

## Contributor Profile: Armenia

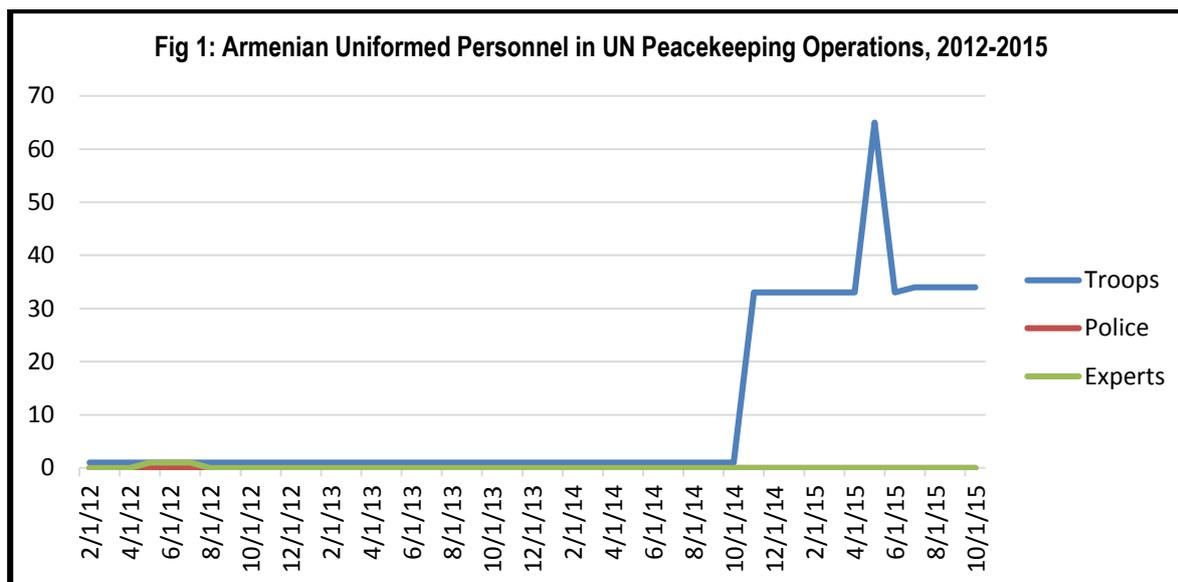
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Active Armed Forces <sup>1</sup>	Helicopters & fixed-wing transport	Defense Budget	UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments
44,800  World Ranking (size): <b>81</b>  Army: 41,850 Air/Air Defense Forces (Joint): 1,100 Other Air Defense Forces: 1,850  Paramilitary: 4,300	Attack: 26  Multirole: 20+  Transport: 20 (13 medium, 7 light)  UAV: 4	2014: \$470m (4.23% of GDP)  2013: \$458m (4.39% of GDP)  2012: \$396m (3.98% of GDP)  2011: \$393m (3.87% of GDP)	34 (31 Oct. 2015) (0 women)  Ranking: <b>85<sup>th</sup></b>	MINUSMA: 1  UNIFIL: 33	NATO ISAF: 130  NATO KFOR: 70
Defense Spending / Troop: <sup>2</sup> <b>US\$10,444</b> , (compared to global average of approximately US\$65,905 and regional average of \$6,800)					

### Part 1: Recent Trends

While Armenia has long served as an important Russian ally in the South Caucasus region, it has recently nurtured a closer and more active relationship with NATO and expanded its bilateral military cooperation with key Western countries, including the United States, France, Germany and Italy. This facilitated Armenia's contributions to Western-led military campaigns in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan. Simultaneously, however, Armenia has continued to demonstrate its role as a loyal and reliable security partner for Russia, and as a member of the [Collective Security Treaty Organization](#) (CSTO). More recently, Armenia has developed a larger role in peace operations, in part, to help pursue domestic defense reforms and modernization, and in part to forge greater self-sufficiency and gain valuable international experience for its elite peacekeeping battalion. The self-sufficiency stems from Armenia's expanding capacity to participate in peacekeeping operations separate from its role as a member of the Russian-dominated CSTO and distinct from its security partnership with Russia. In this way, Armenian commitments to peacekeeping missions have tended to bolster the country's self-sufficiency and self-confidence.

