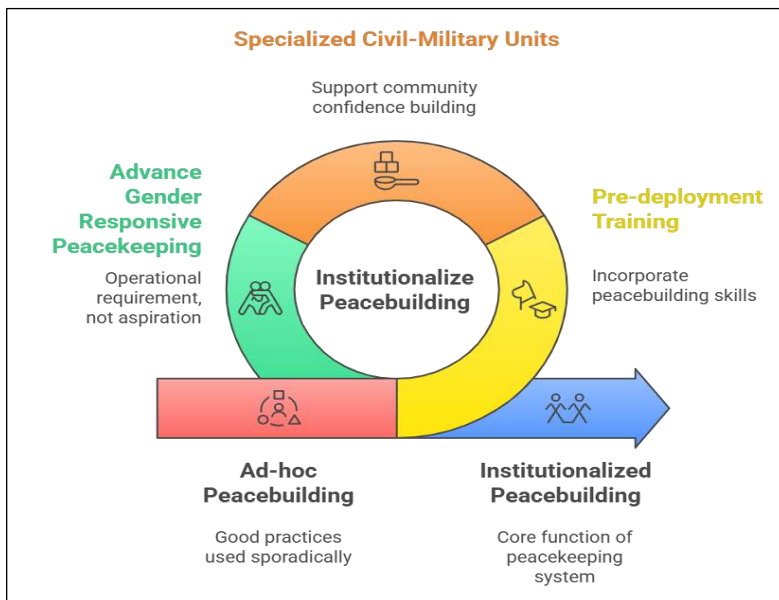
To establish the evolving role that Bangladesh has started playing in UN peace operations, Bangladesh will have to move beyond merely using good practice on an ad-hoc manner and institutionalize peacebuilding as part of its core functions of the peacekeeping system. This is best achieved by incorporating peacebuilding skills (for example, conflict sensitivity skills, awareness of mediation and local political analysis skills, community engagement) into pre-deployment training and mission rehearsal activities. Organizations like Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operations Training (BIPSOT) have a strong base to emerge as regional centres of excellence in peace building through linking UN policy frameworks with lessons learnt on the field and scenario-based simulation.

Operationally, Bangladesh can contribute more to peace building efforts through specialized civil-military units that will offer support for community confidence building efforts and respect the boundaries of the mission mandate. Examples of these types of units could include mixed-gender engagement teams, culture attuned liaison elements and civilian interface cells that could work with local leadership, youth organizations and women's organizations. There is evidence from UN missions that having formalized

community engagement mechanisms are important considerations to improving early warning and better outcomes in protection.<sup>18</sup>

A big factor of the future will be the progress of advancing gender responsive peace keeping as an operational requirement rather than aspirational goal. The MOWIP assessment identified some of the institutional barriers to women deployment and career advancement. Expanding meaningful participation by women will not only improve the legitimacy and effectiveness of a mission, but will contribute to its success.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure-9: Measures to Institutionalize Bangladesh’s Peacebuilding Efforts for Longer Period**



Source: Author's self-construct

## Conclusion

The evolution of UN peace operations has shown that the distinction between peacekeeping and peacebuilding is no longer feasible in the modern conflict environment. Recent operational experiences confirm the fact that security, political processes, and social recovery now occur together rather than sequentially and require integrated and adaptive approaches. While keeping peace is still necessary to contribute to stabilization efforts, its effectiveness increasingly relies on peacebuilding practices addressing their local needs, institutional legitimacy, and trust in communities. At the same time, extending mandates to incorporate peacebuilding carries with it some dangers when

coercive stabilization double-mandating inclusive engagement. Sustainable peace is therefore most likely when the roles of peacekeeping and peacebuilding are part of the same sustaining peace package.

The shifting nature of conflict has led to an additional change in the operating environment of UN peace operations. Fragmented armed groups, urban violence and extended conflicts have undermined the presumption of consent as well as clear civilian-combatant distinction and limited mission length. As a consequence, peacekeepers now have to spend more time interacting with political processes, social structures and institutions. Empirical evidence indicates that the force is not enough: mission legitimacy as well as civilian protection is more dependent on trust-based engagement and local resilience. Peace operations therefore need to strike a careful balance between effective implementation of the mandates on one hand and hesitation on the other; community engagement on the one hand and sustaining national capacity throughout the mission's life on the other.

