

Contributor Profile: Austria

Dr. Erwin A. Schmidl

Head (acting), Institute of Strategy and Security Policy, Austrian National Defense Academy

Active Armed Forces ¹	Helicopters	Defense Budget	Uniformed UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments ²
23,250	67	2010: \$2.69bn (0.71% of GDP)	295 (10 women) (30 June 2013)	MINURSO 2 experts UNDOF 117	EUFOR "Althea" 203 troops
World Ranking (size): 88	(24 multirole; 11 surveillance; 32 transport)	2011: \$2.84bn (0.68% of GDP)	Ranking: 43	UNFICYP 4 troops UNIFIL 167 troops UNTSO 5 experts	KFOR 375 troops (+ 150 Operational Reserve Force)
Army: 11,500 Air Force: 2,750 Support 9,000		2012: \$3.16bn (0.81% of GDP)	(5th largest contributor from EU states)		ISAF 3 officers EUMM Georgia 5 experts
4,300 Special operations forces.					RACVIAC 1 officer EUSEC DR Congo 1 expert
Defense Spending / Active troop: ³ US\$137,391 (compared to global average of approx. US\$67,959)					

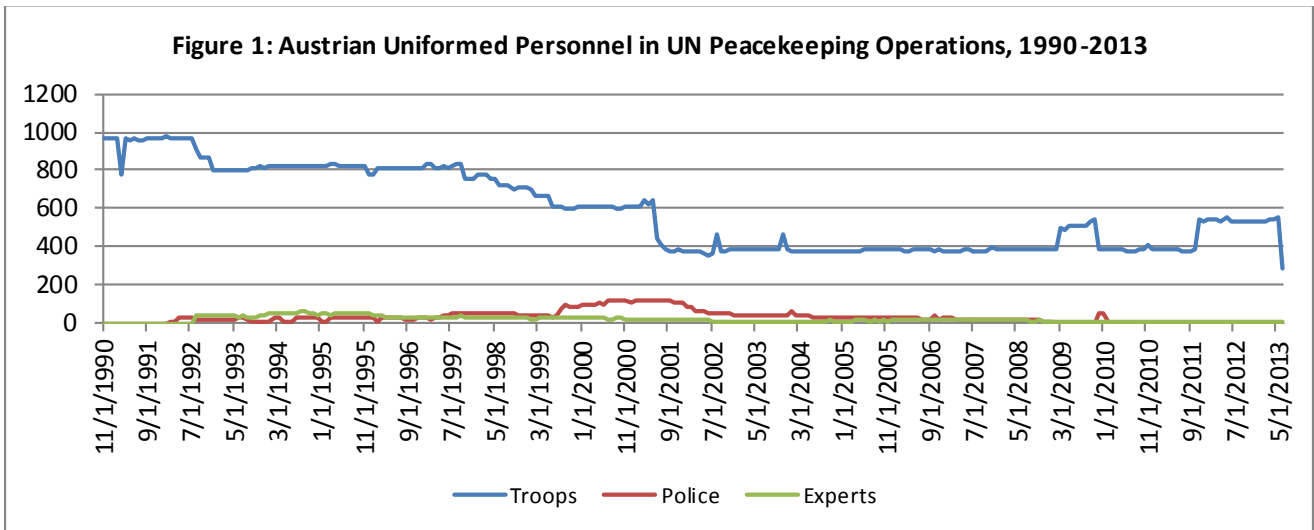
Part 1: Recent Trends:

Austria regained its sovereignty in 1955, and joined the UN in December 1955. It has contributed to UN-led peacekeeping missions since 1960 (and since 1995 to non-UN-led peacekeeping operations as well). In the 1950s, Austria developed a foreign policy, in part modeled on Swedish and Swiss examples and labeled "active neutrality," under long-term foreign minister (1959-66) and prime minister (1970-83) Bruno Kreisky. This policy offered Austria's good offices as a neutral country for international conflict resolution, depicted Austria as a "bridge between East and West" and promoted Vienna as host city to major international conferences and organizations, such as the IAEA, UNIDO, OPEC or OSCE. The policy also helped prompt Austria to contribute a medical unit to ONUC in the Congo in 1960-63. In 1964, Austria contributed a medical unit and civilian police to UNFICYP in Cyprus. This was followed by the deployment of military observers in the Middle East (with UNTSO) in 1967. A major increase in Austria's contribution came in 1972-73, when the number of men multiplied from c.120 to c.900, with the deployment of one battalion to Cyprus (UNFICYP) in 1972 and another to UNEF II in Egypt in 1973. The latter was transferred to UNDOF in Syria in 1974. Austria also pledged a battalion to the UN Standby Arrangements System initiated in the 1960s and resurrected in the 1990s.

