

## **Ukraine Conflict: Is UN peacekeeping an option?**

*Major General AK (Dr) Bardalai, Retired<sup>1</sup>*

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has entered the second month but with no sign of a ceasefire yet. The flurry of diplomatic activities combined with the threat of more economic sanctions continues. Meanwhile, Poland has suggested a kind of peace mission as an interim measure.<sup>2</sup> Gowan, The UN Director of Crisis Group, even though has not outrightly rejected the Polish 'Peace Mission,' rightly pointed out that "There is a natural tendency in moments of crisis to raise the idea of "peacekeeping" in a vague way, much as Poland has done. In the case of Ukraine, it would be unwise to invest too much hope in the prospects for peace operations." Gowan observed that such an idea of using Blue Helmets came up earlier also in 2015 and Putin was open to the idea. Comparing the starting points for a peacekeeping mission in 2015 and now, it had a better chance in 2015 because Putin was at least open to the idea. That the Blue Helmets would be able to do something is making rounds again. Even a former Canadian foreign minister and a professor of law at the University of Ottawa Axworthy and Rock believe that the UN can use Blue Helmets to save Ukrainian lives.<sup>3</sup> Without being prejudiced against the probability of success of a UN peace operation, the bigger question is who is going to participate in such a mission. Given the kind of violence that the peacekeepers would be exposed to (including the threat to peacekeepers), any peacekeeping mission for such a conflict must comprise capable peacekeepers. The desired capability is at a premium except for a few nations from the Global South and mostly from the western nations. But the member states from the West are not inclined to take part in difficult peace operations. Therefore, expecting a few developed nations from the West to field their soldiers and face the wrath of Russia is like expecting them to participate in UN peace operations in complex intra-state conflicts in Africa. These nations will be happier with their status quo contributions. But it is also a testing time for the developed nations that the conflict is not very far away from their land as both

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<sup>1</sup> Major General AK (Dr) Bardalai is a retired Indian Army Officer.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Gowan, "A Tentative First Look at Options for Peace Operations in Ukraine," *Crisis Group*, March 24, 2022, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/tentative-first-look-options-peace-operations-ukraine>

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd Axworthy and Alan Rock, "The United Nations can use its blue helmets to save lives in Ukraine," *The Globe and Mail*, March 22, 2022, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-united-nations-can-use-its-blue-helmets-to-save-lives-in-ukraine/>

President Putin and President Zelensky are now trapped inside their self-created political narratives either to come to or remain in power.

UN peacekeeping as a tool for conflict management serves the best when there is consent from the parties to the conflict for the deployment of the peacekeepers. Given the suffering, there are chances that Ukraine might agree to a peacekeeping mission just to alleviate the suffering of the civilians. As noted by Gowan earlier, Putin was open to the idea in 2015 possibly with the hope for the Minsk Agreement could be implemented in letter and spirit. To deploy peacekeepers without the consent of the parties to the conflict is against the first cardinal principle of UN peacekeeping – *Consent*.<sup>4</sup> Besides, UN peacekeeping rarely succeeds when get deployed in vicious conflicts. Using statistical analysis and selected case studies, Doyle and Sambanis studied several complex peace operations since 1960 to find out why the UN tends to fail at making war and how it succeeds in some countries. They concluded that while UN peace operations can be effective in the initial years if each mission is designed to fit the conflict, UN peace operations can also be effective by supporting new actors who are sincere in their commitment to peace. They however observed that the UN would not be effective in intervening in the ongoing wars other than giving technical advice to non-UN-led multinational peace operations.<sup>5</sup>

The world is cursing Russia for the suffering of Ukraine. But there was one year time for the UN (Secretary-General) and the world leaders, when Russia dropped paratroopers near the Ukraine border on 21 February 2021 and until the actual invasion on 24 February 2022 to initiate preventive diplomacy and may be considered preventive deployment to prevent the conflict.<sup>6</sup> It is intriguing that that window was lost either deliberately or out of ignorance. It is difficult to believe that it can be out of ignorance. The world kept talking about the invasion

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<sup>4</sup> Peacekeeping principles were identified after the establishment of UN Emergency Force I (UNEF I) in Gaza. See United Nations, “*Summary Study of the Experience Derived from the Establishment and Operation of the Force: Report of the Secretary-General, A/3943*,” (October 9, 1958) and Paul F. Diehl, “First United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I)” in *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, ed. Joachim A. Koops, Norrie Macqueen, Thierry Tardy and Paul D. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 151.

