

The UK and UN Peacekeeping

Richard Reeve – May 2018

Subject:

This primer explains the United Kingdom's human, financial and other commitments to UN Peacekeeping operations, how these compare to other states, and how they have changed over time.

Context:

After nearly twenty years of neglect by Western powers, since 2015 UN Peacekeeping operations have seen a revival of commitments from several European states, including the UK. This reflects the greater availability of European troops since the drawdown of most forces from NATO-led operations in Afghanistan in 2014 as well as a growing awareness (outside the United States) that UN Peacekeeping is both effective and cost-effective in managing violent conflict. The British government also sees UN Peacekeeping as an attractive means to bolster its international image and defence relationships as it leaves the European Union. As such, it has significantly increased its contribution of personnel to UN Peacekeeping operations since 2016 and plays a very active diplomatic role in defining peacekeeping mandates.

Key points:

- The UK has exceeded its commitment to double its 2015 contribution of personnel to UN Peacekeeping operations, increasing their number from 291 to 740 by May 2018.
- This is the largest UK commitment to UN operations since 1995 but far below the 3,000+ troops committed in the earlier 1990s and representing just 0.5% of active personnel.
- The current UK commitment of personnel is broadly comparable to major European peers Italy, Germany, France and Spain, although still only 34th in global terms.
- The UK contributed \$392 million in 2017-2018 in direct funding of UN Peacekeeping operations, as well as training and transporting foreign peacekeepers.
- No significant change to the UK's support for UN Peacekeeping is likely in the current parliament and there is a growing cross-party consensus on its importance.
- Pressure on UK peacekeeper training resources may come from recent British commitments to run major counter-insurgency training programmes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Nigeria.

For a more extended and eloquent analysis of the issues raised and updated in this primer, please see David Curran and Paul D. Williams, [The UK and UN Peace Operations: A Case for Greater Engagement](#) (ORG, May 2016).

What are UN Peacekeeping Operations?

UN Peacekeeping Operations are those military or police missions mandated by the UN Security Council and directly managed and resourced by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO). The term may also include a smaller number of military and police personnel deployed to protect, assist or advise UN Department of Political Affairs (UNDP) missions, which are essentially civilian in nature. The UN has no troops of its own but depends on voluntary commitments of personnel from troop contributing countries (TCCs).

Not all military deployments mandated by the UN Security Council are UN Peacekeeping Operations. The Security Council can provide legitimacy for military operations run by third parties. For example, Security Council resolutions have endorsed the military operations of NATO in Afghanistan and Libya, of the African Union in Somalia (AMISOM), and of regional states in the Sahel (G5 Joint Force).

UN Peacekeeping Operations have expanded and evolved greatly since the 1990s. While some missions do separate warring parties and observe and support ceasefire agreements, others are peace enforcement missions where there is no ceasefire in place and all the main parties may not consent to a UN presence. Such mandates will be distinctly defined by the Security Council. Many missions are now “multidimensional”, providing “security and the political and peacebuilding support to help countries make the difficult, early transition from conflict to peace.”

Increasingly, UN Peacekeeping Operations work in complex situations where the Security Council has mandated multiple missions to do different things. For example, in Mali, UNDPKO maintains a large multidimensional peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA), while the Security Council has mandated France (with

allies) and regional states (G5 Joint Force) to conduct offensive peace enforcement missions in the name of counter-terrorism.

What is UK Government policy on UN Peacekeeping?

The Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) of November 2015 set out a specific commitment for the UK to “double the number of military personnel that we contribute to UN peacekeeping operations.” As of November 2015, these totalled 291 personnel. The SDSR also committed to establishing a UN Peacekeeping Policy Unit to coordinate between the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence.

The National Security Capability Review (NSCR), which updated the SDSR in March 2018, made no new commitments to UN Peacekeeping, although the defence component of the review has been separated into the Modernising Defence Programme (MDP), due to report in July 2018. The NSCR confirmed that the UK had met the target to double its personnel commitment but made no mention of the Policy Unit.

What contribution of personnel does the UK make to UN Peacekeeping Operations?

As of May 2018, the UK deployed 740 military personnel to UN Peacekeeping Operations. These were comprised of 704 contingent troops, 32 staff officers, and 4 military observers or experts. They were deployed as follows:

- 361 troops and 9 staff officers with UNMISS in South Sudan;
- 259 troops and 15 staff officers with UNFICYP in Cyprus;
- 84 troops and 3 military experts with UNSOM and UNSOS in Somalia;
- 6 staff officers with MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo;

- 2 staff officers with MINUSMA in Mali;
- 1 military expert with UNSMIL in Libya.

While the vast majority of these personnel are from the British Army, they are not necessarily infantry or combat troops. The longstanding Cyprus deployment is mostly light infantry, but the newer deployments in South Sudan and Somalia leverage British Army comparative advantages in engineering, medical, logistics and training support.

740 personnel represent about 0.5% of the total British Armed Forces strength, or about 1% of the British Army's trained strength.

The UK does not currently deploy any civilian police with UN Peacekeeping missions.

Have such contributions changed much over time?

The current UK contribution is the highest it has been since 1995 and nearly three times what it was in 2015, when the Cyprus commitment – maintained consistently since the 1960s – was the only significant UN deployment. UK commitments to UN Peacekeeping halved between 2003 and 2009 (from almost 600 to under 300) as the British military became more heavily committed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, the UK has historically contributed much larger numbers of personnel to UN operations, albeit for short periods. Between 1992 and 1995, an average of 3,000 to 4,000 British personnel was deployed, mostly with UNPROFOR in Bosnia. Thereafter, the UK preferred to make larger deployments to volatile countries under NATO command (e.g. Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan) or in parallel with UN missions (e.g. Sierra Leone) but under national command.

