

Contributor Profile: Thailand

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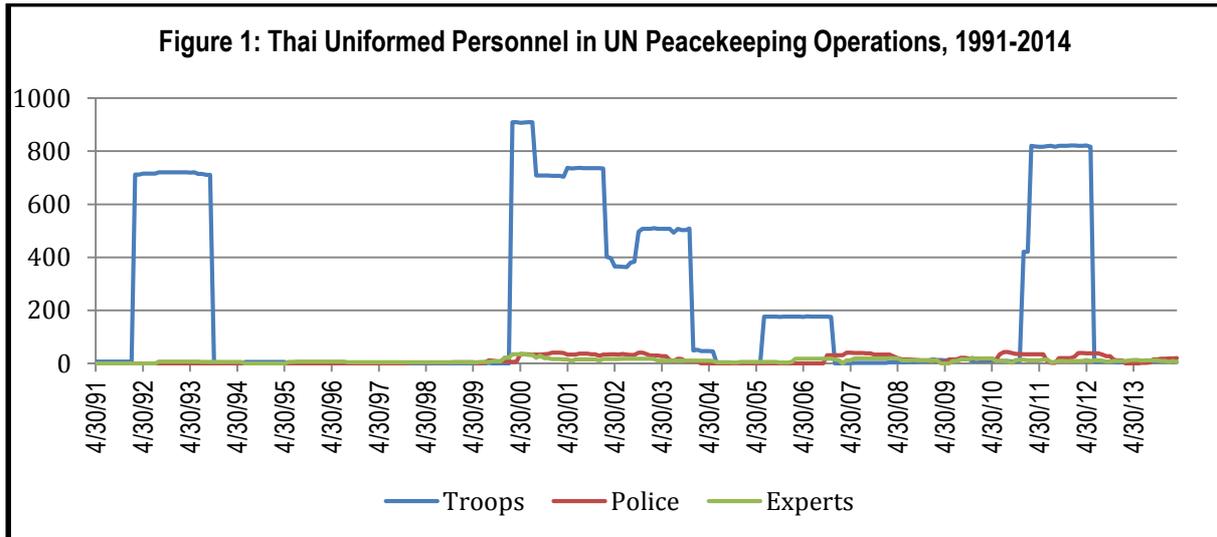
Ryerson University, Toronto

Active armed forces ¹	Helicopters	Defense Budget	Uniformed Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments
360,850 World Ranking (size): 18th Army: 245,000 (incl. 115,000 conscripts) Navy: 69,850 Air: 46,000 Paramilitary: 92,700 Reserves: Army: 200,000	315 Attack: 7 Multi role: 21 Transport – heavy: 5 Transport – medium: 11 Transport – light: 217 Trainer: 54	2013: US\$6.21bn (1.46% of GDP) 2012: US\$5.43bn (1.44% of GDP) 2011: US\$5.52bn (1.6% of GDP)	31 (12 women) (30 April 2014) Ranking: 84th	MINUSTAH: 7 police UNAMID: 11 (5 experts, 6 troops) UNMIL: 3 police UNMISS: 10 police	None
Defense spending/troop: US\$17,211 - compared to a global average of US\$70,000.					

Part 1: Recent Trends

Thailand did not begin contributing forces to UN peacekeeping operations until 1991 and since the downsizing of its contribution to UNAMID (in 2012) has made only a modest contribution. However, its deployment of significant contingents to Cambodia (UNAMIC and UNTAC), East Timor (UNTAET) and Darfur (UNAMID) suggests that Thailand has the capability, and sometimes the willingness, to make significant contributions.

