



SHIRBRIG photo

SHIRBRIG Headquarters inside the *Garderkasernen* at Høvelte, Denmark.

SHIRBRIG: THE FUTURE OF CANADA'S CONTRIBUTION TO UN PEACE OPERATIONS?

by Peter Armstrong-Whitworth

Introduction

Canada has long advocated for effective military capabilities to be placed at the disposal of the United Nations. Since the inception of the UN Emergency Force in 1956, Canada has continuously maintained units on standby for United Nations duty.¹ In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, the nation played a leading role in the establishment of the Multinational Standby High Readiness Brigade for UN Operations (SHIRBRIG) to provide the United Nations with a rapid reaction capability for the initial six months of a peace support operation. Since SHIRBRIG declared its availability for UN operations in January 2000, Canadians have figured prominently in SHIRBRIG deployments to the UN missions in Ethiopia-Eritrea, Liberia, and most recently, Sudan. Canada held the Presidency of SHIRBRIG in 2003, and provided the brigade commander, Brigadier-General Gregory Mitchell, from January 2004 until summer 2006.

Although Canada's military participation in UN peace operations has diminished over recent years, Minister of National Defence Gordon O'Connor affirmed in his first major policy speech to the Conference of Defence Associations that Canada would defend its national interests globally through its longstanding engagement in both NATO and the UN.² Nonetheless,

Canada is heavily committed to the NATO mission in Afghanistan. There are also significant additional pressures on the Canadian Forces, including undergoing restructuring and expansion, as well as preparing for a major, although discreet, role in providing security to the 2010 Olympics. Is there scope for the Canadian Forces to participate in future UN operations? If so, what role should be sought?

Canada's current limited capacity to participate in new operations will improve over time, as Canadian Forces transformation takes root and expansion gets underway. It is held that it is in Canada's national interest to participate in UN operations, and that Canada can provide leadership, through SHIRBRIG, in ensuring that the UN has an effective rapid deployment capability. This article will first trace the origins of SHIRBRIG from the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide to the brigade's first deployments, as well as review the

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importance of SHIRBRIG to the UN. It will then outline how a lead role in SHIRBRIG could contribute to Canadian foreign and defence policy priorities. Finally, it will examine the role Canada can play to transform SHIRBRIG and further increase its flexibility and relevance to Canada and member states of the United Nations.

Origins

On the dark day of 9 May 1994, Major-General Romeo Dallaire signed off on an options analysis for the “Proposed Future Mandate and Force Structure of UNAMIR,” arguing for a strong, well-equipped brigade of troops to halt the Rwandan genocide. Indeed, it was his belief that he could have done so with a strengthened force mandate and the rapid deployment of some 5000 troops³ that prompted UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his “Supplement to an Agenda for Peace,” (A/50/60, S/1995/1) to call upon members of the United Nations to consider the idea of a rapid reaction force. Such a force would provide the Security Council with a strategic reserve when there was an urgent need for peace support troops. In response to the Secretary-General’s request, the governments of the Netherlands, Canada, and Denmark each submitted working papers to the UN Security Council.

The first paper was actually submitted as a ‘non-paper’ on 10 April 1995 by the Netherlands, and it explored the notion of a 5000-strong United Nations Rapid Deployment Brigade.⁴ However, the Dutch proposal lacked member-state support, due to concerns that such a supranational capability could undermine national sovereignty, and would be expensive.

Canada submitted its report in September 1995, entitled “Towards a Rapid Reaction Capability for the United Nations,” which considered the concept of rapid reaction from the political, strategic, operational, and tactical levels. A number of the recommendations seeking to improve the strategic management of peace operations were implemented.

Others, such as the Rapidly Deployable Mission Headquarters (or Integrated Mission Task Force concept) were incorporated into the Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/305 – S/2000/809) – commonly (and hereinafter) referred to as the Brahimi Panel report.

“Canada submitted its report in September 2005, entitled ‘Towards a Rapid Reaction Capability for the United Nations...’”



The Canadian proposal for a vanguard force to be made available to the UN was then taken up in a Danish study.