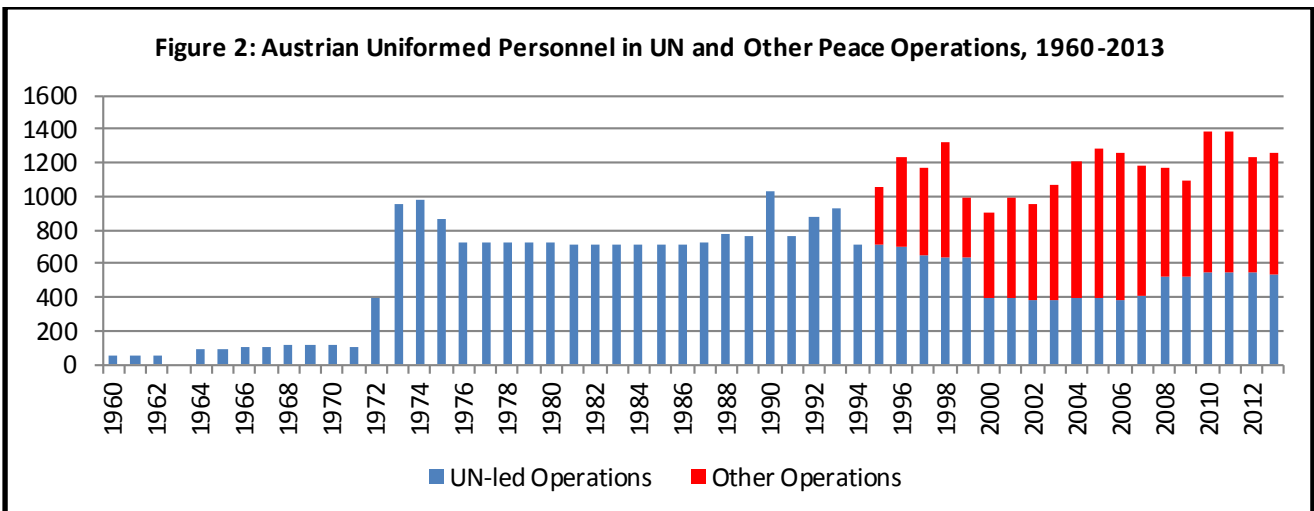
Until the end of the Cold War, Austria was among the leading UN contributors, usually being between the second and fifth largest contributor on the monthly list of UN troop-contributing countries with some 800-1,200 troops. It enjoyed a reputation as a reliable and experienced contributor. Since 1974, Austrian officers also served as force commanders in numerous UN operations: UNDOF (Syria, 1974-81, 1988-91 and 2007-10), UNFICYP (Cyprus, 1981-89), UNIKOM (Iraq-Kuwait, 1991-92), MINURSO (Western Sahara, 1997-99) and UNMOGIP (Kashmir, 2001-02). In addition, Austrian police officers served as Commissioners in UNAMIR (Rwanda, 1994), MINURSO (1996) and UNTAES (East Slavonia, 1996-98).

With the end of the Cold War and the ensuing increase in UN operations, Austria's relative contribution to UN peacekeeping declined (even though numbers rose slightly in the early 1990s). For a time in the early 1990s, Austria's *de facto* policy supported taking part in many operations,

sometimes with token contingents only. This was never an officially formulated policy but rather a practice that developed over time and, to some extent, is still in evidence.



A major change in Austria’s participation in peace operations occurred in the mid-1990s. From an organizational perspective, Austria’s accession to the EU and the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1995 coincided with both organizations’ increasing involvement in peace operations in the Balkans and, later, also in Afghanistan as well as in some African operations and in minor missions like Aceh (Indonesia). For Austria, this “diversification,” as it was called at the time, led to the deployment of police officers to the WEU-led police element in Mostar in 1995, and to participation in NATO’s Peace Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1996. This latter contingent was a battalion-size logistic unit, which continued when IFOR became SFOR in late 1996. In 1997, a company was deployed to the OSCE-sponsored, Italian-led *Operation Alba* in Albania. In 1999, Austria deployed another battalion task force to NATO’s KFOR in Kosovo. The Balkan operations, in Austria’s neighborhood, naturally took (and still take) first place in priority when it comes to participation in international operations.