UN policy reforms since 2015 reflect how the UN institution is responding to these changing realities. The HIPPO report, the Sustaining Peace Resolutions, the Action for Peacekeeping initiative represent a turning point in terms of outcome-oriented peace operations of political primacy, prevention, performance and accountability. These frameworks have blunted the definition of effectiveness beyond the use of force, and have emphasized the importance of coherence, legitimacy and cooperation across the board. They have also raised the expectations of troop and police-contributing countries and made them integrated partners in maintaining peace instead of merely just mandate implementers.

The lessons learned from more recent missions have further shown that the effectiveness of peacekeeping is closely coupled with integration with peacebuilding at strategic and tactical levels. Experiences in Haiti, in the Central African Republic and South Sudan indicate that security gains reached without prior parallel investment into institutional resilience, social cohesion and local legitimacy are not easily sustained. In contrast, missions that combine the need to protect civilians and engage with the community and dialogue have had more sustainable effects. The increased emphasis laid on the value of community-oriented patrols, and CIMIC activities, within Bangladeshi operational practice, are examples of how normal peacekeeping tasks carry on wider peacebuilding goals.

Bangladesh's experience speaks volumes about what a contributing country can do to adapt itself to this new peacekeeping and peacebuilding nexus. While its scale and continuity in the deployments are a strong quantitative foundation, it is the qualitative nature of its work-discipline, cultural sensitivity, institutionalized training and community engagement-which increasingly characterizes its contribution. This evolution is indicative of a large change from participation through manpower to contributions through capability/credibility/sustained impact.

At the same time, of course, structural constraints still restrict the ability to translate the peacekeeping presence into lasting peacebuilding results. Some of **the** issues that erode continuity and long-term effect include mandate-resource mismatches, weak mission transitions, politicized environments and poor system-wide coordination. Addressing these challenges in particular requires deliberate institutional reform and increased coherence across the UN system and greater identification between security, development and the actors for peacebuilding. If such reforms are not made, peacekeeping efforts may become temporary and reversible.

It is concluded that institutionalizing Bangladesh's peacebuilding role entails moving away from ad hoc contingent-level practices and moving towards a systematic approach that is driven by capability. Embedding peacebuilding competencies in pre-deployment preparation, deploying specialized civil military enablers, making peacekeeping more gender responsive, and bringing the field experience to sustained policy advocacy would enhance Bangladesh's contribution. Through these efforts, Bangladesh is able to strengthen its enlistment as a dependable peacekeeper and an active actor in sustainable peace for enduring benefits for those nations hosting peacekeeping forces and to enhance its position in the international community of peacekeepers.

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### **Brief Biography**



**Major Istiak Ibne Hasan, psc, Infantry**, was commissioned on 24 December 2014 with 71 BMA Long Course. He has served with the 20 East Bengal Regiment, the 35 BIR Division Support Battalion, and the 37 BIR, holding key command and staff appointments. He has operational experience in 'Operation Uttoron' and served in MINUSMA with Bangladesh Mechanised Infantry Quick Reaction Force-1 (BANMIC QRF-1) as a Platoon Commander, earning the Force Commander's Commendation. He also served in the Special Security Force as a Protection Agent and Instructor. Currently, he serves as Grade Staff Officer 2 (GSO 2) in the Overseas Operations Directorate, AHQ (General Staff Branch). A graduate of the Defence Services Command and Staff College, Mirpur, Dhaka, he holds a Master of Science in Security Studies from BUP.