Denmark led a multinational working group composed of participants representing the governments of Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, and Sweden – as well as observers from Finland and Ireland – to detail the vanguard concept further. The Danish-led study determined that a pre-

established brigade could be made available to the UN by drawing upon the contributions member states had made to the UN Standby Arrangements System. In February 1996, the Permanent Representative of Denmark to the UN submitted the report of the working group as a ‘non-paper’ on the establishment of a Multinational United Nations Standby Forces High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG) to the Secretary-General.⁵

SHIRBRIG would consist of three elements: a force pool to which the SHIRBRIG nations would contribute the units that make up the brigade organization; a small staff that would provide a permanent headquarters, known as the Planning Element (PLANELM) for the brigade that would be augmented by non-permanent staff from SHIRBRIG nations upon deployment; and a Steering Committee consisting of national delegations from SHIRBRIG members, who would meet regularly to provide policy guidance for the brigade and would be responsible for force generation should the brigade be called upon for deployment. The SHIRBRIG Presidency would rotate amongst the SHIRBRIG members on an annual basis, and would act as the Chair of the Steering Committee.

Although considered a rapid reaction force, the SHIRBRIG Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) establishing the brigade specifically limits its application to:

Missions where rapid response is important, and where other forces cannot meet the United Nations’ requirements. The SHIRBRIG will only be employed on a case-by-case basis in a manner safe-guarding national sovereignty considerations in peace operations mandated by the Security Council under Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations, including humanitarian tasks. The SHIRBRIG, as an integral formation – i.e. consisting of elements from all types of arms, including manoeuvre units, medical, logistics, and communications – will only be employed for deployments of up to 6 months duration, and it should not be considered

for routine rotation of forces in connection with ongoing missions. As a general rule, force contributions for the SHIRBRIG will not be equipped for operations in extreme climates, i.e. arctic or alpine environments, severe desert, swamp and jungle areas.⁶

The document also notes that "...subunits should be ready for deployment from point of embarkation within 21-30 days, ... after the decision of the Participating Nations to make them available for deployment upon request by the United Nations." The MOU envisages various small-level training initiatives consisting of command post exercises, computer-assisted exercises, commanders' conferences, and staff conferences. Logistical and medical support is ultimately a national responsibility, although resources will be combined or shared to the greatest extent possible to improve efficiency. Units deployed as part of the brigade will be under operational control of the Commander SHIRBRIG.⁷

From 1995 to 2000, members of the working group concentrated on implementing the proposals put forward in the study. Following its first meeting in March 1996 in Copenhagen, seven members of the Implementation Group (Austria, Canada, Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Sweden) formalized their commitments to SHIRBRIG by signing a Letter of Intent on 15 December 1996 at Old Avernæs, some 200 km south-west of Copenhagen. Six months later, on 3 June 1997, members of the Implementation Group met for the first time as the SHIRBRIG Steering Committee. The Planning Element was officially inaugurated by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on 2 September 1997. Since the Headquarters Company

Exercise *First Effort* was held (9-13 November 1998), the PLANELM has conducted regular command post exercises, staff training, and commanders' conferences. The SHIRBRIG Steering Committee has also met on a consistent basis – with discussions concentrating on improving the brigade by increasing membership, resolving unit contribution deficiencies, and developing formal relations with the UN, as well as developing the criteria to declare the brigade operationally ready. The Steering Committee finalized the MOU to establish the brigade in early 1998 and declared SHIRBRIG available for UN peace operations as of 1 January 2000. At present, SHIRBRIG nations include: Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden. Seven additional countries participate as observers: Chile, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Egypt, Jordan, Senegal, and Portugal.