To date, Armenia has focused on NATO missions in Kosovo (KFOR), Iraq, Afghanistan (ISAF) (see Box 1), and, more recently UN missions in southern Lebanon (UNIFIL) and Mali (MINUSMA). In late 2014, 33 Armenian peacekeepers were deployed in UNIFIL. They serve under Italian command, conducting headquarter security tasks. Planning is underway for a deployment to the MINUSMA mission in Mali, based on an official decision adopted by the Armenian government in May 2015. These Armenian peacekeepers will be under French command. At the recent UN Peacekeeping Leaders' Summit on September 28, 2015, Armenia [pledged](#) to train and deploy an additional Level II Medical Hospital and an Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD)/Counter Improvised Explosive Device (C-IED) Company.



### Box 1: Armenia's Deployments in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan

*Kosovo:* Armenia's first contribution to an international peacekeeping mission was in Kosovo in 2004, where it deployed peacekeepers to NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR), serving under Greek command and with mission responsibilities including checkpoint and perimeter security, conducting patrols, riot and crowd control and convoy security. Conducted as a co-deployment, or as an operational partnership, as a small and somewhat recently independent state, Armenia benefits from the longer experience and greater resources of its larger partners. Such benefits have also been identified in the [recent \*Providing for Peacekeeping report on co-deployments\*](#). The mission memorandum was concluded on September 3, 2003 and later formally ratified by the Armenian Parliament on December 13, 2003. Initially, Armenia dispatched 34 peacekeepers, rising to 106 by June 2008. These troops were temporarily withdrawn in February 2012, after a change in the Greek command that the unit was serving under. The deployment resumed in July 2012, when 35 new Armenian peacekeepers deployed to the U.S. Bondsteel Military Base, near the city of Urosevac. Their duties include conducting patrols, checkpoint security, riot and crowd control, and convoy activity. As of September 2015, there are 70 Armenian peacekeepers in KFOR. Since 2004, Armenia has deployed over 670 soldiers to KFOR.

*Iraq:* In January 2005, 46 Armenian peacekeepers deployed to Iraq under Polish command, based in Al-Kut, outside of Baghdad. In November 2006, the peacekeeping deployment was extended for another year, despite public concerns after an Armenian officer was seriously wounded in a demining operation (the first casualty in any Armenian peacekeeping operation). The Armenian peacekeepers in Iraq were more diverse than in KFOR, including a higher number of mid- and senior-level officers, more specialized medical, transport, logistics personnel, as well as combat engineers. The mission in Iraq ended on October 7, 2008.

*Afghanistan:* As part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Armenia contributed 45 peacekeepers, serving under German command and tasked with a limited mission to provide security for an airport in Konduz. On May 11, 2011, the Armenian parliament formally approved the Ministry of Defense request to expand the Armenian contingent from 45 to 130 and voted to endorse an agreement reached with the German Command on prolonging the participation of Armenian peacekeepers in the mission through the end of 2012. As of September 2015, Armenia maintains 130 peacekeepers in Afghanistan. This peacekeeping mission also represented an upgraded mission for Armenian personnel, including five Operational Mentor and Liaison Team

Officers who were primarily responsible for training and assisting Afghan national army units.

## **Part 2: The Decision-Making Process**

In part reflecting the powerful position of the defense minister within the Armenian government, the Ministry of Defense holds the institutional authority for nearly all of the decision-making process regarding peacekeeping deployments, operations and details for the mission, mandate and extension of operations. While this institutional dominance is unchallenged, the final approval of all decisions firmly rests with the Armenian president. In recent years, this rather unique and largely informal process has become even more entrenched, due to three distinct factors.

First, Armenia's current Defense Minister, Seyran Ohanyan, is one of the most popular ministers, with strong public support for his reform program and personal credibility emanating from his professional military background. Moreover, the defense minister, as a career professional officer, has refrained from outright political activity and has led the way in pushing through the "civilianization" of the country's armed forces, whereby civilian control and oversight of the armed forces have been firmly entrenched. He has also formed a small, but influential team of like minded reformers within his ministry and has successfully countered more conservative elements of the ministry opposed or resistant to reform. It is the latter camp that is overtly pro-Russian, less enthusiastic over Armenia's deepening ties with the West and NATO, and more opposed to peacekeeping deployments.

A second factor encouraging the more informal nature of the Armenian decision-making process is the absence of any real institutional rival or competitor. The Armenian National Security Council (NSC), as a state entity that theoretically shares jurisdiction over peacekeeping decisions, is inactive and rarely meets. For its part, the Armenian parliament, which formally ratifies peacekeeping contributions and approves mission mandates and extensions, fails to provide any real oversight or even consultative functions. Rather, the parliament is dominated by the government's ruling party and, without exception, merely grants its formal approval of governmental requests in this area. A third factor stems from the fact that the current Armenian president, Serzh Sarkisian, was formerly minister of defense, which has encouraged a reluctance to involve other political actors or state institutions in policy discussions related to peacekeeping operations. Given this overly dominant presidency, the President has in practice the ultimate authority and the capacity to override the defense minister.

