Conflict Resolution Methodologies and Approaches: United Nations Context

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On the occasion of the 75th anniversary, it is an opportune time to revisit and rediscover the United Nations (UN) especially concerning the resolution of conflicts in the international realm. Maintenance of International Peace and Security was the very reason for its genesis on the 24th of October 1945 and continues to remain one of the vital goals of the United Nations. Time and again the UN has used and provided for different approaches and methods on Conflict Resolution. The legalities of such have been laid out in many articles of the UN Charter, like Article 1[i] Article 33[ii], Chapter VI[iii]& Chapter VII[iv] as also other UN offices and organs like the General Assembly and the Secretary-General**.**

Different Conflict Resolution skills, methods and processes have been utilized, depending upon the context and the situation on the ground. These processes/activities often overlap, complement and reinforce one another, which in turn helps them to be more effective as well as holistic in their efforts towards establishing Peace and Conflict Resolution.

The UN's approach to ***Conflict Prevention*** has evolved. The General Assembly and Security Council resolutions (A/70/262 and S/2282, respectively)[v] on "sustaining peace" were adopted in 2016. These involve the application of structural or diplomatic measures to keep tensions and disputes from escalating and spreading into a violent conflict. Measures like timely information for crisis prevention, diffusion of hostilities before they become violent, mediation and negotiations capabilities, establishing channels of communication both formal and informal between the parties in conflict, fact-finding missions on humanitarian aid and assistance; identifying non-violent means of resolving the tensions; stop ongoing conflicts from spreading, and deter the re-emergence of violence. [vi]

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> " *The aim [of conflict prevention] must be to create a synergy with those civil society groups that are bridge-builders, truthfinders, watchdogs, human rights defenders, and agents of social protection and economic revitalisation.*"
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> - **UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan quoted in The** *Washington Times*, **23 June 2004**

A successful example of preventive action was taken in 1992 when the UN peacekeepers patrolled the Macedonia–Serbia borders and the civilian unit monitoring early signs of conflict used its "good offices" in the form of *preventive diplomacy* to address tensions rising among ethnic groups within the country. Many civil society efforts were also initiated including inter-community dialogues, promoting tolerance through radio and television programs and democratizing the media.[vii] More of such *Pro-Active strategies* like early warning systems, information gathering and detailed analysis of the drivers of the conflicts should be undertaken.

For a comprehensive understanding of Conflict Prevention approach, one can be categorise them into two types as shown below:-

Figure - 1

Types of Conflict Prevention

Direct Conflict Prevention	Indirect Conflict Prevention
These measures address immediate and instant causes of conflict	These address the root causes/structural needs/ John Burton's Basic Needs theory[viii]
More tactical & operational in nature	These measures are basic & evolving in nature
Egs. Sending high-level diplomatic missions to mediate between parties, peace keeping missions	Good offices, negotiation, mediation and special political missions
Forceful methods are used; like use of economic sanctions, inducements, or collecting weapons and demobilising the warring factions, and deployment of peacekeeping mission	Protection of human rights, minority rights, non violent responses to conflicts, involvement of women & civil society
The operational role finishes once the Peace Keeping Mission ends and leaves.	This is an ongoing peacebuilding process continuing even after the UN Peace keeping mission leaves.

Source: Annotated by the Author

Conflict Management aims to limit/ regulate the conflict. Though it is a short term measure, it does have an impact on the possibilities for a long-term settlement and resolution of Conflicts. Sometimes such limiting measures congeal the possibilities of a resolution, because they provide a stalemate/status quo to the conflict at that point of time, making it difficult for conflicting parties to move on to newer rapprochements. A case in point is the Cyprus Conflict, Since 27th March 1964, UNFICYP Peacekeeping Mission has been stationed there but no resolution of the conflict is in sight. A political stalemate continues despite some success in humanitarian and non-military spheres.

The most comprehensive process based on *mutual problem sharing needs*, with its efficacy by & large being permanent and long term, which further helps in providing a win-win situation for the parties in conflict is ***Conflict Resolution***. UN continues to play a critical role in dealing with International Conflict Resolution. There are 14 UN peacekeeping operations currently deployed and there have been a total of 71 deployed since 1948. In 2019, the Secretary-General launched the Action for Peacekeeping Initiative (A4P) to renew mutual political commitment to peacekeeping operations.[ix]

Over the years, peacekeeping has evolved from a primarily military model of observing cease-fires and the separation of forces after inter-state wars, to incorporate a complex model of many elements – military, police and civilian – working together to help lay the foundations for sustainable peace.[x] Such transformative role of the *second generation peace keeping operations* help in facilitating the political processes, assisting in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants; organization of elections and promotion of human rights.

Noteworthy instances of UN efforts in mediation were seen in Iran acceptance of UN Resolution 598 as the basis for talks with Iraq to end the *Iran-Iraq war*.[xi] *Angola-Namibia-South Africa.* Resolution 435 call for a ceasefire, a UN peacekeeping force, and UN-sponsored elections in Namibia, United Nations transition Assistance Group (UNTAG); UN Angola Verification Mission (UNAVIM); *Western Sahara*- UN-brokered peace plan calling for a cease-fire and referendum. Some *successful peacekeeping operation* also include those of United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) which organized elections and repatriated about half a million refugees; United Nations Observer Mission (ONSUL) in El Salvador ended the armed conflict and conducted elections; UN Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) ended 36 years of armed conflict; The United Nations Operations in Mozambique (UNOMOZ) helped in maintaining the peace accord; United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia monitored the peace process; United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) monitored peace agreements during and after the Civil war.

