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Sri Lanka's Role in UN Peacekeeping: Possibilities and Challenges for a Mutually Beneficial Process

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Abstract: *Fourth-generation UN Peacekeeping is characterised by multidimensional operations and active peacebuilding efforts due to the increasingly challenging nature of the threat landscape. Since 1957, Sri Lanka has contributed to UN Peacekeeping, leveraging its unique strength as an exceptionally experienced force. Despite Sri Lanka's readiness to participate in peace operations, there is a notable gap between its potential and actual contributions. The primary challenges hindering Sri Lanka's contributions are the unpredictable and difficult operational conditions, coordination and supply difficulties, and challenges in pre-deployment. Despite these challenges, Sri Lanka must maintain its status as a troop-contributing country. The brief offers three recommendations to address these challenges and enhance Sri Lanka's troop contributions: improving transparency in the vetting system, expanding diplomatic outreach in Western and Central Africa, and centralising communication and coordination among stakeholders.*

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1.0 Introduction

Since the introduction of United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping operations in 1948 it has emerged as a key tool employed by the UN and the international community in general to respond to conflicts and maintain global peace and order. Today these operations have become one of the most active elements of the UN's work due to the tangibility of its results and visibility of its influence.

While peacekeeping is not explicitly mentioned in the UN Charter, it has evolved into a key aspect of the organisation's operation and key mandate. Since 1948 there have been over 60 peacekeeping missions spearheaded by the UN (UN Peacekeeping Guidelines, 2008), each mission with a unique mandate and tasked with a variety of objectives based on the specific conditions of the conflict. For nearly 60 years, an unwritten body of principles guided these peacekeeping operations until 2008 when a set of official principles and guidelines titled *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines* was introduced by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support (UN Peacekeeping Guidelines, 2008).

These guidelines served three key purposes. Firstly, it established the UN Charter to be the principal framework of UN Peacekeeping, citing the mandate of the organisation provided in the Charter to maintain international peace and security, for which peacekeeping is an imperative tool. Secondly, it assessed and acknowledged the evolution of UN Peacekeeping during the past decades. Thirdly, it stipulated that despite its evolution UN Peacekeeping missions both traditional and contemporary should be based on three key principles; consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.

2.0 Phases of UN Peacekeeping

To better understand its contemporary development scholars and practitioners have broadly categorised UN Peacekeeping operations into generations based on the nature of its functions and operations. Various scholarly sources identify different numbers of generations ranging from two to four. It is understood that this differentiation of categorising the number of generations may stem from the complexity of post-World War II conflicts, leading to nuanced and varied interpretations of how peacekeeping initiatives responded to these conflicts.

An overarching characterisation which identifies four (4) generations of peacekeeping is outlined in the tabulation below (*Table 1*). This interpretation based on the categorisation presented by Yesmin (2013) gives the broadest overview of the evolution of peacekeeping.

