Assessing UN Peacekeeping Missions in Central African Republic (CAR) through the Lens of Returning Pakistani Peacekeeping Troops: Perceptions and Challenges

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Abstract

The research surrounding the effectiveness of UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs) has been an on-going process ever since the inception of these operations. The available literature discusses the successes and failures of the missions depending on variables such as the host country's dynamics, mission mandate, and end result etc. However, the experience of the peacekeepers is rarely, if ever, a consideration in understanding the success/failure. Pakistan is one of the largest troops contributing countries to UNPKOs; therefore, it has a huge reservoir of returning and actively serving peacekeepers. The field area challenges and host country's environment experienced by the troops play a significant role in discerning the outcome of a UN mission. This research focuses on assessing the challenges and perceptions of Pakistani-UN Peacekeeping Troops in achieving the underlying objectives of United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Central African Republic (MINUSCA). The assessment is based on the primary data collected through interviews from Pakistani UN peacekeepers discussing their in-field challenges, motivations, perceptions, experiences and training. The study endeavours to highlight the contribution of Pakistani Troops to achieve global peace in today's complex peacekeeping environment.

Keywords

Peacekeeping, global peace, Central African Republic (CAR), multi-national troops, UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs)

Introduction

Since the birth of UN in 1945, world leaders have joined hands to encourage peace and security throughout the world. While the UN charter envisioned a thorough spectrum of conflict management and conflict resolution, over the years many

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Disclaimer: The discussion in this paper is part of a wider research project examining the UN peacekeeping missions in Central African Republic. This research project was submitted as a thesis in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MS degree in Peace and Conflict Studies (2018) at the Centre for International Peace and Stability (CIPS), National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST).

challenges have surfaced. Some of the hurdles are purely conceptual while others demand more practical and experiential insights. Peacekeeping operations were initiated as an instrument keeping in mind the end goal to help nations in conflict to return to peace (Yamin, 2017). The UN Charter declares that its fundamental aim is 'to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war'(UNO). In this regard, peacekeeping operations were initiated under UN banner in 1948 with the arrangement of an unarmed military observer group following the cease-fire between Israel and its Arab neighbours. In the initial years, the UNPKOs were tasked to fulfil three functions. Firstly, it was expected of the peacekeeping forces to maintain impartiality in their conduct with the parties in conflict. Secondly, it was necessary until the 1990s that the parties consented to involving the UN peacekeepers in the resolution of the conflict. Lastly, the UN peacekeepers were tasked to avoid the use of force (Krasno, 2005). Typically, modern peacekeeping missions are deployed with or without the compliance of conflicting parties, depending on international legislation and mandate to sustain and implement a peaceful environment impartially and without using combat arms (unless mandated otherwise).

By the end of 1998, 35 UN missions had been deployed as compared to only 13 in the pre-cold war era (Duffey, 2000). The shift in intensity of conflicts, in the post-cold war era, from interstate to intrastate conflicts drastically expanded and evolved the peacekeeping operations. Contemporary peace missions do not solely rely on military troops to perform the task of 'traditional' peacekeeping by monitoring a peace agreement. They now comprise of a multilateral force including a civilian component that undertakes the responsibility of political negotiations, humanitarian assistance, peace-making and peacebuilding. Consequently, modern peacekeeping has been viewed as a valuable third party intervention, instead of a token military presence in the conflict zones.

Article 43 of the UN charter was envisioned to provide the legal basis for a permanent force under the auspices of UN Security Council (UNSC) to ensure peace and security (Woodhouse, 2010). However, it has yet not been brought to action due to various limitations. Until the UN does not form its own standing army, the member states will have to provide troops and equipment for setting up a peace mission in the conflicted areas of the world. Currently, about 100,000 military, police and civilian personnel from 125 countries are deployed in 14 peacekeeping missions spread over four continents ("UN Peacekeeping", 2018).

