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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

South Sudan's Descent — India's Peacekeeping Commitment Faces Its Hardest Test

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SUBJECTS COVERED**IR** **SECURITY & DEFENCE****GS PAPERS****GS2****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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South Sudan's Descent — India's Peacekeeping Commitment Faces Its Hardest Test

Hindustan Times 22 March 2026 **GS2**

HT Hindustan Times | MAINS RELEVANCE: **GS Paper 2**



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India has lost more peacekeepers than any country in UN missions — should India continue large troop deployments in increasingly dangerous environments like South Sudan?"

WHY IN NEWS

The escalating South Sudan conflict — with 280,000 displaced, 160+ civilians killed in 17 days, and the military ordering closure of a UN base — places India's ~2,400 peacekeepers in UNMISS under heightened risk, reigniting the debate on India's UN peacekeeping strategy.

India's Peacekeeping Legacy

India has been the **largest cumulative troop contributor** to UN peacekeeping operations since 1950. Key data:

METRIC	INDIA
Total peacekeepers deployed (2026)	~5,500+
Peacekeepers lost in service	179+ (highest of any country)
First UN mission	Korea (1950)
Contribution to UNMISS	~2,400 (engineers, medical, infantry)
Total UN missions participated	49+

Indian peacekeepers in South Sudan provide **engineering, medical, and security services** — building roads, bridges, and airstrips; running field hospitals; and protecting civilians in Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites.

The Current Crisis

The South Sudan situation has deteriorated sharply:

- The Revitalized ARCSS (2018 peace agreement) has **effectively collapsed**
- On March 6, the SSPDF military ordered **evacuation of all civilians from Akobo town** and directed **closure of the UNMISS temporary base** — directly threatening the UN’s ability to protect civilians
- **139 civilians were killed in a single day** (March 1) at Abiemnom
- The UN Secretary-General has expressed “deep concern” and OHCHR called for war crimes investigation

The Dilemma for India

For Continued Deployment:

- ① **Multilateral credibility:** India’s UNSC permanent seat ambition requires demonstrated commitment to international peace and security
- ② **Soft power:** Indian peacekeepers are widely respected for professionalism and compassion
- ③ **Operational experience:** Real-world deployment experience is invaluable for military training
- ④ **Moral obligation:** Withdrawing when civilians face mass atrocities would be morally and diplomatically costly

Against Continued Deployment:

- ① **Risk to personnel:** 179+ fatalities is a heavy toll; South Sudan is becoming a full-scale war zone
- ② **Limited mandate effectiveness:** UNMISS’s Chapter VII mandate authorises force protection, but troop-contributing countries (including India) face restrictive ROE (Rules of Engagement)
- ③ **Cost:** India bears significant costs for deployment that are only partially reimbursed by the UN
- ④ **Domestic politics:** Indian military casualties abroad generate limited public debate — but this could change if casualties spike

What India Should Do

The editorial recommends a **calibrated approach**:

- ① **Demand mandate strengthening:** India should push in the UNSC for a more robust UNMISS mandate with clear authority to use force to protect civilians
- ② **Equipment upgrades:** Indian contingents need better protective equipment, surveillance drones, and armoured vehicles
- ③ **Diplomatic engagement:** India should leverage its relationship with both South Sudan’s government and opposition to push for ceasefire

- ④ **Red lines:** Establish clear criteria for troop withdrawal if host government deliberately endangers peacekeepers (as the Akobo base closure suggests)
- ⑤ **Rotate, don't withdraw:** Maintain presence but rotate contingents more frequently to manage fatigue and risk

UPSC RELEVANCE

UNMISS, South Sudan independence, R-ARCSS, India's peacekeeping record, IGAD.

MAINS GS-2:

India's role in UN peacekeeping, UNSC reform, international conflict resolution, India's multilateral diplomacy.

MAINS GS-3:

Internal security dimensions of peacekeeping experience.

ESSAY:

"A nation that aspires to global leadership must be willing to bear the costs of global responsibility."

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

INDIA'S UN PEACEKEEPING RECORD:

Largest cumulative troop contributor since 1950

Current deployment: ~5,500+ across multiple missions

Peacekeepers lost: 179+ (highest of any country)

Missions participated: 49+

Major current deployments: UNMISS (South Sudan), MONUSCO (Congo), UNIFIL (Lebanon)

UNMISS:

Established: July 9, 2011

Mandate: Chapter VII (use of force authorised for civilian protection)

India's contribution: ~2,400 (engineers, medical, infantry)

Current authorised strength: ~17,000 troops

SOUTH SUDAN:

Independence: July 9, 2011 (world's youngest country)

Capital: Juba

Civil war: 2013-2018 (~400,000 killed)

R-ARCSS: September 2018, Addis Ababa

Current crisis: 280,000+ displaced since Dec 2025

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

UN peacekeeping budget: ~\$6.4 billion/year

India's reimbursement rate: ~\$1,428/soldier/month (UN standard rate)

India's UNSC permanent seat bid: G4 (India, Japan, Germany, Brazil)

Key Indian peacekeeping milestones: ONUC (Congo, 1960s), IPKF (Sri Lanka, 1987-90), UNMEE (Ethiopia-Eritrea)

Sources: [Hindustan Times](#), [OHCHR](#), [UN News](#)

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