

CONTRIBUTOR PROFILE: FRANCE

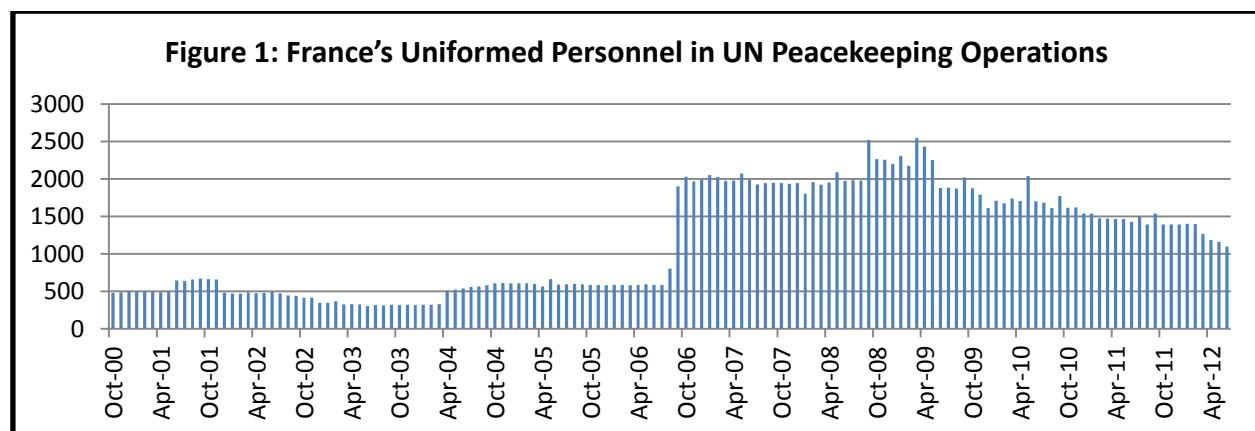
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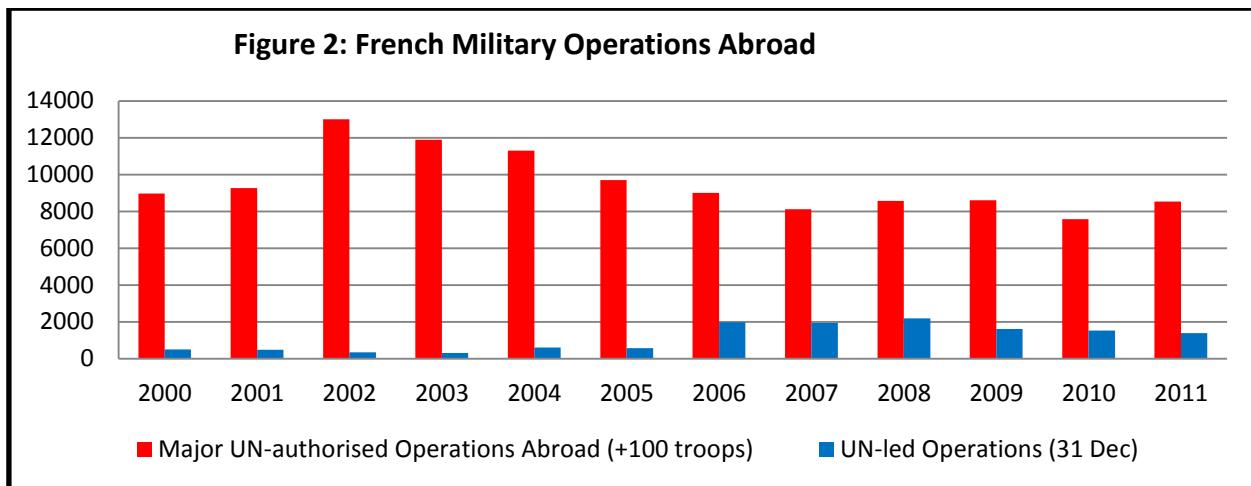
Active Armed Forces ¹	Helicopters	Defense Budget	Uniformed UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments
238,591 World Ranking (size): 25 Army 130,600 (inc. 7,300 Foreign Legion) Navy 40,353 (inc. 2,200 Strategic Nuclear Forces) Air Force 52,669	Attack: 36 (+ 25 Anti-Submarine Warfare) Multi-role: 266 Transport: 162 (14 hvy; 118 med; 30 light) + 5 squadron	2010: \$52.0bn 2011: \$58.8bn (2.10% of GDP)	1,066 (31 July 2012) Ranking: 24 (2 nd largest contributor from EU and NATO after Italy)	MINURSO: 14 experts MINUSTAH: 35 police, 2 troops MONUSCO: 9 police, 9 experts UNIFIL: 971 troops (62 female) UNMIL: 2 troops UNOCI: 14 police, 6 troops UNSMIS: 1 expert UNTSO: 3 experts	As of spring 2012 ISAF: 3,600 Licorne: 450 Kosovo: 300 Gulf of Aden: 1 Frigate + logistical and medical support