In similar vein, Pakistan has ascended to assume the role of one of the largest contributors of peacekeeping troops in this multi-national force that contributes to global peace by offering specialized military services. Pakistan has thus far participated in forty-three missions in over twenty-six countries with a contribution of over one hundred and seventy-two thousand uniformed personnel. It is currently involved in seven missions with a contribution of five thousand and eighty-one personnel. Pakistan ranks on number four, as the largest Troop Contributing Country (TCC) in the world, whereas it is the second largest contributor in terms of its military deployment. Moreover, Pakistan is the sixth largest police contributor in the world. For the international policing duties, it has also sent its paramilitary personnel.[2]

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Despite the proactive role that Pakistan plays in contributing to global peace under the banner of UNPKOs, the deployed troops remain unapproached in regards to understanding the challenges they face. A gap prevails between the understanding of actual and perceived challenges faced by Pakistani troops that impacts the effectiveness of a UN peacekeeping mission such as MINUSCA. This necessitates the study of challenging aspects of UNPKOs through the lens of UN-Pakistani peacekeepers to conceptualize and assess individual and military level challenges. The rationale behind focusing the research on the Central African Republic (CAR) was driven by three factors: (1) The mission started in 2014, hence, it is relatively new as compared to other UN missions; (2) it has a unique 'peace enforcement' and 'robust' mandate as compared to other mandates of peacekeeping missions; and (3) Pakistan has the second largest troop deployment as compared to other nations deployed in the area (see Graph 1).
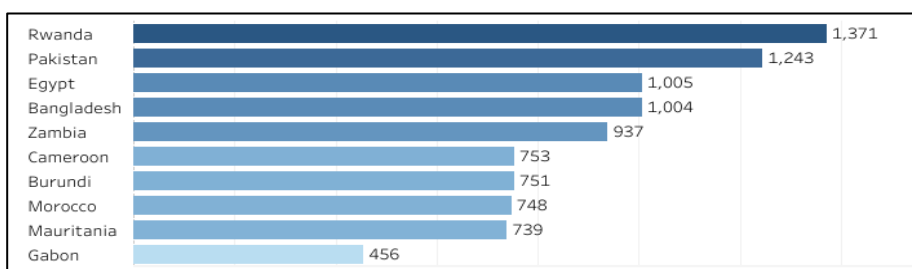
Graph 1: Top Ten Troop Contributing Countries ("MINUSCA")

CAR, which is slightly smaller than the size of the State of Texas in USA, is a country in the middle of the continent between the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Cameroon, Sudan and South Sudan. The country fell into unrest in 2012 when Muslim rebels from the Seleka umbrella seized control in the Christian dominant part of the nation. A counter force in the form of Christian volunteer armies, called the Anti-Balaka, ascended to combat the Seleka in 2013. Seleka surrendered power to a transitional government in 2014 under the constant pressure from global forces. Violence continues to take place despite active government forces and presence of UN peacekeeping troops (Carayannis & Fowlis, 2017).

The UN launched its first peacekeeping mission in Africa in 1960. Since then, over 20 operations have been authorized throughout the African continent. The UN operation in CAR represents one of the last threads of security for many Central Africans (Welz, 2014). Over the past two decades, the UN has launched three peacekeeping operations in CAR. The latest mission called MINUSCA was operationally mandated in 2014. Going back to where peacekeeping in CAR began, it can be observed that since 2013, troops from multiple countries have been deployed to manage the situation. In July 2013, the African Union Peace and Security Council authorized the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission titled MISCA. Deeply concerned about the deteriorating security situation despite the deployment of MISCA and on-going human rights abuses in CAR, the Security Council in 2014 approved the establishment of a nearly 12,000-strong UNPKO named as MINUSCA, to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access in the war-torn country (Siradag, 2016). In accordance with Resolution 2149 (2014),

MISCA transferred its authority to MINUSCA on 15th September 2014. As of 2018, MINUSCA has a total of around 14,632 personnel serving as peacekeepers including civilian, police and military troops with Pakistan as the second highest contributing country.

