

Contributor Profile: Colombia¹

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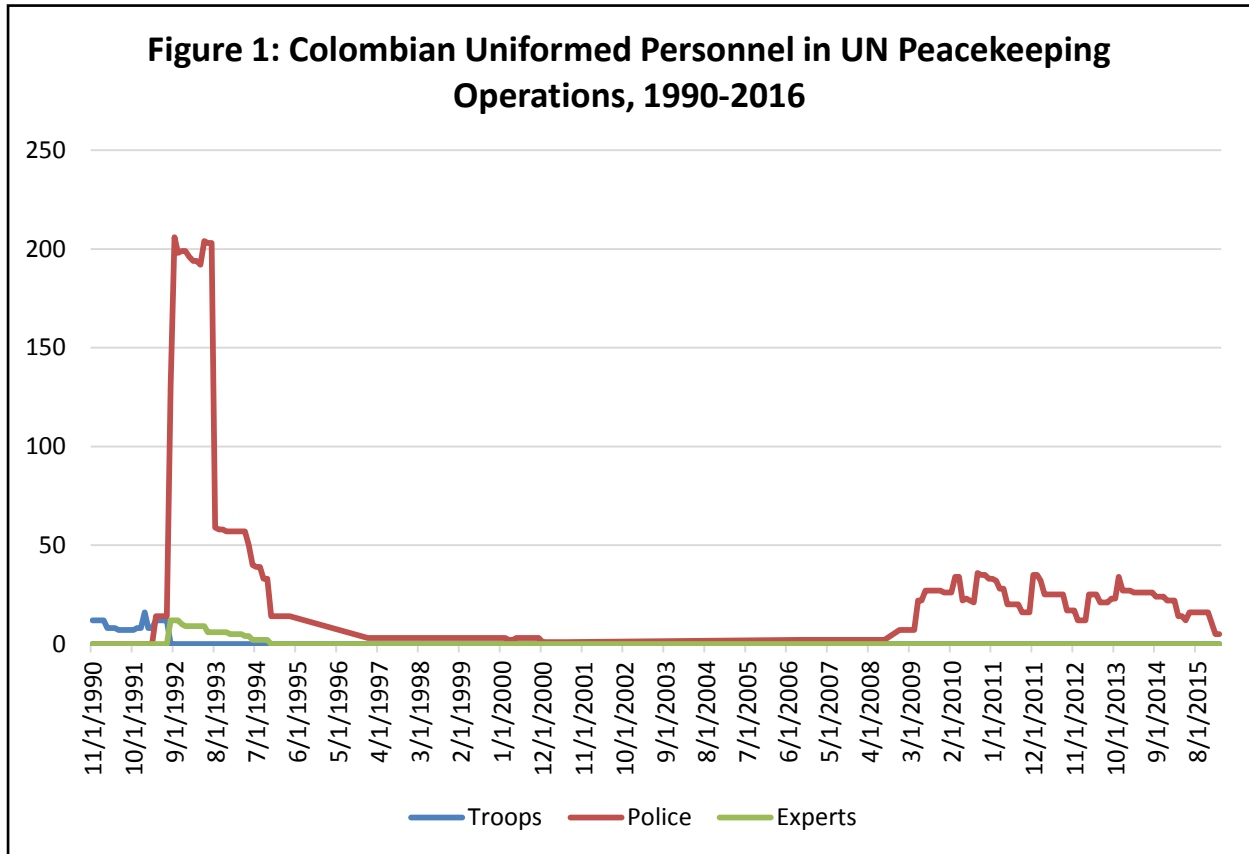
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Active armed forces ²	Helicopters & fixed-wing transport	Defense Budget ³	UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other significant deployments ⁴
296,750 World Ranking (size): 16 Army: 237,000 Navy: 46,150 Air Force: 13,600 Paramilitary: 159,000	Attack: 22 Multi-role: 18 Transport: 48 Light: 35	2016: pC 29.1tr 2015: \$9.84bn (3.60% of GDP) 2014: \$13.4bn (3.36% of GDP) 2013: \$13.6bn (3.58% of GDP) World Ranking (2016): 22	29 (5 female) (30 April 2016) Ranking: 87th (12th largest contributor from the Americas).	MINUSTAH 5 police	MOF (1982-present): 357 military observers.
Defense Spending / Troop: ⁵ US\$33,215 (compared to global average of approximately US\$60,054 and an average spending in Latin America and the Caribbean of US\$2,143).					

