

Contributor Profile: South Africa

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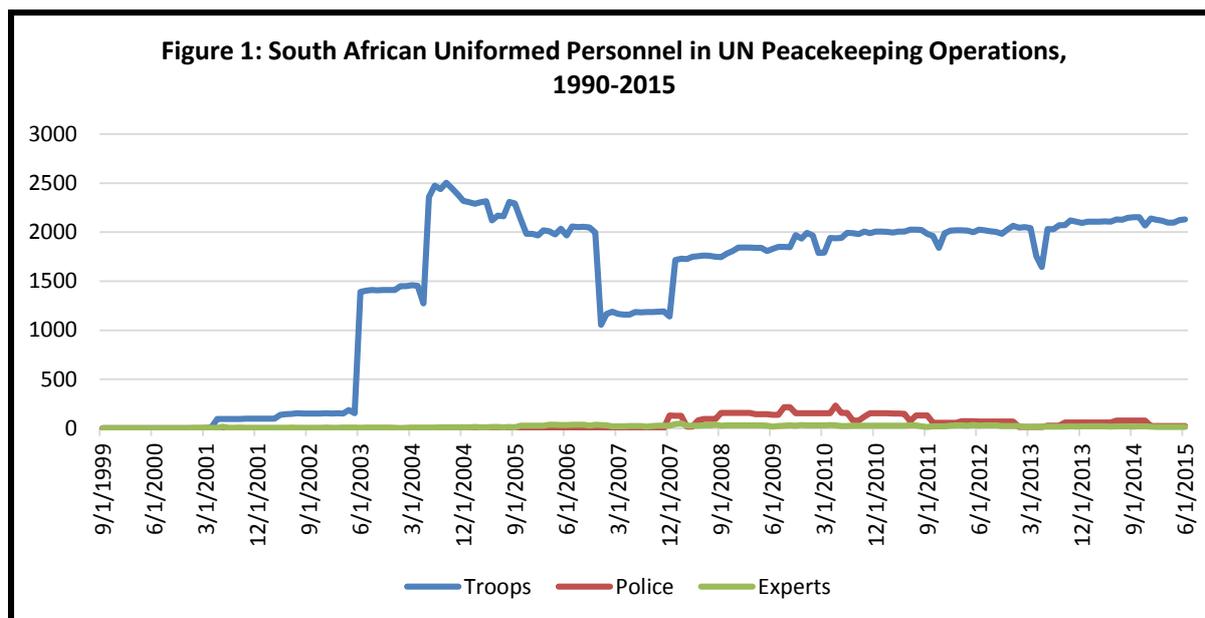
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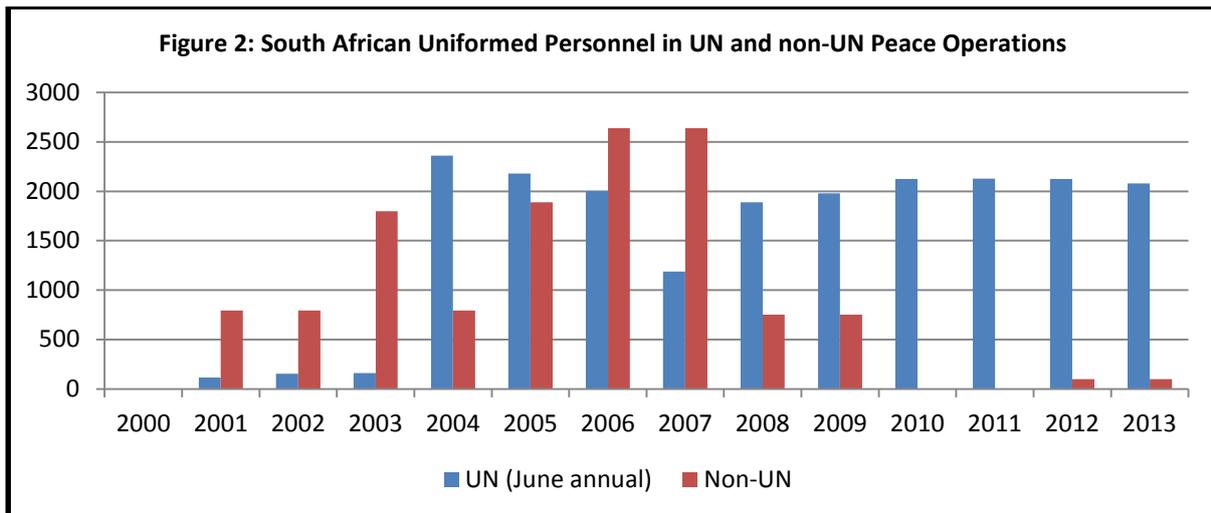
Active armed forces ¹	Helicopters	Defense Budget	Uniformed Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments
Active: 62,100 World Ranking (size): 42 Army 37,150 Navy 6,250 Air Force 10,650 Military Health Service 8,050 Plus Reserves: 15,050	Attack: 11 (only 5 in service late 2012) Multi-role: 4 Transport: 76 (39 medium, 37 light)	2010: US\$4.27bn (1.18% of GDP) 2011: US\$5.29bn (1.29% of GDP) 2012: US\$5.08bn (1.30% of GDP) 2013: US\$4.21bn (1.20% of GDP) 2014: US\$4.01bn (1.17% of GDP)	2,173 (341 women) (31 July 2015) Ranking: 14 8 th largest African contributor	MONUSCO: 1,333 (6 experts, 1,327 troops) UNAMID: 817 (10 experts, 807 troops) UNMISS 23 police	200 in Central African Republic (withdrawn March 2013)
Defense Spending / Troop: ² US\$ 64,597 (compared to global average of approximately US\$65,905)					

