

Experience as Chief Military Observer of.....

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was established in 1993, little progress was made in resolving the issues. Till I left the mission in 1998, 167 agreements were signed by the belligerents, but none was implemented. However, one would also have to judge as to what would have happened if the UN was not there. During my tenure, though hostilities resumed three times, yet loss of lives and property were minimum due to immediate response of UNOMIG and the UNHQ. Though it was one of the most difficult period of my career after the "Bangladesh War of Liberation," yet I enjoyed the challenges and managed the affairs of the Mission to the entire satisfaction of International Community. After my return to Bangladesh, Special Representative of the Secretary General wrote to Bangladesh Permanent Mission in New York, "General Harun has consistently demonstrated objectivity, the ability to remain calm under pressure, and self control and the leadership in the most stressful situations" Today on this UN day I admire the contribution of all Military Observers of 24 Nations for their dedication and tireless efforts for establishing peace in UNOMIG.

28. Relationship with the Non-governmental Organizations. There were in total 79 NGOs and United Nations' Humanitarian Assistance in the conflict zone. The aim of all these organizations was to mitigate the sufferings of the

distressed people and rehabilitate the Internally Displaced Persons. However, since each of these agencies had their own mandate, which seldom coincided with each other, a concerted effort could not be made and rehabilitation remained a far cry.

29. As regards to the Non-Governmental Organizations, my role was two-fold. Firstly, to maintain a secured environment in mission area through military activities for those agencies or organizations to work. Secondly, to make effort for making a coordinated action plan so that the help reaches the affected people always and everywhere, an objective that was seldom achieved.

30. Security Situation: Security hazards remained one of the main issues for UNOMIG operations. Everybody in the area knew that, any one putting on a blue helmet is surely an unarmed person. So, the Military Observers became the most precious but softest targets for drawing the attention of the international community as well as the United Nations. As a result, repeated incidents of abduction, robbery, ambush, etc. took place in the mission area. Even my patrol was ambushed on three occasions. On one occasion four of my fellow UN Observers were seriously injured and became crippled for life.

31. Mine and booby trap attacks by the clandestine groups against the CISPKE and the Abkhaz army were equally

applicable for the Military Observers since explosives do not recognize friends and foe. At the later stage, although they started using the control devices, the treat remained alive.

32. Experience as Military Commander: It was really interesting to work with the military officers of twenty-four countries from different parts of the world. Their culture, religion, language and habits; everything was different except that all of them were military persons. As their commander I enjoyed working with them. However, as usual there had been some problem areas like:

a. Standard of training varied widely from country to country.

b. Communication amongst the Military Observers was a big problem due to the language barrier. Level of understanding of English varied widely and passing the exact information was a difficult task.

c. Though most of the Observers were good at driving the utility vehicles, very few of them had the experience of driving the heavy vehicles like MAMBA, especially in a hilly and snowy terrain.

d. At times the cultural differences among the Observers also became a point of misunderstanding.

e. Due to lengthy and cumbersome administrative chain, providing logistic support to the operational team bases and patrols was a major problem.

f. Due to absence of the agreed map as per the Moscow Agreement, establishing the ceasefire line accurately was a difficult proposition.

33. Along with political and diplomatic efforts, military components of UNOMIG had to put in untiring efforts to maintain the status quo on the ground and keep the conflicting armed factions separated from each other. For this I tried to maintain regular contact, liaison and co-ordination with the Local Military Leaders of different armed groups. Despite the wholehearted effort of UNOMIG, full-scale hostilities broke out thrice during my tenure and ceasefire agreement had to be arranged and reestablished. Among many organizations, the people with Blue Helmets were the only person who remained available to general mass on the ground throughout the conflict zone and the Military Commander was the most visible person in that context. I had to make deliberate attempt to ensure neutrality of the UN through all the activities of all members of UNOMIG. As regards the conflict itself, my personal assessment are:

a) Due to the difference of opinion, parties involved in the mediation were not serious enough to implement the UN mandate.

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A recount of diplomatic efforts in acquiring peace missions from the UN



HEMAYET UDDIN

Peacekeeping is one area where Bangladesh Public diplomacy has been at its best. Today Bangladesh is the top among the TCC and PCC countries in the world. Our commitment to peace and our credibility in fulfilling the mandate of the PKOs including protecting the lives of civilians, has raised our profile in the comity of nations to the highest levels. For this we have to pay our tribute to the diplomatists at the policy-making and procedural negotiations and the honesty, integrity and professionalism of the armed forces and civilian police personnel who have put their lives in harm's way, for the cause of global peace, security and stability and earning the acceptance and confidence of the government and common people of the host countries.

The Father of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in his speech at the UN General Assembly in September 1974 said, "Peace is an imperative for the survival of mankind; it represents the deepest aspirations of men and women

throughout the world. Peace to endure must, however, be peace based upon justice". These visionary words, remain true and real to this very day to inspire and motivate us to take the lead in global peacekeeping operations.

Bangladesh's commitment to peacekeeping is ingrained in the country's Constitution. It commits us, inter alia to "make our full contribution towards international peace and cooperation" - "peaceful settlement of international disputes, and respect for international law and the principles enunciated in the United Nations Charter, (and on the basis of those principles shall - (a) strive for the renunciation of the use of force in international relations and for general and complete disarmament; (b) uphold the right of every people freely to determine and build up its own social, economic and political system by ways and means of its own free choice; and (c) support oppressed peoples throughout the world waging a just struggle against imperialism, colonialism or racialism.)"

In addition to maintaining peace in extremely volatile situations, Bangladeshi peacekeepers have earned appreciation for supporting democratic elections, protecting civilians, especially women and children, repatriating refugees, and for

their multifarious roles in areas of disarmament, demobilization, reconciliation and reintegration.

Diplomacy and Peacekeeping are intimately interlinked and, to play a proactive role, it calls for astute diplomacy on the part of professionals on the ground and the Foreign Ministry. The linkage between diplomacy and peacekeeping begins from the conceptual stage and continues till the very end, i.e. termination of the Mission and withdrawal of the Peacekeepers. During this entire period, it becomes incumbent on those concerned to remain fully engrossed in monitoring the developments both in the crisis area and elsewhere in international relations

Peacekeeping Operations in my mind has two essential ingredients: Diplomacy in policy formulation and decision-making and the peacekeeping implementation by military and police forces and other stakeholders on the ground. As a TCC and PCC, it is our responsibility that we negotiate the best terms that would meet our objectives before we commit our peacekeepers to any particular Mission.

Our commitment to international peace and security as well as stability, democracy and the protection of basic human rights conforms to the provisions of UNDHR

and other HR Instruments. In our own lifetime we are witness to some of the worst human rights violations in history, the withering of basic ingredients of a viable state, resulting in anarchy, and breakdown of the political, administrative and judicial and legislative machinery, degrading countries to a failed state. When a country reaches such a state and a humanitarian situation is created, the international intervention is called for to restore peace and stability and save human lives.

The concept of peacekeeping is drawn from the premise that absence of war is no guarantee of peace. Domestic turmoil, sectarian strife, ethnic and inter-faith hatred, religious extremism as well as the lure of looting of natural resources can result in bloodshed of millions. In situations such as this, the International Community cannot be expected to be a silent spectator, although reluctance, lack of political will to act and procrastination of the international community have contributed to escalation of violence and loss of lives and often genocide. In such situations, diplomacy comes into play in de-escalation of tensions and violence and restoration of peace by seeking out the options. Peace Keeping is one.

Since the beginning of the new

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