

Addressing Gender Imbalance in United Nations' Peacekeeping

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Introduction

The Department of Peacekeeping Operation (DPKO) is the backbone of United Nations' Peacekeeping operations worldwide. The history of United Nations Peacekeeping operations can be traced back to 1948 when the Security Council authorized the deployment of UN military observers to the Middle East (ME). Since then its presence has been recognized and appreciated by all those affected by armed conflict and/or to humanitarian crises. Men in uniform have been at the forefront of its face in difficult and violent situations regardless of the areas being remote or urban in nature. As with many 'traditional' aspects of Peacekeeping operations (such as force application), the continuously changing environment has also influenced the 'face' itself to be changed, *albeit* at a slower pace. For instance, the need for incorporating women into this so far purely 'men in uniform' domain is being considered in all facets of its operations. Women with their natural affinity to Peacemaking, and their ability to access gender restrictive societies is continuously being recognized as a necessary resource for UN operations.

It must be noted that given the inherent diversity within the UN framework, the troop contributing countries (TCCs) too, largely vary in their religious, ethnic, and social backgrounds. And whereas some countries are ready to be in a position to comply with this need, i.e. to integrate more female peacekeepers in their contingents, other countries still appear to be making an effort to come to terms with the idea. Fact of the matter is that, despite the urgency and realization, there is still a vast gender imbalance in UN's human resources committed to various tasks in different missions.

The aforementioned gender imbalance was identified by UN in October 2000, and resultantly the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously approved *Resolution 1325* on 'Women, Peace and Security' (reference please). It was for the first time that the UNSC recognized that women and girls are also adversely affected by (violent) armed conflicts and therefore should have an essential role in peace support processes and Peacekeeping operations. Since its passage, the *Resolution* has served as a milestone towards better integration of women's perspectives in peace processes. Following the passage of the Resolution, various UN requirements continued to pour in (see; resolutions: 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, and 2242), stressing the significance of the role that women can potentially play in societies ridden with violent conflict and/or an evident absence of peace

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(Promoting Women, Peace and Security, n.d.). Consequently, as per the current directives under practice, all TCCs are obliged to comply with at least 15 % of females in all categories of their manpower including military, police, Staff Officers (SOs), observers, or as part of contingent. Some member states of the UN have willingly contributed women peacekeepers in missions; however, the ratio compared to men still remains visibly low. Evidently, in 2017 it was observed that, women's representation among military troops and police officers in UN peace operations remained low at 4 % and 10 % respectively (UN Women, 2018).

Since its inception, Pakistan has been one of the top few contributors to UN Peacekeeping efforts worldwide and has willingly taken part in various kinds of operations. In fact, Pakistan stood among the top five countries of the world with largest troop contribution to UN in 2018 (Statista, 2019): the list includes Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Rwanda and India. Despite an honest desire to address the previously identified gender imbalance by the TCCs, the societal norms and traditional patriarchal culture has majorly obstructed the road towards a total fulfilment of UN requirement—i.e. addressing gender imbalance. Although Pakistan's military and police force(s) have substantially promoted the idea of gender balance in UN operations, the country still falls short of being fully compliant status, fulfilling all the requirements of the UN.

One of the main arguments for under-representation of women in the UN Peacekeeping missions surrounds around the 'conditions' related to mission operating environments; often frugal and living conditions rated as 'tough'. Moreover, any posts and consequent roles of UN peacekeepers are isolated and characterized by 'Spartan' living conditions, implying their inability to survive such rough field conditions. In some cases, handful members of UN Peacekeeping missions live in fairly close proximity of each other (primarily in make-shift or rented accommodation) with often limited access to water, thus making living conditions more difficult for women as Peacekeepers. Adding to these conditions, physical dangers of abduction, sexual harassment and threat to life make it further discouraging for those TCCs who are already plagued by their societal norms, yet working to ensure the gender balance. In this backdrop, it becomes imperative to critically examine the underlying issues and involved multifaceted factors, particularly in the context of Pakistan.