Beyond this informal process, however, decisions are guided by three official documents, which provide a legal, political and military framework. The first, Armenia's [National Security Strategy](#)<sup>3</sup> was adopted in January 2006. It prioritizes "peace and international cooperation" with a stated goal that "aspires to expand and develop its level of international engagement, and to promote peace and security in both the regional and global context." It goes on to identify the need to consolidate "Armenia's international standing and credibility, pursuing lasting peace and security in the region, and a deeper engagement in international security, including participation in international peacekeeping operations."

The second framework document, Armenia's [Military Doctrine](#),<sup>4</sup> was adopted in 2007. It provides a more detailed and military-focused approach that is generally defensive in nature. It also identifies the path toward bolstering military security "by broadening the cooperation, strengthening the peace and stability in the region." Similarly, a third, but less important

document, the Strategic Defense Review (SDR),<sup>5</sup> also offers an underlying framework in support of peacekeeping contributions. The SDR process was first launched in 2008 and, as of September 2015, is undergoing an update and review. The SDR aims to improve and elevate “threat perception” and has also underlined the importance of Armenia’s participation in international peacekeeping operations.

### **Part 3: Rationales for Contributing**

Several rationales drive Armenia’s contributions to peace operations. The most important are security rationales, followed by political and a related normative rationale. Institutional and economic rationales are evident but less significant.

*Security Rationales:* Armenia has long been required to shape all aspects of its military and security reforms according to the imperative of the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the related escalation of hostilities with neighboring Azerbaijan. This has also had a direct impact on threat perception and force posture, as well as defense spending, contributing to an overall militarization of the country. Despite these negative factors, the same drivers have also positively reinforced Armenia’s commitment to peace operations. This security rationale is also the basis for Armenia’s rather successful move from a “consumer” to a “contributor” of regional and international security. And although Armenia remains reliant on Russian arms and discounted weapons stocks obtained from Russia and the CSTO, in terms of operational training, doctrine and modernization, Armenian defense reforms have adopted a firmly pro-Western perspective.

*Political and Normative Rationales:* Armenia sees its peacekeeping role as essential to forging a positive international image for the country. This is especially important consideration because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the international mediation of that conflict.<sup>6</sup> Armenian peacekeeping is thus also leveraged to strengthen the country’s diplomatic power and to support its overall foreign policy goals. Here, Armenia’s peacekeeping contribution has also fostered a degree of “*complementarity*,” modeled on a policy of balancing the inherent contradictory impulses of a “strategic alliance” with Russia with a pro-Western orientation, which has helped to enhance Armenia’s strategic significance to the West while also elevating its value as Russia’s reliable regional ally.

Armenia therefore uses its peacekeeping commitments and activities to help offset its over-dependence on Russia as its primary security partner. This is even more crucial since the war in Ukraine, where Russian aggression and confrontation with the West has threatened to also taint Armenia’s international image, as Armenia was notably forced to back Russia diplomatically in Ukraine-related votes in both the UN and Council of Europe. This has fostered a negative “branding” of Armenia as an overtly subordinate state to its ally Russia. Moreover, the emergence of Russia as the leading arms provider to not only Armenia but also to its rival Azerbaijan has also further contributed to the political rationale for peacekeeping, as some of the more pro-Russian elements in Armenia have argued that the country should curtail its participation in so-called “Western” peacekeeping operations as a way to regain Russian support or “favor.”

*Institutional Rationales:* Armenia’s leaders see peacekeeping as a way to support defense reform by helping it deepen ties with the West. Bilaterally, Armenia has greatly expanded its options, forging agreements with a wide range of Western countries. Multilaterally, Armenia has also bolstered its institutional cooperation with NATO and its Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, which is the key driver of Armenian deployments to the Balkans and the Middle

East. These initiatives are helping to develop a modern, professional peacekeeping unit that, in turn, influences the overall institutional course of defense reform. This is also evident in the successful implementation of core reforms, such as the development of professional contract-based units, a focus on non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps, and the strict enforcement of civilian oversight and command leadership of the armed forces. Thus, peacekeeping experiences and perhaps even more importantly, the Western (German, Polish, Greek, US, etc.) command and mentoring of Armenian peacekeepers have bolstered the impact of defense reform by supplementing and deepening military education and professional development.

