

UN Peacekeeping: Bangladesh, India and Pakistan's Troop Contributions

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PRISCILLA CABUYAO, JUN 18 2014

The Duality of UN Peacekeeping Participation: Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan's Devotion to Troop Contribution

Introduction

In the past few years, there has been an active participation of non-Western and developing countries in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations. In fact, since 2010, the top 10 UN troop-contributing countries are all non-Western and developing.[1] Idealists would contend that these states are enthusiastic to contribute troops simply because they desire to cooperate in the promotion and maintenance of international peace, however, realists would argue that they are motivated to participate in UN peacekeeping because it allows them to promote their national interests (Neack, 1995).

The UN does not oblige its member countries to contribute troops, the latter send military personnel voluntarily and decide on the number of people they intend to deploy to peace missions. As countries choose to participate of their own will, it can be argued that there must be reasons behind the top troop contributors' keen participation in UN peace operations. While the idealist view can explain the states' choice whether to send troops, the differences in the level of participation and effort of states to contribute troops can be best explained by the realist stand. Sending military personnel to peace missions must play a significant role in pursuing the interests of developing and non-Western countries for them to contribute quite a number of troops.

This paper will take a realist approach by emphasising that states' degree of commitment in UN peacekeeping are influenced by their intent to pursue national interests. The impressive devotion of top-troop contributors must be rooted in several motivations; there ought to be reasons why most non-Western and developing countries are deeply involved in UN troop contribution.

This paper will focus on the interests of the top three troop contributors: Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. It is quite interesting that Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India have consistently occupied the top 3 places of top troop contributor lists for almost a decade (United Nations, 2005–2013). The consistent level of troop contribution of these three countries validates the assumption that states are able to pursue their interests through participating in multilateral activities such as peacekeeping. Contributing troops have been effective for the realisation of different aspects of Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India's national interests, and thus they would like to maintain and preserve the intensity of their participation in UN peace operations. If states see that their interests are promoted by the international status quo, they will do whatever they can to support the international status quo (Neack, 1995).

Among the different roots and aspects of the realist tradition, which are often criticised as extremely pessimistic and radical for a period where cooperation among states is evident, Hans Morgenthau's principle on the coexistence of ethics and interest could best support the argument of this paper. Morgenthau does not deny the presence of morality and virtue in politics, he argued that man is bound to act in accordance to what is regarded as universally right, but is also always in pursuit of the realisation of his goals and interests (Cozette, 2008). The participation of states in UN

UN Peacekeeping: Bangladesh, India and Pakistan's Troop Contributions

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peacekeeping missions is obviously regarded as a noble act. However, it cannot be denied that states also receive a number of benefits from participating in peacekeeping missions. It would be ideal to believe that the top three troop contributors' participation in UN peacekeeping is entirely for the promotion of international peace. However, the reality is that Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India have stayed on top of the troop contributor rankings because UN peacekeeping has been convenient and practical for them, for it has allowed them to pursue different interests.

Economic Interests

Both the individuals and the state are able to pursue their economic interests through UN peace missions, and thus both are also motivated to participate in them. Kudesia and Rubenstein (2009) argue that 'peace operations and the opportunity to participate in one are regarded as income generators and incredibly beneficial to participate in' (436).

The UN compensates countries that contribute troops for about US\$1000 per soldier per month, but national governments determine the salaries of their soldiers.[2] Whether a soldier receives the full amount from the UN or a wage that is adjusted according to his national military rank is decided by the contributing state. In the case of Pakistan, the national government pays troops based on its own salary scale. Ergo, the surplus of the salary from the UN adds to its national treasury (Krishnasamy, 2002). The income generated in peacekeeping could be a huge motivator for Pakistan in sending their armies to UN missions.