## **The Evolving Role of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Bangladesh Perspective**

Captain Rafi Ahmed Fahim, Arty

### **Introduction**

Peacekeeping missions of the United Nations (UN) have always been the pillar of global security and peace. Peacekeeping missions have undergone a lot of development since its commencement in 1948 as it shapes various dynamic aspects of conflicts. The modern international system is becoming more intricate with intrastate violence, acts of terrorism, political instability, humanitarian crises and insecurity driven by climate.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, it has been revealed that Bangladesh has become one of the biggest players in the UN peacekeeping missions, both in sense of their diplomatic involvement and the number of troops offered. As a Bangladeshi peace keeping is not only a mechanism of global responsibility but also a national ideal based on global peace, multilateralism and collaboration. As a critical analysis of the changing role of the UN peacekeeping operations this essay discusses Bangladesh and its role, experience and future interest in fulfilling the current security challenges.

UN peacekeeping was initially created as a nonpartisan system that was to ensure the states are at peace and the observance of ceasefires. Nevertheless, the character of conflict evolved with time, and the interstate wars were replaced by the complex intrastate ones that involved the civilians, weak governments, and non-state actors. As a reaction, peacekeeping operations turned to be multidimensional with the inclusion of civilian protection, humanitarian assistance, human rights promotion, and state-building. In 1988 Bangladesh became a member of the UN peacekeeping missions that launched the beginning of its activities in the sphere of global security affairs.<sup>2</sup> Ever since, Bangladesh has been one of the most productive troop and police providing nations throughout the world. Bangladeshi peacekeepers have been deployed on various missions in Middle East, Africa and the Caribbean such as in Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), Mali (MINUSMA), South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). This protracted engagement is an indicative of how much Bangladesh is firm in the values of the United Nations Charter and its philosophy of peaceful conflict resolution.

This article aims to understand the perspective of Bangladesh in the evolving contemporary security challenges encompassing the peacekeeping missions all over the world.

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## Peacekeeping Missions and Contemporary Security Challenges

Modern peacekeeping missions deployed by UN peacekeeping forces are more and more being consistent with insecurity volatility, broken authority and perpetrated violence. Modern conflicts are mostly intrastate as opposed to the existence of ceasefires between recognizable state actors in the past in which the latter is the main context underlying peacekeeping operations. This change has deepened the character of both deployment and operational risk causing Bangladeshi peacekeepers a lot of change. Examples of missions into countries like Mali, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo show that peacekeepers are commonly deployed in the countries in which political settlements are weak or, rather, nonexistent. The increasing risk of terrorism and asymmetric warfare is one of the most urgent problems of the security of Bangladeshi contingents. Armed, these groups are now considering peacekeepers as proper targets and fighting using tactics like improvised explosive devices (IEDs), ambushes and suicide attacks. Such environments have claimed the lives of Bangladeshi peacekeepers. One of the recent examples include the drone attack in one of the UN logistics bases of South Sudan, where 6 members of Bangladesh military got killed with 8 injured. This indicates the truth in that, peacekeeping these days is an activity that looks like a peace enforcing exercise. This phenomenon creates new complicated ethical and operative scenarios especially in the application of force with respect to preserving the UN principles of impartiality and consent.

The weak governance and political instability in host states make the process of peacekeeping even harder.<sup>3</sup> The information is relevant because Bangladeshi peacekeepers often work in the environment when state organizations have no credibility or influence to provide their services, and the process of coordination with local players is complicated. At this, peacekeepers have to learn to strike a balance between neutrality towards domestic political conflicts and collaboration with host governments. This, in the Bangladeshi perspective demands great diplomatic tact, cultural sensitivity and discipline. Also, massive displacement and humanitarian disasters are indirect security threats. Peacekeepers are sometimes mandated to defend internally displaced individuals (IDPs) and provide humanitarian access but are not in line with the conventional military role. The experience of Bangladesh with managing refugees, especially the experience of receiving Rohingya refugees, gives the Bangladeshi peacekeepers an excellent experience of humanitarian coordination and civilian protection. These issues are further exacerbated by climate-related insecurity, with resources shortages and environmental degradation becoming a driver of conflict in the peacekeeping regions more and more, reflecting a setback felt by Bangladesh itself.