Table 1: Generation based evolution of UN Peacekeeping

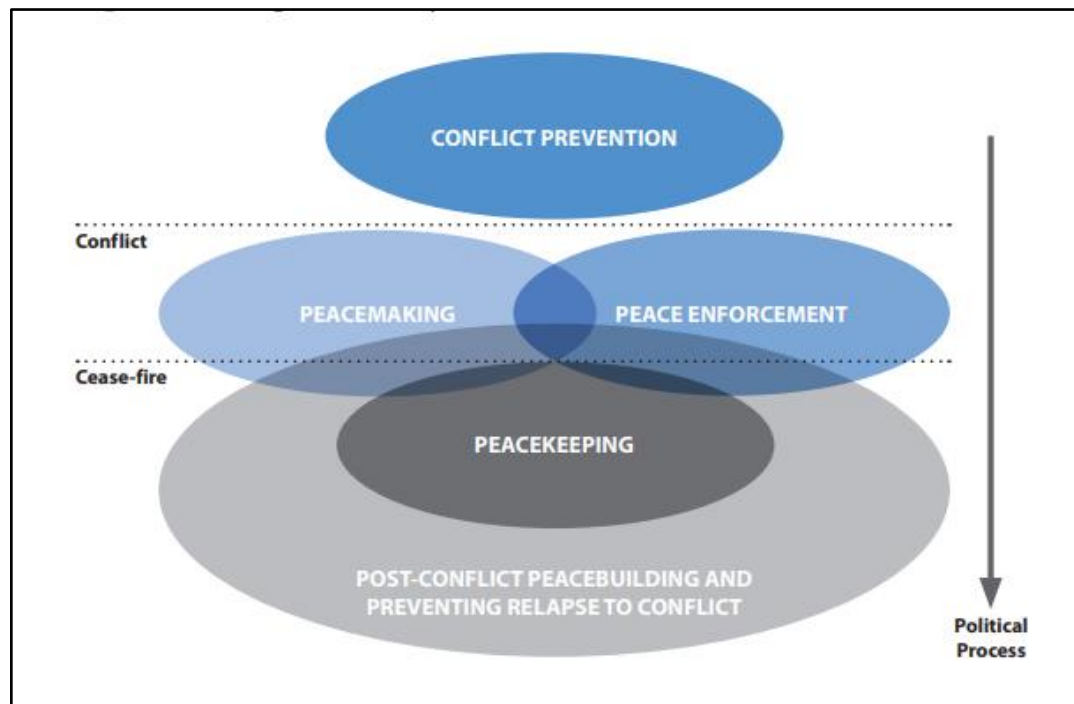
Generation	Time Period	Nature of Threats	Nature of Operations
First	1948- Conclusion of the Cold War	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tensions and rivalries between the United States and the Soviet Union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deployment of unarmed or lightly armed military personnel • monitoring ceasefires • stabilising conflict zones • facilitating diplomatic solutions • interpreting agreements
Second	late 1980s- early 1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intra-state conflicts • Human rights abuses • Social inequality • Resource competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise in the number of troops (from 9,950 in 1989 to 80,000 by 1993) • Disarmament of irregular forces • Assistance in electoral processes • Security Sector Reform (SSR) • Humanitarian aid to refugees and internally displaced persons • Capacity building of government institutions
Third	The transition of the twentieth to the twenty-first century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paradigm shifts in the nature of conflict • Rise of internal conflicts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive approaches. • Military tactics shifted towards combative responses. • Combined both military and civilian components. • Multidimensional tasks (political, military, humanitarian, economic, social and judicial activities)
Fourth	Mid 2000s- Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise of failed states • Non-traditional security challenges • Shifts in UN operational capacities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive conflict resolution. • Multidimensional operations. • The Requirement to multitask. • Humanitarian engagement with victim communities.

Source: Adopted by Author based on Yesmin (2013)

3.0 Contemporary UN Peacekeeping

It is evident from this nuanced generation-based classification that there is a significant difference in the functions and operations of UN peacekeeping, particularly since the dawn of the new millennium. The evolving nature of threats has increasingly blurred the lines between different peace processes, and has contributed to the overall complexity of the UN Peacekeeping operations. This is demonstrated in the schematic diagram depicted in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1: Linkages and Grey Areas of contemporary UN Peacekeeping



Source: UN Peacekeeping Guidelines, 2008

As evident in *Figure 1* the different elements of the process include an amalgamation of several related processes of peacebuilding and conflict resolution (conflict prevention, peacemaking, peace enforcement, peacebuilding), thus demanding from peacekeepers an unprecedented level of adaptability and versatility in order to achieve the objectives of their respective mandates.

This indicates that in the contemporary context, peacekeeping has become an integral component of a holistic approach to addressing conflicts and establishing international peace and order (Abiola and Otte, 2014). While the primary aim of deploying peacekeepers is principally to maintain sustainable peace, achieving this goal requires peacekeepers to engage in and contribute to various other complex processes within unfamiliar terrain.

The landmark *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* of 2000, more commonly known as the *Brahimi Report*, aimed to recommend key reforms to the UN Peacekeeping structure to address what was then perceived to be a failing system (Durch et al., 2003). The report highlighted the importance of UN Peacekeeping operations adopting peacebuilding measures and multidimensional engagement with local groups as a crucial step in peacekeeping reform (Brahimi Report, 2000). Thus, the primary goal of contemporary peacekeeping missions is to ensure sustainable peace and establish order based on legitimate governance. Essentially, UN peacekeepers now have to ensure that once their respective missions end, the societies in which they were deployed will not return to a state of violence and instability. This described reality regarding the nature of fourth-generation peacekeeping must be considered when evaluating Sri Lanka's participation in UN Peacekeeping operations.

4.0 Contribution to UN Peacekeeping Missions

In their report *Broadening the Base of United Nations Troop- and Police-Contributing* Bellamy and Williams (2012) explore why countries contribute their troops to peacekeeping missions, and categorise these rationales into five clusters. These include political, economic, security, institutional, and normative rationales. The explanations outlined below are drawn from Bellamy and William (2012).