Note: The maximum figures are given for each year. This does not include reserve formations (like the KFOR Operational Reserve) and other units prior to deployment.

At the same time, Austria continued to deploy battalion-size forces to the UN operations in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and Syria (UNDOF), as well as numerous smaller contingents to various UN operations

in Africa, Haiti and the Balkans. Plans existed for larger units to be deployed to Somalia or Western Sahara in 1993 and 1998, but these were never executed because of the changed situation in the theaters.

The 1990s also saw a move to integrate contingents from neighboring countries into Austrian battalions deployed abroad. This began with a Hungarian platoon, then a company, and later a Slovenian platoon in Cyprus, and was followed by Slovak, then Croat companies in Syria, and Swiss, Slovak and German elements in Kosovo. This was part of Austria's post-Cold War neighborhood policy and helped some of the neighboring countries to start participating in peace operations. Austria also contributed trainers, especially to Germany when that country embarked on increased participation in international operations. This was also the rationale behind Austria's catalytic role in the establishment of the Central European Nations' Co-operation in Peace Support ([CENCOOP](#)) in 1998, which included Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland. To some extent, CENCOOP was modeled on the Danish-initiated Multinational UN Standby Forces High Readiness Brigade ([SHIRBRIG](#)) of 1996, in which Austria also participated. Unfortunately, both initiatives have ended: [SHIRBRIG](#) was closed down in 2009 and [CENCOOP](#) remains only in name.

By 2000, with the deployment of additional troops to the Balkans in 1996 and 1999, Austria's contribution to international operations had reached the equivalent of more than three battalions. In view of continuing cuts to Austria's defense budgets, it had become clear that this commitment could not be maintained. Consequently, the number of forces deployed was reduced in 2001 by withdrawing the logistic unit (already reduced in size) from Bosnia-Herzegovina and the battalion from Cyprus (token participation by a handful of staff personnel continued in both missions, however). With the EUFOR *Althea* taking over from the SFOR mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2004, Austria again increased its commitment there, first to 290 troops in 2004, and later up to 370 in 2011. In 2006, Austria became the lead element of the Tuzla brigade-size task force, and assumed the position of force commander in 2009, which it still holds in 2012.

In addition to these major operations, smaller contingents have served in numerous UN and other operations since the 1980s, from Iran and Iraq through Cambodia and Haiti to East Timor. In 2001 and 2005, company-size contingents were deployed to Afghanistan. In 2008-09, a 160-strong contingent served with the EU mission in Chad and Central African Republic, which duly became MINURCAT in 2009. Austria contributed 130 soldiers to MINURCAT in 2009-10. In 2011, a 153-strong logistics unit was deployed to the restructured UNIFIL in Lebanon.

Various explanations have been offered for these deployments. For example, the deployment of forces to the EU mission in Chad and to UNIFIL was sometimes interpreted as a move to avoid contributing more than a few staff officers to ISAF in Afghanistan. Some observers saw a coincidence between contribution to the Chad mission in 2008 and Austria's ambition to be elected to the UN Security Council later that year, whereas others interpreted this as an effort to demonstrate the country's strong European commitment. This European commitment also led to participation in the EU's Battle Groups, to which Austria contributed elements in 2011 and 2012. These have not been deployed, however.

In early June 2013, Federal Chancellor Wener Faymann surprised most observers by announcing the immediate withdrawal of the Austrian contingent from the UNDOF mission in the Golan Heights. The [official reasoning](#) was that the character of the mission had changed because of the civil war in Syria, and that the mandate from 1974 was no longer sufficient in the new environment. However, when the Croatian contingent (which had deployed a company within the Austrian battalion) was

withdrawn for similar reasons in March 2013, Austria officially announced its intention to remain in place. The rapid turnaround resulted in a severe blow to Austria's reputation in the UN. Some observers criticized the decisions as being solely based on domestic political considerations, in particular government fears about adverse public reactions in the event that Austrian soldiers were killed because of the civil war in Syria. Both the [US and Israel criticized the Austrian decision](#). On 30 July 2013, [the last 44 Austrians left UNDOF](#). The official [UNDOF homepage](#) announced that "after 39 years AUTCON out of UNDOF."

