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**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

BLUE HELMETS: UN PEACEKEEPERS

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Context

- In a world increasingly fraught with conflict, the role of the **United Nations (UN) peacekeepers, often referred to as 'blue helmets'** has never been more critical. However, there is growing concern that these peacekeepers are not fulfilling their mandate effectively, often being reduced to mere bystanders in the face of escalating violence.

About the Blue Helmets (Peacekeepers)

- The United Nations (UN) Peacekeepers, commonly known as the 'Blue Helmets' are a symbol of hope and stability in conflict-ridden regions around the world.
- These peacekeepers, drawn from various national armies, police forces, and civilian experts, work under the UN mandate to maintain peace and security, protect civilians, and support the implementation of peace agreements.
- They are tasked with **maintaining peace and security in conflict zones** worldwide. They operate under the principles outlined in the **UN Charter**, which includes both the peaceful settlement of disputes (Chapter VI) and the use of armed force with Security Council authorisation in cases of aggression (Chapter VII).
- Despite having over 100,000 peacekeepers deployed globally, the UN has faced criticism for its inability to act decisively in critical situations.
- **Historical Success:** Historically, the UN has had **notable successes** in peacekeeping missions in countries like Cambodia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Angola, Timor Leste, Liberia, and Kosovo.

Historical Background

- The concept of UN peacekeeping was born in 1948 when the UN deployed military observers to monitor the **Armistice Agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbors**.
 - ◆ Since then, over 1 million peacekeepers have participated in more than 70 operations globally.
- The iconic blue helmets and berets, introduced by Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, distinguish these personnel from other military forces.

Roles and Responsibilities

- UN peacekeepers operate under three core principles: consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate. Their roles include:
 - ◆ **Protecting Civilians:** In many missions, the protection of civilians is paramount. Peacekeepers provide a secure environment, often in hostile and dangerous conditions.
 - ◆ **Monitoring Peace Processes:** They observe and report on ceasefires and peace agreements, ensuring that all parties adhere to their commitments.
 - ◆ **Supporting Elections:** Peacekeepers assist in organizing and monitoring elections to ensure they are free and fair.
 - ◆ **Training and Support:** They help train local security forces and support ex-combatants in reintegrating into society.

Global Contributions

- Peacekeeping is a collective effort, with contributions from over 120 countries. Nations like Bangladesh, Nepal, India, and Rwanda are among the top contributors of personnel, while countries like the United States, China, Japan, and Germany provide significant financial support.
- It underscores the shared responsibility of maintaining international peace and security.

India's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping

- Since its independence, India has been a steadfast supporter of the UN's efforts to maintain international peace and security.
- India's involvement in UN peacekeeping began in 1950 when it deployed medical personnel to support the UN mission in Korea.

- Since then, India has participated in over 49 peacekeeping missions, contributing more than 200,000 troops and a significant number of police personnel.
- It makes India one of the largest and most consistent contributors to UN peacekeeping operations.

Key Contributions

- **Troop Contributions:** India has consistently been among the top troop-contributing countries.
 - ♦ As of 2023, India had deployed approximately 5,900 military personnel across 12 UN missions.
 - ♦ Indian peacekeepers have served in some of the most challenging and volatile regions, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Lebanon.
- **Leadership Roles:** India has provided 15 Force Commanders to various UN missions, showcasing its leadership and commitment to global peace.
 - ♦ Notably, Indian officers have held key positions such as Military Advisors, Police Advisors, and Force Commanders, contributing to the strategic planning and execution of peacekeeping operations.
- **Women in Peacekeeping:** India has been a pioneer in deploying women in peacekeeping roles.
 - ♦ In 2007, India sent the first all-female Formed Police Unit to Liberia, which played a crucial role in restoring law and order and promoting gender equality. It has set a precedent for other countries to follow.
- **Medical and Engineering Support:** Indian peacekeepers have provided essential medical and engineering support in conflict zones.
 - ♦ Indian medical units have been instrumental in providing healthcare services to both peacekeepers and local populations, while engineering units have helped rebuild infrastructure in war-torn areas.

Impact and Recognition

- Indian peacekeepers have earned a reputation for their professionalism, dedication, and bravery. They have been involved in protecting civilians, disarming ex-combatants, and supporting the transition from conflict to peace.
- The UN has recognized India's contributions on multiple occasions, highlighting the sacrifices made by Indian peacekeepers. Over 160 Indian peacekeepers have lost their lives while serving under the UN flag.

Current Conflicts

- Today, the UN finds itself in a similar predicament with ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia.
- The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the conflict between Israel and Gaza have highlighted the UN's passive role, failing to protect civilian lives effectively.
- Despite having access to substantial military and police forces, the UN has not deployed them effectively to contain the violence in these regions.

Challenges and Evolution

- The nature of peacekeeping has evolved significantly over the decades. Modern peacekeeping missions are multi-dimensional, involving not just military personnel but also police, legal advisors, and humanitarian experts.
- Peacekeepers often face asymmetric threats, requiring them to adapt to new forms of conflict and instability.
- Despite their efforts, peacekeepers have sometimes been criticized for being ineffective or passive in the face of atrocities, as seen in **Rwanda (1994) and Bosnia (1995)**.
- However, the UN has continuously worked to improve its operations, focusing on the protection of civilians and enhancing the capabilities of its peacekeepers.

Need for Reform

- To address these challenges, there is a pressing need for reform within the UN, particularly in the Security Council.

- The **veto power held by permanent members** often hinders decisive action. Expanding the Security Council to include countries like India and South Africa and limiting the impact of individual vetoes could enhance the UN's ability to act swiftly in conflict zones.

Conclusion

- The future of UN peacekeeping depends on its ability to enforce peace effectively. Without significant reforms and a commitment to decisive action, the UN risks becoming irrelevant in the face of growing global conflicts.
- The world needs blue helmets who act as blue helmets, embodying their mandate to protect and maintain peace with impartiality and determination.

Source: TH

Mains Practice Question

[Q] Given the challenges and complexities of modern peacekeeping missions, do you believe the current 'blue helmet' model is still effective in ensuring peace and security, or is there a need for a fundamental overhaul of the concept and its implementation?