Defense Spending / Troop:² **\$218,000** (compared to global average of approx. US\$59,000)

Part 1: Recent Trends

After having been a large troop contributor to UN-led operations in the first part of the 1990s, France underwent in the mid-1990s a policy shift to distance itself from UN missions. In the 2000s, France started to return to UN peacekeeping in a select number of operations, notably in Côte d'Ivoire, Lebanon, and Chad, together with police contributions to missions in Kosovo and Haiti. France participated in the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) from its inception in April 2004 with an initial contribution of 185 troops (engineering unit) that was, by and large, constant until its withdrawal in March 2009. That same month, in Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR), France "re-hatted" some of its soldiers that had been deployed in the European Union (EU) bridging operation (EUFOR Chad/CAR) into the UN operation (MINURCAT 2). This commitment was maintained until early 2010 when France started to withdraw its troops from MINURCAT. Besides these two missions, the most significant change was in Lebanon. The French contingent was reinforced with the establishment of UNIFIL II in August 2006 (from 432 personnel in August to 1,531 personnel in September), and increased to 2,177 personnel in September 2008, making France the second largest troop contributor to UNIFIL after Italy. With this deployment France also reached the top 20 largest UN troop contributors.





During this period, France has contributed to a number of UN-authorized missions, most notably in Afghanistan (from which all combat troops are to be withdrawn by the end of 2012), Kosovo, the Gulf of Aden, and Côte d'Ivoire (with Operation *Licorne* in support of UNOCI).

France's relatively modest troop and police presence within UN-led operations contrasts with its major role at the political level, particularly at the UN Security Council. In 2009, France, together with the United Kingdom, launched an initiative to improve the overall effectiveness of operations and in particular their political and military direction.³ More recently, France has emphasized the need to develop cooperation among UN missions, to further mainstream the protection of civilians in UN mandates, and to better articulate the transition between peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities.⁴

While France's 2008 [White Paper on Defence and National Security](#) put the UN at the center of the international security architecture, including in its role of legitimizing peacekeeping operations, the UN is still perceived as structurally ill-adapted to France's conception of military crisis management.⁵ The UN as an operational framework is not prominent in recent French military doctrine. Instead, France has preferred to operate within other frameworks over the last decade, including NATO (Afghanistan, Kosovo), the EU (Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden, and Chad), or the national framework (Operation *Licorne* in Côte d'Ivoire).

Part 2: Decision-making

Under the Fifth Republic (starting in 1958), the French foreign policy decision-making process has largely been in the hands of the president. This has been constant regardless of the political orientation of the president and of the prime minister. Insofar as military contingents deployed in UN peace operations are concerned, decisions are made by the president as Chief of the armed forces but are to a large extent shaped by the ministers of defense and foreign affairs. If need be, the president can call a "Restricted Defense Council" meeting that brings under his chairmanship the prime minister, the foreign affairs and defense ministers, the chief of defense staff and other representatives of the French security apparatus. In New York, the permanent representation is closely involved in decision-shaping, and is traditionally headed by one of the most senior French diplomats.