This research is a compiled narrative of Pakistan's involvement and resolve to restore international peace and stability through its participation in UNPKOs. Moreover, this research aims to fill gaps in the existing literature surrounding the challenges of UNPKOs, by viewing it from the perspectives of peacekeepers.

Also, the aforementioned advantages heavily rely on primary data as it includes the perspectives of peacekeepers with insights into the ground realities of peacekeeping.

Methodology

Ten semi structured interviews were conducted in 2018 to collect the peacekeepers' take on the challenges faced by them on ground and its relation with the mission's effectiveness. The perspectives were gathered on peacekeeping as an effective tool for global peace, their understanding of peacekeeping and their assessment of themselves as peacekeepers. An extensive questionnaire was drafted to understand the ground realities and challenges. The questionnaire was further substantiated by the available literature and pilot interviews with participants who had served in various peacekeeping operations. It included questions ranging from operational to social and psychological challenges. On average, each interview lasted for about 45 minutes to one hour. Most of the interviews were conducted face to face while a few were conducted through a telephone call. The interviewed participants varied in their ranks and duties.

The study endeavoured to cover all the ranks from Junior Commissioned Officers (JCO) to Brigadier level officers who served as a sector commander in the field. By the 7th interview, the data saturation was evident however; three more interviews were conducted to get further input. Military Operations (MO) Directorate at the Army General Headquarters was contacted to provide the contact details of the peacekeepers that had served in MINUSCA for this study. Another aspect of the research was taking what peacekeepers said at face value, responding to and interpreting information as true. While no particular efforts were made to verify what peacekeepers reported in their interviews, many of their thoughts were reflected in the reviewed literature. The recorded audio clips of the interviews were later transcribed, analysed, coded and clustered into various themes. The themes were finally analysed in light of the available literature which revealed that the interviews did to a great extent, correspond to the literature.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Only the peacekeepers who had served in CAR were chosen for this study, therefore the pool of peacekeepers eligible for the study was limited. There has been no female deployment in CAR from Pakistan so far, hence a gender balance for the study could not be achieved. The interviews reflected thinking and feelings at particular moments of time, not necessarily what the same person would say on a different day. It proved challenging to convey exactly the emotions expressed during interviews. All the participants of the study have been kept anonymous due to their personal preferences and ethical requirements. The respondents were requested to sign the consent form

that detailed the overall research and usage of the recorded interviews. For the purpose of maintenance of transparency and confidentiality, pseudo-names have been assigned to the participants of the study.

Results

The 21st century has brought an evolution in the challenges faced by peacekeepers. The shift from inter-state conflict to intra-state conflict has completely changed the dynamics of peacekeeping. Peacekeeping of today is different from the peacekeeping of the cold war era. This new change in conflict dynamics has spurred peculiar challenges that have left UN with a new dilemma of tackling these predicaments.

The challenges mentioned by the peacekeepers are divided into four main themes: operational, socio-psychological, motivational and multinational force. These themes are further divided to give a comprehensive assessment of challenges.

Operational Challenges

Since the inception of UN peacekeeping missions, militaries around the world have been employed in numerous environments presenting unique challenges to the peacekeepers. The challenges are wide ranging from terrain, to politico - social, nature of tasks, resources available, training, mandate, joint operations and psychological issues, to name a few. All such issues have an impact on the troops' overall performance. However, issues regarding the provision of adequate equipment, training, understanding of mandate and rules of engagement directly impact the operations of the mission and can therefore be listed under the operational challenges faced by the peacekeepers in the peace missions abroad. These operational challenges are very critical as they sometimes land peacekeepers in life threating situations. Pakistan army has contributed to peace and stability around the world under the ambit of UN, and has accumulated vast experience of operating in varying environments. In view of this, during the deployment in MINUSCA the issues identified by the Pakistani peacekeepers in accomplishing their task are discussed under separate headings.

