

Contributor Profile: Rwanda

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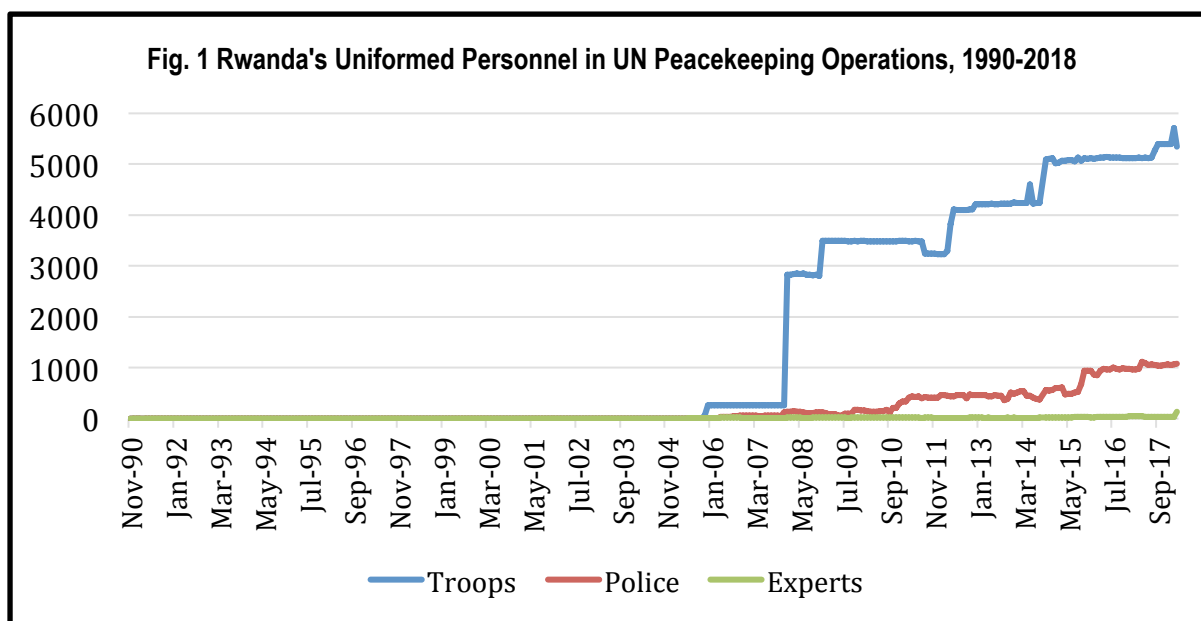
Active Armed Force ¹	Helicopters	Defense Budget	Uniformed UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Official Deployments
33,000	18	2017: US\$107m (1.2% of GDP)	6,548 (320 women) (31 Mar 2018)	UNMISS 3,226 (427 police, 17 experts, 2,731 troops, 51 staff officers)	
World Ranking (size): 74th	Attack: 5	2016: US\$95m (1.12% of GDP)	Ranking: 4th (2 nd largest African contributor)	MINUSCA 1,442 (445 police, 10 experts, 17 staff officers, 960 troops)	
Army: 32,000	Multirole: 12	2015: US\$89m (1.1% of GDP)		UNAMID 1,730 (48 police, 4 experts, 24 staff officers, 1,654 troops)	
Air force: 1,000	Multirole / Transport: 1	2014: US\$81m (1.01% of GDP)		UNFISA 10 (3 police, 2 experts, 5 staff officers)	
Paramilitary/ Local Defense Forces: 2,000				MINUJUSTH 140 police	
Defense Spending/Active troop: ² US\$3,242 (compared to global average of approx. US\$70,300)					

Part 1: Recent Trends

Particularly over the last decade, Rwanda has become an important contributor to UN peacekeeping and African Union (AU) peace operations. Rwandan contributions to peacekeeping were initially precluded by the 1990-94 civil war, 1994 genocide, and challenges of post-war security, including fighting an insurgency in the northwest of the country until 1998 and recurring interventions in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Since 2004, Rwanda has risen to become one of the top providers of peacekeepers for both UN and AU missions. In some cases, Rwandan contributions deployed to AU missions which subsequently transition into UN operations, as in Darfur, Mali, and Central African Republic (CAR). Today most Rwandan peacekeepers are in UN missions where it has risen to become a leading contributor. The Rwandan Defense Forces (RDF) are particularly valued for peace operations due to their training, discipline, the development ethos they bring to deployments, and the growing number of women among those trained and deployed.

