

Contributor Profile: Australia

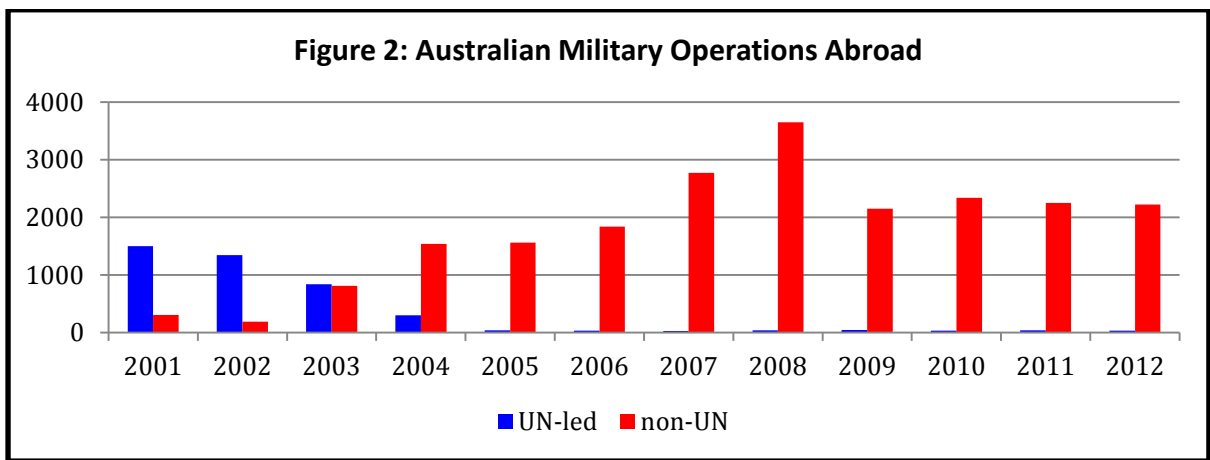
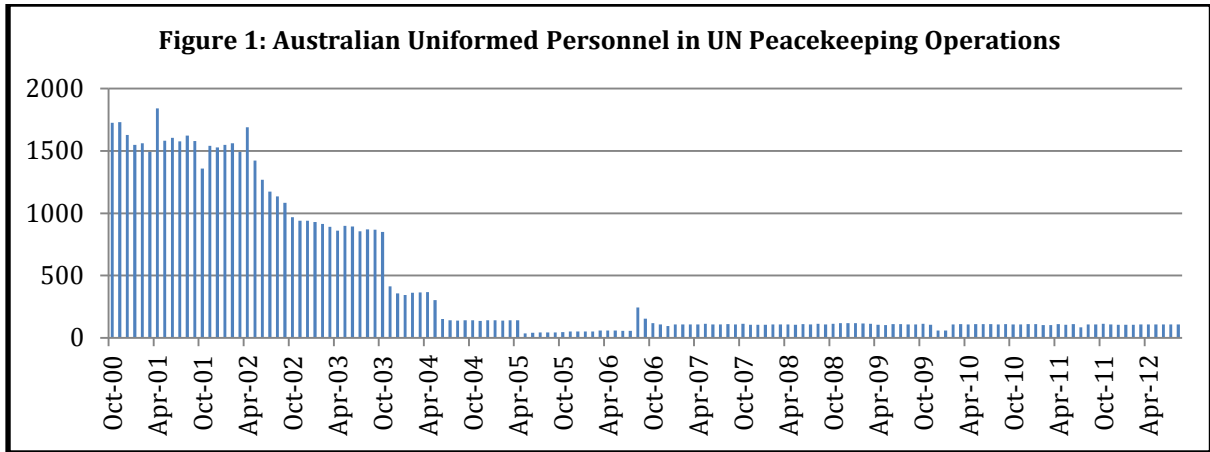
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Active Armed Force ¹	Helicopters	Defense Budget	Uniformed UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments
56,552 World Ranking (size): 63 Army: 28,246 Navy: 14,250 Air Force: 14,056 (excluding High Readiness Reserve: Army: 2,800 Air Force: 1,400)	Attack: 22 Transport: 105 (5 hvy; 59 med; 41 light)	2011: \$26.7bn (1.9% of GDP) 2012: \$26.5bn (1.8% of GDP) 2013: \$24bn (1.56% of GDP) Ranking: 13 ²	107 (31 August 2012) Ranking: 62	UNMIT: 48 police, 4 experts UNMISS: 11 troops, 10 police, 4 experts UNFICYP: 15 police UNTSO: 11 experts UNAMA: 2 experts UNAMI: 2 experts	ISAF: 1,550 Solomon Islands: 80 Timor-Leste (ISF): 380 Iraq: 35 MFO (Egypt): 25
Defense Spending / troop: ³ US\$366,000 (compared to global average of approx. US\$59,000)					