Ambiguities in Mandates and Rules of Engagement (ROE)

For a successful initiation, peace keepers rely on three avenues: a mandate, a peace agreement, and a UN Security Council resolution. The mandate underscores the tasks to be performed during this process. This aspect might be troublesome in areas where there is little peace left to keep. Additionally, certain international obligations and limitations of Security Council might influence the mandate itself. As a result, mandates may be drafted in a way that leaves room for interpretation and ambiguity (Swope, 2011). Most respondents conveyed some reservations regarding the precision and explicit nature of the mandate. In cases where the mandate is vague, such as when political discord prevents a unified agreement regarding the host state, the entire mission may become destabilized from the very beginning. Unfortunately, due to volatile events on the ground, the council rarely finds the opportunity to draft a strategy before formulating a peace mission. Resultantly, most operations are influenced by the international politics and organizational limitations.

On the other hand, streamlined and up to date mandates might look good on paper, but can also come with their own set of problems. Due to their multilateral nature, mandates have become lengthy and tedious, distracting from core priorities

and focusing on multiple and evolving tasks. Consequently, it may become difficult for peacekeepers to keep track of all the tasks or even prioritize them according to different phases of the mission (Nadin, 2014).

UN missions in 21st Century are being sent to more hostile and chaotic environments, where the mission is more about peace-enforcement rather than peacekeeping. Such missions are given the peace- enforcement or in other words 'robust' mandates. Mandates are responsible to cover the political, social, diplomatic and operational aspects of the mission whereas; Rules of Engagement (ROE) are means to implement those policies. ROE is also the only effective way to control and limits the use of force on ground. While the mandate is drafted by the Security Council, the ROE are agreed and signed by the troop contributing countries to implement the will of UN on ground. However, when the tasks assigned in the mandate do not comply with the ROE required by the troops in field then it impacts the effectiveness of the mission (Simpson, 2016). The mandate authorized by the Security Council to MINUSCA is of peace-enforcement because of the active conflict situation between the rebel groups. However, this 'robust' mandate creates ambiguity in the minds of peacekeepers due to its contradictory nature to traditional peacekeeping. In similar vein, Karlsrud (2015) argued that UN missions have mandates authorizing the use of force, but these normally do not specify enemies and situations on the ground. Moreover, Blocq (2006) highlights the ethical dilemmas and moral confusion related to peace- enforcement mandates. He has mentioned this ambiguity as the 'fog of UN peacekeeping' and how the peacekeepers should be prepared for it. Many respondents of this research also shared similar concerns. Major Alan expressed that they suffered traumatic experiences and material losses due to ambiguity about the use of force against the rebels in certain situations.

Lack of Resources

In addition to a lack of trained personnel, many peace keeping operations have also been plagued by budget cuts. While peacekeeping is cheaper than its opponent, war, it requires hefty finances that require judicious handling. All member states are required to pay a fixed amount towards the annual budget, however, for some developing countries; this may not always be feasible. Additionally, with new conflicts, arms, troops and monetary resources may be sub-directed elsewhere mid-mission. This aspect can greatly jeopardize the momentum of the peace mission. Moreover, a dearth of critical equipment required to fulfil UN mandates can create a gap between expectations and performance. Moreover, failure to resource crisis struck areas with the correct development tools can foster spite in civilians. As such, there is a lack of professionals that are needed for lasting socioeconomic development Therefore, without the proper provisions, discord between objectives and lack of resources could undermine the mission's credibility as projected by the literature and the primary data collected from interviews. As Brigadier Ali narrated:

> Whichever mission there is, whether it is pertaining to CAR or otherwise, the mission never has enough resources to address all the factors that need its help, and to fully fulfil the requirements of the mandate. At many places there are less troops deployed than the requirements of the area. Then the civilian and military leadership needs to decide where to focus the help on, where the trouble lies. So the concentration of troops would be there. Mission sources are

> never ever adequate and in terms of compatibility also. There is no communication infrastructure. There are no roads in the country. If one has to travel from the south route to anywhere, you can't go there via roads because there are none. There is no road connecting places. There is jungle terrain in between also that hinders communication even further. These are major factors that affect the mandate and why it is not implemented (Personal interview, 6th June, 2018).