1. Recent Trends

Colombia's participation in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions began when a Colombian Armed Forces infantry battalion was sent for military observation to the Suez Canal and the Sinai Peninsula, as part of the UN Emergency Force (UNEF I, 1956–67). In 1982, Bogotá sent troops to the Sinai Peninsula under the Multinational Force of Observers (MFO): Colombia still maintains over 350 observers in this mission.⁶ In the 1990s, it contributed military observers and police personnel to the UN Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA, 1989–92), the UN Observer Group for the Verification of the Elections in Haiti (ONUVEH, 1990–91), the UN Angola Verification Mission II (UNAVEM II, 1991–95), the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL, 1991–95), the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC, 1992–93), the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR, 1992–95) in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the UN Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA, 1997), and the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (2004–today). Furthermore, Colombia contributed to the Organization of American States' (OAS) 1990s [demining program in Honduras](#) and the Special Mission for Strengthening Democracy in Haiti (2002–06).⁷

More recently, Colombia participated in political missions organized by the UN Department of Political Affairs such as the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA, 2002), the UN Office in East Timor (UNOTIL, 2005), the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL, 2005) and the UN Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB, 2007).



However, its participation in UN peacekeeping missions is “modest,” especially when compared to some of its Latin American neighbors. Colombia’s current contribution to UN peacekeeping operations is 29 civilian National Police deployed in MINUSTAH to protect civilian populations, assure human rights, and to help rebuild institutions. To date, Colombia had not authorized the deployment of infantry troops in any peacekeeping operation. The UN mission in Haiti, however, is seen by Bogotá as an opportunity to rethink its position on peace operations, specifically by merging peacekeeping and peace consolidation initiatives, fostering technical cooperation, and creating police, logistic, technological, and institutional capabilities in receiving countries.⁸

After the successes of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay in UN peacekeeping, the UN has recently signaled its interest in counting on more South American support for its missions. Colombia has signed two framework accords to institutionalize its contribution to such multilateral efforts. The first, in 2014, with the European Union, allows Colombian troops to participate in crisis management and peace consolidation missions around the world.⁹ The second, in 2015, is a framework agreement allowing Colombia’s Armed Forces to contribute to the UN Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System.¹⁰ In a [pledge](#) made at the World Leaders’ Peacekeeping Summit in September 2015, President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-18), said Colombia would send more personnel in 2016, both males and females, to similar missions to Haiti and Guinea Bissau which, according to recent figures from the Colombian National Police, would be a total of 58 UN certified police officers expected to be deployed in the UN Missions in Mali, Central African Republic and the Ivory Coast.¹¹ In 2017, Colombia would contribute a military contingent of 500 troops; by 2018, Colombia should be able to add three battalions to other peacekeeping missions, thereby reaching 5,000 troops deployed.¹²

2. Decision-Making Process

The President of Colombia, as the Head of the State and the Executive Power, in accord with foreign policy parameters outlined by the national government, decides to deploy staff within a UN peacekeeping mission. Once the decision has been taken, the Ministry of National Defense, with the support of Foreign Relations, signs an agreement.¹³ Then, the Ministry of National Defense defines the type of contribution to be made according to two factors: (a) internal stability in Colombia (the Army and Police priorities are to keep internal order in Colombia); and (b) the availability of suitable military and police personnel.