2014 would have been the 40th year of Austria's presence in the mission. Since the start of the mission Austria had provided four UNDOF force commanders. Austrian forces have been replaced by troops from Fiji, who, together with a Philippine battalion and an Indian logistics battalion, provide the majority of UNDOF troops. Following Austria's withdrawal and several incidents, including UNDOF personnel being taken hostage by Syrian rebels, the Security Council renewed UNDOF's mandate in [Resolution 2108](#) (27 June 2013). This "stresse[d] the need to enhance the safety and security of UNDOF," and endorsed "the Secretary-General's recommendation to consider further adjustments to the posture and operations of the Mission, as well as to implement additional mitigation measures to enhance the self-defence capabilities of UNDOF, including maximizing the Force strength and improving its self-defence equipment."

This list does not include Austria's humanitarian and disaster relief missions, in which it has participated since 1963, starting with the earthquake in Skopje. Austrian experts like Brigadier General Norbert Fürstenhofer were also involved in the development of international disaster relief cooperation both by the UN and the EU. The Austrian Forces Disaster Relief Unit (AFDRU) enjoys a high reputation worldwide.

Part 2: Decision-Making Process

The decision-making process was laid down in the [Entsendegesetz](#) (Deployment Law) of 1965. It had to be adopted as a "constitutional law" (i.e. requiring an amendment to the [constitution](#)) because service abroad was only added to the duties of the armed forces, as defined in the Constitution of 1920/29, in 1975. This Deployment Law of 1965 was useful as long as Austria contributed only limited numbers of units to two or three operations. However, the increasing number of missions in the early 1990s rendered the formal procedures cumbersome, leading to moves to replace the old law. Eventually, a new law was introduced in 1997, in connection with participation in *Operation Alba*. Called *Bundesverfassungsgesetz über Kooperation und Solidarität bei der Entsendung von Einheiten und Einzelpersonen in das Ausland*, it is commonly known as [KSE-BVG](#) (Constitutional Law on Cooperation and Solidarity regarding the Deployment of Units and Individual Persons Abroad).

The formal decision to contribute a unit or personnel to any mission is preceded by informal negotiations between the UN (or other organization), the Austrian Foreign Ministry, and the Ministry of Defense. The decision to deploy a contingent or individuals abroad is then formally taken by the government and has to be confirmed by the Parliament's Main Committee. In cases of emergency (such as humanitarian disasters), the 1997 law includes provisions for rapid deployment through a decision of the government, which has to be confirmed by Parliament. For political reasons, a UN mandate is a prerequisite for participation in any operation. There are also political concerns regarding service in "unpopular" theatres such as Afghanistan or Iraq. The deployment of a unit to Lebanon in 2011, or of five police officers to the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan in 2010 was only achieved after long discussions between the Foreign Ministry and the ministries concerned.

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political Rationales: In 1960, the decision to contribute to UN operations formed part of Austria's general policy of increased participation in the international arena. This also was the rationale behind establishing Vienna as a major international diplomatic center. There was, however, a second element: In 1960, Austria sought UN support to back its position in the dispute with Italy over the rights of the German-speaking population in South Tyrol. It therefore wanted to strengthen its profile especially vis-à-vis Third World countries. Over the years, other rationales have dominated, such as support for Austrian foreign policy (i.e. its ambitions in the UN) in general, and particular aspirations, such as support for candidatures for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council (1973-74, 1991-92, 2009-10). To some extent, peacekeeping is seen as a source of international prestige.

With the country's accession to the EU, participation in EU missions has become a significant element of Austria's European policies. This reflects a shift to a more European-centered foreign policy, which goes back to the late 1980s, when Austria started to seek EU membership. In the context of the new situation created in Europe after the end of the Cold War, European politics became central. Although a UN-oriented policy remained important, the EU commitments increasingly took first place. This was helped by the tragic developments in Austria's immediate neighborhood (the Balkans) in the 1990s which directly affected Austrian interests.

In early 2011, the Security and Defense Doctrine of 2001 (*Sicherheits- und Verteidigungsdoktrin*) was amended by eliminating the option of joining NATO but stressing continued cooperation. Parliament adopted this amendment on 3 July 2011. Two years later, on 3 July 2013, the new Security Strategy was also approved by Parliament. Its contents differed little from earlier declarations, stressing cooperation within the EU framework as well as participation in UN peacekeeping missions as part of Austria's foreign policy. Under section 3.4.2.4, the document lists the priorities for participating in peace operations, with a mission's security policy relevance for Austria as the most important, followed by European/EU solidarity and international (i.e. UN) solidarity. The other items identified are the consequences for Austria's standing in an international organization, geographical aspects, the availability of troops, and financial aspects.