## **Contribution of Bangladesh to Modern Peacekeeping Operations**

Bangladesh has made improvements in the ways it contributes towards peacekeeping in response to the changing security situations and in capacity and scope. Bangladesh has one of the highest numbers of peacekeeping forces, especially in the police forces, comprised of the female representatives. The female peacekeepers in Bangladesh have played a significant part in community relations, concern on gender and sexual violence, facilitating the reliance and development of peacekeeping on the local people. Not only are they expected to enhance the effectiveness of operations but it is also in line with the Women, Peace and Security agenda by UN. Specialized units such as aviation unit, medical teams, engineering contingents, and logistics support have also been made serious contributions by Bangladesh. These units are very instrumental in the sustainability of missions through maintaining mobility in hostile surrounding or a remote area, delivering healthcare to the peacekeepers and also construction of infrastructures to the people of the are. Such contributions are also highly appreciated mostly in missions where infrastructure is very underdeveloped.

## **Adaptation of Bangladesh to Modern Peacekeeping Operational Patterns**

The main characteristic of the modern peacekeeping role of Bangladesh is that it is becoming more regularly gender inclusive. Training and preparedness are one of such areas of adaptation. Peacekeepers are trained in Bangladesh using specialized training founded on human rights, ability to negotiate, civilian protection, rules of engagement, and cultural awareness through institutions like the Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training (BIPSOT). This is an all-embracing training as Bangladesh has realized that the contemporary peacekeeping must involve not only military proficiency but also political and social consciousness. The effectiveness of the peacekeeping by the Bangladesh has been further enhanced by the use of technology.<sup>4</sup> The application of the latest surveillance methods and the chain of communications, as well as the utilization of data to make decisions, is the demonstration of the transition to more action-oriented and proactive peacekeeping measures. In the national view, these transfers help in developing the skills of the armed forces and police of Bangladesh in terms of their professional growth which can be applied to the internal security and disaster rescue operations.

## **Role of Bangladesh in UN Peacekeeping**

Bangladeshi peacekeepers are also known to be professionally oriented, disciplined and humanitarian oriented. They have been found to work

best in engineering and medical aid, as Bangladeshi units have built roads, bridges, and camps which have helped them directly in stabilization and works to regain economic growth in the post-conflict societies. This kind of activity increases the validity of UN missions and establishes good relationships with the locals. Diplomatically, the stable and exemplary peacekeeping efforts of Bangladesh have enhanced its image and soft power across the world. The involvement into the UN peacekeeping makes Bangladesh more visible in the world arena and increases its adherence to multilateralism and international cooperation. This has extended consequences to the foreign policy of Bangladesh such as its involvement with the developing nations and its promotions of peace and development.

### **Limitations and Effectiveness of Bangladesh in UN Peacekeeping**

Despite all the achievements, peacekeeping role in Bangladesh has a number of limitations. It has also boosted the level of operational risks considering that peacekeepers have been directly threatened by armed groups. The casualty of the Bangladeshi staff highlights the human factor of peacekeeping and brings up the idea of sufficient protection, information sharing, and operations planning. Such risks will commonly be worsened by the scarcity of the resources and delayed logistical aid. Efficiency is also restricted by institutional barriers in the UN system. Peacekeepers at times end up in such situations where expectations are huge compared to available resources as mandates are in most cases too ambitious.<sup>5</sup> These misfits indicate the importance of more realistic requirements and more political effort on the part of the international community. Moreover, the reimbursement delays, and financial constraint of payment can also burden the contributing countries, especially the ones that belong to the Global South.

### **Policy Recommendations and Future Directions of Bangladesh for Security Concerns in Missions**

The future will determine whether Bangladesh continues its leadership in UN peacekeeping based on what it continues to do in changing with the new security challenges. The advanced capability development, such as counter-IED training, cyber awareness, and intelligence coordination, is one of the areas of priority. With peacekeeping environments growing more complicated, they will be crucial to the successful completion of operations as well as the physical security of personnel. Bangladesh can also play a significant role in maintaining peace using its skills in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. As the effects of climate change as a security issue are slowly being realized, it is possible to promote the incorporation of environmental risk

assessment into the peacekeeping mandate in Bangladesh. This would not only increase the impact of the mission but also show the national experience in Bangladesh of having climate resiliency. Another area of significance in the future direction is the policy aspect at the UN level. Bangladesh can be more actively involved in influencing peacekeeping reforms through better advocacy of more powerful protection measures to peacekeepers and clear guidelines on rules of engagement as well as better coordination of the UN and regional organizations.<sup>6</sup> Operational coherence can also be increased by strengthening collaboration with other bodies like the African Union.