Rwanda deployed its first 150 peacekeepers to protect ceasefire monitors under the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) in 2004 before becoming a ‘hybrid’ AU-UN mission, [UNAMID](#) in 2007. The decision for Rwanda to join AMIS was partly influenced by the way the mission was framed as an effort to prevent genocide. In addition, the deployment coincided with the withdrawal of Rwandan forces from the DRC. This linked peacekeeping directly to the stated aims and basis of legitimacy of Rwanda’s ruling party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Since then, a desire to maintain positive relationships with key donors, support for the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) principle, commitment to African solutions,

and incentives related to prestige and finance, have underpinned Rwanda's provision of peacekeepers. Several internal professional and institutional development aims have also contributed to motivations for peacekeeping deployments such as operational experience, occupation for the armed forces and developing military skills and force cohesion.



The contribution of Rwandan police to Haiti signals willingness to deploy beyond Africa, but most of its peacekeepers remain in Africa, particularly in CAR, Sudan and South Sudan. CAR, Darfur and South Sudan account for the majority of Rwanda's overall deployment of troops, with CAR, Darfur, Haiti and South Sudan making up most of Rwanda's police contributions.

Not only has Rwanda provided large numbers of troops and police to peacekeeping operations but also a number of senior staff officers up to the level of Force Commander, including to UNAMID which had a Rwandan Force Commander from 2009-13 and to MINUSMA in Mali from 2013-14. The current Force Commander of UNMISS is a Rwandan Major General, Frank Kamanzi. Rwanda has also agreed to provide the bulk of forces to the [Regional Protection Force that will deploy within UNMISS](#).

Part 2: Decision-making Process

RDF deployments and activities, including peacekeeping, are enshrined in the RDF Law. Under [Article 10 of Section II of the RDF Law peacekeeping](#), peacebuilding and humanitarian missions are stated as core tasks of the RDF.

Decision-making within the military is somewhat opaque, resting with a select politico-military elite within the RPF and defense establishment. President Kagame as Commander in Chief has the ultimate say over who goes where. The Minister of Defense, General James Kabarebe, and the Chief of Defense Staff (CDS), General Patrick Nyamvumba, are involved at the strategic decision-making level. Other senior military officers and security advisers to the President and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) such as members of the High Command are also involved in the decision to deploy. After the initial decision to deploy has been made, the CDS and takes over day-to-day strategic oversight of RDF forces. Troops earmarked for peacekeeping missions are then sent to the Rwanda Military Academy, Gako, for collective

predeployment training. Troops returning from mission are sent back to [Gako](#) for a further 6-9 months for re-insertion, political education and lessons learned.

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political Rationales: Rwanda's contributions to peace operations, both UN and AU, should be seen in the wider context of the political aims of the RPF. The failings of UN peacekeeping in Rwanda 1993-94 are a recurring feature in the [rhetoric of Rwanda's political leaders](#). This underpins both criticism of the UN for inadequate responses to African crises and an argument that Rwanda's unique experience bestows a responsibility to ensure robust future responses. This translates into support for "African solutions" and AU missions, as well as UN missions. This is reflected in the [stated aims](#) of Rwandan representatives following Rwanda's election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2013. Though African peace and stability are stated as high priorities during this tenure, Rwandan representatives have also used the Security Council platform to highlight non-African crises, such as in Syria.

Domestically, the provision of peacekeepers has become a source of national pride and can be considered part of Rwanda's post-genocide national identity. This is clear in the efforts to highlight a distinctive "Rwandan approach" to peacekeeping. Elements of post-war reconstruction derived by Rwanda's leaders from historical national practice, including the concept of *Umuganda* ("community work") have been transplanted from Rwanda to other regions including Darfur via peacekeepers. Accounts of Rwandan peacekeepers constructing schools and clinics while on mission, introducing energy-saving stoves and *Umuganda* are publicized widely in national media. This contribution to peacekeeping is part of the post-genocide story of Rwanda's place in the world and part of the RPF approach to nation-building. The deaths of Rwandan peacekeepers on mission are reported, marked and commented on by political and military leaders. [53](#) Rwandan peacekeepers have been killed during UN and UN-AU peace operations, 30 of these in Darfur/UNAMID. A further 10 were killed during the UN Mission in CAR (MINUSCA), and 5 serving in UNMISS in South Sudan. There is no attempt to hide casualties, as some other TCCs have done. Instead, deaths are acknowledged as sacrifices in service to the people of the country in which they were sustained, and there is public recognition of those injured during peacekeeping duties.

