

## WHAT IS A PEACE-KEEPING FORCE?<sup>1</sup>

I have so far refrained from expressing my serious misgivings about the role assigned to the Indian Army under the Indo-Sri Lanka accord in the hope that the urge for peace and the goodwill of the parties could overcome any problems. But the turn of events makes it imperative that the matter should be reconsidered.

The concept of a “peace-keeping force” was invented in the wake of the Anglo-French-Israeli aggression against Egypt in 1956, as it was impossible at that time to undertake enforcement measures under the United Nations Charter. The UN Emergency Force was sent to the Sinai to separate the combatants and, thereby, facilitate a cease-fire and the withdrawal of the invading forces.

The peace-keeping force was not a fighting force. It could function only if the parties abided by their agreements in good faith. While its members were entitled to shoot in self-defence, it was not intended that the Force would resist the advance of the armed forces of either side, if they decided to resume hostilities. The UNEF exerted no pressure on the Israeli forces to withdraw to their borders – that was a matter for diplomatic action.

Subsequently, in the Congo (now Zaire), the UN peace-keeping force was obliged to maintain law and order as the Congolese army had disintegrated. It faced enormous difficulties in performing that task, especially because of the internal conflicts in the Congo and the interventions of external powers.

India contributed its troops to several UN peace-keeping operations and undertook similar operations in Korea and Indo-China, under international agreements.

In the case of Sri Lanka, however, the Indian Army was rushed into the country without an agreement among all the parties to the conflict in that country. It soon became involved in military operations to enforce “law and order and in confrontation with a guerilla force which posed no threat to the security of India. It is surprising that the defence establishment, with its long experience in peace-keeping operations, did not draw the attention of the government to the dangers, though the debacle of the United States “peace-keeping force” in Beirut was too fresh to be ignored.

It has been the policy of India since independence that the Indian Army would not be sent outside the borders of the country except in international peace-keeping operations. The only exceptions have been the use of the Indian Army for the liberation of Goa and for support to the liberation forces in Bangladesh.

The use of the Army for other purposes, especially for police operations in other countries, may have grave repercussions on Indian democracy.

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It is to be hoped that the Indian Army can soon be redeployed, with the agreement of all parties in Sri Lanka, to separate the combatants in order to facilitate negotiations and help supervise the implementation of agreements. Maintenance of law and order is the task of the police and not of the Army.