Similar to Pakistani soldiers, Bangladeshi troops are also able to help their country's economy through UN peacekeeping. In fact, according to the country's Permanent Representative to the UN, from 2009 to 2012, the Bangladeshi troops were able to bring in Tk75 billion (US\$917 million) to the country (Chowdhury, 2012). The remarkable contribution of Bangladesh in UN peacekeeping can also be attributed to the enthusiasm of the soldiers themselves, as the country would not be able to send a large number of troops if the soldiers do not want to participate in the first place. Aside from their monthly salary, Bangladeshi peacekeepers also receive remuneration and food rations from the national government. Chowdhury (2012) explains that:

'money earned from the peacekeeping operation provides a sense of security in a country with no practical social security programme for its 160 million people'.

Compared with Pakistan and Bangladesh, India has a better economic status, and it can be argued that financial gain is not a major motivator in contributing thousands of soldiers for UN peace operations. This is true to a large extent, however, it cannot be denied that it is still able to benefit economically in contributing troops. The financial rewards from India's dedicated participation in UN missions can be considered as bonuses that come with the more crucial motivators for its large troop contribution. Bullion (1997) explains that similar to fellow South Asian countries that are also top troop contributors, India acknowledges that 'payment by the UN helps them offset the large standing armies they wish to maintain for local strategic reasons' (106).

Soldiers from developing and non-Western countries might appreciate the salary from the UN more than their Western counterparts. After the conversion to the local currency, the salary can be a doubled or tripled equivalent of what could be earned in their home countries, whereas for Western soldiers, the salary might not be as tempting. Troops from non-Western and developing countries are more easily motivated to serve as peacekeepers than those from developed countries, hence the trend in the troop contributor rankings.

Professional Interests

Aside from economic rewards, troops can also gain non-monetary benefits such as new military skills and training that they would not experience in local assignments. UN peace operations provide troops actual field experiences, international exposure, and an opportunity to receive training from more trained and equipped troops from other countries. For instance, before their deployment for the peace operation in Haiti, Bangladeshi troops were trained by the US Special Forces and the British Army to use new weapons and military vehicles during a stop-over in Puerto Rico (Krishnasamy, 2003). As Axe (2010) explains, training for UN peace operations is extremely rewarding for Bangladeshi airmen. For example, Bangladeshi pilots stationed in Dungen, Congo were able to fly at least 300 hours a

UN Peacekeeping: Bangladesh, India and Pakistan's Troop Contributions

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year, in contrast, they are only able to exercise flying for less than 100 hours annually back home. This kind of experience is tremendously beneficial to under-funded and ill-trained armies from developing countries (Kudesia and Rubenstein, 2009).

However, in the case of India, the professional benefits are the lessons and strategies they can apply to conflicts back home. Its army is one of the largest in world, and is not one would regard as ill-trained. Bullion (1997) argues that Indian troops' participation in UN peacekeeping provides them

'valuable experience which some commentators have more controversially suggested could be utilized for domestic conflict resolution in divided states such as Assam, the Punjab and Kashmir'.

Apart from training and experiences, UN peacekeeping has provided Pakistan an initiative to improve its military recruitment system. The Pakistan Army wants to ensure that it deploys soldiers that are patient, disciplined, sensitive, and understanding, and thus developed a strict selection process for recruitment (Krishnasamy, 2002).

Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India are motivated to contribute a great number of troops for UN peace missions because it is a venture that gives them a number of profits. It is rational for states to adopt policies that are compatible with their interests (Oppenheim, 2002). It is thus practical for the top troop-contributing countries to participate in an activity that gives them a good name in the international community and at the same time an opportunity to reap a number of rewards. Morgenthau (1948/1993) argues that states are capable of pursuing policies that value the interests of other states, while still protecting and elevating their own.