Part 1: Recent Trends

South Africa is a relative newcomer to international peacekeeping, commencing its contributions in 1998 with the deployment of personnel in what it claimed was a Southern African Development Community (SADC) intervention in Lesotho. South Africa's first UN deployment came in 1999 in MONUC in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). But its first major UN contribution came in 2004 when South African troops stationed in Burundi as part of the African Union (AU) mission there were re-hatted to form the basis of the UN Operation in Burundi (ONUB). Since then South African forces have served in 14 international peace operations, including seven UN peacekeeping missions.³ In the 21st century, South Africa has emerged as a major provider of uniformed UN peacekeepers, with annual contributions consistently ranging between 1,500 and 2,500 (see figure 1).



South Africa's emergence as a contributor to international peace operations has been characterized by several trends. First, its contributions are strongly informed by the country's political engagements on the African continent, notably its efforts at conflict prevention and management. South African deployments to Burundi and the DRC were characterized by Pretoria's leading role as a facilitator in the peace processes in both countries, whereas the South African deployment to Darfur paved the way for South Africa to play a leading role in the resolution of conflicts in the Sudan(s). Second, South Africa has deployed its forces in UN-led operations, through regional and sub-regional organizations, as well as through bilateral arrangements. South Africa does not tend to prefer providing peacekeepers to UN operations over other types of peace support operations. Indeed, Pretoria has at times deployed more or roughly the same levels of personnel through bilateral agreements to deploy (in the DRC and Central African Republic), sub-regional deployments (in Lesotho) and regional deployments (in Burundi, Ethiopia/Eritrea, the Comoros, Darfur) as it has through UN deployments (in Burundi, Ethiopia/Eritrea, Darfur, DRC, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire) (see figure 2). Third, South Africa's contributions to peace operations are linked to its growing self-image as an emerging "middle power," and as an African power, in the international arena. Consequently, South Africa views such operations as a foreign policy tool which can support its ambition to play a leading role in multilateral forums.



Data note: UN figures are taken annually around 30th June; non-UN figures were compiled by the authors.