The **Political rationale** includes the motive to contribute to UN Peacekeeping based on diverse political goals, including enhancing national prestige, supporting regional stability and dissuading political pressure from major powers or the UN. The **Economic rationale** encompasses national governments, especially in developing countries relying on UN compensation payments to support national budgets and individuals gaining financially from UN Peacekeeping deployments through increased domestic salaries via mission subsistence allowances. Additionally, firms and national corporations stand to profit from UN procurement contracts for various goods utilized in peacekeeping operations. The **Security rationale** includes the inclination of states to engage in peacekeeping operations when they perceive it as distinctly advantageous to their national security especially due to geographical proximity to conflict affected areas. The **Institutional rationale** includes the participation in UN Peacekeeping driven by factors related to a country's armed forces, security sector, and bureaucratic dynamics which highlight the attractiveness of peacekeeping participation seeking overseas experience. **Normative rationale** includes the incentive for nations to provide peacekeepers as it aligns with their self-image as global altruists and responsible international actors.

5.0 Sri Lanka in UN Peacekeeping: Role, Strengths and Limitations

5.1 Role

Sri Lanka has participated in UN Peacekeeping missions since 1957, starting with its contribution to the mission to end the Suez War in the First UN Emergency Force (Sri Lanka

Army website, n.d.). A modest-sized contingent was dispatched to the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) in 1960 (Sri Lanka Army website, n.d.). The then ongoing conflict within Sri Lanka led to a hiatus in Sri Lanka’s participation in UN Peacekeeping lasting several decades until 2005.

In 2004, to meet the UN requirement that each Troop Contributing Country (TCC) provide necessary training to their armed forces before any deployment under the UN flag, Sri Lanka established the Institute of Peace Support Operations Training, Sri Lanka (IPSOTSL) in Kukuleganga. Since its inception, this institute has served as the primary training school for peacekeepers deployed by Sri Lanka. The training provided at this institute encompasses critical areas of knowledge essential for peacekeeping operations including the UN system, human rights frameworks, negotiation, mediation, and liaison procedures (IPSOTSL Website, n.d.).

In 2005, Sri Lanka made its contribution to the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), thereby marking a significant milestone in its engagement with UN Peacekeeping. The initial contingent, comprising 750 members and 1 staff officer, commenced its service in MINUSTAH in 2004, followed by an additional 200 troops from the Sri Lankan Army, Navy, and Air Force constituting the second contingent. The MINUSTAH mission concluded in 2015 (Berenger, 2023). The domestic conflict in Sri Lanka ended in 2009 and subsequently the Sri Lankan Armed Forces significantly increased their contribution to UN Peacekeeping missions (Premarathne, 2018). Between 2004-2008 Sri Lanka joined seven additional peacekeeping missions: South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Lebanon, Liberia, Timor, and Western Sahara (The Associated Press, 2017).

Currently, Sri Lanka engages in four (4) peacekeeping missions located in the Central African Republic, Lebanon, South Sudan and Mali (Fernando, 2023).

Table 2: Sri Lanka’s Current UN Peacekeeping Missions

Mission	Country	Number of troops	Major tasks
United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)	Central African Republic	Total personnel- 110	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perform medical and supply duty for UN troops. ● Transport medical supplies to civil hospitals when the UN requests.

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)	Lebanon	Officers - 11 Other ranks- 114	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for the protection of the UN mission Headquarters
United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS)	South Sudan	Officers- 17 Other ranks- 49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SL Army medical unit maintains a field hospital. Provide medical assistance to UN personnel.
United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)	Mali (Mandate expired in December 2023. Troops continue to be deployed during the drawdown stage)	Officers- 20 Other ranks- 187	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convoy protection duties.
New York		Officers- 01	

Source: (Personal interview with Ministry of Defence officials, 19 October 2023 & 26 June 2024)

An important development affecting Sri Lanka's role in UN Peacekeeping was the termination of the mission on Mali on 31 December 2023 following directions of the military junta governing Mali (Simone, 2023), effectively requiring Sri Lanka to withdraw from one of its most significant UN assignments. Following the withdrawal, the Government of Sri Lanka has sought more engagements in UN Peacekeeping operations.

It is against this background that Sri Lanka has consistently reaffirmed its willingness to engage in UN Peacekeeping missions through numerous communications issued by the Government. In December 2023, at the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial meeting, the Special Envoy of the President of Sri Lanka, Rohitha Bogollagama delivered the country's statement and pledge

for UN Peacekeeping operations, emphasising Sri Lanka's collective commitment to these efforts (Sri Lanka High Commission in London, 2023).

