

United Nations Peacekeeping: Challenges, Reforms and the Role of Bangladesh

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Abstract

United Nations peacekeeping has evolved from modest ceasefire observation missions into complex multidimensional operations that combine security stabilization, political facilitation, civilian protection, and institutional rebuilding. While peacekeeping remains one of the most visible expressions of multilateral cooperation, its operational environment has become significantly more demanding. Mandates are broader, threats are asymmetric, and geopolitical consensus is often fragile.

This article examines the evolution of UN peacekeeping, identifies structural and operational challenges, and reflects on reform efforts aimed at strengthening mission effectiveness. Particular emphasis is placed on Bangladesh's sustained engagement as a leading troop-contributing country. From a practitioner-informed perspective, the article explores how peacekeeping contributes not only to global security but also to national professional development, institutional learning, and diplomatic positioning. The discussion integrates operational realities with policy analysis to provide a balanced academic and training-oriented assessment.

Keywords: United Nations Peacekeeping, Peacekeeping Operations, Peacekeeping Reform, International Security, Multilateral Cooperations, Conflict Resolution, Civilian Protection, Security Governance, Troop-Contributing Countries (TCCs).

Peacekeeping as Institutional Practice, Not Mere Policy

Peacekeeping is frequently discussed in theoretical terms — consent, impartiality, non-use of force. Yet for those engaged in training, deployment preparation, and operational planning, peacekeeping is far more concrete. It involves convoy planning across difficult terrain, negotiation with local actors, coordination between military and civilian components, and constant adaptation to unpredictable security conditions.

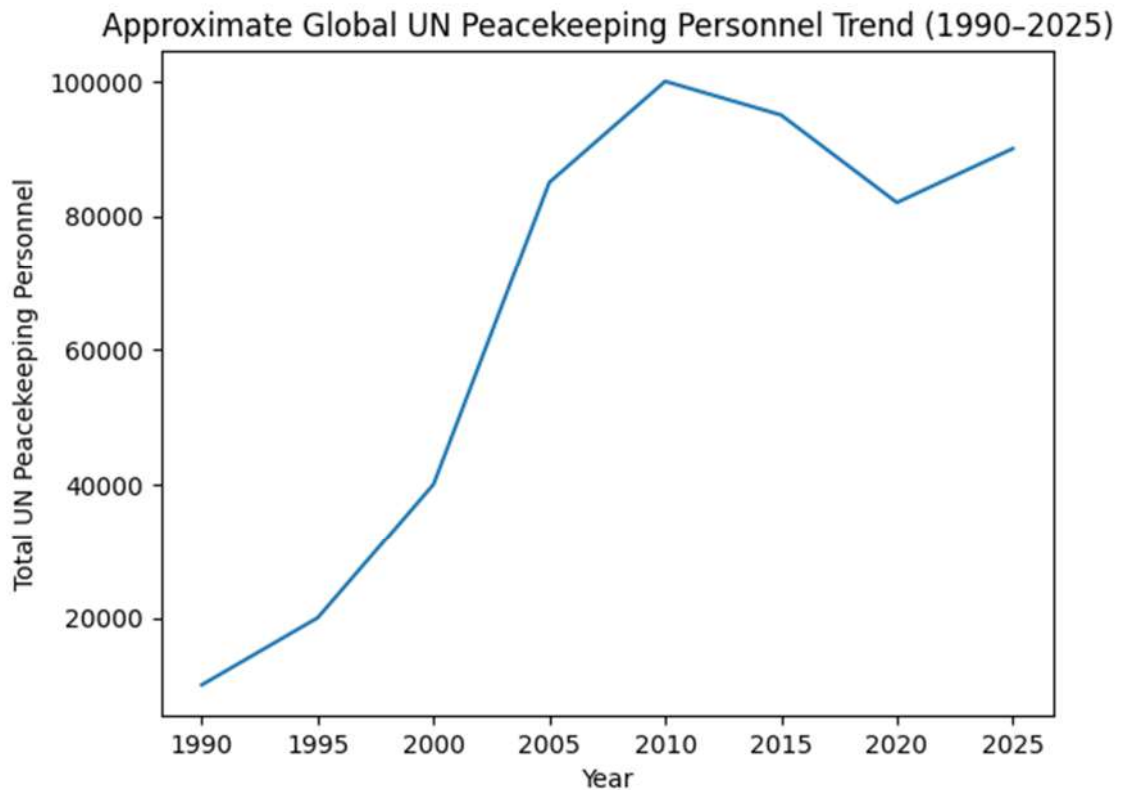
Although the UN Charter does not explicitly mention peacekeeping, the practice emerged in 1948 as a pragmatic solution to political deadlock. Over time, what began as lightly armed observation missions developed into multidimensional enterprises integrating soldiers, police officers, engineers, medical professionals, political advisors, and humanitarian coordinators.