The current growth potential of South Africa as a contributor to international peacekeeping appears limited because defense spending over the course of the past decade has not kept pace with the growth in international deployments. Pretoria's deployment of approximately 2,500–3,000 personnel on peacekeeping duties at any given point in time thus appears to be a ceiling. While South Africa could deploy more personnel under special circumstances, such a deployment could likely not be sustained for more than one year at a time. The most recent deployment of additional personnel to the [“Intervention Brigade” in the eastern DRC as part of MONUSCO](#) will likely stretch South Africa's peacekeeping capabilities to its limits. This is because of the limited capacity of the South African National Defence Force to deploy its troops in multiple peacekeeping operations or theatres on the continent simultaneously.

Part 2: Decision-Making

South Africa contributions to international peacekeeping were foreseen by the [Constitution of the Republic of South Africa \(1994\)](#). This states that the SANDF is to act both in defense of the republic and in fulfillment of international obligations. But this envisaged role proved controversial, and both the [Defence White Paper of May 1996](#) and the subsequent [Defence Review of 1998](#) argued that the primary role of the SANDF was to protect South Africa's territorial integrity, and that only limited resources should be set aside for international peace operations.

To bridge these differences, and to prepare South Africa for what was (domestically and internationally) expected to become a growing role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, particularly on the African continent, the Department of Foreign Affairs (now the Department of International Relations and Cooperation – DIRCO) developed a [White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions](#) (the White Paper). This was approved by Cabinet in October 1998 and tabled in Parliament in February 1999. The White Paper provides DIRCO with the lead responsibility of overseeing and coordinating South Africa's involvement in international peacekeeping missions, and to this effect the Department established a National Office for the Coordination of Peace Missions (NOCPM) in 1999. Aside from being mandated to coordinate South African engagement in international peace operations and maintain political oversight of such missions, the NOCPM is also tasked to lead Pretoria's whole-of-government approach to international peace operations, thereby leading the combined planning of the Department of Defence, the Department of Safety and Security, and the National Treasury.

While the NOCPM is responsible for overseeing the planning and deployment of personnel in support of international peacekeeping missions, the decision to contribute to such operations is taken at the level of the executive branch of the government, in this case by the Cabinet. Once the Cabinet has taken a decision to contribute to a peace operation, the decision is relayed by the Minister for International Relations and Cooperation, and the NOCPM initiates a whole-of-government planning and oversight process. This process is the same whether the operation is UN-led, UN-authorized or a non-UN peace operation.

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political rationales: The main rationale driving South African contributions to provide peacekeepers abroad is political. Two political considerations in particular underpin South Africa's growing desire to contribute to international, not only UN, peace missions. First, South Africa views its own development and prosperity as hinging on the development and prosperity of the African continent. On this basis, the country has articulated a foreign policy which is designed to promote economic and social development throughout the African continent, which in turn requires the strengthening of peace and security across it. Pretoria therefore views contributions to sub-regional, regional, and UN peace operations as an intrinsic part of its foreign policy aims and objectives. Second, South Africa has increasingly come to use its role as a facilitator in peace processes, which is reinforced through the deployment of peacekeeping personnel, to leverage its position in multilateral forums, especially in the UN. This has allowed South Africa to "punch above its weight," and has strengthened its case for a permanent seat on a reformed UN Security Council. Both of these considerations help to explain why all South African contributions to date have been to peace operations in Africa, and why it seems unlikely that Pretoria would consider a deployment outside of the continent.

Economic rationales: While the main rationale underpinning South Africa's provision of peacekeepers is political, the country's deployments also serve to support national economic interests. South Africa has deployed peacekeepers in countries where it holds commercial interests, such as the DRC and Sudan. In other cases, bilateral deployments have been conducted where potential to extend South Africa's commercial interests exist, such as in the CAR. The deployment of peacekeeping personnel should therefore not be viewed as entirely distinct from South Africa's use of economic diplomacy as its influence spreads in Africa.

Institutional rationales: Foreign policy, once formulated, can be implemented by various means. The SANDF accepts its role to act as a foreign policy instrument of the South African Government. In this context, the *Draft Defence Review 2013* states that "the promotion of peace and stability in the region and on the continent is a key component of South Africa's foreign policy."