5.2 Strengths

In the context of Sri Lanka's eagerness to engage in UN Peacekeeping missions and its current contributions, it is important to assess the strengths Sri Lanka offers as a TCC. Sri Lanka's importance stems from its ability to provide a highly experienced, battle-tested force, a quality that sets it apart from numerous other TCCs. Thus, Sri Lankan military personnel are seasoned professionals capable of undertaking rigorous and demanding tasks, thereby providing a unique and valuable asset to their assigned peacekeeping operations.

Especially pertinent to the specialised requirements of fourth-generation peacekeeping, which necessitate peacekeepers to function as both peacebuilders and combat forces, Sri Lankan peacekeepers are capable of responding to these challenges within these domains. Ekanayake (2020) observes that following the successful eradication of internal terrorism in 2009, Sri Lankan forces, particularly the Sri Lankan Army, actively participated in all facets of the post-war reconciliation process. Consequently, Sri Lankan forces possessed a wealth of experience, capacity, and determination to address the diverse challenges encountered by UN Peacekeepers. While the experience of Sri Lankan peacekeepers is a rarity among states of comparable size and economic development, similar to many other South Asian countries, the Anglophone proficiency of Sri Lankan peacekeepers serves as an added strength for Sri Lanka's troop contributions (Cunliffe and Wanasinghe-Pasqual, 2017).

The UN Peacekeeping system emphasises increasing female participation as a core strategy to enhance the effectiveness of mission mandates. This emphasis stems from evidence that women's participation in peacekeeping helps prevent and reduce sexual and gender-based violence against women and children in conflict zones (Sriyananda, 2018). In this regard Sri Lanka has consistently prioritised women's participation in UN Peacekeeping missions, becoming one of the TCCs to meet the UN initiative's target of deploying 15% female military experts in missions (Statement from Sri Lanka for the UN Defence Ministerial, 2019). Currently, there are 03 female officers and 18 from other ranks serving in missions (*Personal interview with Ministry of Defence officials*, 26 June 2024). At the 2023 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial Meeting, the Special Envoy of the President of Sri Lanka pledged to enhance women's participation in peacekeeping by providing specialised training in VIP protection, perimeter guard duties, and securing vulnerable points, along with specialized combat skills and drills (UN Peacekeeping Ministerial Statement of Sri Lanka, 2023), demonstrating how Sri Lanka strives to meet international standards on women's engagement in peacekeeping missions.

Sri Lanka has made important contributions in addressing the medical needs of vulnerable regions requiring urgent healthcare assistance. For instance, in January 2024, the 10th

contingent of the Sri Lanka Army Medical Corps was deployed to the Mission in South Sudan, comprising 64 dedicated personnel—including 14 Army Officers, 1 Naval Officer, and 49 Other Ranks, exemplifying readiness to serve in challenging environments and conditions (Sri Lanka Army Medical Corps, 2024).

Sri Lankan peacekeepers have also been recognised for their exceptional service. In June 2021, 103 members of Sri Lanka's aviation unit were awarded UN medals for their dedicated work in the name of peace (UN Peacekeeping Website, 2021).

5.3 Limitations of Sri Lanka's Contribution

However, Sri Lanka's readiness to participate in UN Peacekeeping missions and the country's unique strengths within these missions contrast with its actual contributions in numbers.

This context is further highlighted in comparison by Sri Lanka's position within South Asia, a region notable for its successful peacekeeping TCCs. Indeed, South Asia is the largest regional contributor to UN Peacekeeping operations (Ekanayake, 2020). However, Cunliffe and Wanasinghe-Pasqual (2017) observe that despite Sri Lanka's attempts to expand its peacekeeping commitments, the country remains an outlier in South Asia compared to its regional neighbours.

To provide further context, as of 30 April 2024 Nepal is the largest contributor with 6,123 personnel, followed by Bangladesh with 5,938 personnel, India in fourth place with 5,542 personnel, and Pakistan in fifth place with 3,706 personnel. In contrast, Sri Lanka ranks 30th, contributing only 526 personnel (UN Peacekeeping Website, 2024).

Being ranked 30th represents a significant disparity between Sri Lanka's capabilities and its potential to contribute. While acknowledging the importance of current contributions it is imperative to underscore that Sri Lanka has the potential to achieve more in its peacekeeping goals. This comparative factor with other South Asian countries provides additional motivation to investigate the underlying reasons for Sri Lanka not being able to reach its full potential as a TCC.

6.0 Rationale for Continued Contribution

There are considerable benefits for Sri Lanka in participating as a TCC in UN Peacekeeping missions. This brief advocates for continued participation and will examine the rationale behind this stance.