Thailand's first contribution was seven military officers deployed in UNIKOM in 1991 along the demilitarized zone on the border of Kuwait and Iraq. In September 1991, Thailand sent a further 50 troops to Iraq as part of the UN Guard Contingent in Iraq (UNGCI). Thailand became more actively engaged in UN peacekeeping when it contributed 705 military engineers to the mission in its neighbor, Cambodia, as part of the UN Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC, later UNTAC) in February 1992. Their tasks included demining (landmine clearance) and rebuilding infrastructure such as bridges and roads. It was not until July 1998 that Thailand became more involved in international peacekeeping further afield, when it contributed 5 soldiers to UNOMSIL. This was soon followed in October 1999 by the country's largest deployment to date, when 1,581 soldiers deployed in the Australian-led INTERFET mission in East Timor. Thailand subsequently contributed 925 soldiers to UNTAET. A significant contingent of Thai troops remained in East Timor until 2004. In December 2010, after a six-year period when Thailand made only small contributions, Thailand agreed to deploy around 800 troops (known as the Thai/Darfur Task Force 980) to Darfur as part of UNAMID. Significant delays imposed by the Sudanese government on the granting of visas almost prompted Thailand to withdraw its offer of troops before they had deployed (the contribution was first mooted in 2008). The Thai contingent was withdrawn in the second half of 2012. Since then, Thailand has maintained a small presence in a handful of UN missions.



In sum, the pattern of Thailand's peacekeeping contributions between 1991 and 2013 begins with a small contribution in the Middle East and then expands significantly with major deployments to peacekeeping operations in Thailand's Southeast Asian neighborhood. This clear preference to deploy within its region was temporarily overcome by Thailand's contribution to UNAMID, but this did not signal a broader shift. Since withdrawal from that mission, its provision of peacekeepers has been modest.

Part 2: Decision-Making Process

Thailand has no formal process for responding to UN requests for peacekeepers. Instead, requests are handled in an ad hoc manner with the final decision resting with the cabinet, usually in close consultation with the military leadership. For instance, Bangkok's decision to contribute Thai troops to INTERFET and then UNTAET was driven by senior Thai politicians, most notably Prime Minister Chaun Leekpai and his Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan. Chaun Leekpai, for instance, announced his commitment to INTERFET at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Auckland in 1999, after having reached an agreement with his Australian counterpart John Howard. Only after a political decision to contribute was made, did the Foreign Ministry's East Timor Policy Unit and Thai military officers engage in negotiations about the details of the deployment (size and equipment etc.). This process was repeated in other missions where the planning process was preceded by a political decision to contribute. Likewise, Thailand's decision to contribute to the US-led occupation of Iraq in 2003 was driven largely by the decision of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

After the end of the Cold War, Thailand made a formal policy commitment to help meet the UN's peacekeeping needs, especially after its participation in UN operations in Kuwait, Iraq and Cambodia.² International peacekeeping became formally part of Bangkok's foreign policy after that. On 15 September 1998, the government approved in principle the policy of developing close cooperation with other ASEAN member states' armed forces and good understanding among them, as well as providing international peacekeeping with Thai support. Shortly after that, Bangkok submitted to the UN a list of Thai capabilities as part of the UN's Standby Arrangements System (level 1).

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political Rationales: While regional security considerations have typically played the most influential role in motivating Thailand to engage in UN peacekeeping (with some notable exceptions), providing peacekeepers is commonly seen as supporting Thai foreign policy, principally through elevating its regional and global standing. Regarding itself as a major power within ASEAN, Bangkok has at times seen peacekeeping as an opportunity to play a more active role on the world stage. The Thai government and military elites were also quick to take on this challenge when Australia offered Thailand the position as Deputy Force Commander of INTERFET. Also, as ASEAN's candidate for the UN Security Council from 2017-18, Thailand definitely has its eye on a role within the UN's foremost organ.

Institutional Rationales: There are a number of institutional rationales that contribute to Thailand's willingness to contribute troops. Thailand is the regional hub for numerous international organizations and more than 28 specialized agencies, such as the Asian Development Bank, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the Asia-Pacific Centre for the UN Development Program (UNDP-APRC), and the International Organization of Migration. This has helped establish unusually close working relationships between Thai officials and some sections of the UN Secretariat. As a leading member of ASEAN and member of its Political and Security Committee, Thailand views international peacekeeping as a major component of this regional development. Within ASEAN itself, efforts have been made to establish an ASEAN Peacekeeping Centers Network to enhance peacekeeping coordination among national authorities. ASEAN also has worked with other states through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus). The ADMM Plus established the Experts' Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations for military personnel. The ARF Peacekeeping Experts Meeting has taken place and its Experts' Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations has been established to promote cooperation.