UN Policy on Addressing the Gender Imbalance

Since the conception of Peacekeeping, it has been a male-dominated field employing soldiers from diverse backgrounds and cultures contributing towards peace and stability in troubled and war-torn societies. While considering the multifaceted nature of conflicts and natural calamities, the roles entrusted to UN peacekeepers have constantly been evolving. Similarly, critical focus on combatants has also witnessed a dramatic shift towards more inclusive approach. Consequently, contemporary peacekeepers are increasingly finding themselves communicating and interacting with local communities; large percentage of which comprises women and children. Accordingly, inclusion of women UN peacekeepers helps to reduce conflict and confrontation and provide a greater sense of security to local populations, particularly while dealing with women and children. It has been well observed that, the induction of women members in various missions has significantly improved access and support for local women, apart from providing role models for women in the

community. Above all it has broadened the skill set available within a peacekeeping mission, which in itself is a significant contribution. The UN believes that increased recruitment of women is critical for (cited from, Karim, 2017, p. 825):

- Empowering women in the host community;
- Addressing specific needs of female ex-combatants during the process of demobilizing and reintegration into civilian life;
- Helping make the peacekeeping force approachable to women in the community;
- Interviewing survivors of gender-based violence;
- Mentoring female cadets at police and military academies;
- Interacting with women in societies where women are prohibited from speaking to men.

In view of the above, the Security Council adopted *Resolution (S/RES/1325)* on Women, Peace and Security on 31 October 2000. The resolution reaffirms the significant role of women in the realm of peacekeeping. The said role necessarily stretches from their on-field presence as trained peace keepers, their efficacy as peace-builders and negotiators and their character in advancing humanitarian responses during and following conflict situations. Their effective presence also points towards the emancipated role of women and the prevalent norm of gender equality within the UN framework. In this regard the Resolution 1325 directs all actor states to ensure increased women participation from their respective countries in various UN peacekeeping and security missions. Alongside ensuring their involvement, the Resolution also meaningfully attends to the task of warranting a safe working environment for these women peacekeepers. In this regard, the Resolution upholds the need to guarantee a working environment that is free from all sorts of gender -based violence, particularly, rape and other forms of sexual abuses. It must be noted, that when on field, the intensity of these threatening elements multiplies by leaps and bounds. The resolution provides a number of important operational mandates, with implications for Member States and the entities of the UN system (OSAGI, n.d.).

In 2006, DPKO adopted the UN Policy Directive on Gender Equality in Peacekeeping Operations. This initiative added an additional mandate to the credentials of the DPKO, entitling it to add a gender balanced work force at all operational levels; be it at ground level or on managerial/ administrative basis (Luchetti, 2017). The policies chalked out in this framework further laid down minimum requirements for female deployments; and a report monitoring the progress of efforts by member states to improve the gender balance situation with a keen attention to issues pertaining to the deployments apart from practical propositions concerning the security and safety of conflict fields. An additional component of these guidelines was their insistence on the fact that the missions should maintain gender based data on the numbers of male and female military personnel within their respective national armed forces alongside the appointment of a Gender Focal Point within each military group with clear description of designated tasks; and assessing the operational impact of the deployment of female personnel. These efforts came coupled with the appointments of Military Gender Advisers and Military Gender Focal Points entrusted with the responsibility of supporting the integration of a gender

perspective into the work of the military component during a peacekeeping mission (DPKO/DFS Guidelines, 2010, p. 39; see also, “Gender Responsive United Nations”, 2018)”.

As per rules laid down in the directive, these personnel were to be placed in the military chain of command within a mission on duty. Contrastingly, the mission’s Gender Adviser who had to be a civilian, (as laid down in the framework) was to provide an overall strategic guidance and direction to support the integration of a gender perspective into the work of various components of a peacekeeping mission (DPKO/DFS Guidelines, 2010, p. 39). It was further expressed that the duties of the Military Gender Adviser and the Mission Gender Adviser meant to be coordinated throughout the mission.

