

Contributor Profile: Burundi

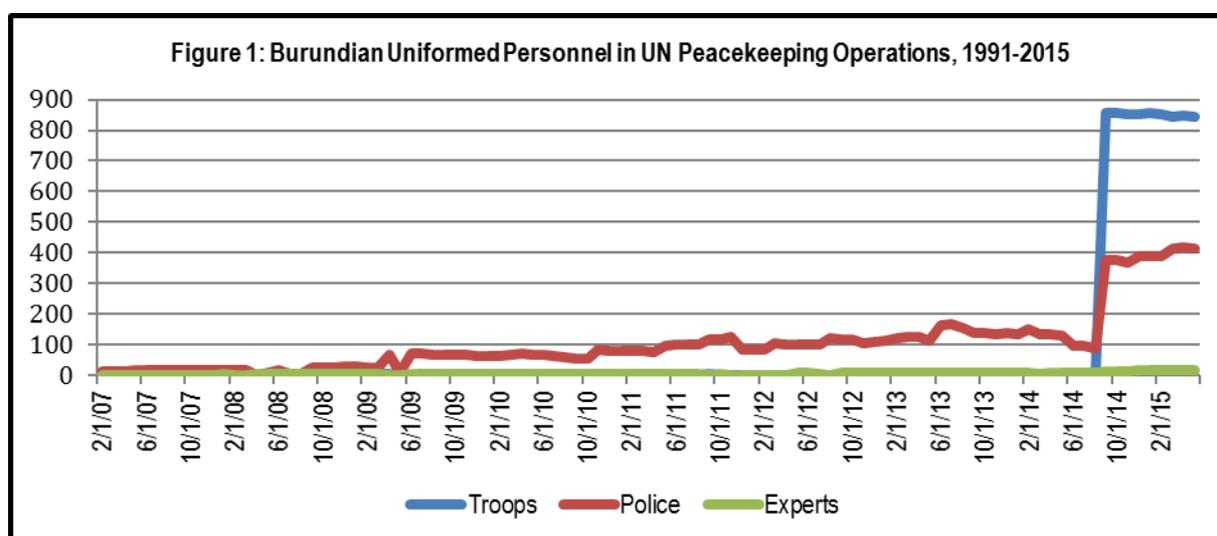
Nina Wilén
Institute of Development Policy and
Management (IOB), University of Antwerp

Gérard Birantamije
Department of Quality Assurance, University
of Lac Tanganyika

Active Armed Forces ¹	Helicopters	Defense Budget	Uniformed UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments
20,000 Army	6	2014:US\$61m (2.01% of GDP)	1, 279 (30 female) 31 May 2015	MINUSCA 1,141 (282 police, 9 milex, 844 troops)	AMISOM: 5,432 troops + Force Commander since 2013
World Rank (size): 129	2 Attack 2 multirole 2 transport (medium)	2013:US\$66m (2.41% of GDP)	Ranking 23rd (15 th largest African contributor; 14 th largest African Union contributor)	MINUSTAH 13 police UNAMID 41 police UNISFA 1 milix UNOCI 65 police	
+ 31,000 Paramilitary		2012:US\$62m (2.47% of GDP)			
Defense spending/troop: US\$3,050 (compared to global average of approx. US\$65,905; sub-Saharan Africa average US\$537) ²					

Part 1: Recent Trends

Burundi has been the recipient of several peace operations deployed by the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), and South Africa as part of international efforts to manage its internal conflicts. Following various peace agreements, since 2006, Burundi has become an important troop-contributing country (TCC), especially for the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), but also for UN peacekeeping. Burundi's history of ethnic massacres and its internal conflict, which lasted more than a decade after 1993, left Burundi a relative newcomer to providing peacekeepers. The decision to become a TCC was taken in 2007 in the midst of Burundi's post-war security sector reform. So far, it has proved to be a durable commitment. Having initially deployed to AMISOM in December 2007, Burundi has remained the mission's second largest TCC, after Uganda. It currently deploys six rotating battalions, maintaining over [5,000 troops](#) in the field. Its heavy investment in AMISOM has restricted its potential to contribute to UN peacekeeping operations.



Yet, today, the Burundian armed forces (FDN) have contributed to several UN missions in Africa. By far the largest deployment is to MINUSCA in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2014. But other deployments include UNAMID in Darfur, MINURCAT in CAR, UNOCI in Ivory Coast, and most recently UNMISS in South Sudan. Nevertheless, these deployments remain minor in comparison to its investment in AMISOM.