*Economic Rationales:* Another important, although less pressing rationale is the economic aspect of Armenian peacekeeping. Given the small size of the Armenian economy, UN peacekeeping missions offer an important alternative to shortfalls or limited resources available from the Armenian defense budget. For example, Germany, Greece and the United States have each offered financial support to Armenian peacekeepers, in terms of logistical support and direct contributions that were used for payroll costs. Armenia's willingness to participate in peace operations has also increased international donor support for its military.

#### **Part 4: Barriers to Contributing**

*Russian pressure:* Armenia's contributions to peace operations may be susceptible to Russian pressure to limit them. More specifically, despite the fact that Armenia has long served as an important Russian ally in the South Caucasus, more recently it has steadily aligned closer to the West, increased its peacekeeping contributions well beyond the Russian orbit, and adopted a much more active relationship with NATO and key Western countries. Armenia has been prudent and careful not to trigger an assertive reaction from Russia, including by repeatedly ruling out any aspirations for full NATO membership and reiterating its firm commitment to maintain the Armenian-Russian strategic relationship while maintaining active participation within the CSTO. For the time being, Moscow seems confident of Armenia's reliability, but there is a danger that if this were to change, Russia might move against Armenia's expanding peacekeeping commitments, since these are done outside the limits and control of CSTO missions.

*Alternative institutional preferences for crisis management:* Until very recently, Armenia demonstrated a preference for contributing to NATO operations rather than UN missions. Contributing to NATO's more Western-aligned missions was thought to improve Armenia's image in the EU and Western states, which, in turn, was thought to strengthen such relationships.

*Resistance in the military and difficult domestic politics:* There is the possibility of internal resistance to future peacekeeping commitments from within the armed forces. This scenario may emerge on two levels. First, given the escalation of low-intensity conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan, the country's peacekeeping commitment may be challenged by those who argue that the threat from the much larger Azerbaijani armed forces means Armenia should not send its limited resources abroad. But in light of the small number of Armenian peacekeepers, and its role in supporting reform, this argument is unlikely to gain any real traction within Armenia. A second possibility, however, is that a rival faction within the Armenian ministry of defense uses peacekeeping deployments as a tool to derail Armenia's pro-Western ties, while also targeting the defense minister himself as part of a deeper, Moscow-inspired political campaign that argues that the peacekeeping operations undermine the relationship with Russia. The likelihood of this scenario emerging as a barrier, however,

depends on a possible policy shift in Russia, whereby Moscow abruptly limits Armenian peacekeeping commitments, which is the primary danger.

*Financial costs:* Despite the small budget, there is no significant financial barrier to Armenia's deployments.

*Discomfort with the expanding UN peacekeeping agenda:* Armenia is in general supportive of the development of broader UN peacekeeping operations mandates, and has not raised any such concerns.

*Legal obstacles:* There are no major legal obstacles that prevent Armenia's deployment in peace operations.

### **Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues**

In the context of broader defense reform and current challenges facing peacekeeping operations, the Armenian Ministry of Defense is now approaching an important threshold, as it seeks a "third generation" of military reform. The "first generation" of reform focused on building modern armed forces, and succeeded in winning the 1990s war over Nagorno-Karabakh. The "second generation" was the post-war period of improving combat readiness and building even greater military superiority. During this period the Armenian armed forces were strengthened by the introduction of democratic reform, with civilian oversight of the military representing a crucial achievement. A potential "third generation" of necessary internal reforms might distract or even deflect from Armenia's commitment to peacekeeping operations. These issues include internal problems within the armed forces, namely the issue of non-combat deaths and Soviet- or Russian-style hazing and abuse within the military. For this unacceptable situation, the challenge is to restore discipline and to impose a new "zero tolerance" policy within the ranks. Although Defense Minister Ohanyan and his team have initiated efforts to find the specific officers responsible for such abuse, injury and deaths of conscripts, and the numbers are declining, more needs to be done. For example, the defense ministry's priorities of military education and the expansion of the NCO corps need to be expanded and accelerated.

In addition, three sets of policy reforms should be adopted. First, improvements in military education to forge a new awareness and culture among the officer corps that hazing and abuse is unacceptable. Second, a comprehensive reform of the promotion system to ensure promotions will be based on merit, performance, achievement and accomplishment. Third, adopting a modern series of physical and psychological tests for serving command officers is necessary.

