

**Country Profile: Sri Lanka**Philip Cunliffe  
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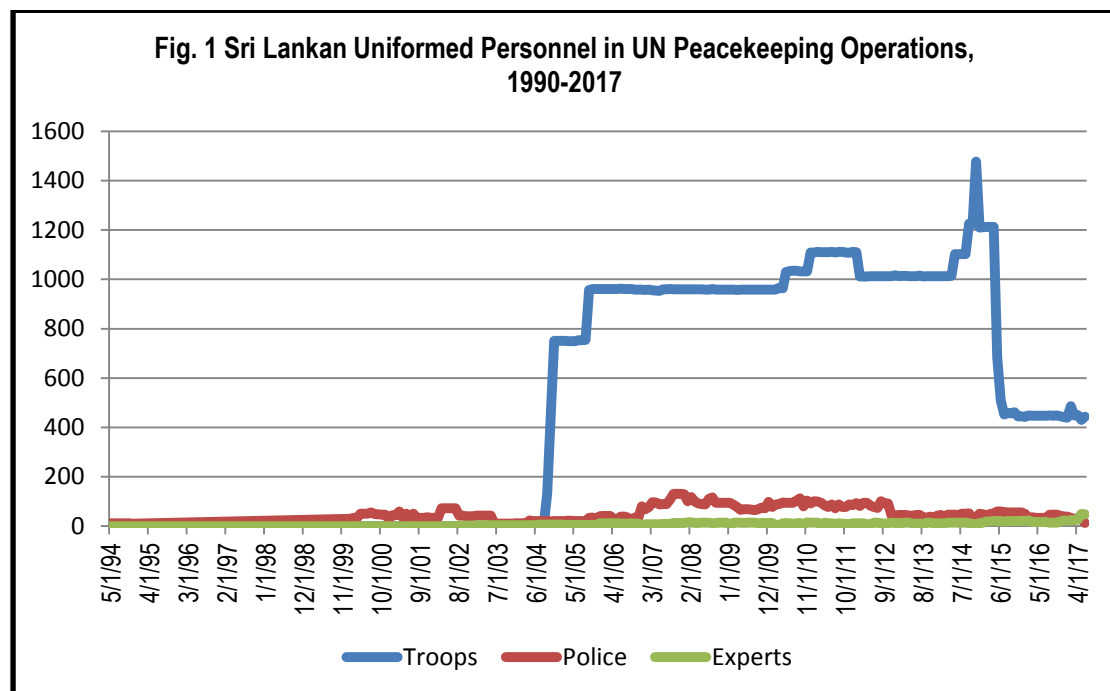
Active armed forces <sup>1</sup>	Helicopters & fixed-wing transport	Defense Budget	UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments
<b>243,000</b>  Army 200,000 Navy 15,000 Air Force 28,000  +62,000 paramilitary  World Ranking (size): <b>23</b>	11 attack helicopters, 16 transport helicopters; 21 fixed-wing transport aircraft	2016: \$1.96bn (2.38% of GDP)  2015: \$2.01bn (2.48% of GDP)  2014: \$1.93bn (2.58% of GDP)  2013: \$1.82bn (2.79% of GDP)  World Ranking (budget): <b>58</b>	<b>504</b> (9 women) (30 Jun. 2017)  Ranking: <b>43</b>	<b>UNMISS</b> 198 (13 experts, 2 police, 183 troops) 1 Heli Sqd; 1 hospital <b>UNIFIL</b> 151 (1 expert, 150 troops) <b>MINUSCA</b> 121 (11 experts, 110 troops) 1 Heli Sqd <b>MINUSMA</b> 7 experts <b>MINUSTAH</b> 3 experts <b>MONUSCO</b> 4 experts <b>UNAMID</b> 11 police <b>UNISFA</b> 7 experts <b>MINURSO</b> 1 expert	N/A
Defense Spending / Troop: <b>US\$9,645</b> (compared to global average of approximately US\$77,000) <sup>2</sup>					