Social Challenges

Culture differences in a new region can be overwhelming for peacekeepers unless they are adequately trained. Differences in social, cultural, and religious setting can be hard to accept for certain members. From dress codes, eating habits, to social interactions, the pronounced differences may become a source of anxiety for peacekeepers, especially if there is a lack of training before deployment. These differences can reflect on job performance, as well as morale of the troops. Peacekeepers may become prejudiced and biased towards one faction based on cultural and religious differences, and as a result affect the mission's success. In addition, language can also become a source of communicative hindrance for the troops. Language is a powerful tool for coherent interaction and understanding; however, communication gaps can lead to misunderstandings and false assumptions.

Communication Gap & Cultural Cleavages

Goodwin (2005) in her book 'The Military and Negotiation: The Role of the Soldier-Diplomat' has emphasized on the military tactical level negotiations undertaken by a non-duty soldier in line with *Article 33* of Chapter VI of UN charter that prefers to resolve conflicts through negotiation, mediation, enquiry and conciliation. She has further explored the concept of negotiations at the individual troop level that is encountered by multiple challenges including volatile environment, urgency in decision making, threats, personal competence, language, and culture barrier. Moreover, strong hold on the local language and culture is not only fundamental for smooth negotiations, but also vital to social acceptance amongst the local populace.

Pakistani peacekeepers in MINUSCA faced a similar challenge of communication gap and cultural shock due to the language barrier hindering their interaction with the locals to build friendly relations for better negotiations. The Pakistani contingent was deployed in Kaga-Bandoro, the town which was under siege by Seleka rebels. Pakistanis at numerous occasions faced difficulties due to insufficient understanding of the local language and culture. As explained by Captain Muhammad:

> [...] Not being able to communicate our stance due to language barrier only meant aggravating the sentiments of a particular faction in the host country. We could not entirely integrate into CAR culture due to a huge language barrier as opposed to, for example, the French forces. This further reinforced the tension between the fighting parties, rather than bringing the crisis under control, ultimately impacting negatively, on the effectiveness of peacekeeping agenda (Personal interview, 3rd July, 2018).

Trust Building
The religious nature of conflict in CAR among Muslims and Christians necessitated proactive impartiality and neutrality in dealing with the parties. Many respondents pointed out the baseless scepticism of local Christians towards Muslim peacekeepers. According to the participants, such incredulity was demoralizing for the peacekeepers, who were deployed to sacrifice their toil and blood for another nation away from their homeland. When the respondents were questioned about their personal bias coming into play towards the Muslim groups, they answered that it was nearly impossible to favour a certain group based on your personal preference as the UN measures to ensure impartiality were very strict.

The Psychological Aspect
Peacekeeping missions can range from observation and monitoring, to serious anti-rebellion law enforcement. As a result, missions can sometimes turn out to be more dangerous, and peacekeepers are required to be vigilant for such eventualities. Well trained soldiers can quickly adapt to evolving roles and will readily respond to threats with skill; however, untrained soldiers may not be able to respond appropriately to the severity of the situation. Bartone et al. (1998), note that these unqualified militants may use brute force on civilians or open fire when faced with threats. While most of the circumstances warrant serious response, these instances can have sombre psychological repercussions for the peacekeepers. Resultantly, it is important that soldiers, health care professionals, and leaders have a clear idea of the objectives and procedures of the mission.

Psychological Trauma of the Home State Conflicts
Shigumera and Nomura (2002), note that peacekeepers may face multiple stressors during the missions. For many soldiers and militants, operations away from home can be a challenging feat, especially in dangerous situations. For many the psychological trauma stems from being cut off from friends and family members for extended periods of time.

