

Opinion

Ethiopia and UN Peacekeeping

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It must be stated from the outset that strictly speaking the role of Ethiopian UN peacekeeping history does not commence with the Korean war, though, no doubt, Ethiopian troops did play a heroic role in the Korean war until the Armistice Agreement brought the war to an end on 27 July 1953. This needs to be clarified because the idea and practice of peacekeeping is embedded in principles that are antithetical to the dynamics of the period that underpinned the nature of relations among nations, particularly those of the major powers.

Security Council resolution 82 created the basis for UN intervention in Korea when the Korean War broke out in June 1950. The passage of the Resolution was made possible by the USSR boycotting the Security Council meeting because Taiwan was given the permanent seat of the Council instead of the People's Republic of China. Obviously, under these circumstances those principles that are supposed to be the distinguishing features of peacekeeping - consent of the parties, impartiality and non-use of force except in defence of the mandate, could have had no place.

On the UN side, the war was essentially fought under U.S command. Though all together 22 nations contributed troops, it was the U.S which played the major role in all areas, including in the contribution of troops and carrying the financial burden for the war. In other words, it would not be valid to take the Korean War as the beginning of UN Peacekeeping.

Strictly speaking, UN peacekeeping has in fact a much longer history, for it began in 1948 in the Middle East in connection with the need to observe and maintain the ceasefire during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Page 2 per 4 It was in May of that year that the Security Council authorized the deployment of UN military observers to create the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) to maintain, as already said, the Armistice Agreement. Ethiopia's first major involvement in peacekeeping was with United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC). The mandate of ONUC was to ensure the withdrawal of Belgian forces following the independence of the country on 30 June 1960. It is to be recalled how the then Secretary- General of the UN, Dag

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Hammarskjöld, lost his life in a plane crash whose precise cause continues to be shrouded in mystery. The deployment of UN peacekeepers was made necessary because the Belgians were continuing to stir trouble and Patrice Lumumba and his colleagues asked for UN support. Those times were difficult. Even nationalists were seen as communist. That peacekeeping mission which was the UN's first major mission with significant military capabilities did witness Ethiopia's first notable participation in UN peacekeeping. It was not only through the deployment of troops that Ethiopia contributed to the Mission. Ethiopia's Lieutenant-General Kebede Guebre also served as force commander from April 1962 till July 1963. Other two generals from Norway and

Nigeria served in the same position before the Mission ended on 30 June 1964. It was 460 Ethiopian troops of the Imperial Guard who were the first to arrive in Congo along with 3,500 UN soldiers of other nationalities. The Ethiopian Brigade was called Tekel which is a reference to the Emperor. Page 3 per 4 Altogether, in the course of the mission, some 3,000 Ethiopians took part in the operation. Ethiopia also contributed an air force squadron. It is reported that the "Ethiopian 3rd Brigade was distinguished for having provided decisive artillery support in the UN's siege of Kibushi in late 1962 /early 1963". In total 93,000 peacekeepers are reported to have served in the Congo from various nations until 1964. Among those who played significant roles were, first of all, from India and then, Sweden and Canada. Even those from Malaya (now Malaysia) played a very important role.

There is no doubt UN peacekeeping has been totally transformed now. Today the UN peacekeeping budget is a whopping \$6.37 billion, while the regular budget is a mere 3.4 billion. It is also obvious the Security Council plays a more critical role and, within the Council, it is essentially the three Western countries that more or less set the tone. With respect to the role Ethiopia has been playing, there is no doubt it has increased many fold and some of its contributions have indeed been very historic. It is to be recalled that it was critical for Ethiopia to replace the troops from France following the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the tragic failure of UNAMIR to protect the people. Ethiopian troops were deployed following the adoption of resolution 929 (1994) on 22nd June which expanded UNAMIR. It demanded some courage for Ethiopia so soon after the establishment of the new government for the country to accept that kind of enormous responsibility. In subsequent years, the role of Ethiopia in UN peacekeeping continued to grow reaching more than 8,000 uniformed personnel and the country becoming the leading troop contributor. Ethiopian troops were in Darfur Page 4 per 4 (UNAMID), in Abyei (UNISFA) and in South Sudan (UNMISS). The story behind the formation of UNISFA is particularly worth recounting because that mission is entirely made up of Ethiopian troop because the parties that were not in speaking terms refused to accept troops from any other

country except from Ethiopia. UN sources now indicate that at present the leading troops contributors are: Bangladesh (7,233), Nepal (6,251), followed by India and Rwanda. In 2023 more than 90,000 troops, police and civilian personnel carry out duties in peacekeeping. It is unlikely that the need would decline because peace continues to elude the international community. Therefore, the opportunities are always available for Ethiopia to enhance its role in UN peacekeeping. But, of course, first of all, our greatest responsibility is to make sure our own country would be peaceful and secure.