Part 2: Decision-Making Process

The rules governing Burundi's peacekeeping deployments are not enshrined in any particular legal document. The decision-making process therefore rests with the President, the Minister of Defense, and the Chief of General Staff. The analysis and decision take place at the strategic level, i.e. the President's Military Cabinet, and the Defense Ministry, and thereafter at the operational level (i.e. the Chief of the Army Cabinet). Despite a demand for parliamentary oversight of the decision-making process, which is enshrined in the [constitution](#) (see Art.249-250), this appears to be absent. The time frame for decision-making is sequenced in two semesters within a financial year, with action plans conceived annually in September. These plans must integrate peace operations and clearly show battalion rotations for both training and deployment.³

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political Rationales: The decision to contribute troops to international peace operations is used by the Burundian government as a political and diplomatic tool in both its domestic and international relations. In the international context, the troop/police contributions are used to generate leverage in international negotiations related to Burundi's domestic affairs, but also in order to gain greater influence in multinational organizations. The Burundian government has therefore been keen to [underline its new role as a peacekeeper](#) abroad in order to push for the withdrawal of UN agencies at home, therefore emphasizing how Burundi has transitioned from "a post-conflict state" to a peacekeeper providing security for other countries. It is widely considered that Burundi's troop contributions to AMISOM were the main reason it was elected onto [the African Union's](#) Peace and Security Council in 2008, 2010 and 2014.

Economic Rationales: Economically, Burundi's provision of peacekeepers has enhanced not only the official defense budget and those of individual soldiers, but also the government's overall finances. The Burundian government has recently been accused by the anti-corruption agency OLUCOME of using monies received from the AU (for its AMISOM contributions) to [buy a presidential jet](#). It is also widely known that in the case of AMISOM, the Burundian government has taken US\$200 from the troops' allowances since at least 2011, which is explicitly stated in the Memorandum of Understanding between the African Union and the Burundian government, but most likely since 2008 when the [EU stepped in to finance](#) both AMISOM allowances and the death and disability compensation packages. Individual soldiers still receive an impressive sum through their participation in peace operations in comparison with their normal salary [of approximately US\\$40 per month](#). The construction of a [new neighbourhood](#) in Gitega for "veteran" peacekeepers who have invested in building new houses is evidence of these financial benefits. Although the transparency regarding the government's income for the troop contribution to AMISOM is rather limited, in the budget estimations for 2014, the sum of 29,500,200,000 Burundian francs is mentioned as "AMISOM extraordinary income," which is equivalent to a sixth of the combined budget of the army and police.

Security Rationales: Burundi, which is part of a turbulent region, has for the most part avoided implicating itself in regional conflicts. The security rationale for providing

peacekeepers lies instead within Burundi's domestic politics. The decision to deploy troops on international peace operations was taken in the midst of a [forced demobilization process](#) in which mostly former government soldiers (FAB) were demobilized. The troop contribution to peace operations temporarily halted the demobilization process and alleviated complaints from ex-FAB soldiers, which helped smooth the creation of a new, integrated national army. A [splinter group](#) from the last remaining rebel group FNL (*Forces Nationales de Liberation*), which was integrated in the army after cease-fire agreements in 2009, has recently posed new, internal security threats albeit on a limited scale.

Institutional Rationales: Burundi's decision to provide peacekeepers arrived just three years after the two major former belligerent forces had merged into a new army and in the midst of an externally financed security sector reform process. As such, training opportunities and external capacity-building for the joint forces were especially welcome as part of an effort to reinforce the integration process and professionalize the army. The [US-led ACOTA pre-deployment training](#) has become the hub around which other international partners' initiatives turn, including theoretical PSO (peace support operation) courses given by Belgium, French-led training under RECAP (Reinforcement of African Peacekeeping Capacities) and to a lesser extent the Dutch long term security sector development (SSD) program.⁴ These different types of education have contributed to a progressive transformation of the FDN into an army focused on peace operations. In addition to these changes the composition of the deployed battalions has been altered to better correspond to peace operations by combining a greater mixture of different corps, including infantry, marine, doctors and combat engineers. This process of developing unified, joint operations between these different corps has progressively and informally been implemented over the last few years without any official doctrine promoting it. A new peacekeeping department was also created in 2009 in order to respond to the new requirements associated with peace operations. With funds from the U.S. ACOTA program, a new Burundi National Peacekeeping Training Center was also constructed at Mudubugu.

Normative Rationales: Despite not being a member of the [Inter-governmental Authority on Development](#) (IGAD), Burundi's contribution to AMISOM in particular is officially explained by its desire to contribute to peace in the Horn of Africa. Senior defense officials have also stated that they feel a moral obligation to help those who are in a difficult situation, given their own experience of internal conflict. Its heavy investment in AU operations has undoubtedly increased its political weight in the region, not least through its seat on [the AU's Peace and Security Council](#).

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

Alternative institutional preferences for crisis management: Burundi's provision of peacekeepers to the UN has increased significantly with the establishment of MINUSCA in the Central African Republic in 2014 (see Figure 1). In August 2013, Burundi contributed just 2 troops to UN missions, while in November 2014 the number had risen to 854 troops (852 of those in MINUSCA). This shows that Burundi currently appears willing to contribute troops to both UN and AU missions in Africa. Yet, given its heavy investment in AMISOM, it seems unlikely that Burundi will be able to step up its UN contributions in the near future.