Health Related Issues
In addition to above mentioned stressors, peacekeepers are also required to be vigilant about their health in the mission areas. Unfortunately, most missions are conducted in the African continent where the health system is fractured and major infections are prevalent. Despite precautionary measures, soldiers may find themselves suffering from common ailment, and in rare incidences, serious diseases. In addition to the anxiety and stress from the particular disease, affected personnel may be isolated from healthy soldiers as a precautionary measure. This aspect fosters loneliness, and depression among peacekeepers. Brig Ashfaq noted that missions in Congo were particularly difficult due to the prevalence of Ebola, Congo fever and AIDS. Many soldiers are required to keep hand sanitizers to minimize risk of contact through hand holding. Additionally, he noted that Lassa fever in Sierra Leone was common and dead bodies had to be burned in order to contain the spread of virus. Major Ijaz expressed, that the fear of catching contagious diseases caused hindrance in their daily routine tasks. It made them extra conscious while dealing with the locals, thus hampering development of better inter-personal relations. However, he also

acknowledged that UN health care facilities did their routine check-ups to ensure their safety.

Depression and Low Morale

Due to the isolated and dangerous nature of the mission in CAR, it is not uncommon for soldiers to face frequent depression spells, as well as a myriad of other psychiatric problems. Being in a foreign land away from home, foreign culture, hostile environment, lack of resources and overstretched missions have psychological repercussions. Many soldiers may also suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after dangerous missions, especially in cases where the death of fellow soldiers or civilians is involved. Moreover, in lengthy missions, boredom may also take a toll on the troops. For operations that require high activity over extended periods of time, troops may feel over worked and exhausted. As a result, work performance may suffer. The Quick Reaction Force (QRF) was continually out for patrolling to respond to emergency situations. Additionally, it was very hard for troops to complete their given responsibility within the time due to poor road infrastructure. Even after we were back at the camp areas, frequent radio beeps kept us alert to leave on short notices" (Personal interview, 26th June, 2018).

Fortunately, the instances of depression and anxiety among Pakistani troops are comparatively lower as compared to their contemporaries. Few respondents attributed this finding to the two-month vocational break given to soldiers after lengthy deployment for 6 months or more. This paid leave allows soldiers to relax, visit friends and family, and reboot, which proved beneficial for their psychological well-being.

Multinational Force

Cultural Differences and Diversity

The UN peacekeeping missions frequently employ trained personnel from various ethnicities and backgrounds. Duffey (2000) noted that UN forces are not a homogenous group of individuals. Moreover, keeping the language differences aside, each battalion from another country brings its own culture, assumptions, strategies, training and understanding of the mandate. In order for peaceful operations, leaders need to acknowledge this cultural diversity within troops and find common ground between parties. Additionally, these multi-cultural troops are faced with diverse tasks and therefore, require strong management skills. As a result, lack of communication can create a gap between performance and expectations, and reflect badly on the mission's success.

Similarly, in accordance with the views of the respondents Elron (1999) in the book titled *Blue Helmets and White Armor: Multi-nationalism and Multi-Culturalism among UN Peacekeeping Forces*, claims that multi-national peacekeeping forces are often plagued by cultural discords. Military cultures, enforcement laws vary across every TCC and the host countries. The training guidelines are given by the UN but the responsibility of training lies on the TCCs. The mission-worthiness of the UNPK troops can also create a discord within the mission. If the troops and leaders do not share a common language, or develop implementation differences, the success of the mission can become a difficult feat. Problems also arise when contingents are reluctant to serve under another nation's

command. Such discontinuities within a peacekeeping force limit its ability to operate in a coordinated military manner adversely impacting the mission. But the diversity within the mission can also prove to be an asset. Major Imran noted, "we had a good relation with the Moroccan contingent, they helped us in translating the local language …. We also learnt different strategies of jungle warfare from the African contingents deployed in the same area" (Personal interview, 11ᵗʰ June, 2018).