How do UK contributions compare to those of similar countries?

Notwithstanding the post-2015 surge in British deployments to UN missions, the UK is still

ranked only 34th globally in its contribution of UN Peacekeepers, of whom there are currently about 91,100.

All but two of the current top 25 TCCs are low- or middle-income countries from Africa and Asia, partly representing the relative appeal of UNDPKO reimbursements to TCCs of about \$18,000/person/year.

Compared to its European and G8 peers, the UK is now about average in its contributions to UN Peacekeeping operations. Italy is the largest European or high-income contributor, with 1,126 personnel, and the only one to significantly exceed the UK commitment. Germany, France and Spain are comparable to the UK, deploying 869, 827 and 645 personnel, respectively.

By contrast, G8 peers Russia (82), the United States (71), Canada (48) and Japan (4), now barely participate in UN-commanded operations. Canada has committed to change this, with up to 600 military and 150 police peacekeepers pledged to the UN soon. China is easily the largest contributor of personnel to UN Peacekeeping operations among the five permanent Security Council members. It deploys 2,500 peacekeepers, although this is a tiny proportion of its vast armed forces.

A few smaller high-income countries are notable for devoting far larger proportions of their militaries to UN Peacekeeping. Ireland (6%) and Uruguay (4%) are the clearest examples. No NATO member state currently commits more than 1% of its active armed forces to UN Peacekeeping operations. This is a big change from the earlier 1990s when NATO states provided the bulk of UN peacekeepers. Débaçles in Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia in the mid-1990s severely curbed this enthusiasm and the post-1999 series of interventions (Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Syria) substantially directed member states' resources elsewhere.

57 British peacekeepers are female – 7.7% of the British total. This compares favourably with the current UN total of 4.8% but is still below the UN’s 2020 target.

How much does the UK contribute financially to UN Peacekeeping?

Every UN member state is required to contribute to UNDPKO’s budget according to a complex formula largely based on its share of global income. These are known as Assessed Contributions. As a permanent member of the Security Council, the UK is expected to shoulder a somewhat higher proportion of costs.

In the current 2017-2018 financial year the UK is the sixth largest financial contributor, paying 5.77% of UNDPKO’s \$6.8 billion budget: \$392 million or roughly £300 million. This has decreased in recent years (in % and \$ terms) in relation to the UK’s relative economic decline. It is equivalent to about 0.7% of the UK defence budget.

However, the UK’s contribution to the UN Peacekeeping budget is not funded directly from the defence budget but from the cross-Whitehall Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). About a quarter of this fund is allocated to UN Peacekeeping. The current government is committed to getting as much of this contribution as possible designated as official development assistance (ODA, or foreign aid) by changing the international rules governing ODA. In effect, this means that some of the 0.7% of national income that it is legally obliged to spend on ODA can be spent through the Ministry of Defence. It is a flexible mechanism but the implication is that any increase in financial commitments to peacekeeping would be at the expense of funds available for civilian peacebuilding rather than other military priorities.

What other contributions does the UK make to UN Peacekeeping ?

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council the UK has disproportionate influence over UN policy on peacekeeping in general and specific mandates of missions. On one hand, it has the ability to veto a resolution seeking to mandate a peacekeeping mission. In practice it never does this, although the threat of such action (likely in coordination with France and the United States) may keep certain mission proposals off the agenda.

On the other hand, the UK is “pen-holder” for Security Council approaches to certain countries, meaning that it chairs meetings on them and leads on drafting resolutions. Such UK responsibilities currently include Colombia, Cyprus, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. Whether or not there are UN peacekeeping or peace enforcement missions in these countries is, thus, to some extent conditioned by British diplomatic initiative.

The UK is also pen-holder on key thematic issues: Peacekeeping, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, and Women’s Participation and Protection. This gives it great influence on UN peacekeeping policy and reform initiatives.

Finally, the UK expends considerable effort in providing peacekeeping training to TCCs, especially in Africa. This is particularly exercised by long-term training presences in Kenya, South Africa and West Africa. Recipient states are primarily Commonwealth countries, including Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia. In recent years the focus has been as much on training peace enforcers for the African Union’s Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which has a counter-terrorism focus, as on UN peacekeeping.

What are the prospects for change in the UK's approach to UN Peacekeeping?

The current government seems unlikely to alter significantly its enhanced commitment to UN Peacekeeping over the 2017-2022 parliament. There is a recognition that this level of deployment is good for the “Global Britain” brand and broadly sustainable given lower (relative to 2003-2014) Army deployments in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Peacekeeper training – especially when oriented to counter-terrorism missions – also fits with the orientation of UK “defence engagement” and the recent creation of dedicated “Specialised Infantry” battalions.

There is a possibility that greater stretch of ground forces and support helicopters in non-UN operations and training commitments could still redirect British forces away from UN Peacekeeping. For example, in early 2018 London has committed to deploying Chinook helicopters to the French-led Opération Barkhane in Mali rather than to MINUSMA, as Canada, Germany and the Netherlands have done. Similarly, the current heavy emphasis on training Iraqi, Afghan and Nigerian troops in counter-insurgency tactics diverts resources away from UN peacekeeper training.

Looking longer term, the 2017 general election was notable for the prevalence of commitment to UN Peacekeeping among all the major parties. Should there be a change of government before 2022, at least the same level of support seems likely from current opposition parties. Indeed, the Labour Party's 2017 manifesto made passing reference to supporting a UN Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS), which would amount to a small stand-alone UN army independent of member states' militaries. This would be a genuinely radical peacekeeping initiative for the UK to champion, although it would be very difficult for it to secure global support in the current international climate.

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