The expansion of peacekeeping reflects the transformation of conflict itself. Contemporary conflicts are rarely conventional interstate wars. They are more often internal struggles

characterized by fragmented authority, militia activity, weak governance, and humanitarian vulnerability. Peacekeeping missions therefore operate in environments where there may be no clear “peace” to keep — only a fragile political process requiring stabilization.

Global Expansion and Contraction: Understanding the Trend

The global personnel trend illustrates how UN peacekeeping expanded dramatically after the Cold War. From relatively modest deployments in the early 1990s, total personnel surged in the 2000s, peaking around 2010. This increase corresponded to complex missions in Africa and other conflict-affected regions.



However, the subsequent gradual decline highlights two realities. First, peacekeeping is not permanently expanding; it responds to political authorization and strategic demand. Second, global consensus fluctuates. When geopolitical divisions intensify, mandate ambition often decreases.

This fluctuation matters for training institutions. Planning cannot assume steady growth. Preparedness must account for expansion, contraction, and mandate evolution.

Mandate Complexity: Between Ambition and Feasibility

Modern missions are tasked with protecting civilians, supporting elections, facilitating disarmament, reforming police institutions, and enabling humanitarian access — often simultaneously. While multidimensional mandates reflect holistic understanding of conflict, they also create operational tension.

For example, protecting civilians requires rapid mobility, intelligence gathering, and sometimes robust deterrence. Supporting political dialogue requires neutrality and careful diplomacy. Balancing these functions is not merely conceptual; it affects daily field decisions.

In many missions, commanders must interpret mandates under uncertain conditions. Overly broad mandates risk strategic ambiguity. Yet overly narrow mandates risk irrelevance. The challenge lies in calibrating ambition with resources.

Financial and Political Constraints

Peacekeeping is funded through assessed contributions. Financial sustainability depends heavily on major contributors. Budgetary debates influence procurement, force generation, and mission renewal.

Equally important is political consensus within the Security Council. Divergence among permanent members can limit mandate clarity or delay strategic decisions. Peacekeeping thus operates within broader geopolitical dynamics beyond the control of field commanders.

For training institutions, this means preparing personnel for political sensitivity. Operational effectiveness depends not only on tactical skill but also on understanding diplomatic context.

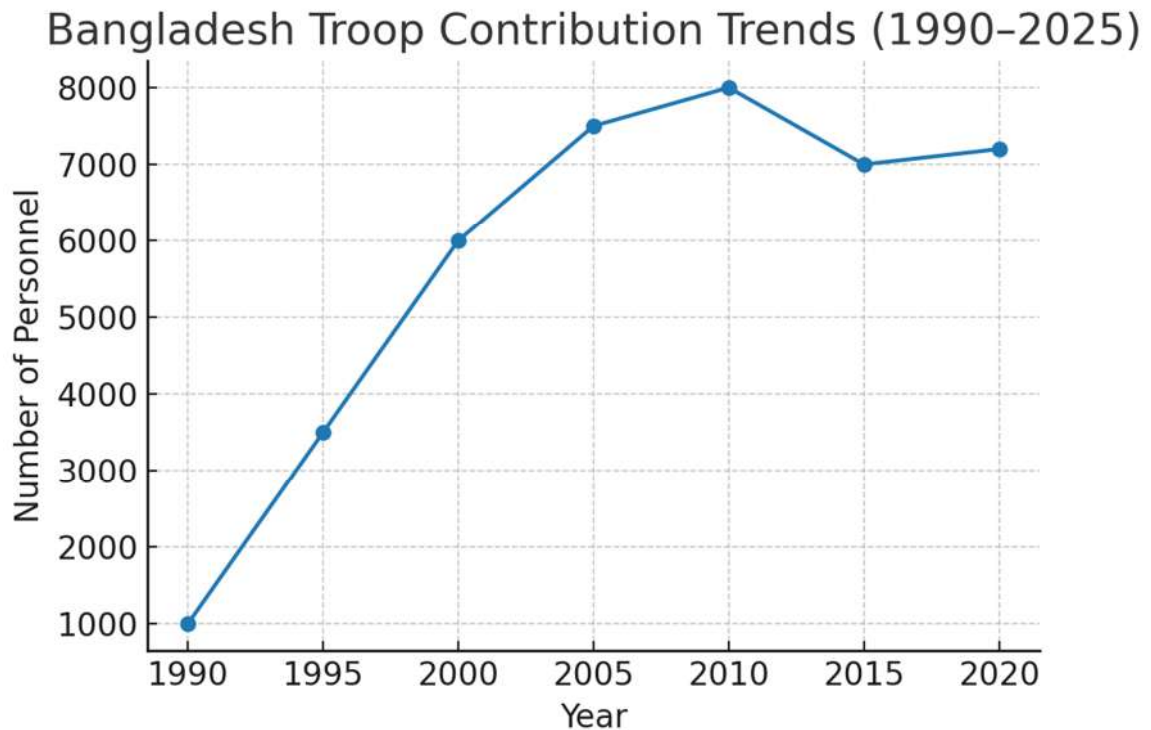
Operational Realities: Mobility, Protection and Intelligence