Results: Perceptions, Understanding and Personal Motivation

Oxford dictionary defines perception as "the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted" or as "intuitive understanding and insight". Looking deeper into perceptions can give insights into the peacekeepers motivations and experience. Perceptions or concepts shape a person's action on ground. In the section below, peacekeeping perceptions have been assessed under three themes: their understanding of peacekeeping, their perception about peacekeeping's contribution to global peace, and Pakistanis' role as peacekeepers

'Peacekeeping' for Peacekeepers

Peacekeeping is primarily conceptualized by peacekeepers who were interviewed, as work by third parties, focused on preventing violence, protecting people and supporting local problem-solving and/or making space for local people to find their own solutions. In general people tend to emphasize one aspect more than the other, but included references to several aspects of peacekeeping in their reflections and experiences.

An aspect that frequently came up during the interviews was how the peacekeepers considered peacekeeping as a noble and honourable job. Their motivation to go on a peacekeeping mission was reflected in their perception of high moral duty to serve humanity. Major Yaqoob expressed, "peacekeeping for me is a noble cause of protecting innocent people who are being killed in the name of power, ethnicity or for resources. My job was to protect them and reduce their suffering" (Personal interview, 26ᵗʰ June, 2018).

Despite the popular criticism on UN for ineffectiveness, Hultman and colleagues (2013 & 2014) note that the presence of UN military troops in active conflicts reduces the number of battlefield civilian deaths. Peacekeepers also mentioned that their presence in the field deterred rebels from committing atrocities against the civilians. Major Uzair said, "by our presence we deter violence and destruction of property, but if you look deeply at what we do, the primary goal really is, we give voice to civilians, to give them that level of confidence" (Personal interview, 13ᵗʰ June, 2018).

Captain Asif noted, […] "when you go there, that's when you understand what contributions have you made, how you've been saving people but only if you're sincere in your approach to serve the larger world peace" (Personal interview, 3ʳᵈ July, 2018).

Contribution to Global Peace

UN is widely criticized for the peacekeeping missions, as reflecting a narrative that comes out of neo-liberalism and serves the hegemony of western powers. Current peacekeeping is described as operating to stabilize the status quo so that the corporations of wealthy countries can exploit the resources and people of the

developing world (Duffield, 2010), without the drawbacks of their governments actually occupying them ("Human Security Report Project", 2010). Military peacekeepers echo some of these concerns; in the discomfort they describe at times when they perceive their work as imposing unwanted solutions. They also feel a sense of powerlessness and disappointment when they are unable to do much that is good for local people.

Captain Javed comments that "If there are no UN peacekeeping missions we may have more causalities than we've seen in previous years. But in the beginning, when the world powers intervened through peacekeeping missions, they did not control or contain the conflicts. The thing is, the vulnerabilities of the conflict-ridden, yet highly resourceful regions, diverted the objectives underlying the involvement of the world powers. The scope of this matter is much larger than my comments can explain." (Personal interview, 3ʳᵈ July, 2018)

When the frontline peacekeepers were questioned regarding the contribution of peacekeeping missions to global peace and whether these missions should be continued, majority of the peacekeepers were of the view that it saves lives and reduces human suffering and thus contributes to world peace. They also mention the peacekeeping missions that achieved recent success, like mission in Liberia and Sierra Leone. According to most of them, these missions should be continued.

Pakistani Troops as Better Peacekeepers

Pakistan not only ranks amongst top troop contributing countries, but also has the capacity to meet some of the challenges faced by peacekeeping forces. Pakistan's experience with 'war on terror' on its western border and the deployment at Line of Control in Kashmir makes Pakistani armed forces a well-trained military to tackle operational challenges. Pakistani military's civil-military cooperation strategy post-Somalian crises to deal with on-ground issues in intrastate conflicts make it a suitable force for peacekeeping missions (Krishnasamy, 2002).

The editor of the Bosnian news magazine *Djanana Islamovic* wrote that: 'Pakistani Battalion (PAKBAT) in Bosnia has not only protected us from brutal assault of Serb offensive, but also has infused a new spirit into our lives. They have given us all sorts of humanitarian help, taught us the values of Islam and above all have gave us a constant medical care in form of their hospital' (ISPR, 1995).