There is also support for peacekeeping within the Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTARF). Overall, the military has shown a willingness to play an international role in the area of peacekeeping for several reasons: one was the institutional legitimacy afforded by participation in this type of mission. After democratization in 1997, the new prime minister cut the defense budget. As a result, the military leadership was left in a weaker position and looked to retain its usefulness by showing its support for the newly elected civilian government and becoming an active player in international peacekeeping. As the process as democratization has wavered, however, so too has this imperative for domestic legitimation. The RTARF also views peacekeeping as a useful for training and operational experience. Thailand participates in the US Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) and received peacekeeping training from the UK. Thai officers generally argue that peacekeeping helps build military capacity and operational effectiveness.

Normative Rationales: Normative rationales play a relatively small part in influencing Thai decision-making. In principle, the government is committed to the UN Charter and ASEAN principles such as territorial integrity, state sovereignty, and non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states, which makes it most disposed towards peacekeeping (distinguishing from peace enforcement) with strong host state consent. In practice, however, it has exhibited a willingness to override these principles and participate in enforcement operations, as in 2003-4 when it contributed troops to the US-led occupation of Iraq.

Economic Rationales: Thailand is a middle-income state for which economic considerations play a role in its decisions about peacekeeping. Although Thailand does not expect to make a

profit from UN reimbursements for deployment to peacekeeping missions, it is concerned with ensuring that contributions do not add additional costs to the defense budget overall. In the case of INTERFET and UNTAET, which came in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Thailand's decision to contribute troops was related to some specific guarantees from Australia about cost-sharing as well as other economic inducements.

Security Rationales: With the notable exception of Thailand's major (though relatively short-lived) contribution to UNAMID, decision-making on peacekeeping has been heavily influenced by security considerations. Thailand exhibits a clear preference for contributing to peacekeeping missions within its region (specifically Cambodia and East Timor) and views these as making an important contribution to regional peace and security. However, Thailand's participation in UNAMID and small contributions to a range of other missions suggest that broader considerations about the maintenance of international peace and security should also be part of Thailand's foreign policy, though these sentiments remain quite nascent and have become less salient as a result of the domestic political crisis that has befallen the country since the ousting of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006 and his sister Yingluck Shinawatra in 2014.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing:

Alternative institutional preferences for crisis management: While Thailand remains committed to international peacekeeping, it is clear that successive governments have still considered national security their top priority. National defense thus remains the principal priority for procurement and training, and maintaining important security alliances also takes precedence over international peacekeeping. Chief among those is Thailand's alliance with the US. In 2003, the United States designated Thailand as a "major non-NATO ally" and this is a status that the government is determined to keep. Historically, Thailand contributed forces to the Korean War and provided material support to the US wars in Indochina. Thailand contributed 6,500 troops to the US-led UN forces. During the Vietnam War, the country allowed 50,000 American troops on its soil and sent its troops to Laos and Vietnam in support of US military efforts in Indochina. More recently, Thailand continued to support American war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, providing the US military with airfields, airspace and ports to support these efforts and contributing 423 troops to a 12-month rotation in Iraq (October 2003-October 2004). The two allies have also conducted over 40 joint or multilateral military exercises per year, including Cobra Gold in 2013 – the world's largest combined military exercise.

Alternative political or strategic priorities: National security is the principal priority for the defense sector, and as there are some significant domestic security challenges, contributing to UN peacekeeping is generally regarded as a low priority. Since the removal of Prime Minister Thaksin by military coup in 2006, Thailand has been in a semi-permanent state of domestic political crisis. Major protests in Bangkok are very common and often turn violent. Thailand also confronts a significant ethnic separatist insurgency in its mainly Muslim southern border regions, which has claimed the lives of approximately 6,000 people since 2004. In 2013 alone there were some 320 bombings in the four southern provinces. Both of these challenges have required major deployments and concentrations of troops to respond to serious threats to public order and combat insurgents, constituting a significant burden on military resources. The effects of these domestic considerations on the country's willingness to provide UN peacekeepers are amplified by the international strategic priority accorded to Thailand's alliance with the US.

Financial costs: Financial costs are a consideration for the Thai government, which is keen to ensure that contributing to UN peacekeeping is a cost neutral activity. The UN's reimbursements are not sufficiently large to make peacekeeping a financially beneficial activity.