Economic Rationales: Economic rationales are not significant. However, participation in peace operations has in the past occasionally provided opportunities for Austrian producers of arms and equipment to demonstrate their products to an international audience. The successful export of weapons like the Steyr-AUG (*Armee Universal Gewehr*) assault rifle in the 1970s and 1980s was certainly aided by its use by Austrian contingents abroad. Anecdotal evidence (from Irish and other officers who encountered this weapon first on UN service) suggests that they were duly impressed by the weapon's performance.

Security Rationales: Given Austria's position as a small neutral country located on the "Iron Curtain" during the Cold War, supporting international organizations was always seen to be in the country's security interests. Chancellor Kreisky is said to have favorably compared the security value of the UN Office in Vienna to that of two armored divisions (which Austria never had anyway). A strong belief in the positive aspects of international cooperation continues to be a major feature of Austria's foreign and security policy.

Institutional Rationales: Until the mid-1990s, some high-ranking officers perceived peacekeeping as a nuisance and synonymous with supposedly harmless "sunshine peacekeeping" or "beach-keeping" missions which were perceived as "non-military" affairs – even though Austria has suffered more casualties in UN missions than in other operations (43 killed in UN-led missions as of 30 September 2012 and an additional eight in other missions). This picture has changed dramatically since then.

Participation in operations abroad has become one of the main tasks (and, actually, a major *raison d'être*) for the armed forces. This was reflected in the Army Reform discussion of 2003 (leading to the [BH2010 concept](#); see also the biannual "[White Book](#)" published by the Ministry of Defense). These concepts envisaged the contribution of a "framework brigade" and two battalions being deployed to international operations (in addition to smaller components, observers etc.). Of these battalions, one would have been for operations of a more robust type, consisting mainly of professional soldiers, whereas one would have been for less robust (i.e. UN) missions, with a high portion of reservists. Whereas doctrinal concepts of the early 2000s usually listed the armed forces' three missions (i.e. traditional defense, assistance to the civil power at home, and international operations) as equally important, more recent documents (such as the general staff's decision to adopt the so-called "[Profile F2](#)" in mid-2012) place greater emphasis on international deployments and assistance missions at home, limiting traditional defense to the maintenance of operational capabilities.

The growing importance of peace operations was also shown by the growth of the Command for International Operations established in 1987. At first commanded by a lieutenant colonel, it became a one-star command in 1999 and a two-star command in 2002. In 2006, it was amalgamated with the land forces, air forces and special operations commands to form the Armed Forces Command. In 2000, the army's journal [Truppendienst](#) started to feature a survey of current deployments (both in Austria and abroad) on a regular basis. At a [ceremony on 9 August 2013](#), the new Minister of Defense, Gerald Klug, praised the newly appointed highest-ranking officers for 'their encompassing international experience in missions abroad'. This marked a significant change of official attitude.

To some extent, participation in UN and other peacekeeping operations has become habitual. Although highly disputed at first, most Austrians now look favorably towards Austria's participation in peacekeeping. This is also partly due to the enduring principle that only volunteer soldiers may go abroad. Only in 2008 did major political discussions emerge over whether Austria should deploy a unit to the EU operation in Chad; and these ended abruptly once the deployment started.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

The main barriers are not political, but financial. In addition, maintaining a sufficient number of qualified volunteers remains a challenge. As Austria is still a neutral country (although some provisions of the neutrality law have been superseded by the accession to the EU and the subsequent development of European security and defense politics), there are certain limits to participation in "higher spectrum" operations.

Alternative political or strategic priorities: Since joining the EU in 1995, participation in the European Common Foreign and Security Policy has taken prime place in Austrian foreign policy in general and in relation to peacekeeping issues in particular. Other important factors are developments in South Eastern Europe since 1991, which has become the main theater for Austrian peacekeeping engagements. Apart from the Balkans, the Eastern Mediterranean and Africa claim some priority in Austrian foreign policy.

Alternative institutional preferences for crisis management: Resulting from the developments described above, Austrian involvement in peace operations includes both UN and non-UN missions. As most components in the operations in Southeastern Europe were gradually taken over by other organizations, this has led to a decrease in Austria's participation in UN operations.

Financial costs: Because of existing schemes of reimbursement, participation in UN missions is slightly less costly than EU or NATO operations. This does not affect the decision-making process

vis-à-vis participation in particular missions, however. Given the increasing budgetary restraints and the shrinking defense budget (the bulk of which goes to personnel costs), even maintaining the present level of participation in international operations is highly difficult, and any increase in Austria's commitment remains highly unlikely.