Part I: Recent Trends

The number of Australian uniformed personnel in UN-led peacekeeping operations has declined sharply in the past decade from an average of around 1,500 to around 100 (see figure 1). This decline can be attributed primarily to the drawdown of UN operations in Timor-Leste (UNTAET and UNMISSET), to which Australia was a major contributor. Since then, Australia’s contribution to UN peacekeeping has come primarily in the form of police officers and token military contributions. Between 2003-5, Australia maintained a relatively large force (peak 550) in the Solomon Islands as part of the Pacific Islands Forum’s Regional Assistance Mission (RAMSI). From 2004, it made a significant contribution to UN Security Council-authorized operations in Iraq (peak c.850). From 2006, operations in the Solomon Islands and Iraq were scaled back and Australia made larger contributions to ISAF, reaching a peak of 1,550. Australia has the 12th largest assessed financial contribution to UN peacekeeping.

Figure 2 shows that on average approximately 2,000 Australian uniformed personnel have been stationed overseas since 2004.⁴ This suggests Australia decided to redirect its troops away from UN-led operations toward other types of operation (especially in the Solomon Islands, Iraq and Afghanistan) but also that it has a relatively fixed pool of deployable capability. The Australian government intends to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 and plans to begin scaling down operations from 2013.



Part 2: Decision-Making

Australia takes a “whole of government” approach to peacekeeping whereby a range of different agencies are involved in the decision-making process. Ultimately, however, the decision to contribute is made by the Prime Minister on the advice of Cabinet. According to the final report of a 2008 [Parliamentary Inquiry into Australia’s peacekeeping policy](#), upon receipt of a request the relevant ministries and departments (specifically, Defence Department, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), AusAID, Australian Federal Police, and intelligence agencies) conduct their own fact-finding exercises on the proposed operation and its implications for their work. Where the government is seriously considering a contribution, departments might dispatch assessment-teams to gather additional information from the field. DFAT consults other countries and advises on the political and diplomatic implications, as well as on the expected responses of other states to the UN’s requests. The ministries and agencies come together in interdepartmental committees to consider the UN’s request. In particular they: (1) look at the mission; (2) look at what Australia is being asked to do; (3) evaluate the expected timeframe and the chances of mission success; and (4) assess local conditions, including the degree of local and international acceptance of the proposed peacekeeping mission. Thus, the Prime Minister receives a single piece of “whole of government” advice. Once the government has taken a decision, it must then inform Parliament but there is no requirement for formal parliamentary approval. Such approval is often granted, nevertheless. This is rarely controversial. Because Australia is a parliamentary democracy, the government commands a majority in parliament. Moreover, UN peacekeeping deployments have typically enjoyed bipartisan support.

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Rationales for contributing Australian troops to UN-led operations are obviously quite weak. However, some of these rationales explain why Australia has been active in relation to major international deployments in UN-authorized missions or missions authorized by regional organizations and/or unilaterally after host state invitation.

Political and Security Rationales: These rationales have become relatively more important over the past decade and play the principal role in determining whether Australia will make more than token contributions. This is a new development, as past commitments to UNOSOM, UNAMIR II, and UNPROFOR attest. For the past decade, Australia has focused on missions that address perceived security threats and alliance interests (Australia is a member of a formal alliance with the US – ANZUS – and invoked the relevant mutual defense provisions in the wake of 9/11) or instability and humanitarian need in its own neighborhood, as with operations in Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands. It has tended to avoid operations that do not fall into one of these two categories. This was reflected to some extent in the [2009 White Paper](#), which identified the most important strategic priorities as a secure Australia and a secure neighborhood.

Economic Rationales: Economic rationales do not play a significant role in Australian thinking about UN peacekeeping. Neither the Australian government nor individual personnel stand to benefit financially through participation in UN peacekeeping, though the Department of Defense can sometimes recoup its losses from the Treasury. Although UN reimbursement does reduce the costs relative to NATO-led or non-UN operations, Australian policy-makers tend to see the additional national control permitted by operating outside of UN structures as being worth the additional marginal costs.

Institutional Rationales: The Australian Defence Force, especially the Army, maintains a high operational tempo and high deployment rate. This reduces the impact of potential institutional rationales associated with UN peacekeeping.