**Part 1: Recent Trends**

Following the withdrawal of 108 personnel accused of sexual exploitation and abuse from a 950-strong Sri Lankan contingent deployed with UN forces in Haiti in 2007, Sri Lanka has sought to renew and expand its peacekeeping commitments under the government of President Maithreepala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe (both elected in 2015). Sri Lanka was involved in the September 2015 Peacekeeping Leaders' Summit, in which various states pledged to commit forces to UN peacekeeping operations. Sri Lanka has offered significant enabling capacities in the form of a composite engineering squadron and convoy protection company for the beleaguered MINUSMA mission in Mali. In the interim, the bulk of Sri Lanka's deployments are distributed over three missions: MINUSCA in the Central African Republic, UNIFIL II in Lebanon, and UNMISS in South Sudan. Since 2004, Sri Lanka has transformed the 100 acre Kukuleganga camp in the south of the island into the Institute of Peace Support Operations ([IPSOTSL](#)). This training institute operates under the Ministry of Defense and has, as of 2017, trained 28,998 with 19,395 troops estimated to be ready for deployment. Over 300 members of the Special Task Force of the Sri Lankan police have also been trained for deployment as peacekeepers.

Despite its efforts to expand its peacekeeping commitments, Sri Lanka remains an outlier in South Asia when compared to its regional neighbors and peacekeeping giants India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Even Nepal, which is closer in demographic

size to Sri Lanka and like Sri Lanka was embroiled in a civil war until recently, has been more heavily involved in international peacekeeping than Sri Lanka. Despite this, Sri Lanka nonetheless has a long and complex historical involvement with peacekeeping. Only a year after Ceylon joined the UN in 1955 (Sri Lanka became independent in 1948, and was renamed Sri Lanka in 1972), the country served as a member of the 1956 Advisory Committee, which led to the establishment of the first ‘classical’ peacekeeping mission UNEF I, deployed to help end the 1956 Suez War. Ceylon offered troops for UNEF I and was also involved in the ill-fated 1960-64 ONUC mission in Congo. Later Sri Lanka itself was host to a controversial and failed peacekeeping mission in the form of the Indian Peacekeeping Force deployed to the island between 1987 and 1990 as part of a regional effort to end the civil war between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE).



After having decisively crushed the LTTE insurgency in 2009, Sri Lanka finds itself with a very large, well-trained, well-armed and highly experienced army bereft of purpose after the end of a bitter 26-year civil war. Given the lack of any significant pan-regional institutions in South Asia and Sri Lanka’s own history of Non-Aligned diplomacy, the United Nations will be the most natural outlet for any international commitments that the Sri Lankan military may pursue in future.

## Part 2: Decision-Making Process

Under the terms of Sri Lanka’s 1978 Constitution, the President is vested with the power to release troops based on a mission mandate. This role continues despite the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which intentionally delimited the power of the President. While the decision to deploy forces abroad rests ultimately in the hands of the President, according to Article 33A of the Constitution, the President is “responsible to the Parliament for the due exercise, performance and discharge of his powers, duties and functions” (19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, 2015). This formed the basis for subsequent agreements, such as the May 2011 MoU formulated under the UN Stand-by-

Arrangements system, which solidified the commitment between the UN and Sri Lanka to speed-up provision of peacekeeping resources to the UN. This is one of Resolutions (UNGA 49/37, UNSC 1327) and Conventions (e.g. Convention on the Safety of UN and Associate Personnel, ratified in 2003) adhered to by Sri Lanka in relation to peacekeeping.

### **Part 3: Rationales for Contributing**

*Security Rationales:* By virtue of being an island nation and since having crushed the LTTE insurgency, there are no immediate regional or internal security threats that would induce Sri Lanka to deploy peacekeepers abroad. Thus security rationales for peacekeeping deployment are limited, e.g., contributing forces abroad to build operational and professional experience of working with other countries' armed forces, to reinforce experience of counter-terrorism and peace support operations as per the mission statement of IPSOTSL.

*Political Rationales:* Political rationales are primary in shaping Sri Lanka's peacekeeping contributions. Sri Lanka's most recent efforts to expand its role in international peacekeeping should be seen as part of the diplomatic offensive by the government of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe to rehabilitate Sri Lanka on the international stage. As the previous government of Mahinda Rajapaksa (2005-2015) came under intense international criticism and scrutiny for its conduct of the final offensive against the LTTE in 2009, Sri Lanka found itself under pressure within the UN system for human rights abuses. As a result, Sri Lanka's relationship with key Western allies such as the US and UK came under severe strain. A renewed commitment to peacekeeping should be seen as part of the new government's effort at rebalancing Sri Lanka's foreign policy, tilting away from the more Sino-centric foreign policy pursued by the Rajapaksa government.

