

UNITED NATIONS AND ROLE OF INDIA

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Abstract:

India has been an influential member of the United Nations (UN) since its inception in 1945, consistently advocating for peace, equality, and multilateral cooperation. As one of the original signatories to the Declaration by United Nations in 1942 and a participant in the 1945 San Francisco Conference, India has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to the UN Charter and its objectives. Over the decades, India has played a crucial role in peacekeeping operations, championed the rights of developing nations, and promoted global governance reforms. Having served eight terms as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), most recently during 2021–22, India continues to advocate for the democratisation and comprehensive reform of the Council's structure to ensure equitable representation. As a member of the G4 nations, India supports collective efforts to secure permanent representation for emerging powers. Its engagement with the UN also reflects its evolving foreign policy priorities, balancing national interests with global responsibilities. India's active participation in multilateral dialogues on climate change, trade, terrorism, and sustainable development underscores its growing global influence and commitment to international cooperation. Despite challenges in securing a permanent UNSC seat, India's enduring dedication to multilateralism, peace, and global equity highlights its emergence as a responsible and proactive actor in the evolving international order.

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Introduction:

The United Nations (UN) was established in 1945, following the devastation of World War II, with the primary goal of maintaining international peace and security. Over time, peacekeeping operations have become one of the UN's most visible and successful tools for supporting countries emerging from conflict (Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], 2025). India, as one of the founding members of the UN, has consistently upheld these objectives through its active participation in peacekeeping missions. With over 2,90,000 personnel having served in more than 50 missions, India stands among the largest and most reliable contributors to global peace efforts. Currently, over 5,000 Indian peacekeepers are deployed across nine active UN missions worldwide (MEA, 2025).

Evolution of UN Peacekeeping:

The history of UN peacekeeping dates back to 1948 with the establishment of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in the Middle East to monitor ceasefires. Initially limited to unarmed military observers and mediators, peacekeeping gradually evolved into multidimensional missions involving political, military, and humanitarian components. The end of the Cold War in the 1990s marked a turning point,

as peacekeeping operations expanded significantly in both scope and complexity.

Modern peacekeeping now includes facilitating political processes, protecting civilians, disarmament and reintegration of combatants, supporting elections, and strengthening human rights and governance frameworks (MEA, 2025). Reforms initiated after the failures in Rwanda and Bosnia, particularly the Brahimi Report (2000), emphasized stronger mandates, better resources, and greater accountability. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine further reinforced the moral imperative of civilian protection. Today, UN peacekeeping continues to adapt to evolving global threats, emphasizing gender inclusion, local ownership, and regional cooperation.

India's Historical Relationship with the United Nations

India's association with the United Nations predates its independence. At the San Francisco Conference in 1945, India—then under British rule—was among the original signatories of the UN Charter, represented by Sir Ramaswamy Mudaliar (Mathur, 1964). Although India was not yet a sovereign nation, its inclusion underscored its international significance during the war. After independence in 1947, India retained full membership and continued its engagement with the UN as a sovereign state.

The Indian Constitution enshrines a strong commitment to global peace and cooperation. Article 51 of the Directive Principles of State Policy mandates the promotion of international peace, respect for international law, and peaceful resolution of disputes. This constitutional vision aligns with India's civilizational philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—"the world is one family"—and Mahatma Gandhi's principles of non-violence and moral leadership. Together, these ideals have shaped India's foreign policy orientation and its active participation in UN initiatives.

India's Role and Contributions to UN Peacekeeping

India's participation in UN peacekeeping began in 1953 during the Korean conflict, when it contributed medical and military personnel to the UN Command. Since then, India has consistently supported peacekeeping missions in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Indian troops have played pivotal roles in operations in the Congo, Sudan, Lebanon, and Sierra Leone, often serving in high-risk environments.

India's peacekeepers are globally respected for their professionalism, neutrality, and humanitarian approach. The country's long-standing contribution was recognized in 2023 when the UN posthumously awarded the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal to Indian peacekeepers Shishupal Singh and Sanwala Ram Vishnoi, and civilian UN worker Shaber Taher Ali, for their sacrifices in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MEA, 2025).

India has also been a global advocate for gender equality in peacekeeping. In February 2025, the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK) hosted the Conference on Women Peacekeepers from the Global South in New Delhi, gathering participants from 35 nations. This initiative underscored India's leadership in promoting women's participation in peace operations and advancing the UN's Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda (MEA, 2025).

India's Broader Engagement and Strategic Role in the UN

India's contributions extend well beyond peacekeeping. As highlighted by Neeralgi (2023), India played an important role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and has been an advocate for sustainable

development, global equity, and multilateral cooperation. Despite its significant contributions, India's long-standing aspiration for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council remains unrealized, primarily due to geopolitical challenges and resistance from certain states, including China.

Ramesh Thakur (2011) argues that as global power shifts from the transatlantic West to emerging economies like India, Brazil, and China, the balance of global governance must reflect this new reality. India's commitment to democracy, human rights, and responsible global engagement strengthens its claim to leadership within the UN system. Similarly, Malone (2020) notes that India's peacekeeping efforts and intellectual contributions—from administrative expertise to scholarly engagement—have deeply influenced the UN's institutional development.

C.S.R. Murthy (2010) further emphasizes that India's engagement with the UN serves both moral and strategic purposes. By participating actively in peacekeeping, India enhances its international visibility, strengthens diplomatic relations, and reinforces its case for Security Council reform. More importantly, India demonstrates that responsible global citizenship and national interest can coexist harmoniously within the UN framework.

Conclusion: India's legacy in UN peacekeeping is one of leadership, commitment, and sacrifice. From its foundational involvement in the creation of the United Nations to its contemporary peacekeeping leadership, India has consistently upheld the principles of non-violence, equality, and collective security. Its peacekeepers have served with distinction in some of the most challenging environments, embodying both professionalism and compassion.

In the 21st century, as peacekeeping missions confront new challenges such as terrorism, climate-induced conflict, and gender-based violence, India's values and experience offer vital guidance. By continuing to advocate for reform of global institutions, promote inclusivity, and lead through example, India reinforces its position as a cornerstone of the United Nations' mission to maintain international peace and security.

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