Figure - 2

Interlinked Conflict Resolution Processes

Source: Annotated by the Author

Conflict Transformation/Post Conflict Rebuilding & Reconstruction includes creating conditions to allow peace to hold and flourish. The post-reconstruction development efforts like continuously engaging with the local communities and sustaining dialogues remain crucial in maintaining peace, because such efforts help in reducing the risk of relapsing into conflict again. Such ongoing processes and reconciliation commitments are the foundation for sustainable peace and development. *John Paul Lederach[xii]* developed transformation-oriented approach highlighting the reconciliations aspects of the society.

In Liberia, the Peacekeeping Operations UNMIL accomplished its mission after 15 years. But the UN Country Team, such as the UN Development Programmes, UNICEF and the World Food Programme, continued to remain in the country for post-conflict reconstruction and development activities. After successful disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration process and peaceful elections, the mission's attention shifted to providing security for the country, helping to midwife a new army and police force and extending civil authority throughout the country. UNMIL provided technical and logistical support to various government departments.[xiii] Countries like Sierra Leone, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Timor-Leste, Liberia, Haiti and Kosovo, have been

provided with the path to normal development including; basic security, support in political transitions and building new state institutions.

India and *Bangladesh* have continued their outstanding commitment and service to the UN Peace Keeping Operations; as the top ranking contributors together with about 11,853 troops, out of total 82,245 as on 30th June 2020.[xiv] India has been the largest mission troop contributor since the inception of UN and Bangladesh too has been regularly contributing since 1988. India has taken part in 49 Peacekeeping missions with a total contribution exceeding 2, 40,000 troops[xv] and police personnel, but this has also come with a price of having lost most peacekeepers than any other member states.

The challenges faced today are innumerable and few unsuccessful peacekeeping operations like Israeli Occupation, Cambodia Violence, Somalia, Rwanda, and Darfur Conflict in Sudan remain. United Nations has seen an increase in significant use of measures like preventive diplomacy, conflict resolution and peace maintenance activities over the last few years. But to fully actualize its potential in the realm of Conflict Resolution, restructuring and reform is of paramount necessity. The UN cannot function efficiently and efficaciously, if it continues on the basis of 1945 world order. To begin with, enlarge the Security Council Permanent Members to include rising democratic powers like India, Japan, Brazil, and Germany; question the Veto; need for more regional representation and transparency in administration & working of UN. On its 75th Anniversary, the member nations should stand up together and demand restructuring for a fair and just system based on equality, representation and multilateralism.

End Notes:

[i]Chapter 1(Article 1) - Purpose and Principles, The UN is engaged for maintaining international peace and security through peaceful manners and with respect to International law and the principle of justice, Available at- http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/peace/docs/chapter1.html

[ii]Article 33- Parties to a conflict shall resolve their differences by "mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangement or other peaceful means of their own choice, Available at – https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/index.html

[iii]Chapter VI: Pacific Settlement of Disputes (Art 33-38) ibid

[iv]Chapter VII: Actions with respect to threats to peace, Breaches of the Peace and Acts of aggression (Art 39-51) ibid.
[v]https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_262.pdf
[vi]Carnegie Commission on the Prevention of Deadly Conflict Report published in 1999, Available at- http://www.carnegie.org

[vii]The Post-Conflict Reconstruction Task Frame Work Report, May 2002, Available at - <http://www.csis.org/isp/pcr/framework.pdf>.

viii John Burton, Resolving Deep-Rooted Conflicts: A Handbook, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987. Needs theory - thus postulates that human development requires the fulfillment of basic human needs such as identity, security, recognition, creativity, control, belongingness, love, choice and self-actuation.

ix International Peace Institute   Issue Brief, Sep 2018, available at - https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1809_Action-for-Peacekeeping.pdf

x United Nations Peace Keeping operations, Principles & Guidelines 2010, Available at - peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/capstone_eng_0.pdf

xi Fen osler hampson, The role of the United Nations in conflict resolution and peacekeeping, Multipolarity, Available at- https://www.e-cultura.pt/ieei_pdf/81/Fen_Osler_Hampson_The_Role_of_the_United_Nations

xii John Paul Lederach is an American Professor of International Peacebuilding at the University of Norte Dame, Norte Dame, Indiana

xiii Kingsley Ighobor, Mission accomplished: 15 years of Peacekeeping in Liberia, Africa Renewal Magazine, 2018 Available at - https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/april-2018-july-2018/mission-accomplished-15-years-peacekeeping-success-liberia

xiv Contributors to UN Peacekeeping Operations by Country and Post Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers and Troops, Available at - https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors

xv India and united nations peacekeeping and peacebuilding, Available at -
https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/pdf/menu/submenu__455847884.pdf