*Economic Rationales:* Although indirect, the economic rationales for Sri Lankan peacekeeping are significant. Sri Lanka's defense budget is still that of a war-time economy, and the Sri Lankan military has significant interests spread across various business sectors. Thus whatever money the Sri Lankan military makes from its modest overseas deployments with the UN is proportionally small by comparison to its alternative revenue streams. Although hard currency reimbursement for participation in UN peacekeeping may be a welcome boon to individual soldiers in the Sri Lankan forces, at current deployment levels such earnings are too small to explain Sri Lanka's peacekeeping commitments in the aggregate.

Nonetheless, international rehabilitation is economically important for a debt-laden and export-dependent economy such as Sri Lanka's as it struggles to sustain economic growth. The country's progress in implementing transitional justice and accountability mechanisms following the end of the civil war has been linked to its economic fortunes. In 2010 following the human rights concerns that emerged after the end of the civil war the European Union (EU) withdrew Sri Lanka from its "[Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus](#)" (GSP+) trading system, thereby seriously damaging Sri Lankan garment exports to the EU. In early 2017, Sri Lanka requested that its GSP+ status be renewed. Inasmuch as participation in international peacekeeping could be seen as part of a wider effort at international rehabilitation, there is an indirect economic logic to Sri Lankan peacekeeping activism. Economic considerations may also become more important in future, as alternative revenue

streams are likely to become more important for the army as the over-sized defense budget is unlikely to be economically or politically sustainable over the long run.

*Institutional Rationales:* With a large, professional and battle-hardened military searching for a new purpose after the civil war, international peacekeeping could provide a new, outward-facing rationale for the over-sized Sri Lankan army. This could become more important over time as inter-service rivalries can be expected to grow, no longer contained by the demands of the war effort against the LTTE (see below). Hard currency reimbursements provided by the UN could help smooth civil-military and intra-military relations over the short- to medium-term, while involvement in peacekeeping missions with peacebuilding and civilian-protection mandates could also help the Sri Lankan military burnish its image following the extensive criticism it received for its conduct in the closing phases of the war against the LTTE.

*Normative Rationales:* Sri Lanka has long maintained a broad range of international links with global actors, remaining close to Western states while also being a long-standing member of the Non-Aligned Movement. Participation in peacekeeping and international institutions more broadly reinforces Sri Lanka's internationalist commitment to the UN, a policy that has support among Sri Lanka's foreign policy elite and middle classes.

#### **Part 4: Barriers to Contributing**

There are few specific internal inhibitors to Sri Lanka doing more peacekeeping. That said, nationalist skepticism towards the UN as a whole for perceived “interference” in the country's internal affairs stemming from international criticism of its post-conflict policies, could undermine wider public support for expanding the country's peacekeeping deployments. Popular perception of the military as heroes for overcoming the LTTE is likely to inhibit the reforms that might be necessary to expand the Sri Lankan military's international involvement, such as e.g., prosecuting those accused of abuse and misconduct. Other potential include the possibility of further damage to the country's reputation should Sri Lankan forces be accused of abuses such as those that occurred during the Haiti deployment. (In 2016 the government made a one-off payment to an individual and their child allegedly born as a result of sexual abuse committed by a Sri Lankan peacekeeper.) Sri Lanka also falls behind in the deployment of female peacekeepers, with the largest number of women being deployed abroad being only 9 in 2017. Nonetheless, the possibility of deployment in UN missions remains popular with rank and file soldiers.

#### **Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues**

There are a number of immediate short- to medium-term challenges confronting Sri Lanka's peacekeeping efforts. At the time of writing, Sri Lanka's specialist convoy protection unit has still not deployed with the MINUSMA mission in Mali. Designed to protect UN convoys that are resupplying isolated blue helmets in the remote north of the country, this deployment would constitute a significant expansion of Sri Lanka's peacekeeping involvement in a high-profile African mission. Should Sri Lanka's diplomatic efforts to cooperate with the UN falter over criticisms of Sri Lanka's post-war domestic policies, this might in turn jeopardize efforts to enhance Sri Lanka's peacekeeping. Aside from these specific issues, Sri Lanka also confronts the same generic issues confronting other states seeking to expand their peacekeeping

involvement. For instance, should the Trump administration fulfill its declared aim of significantly defunding UN peacekeeping, the attractiveness of participating in peacekeeping may also diminish for small developing countries such as Sri Lanka.