<sup>5</sup> Michael W. Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Paul F. Diehl, *International Peacekeeping: With a New Epilogue on Somalia, Bosnia and Cambodia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Dennis C. Jett, *Why Peacekeeping Fails* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Lise Morje Howard, *UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); K. N. Pepra, *UN Robust Peacekeeping: Civilian Protection in Violent Civil Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Simson Shuster, “Great wars sometimes start over small offenses,” *Time*, 199, No.5-6 (February 14-21, 2022)

much before the actual invasion. But nothing was done to prevent it other than threatening and asking Russia to respect the sovereignty of Ukraine and Ukraine too believed that the West would come to its rescue. France and Germany tried but after all, Russia looks at Europe with suspicion. There was however a chance that Russia would have listened to its close friends like China (they have come very close recently and maybe united against a common rival). Sadly, neither the UN nor the West did anything to seize the initiative to assure Russia and convince Ukraine that neutrality of Ukraine is important to avoid war and can be arranged using ways other than a war of violence. The international community lost out on the theory of 'Preventive Diplomacy' as laid out by the then Secretary-General Butros Butros Ghali in *Agenda for Peace*.<sup>7</sup> The Secretary-General is best suited to begin preventive diplomacy. There are at least two earlier but similar situations if not the same when the security situation created a decision dilemma for the Security Council.

The first one was when Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal when US and UK refused to fund the Aswan Dam project after the British had handed over the canal to Egypt in June 1956. Meanwhile, Egypt began to develop closer ties with the Soviet Union and its allies impacting the oil supply to Western Europe. In addition, efforts of the UN to resolve the differences between Israel, Egypt, the UK, and France failed.<sup>8</sup> Based on a secret agreement between Israel, the UK, and France, Israel invaded Egypt on 29 October 1956. The secret plan was to Israel invade Egypt first followed by an intervention by UK and France forcing Israel to withdraw but stay back to wrest full control of the canal. Recognising the situation that the Security Council was almost paralysed, the Security Council adopted a resolution calling for an emergency meeting of the General Assembly to address the issue.<sup>9</sup> Since a collective enforcement action became politically impossible, on 2 November, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling for a ceasefire and withdrawal of forces.<sup>10</sup> UK and France insisted on the presence of an international police force before their withdrawal. On 4 November, the General Assembly passed the landmark resolution 998 authorising the Secretary-General to set

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<sup>7</sup> UN General Assembly Security Council, *Agenda for Peace*, A/47/277 – S/24111 (June 17, 1992); UN General Assembly, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, A/55/305-S/2000/809 (August 21, 2000); UN General Assembly Security Council, *High-Level Independent Panel Report*, A/70/95–S/2015/446 (June 17, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> The UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/118 (1956), October 13, 1956

<sup>9</sup> The UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/119 (1956), October 31, 1956; “Annexure: Decisions deemed Procedural,” The UN General Assembly, A/RES/267 (III), April 14, 1949

<sup>10</sup> The UN General Assembly, A/RES/997 (ES-1), November 2, 1956

up “an emergency UN international force to secure and supervise the cessation of hostility.”<sup>11</sup> While adopting the resolution, the General Assembly did not either elaborate on the strategy or the employability of the force or the composition. The strategy and the composition of the force were left to the Secretary-General. UNEF went through several stages of its mission. UK and France, even though reluctant, had pulled back by end of 1956. Israel was more problematic but eventually withdrew. Suez Canal was reopened in April 1957 under Egyptian control to international traffic, and UNEF settled down into its monitoring role on the Egyptian side of the Armistice Line. On 17 June 1967, at the request of the Egyptian government, the UNEF operation ended.

The second instance was when the Security Council was caught in the power play between the West and the Soviet Union soon after Belgium the colonial master of Congo announced Congo’s independence on 30 June 1960 and Moise Tshombe, the head of the provincial government of Katanga declared the independence of Katanga on 10 July 1960. These developments prompted Congo’s new leaders President Joseph Kasavubu and Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba to appeal to the UN on 12 July for assistance citing Belgium’s involvement in inciting the secessionist movement of Katanga.<sup>12</sup> Recognising the urgency of the situation, Dag Hammarskjöld, the Secretary-General, exercising his power under Article 99 of UN Charter XV called for an immediate meeting of the Security Council. The reasons for the Secretary-General taking the initiative calling for a meeting of the Security Council are interesting. In normal circumstances, The President of the Security Council calls a meeting of the Security Council if a dispute or situation is brought to the attention of the Security Council under Article 35 or under Article 11 (3) of the Charter. In the instant case, by exercising his power of Article 99, the Secretary-General took the lead to hasten up the process. Besides, on 17 July, the Congolese President and the Prime Minister informed the representative of the Secretary-General in Congo that if the UN is unable to ensure the withdrawal of the Belgium troops within 48 hours, they will be forced to request the intervention of the USSR.<sup>13</sup> This created a decision dilemma in the Security Council. As observed by Aksu, To the West, the reports of Belgium’s involvement were a matter of concern and so were the political and

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<sup>11</sup> The UN General Assembly, A/RES/998 (ES-1), November 4, 1956

<sup>12</sup> “Cable Dated 12 July 1960 from The President of The Republic of The Congo and Supreme Commander of The National Army and The Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence Addressed to The Secretary-General of The United Nations,” the UN Security Council, S/4382, July 13, 1960.