When applying Bellamy and Williams's (2012) classification to Sri Lanka's engagement in UN Peacekeeping, it becomes evident that the country's involvement is primarily driven by political, institutional and normative rationales and not by security rationales, given that Sri Lanka is not directly impacted by major global conflict zones. This brief identifies four main grounds specifically applicable to Sri Lanka in which continued contribution can be justified which are; International obligations and reasons of humanitarian relief, International image-building and strategic branding, Military experience and Foreign Earnings.

6.1 International Obligations and Humanitarian Relief

Perhaps the most compelling rationale is that Sri Lanka, along with the international community, has an obligation to intervene in vulnerable regions to protect human life, peace, and security. The conflicts and nations where Sri Lankan peacekeepers are deployed are characterised by intense suffering and devastation. As a member of the global community, Sri Lanka has a responsibility to extend assistance and demonstrate empathy towards those affected. This upholds the principle that states must not permit atrocities to occur unchecked, with UN peacekeeping missions being a crucial tool in ensuring this condition. Additionally, peacekeeping missions have proven effective in reducing large-scale conflicts (Coning, 2019). Therefore, it is important to recognise that Sri Lankan peacekeepers are actively making a positive impact on these communities by preventing and reducing violence.

6.2 International Image Building and Strategic Branding

Contributing troops to peacekeeping operations can yield significant political and strategic benefits, particularly in the realm of international image and reputation. Through continuous contribution, Sri Lanka can affirm its support for international norms of upholding peace, security and international law, resulting in the projection of Sri Lanka's soft power and amplifying Sri Lanka's voice within the international arena. This can be further enhanced through the implementation of national branding based on Sri Lanka's peacekeeping efforts demonstrating the nation as a proactive participant of steering the world towards global security.

A case study is Bangladesh, which has effectively utilised its contributions to UN Peacekeeping missions to enhance its national image. Stronger participation in UN missions has notably strengthened Bangladesh's global reputation (S.M.A. Rahman, 2012). In Ivory Coast, for instance, individuals frequently refer to Bangladeshi peacekeepers as *munami*, which translates to "my friend." Additionally, Sierra Leone has officially recognised Bengali as a second

language, a gesture stemming from the impact of Bangladeshi peacekeepers (Yesmin, 2013). Bangladesh's notable contributions to UN Peacekeeping have garnered recognition from prominent figures, including Former UN Secretaries-General Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-Moon (Quyum, 2020). Bangladesh's deliberate investment in promoting its status as a dedicated contributor to UN Peacekeeping has yielded tangible diplomatic dividends, including enhanced diplomatic relations, increased international influence, and economic opportunities.

While Sri Lankan peacekeepers excel in various aspects such as field experience and training, Sri Lankan peacekeeping as a national pursuit falls short in strategic branding. Thus, Sri Lanka needs to in a similar manner align its branding initiatives with its national interests and values, ensuring coherence with broader foreign policy objectives. However, there is also a risk of excessive strategic branding. Thus, it is crucial that branding does not appear overly hyped or insincere, as this could undermine the genuine normative rationale of wanting to assist vulnerable regions.

6.3 Military Experience

There exists a significant incentive for Sri Lankan military personnel to engage in UN Peacekeeping missions due to the invaluable exposure they receive at a personal level and also the overall effect it has in terms of enhancing the capabilities and exposure of the military at an institutional level. For military personnel this encompasses engagement within an international operational framework and command structure, facilitating a deeper understanding of UN principles and international law, and exposure to a wide array of terrains and challenges, thereby improving the adaptability and versatility of personnel. M. Rahman (2020) elucidates that the engagement of peacekeepers in diverse peacekeeping operations worldwide yields significant professional advantages for a country's defence forces. This participation facilitates the acquisition of contemporary military doctrines, tactics, and equipment through direct experience. Furthermore, their immersion in varied military management systems and conflict typologies enhances their prowess in combat. Additionally, their engagement in an international, multi-national framework fosters the assimilation and application of emerging global standards and knowledge.

Particularly noteworthy is the exposure to the socio-economic intricacies of foreign societies, a facet to which these personnel would not be exposed within Sri Lanka. This exposure enables officers to navigate complex societal dynamics and confront issues that may differ markedly from those encountered domestically. Consequently, sustained engagement in UN Peacekeeping is poised to enhance the tactical and operational proficiency of Sri Lankan officers, thereby augmenting their overall capabilities.