### **Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents**

Armenia's commitment to peacekeeping is now fairly well entrenched and without any direct challengers. Nevertheless, it remains dependent on a small group of key "champions," who have marginalized but not completely defeated potential opponents. For example, as the key champion of peacekeeping, Armenian Defense Minister Seyran Ohanyan remains weakened by a series of non-combat deaths within the Armenian armed forces. He continues to contain and attempt to correct the problem but political pressure and public outrage over the issue continues to mount. In addition, the issue has also triggered a widening division within the Ministry of Defense, expressed through two rival factions. On the one side, a group of younger, more reformist, pro-Western (but not necessarily anti-Russian) officers closely aligned with Defense Minister Ohanyan, hold sway. But they are pitted against a second

faction comprised of older, more traditional military officers who are generally fearful of reform and resistant to change or modernization. This group is dominated by two more conservative figures, Chief of the General Staff Yuri Khachaturov and Inspector General and former Defense Minister Mikhail Harutiunyan. It is the latter group that may challenge Armenia's future peacekeeping commitments.

### **Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats**

In terms of capabilities, the performance of Armenian peacekeepers has been one of the more popular aspects of defense reform and modernization. Yet Armenian military planners and officials have long been prudently cautious in promoting peacekeeping too loudly, especially in the wake of a much more assertive Russian posture and sensing a danger of Russia placing limits on Armenia's "Western embrace." In the short- to medium-term, the visibility of such a Western embrace by Armenian defense reformers may be difficult to sustain. And fears that Moscow may impose a "line in the sand" regarding Yerevan's long-standing embrace of Western-style defense reform are well-founded, as Moscow may now seek to halt Armenia's deepening ties to NATO and hinder its reform and modernization efforts, and may exert greater pressure on Armenia's pro-Western reformers. In that event, Russia may move to constrain Armenia's Western-oriented NATO-supported military education reforms and even seek to block Armenia's operational contribution to peacekeeping deployments abroad, which have included missions under Western command in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan. It would also challenge Armenian military planners, and endanger operational plans to expand Armenian peacekeeping deployments in Lebanon and Mali. Given the recent Russian deployments to Syria, Armenian peacekeeping efforts in Lebanon are particularly threatened, since these are not under Russian command or control. The challenge for Yerevan will center on the country's capacity and its leaders' determination to withstand a fresh round of Russian pressure and coercion, which may result in direct pressure on the Armenian government, either through economic coercion such as threatening to raise the price for Armenian imports of Russian gas, or through a more subtle threat to provide less military assistance to Armenia.

### **Part 8: Further Reading**

- R. Giragosian & S. Minasian, "[Recent Trends in Security and Stability in the South Caucasus](#)," *CONNECTIONS: Quarterly Journal*, XI:1 (Winter 2011).
- R. Giragosian, "Armenia's National Security: External Threats, Domestic Challenges," in A. Jafalian (ed.), *Reassessing Security in the South Caucasus* (Ashgate, 2011), pp.47-64.
- R. Giragosian, "Hazing could subvert military reform in Armenia," *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief*, 3 February 2012.
- R. Giragosian, "Soft and Hard Security in the South Caucasus and Nagorno-Karabakh: A Euro-Atlantic Perspective," in M. Kambeck & S. Ghazaryan (eds), *Europe's Next Avoidable War. Nagorno-Karabakh* (PalgraveMacmillan, 2013).
- International Crisis Group (ICG), [Armenia and Azerbaijan: Preventing War](#) (ICG Europe Briefing No. 60, 8 February 2011).

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### **Notes**

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

<sup>2</sup> Armed Forces Spending is a country's annual total defense budget (in US dollars) divided by the total number of *active* armed forces. Figures from IISS, *The Military Balance 2015*. Here, the exchange rate used is for 30 June 2013 ([www.xe.net/ucc](http://www.xe.net/ucc)). Note that due to exchange rate fluctuations this represents an 8 per cent drop in spending per troop despite increased absolute spending in local currency terms.

<sup>3</sup> [Republic of Armenia National Security Strategy](#) (Yerevan, January 2007).

<sup>4</sup> [Republic of Armenia Military Doctrine](#) (Yerevan, December 2007).

<sup>5</sup> This document has not yet been made publicly available; the author will participate in the drafting and formulation process. For more information, see [the relevant website of the Ministry of Defence of The Republic of Armenia](#).

<sup>6</sup> The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is mediated by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) so-called “Minsk Group,” which is led by three co-chairing nations: France, Russia and the United States.