Political Interests

Compared with economic and professional interests, political interests is probably the most important motivator for top troop-contributing countries. While reaping the economic and professional rewards of contributing troops for UN peace operations is more instantaneous and straightforward, the political rewards take a longer time, perhaps even a couple of years, to be realised. As mentioned previously, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India, have been the consistent top 3 contributors of troops for UN peace operations for almost a decade now, and their length and level of service demonstrates their desire to preserve their status in UN peacekeeping. India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have established a reputation of having an active participation in international peacekeeping, and they favour the image they portray in the international community.

For Pakistan, working with international organisations such as the UN is a way to identify itself as a member of the international community (Krishnasamy, 2001). It has an ambition of becoming a 'good international citizen' with 'international responsibilities', which includes preserving international peace and security through a proactive involvement in UN peacekeeping. Political image is very important to Pakistan, as it does not want to be regarded as a weak or 'failed state' (Krishnasamy, 2002). Pakistan's concern regarding its image could be rooted in its larger goals. Before it can pursue its international interests, it should be able to assert its strengths and capabilities first. According to Morgenthau (1948/1993), others' impression of us is as important as what we actually are. One's characteristics and qualities can only be regarded as true when there is affirmation and validation from his fellowmen. Pakistan's image as a stable nation has been blemished by internal conflicts and military coups, and it struggles to project an image of a country which values peace, and what better way to demonstrate it by being deeply involved in UN peacekeeping. However, Pakistan has reasons that go beyond the goal of being regarded as a nation that is committed to global peace. It aims to establish bilateral relations with major powers such as the United States, which had deep concerns regarding Pakistan's nuclear programme in the 1990s. Pakistan tried to iron out the tension by supporting US-led multinational force and peacekeeping policies through the UN (Krishnasamy, 2002).

Bangladesh is also concerned with its image, and it also sees UN peacekeeping as an influential factor in building one's reputation. However, its objective to protect and improve its image is still tied to its economic interests. Bangladesh strives to have a good reputation because it desires to attract foreign aid and investments. It recognises the fact that as a small state, it needs the aid of powerful states in some of its concerns. Krishnasamy (2003) explains that Bangladesh is active in UN peacekeeping because it 'is motivated by the long-term goals of securing external

UN Peacekeeping: Bangladesh, India and Pakistan's Troop Contributions

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relations and mobilising foreign aid and support for its internal economic recovery. The need to attract foreign support has led to Bangladesh strengthening its image and increasing its presence in the comity of other states and within the international community at large' (43).

While Bangladesh's commitment to UN peacekeeping is explained by its need to please the great powers, India's is explained by its need to become one. As a regional power in South Asia, India aspires to be recognised as a great power that can influence the world stage, and this ambition is one of the factors that drive its investment of energy and efforts in international affairs such as UN peacekeeping (Krishnasamy, 2001). As a high-profile international activity, participation in peacekeeping can elevate one's status and influence (Monnagotla, 1996). More importantly, the committed participation in UN peacekeeping could help it realise its long-time ambition of becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council (Bullion, 1997; Thakur, 2011). There has been clamour for the reform of the UN system, and according to Bullion, 'any expansion of the Security Council membership would lead to serious consideration of India's candidacy, and in this respect India's peacekeeping contributions would stand it in good stead' (107).

Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan each have their own political interests and motives that drive one's dedication in contributing troops for UN peace operations. However, as the consistent top 3 troop contributors for many years now, it is inevitable to broach the subject of their active participation in UN peacekeeping as being influenced by their relationships with each other. India has been perceived as a threat in the South Asian region, and Pakistan and Bangladesh react to this as a state affected by past tensions and as a weak state paranoid about its security respectively.

Krishnasamy (2002) argues that,

'given the history and nature of Indo-Pakistan relations, one cannot dismiss the fact that Pakistan may also be motivated by the desire to compete with India in UN peacekeeping' (113).