Prestige is also a motivating factor for Rwandan contributions. Peacekeeping offers an opportunity for Rwanda to showcase a transition from a state synonymous with genocide to one making a significant and positive contribution to African peace and security. It also allows the RDF to access funds and support for training and infrastructure to facilitate this. Rwanda now routinely trains all members of the RDF for peacekeeping duties. This expands the pool for potential deployment as well as suggests that peacekeeping is considered a core duty of the RDF. Rwanda has also established its own peacekeeping training center, the [Rwanda Peace Academy](#), that provides peace operations training to peacekeepers from around Africa and beyond.

Despite these significant contributions Rwanda remains a small state in a region where several states are increasingly involved in AU and UN peace operations, including Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya. Maintaining and increasing contributions, and/or developing specialist capacities such as the deployment of female police and troops, are likely to be important in sustaining both Rwanda's prestige in this field and its position as a strategic partner for states, including the US. Related to this is the benefit for Rwanda in terms of international diplomacy. Significant Rwandan deployments to AU and UN missions is a useful barraging

chip for Kigali with international partners, especially regarding criticism over domestic and regional concerns.

Economic Rationales: Rwanda's defense spending has been on the increase in recent years, increasing as a proportion of GDP from 1.01% in 2014 to 1.2% in 2017. Nevertheless, the RDF continues to require a significant financial commitment and peacekeeping contributions help offset some of these costs. Rwanda is clearly a preferred partner of the US and other donor states in building African peacekeeping capacity, with the ACOTA Director [commenting](#) in 2013 that "ACOTA trains over 17 countries engaged in peacekeeping but Rwanda remains the best..." In 2014, Rwanda was selected as one of six African states to be part of the US African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership ([APRRP](#)). International partners, especially the US, UK, EU and Japan, have underpinned the development of the RDF into a valued peacekeeping contributor, through military and others forms of assistance. This has largely taken the form of bi-lateral training programs, constructing training facilities such as the Rwanda Peace Academy and paying for various courses, but also in procuring non-lethal equipment and providing strategic lift. The [US, for instance, transported the Rwandan battalion into CAR in support of the AU in January 2014](#).

Reimbursements from the UN for peacekeeping contributions provide significant proportions of Rwanda's defense budget. However, delays have caused frustration and impacted Rwanda's performance against wider fiscal targets. During its role in AMIS (2004-07), Rwanda also experienced delays in receiving compensation from the AU for peacekeepers killed during the mission. Rwandan representatives at the UN have [cited](#) slow rates of reimbursement as a factor hindering sustained commitment. Nevertheless, [Nina Wilen suggested](#) that in 2010 around 70% of defense expenditure could be covered from such reimbursements. If Rwanda is to maintain large armed forces it will be difficult to make up such a shortfall other than through peacekeeping. In this vein, Rwanda contributed to a Senior Advisory Group survey of TCCs in 2013, seeking to use this process to secure increased rates.

Economic incentives also relate to financial benefits for individuals. Rwandan personnel deployed to AU and UN missions all receive relatively lucrative salaries and allowances.

Security Rationales: Rwanda is an important military power in east and central Africa, but it is not a regional hegemon. Rwanda's leaders must continually re-assert their claims to be a key security partner in the region, compared to Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. RDF peacekeeping greatly supports this case given the quality of Rwandan peacekeeping and has proved central to Rwandan diplomacy. Rwanda has faced much criticism and censure, [including aid cuts](#), for its military involvement in the DRC. Peacekeeping elsewhere allows Rwanda's military prowess to be cast instead as a positive attribute. It also provides leverage in discussions with UN representatives. In 2010, President Kagame [threatened](#) to withdraw troops from UNAMID if a leaked UN report that was critical of Rwandan involvement in the DRC was not amended. In 2013, Kagame made similar threats over accusations of Rwandan support to the M23 rebel group in DRC. Assuming such threats are genuine, Rwanda's commitment to existing and future missions may therefore be conditional on wider political factors.