Since 2009, the UN has stressed upon contributing world states to make sure that the contribution of female peacekeepers from their respective countries is substantial and that it continues to rise. In order to make the inductions and then the role of women peacekeepers more formal from its own end, the UN, decided in 2011 that a Gender Focal Point be appointed before a full-time dedicated Military Gender Adviser became available. In a similar vein, the UN now also requests national contingents to appoint Gender Focal Points, and several missions have them. However, no Military Gender Advisers have been appointed at the operational level. The above detailed discussion explicates that, TCCs are still struggling to comply with UN instructions in addressing the gender imbalance and major reason for the lack of policy implementation seems to be non-understanding of various resolution, rules, and instructions. Sahana Dharampuri in her study very aptly captures this dilemma for the TCCs as she argues that: “UN member states are aware of Resolution 1325 but most do not understand its full implications for UN peacekeeping beyond increasing women’s presence in missions. During many interviews conducted for this study there was a general sense of fatigue and lack of clarity about Resolution 1325” (Dharmapuri, 2013, p. 12). It thus becomes imperative that TCCs should constitute a board at appropriate levels of their decision making to critically analyse *Resolution 1325* and all its subsequent forms for meaningful adoption of strategies for effective compliance.

Issues Causing Gender Imbalance

Major portion of worlds’ uniformed services and especially the militaries consider soldiering an area where females cannot cope with even the routine life demands. Extra resources to accommodate women in field locations, is another military recurring concern by the relevant authorities. For instance, former Indian army chief, General VP Malik stated that, "The Indian armed forces cannot do something socially unacceptable. Would you want your wife or sister to share a bunker with five other men like they do in Siachen?" (Nair, 2010, n.d.). Apart from traditional disdain for perceived so called ‘weaknesses’ of opposite sex, it is inherent male protective reflex which is likely to cloud his judgment during crisis time. Apart from male dominated military mind-set there are a host of other issues which hinder integration of women in armed forces and thus constitute a problem for TCCs to comply with UN policies on the issue.

Patriarchal culture spread around most parts of the world has further egged on the issue of gender imbalance. Female (as ‘self’) is considered as weak, fragile and inviolate, thus requiring protection by males. Even though the concept has been

successfully challenged and reversed to an extent among more advanced nations of the world, the idea still has to be defeated to provide an even playing field for all. The dogma is so deeply rooted that in some parts of the world women themselves subscribe to it and are reluctant to breach limits laid down for them. Men on the other hand assume the role of 'protector' and 'provider' and therefore are reluctant to witness females among them coming into harm's way. Even their professional judgement is assumed to be marred when confronted with a situation where women under their care or company come to be threatened. All this needs to change if we are to benefit from equal participation of almost half of world's population in all fields. After all women have proved themselves equal to men in most challenging fields so far reserved for men by becoming successful astronauts, race car drivers, deep sea divers, mountaineers etc.. Armed forces are likely to be one of the beneficiaries of such change in line with other workplaces in society.

Largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions belong to third world and have their unique problems which may also be visible among more affluent nations of the world. First among many are societal and ethical taboos against female mainstreaming in the society. Culture, and in some cases even religion becomes a hurdle in path of women becoming equal partners with men, at a societal level. Upbringing of female child in such societies is steeped in favouritism towards males even to an extent where female embryos are terminated for want of male heirs. Discrimination during feeding times, opportunities to education and later lower wages for females in the job market, all contribute towards women's suppression. Women when allowed to access education are reduced to selected subjects, which are traditionally accepted for female jobs in society. All this loads the dice against females and consequently, few high achievers in traditionally male dominated fields become apparent. Female segregation in various institutions and work place further contribute towards breeding gender based taboos. To this end, greater and more wholesome opportunities towards female education can gradually reverse this trend.