Pakistan seeks to establish its credibility in peacekeeping as it sees the UN as a forum where it can sway the position of major powers regarding the Kashmir dispute, however, India is not allowing it to have an advantage as it is also quite dedicated in contributing troops. Peacekeeping thus is also an arena for inter-regional rivalry and competition (Bullion, 1997). In the case of Bangladesh, India's history of occupying several areas and territories in South Asia has been a source of insecurity. It thus makes sure that it is seen as an active member of the UN through its peacekeeping because it regards the institution as a key to the preservation of the safety of small and weak states (Krishnasamy, 2003).

Conclusion

For almost a decade, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India have consistently been the top 3 contributors of troops for UN peace operations. It is ideal to think that this trend is a clear manifestation of the three states' pure commitment to international peacekeeping. However, the reality is that UN peacekeeping is an instrument for the top 3 contributors to pursue economic, professional, and political interests. Their active participation in UN peace missions is reciprocated by a number of benefits and rewards. The international community could regard Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh as valuable, responsible, and reliable supporters of peacekeeping, and this is perfectly fine, however, it cannot be denied that behind their consistent performance in peacekeeping are motivations and goals that are difficult to disregard and leave behind.

According to Morgenthau, states always yearn to pursue their interests even if they strive to work for the common good (Cozette, 2008). It is impossible for them to deny their inherent selfishness (Wong, 2000). Even though top troop contributors assert that their behaviour toward UN peacekeeping is solely for the betterment of the international society, it cannot be denied that their actions are heavily driven by the pursuit of their interests. Morgenthau (1948/1993) explains that

'all nations are tempted—and few have been able to resist the temptation for long—to clothe their own particular

UN Peacekeeping: Bangladesh, India and Pakistan's Troop Contributions

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aspirations and actions in the moral purposes of the universe' (13).

States will always be conflicted because prioritising their goals will always be in their nature, but at the same time, they also want to be good international citizens.

Because the conflict within the very nature of states is impossible to eliminate, the best way to act is to serve both the interests of others and themselves. Morgenthau underscores the 'importance of emphasizing *both* the national interest and moral principles of foreign policy' (Murray, 2001, 107). India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan might have realised that UN peacekeeping is an effective way to fulfil their responsibilities to themselves and to the world, hence their track record in contributing troops.

As for the other top contributors which did not match the consistency of the top 3 in UN peacekeeping participation, that is, those which are frequently in the top 10 but have always exchanged ranking positions, it could be that they have other options and choices in pursuing their interests or they are not strong enough to juggle a deep commitment to an international activity while also looking after themselves. As most of the countries in the top 10 troop contributor rankings are non-Western and developing, the latter point is more likely to be a suitable explanation. On the other hand, the first point could explain the lacklustre performance of Western and developed countries in contributing troops for UN peace missions. Aligned with the economic benefits that non-Western countries reap from their strong troop contribution is what they cannot contribute. Interestingly, the top 5 contributors to the UN peacekeeping budget are developed countries: USA, Japan, UK, Germany, and France (UN, 2012). In addition, most industrialised and Western countries have advanced, well-trained and well-funded armies and they already have achieved strength and power in the international arena.

By doing what is good in the eyes of the international community, that is, serving the needs of other states by contributing troops for UN peace missions, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are at the same time able to pursue their own interests. It is possible to 'respect the interests of other nations, while protecting and promoting' one's own (Morgenthau, 1948/1993, 13). It is ideal to think that top troop contributors are doing what they do solely for the benefit of the international community. However, the reality is that they do so because they want to achieve their goals and objectives. UN peacekeeping has become a convenient, rational, and practical activity for Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India to participate in as they are able to hit two birds with one stone. These three states try to maintain their status in UN peacekeeping as it is extremely beneficial to them. They are able to pursue their national interests while enjoying a favourable reputation as peacekeepers.

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UN Peacekeeping: Bangladesh, India and Pakistan's Troop Contributions

Written by Priscilla Cabuyao

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[1] The last time a Western country ranked in the top 10 was in 2009, with Italy placing 10th (UN, 2004-2012).

[2] See <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/financing.shtml>

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