Pakistan armed forces also routinely participate in Aid and relief operations in emergency situations including natural disasters at home. Pakistanis perceive themselves better peacekeepers because of their military operation against terrorists in erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and their hands-on experience with managing Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and their rehabilitation and reintegration. Brig Farukh added, "Pakistani soldiers, just like many other armies with combat experience, are more effective peacekeepers. They understand the field challenges, and how to overcome those challenges, they are physically fit and are very well trained. Their domestic experiences of dealing with the state institutions and managing variety of calamitous situations is unmatched" (Personal interview, 4ᵗʰ June, 2018).

Conclusion

This work began out of curiosity about how frontline peacekeepers understood effective peacekeeping. It was started with a belief that people who do peacekeeping

on the ground, on the frontlines, would have different perspectives and knowledge than people who theorized about that work from other positions. The literature on effective peacekeeping or the success of peacekeeping rarely includes the views of frontline peacekeepers. Pakistan, being one of the largest troop contributing countries (TCC), has a major edge in adding the views of peacekeepers in the literature. This reservoir of Pakistani peacekeepers remains under-utilized in this regard. Thus, it seemed important to address this gap by adding the voices and experiences of frontline Pakistani peacekeepers to the literature. The assumption that frontline peacekeepers face challenges that the higher officials and policy makers have not anticipated is seen through the idea of annual 'chiefs of defence conference' and 'force commanders briefing' to elaborate the challenges faced on ground by the peacekeeping forces. This Ban Ki-moon Chiefs of Defence Conference began in 2015 in response to the advice of Military Advisor to Under Secretary General, Lieutenant General Maqsood Ahmed. According to Maqsood Ahmed […] "The idea behind this conference was to gather the military Generals of the troop contributing countries on one platform and discuss the challenges faced by their respective militaries on the peacekeeping missions abroad and to provide suitable suggestions. The purpose of this conference was mainly to bridge gap between the Security Council and their expectations from the troop contributing countries" (Personal interview, 15th August, 2018). This conference was in held in 2015 for the first time, and has now become a regular practice of the council. The idea of this conference validates the hypothesis that there lies a gap in understanding of peacekeeping operations between the men on ground sent by troop contributing countries, and the Security Council.

With the change in conflict dynamics in the recent era, the peacekeeping in the conflict zones has also evolved. The UN has shifted from 'traditional' peacekeeping of just monitoring peace agreements through unarmed or armed troops to peace enforcement and peacebuilding mandates of the peacekeeping missions. Due to this advancement in the peacekeeping mechanism the troops are sent to increasingly difficult and hostile environments where they frequently encounter life threating situations. It is, therefore, more important than ever to recognize the challenges they face at their level and equip them accordingly to avoid any loss. These in-field challenges listed by the troops, encompassing operational, social and psychological challenges might not have grave implications but hamper the overall effectiveness of a mission. The ambiguity of rules, non-availability of resources, lack of effective communication and poor psychological wellbeing create critical situations that put the safety of troops and civilians at risk in chaotic environments. Moreover, these aforementioned challenges appear to be vital in distinguishing a successful mission from an unsuccessful one.

This research was further expanded by assessing the perceptions of peacekeepers while performing their duties. Peacekeepers perceptions indirectly reflect their motivations and passion to serve on a UN mission. Pakistani peacekeepers in general viewed peacekeeping as a noble job related to reduce human sufferings. Most of them believed it contributes to global peace despite the popular criticism on UN's intentions to deploy a mission. However, such concerns were also mirrored in their responses. Moreover, Pakistanis considered themselves as better peacekeepers due to their active involvement in peace operations in their home country.

Finally, this study has aimed to fill the literature gap by assessing the in-field challenges and perceptions faced by the frontline peacekeepers belonging to one of the largest troop contributing country. There is room for extending this research into other missions as the scope of this study was only limited to one mission. Another important aspect in further research could be the comparison of challenges faced in different missions and finding what mechanism worked where and why. In this study, there were no female police or civilian peacekeepers as a part of the sample group. Adding this diversity could give deeper insights and improve the efficacy of peacekeeping missions.

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