Normative Rationales: Normative rationales do play a role in Australian decision-making. In particular, Australia sees itself as a “good regional citizen” that is able and willing to respond to humanitarian crises within its own region. Often, in such contexts, it sees normative and political/security rationales as interdependent. Thus, normative considerations played a role alongside concerns about regional order in driving Australia to lead operations in Timor Leste, the Solomon Islands and, before that, Cambodia. Normative rationales are the single most important factor when Australian forces are committed to humanitarian relief operations, such as those in Aceh in the wake of the 2004 Tsunami. In responding to humanitarian crises, Australia has taken a very flexible approach to the preferred institutional vehicle for dispatching troops. These include UN-led peacekeeping (Cambodia, Timor Leste), UN-authorized peacekeeping (INTERFET in Timor Leste), bilateral/host state invitation peacekeeping and humanitarian relief (Operation Astute, Timor-Leste and Aceh relief), and host state/regional organization (RAMSI).

In summary, Australia has a habit of contributing forces to international missions when they are seen as supporting core security and/or alliance goals or protecting stability and supporting humanitarian goals in its neighborhood. However, it sees little need to make more than token contributions outside these contexts and has little incentive for preferring the UN over other institutional vehicles. Australia wants to retain as much national command and

control as possible when deploying forces overseas and has proven willing to adapt on a case-by-case basis to achieve this effect.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

Alternative political or strategic priorities: Australia's principal defense and security priorities do not converge with the UN's operational priorities except in a small number of cases in Australia's own neighborhood. Australian national security priorities are key and these privilege the "war on terror" (Australians have been specifically targeted by extremists in Indonesia) and its alliance commitment to the US (Australia's defense against potential major threats rests on extended US deterrence and its [defense agreement](#)). Australia has few interests in Africa or Latin America and sees little need to further extend its overstretched forces. There is also a growing perception, noted in a recent review of foreign aid, that Australia lacks expertise in these regions and therefore has little value to add, except through financial support to the UN and African Union.

Alternative institutional preferences for crisis management: Australia prefers to retain as much national command and control as possible and has deployed forces under a range of different institutional conditions to achieve this. There is clear skepticism among politicians and the military towards UN command and control born of perceived inefficiencies in UNPROFOR, UNOSOM, UNAMIR and more recently negative comparisons of UNTAET/UNMIT with INTERFET/Operation *Astute*. Within defense circles there is an informal understanding that, almost as a standard procedure, Australia will not place *significant* forces under UN command and control owing to its perceived inefficiencies.

Financial costs: UN-led peacekeeping imposes additional financial burdens on the Australian government. The current government is struggling to return the budget to surplus and is planning to cut defense spending to achieve this. Perceived financial costs will likely inhibit UN contributions. Combined with problems of overstretch, financial considerations make it unlikely that Australia will make additional forces available for UN service except where there is (1) security/alliance interest or (2) regional stability/humanitarian interest.

Discomfort with the expanding UN peacekeeping agenda: This is not a relevant factor as Australia is a champion of the expanding agenda, especially the protection of civilians and robust approaches to peacekeeping. If anything, the fact that the UN has not moved further down this path is an inhibitor to greater Australian involvement.

Exceptionalism: Former Prime Minister, John Howard, coined the phrase "deputy sheriff" to describe Australia's role in the region. Although widely and rightly criticized on a number of grounds, the phrase captures nicely the two core drivers of Australian decision-making on peacekeeping. As a "deputy," Australia gives priority to requests from the sheriff (the US) but assumes its own responsibilities in a particular region. This self-perception explains Australia's relative activism in some spheres but also its deep reluctance to engage beyond token or specialized contributions outside of these spheres.

Difficult domestic politics: Within the boundaries noted above, peacekeeping is not a contentious issue in Australia. The Australian Labor Party is generally better disposed towards the UN than the Liberal/National Parties but this has not influenced decision-making on peacekeeping in any obvious way in the past decade. That said, a government of either persuasion would have a difficult time justifying a large contribution to a UN mission outside Australia's own, albeit ill-defined, region. In addition, the loss of 35 soldiers in Afghanistan

and of nine soldiers in a helicopter crash during a humanitarian relief operation in Indonesia (2005) has alerted the public and politicians to the potential for casualties. This adds to Australia's wariness about contributing forces to overseas missions, especially where the national interest case is perceived to be weak.