Discomfort with the expanding UN peacekeeping agenda: Thailand remains committed to the traditional form of international peacekeeping based on the principles of consent, impartiality and nonuse of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate. Thailand also supports the idea of enhanced integration between peacekeeping and peacebuilding as well as the norms of dialogue and engagement. The government, however, remains somewhat uneasy about the potential shift from traditional peacekeeping to peace enforcement implied by "robust peacekeeping." For instance, Bangkok questioned the consistency between the principles of peacekeeping and the creation of the Intervention Brigade within MONUSCO authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 2098 (2013). Thailand's commitment to the traditional form of peacekeeping may also have been reinforced by concerns that peace enforcement may put its troops in harm's way. The deployment of Thai troops to combat zones proved to be unpopular after two Thai soldiers died in Iraq in December 2003. Prime Minister Thaksin Sinawatra threatened to withdraw the troops if the security situation kept deteriorating and he withdrew all of them from Iraq in September 2004, despite the US insistence that he wait until after the Iraqi elections scheduled for January 2005. In Darfur, only one Thai peacekeeper died (as a result of malaria). However, casualties sustained by other UNAMID contingents may also help explain why Thailand chose to not renew its major contribution to that mission.

On the other hand, Thailand has voiced support for the UN Security Council's resolutions on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, despite its strong reservation about the use of force in the context of peace enforcement. [Nattawut Sabyeroop](#), military advisor and minister of the Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations, made this clear on behalf of ASEAN. In his words, "Protection of civilians has become a crucial component of peacekeeping. ASEAN notes the Security Council's authorization of protection of civilians mandate in a number of peacekeeping missions, with a focus on women and children, as well as response to sexual violence." He went on to add that "It is important that the UN's commitment to zero tolerance policy on sexual abuse must be implemented and fully enforced at all levels."³ Moreover, Thai peacekeepers in UNAMID were tasked with protecting civilians and their buildings and facilities as well as to ensure free movement for those working for the UN and other international organizations.

Exceptionalism: This is not a relevant consideration in this case.

Absence of pressure to contribute: Past experience suggests that Thailand is more likely to contribute troops when it feels a degree of pressure to do so from states it judges to be in a leadership position. Thus, concerted efforts from the US persuaded Thailand to contribute to the occupation of Iraq and Australian diplomacy was key in persuading Thailand to provide peacekeepers in East Timor. More generic pressure (such as that created by discussion of peacekeeping in an ASEAN context or the increasing contributions of some of its neighbors) seems to have little impact on Thailand, perhaps owing to the presence of strong competing priorities. Military-to-military relations alone may also prove to be inadequate in terms of troop contribution unless political relations are positive and can be strengthened.

Difficult domestic politics: As mentioned earlier, Thailand's domestic turbulence creates a significant barrier. Political rivalry between one camp – former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his sister, Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, supported by those who call themselves Red Shirts – and the alliance between members of the military, royalists and the Bangkok elite (Yellow Shirts) has destabilized the country. Anti-Thaksin demonstrations turned into violent riots in 2010, followed in November and December 2013 by large-scale demonstrations to overthrow Prime Minister Yingluck. In May 2014, the Constitutional Court forced her out of power, having found her guilty of transferring a senior public servant to another position in 2011. Led by the National Peace and Order Maintaining Council, the military then seized power and took action to detain the former prime minister, some of her former cabinet ministers and their anti-military supporters. The extent to which the political crisis has negatively affected Thailand's commitment to peacekeeping is difficult to assess, but some observers note that domestic problems have kept the government preoccupied.⁴

Damage to national reputation: This is not an issue for Thailand as there have been no known charges of misconduct leveled against Thai peacekeepers. It is reported that Thai peacekeepers are known for their hospitality and efficiency.

Resistance in the military: Besides the fact that UN peacekeeping is considered a low priority given the domestic security situation and prioritization of the US alliance, there is no evidence of resistance to Thailand's provision of peacekeepers, partly because members of the armed forces have viewed this policy as raising their international prestige. Moreover, the military has maintained its Peace Operations (training) Centre.

Lack of fit with legislative, procurement and operational timelines: There is no evidence of this problem. Thailand seems able to deploy its police and troops if and when its government has the political will to do so, as it did in East Timor.

Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues

Thailand's current political instability is perhaps the single most important challenge and its contribution to UN peacekeeping is unlikely to increase significantly until this instability is resolved. Institutionally, there are no formal processes for responding to requests for UN peacekeepers and the provision of training for peacekeeping remains low-key and largely ad hoc, especially when compared with advances in this field in other parts of the region.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

Political leadership at the national and regional levels matters a great deal. As noted earlier, in the late 1990s/early 2000s, the Thai government led by Chaun Leekpai and Surin Pitsuwan made a big difference in terms of persuading the country to make a more significant contribution to UN peacekeeping. Under Prime Minister Thaksin, the pendulum swung back towards a focus on the US alliance. Since 2006, political instability has made it difficult to discern a concerted position with the government occasionally tending towards support for peacekeeping (UNAMID) and other times not.

In general, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports UN peacekeeping. It views Thai contributions as part of a policy to enhance the country's international reputation and raise the international prestige of the Thai armed forces. Support for peacekeeping also exists within Thailand's armed forces. As part of its commitment to UN peacekeeping, the Ministry of Defense established, within the Supreme Command Headquarters, on 17 December 2000 a new division under the supervision of the Directorate of Joint Operations called "Division of

Operations for Peace.” The Division served as Supreme Command Peace Operations Centre. The RTARF has also hosted international peacekeeping training sessions, including the UN Global Peacekeeping Initiative, established in 2004 to create common standards for training.

Because international peacekeeping has not been a top policy priority for Thailand, domestic opposition has not been evident. Although not UN peacekeeping, when two Thai soldiers died in Iraq, some politicians renewed their calls for the withdrawal of Thai troops. Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Kraisak Choonhavan, for instance, was strongly opposed to the deployment of Thai troops to Iraq and said that other senators supported his idea of withdrawing Thai troops from Iraq. One argument was that the soldiers should only make sacrifices for their motherland – not for the defense of others. Opposition is also sometimes couched in terms of support for traditional principles of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states. Overall, there has been no opposition in Thailand, at least in public, to international UN peacekeeping.

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats:

Thai soldiers may need more professional training on peacekeeping. In this regard, they are not as well trained for peacekeeping as Malaysian troops, for instance. Thailand possesses significant airlift capabilities, including 12 C-130 heavy lift aircraft. These were purchased during Thaksin’s tenure as prime minister with the aim of enhancing the country’s peacekeeping efforts and fruit exports. Thailand also has significant police capabilities that could be used for peacekeeping. Thai police officers number around 230,000, many of whom have accumulated experience in dealing with social and political unrest that could prove useful to peacekeeping operations. In February 2014, for instance, 15,000 police officers were involved in an operation called “Peace for Bangkok Mission” tasked with the responsibility to reclaim some protest sites near government buildings. They also have developed anti-drug capabilities that could be useful to peacekeeping missions dealing with conflict fueled by drug trafficking.

In terms of caveats, the Thai government is sensitive to the security of its deployed personnel and would be unlikely to contribute forces to areas affected by hostile activity. The security situation played a role in persuading the government to withdraw early from missions in both Iraq and Darfur. Moreover, Thailand is unlikely to engage in military intervention for peace when there are no mandates from the UN, nor is it likely to engage in peace enforcement, largely because its military has so far proven unable to quell a Muslim-inspired armed movement in its own Southern provinces.

As a potential non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2017-18, it is worth noting that Thailand has been pushing for TCCs to be included in the dialogue at every stage of planning for peacekeeping operations, especially mandate drafting and reviewing.

Part 8: Further Reading

Arthur, Gordon, “[Thailand Defence: Defence and Modernization](#),” *Asian Military Review*, 5 November 2013.

Suksaichol, Pinit, “Thailand’s Perspectives on Participation in United Nations Operations” in Hugh Smith (ed.), *Peacekeeping Challenges for the Future* (Canberra, Australia: Australian Defence Academy, 1993), pp.135-37.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, data is drawn from the IISS, *The Military Balance 2014* (London: IISS/Routledge, 2014).

² Piti Kumppong, “[New Roles of the Thai Military: Readjusting for the 21st Century](#)” (Unpublished and undated paper).

³ Nattawut Sabyeroop, “[Statement before the Fourth Committee of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly](#)” (New York: 28 October 2013).

⁴ Emma Chanlett-Avery and Ben Dolven, *[Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations](#)* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 20 December 2013), p.2.