Discomfort with the expanding UN peacekeeping agenda: While Austria remains committed to UN peacekeeping efforts, such discussions are not critical.

Difficult domestic politics: With the exception of the 2008 discussion about participation in the EU Chad operation, participation in international operations has so far been largely supported by all political parties and the public. The withdrawal of Austria's contingent from UNDOF in mid-2013 was interpreted as a product of domestic political considerations, specifically the upcoming elections.

Exceptionalism and absence of pressure to contribute: This is not a relevant factor in Austria, if one discounts the consequences of still being neutral. However, there is a distinct reluctance on the political level to participate in more robust (or dangerous) operations. This was shown in the discussions about participation in the UNIFIL operation in 2010/11 (where [Austria contributes a logistic element since November 2011](#)), and again in early 2013, when [Austria decided reluctantly to contribute a token medical element to the EU Training Mission in Mali](#).

Legal obstacles: Despite Austria's residual status as a "neutral" country, there are no legal obstacles to participation in peacekeeping operations. The law requires that only volunteers serve abroad.

Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues

In 2011 a major debate started about suspending obligatory national service (currently six months), which led to a referendum on 20 January 2013. Whereas opinion polls had predicted a close run the referendum resulted in a somewhat surprising 60:40 majority for maintaining conscription. This issue is important for Austria's international operations because about two thirds of the soldiers in most missions (especially the rank and file) are reservists, not active-duty personnel, and the move to a professional army might have resulted in reduced personnel levels because of the cost factor. With constantly reduced budgetary resources, the financial factor remains an important issue.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

Since 1960, the main promoter of participation in international missions has been the Foreign Ministry (now Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs). The Defense Ministry's engagement was lukewarm at first but this changed since the mid-1990s, with the military increasingly understanding the value of participation in international operations. In the police, the Ministry of Interior occasionally supplied up to 100 police officers, but budget cuts and increasing international obligations (such as participating in EU FRONTEX activities and additional liaison officers at embassies abroad) has cut this number to approximately 25.

The foreign and defense ministries have also supported the annual "Vienna Seminar" on peacekeeping organized jointly by these ministries and the International Peace Academy, now International Peace Institute, since 1970. There is also the [Blue Helmet Forum](#), sponsored annually by the [Association of Austrian Peacekeepers](#) and the [National Defence Academy](#) in Vienna. The Defence Academy's various institutes, as well as institutions like the [Austrian Institute for International Politics](#) and the [Peace Institute at Stadtschlaining](#), also support research and conceptual thinking about peacekeeping.

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats

So far, Austria has contributed a wide range of units to peace operations, from light infantry to special operations forces and logistics, in addition to air elements (helicopters), medical units, and engineers. Popular (and thus political) caveats still exist restricting the contribution of larger combat units to more robust missions of the Afghanistan or Iraq type.

Part 8: Further Reading

General surveys:

Erwin A. Schmidl, *Going International – in the Service of Peace* [Das österreichische Bundesheer und die österreichische Teilnahme an Friedensoperationen seit 1960] (Graz: Vehling, 2010).

Christian Ségur-Cabanac – Wolfgang Etschmann (eds.), *50 Jahre Auslandseinsätze des Österreichischen Bundesheeres* (Schriften zur Geschichte des Österreichischen Bundesheeres, Sonderband, Vienna: Ministry of Defense, 2010).

Rolf M. Urrisk-Obertynski, *Ever Ready! The Austrian Armed Forces at Home and Abroad* (English version: Graz: Weishaupt, 2011).

Special studies:

Erwin A. Schmidl, *Blaue Helme, Rotes Kreuz: Das österreichische UN-Sanitätskontingent im Kongo, 1960 bis 1963* (= Innsbrucker Forschungen zur Zeitgeschichte 13, Innsbruck – Wien: StudienVerlag, 1995; 2nd rev.ed.: Peacekeeping-Studien 1, Innsbruck – Wien – Bozen: StudienVerlag, 2010).

Bundesministerium für Inneres, Sicherheitsakademie (ed.), *Auslandseinsätze der Polizei: Eine Studie des Bundesministeriums für Inneres* (= Sicherheit und Gesellschaft 2, Wien - Berlin: LIT, 2011).

Notes

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

² As of July 2013. Source: www.bundesheer.at

³ 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 2013*.