<sup>13</sup> “Questions Relating to the Situation in the Republic of Congo (Leopoldville),” <https://www.un.org/depts/dhl/dag/docs/congo60.pdf>

economic implications of the situation. To the Eastern bloc, more specifically the USSR, it was a good opportunity that can be used to highlight the imperialistic idea of the West if no action was taken. Overall, everybody wanted to do ‘something’. All that remained was how the Secretary-General could work around with all members and build a consensus. Hammarskjold dominated most of the discussions that followed and indirectly forced the hands of the Security Council to act.<sup>14</sup> On 14 July 1960, the Security Council adopted resolution 143 calling for the withdrawal of Belgium troops and authorising the Secretary-General “to take all necessary steps” to provide the government with “such military assistance as may be necessary” until the national security forces are able “to meet fully their tasks.”

In the case of both Gaza and Congo, the UN namely the Secretary-General took the initiative to force the General Assembly and the permanent members of the Security Council to take a decision to prevent a war. The role played by Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold in finding a solution that satisfies both sides is an example of an innovative leader. The success of both operations however depended on the initial and continuation of consent from the parties to the conflict. The period of one year from 21 February 2021 until 24 February 2022 was the window for the UN as well as the world leaders to find a solution other than war. I will go even slightly far to state that with consent from both Russia and Ukraine (because nobody wants war), the option of Preventive Deployment like it took place in the Republic of Macedonia (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) in March 1995 could have been examined.<sup>15</sup> It intrigues me why such an initiative was not taken. Who gains from the conflict? Russia and Ukraine are suffering and to a large extent the global economy. We are yet to see the worse. NATO's survival is based on the presence of threats from the East. Therefore, NATO is regaining its lost relevance. And finally, those nations that have profited from the arms sale unless these are for free (???). Therefore, were they sincere in preventing the conflict, or is it the other way around?

Has the UN failed? No. The UN is what the member states make out of it. Those who make the decisions are the same since the inception of the UN. The one who is failing is the UN leaders. If the UN and the world are still sincere in bringing a quick end to the suffering of

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<sup>14</sup> Eşref Aksu, "The UN in the Congo conflict: ONUC" in *The United Nations, intra-state peacekeeping and normative change* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2018), 100-29, <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526137906.00009>

<sup>15</sup> Thierry Tardy, United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP – Macedonia) in *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, ed. Joachim A. Koops, Norrie Macqueen, Thierry Tardy and Paul D. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 501-10.

innocent people, measures outside the political rivalry between the West and the East will have to be considered including seeking help from countries like China which even may be seeking international recognition, to play a constructive role to defuse the situation and work out a ceasefire plan.<sup>16</sup> The Secretary-General, notwithstanding his outburst condemning Russia soon after the adoption of the General Assembly Resolution on March 2, 2022, can comprise a high-level delegation (that may or may not include a representative from the West) to find an escape route for both Putin and Zelenskyy to come out from out of their political trap.<sup>17</sup> I am hopeful because, in his interview with Time, President Zelenskyy talked of making compromises.<sup>18</sup> Great leaders are known to have made compromises for the sake of their people. It depends on how far Zelensky is prepared to go to save Ukraine. His stepping down in favor of a pro-Russian government might be one of the unstated demands of President Putin, that we would never come to know.

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<sup>16</sup> Chan Kung, "China can Act as 'Constructive Mediator' in Russia- Ukraine Conflict," *Modern Diplomacy*, March 16, 2022, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/03/16/china-can-act-as-constructive-mediator-in-russia-ukraine-conflict/>

<sup>17</sup> The UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/ES-11/1, March 22, 2022. Also, see The UN News March 2, 2022, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/03/16/china-can-act-as-constructive-mediator-in-russia-ukraine-conflict/>

<sup>18</sup> "Volodymyr Zelensky in his own words," interview with Time, March 27, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2022/03/27/volodymyr-zelensky-in-his-own-words>