6.4 Foreign Earnings

Participation in UN peacekeeping operations also offers a significant financial incentive, particularly for TCCs from the developing world. Firstly, it ensures that participating military personnel receive salaries that surpass their usual monthly income at home (Ekanayake, 2020). Secondly, at the macroeconomic level, it facilitates the influx of foreign earnings into the national economy (Premarathne, 2018). While financial gain should not be the sole driving factor behind engagement in peacekeeping missions, it is a pragmatic consideration, particularly for a developing nation. Moreover, beyond the macroeconomic perspective, the infusion of foreign earnings positively impacts the household economic situation of military personnel. This aspect is especially noteworthy given the socioeconomic challenges faced by many families in Sri Lanka. Thus, while foreign earnings should not overshadow the primary objectives of peacekeeping missions, acknowledging the economic benefits serves to provide a comprehensive understanding of the motivations driving continued contributions, both at the national and individual levels.

7.0 Challenges

Having underscored Sri Lanka's strengths as a TCC and rationale for continued contribution, it is imperative to also highlight the various challenges faced by the Sri Lankan peacekeeping apparatus. Consequently, these challenges may perhaps be regarded as impediments to Sri Lanka realising its full potential in peacekeeping endeavours.

While the challenges are numerous and can be specific to certain instances, three broad challenges can be identified as affecting Sri Lankan peacekeeping contributions, namely; (1) unpredictable and difficult conditions of operations, (2) difficulties in coordination and supply, and (3) challenges in pre-deployment vetting. Navigating through these challenges to maintain continuous and efficient troop contribution should be the main goal of the national institutions that deal with peacekeeping operations.

7.1 Unpredictable and Difficult Conditions of Operation

As previously noted, fourth-generation peacekeeping is distinguished by unpredictable and unmanageable threats exacerbated by factors such as the increasing influence of non-state actors, particularly insurgent and terrorist groups and the weakening of state actors in conflict-affected vulnerable regions. Sri Lankan peacekeepers being no exception are subjected to challenging working conditions while completing their respective missions.

Among the missions involving Sri Lankan peacekeepers, excluding Lebanon, the remaining missions in Africa operate within fragile and politically unstable backdrops, coupled with challenging climatic conditions. The conflict situations in Africa are highly fluid and unpredictable, making it exceedingly difficult to execute UN mandates effectively in such volatile contexts (Kaledzi, 2023).

The mission in Mali in particular, stands out as the most demanding of these missions. Due to the lack of central governance, and the strength of extremist groups and militias, peacekeepers are constantly under the threat of attack, including from Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Furthermore, Mali has been locked in a consistent stage of political instability, while a military junta holds control in the capital Bamako (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2023), various Islamic extremist groups such as the Al-Qaeda-linked Support Group for Islam and Muslims (GSIM) and ethnic separatist groups such as The Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), (an alliance of predominantly Tuareg groups seeking independence) is active and in control of other parts of Mali (Hassan, 2022). Over 350 UN Peacekeepers have been killed in Mali since the initiation of the mission, which includes three Sri Lankans who were killed in 2019 (Newsfirst, 2023). With the announcement of the withdrawal of the UN mission the clashes between the government troops and other armed intensified as each party attempted to establish control of the territory leading to severe clashes such as the fighting that erupted in Tessalit in Northern Mali in October 2023, leading to the hasty withdrawal of peacekeepers from the area (TRT Afrika, 2023).

Similar harsh conditions prevail in both the Central African Republic and South Sudan, both being African states with weak governments, poor economies, and unstable political landscapes. The situation in South Sudan has resulted in loss of life, widespread sexual violence, and large-scale displacement, with both government and opposition forces targeting civilians. This has increased pressure on the mission to protect vulnerable populations and assist with humanitarian aid. As it concentrated on protection efforts, the South Sudanese government began viewing the Mission as an adversary. Despite sheltering civilians from both sides, most individuals in Protection of Civilians (POC) sites are from the *Nuer* ethnic group, mostly considered to be opposition supporters. Government officials have accused the mission of bias, leading to harassment and violence against its staff (Wells, 2017). Notably, the ongoing political crisis in Sudan has worsened the situation in South Sudan (UN News, 2023).

Additionally, Sri Lankan troops operating in the Central African Republic, Mali, and South Sudan face challenges in adapting to and functioning within geographical and climatic conditions that are very different from those of Sri Lanka, which includes the harsh deserts and tropical humid forests. The troops are also prone to diseases such as malaria and illnesses arising due to poor sanitary conditions such as lack of clean drinking water (Personal interview with Ministry of Defence officials, 19 April 2023).