In the absence of a White Paper on Defense, the signing of the framework accord for Colombia's Armed Forces' contribution to the UN Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System is expected to help institutionalize Colombia's participation in UN missions by establishing formal mechanisms for decision-making. So far, the Ministry of Foreign Relations, through its permanent mission in the UN, coordinates the process in order to concretize Colombia's contribution according to UN protocols and standards.¹⁴

3. Rationales for Contributing

Political rationales: Although security issues associated with Colombia's internal conflict have largely driven decision-making since the 1960s, in the 1990s Bogotá showed an interest in increasing its presence in multilateral operations in keeping with a renewed vision of its foreign policy. The expansion and strengthening of bilateral and multilateral relations should open new political spaces to promote Colombia's agenda in the fight against drug trafficking, democratization, and international economic and political cooperation. In 2002, this vision was tempered with the election of President Alvaro Uribe. Nevertheless, Colombia continued to participate in debates on transnational organized crime, citizen security, demining, cyber defense, risk management, natural disasters relief, and human rights, in forums such as the Organization of American States ([OAS](#)) and the Union of South American Nations ([UNASUR](#)). Some authorities argue that Colombia's more proactive involvement in peacekeeping was justified in terms of the country's responsibility within the global community and by consolidating Colombia's prestige as a legitimate partner for global peace.

Economic rationales: From an economic angle, it's important to note that after the Government and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) conclude a peace agreement (negotiations began in 2012 and are still ongoing), this would probably need to be followed by reforms to transform the Armed Forces. In this context, UN peacekeeping operations present an economic opportunity to maintain the Colombian Army's size at current levels.¹⁵ Its remarkable capabilities to manage irregular war, defense, and security, might be used in the service of peacekeeping abroad. After the signing of the framework agreement with the UN, experts expect Colombia to define specific mechanisms to redirect reimbursements, in order to make sure that this support has a positive impact on the national defense budget.¹⁶

Institutional rationales: The participation of the Armed Forces in international cooperation and exchange exercises is an opportunity for them to improve their interoperability capabilities in multilateral scenarios. National authorities believe that the experience gained through such participation will reinforce Colombia's position in world politics.¹⁷ In addition, the peace process between the Government and the FARC has opened a debate on the role of the Armed Forces in an eventual post-war setting. In that context, UN peacekeeping operations may be part of the transformation that would allow the Armed Forces, under the

direction of the Ministry of Defense, to find a new source of legitimacy at the international level.

Security rationales: The 1990s momentum of Colombia's peacekeeping activity was cut off in 2002 with the failure of the Colombian peace talks between the Andrés Pastrana government (1998-2002) and the FARC. Afterwards, Colombians elected a new President, Alvaro Uribe, with his domestic-centered agenda of fight against "narco-terrorism." This led to eight years of the "Democratic Security" policy, a [policy designed by Uribe](#) to confront the FARC, which marked a turning point in relation to the 1990s interest in participating in multilateral efforts. The arrival of Juan Manuel Santos to the Colombia's Presidency in 2010 represented an opportunity to restore international pledges. In 2016, with the ongoing peace talks, the security situation is expected to change for the better, providing an opportunity to materialize President Santos's earlier promises. The fact that the Government has accepted a UN political mission in Colombia is a concrete indication of the recognition of the positive impact of a UN presence in Colombia for internal security. Yet, further discussions must be undertaken in the country to determine the link between its involvement in foreign peacekeeping missions, and its internal security. But there are multiple challenges, including reforming the security sector to deal with the post-war threats such as the increasing criminalization of armed groups.

Normative rationales: Colombia adheres to values of international solidarity, which include participating in multilateral efforts. However, the weight of internal security challenges has overshadowed those commitments. Public debates on how far the country should go with the UN are delayed by domestic security priorities, even if Presidential commitments denote an interest in increasing the country's participation in UN peacekeeping once a peace agreement is reached with the FARC. The same reasoning is applicable to the country's involvement in other organizations (e.g. the OAS and UNASUR). Colombia's input in debates related to transnational organized crime, citizen security, demining, etc., might be understood as a strategy to restrain the spillover of armed conflict in the region. In short, the involvement in UN peacekeeping is not among government priorities today, not because of a lack of interest, but due to the ongoing internal armed conflict and the peace process. As the Government pledges show, however, a refocus on peacekeeping is expected to take place once a final agreement is concluded with the FARC.