Parliament plays a limited role in this process. In 2008, [Article 35 of the Constitution](#) was amended to make it mandatory for the executive power to "inform the Parliament of its decision to deploy armed forces abroad, at the latest three days after the beginning of the intervention" and to ask for the "authorization of the Parliament" to prolong the length of the intervention after a

period of four months. Such a vote was cast only once in relation to a UN-led operation (over UNIFIL on 28 January 2009).⁶ To date, this provision has not significantly modified the decision-making process or degree of parliamentary oversight.

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political and Security Rationales: Peace operations appear as tools of France's security policy to influence events in areas where it has strategic interests. At the same time, these operations are a way for France to raise its profile as a political and military power, therefore legitimizing its permanent seat on the Security Council. In general terms, a presence in UN operations is one of the key dimensions of the French response to security threats. By contributing to UN operations, France intends to project security to areas where threats to its own security – such as regional conflicts, refugee flows, organized crime, humanitarian emergencies, or violations of human rights – can emerge. Côte d'Ivoire, Chad and Lebanon provide examples of situations where French political and security interests were thought to require a military presence in UN operations deployed there. Yet, the French position towards the UN also indicates that if there were core national security interests to be defended through a peace operation, the UN would not likely be seen as the first institutional choice (see below). Put differently, the UN is an option as long as the operation's mandate falls within the realm of peacekeeping, but is seen as less relevant whenever the operation implies a robust posture that potentially goes beyond the UN capacity (i.e. Afghanistan).

Economic Rationales: While economic factors help explain France's policy towards military interventions in general, they do not play a direct role in France's UN peacekeeping policy. The UN reimbursement system does not influence France's institutional choices. This being said, cases like Côte d'Ivoire or Chad have shown that a contribution to a UN operation can be partially justified by the necessity to preserve stability in countries where French economic interests exist. Furthermore at a low price compared with national operations. In the meantime, as with France's security interests, the UN is unlikely to be perceived as the best option where economic interests are high.

Institutional Rationales: Institutional issues create a dilemma for France: on the one hand the UN is seen as a legitimacy provider and a contribution to a UN operation may therefore strengthen the French position at the Security Council. On the other hand the UN is perceived as too operationally constraining to constitute the first option in crisis management. One way in which France has tried to reconcile these two premises is through UN-authorized but not UN-led missions.

Normative/Cosmopolitan Rationales: Humanitarian concerns are part of the French foreign policy narrative and play an indirect role in decision-making (as illustrated by the French contribution to MINUSTAH in Haiti in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake). However, as illustrated by EU-led operations in the DRC or Chad, such cosmopolitan motives do not necessarily find their way through the UN. In these two cases, humanitarian motives produced EU-led rather than UN-led operations. More generally, the discourse around France's long-standing supportive stance on human rights should be nuanced by what is essentially a realist approach to military interventions and the use of force. This mix of realist and liberal conceptions of security governance is a recurrent dual narrative characteristic of France's policy towards the UN.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

Alternative institutional preferences for crisis management: The difficulties encountered by the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-95) in which France was one of the largest contributors, have had a direct impact on the French perception of the role of the

UN in conflict management. More specifically, a major lesson learned through the Bosnian experience (and reinforced by the Rwandan genocide of 1994) was that the UN was not an appropriate tool for complex and multidimensional peace operations, and therefore had to be replaced by other instruments, be they multilateral/institutional or national. This led France to look for other institutional options. Those alternative options are mainly NATO, the EU, and the national framework; they have not been clearly identified in doctrinal documents yet were opted for in practice: NATO in Kosovo (KFOR) and Afghanistan (ISAF); the EU in the DRC (Operations *Artemis* and EUFOR/DRC), Chad/CAR (EUFOR Tchad/RCA) and the Gulf of Aden (Operation *Atalanta*); the national framework in Operation *Licorne* in Côte d'Ivoire. The French narrative emphasizes that these other missions are UN-mandated and are complementary to UN-led operations.

Financial costs: In 2011, the extra-costs (or additional costs) of the French contribution to UNIFIL in Lebanon (notwithstanding the UN reimbursement) were €77.4 million (versus €83.3 million in 2010).⁷ Although the financial issue is important, it is not central in shaping France's choice for one institution instead of the other – indeed the UN tends to be cheaper than operations run by the EU and NATO (where the “costs lie where they fall” rule applies) and yet the UN is still not the favorite option.