Nevertheless, Sri Lanka needs to find a new purpose for its huge army. Although the army currently enjoys national prestige and honor for its decisive victory over the LTTE, as the war recedes into the past it will become increasingly difficult to justify retaining such large ground forces on an island nation. As political and economic pressures to slash an unsustainable defense budget grow over time, inter-service rivalries between the army and navy can be expected to intensify. Given Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean at the intersection of geopolitical rivalries between India, China and the US, the Sri Lankan navy will likely seek to displace the army as the country's most significant armed forces sector. In such circumstances, involvement in UN peacekeeping may constitute a new rationale for Sri Lanka's land forces as well as providing a revenue stream that may help to offset a shrinking share of a smaller defense budget.

### **Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents**

It is apparent that the key champions for deployment of peacekeepers are the military. Peacekeeping deployment expands opportunities for individual soldiers, in terms of training, earnings and most importantly, recognition. Peacekeeping thus enables individuals to earn promotion. While there was opposition to sending troops abroad during the civil war (1983-2009) since then, there is a strong political will to deploy peacekeepers. Despite international criticism of the Sri Lankan military, the argument made is that a handful of troops violating international law should not call into question the discipline and professionalism of the armed forces as a whole.

The main opposition to Sri Lankan deployment of peacekeepers comes from outside the country from those who criticize the military for having violated human rights during the Sri Lankan civil war. Violators should thus not be allowed to enjoy impunity while also personally benefitting from deployment through peacekeeping. These accusations have haunted troop deployment decisions. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch demand the suspension of all deployments until all accusations relating to crimes committed by Sri Lankan peacekeeping troops are investigated (Margolis 2016).

### **Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats**

Like other South Asian countries, Sri Lanka's armed forces are Anglophone, thereby providing a good basis for international deployments in multinational missions, notwithstanding the current shortfall in Francophone peacekeepers. Nonetheless the main appeal of Sri Lanka's military lies in its size, equipment and combat experience all stemming from its defeat of the formidable LTTE. This experience endows the Sri Lankan armed forces with a military prowess that would be rare among states of comparable size and levels of economic development. As a result of this internal conflict, the Sri Lankan military has experience of both low- and high-intensity conflict with insurgent groups – experience similar to the situations confronted by many peacekeepers today. For example, the difficult jungle terrain of the Jaffna peninsula in northern Sri Lanka, heartland of the LTTE insurgency, is not dissimilar to the terrain of central Africa. The army has also had to protect extended supply lines across

hostile territory, and has highly effective demining capacities. These military capabilities are of a sophistication that is rare to find outside of NATO member states.

As a result of this experience, Sri Lanka was able to offer an important enabling unit in the form of a convoy protection battalion for the MINUSMA mission in Mali. Thus far, Sri Lanka's deployment to MINUSMA has been delayed due to criticisms of the procurement process in country-owned-equipment inspection (COE). At the 2015 Peacekeeping Leaders Summit, Sri Lanka also pledged to provide four rapidly deployable battalions, a counter-IED company, two Special Forces companies, a force protection convoy, a combat logistics unit, two combat transport companies, two formed police units, a combat engineering unit and military training capability.

### Part 8: Further Reading

- [Institute of Peace Support Operations](#) at Kukuleganga
- Hillary Margolis, "[A chance for UN Peacekeeping to get it right](#)" (Human Rights Watch, 2016).
- Jagath P. Senaratne, "The Security Establishment in Sri Lanka: A case for reform" in Gavin Cawthra and Robin Luckham (eds.), *Governing Insecurity: democratic control of military and security establishments in Transitional Democracies* (Zed Books, 2003).
- UN website on [Sri Lanka's peacekeeping contributions](#).

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Table based on the data provided by IISS, *The Military Balance 2017* (Taylor & Francis, 2017). UN data are the most recent available on the UN DPKO [official website](#).

<sup>2</sup> 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 2017*.