4. Barriers to Contributing

Colombia's internal armed conflict, one of the oldest in the world, has shaped its domestic (and indirectly, its foreign) policies, for decades. Instead of cooperating for peacekeeping, Colombia's international collaboration on defense and security has focused on exporting capabilities to control and prevent criminality and drug trafficking. An example of this is its participation in [USCAP](#) (the US Colombian Action Plan): a triangular partnership involving Colombia, the US, and other countries in Central America and the Caribbean. In short, Colombia's conflict not only acted as a barrier to peacekeeping contributions, it also transformed Colombia into a recipient of foreign assistance.¹⁸ In 2004, the OAS deployed the ongoing Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia ([MAPP/OEA](#)). Created by the Permanent Council's resolution 859, [this mission](#) seeks to provide verification and advisory aid to Colombia during the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reinsertion (DDR) processes of illegal armed groups, mainly self-defense groups.

Despite Bogota's efforts, Colombia's war had spillover effects across the Andean region. For example, Operation Phoenix (2008), when the Colombian military attacked a FARC camp

located 1.8km over the border, in the Ecuadorian province of Sucumbíos, [broke diplomatic relations](#) between Quito and Bogotá. This justified the creation of an OAS Good Offices Mission in Ecuador and Colombia ([MIB/OEA](#)). Based on a resolution from the 25th Meeting of Consultation of Foreign Affairs of the Americas, this mission was intended to establish confidence-building measures (most of them peacebuilding initiatives at the local level) to prevent further escalation between both countries.¹⁹ This is one example of the destabilizing effects of Colombia's internal conflict. The border between Colombia and Venezuela has also suffered from similar spillover. In short, ending the armed conflict is a *sine qua non* for thinking and talking about larger Colombia contributions to UN peacekeeping.

5. Current Challenges and Issues

With the signing of framework agreements with the EU and the UN, Colombia opens the door to new challenges in its foreign and defense policies. First, the treaty must pass through a domestic approval process, which includes a legislative procedure and a constitutional revision. In the EU case, Congress approved the treaty in 2015; it is currently waiting for revision by the Constitutional Court. Regarding the UN accord signed in 2015, Colombian authorities believe this may enter into force by mid-2017.²⁰ Still, the Government-FARC peace negotiations, and the subsequent need of further legislation to consolidate peace in a new post-war era might require special legislation from the Congress, deferring peacekeeping deliberations to a secondary position in legislative priorities.²¹

Second, human resources need to be deployed with efficiency in any UN contingent. In this sense, even if the police have undergone a successful modernizing process over the last fifteen years, both the police and the military need to reinforce their training in order to reach UN peacekeeping standards. No Colombian security body possesses the necessary logistics, as well as operational and coordination experience, to function suitably in a multilateral international force.²²

In short, troops must increase training and exercises in order to get full knowledge about protocols and logistic procedures for effective participation in UN peacekeeping. The Armed Forces have been improving their military and police skills through local and regional efforts because they believe that once involved, participation in peacekeeping might open further access to multilateral training. For example, in 2010, the Colombian National Army created the *Escuela de Apoyo a Misiones Internacionales y Acción Integral* ([ESMAI](#)), which provides training for UN General Staff, Civilian-Military cooperation instructors, and others. That same year, Colombia joined the Latin American Association of Peace Operation Training Centers ([ALCOPAZ](#)) as a voting member.²³ In 2015, the National Navy opened the *Centro de Entrenamiento y Capacitación para Operaciones de Paz* ([CENCOPAZ](#)), a facility intended to train Colombian peacekeepers and National Defense Ministry functionaries.²⁴ Authorities from the National Army's ESMAI have prepared a course on logistics, to be taught for the first time in 2016.²⁵ Colombia has also been developing joint training programs with Canada (2014-16) and Brazil (2015-17).²⁶

Third, Colombian authorities look to maintain a balance between domestic security needs during any eventual post-war phase, and international commitments in peacekeeping. Political, economic, and social expectations from the FARC may be fulfilled to help implement the peace accord, thereby [reducing eventual obstacles to peace](#). All these measures should help to resolve these weaknesses related to a lack of experience and knowledge.