Institutional Rationales: Peacekeeping is identified by the RPF as helping to professionalize the military and promote integration of former combatants, as well as providing activities to occupy troops. The RDF is comprised of former warring factions as well as new recruits.

Peacekeeping provides these integrated forces with situations where they have to depend on each other and learn to work together, without the danger of conducting military operations in the DRC. Peacekeeping deployments are thus a method of forging cohesion within the armed forces. In addition, Rwanda's increased commitment to peacekeeping followed the withdrawal from combat operations in DRC in 2004, suggesting that peacekeeping might provide an avenue for occupying armed forces, especially those that could be a potential threat.

Normative Rationales: Rwanda's contributions to peacekeeping draw partly on the moral authority gained by the RPF in ending the 1994 genocide. The decision to make a first foray into peacekeeping in Darfur reflects this. Rwanda's representatives have also [made clear](#) that they believe Rwanda speaks on issues such as peace and conflict, genocide prevention, and the responsibility to protect with a moral authority which others cannot possess. Peacekeeping allows Rwandan leaders to illustrate their commitment to genocide prevention. Embedding a culture of peacekeeping within the RDF and highlighting peacekeeping as a source of pride, domestically and internationally, suggests this will remain central to Rwanda's engagement with Africa and the UN. Such contributions may also provide a springboard for Rwanda and Rwandans to play greater roles in regional and continental security fora such as the Eastern Africa Standby Force ([EASF](#)) and the AU.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

Alternative institutional preferences for crisis management: Rwanda's initial preference was to contribute to AU missions. This reflected deep mistrust of UN peacekeeping following the 1994 genocide. Nonetheless, Rwanda maintained contributions to the hybrid mission in Darfur, UNAMID, despite criticizing the mandate and equipment shortages. It has since contributed to other UN missions and currently deploys troops exclusively as part of UN missions. This pattern of deployment suggests that Rwanda may prefer to work through the African security architecture where possible but that it is grown to support UN missions as a priority.

Rwanda has also recently shown increased commitment to East African security partnerships. These are aligned with broader policy priorities of improving trade, development and other links with countries including Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and Kenya, even if relations with individual neighbors fluctuates intermittently. Rwanda has also supported the EASF, supplying its commander 2007-10 and the current Joint Chief of Staff (JCOS), as well as participating in joint exercises. It hosts the East African Community (EAC) Non-Commissioned Officers' Centre of Excellence at RDF Combat Training Centre in Gabiro and, in January 2014, announced plans to develop Mutual Defense and Peace and Security Pacts between Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya. Despite this growth in security-related activity at the regional level the capacities of the EAC and the EASF remain extremely limited. The deteriorating relationship between Rwanda and Burundi is also a cause for concern. In the medium-term these regional activities will therefore likely be a secondary priority for Rwanda rather than replace peace support activities under the auspices of the AU and UN.

Alternative political or strategic priorities: Rwanda has a difficult relationship with the governments of Burundi and the DRC, and with the UN and other international actors over its policies towards the DRC. Since 1996 Rwanda has intervened directly there twice and been regularly accused of supporting rebel groups in the east of the country, most recently in [2013](#). Rwanda denies this while heavily criticizing the failures of the UN, via MONUC and MONUSCO, to stabilize the region. Nevertheless, following the alleged defeat of the M23

rebel group in November 2013 Rwanda [called for](#) the UN Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) to turn its focus on Rwandan rebels, the FDLR. This suggests that although Rwanda has historically questioned the ability of the UN to tackle Rwanda's security challenges, it is currently at least willing to concede that the new force should be given the opportunity to try. Whether this will prove sufficient to deter future Rwandan military involvement in DRC, overt or covert, remains uncertain.

Resistance in the military: There is minimal resistance in the military for peacekeeping operations. Peacekeeping is seen as part of the role and vision of the modern military. Furthermore, the benefits in terms of political bargaining chips, forging cohesion, economic dividends, and collective and individual benefits have not gone unnoticed by the RDF leadership. As such, defense policymakers are keen to continue to deploy the RDF to peacekeeping missions.

Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues

Rwanda contributes extensively to UN and to a lesser extent AU missions and, in the case of the Regional Protection Force in South Sudan, has done so at relatively short notice. Domestic and international benefits flow from involvement in peacekeeping. These go beyond financial inducements, tapping into an RPF vision of a new Rwanda and a new national identity. The development and promotion of a "Rwandan approach" to peacekeeping, characterized by the transfer of the models of *Umuganda*, involvement in development work and [quick impact projects](#), shows this is viewed in Rwandan policy circles as a sustained effort. There are however challenges to maintaining Rwanda's contributions at current levels, in terms of both quantity and quality.

The financing of peacekeeping remains problematic, with Rwanda pressing for higher reimbursement rates and for increased speed and predictability of such transfers. It has used its seat on the Security Council to pursue this. Since 2013, the UN has indeed increased its reimbursement rates for contingents of peacekeepers.

Relations with Burundi and the DRC are a continuing concern. Rwanda has leveraged its peacekeeping contribution to make demands of the UN regarding the publication of [expert reports](#) on Rwanda's role in the latter. These reports allege the involvement of Rwandan military forces and Rwandan-backed rebels in atrocities. Such allegations tarnish the RDF but may also incentivize peacekeeping as a way to rehabilitate the RDF's reputation. However, there are also negative implications which may affect Rwanda's peacekeeping training. Accusations of continued support for M23 during 2012 led to the withdrawal of aid by many of Rwanda's donors, including suspension of military aid from the US and the cancellation by Denmark of a new \$25 million peacekeeping training facility. Since then military aid for peacekeeping has returned to Rwanda, in tandem with withdrawal from the DRC and increased Rwandan peacekeeping deployments to CAR and South Sudan.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

Defense policymakers from the President down are all champions of peacekeeping. Some senior military officers have participated in peacekeeping operations and have seen the benefits. The CDS himself was Force Commander in Darfur from 2009-2013. There is a great deal of pride on behalf of the defense establishment regarding RDF peacekeepers and justifiably so, given the significant numbers deployed and their performance in the mission environments they enter. President Kagame presided over and championed a conference held in Rwanda in May 2015 that sought to improve civilian protection strategies in UN

peacekeeping missions. A set of guidelines called the [Kigali Principles](#) was developed to complement existing UN protection guidelines as well as improve the implementation of these norms, including calling for more robust deployments and responses, better equipping and logistical support and better training.

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats

Although smaller than some of its neighbors, the RDF retains significant capabilities in terms of infantry, counterinsurgency operations, intelligence and Special Forces, but also military administration. Several officers have been Senior Mission Leaders in peacekeeping operations and many more have been trained for senior positions. Other areas of capability are logistics, procurement and supply. Rwanda has highly capable women in the security forces and does not discriminate when deploying forces. The RDF provided the first contingent of female police officers to UNOCI in 2012 and currently has the highest number of female police on UN missions, with 309 women deployed.

Shortcomings are the lack of strategic lift and serious air capability more generally (no fixed wing aircraft). An opaque and closed decision-making structure among a few select individuals is a further shortcoming.

Part 8: Further Reading

Beswick, D., “The risks of African military capacity-building: Lessons from Rwanda,” *African Affairs*, 113:451 (2014): 212-31.

Beswick, D., “Peacekeeping, regime security and ‘African Solutions to African Problems’: Exploring Rwanda’s involvement in Darfur,” *Third World Quarterly* 31:5 (2010): 739-54.

Jowell, M., “Cohesion through socialisation: Tradition, liberation and modernisation in the forging of the Rwanda Defence Forces,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 8:2 (2014): 278–93.

Jowell, M., “The Rwanda Defence Force: from genocide to peace and democratic consolidation” in D. Francis (ed.). *Africa Peace Militaries* (Routledge, 2018).

Jowell, M., *Peacekeeping in Africa: The Failure of Foreign Military Assistance* (I.B. Tauris, 2018).

Wilén, N., “A Hybrid Peace through Locally Owned and Externally Financed SSR-DDR in Rwanda?” *Third World Quarterly*, 33:7 (2012): 1,323-36.

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise stated, data is drawn from IISS, *The Military Balance 2018* (London: IISS/Routledge, 2018) and from the UN peacekeeping website <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/data>.

² Armed Forces Spending is a country’s annual defense budget (in US dollars) divided by the total number of active armed forces. Using figures from IISS, *The Military Balance 2018*.