Peacekeepers today confront improvised explosive devices, extremist groups, misinformation campaigns, and vast ungoverned spaces. Traditional static observation posts are insufficient in such environments.

Mobility has become central. Engineering units that construct roads and bridges directly influence mandate implementation. Aviation support enhances rapid response. Medical units sustain force resilience.

Bangladesh's Expanding Contribution

Bangladesh's troop contribution trend demonstrates steady growth from limited participation in the early 1990s to peak deployment in the mid-2000s. Even after global contraction around 2020, contribution levels remained substantial.

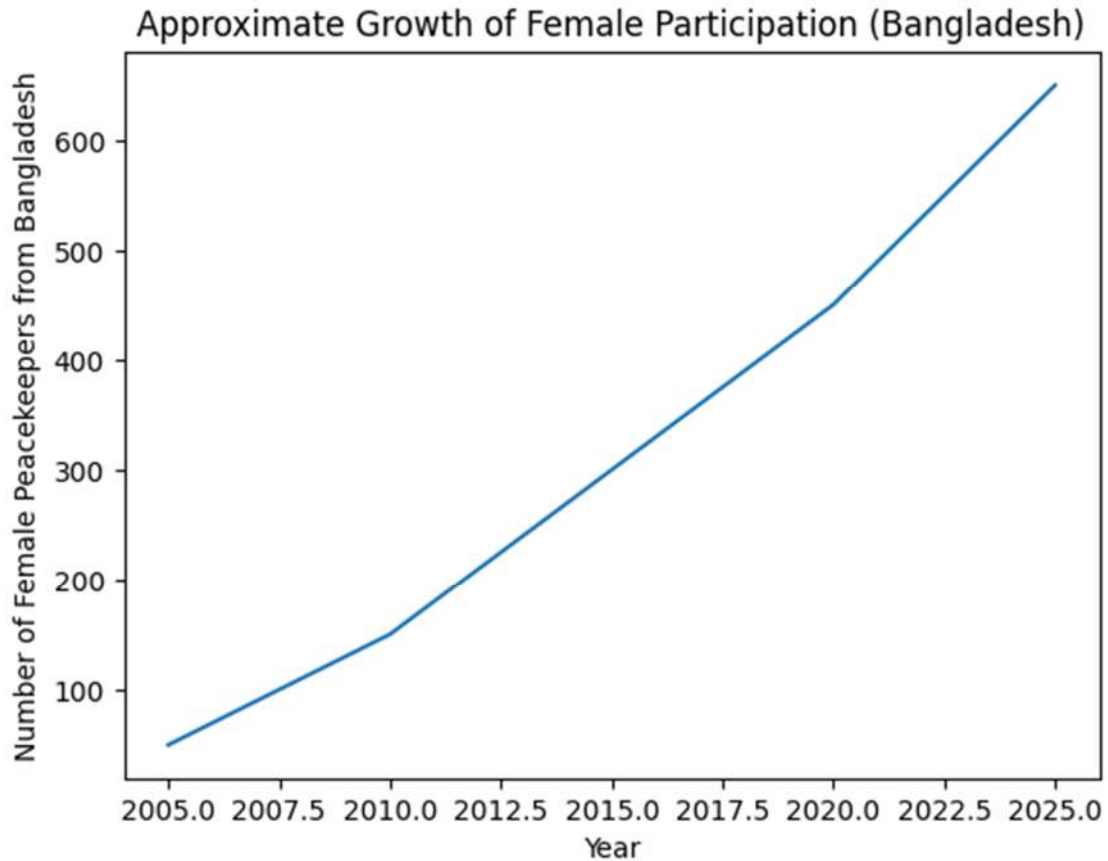


This consistency reflects more than symbolic engagement. It indicates institutional commitment and structured preparation.