Normative rationales: Since the end of Apartheid, South Africa has sought to position itself as a strong supporter of multilateralism, democracy and human rights in the international arena. While the country's foreign policy has not always been consistent in this regard, and indeed South Africa has often been criticized for adopting an inconsistent approach to foreign policy and its support for these norms, overall there is a belief within foreign policy circles that the deployment of personnel in peace operations is an integral part of the country's overall foreign policy ambitions in support of the development of a multilateral, norm-based international system.

Security rationales: Premised on the *Draft Defence Review 2013* it can be stated that South Africa's national security strategy, foreign policy and defence policy are viewed as intertwined. In addition, South Africa's domestic security is viewed as inextricably linked to that of regional security, and vice versa.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

Currently, three barriers inhibit an expansion of South African contributions to UN peacekeeping, namely, a preference for the use of alternative institutional arrangements for crisis management, the financial costs incurred in peace operations, and capacity-related institutional, or structural, constraints within the SANDF.

First, South Africa does not have a natural preference for deploying peacekeepers through the UN and is willing to utilize regional (AU) and sub-regional (SADC) frameworks as well as bilateral arrangements to deploy uniformed personnel where it deems necessary. The deployment of peacekeepers is closely aligned to South Africa's engagements in Africa as a peacemaker, and this will have a greater impact on Pretoria's deployments than whether or not the UN is running the mission in question. Therefore, given South Africa's limited deployable resources, considerations of national interest will determine whether or not these will be made available to UN peacekeeping operations.

Second, contributions to UN peacekeeping missions have proved costly in the past, and South Africa has not always been able to recover costs associated with its deployments. For example, in the DRC, Pretoria was unable to obtain full reimbursement for its equipment that did not consistently meet UN standards. While South Africa has the ability to absorb such losses on a case by case basis, this is not sustainable in the long-term, and could impact on future decisions to deploy.

Third, capacity-related institutional, or structural, constraints within the SANDF are a major factor that restricts further deployments. Since the mid-1990s, the SANDF has witnessed consistent budget cuts, resulting in both a reduction in personnel and the SANDF's ability to maintain its operational capability. In addition, recent defense acquisitions have resulted in a mismatch between defense funding and the purchase of costly equipment vis-à-vis what was required or demanded from the SANDF in relation to its international deployments. To rectify this, in 2012 South Africa considered giving greater priority to developing and maintaining a more balanced set of capabilities, which would need to be appropriate, affordable and adequately balanced with respect to the needs of the SANDF. South Africa's ability to properly equip and support personnel deployed abroad for sustained periods of time will likely remain a major obstacle impeding further deployments in the near future. In particular, the country is in need of air lift capabilities to deploy and sustain its personnel to peacekeeping theatres across the continent.

Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues

Three issues need to be addressed immediately if South Africa is to sustain, let alone expand, its contributions to international peace operations: (1) the discipline of its personnel; (2) the high HIV infection rate among them; and (3) the current mismatch between South Africa's deployment ambitions and capabilities.

South Africa's relatively poor disciplinary record when it comes to the professionalism of its peacekeepers has been well documented.⁴ In Burundi and the DRC, for instance, South African peacekeepers were found guilty of more than 1,000 cases of misconduct between 2002 and

2006. More than half of these violations involved absence without leave, disobeying lawful commands and drunkenness. Included in these statistics are also 230 criminal cases, in which South African peacekeepers were found guilty of assault, indecent assault, theft, rape and murder. Greater emphasis therefore needs to be placed on the training and selection of personnel, staff welfare, and the prevention of misconduct.

In terms of the health of its peacekeepers, a major problem is the high level of HIV infection in the SANDF (at the time of the DRC deployments from the mid-2000s onwards official levels of HIV infection were 23%).⁵ In addition, the SANDF policy not to deploy soldiers that are HIV positive made it difficult to deploy whole battalions. The composite battalions that were subsequently deployed brought all kinds of integration challenges, specifically with regard to joint training and command and control. In order to deploy battalions that have been trained together for peacekeeping deployments, the HIV infection rates in the SANDF must be brought under control or the policy not to deploy personnel that are HIV positive needs to be reviewed.