Alternative political or strategic priorities: Additional UN contributions, on top of the current investment in AU operations would evoke questions about the capacity of the army to defend the national sovereignty. Overall, such a development appears improbable, given Burundi's strong emphasis on defending its sovereignty against various international institutions,

including the UN, and the continued existence of multiple rebel groups in the east of DR Congo.

Resistance in the military: There is no visible resistance to troop contributions to peace operations in the Burundian army. Indeed, deployment on peace operations is something that most soldiers see as beneficial, both for their careers and for the additional income. Senior officers appear to share this vision, as peace operations are likely to enhance professionalism in the army and provide international career opportunities.⁵

Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues

The Burundian army has long been seen as the most successful result of the peace process and a stabilizing force in the country. Yet, the president's recent bid for a third term in office has evoked massive protests in Burundi and revealed divisions within the army. The most visible of these was the [coup attempt on 13 May 2015](#) by a former Chief of Staff and Head of the Burundi Intelligence Service, General Godefroid Niyombare. Nevertheless, the army has remained united and neutral during the past decade, despite a number of diverse crises. It has also been hailed as professional and neutral during the recent protests, especially in comparison with the police corps, which has engaged in violent crackdowns on protesters. In spite of this, if prolonged, the country's political crisis is likely to affect Burundi's troop contributions negatively, not least because some [external partners have been withdrawing](#) support for deployments. It is unlikely that Burundi would be able to maintain its current troop commitments for a significant period without this external support.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

The president has on various occasions showed his support and admiration for the Burundian army's deployment to peace operations. The senior leadership of the army have also been keen to showcase its contributions as a sign of success for the new, integrated army.⁶ The internationalization of the army has also contributed to a certain pride among members of the military. The number of Burundians in high level international positions has exploded in recent years where former President Buyoya was first the head of MISMA (the African-led mission in Mali), then, since 2012, High Representative of the AU in Mali. Brigadier General Domitien Kabisa became the [new Force Commander](#) of the [Eastern African Standby Force](#) (EASF) in March 2014. In addition, Brigadier General Athanase Kararuzza became the Deputy Force Commander of the African-led MISCA force in Central African Republic, while Silas Ntirwurirwa became the first Burundian AMISOM Force Commander in December 2013.⁷

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats

The Burundian army has an infantry with high mobility vehicles and engineering and medical enabling units, yet for airlifts, the Burundian army is dependent on external partners. For example, the [US airlifted](#) the troops that were deployed to Central African Republic. With regard to Rule of Law functions, the army has investigators, prosecutors and corrections officers. However, it remains uncertain the extent to which they are able to wield independent powers. The Burundian army is almost entirely French speaking with relatively little knowledge of English, which occasionally poses problems for communication in international trainings and settings. External donors in collaboration with local actors have recently attempted to increase the number of female soldiers and integrate a gender perspective in the army. This was reflected in the Ministry of Defense and Former Combatants (MNDAC)'s authorization in 2010 of a gender axis in their activities, and also by the creation of a strategy for gender integration in the National Defense Force. So far

however, these efforts have had few visible results, with figures of female soldiers staying under 1%.⁸

Part 8: Further Reading

Curtis, D., “The International Peacebuilding Paradox: Powersharing and Postconflict Governance in Burundi”, *African Affairs*, 112/446 (2012).

Ndayiziga, C., “L’enjeux autour de l’intervention du Burundi en Somalie”, *Egmont Africa Policy Brief*, no.7, Nov. 2013.

Samii, C., “Perils or Promise of Ethnic Integration? Evidence from a Hard Case in Burundi”, *American Political Science Review*, 107, n°3 (2013): 558-573.

Wilén, N., Ambrosetti, D., Birantamije, G., “Sending Peacekeepers Abroad, Sharing Power at Home. Burundi in Somalia”, *Journal of East African Studies*, March 2015, pp.1-19.

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise stated, data is drawn from IISS, *The Military Balance 2015* (London: IISS/Routledge, 2015).

² Armed Forces spending is a country’s annual total defense budget (in US dollars) divided by the total number of active armed forces. Using figures from IISS, *The Military Balance 2015*.

³ Author’s (GB) interview with Director of Peacekeeping Centre, Mudubugu, June 2015.

⁴ The Netherlands government has also provided some funding directly into the US ACOTA program.

⁵ Author’s (NW) interviews with FDN officers, Bujumbura, March 2013.

⁶ Author’s (NW) interview with Former Minister of Defense, Pontien Gaciyubwenge, Bujumbura, 8 March 2013.

⁷ Wilén, N., Ambrosetti, D., Birantamije, G., “Sending Peacekeepers Abroad, Sharing Power at Home. Burundi in Somalia”, *Journal of East African Studies*, March 2015, p.9.

⁸ Wilén, N., “Security Sector Reform, gender and local narratives in Burundi,” *Conflict, Security and Development*, 14:3 (2013): 331-354.