Peacekeeping has become integrated into Bangladesh's defense and police professional pathways. Personnel returning from missions bring exposure to multinational command structures, civil-military coordination mechanisms, and protection-of-civilians frameworks that enrich domestic training.

Gender Inclusion and Operational Legitimacy

The growth of female participation marks a significant evolution. Female peacekeepers enhance community engagement, particularly in contexts where local women may hesitate to interact with male officers.



Beyond symbolic value, gender inclusion improves intelligence flow, community trust, and legitimacy. The steady increase in female deployment from Bangladesh reflects both international expectations and domestic institutional adaptation.

Training curricula must therefore integrate gender-sensitive operational planning, not as an add-on but as a structural component.

Institutional Learning and Training Ecosystems

National peacekeeping training institutions play a critical role in translating global doctrine into operational readiness. Pre-deployment training now includes scenario-based exercises, cultural awareness modules, rules of engagement familiarization, and coordination simulations with civilian components.

Peacekeeping has shifted from static monitoring to dynamic stabilization. Training must reflect this shift.

Exposure to multinational exercises enhances interoperability. Simulation-based training improves decision-making under uncertainty. Lessons learned from returning contingents should systematically feed into doctrine refinement.

Reform Agendas: From Brahimi to A4P+

Institutional reform has sought to address past shortcomings. Emphasis has been placed on realistic mandates, performance accountability, and rapid deployment capacity.

However, reform cannot eliminate structural political constraints. What it can do is improve preparedness, clarify expectations, and enhance coordination mechanisms.

Technology integration — including surveillance drones and digital communication systems — is increasingly central. Yet technology must complement political engagement rather than replace it.

Strategic Dimensions for Bangladesh

Participation in peacekeeping enhances Bangladesh's diplomatic visibility. It strengthens multilateral engagement and reinforces commitment to global stability.

At the institutional level, peacekeeping serves as a professional laboratory. Exposure to diverse operational environments enhances adaptability, leadership skills, and logistical competence.

From a policy perspective, sustained engagement positions Bangladesh as a responsible stakeholder in international security governance.

Critical Reflection: Limits of Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping cannot substitute for political settlement. It can create space for negotiation, deter large-scale violence, and protect vulnerable populations. But durable peace ultimately depends on local political will.

In environments where governance collapse persists, even robust mandates face limitations. Recognizing these limits does not diminish peacekeeping's value; rather, it grounds expectations in realism.

The Road Ahead

Future missions will likely be smaller but more specialized. Rapid deployment capacity, intelligence integration, and regional partnerships will shape effectiveness.

For Bangladesh, continued investment in training, specialization, and gender inclusion will enhance both operational impact and institutional credibility.

Peacekeeping remains imperfect. Yet in a fragmented international order, it continues to represent one of the few collective mechanisms capable of stabilizing fragile environments.

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Md. Baha Uddin Khan (Bahar) is currently serving as a Manager in the Internal Audit and Compliance Department at Brac University, where he plays a key role in strengthening organizational governance, risk management, and control processes. His professional expertise lies in internal auditing, governance frameworks, compliance oversight, and institutional policy analysis, contributing to the enhancement of accountability and transparency within higher education.

In addition to his career in internal audit, Bahar has a strong background in journalism and writing. From 2009 to 2012, he worked as a journalist for several newspapers, where he covered issues related to governance, institutional reforms, and social affairs. During his student life at Cumilla Victoria Government College, he also served as the editor of the college-based newspaper, demonstrating his early commitment to critical thinking, communication, and public discourse.

Over the years, Bahar has authored numerous articles on institutional reforms, audit practices, governance, and policy analysis, reflecting his dual passion for professional auditing and intellectual engagement. His unique blend of experiences in journalism and internal auditing enables him to bring a holistic perspective to issues of governance, compliance, and institutional development.