Discomfort with the UN peacekeeping principles: Within the French debate, peace operations are not considered as a specific category of military operations in which different principles would apply. [French doctrinal texts](#) of the last decade are explicit on the need to ensure that wherever the French armed forces are deployed, they are engaged in accordance with some key military principles, among which the freedom of action and the possibility to resort to coercion. Also a contribution to peace operations must not jeopardize the identity of the soldier as a “warrior”. This partly explains the weak presence in UN operations as it creates an inherent difficulty to reconcile the constraints of contemporary peace operations (and the implications of the consent-based and non coercive approach) with the imperative of military action.

Resistance in the military: Overall, a broad consensus across the political spectrum has presided over the nature of French involvement in UN operations, and this should continue under the new president. Over the last fifteen years, many of the current senior generals (who had command responsibilities in UN operations of the early 1990s) have been reluctant to put French soldiers under UN command and have played a key role in advocating alternatives to the UN command and control structure. To illustrate, in 2006, increased French commitment to UNIFIL was made possible by the establishment of the Strategic Military Cell (SMC) within the DPKO, which was supposed to give the French military optimum control over the use of their units. The “imperfect” nature of the UN was therefore partly remedied by the creation of this mechanism. Yet, in practice, the structure was resisted within DPKO and in the end marginalized in the operation oversight, to the extent that few recommended that it should be replicated. The French effort to revitalize the UN Military Staff Committee can also be seen as an attempt to address some of the French concerns by increasing military advice going into the UN system and command and control arrangements.

In the end, the UN is not seen as the most appropriate instrument for the type of conflict management tasks that face the French military. French officials tend to see the UN through the lens of the early 1990s, although it is difficult to distinguish whether this perception is the result of current assessments of UN capacity, or if it is the product of historically-based anguish rooted in UNPROFOR's failures twenty years ago. The distrust of the UN is not shared equally by the diplomats and the military. Diplomats are more open to a wide spectrum of options depending on

the circumstances and geopolitical context, and therefore less reluctant to consider the UN option. This may, in the medium to long run, impact French policy towards a more UN-friendly approach.

Legal obstacles: There are no legal obstacles to the French participation in UN peacekeeping operations. The decision-making process being in the hands of the executive branch is often presented as an advantage of the French system as it allows for very quick deployments.

Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues

France has pushed, over the last five or six years, for reforms of the UN command and control structure, more robust operations, and clearer exit strategies, in part, to create the conditions for its possible return to UN-led missions. As UN operations are unlikely to disappear or totally give way to operations conducted by regional organizations, and as France will most likely remain an important actor for international conflict management, it would appear to be logical to strengthen an institution that one day might again become an option for French military projection. Furthermore, though the UN might not be the preferred option, the recent history of conflict management practices – with the UN in Lebanon, Côte d'Ivoire or Chad, but also with other organizations, from Afghanistan to Libya – has demonstrated how scenarios that seemed unlikely at a given moment can become contemplated and even reality in response to specific circumstances. This is all the more important as France will have withdrawn its combat forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2012, and will then have a larger pool of resources available for potential UN-led peace operations (not to mention the necessity for the armed forces to be more or less constantly deployed in operations). These factors hint that a scenario in which France would contribute significantly to a UN-led operation cannot be ruled out *a priori*, but this would presumably require some preparation.

This being said, the French position towards UN peacekeeping remains extremely prudent and does not suggest a policy shift under the new president. Not only does the mistrust *vis-à-vis* the UN remain important, but operational and financial constraints (mainly budget reductions) are such that the prospect of new French military deployments in UN-led operations does not appear as the most probable. In Africa, where two thirds of UN peacekeepers are deployed, France also needs to be prudent and make sure it does not fuel the suspicion of a hidden agenda wherever it intervenes. In this case, the UN can be seen as a legitimizing body of the French presence, as was the case with Operation Turquoise in Rwanda in 1994 and more recently with Operation *Licorne* in Côte d'Ivoire; yet the consideration of a long-term involvement in a UN operation on the African continent is likely to be examined with great circumspection.