UN peacekeeping operations are also increasingly facing disinformation campaigns within host communities, leading to heightened hostility and additional threats, particularly prevalent in the Central African Republic and Mali. These campaigns often include false allegations that UN Peacekeepers are trafficking weapons to armed groups, supporting terrorists, and exploiting natural resources (Trithard, 2022).

Given the evolving nature of threats and the increasingly active role of UN Peacekeepers, who are becoming frequent targets of insurgents (Patabendige, 2024), the UN has implemented several measures to protect the lives, security, and safety of its peacekeepers. During a UN General Assembly Special Political and Decolonization Committee debate, the Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions of the DPKO stated that progress is being made through the Action Plan to improve the security of peacekeepers, particularly in areas such as force protection and countering explosive devices. Additionally, the Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support emphasized the Department of Operational Support's efforts to enhance peacekeepers' access to medical facilities and support in complex, high-risk environments (UN General Assembly, 2023).

7.2 Difficulties in Coordination and Supply

Sri Lankan troops also face significant difficulties in coordination and supply, which seriously affects the performance, safety and productivity of the peacekeeping operation. The UN Peacekeeping process requires the TCCs to supply major equipment, which is later reimbursed by the Contingent Owned Equipment (COE) system (UN peacekeeping, n.d), sometimes taking many years to complete the reimbursement. This requirement necessitates that TCCs maintain accessibility to their peacekeepers to provide the necessary equipment. The UN and TCCs agree upon specific performance standards for major equipment and self-sustainment conditions in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), with reimbursements made accordingly (Premarathne, 2018). However, Sri Lanka is facing growing challenges in maintaining this accessibility. The main reasons for this situation include the limitation of capacity, geographical complexities, and political complications of the terrain. Due to financial and operational limitations, Sri Lanka cannot supply equipment to its troops in the capacity and efficiency other TCCs with close proximity to the deployment zones and better-established mechanisms do. A key impediment in this regard is the lack of diplomatic missions closer to Mali, South Sudan, or the Central African Republic, requiring the Government of Sri Lanka to work through the Sri Lankan High Commission in Kenya when coordinating with the relevant missions.

Another key reason for challenges in coordination is the political situation of the regions in which these missions operate. The lack of a strong central government results in the national authorities being unable to provide continuous and unhindered passage for equipment and other supplies, as they have to be transported through numerous control areas, borders, and customs authorities to reach its destinations. The situation was particularly dire in Mali where the country's official military-led government and its allies control only roughly half of its territory, while groups such as the Coordination of Azawad Movements and the Islamic State in Greater Sahara control most of the northern and central regions.

In addition to the complexities of operation emerging from the nature of terrain Sri Lankans troops also face issues connected to limitations in supply of equipment. As an example,

in 2023 the Sri Lanka Air Force was struggling to sustain peacekeeping missions due to difficulties in maintaining its fleet of Russian-built Mi-17 helicopters. Budget cuts and supply chain issues, exacerbated by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, have significantly affected the fleet's upkeep (Fernando, 2023).

7.3 Challenges in Pre-Deployment Vetting

The UN expects all members participating in peacekeeping operations to be cleared through a vetting process (The New Humanitarian, 2014). The *United Nations Policy: Human Rights Screening of United Nations Personnel* (2012) (A) (i) requires Member States who nominate or provide personnel to serve with the UN to screen the personnel and to certify, *inter alia*, that they have not committed, or are alleged to have committed criminal offences.

This vetting process is envisaged to ensure that the prior conduct of peacekeepers and peacekeeping operations are in accordance with international human rights standards.

Thus, as pre-deployment vetting for UN Peacekeeping operations is conducted by a national entity within the respective TCC, following a discussion in June 2016 with the relevant stakeholders this mandate was entrusted upon the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL). The HRCSL was required to conduct the vetting process on behalf of the Sri Lankan Government (HRCSL Press release, 2020).

Although in general the process has met the expectations of relevant stakeholders some concerns have been raised through various media reports in respect of the vetting process.

The Ministry of Defence has highlighted the importance of adhering to strict timelines considering the restrictive deployment timeframes. In response to these concerns, HRCSL has issued a detailed press release outlining information regarding the vetting process. HRCSL has also noted that in order to expedite the vetting process the list of personnel from the military troops shall be vetted by the HRCSL in collaboration with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). While noting that a double vetting process may cause delay, HRCSL reiterated its commitment to uphold the decision made at a meeting on 30 January 2019 chaired by the Hon. Speaker. Moreover, while this is the process that is currently implemented it is evident that the final arbiter of the vetting process is the UN. Furthermore, the HRCSL also noted the considerable amount of time and resources necessary in conducting the vetting process (HRCSL Press release, 2020).