Finally, the mismatch between South Africa's ambitions and the SANDF's capabilities undermines Pretoria's ability to undertake and sustain effective deployments. South Africa's political readiness to deploy its forces into complex operating environments, such as the DRC or CAR, should align more closely with resourcing considerations for the SANDF. This will ensure that the SANDF has the operational capability to act upon the political decisions taken by South Africa's leaders. The [loss of 17 soldiers in the CAR in March 2013](#) served as a stark reminder that international deployments can bring heavy costs. For many years the SANDF has been on the periphery of public debates and scrutiny in South Africa. At the same time, the role of the South African Police Service (SAPS) has been at the center of public debates and scholarly discourses. The funding of the SAPS has also increased significantly since 1994 – as opposed to the declining budget of the SANDF. Now, suddenly (since March 2013) the SANDF is “back” on the national agenda and it is likely to be a matter of greater significance in Parliament and in public in the near future, and given the high levels of national attention to the deployment in the CAR, it is quite likely that the SANDF's performance in the DRC Intervention Brigade will be a matter of public scrutiny.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

To date, the Presidency and the Cabinet have consistently supported deploying the SANDF in international peace operations. The SANDF has also proved willing to undertake such deployments. The loss in March 2013 of SANDF personnel deployed to the CAR on a bilateral VIP protection and security sector reform mission did serve to call attention to such deployments in the national press. However, this does not appear to have adversely influenced the decision to deploy additional SANDF personnel to the DRC to serve in the [MONUSCO “Intervention Brigade”](#) during the same time period.

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats

South Africa possesses a number of specialized capabilities which have been deployed to UN peacekeeping missions, and where a potential for further deployments exists. One such specialized capability is air assets: helicopters are a critical shortcoming in most UN missions, especially military capable tactical helicopters, and South Africa has invested in this area. This capability is now being exploited through the deployment of [Rooivalk attack helicopters](#) to the eastern DRC. Further, South Africa also possesses specialized capabilities in the form of signals units, combat engineering units, and medical units, which could be drawn on more in support of UN peacekeeping operations.

Part 8: Further Reading

- C. de Coning, "The White Paper on SA Participation in Peace Missions: A Unique Beginning," *Conflict Trends*, Issue 2 (April 1999).
- C. de Coning & W. Lotze, "South Africa" in A.J. Bellamy & P.D. Williams (eds.), *Providing Peacekeepers: The Politics, Challenges and Future of United Nations Peacekeeping Contributions* (Oxford University Press, 2013)
- L. Heineken & R. Ferreira, "South Africa's Role in Peace Operations in Africa (Part 1)," *African Security Review*, 21:2 (2012): 20-35.
- T. Neethling, "The SANDF as an Instrument for Peacekeeping in Africa: A Critical Analysis of Three Main Challenges," *Journal for Contemporary History*, 36:1 (2011): 134–153.
- A. van Nieuwkerk, "South Africa and Peacekeeping in Africa," *African Security*, 5:1 (2012): 44-62.

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise states, data is drawn from the IISS, *The Military Balance 2013* (London: IISS/Routledge, 2013).

² Defense Spending/Troop is the total defense budget (in US\$) divided by the total number of active armed forces. Uses latest figures available from IISS, *The Military Balance 2013*.

³ ONUB (Burundi), UNMEE (Eritrea and Ethiopia), UNAMID (Darfur), ONUCI (Côte d'Ivoire), MONUC (DRC), UNMIL (Liberia) and MONUSCO (DRC).

⁴ See T. Neethling, "The SANDF as an Instrument for Peacekeeping in Africa," *Journal for Contemporary History*, 36:1 (2011), p.147

⁵ See C. de Coning & W. Lotze, "South Africa" in A.J. Bellamy & P.D. Williams (eds.), *Providing Peacekeepers: The Politics, Challenges and Future of United Nations Peacekeeping Contributions* (Oxford University Press, 2013)