6. Key Champions and Opponents

Champions and opponents of peacekeeping can be found in the Government. During Alvaro Uribe's administrations, even as Colombia's input to UN political missions increased, participation in peacekeeping remained limited to MINUSTAH.²⁷ The Armed Forces' attention to the Democratic Security enforcement explains this disengagement. During the Juan M. Santos presidency, however, Colombia has developed a more dynamic approach to peacekeeping.

In the context of the signing of the framework accord with the UN, some political parties have revealed their concerns about potential Colombian military participation in international conflicts.²⁸ Doubts are based on domestic investigations of extrajudicial executions that took place during Colombia's civil war, some of which may have been committed by members of the National Army that would be deployed as peacekeepers abroad. The Government has shown its willingness to apply the rule of law to any irregular case. It has also stated that the agreement with the UN involves not only troop-deployments but also other roles, such as military observation.²⁹ So far, the issue of contributing to peacekeeping has generated very little public discussion and the enthusiasm remains inside government. For that reason, the general population has been unable to develop a clear and wide perception of this policy.

7. Capabilities and Caveats

Colombia's main abilities are linked to human resources. The police have accumulated prized expertise in natural disasters management, protection of civilians, human rights promotion, and the reconstruction of civilian and police institutions.³⁰ The Armed Forces, through the ESMAI, have trained 2,374 people between 2010 and 2015. This training includes personal preparation for pre-deployment in the MFO in Sinai, and specialized courses for the UN Staff Officer Course (UNSOC), training of civilian-military cooperation (*Curso para operadores/Instructores de Cooperación Civil Militar*, COIC), and courses on interaction and civilian-military relations (*Curso de interacciones y relaciones civiles militares*, CMR-I).³¹ The Army's CENCOPAZ has trained 57 officials, non-commissioned officers, and marines as military observers.³²

However, given the huge experience of the Armed Forces in irregular warfare, it is conceivable that Colombia could support UN peacekeeping with ground troops, engineering units specialized in natural disaster relief and reconstruction, air force units, civil-military cooperation units, and advisory services for General Staff and military observers.³³

8. Further Reading

[Acuerdo Marco entre las Naciones Unidas y el Gobierno de la República de Colombia relativo a las contribuciones al Sistema de Acuerdos de Fuerzas de Reserva de las Naciones Unidas para las Operaciones de Mantenimiento de la Paz. \(2015\).](#)

Coronel (r) Guillermo Gómez Lizarazo (2005), [La Policía Nacional de Colombia en las Naciones Unidas](#), Cuaderno Histórico No.11, pp.52-65, Academia Colombiana de Historia Policial.

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional (2015), *Diplomacia para la Seguridad y la Defensa*. Colombia: Viceministerio para las Políticas y Asuntos Internacionales, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional.