Isolated observer outposts are often physically cut off from rest of the force and may have to depend on meagre local resources sometimes augmented by UN. Living conditions in some cases are devoid of space, availability of running water, climate control under severe weather conditions, and provision of medical help. Patrolling duties in the field often expose peacekeepers to dangers of violence, abduction and/or rape. For a small number of male peacekeepers, the isolated conditions may result in moral deprecation and may in certain cases become a threat for their female colleagues whose number is bound to be minimal. Certainly, cases of sexual exploitation by UN peacekeepers, is not an unheard phenomenon. Whereas these conditions can be ameliorated to an extent within formed military or police units and within large headquarters, the issue cannot be overlooked where individual or small numbers of female peacekeepers are active at isolated posts. Further safeguards can be ensured during pre-deployment training in mixed teams where female members are sufficiently trained to take care of themselves in case of a violent encounter. Similarly, exposure to working with opposite sex during training would also go a long way towards reducing male curiosity resulting into greater confidence and mutual respect.

With the availability of more emancipated women ready to take on fields (so far reserved for men), armed forces would also emerge as beneficiary and be able to bridge this gender gap within its rank and file. Societal and ethical norms, however

take long time to be established, therefore mainstreaming the women participation in society should be a long-term strategy. For the time being, existing female presence in the armed forces of various nations can be harnessed and volunteers can be inducted through an extensive basic military training for UN peacekeeping assignments and subsequent deployment. This being a stop gap arrangement would go a long way towards opening up greater female participation from a bigger pool still, as and when it becomes available.

Way Forward

Intricacies involved in gender imbalance are varied and complicated. These can neither be wished away nor overcome in a short while. A sustained and focused approach is needed at national and Service level to be able to address the situation. Following are some recommendations with long and short term results to get out of this controversy and be able to become useful members of UN peacekeepers' team. Even though these recommendations are focussed towards Pakistan military, some can also be useful for others when suitably modified.

Short Term Measures

- Immediate constitution of a dedicated team at army headquarters for analysis of various UN resolutions and DPKO's instructions on the subject for a systematic and effortless compliance.
- Look for suitable candidates from among the female officer corps to fill officer cadres required in categories of Military Observers, Staff Officers and contingents as is being presently done. Vacancies among lower ranks can be picked up from amongst very large pool available in Armed Forces Nursing Service. These when suitably trained in basic military fields and where possible equipped with required language training can prove extremely useful as medics and mediators with UN patrols, Observers as well as in field units.
- Fresh recruitment as officers of suitably qualified women in fields of Negotiation, Women and Child protection, Sexual Exploitation against Women and Children etc., and their rotational employment with our Peacekeeping effort.
- Extensive pre-deployment training of female participants along with their male counterparts without any gender deference and thus reduce misgivings about each other and to build mutual confidence.

Long Term Measures

- Gradually remove gender segregation from playgrounds to work place by providing safe and encouraging environment.
- Provide equal educational and professional opportunities to females.
- Abolish gender specific wages.
- Create newer opportunities for females within armed forces and police.

Conclusion

UN's desire to bridge the gender gap among its peacekeepers is necessitated by a considered opinion arrived at jointly with the member states in the past and later

supplemented by useful role that female peacekeepers have already demonstrated in some field missions. Consequently genuine desire of TCCs to comply with the policy is marred firstly by lack of understanding the requirement, and secondly by non-availability of sufficiently trained female members in their armed forces and police. Gender discrimination and lack of opportunities for women in third world societies make it further complicated for the armed forces to pick, choose and equip their contingents with correct gender balance. Risks and difficult living conditions in mission areas further discourage the employer as well as the participants, it is therefore imperative not only to initiate necessary steps towards improving these conditions but also to prepare intending participants through intensive training. Above all it must be remembered that only longer term measures would result into long-term benefits and therefore all efforts must be concentrated towards mainstreaming of females into society through equal opportunities in fields of education, job parity and gradual shift away from patriarchal culture.

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