In parallel, recent evolutions in peacekeeping have produced configurations that better suit French peacekeeping requirements. In particular, the scenario where a rapid reaction force operates in support of a UN operation but remains operationally distinct is a model that receives attention in France. Be it in the DRC in 2006 with the EU-led operation EUFOR DRC in support of MONUC for the presidential election, or Operation *Licorne* providing operational support to UNOCI, this type of cooperation is more likely to be reproduced and developed in the future. The EU Battle Groups could be used in such a scenario. Through UN-authorized operations that can be national, NATO- or EU-led, France can simultaneously contribute to the stabilization of a place to an extent under its own conditions while supporting UN missions.

France can also contribute to UN peacekeeping in at least two other ways: it is involved in African peacekeeping capacity-building programs that train and support activities of African contingents (e.g. Togo, Benin); and France will face demands from the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) for niche capabilities and enablers, such as tactical transport, medical units, staff officers, etc., which will be increasingly difficult to resist.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

France's UN policy is not backed by any sustained debate among the French think tanks or academic community. None of the main think tanks – *Institut Français de Relations Internationales* (IFRI), *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique* (FRS), *Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'Ecole Militaire* (IRSEM) – have real expertise or interest in UN security affairs. French officials and scholars have a low profile in the various policy and academic conferences dealing with peacekeeping. Furthermore, France's active role in official debates (at the Security Council) contrasts with a relatively small presence in DPKO, where France has put its weight on keeping the position of Under Secretary-General (USG) rather than on “placing” French citizens at intermediary levels (P5 to D2 positions). Also, none of the main political parties have a strong opinion on France's policy towards UN peace operations, and the debates are more on where to deploy troops and why rather than through which institutional framework. The absence of debate makes evident that current perceptions are still to a large degree determined by experiences of the early 1990s.

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats

Despite budgetary cuts and downsizing its forces, France still retains relatively large projection capabilities, with high-technology equipment, logistical and C3 assets. France also has police forces with a military status (Gendarmerie forces) that are in high demand in UN operations.

In terms of caveats, France insists that its forces remain under national or allied command, although recent history – in Lebanon, Côte d'Ivoire and Chad – has shown that French forces could also be placed under UN command (yet in the Lebanon case in 2006 this was initially made possible by the establishment of the Strategic Military Cell within DPKO). Most importantly, France is eager to define Rules of Engagement (RoE) and to equip its forces so as to give them sufficient leeway to face any type of situation.

France is a “Level 3” participant of the UN Standby Arrangement System (MOU signed in 1999), with pledges including air services, civilian police, headquarters, infantry and logistics.

Part 8: Further Reading

Winning the Battle. Building Peace. Land forces in Present and Future Conflicts, FT-01, Centre de Doctrine d'Emploi des Forces, Paris, January 2007.

French White Paper on Defence and National Security, Paris, 2008.

France-UK Non-Paper on UN Peacekeeping, January 2009.

Capstone Concept on the Employment of Armed Forces, Joint Concept JC-01, CICDE, French Ministry of Defence, Paris, 2010.

Notes

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

² Armed Forces Spending is a country's annual total defense budget (in US dollars) divided by the total number of *active* armed forces. Using 2010 figures from IISS, *The Military Balance 2012*.

³ See Franco-British non-paper on Peacekeeping, January 2009, listed above; and Statement by the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/2009/24, 5 August 2009.

⁴ See Speech by the Permanent Representative of France at the Security Council, New York, 20 June 2012.

⁵ *White Paper on Defence and National Security* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2008), pp.114-116.

⁶ The Parliament also voted on the operation in Afghanistan on 22 September 2008, on the operations in Côte d'Ivoire (operation Licorne), Kosovo (NATO operation) and Chad/CAR (EU operation) on 28 January 2009, and on the operation in Libya on 12 July 2011.

⁷ Report on the 2012 Budgetary Law No.107, French Senate, Paris, 17 November 2011, p.35.