In the ultimate analysis long-term focus on gender inclusion, human rights, and community-based peacebuilding would also be important. Bangladesh would have a different view regarding peacekeeping that should not be done to stabilize the situation only on a short-term basis but should help in the long-term peace and development. Through these principles, Bangladesh can still influence the emerging role of UN peacekeeping in the dynamic world security environment by aligning its peacekeeping strategy with these principles.

## **Conclusion**

In this era of intricate and changing security issues, the UN peacekeeping operations have to be constantly tailored to be relevant and efficient. The concept of peacekeeping from the Bangladesh perspective and the international standpoint is viewed not only as a matter of national principles but as the essence of the country built on peace, strength and harmony. The broad experience and professionalism coupled with flexibility have placed Bangladesh at the forefront as a major contributor to the contemporary peacekeeping operations. Though issues of operational risk, political limit and lack of resources continue to be a problem in Bangladesh, the emerging role of the country shows how troop-contributing nations can determine the future of peace keeping by being professional, innovative and being principled. Conclusively, the fact that Bangladesh has remained a contributor to the UN peacekeeping initiative, reminds us of the fact that Bangladesh believes in the global peace and portrays the fact that peacekeeping is an instrument of international security that will always be applicable in the twenty first century and beyond.

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## Brief Biography



**Captain Rafi Ahmed Fahim, Arty**, was commissioned on 6 June 2023 with 84th BMA Long Course in the Corps of Artillery. He has completed Bachelor of Business Administration from the Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP). During his three years of military career, he has attended various courses, including the Officers' Basic Course, Officers' Weapon Course and Basic Commando Course. At present, he is posted to 24 Field Regiment Artillery, Bir Uttam Shaheed Mahbub Cantonment.

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## 2. Examples

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4. Shaikh Maqsood Ali, *From East Bengal to Bangladesh: Dynamics and Perspectives*, Dhaka: University Press Ltd, Second Edition, 2017, p.110.
5. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State ;The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
6. Formulated in 2011 Forces Goal 2030 is a Long Term Modernization Program for Bangladesh Armed Forces. Its main purpose is expanding the force size, acquiring modern war weapons and equipments and providing advanced level training. The Goal also stresses on developing indigenous defence industries. The Bangladesh Army has established a riverine brigade headquartered in Mithamain, Kishoreganj. This brigade is part of the broader modernization efforts under the Forces Goal 2030.

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#### তথ্যনির্দেশ ও টীকা

১. হাসান হাফিজুর রহমান (সম্পাদিত), *বাংলাদেশের স্বাধীনতায়ুদ্ধ দলিলপত্র*, ১-১৫ খন্ড, ঢাকা: তথ্য মন্ত্রণালয়, গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার, ১৯৮৪।
২. মোহাম্মদ মোশাররফ হোসেন, *আল কুরআনে নারী* (প্রথম খন্ড), ঢাকা: আধুনিক প্রকাশনী, ২০০২।
৩. সিরাজুল ইসলাম চৌধুরী, *অর্থনৈতিক ভূগোলঃ বিশ্ব ও বাংলাদেশ*, ঢাকা: ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, ২০০৩।
৪. এ.বি.এম হোসেন, *বাংলাদেশের সাংস্কৃতিক সমীক্ষামালা-২*, ঢাকা: বাংলাদেশ এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটি, ২০০৭।
৫. ১৯৪০ সালের ২২ মার্চ শিলাইদহে অনুষ্ঠিত নিখিলবঙ্গ পল্লীসাহিত্য সম্মেলনে কুঠিবাড়িকে জাতীয় সম্পদ হিসেবে সংরক্ষণের প্রস্তাব গৃহীত হয়। বাংলাদেশের একজন শিল্পী-সাহিত্যিকের উদ্যোগে এর আয়োজন হয়েছিল।

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