8.0 Recommendations

When assessing the challenges faced by Sri Lankan peacekeeping operations, a few observations can be made. The challenges, mainly connected with the unpredictable and difficult conditions characteristic of fourth-generation peacekeeping, stem from global or local political,

economic, and security trends. Policy solutions may not be effective in addressing these issues, as they are beyond the scope of Sri Lanka's capacity to resolve. Therefore, Sri Lanka must focus on using its available resources to mitigate the impact of these challenges on its peacekeepers.

Similarly, it could be expected that some of the issues in the realm of finance would ease when the Sri Lankan economy gradually recovers from the economic crisis. This could enable the expected expansion of Sri Lanka's peacekeeping contribution as a larger amount of equipment could be provided.

This brief presents the following recommendations as implementable solutions to overcome the contemporary challenges faced by Sri Lankan peacekeeping apparatus, particularly at a national level.

8.1 Transparency of the Vetting System

Transparency in the vetting system should entail clarity among all stakeholders to prevent and minimise misunderstandings or miscommunications. Improving the transparency of the process could substantially address some of the concerns raised in this respect. Implementing clear timelines for completing the vetting process, ensuring adherence to these timelines and providing the agencies responsible for vetting with all the needed information and resources efficiently could reduce delays and enhance the robustness of the process for all stakeholders involved.

8.2 Expanding Diplomatic Outreach in Western and Central Africa

Expanding Sri Lanka's diplomatic presence in Central and Western Africa would facilitate the peacekeeping process by enhancing the ease and efficiency of coordination and supply operations. If not, coordination efforts would have to be conducted from one of the African states where Sri Lanka maintains diplomatic missions (Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Seychelles, South Africa), which could be geographically distant from the actual host country. This could seriously hinder the efficiency of supply and the ability of Sri Lankan officials to respond to urgent situations. While recognising the many challenges within its implementation, this brief proposes the expansion of Sri Lanka's presence in the Western and Central African region, particularly through establishing relations and missions in stable West African states.

Additionally, while acknowledging the crucial role played by Sri Lanka's mission in Addis Ababa it could play a more proactive role in coordinating, liaising and promoting Sri Lanka's peacekeeping assignments in Africa, given Ethiopia's more centralized location. Particularly in light of Sri Lanka's request for new assignments and therefore expected expansion of troop contribution for UN peace operations, it could be anticipated that some of these missions could be located in Africa. Therefore, despite the end of the Mali mission, it is imperative to broaden Sri Lanka's diplomatic presence in the various regions of Africa.

8.3 Centralised Communication and Coordination of Relevant Stakeholders

Each party being fully unaware of the restrictions and complexities within which they function further strengthening the coordination among the relevant stakeholders may mitigate substantial miscommunications and misunderstanding.

Instead of each of the stakeholders operating separately, a strengthened and coordinated mechanism could therefore help further improve the efficiency of the predeployment processes. In order to achieve this a Central Committee composed of representatives from the main stakeholders could help the smoother functioning of the predeployment process. Additionally, this would allow continuous dialogue regarding the strains and issues each party has to face allowing them to accommodate the needs and requirements of each other.

The ultimate goal of each party should be the improvement of Sri Lanka's peacekeeping contributions through recognising the unique skills possessed by Sri Lankan troops as a result of previous battle experiences. Therefore, national institutions must collaborate effectively to ensure the continuity and stability of the peacekeeping mechanism.

9.0 Conclusion

It is important to refocus attention on the limitations identified in *Section 4.0* between Sri Lanka's superior strengths as a TCC, and its low contribution. This limitation should serve as the guiding point for all of Sri Lanka's peacekeeping efforts, consistently reminding stakeholders that there is potential for significant improvement. The brief identified three ongoing challenges affecting the Sri Lankan peacekeeping apparatus: unpredictable and difficult conditions of operation, difficulties in coordination and supply, and challenges in pre-deployment vetting. Despite these challenges, peacekeeping remains a worthy cause for Sri Lanka to pursue, grounded in political, economic, institutional, and normative considerations. The reasons for continued contribution are multifaceted and include recognising the importance of fulfilling international responsibilities and demonstrating empathy towards those affected by conflict and leveraging peacekeeping contributions to enhance Sri Lanka's global reputation and strategic positioning. Participation in peacekeeping also allows troops to gain valuable military experience. By addressing the identified challenges and capitalising on these rationales, Sri Lanka can enhance its role and effectiveness in UN Peacekeeping operations.

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