Notes

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- ¹ The authors are grateful for the valuable assistance of Santiago Valdés-Yáñez, from the Center for Comparative Politics and International Studies (Mexico), and Diego Briceño-Redondo, analyst from Decisive Point (Colombia), who contributed to this work as research assistants.
- ² Unless otherwise stated, data is drawn from IISS *Military Balance 2016* (London: IISS/Routledge, 2016).
- ³ Official defense Budget includes disbursements on the National Police and pension liabilities of the entire security sector.
- ⁴ Data from the [Réseau de Recherche sur les Operations de Paix](#) (January 2015).
- ⁵ 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 2016*.
- ⁶ Centro de Estudios Históricos del Ejército, 2007. *Capítulo XIX: El Ejército de Colombia en Misiones de Paz*. In: Historia Militar del Ejército de Colombia. Volumen II. By: Coronel Manuel José Santos Pico. Biblioteca Histórica Militar Colombiana. Bogotá, D.C.
- ⁷ For more information visit the [SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database](#).
- ⁸ S.Borda & C. Castillo (2011), *Colombia en el Consejo de Seguridad de las Naciones Unidas*. Policy Paper Number 39. Programa de Cooperación en Seguridad Regional. Bogotá: Fundación Friedrich Ebert Stiftung en Colombia (FESCOL).
- ⁹ The [bill draft](#) was last published in August 2015 at the Official Gazette Number 647/15.
- ¹⁰ The [bill draft](#) was last published in September 2015 at the Official Gazette Number 648/15.
- ¹¹ Data was provided on 11 February 2016 by the officer responsible for UN Peacekeeping Operations of the Foreign Affairs Office of Colombian National Police.
- ¹² D. Valero, "[Colombia enviará hasta 5.000 hombres a misiones de paz: Santos](#)," *El Tiempo*, 29 September 2015.
- ¹³ Interview with the Director of International Relations and Cooperation of the Ministry of National Defense developed, 3 September 2015.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Colombia's defense budget has decreased since 2013 from US\$13.6bn to US\$13.4bn in 2014 (-0.8% variation), and reaching US\$10.7bn in 2015 (-20.6% variation). IISS, *The Military Balance 2015* and Colombia's General Budget Law 2015.
- ¹⁶ See "[Las cinco claves del acuerdo firmado entre Colombia y la ONU](#)," *El Tiempo*, 27 January 2015.
- ¹⁷ Interview, op. cit., *ESMAI*, 28 September 2015.
- ¹⁸ Interview, op. cit., Resident Coordinator's Office from the UN Representation in Colombia, 3 September 2015.
- ¹⁹ Fernando A. Chinchilla (2011), "Confidence-Building and 'Good Offices' After Angostura: Assessing the MIB/OAS Initiatives in the Colombian-Ecuadorian Burning Border" in *The Person Papers*, Vol.13, pp.54-58.
- ²⁰ The [bill draft](#) was last published in September 2015 at the Official Gazette Number 648/15.
- ²¹ Interview, op. cit., Director of International Relations and Cooperation of the Ministry of National Defense, 3 September 2015.
- ²² Interview, op. cit., Resident Coordinator's Office from the UN Representation in Colombia, 3 September 2015.
- ²³ Colombia's acceptance took place in ALCOPAZ Second Annual General Assembly, between 9-13 August 2010 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. (2010). [Latin America Peacekeeping Capacity Building Project Bulletin](#) No.3.
- ²⁴ Interview with the Director of the CENCOPAZ from the Colombian National Navy, 4 September 2015.
- ²⁵ Interview, op. cit., *ESMAI*, 28 September 2015.
- ²⁶ Interview with the Director of the School of Integrated Action and International Missions (*ESMAI*) from the Colombian National Army, 28 September 2015.
- ²⁷ The participation of Colombia's National Police personnel was developed under the "Foreign Support Service Commissions" (*Comisiones de Servicios de Apoyo al Exterior*), which does not allow personnel immunity or the possibility of being integrated into a chain of command, and consequently does not constitute formal participation in a peacekeeping operation.
- ²⁸ Discussions on contributions have been developed without public announcements, so we prefer to avoid identifying specific political parties.
- ²⁹ Interview, op. cit., Director of International Relations and Cooperation of the Ministry of National Defense, 3 September 2015.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Interview, op. cit., *ESMAI*, 28 September 2015.
- ³² Interview, op. cit., *CENCOPAZ*, 4 September 2015.
- ³³ Interview, op. cit., *ESMAI*, 28 September 2015.