Resistance in the military: There are strong supporters of UN peacekeeping within Australia's military sector (see below), including former force commanders such as Generals John Sanderson (UNTAC) and Tim Ford (UNTSO). However, there is also deep-seated skepticism towards UN command and control structures, whether UN missions are suitable for complex operations in difficult environments. The military rewards system is also somewhat skewed against UN service. Veterans of UNAMIR II, who among other things were first-hand witnesses to the Kibeho massacre (1995), did not have their service recognized as "combat service," with negative implications for their pensions and treatment for conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder. This was reversed more than a decade later, but it indicates institutional wariness towards UN peacekeeping, as recognition and reward for service in non-UN-led operations is greater.

Legal obstacles: There are no legal barriers to Australia's participation in UN peacekeeping operations.

Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues

The most significant future political developments are likely to be: (1) the release of a new Defense White Paper, which will replace the [2009 White Paper](#). This 2009 White Paper paid almost no attention to peacekeeping and argued instead that Australia's defense policy should focus on "hedging" in relation to a rising China and other strategic challenges. It called for significant new investment in heavy and expensive equipment such as submarines and the Joint Strike Fighter and a relative loss in the priority afforded to Army and expeditionary capability. It did mention the need for humanitarian response capability but not as a priority. The paper identified no specific measures in relation to peacekeeping. There is no indication that the new White Paper will depart from this track.

(2) The government has expressed its intention to cut the Defense Budget to take account of the withdrawal from Afghanistan and achieve an overall budget surplus. Although the Liberal Party has pledged to increase defense spending, it is also committed to achieving a budget surplus and to a number of other expensive policy reforms.

(3) The likely change of government in the 2013 national election to one led by a Liberal/National coalition. The Liberal/National parties are traditionally more critical of the UN and are unlikely to commit uniformed personnel to UN peacekeeping operations unless in Australia's immediate neighborhood. In practice, the current Labor government has behaved in the same way but its friendlier attitude towards the UN created potential for positive engagement, which may become more difficult to sustain under a Liberal/National coalition.

(4) Australia is a candidate for non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council for 2013-14. It has not attempted to strengthen its candidacy by increasing its contribution. However, failure to win election may encourage the government to adopt a less friendly attitude towards the UN in general.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

Peacekeeping is not a topic of active debate in Australia. Key think tanks such as the [Lowy Institute for International Policy](#) and the [Australian Strategic Policy Institute](#) pay almost no attention to UN peacekeeping. There are, though, some key pockets of support for UN peacekeeping. Most notably, the [Australian Civil Military Centre](#), the [Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect](#), the [UN Association of Australia](#), and the [Australian Association of Peacekeepers and Peacemakers](#). The [Australian War Memorial](#) has also done a lot of work on Australian peacekeeping, including high profile displays on Australia's contribution to UN peacekeeping and an official histories book series. Principal skeptics include sections of the print media (the Murdoch owned national daily, [The Australian](#), is repeatedly critical of the UN and of peacekeeping) and right-wing think tanks such as the [Centre for Independent Studies](#) and the [Institute of Public Affairs](#). The biggest barrier, however, is not specific criticism but a widespread public apathy and belief that the UN is ineffective.

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats.

Australia has a small but advanced military, with a reputation for being a highly capable peacekeeper and coalition partner. It was one of the few contributors to UNOSOM I and II to emerge with a positive story to tell, having achieved dramatic humanitarian results in its area of operations. The Australian-led missions in Timor-Leste also proved effective. The Australian Federal Police's [International Deployment Group](#) (IDG) maintains a standing police capacity for international deployment, including a rapid deployment group (capable of deploying teams within 24 hours and 72 hours). The IDG also has its own purpose-built training center for international policing, which includes a mock-up village.

The principal issues for Australia relate not to capability but to: (1) military overstretch given other commitments and budgetary decline; (2) Australia's clear preference to retain as much national command and control as possible; and (3) an equally clear preference for contributing only when there is either alliance/security interests involved or when a mission is in its neighborhood.

Part 8: Further Reading

[Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030](#). (Defense White Paper, Government of Australia, 2009).

[Australia's Involvement in Peacekeeping Operations](#). Final Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade. (August 2008).

David Horner, Peter Londey and Jean Bou (eds.), *Australian Peacekeeping: Sixty Years in the Field* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Peter Londey, *Other People's Wars: A History of Australian Peacekeeping* (Allen and Unwin, 2004).

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise stated, data is drawn from IISS, *The Military Balance 2012* (London: Routledge, 2012).

² Based on calculations from IISS, *The Military Balance 2012*.

³ 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 2012*.

⁴ Figure 2 uses data presented in IISS, *The Military Balance* for the years 2001-2012.