

# **UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS: A WAY FORWARD FOR MALAYSIA**

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The UNPKO has a creditable reputation as an effective and comprehensive means for the UN to support member countries facing difficulties during internal and external conflicts. Neutrality, inoffensive deployment, and mutual acceptance by each stakeholder has ensured that the UNPKO maintains its position as the most suitable and credible mediator for most conflicts occurring these days. In line with changes in the conventional scenario, the UNPKO has changed significantly over time evolving from traditional infantry troops into a well-equipped force consisting of armored personnel carriers, aircraft, and warships.

Almost six decades ago on the African continent, Malaysia made its first foray into a new dimension of military operations called peacekeeping under the aegis of the blue berets and white scout cars. Since then, Malaysia has never failed to respond to any major conflict around the globe requiring the involvement of UN peacekeepers. The 2nd Battalion of the Malay Regiment, call-signed *Harimau Congo*, set the stage for the almost 30 missions in different parts of the world, and, today, Malaysia's ensign can be seen in at least seven UNPKO missions across several continents.

Malaysia charted significant and unique history in UNPKO as a pioneer country among its neighbours in the Asia Pacific region by its involvement in peacekeeping operations, and it is understandable why Malaysia is often seen as a role model in this regard due to our long history in UNPKO. All nations agree that peacekeeping is a solid means for promoting a globally recognised positive image especially where the operations are successful.

Some countries in the region too have got involved such as Indonesia which has injected a warship into the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force in Lebanon. Meanwhile, Malaysia's over 800 troops mostly stationed in Lebanon are the second largest contributor for UNPKO among ASEAN members. Although such contributions are generally used to measure countries' involvement in UNPKO it must be appreciated

that peacekeeping is a multidimensional mission that is not merely confined to participation of conventional forces but covers the actual conflict period, and the deconflict and peace building phases.

In terms of the peace-building processes, there is much to be gained by deploying the full spectrum of the Malaysian branding in peacekeeping operations. Previous missions involved significant contributions from the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) and the Royal Malaysian Police, and it is time to widen the field to include other agencies? In peace-building, the host country struggles to improve good order during the power transition, elections, or disarmament processes. Perhaps future Malaysian involvement in this should include the Fire and Rescue Department to be part of the nucleus team in conflict countries. Also the Malaysian Election Commission could be included in the UN election commission? Even former or current government officials could contribute to the transformation of the public services administration in the host countries.

The beauty of the Malaysia brand will be more visible when we approach issues holistically. While multiple agencies in peacekeeping operation are to be lauded, the process would evolve into something larger when other entities such non-government organisation and industry players also participate. The National Blue Ocean Strategy (NBOS) has shown its effectiveness in tackling issues holistically and Malaysia's local industries have a good reputation abroad in providing important facilities such as highways, railways, and telecommunications. Further, Malaysia is known internationally as a trendsetter in the *halal* food industry, and billions of dollars within this industry can have a major impact on Malaysia's contribution towards the UNPKO. Such expertise are hugely beneficial to the host countries recovering from conflict and Malaysia can contribute towards their well being in its own ways. The concept of the NBOS has been well-received locally and this is a good time to export this practice abroad. Malaysia has been a key player in UNPKO since 1960 and it will be a major credit to the country if this initiative can be expanded to include a more comprehensive approach in the international arena.