Operations and Concept Refinement

The first call for SHIRBRIG to deploy came in the summer of 2000 with the cessation of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Informally, many in the SHIRBRIG Steering Committee had recognized that an end to the border conflict, which began in 1998, would provide an 'ideal' test case for SHIRBRIG. Although the area's features included 'severe desert' and rugged terrain, a peace support mission to separate the forces of the two warring states was much closer conceptually to the traditional Chapter VI missions that characterized the first generation of UN operations. In May 2000, the UN contacted SHIRBRIG to provide the nucleus of the mission headquarters, as well as units to be deployed along the border. SHIRBRIG was

also to be prepared to accept and work with contributions from non-SHIRBRIG nations to ensure adequate geographic representation. Recognizing the opportunity and experience that such a mission could provide, SHIRBRIG's commander, Brigadier-General Patrick Cammaert, played a central role in ensuring SHIRBRIG's deployment. Elements of SHIRBRIG, including the headquarters, the Danish headquarters company, and a Dutch marine battalion, augmented by a Canadian infantry company (totalling some 450 troops, including national command and support elements), deployed to the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia-Eritrea



The former Commander SHIRBRIG and United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) Force Commander, Dutch Major General Patrick C. Cammaert, reviews his troops.

“The SHIRBRIG deployment to UNMEE was considered a success.”

(UNMEE) in November and December 2000. Italy also provided forces to the mission.

The SHIRBRIG deployment to UNMEE was considered a success. Positive mention of SHIRBRIG in

the Brahimi Panel report further validated the SHIRBRIG concept. Although there was great unease from members, as SHIRBRIG did not deploy as an integral brigade, the mission was considered militarily effective. In particular, the deployment of the fully staffed SHIRBRIG Headquarters was highly valued by the UN. However, the mission also highlighted the need to review some of SHIRBRIG’s self-imposed limitations and the need for a flexible approach towards the employment of the brigade.⁸ The UN requested that SHIRBRIG consider extending its deployment time for longer than six months. SHIRBRIG responded that it could stagger its withdrawal to ensure an effective transition to follow-on forces, but would maintain the six-month limitation to facilitate the reconstitution of the brigade following a deployment.

Other efforts to address the limitations of the SHIRBRIG concept were initiated during the 2002 Norwegian presidency, and more fully during the 2003 Canadian presidency. The Steering Committee endeavoured to address the Chapter VI limitation by deciding that SHIRBRIG would consider deployments to more robust operations on a case-by-case basis. However, there was little interest in seeking a formal amendment to the MOU establishing the brigade.⁹ Under the Canadian presidency, the Steering Committee further deliberated on the SHIRBRIG concept. Building upon SHIRBRIG’s experience with UNMEE and in anticipation of a potential role in Sudan, members determined that it was unlikely that SHIRBRIG would deploy as a full brigade, as originally envisaged. Indeed, with the guidance of the Chair of the Canadian presidency, Lieutenant-General (ret’d) Ray Crabbe, nations decided that SHIRBRIG ought to have a broader scope of employment and include:

- employing SHIRBRIG as a full brigade for a peace support operation;
- employing SHIRBRIG as less than a full brigade for a peace support operation;
- employing SHIRBRIG for a UN observer or monitoring mission;
- employing SHIRBRIG Headquarters as the nucleus of a force level headquarters; and
- employing the PLANELM as Group 1 (core planning staff) of a UN force level headquarters.¹⁰

“The continuing focus upon Sudan did enable SHIRBRIG to undertake contingency planning for an eventual mission.”

Furthermore, the Steering Committee determined that SHIRBRIG should focus upon Africa as the most likely area for future deployments. With the support of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN DPKO), SHIRBRIG members agreed to further assist the UN by enhancing the peace operations capability in other regions, and to help create similar rapid reaction organizations for UN operations, as called for in the Brahimi Panel report by:

- assisting in building regional brigades/headquarters;
- providing planning/expert team assistance;
- offering secondments; and
- inviting non-SHIRBRIG nations to participate in training activities.¹¹

The effort to increase SHIRBRIG’s flexibility proved timely. In late 2002 and early 2003, the UN indicated that it intended to call upon SHIRBRIG for an eventual peace support operation in Sudan, should a peace agreement be reached. The broadening of the employment options made it possible for SHIRBRIG nations to respond positively to additional UN requests for assistance, while keeping an eye on an eventual mission to Sudan. In February 2003, the SHIRBRIG Steering Committee authorized members of the PLANELM to respond to a UN request to provide a small planning team for several weeks to assist the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for its forthcoming operation in Côte d’Ivoire. In a similar capacity, elements of the SHIRBRIG Headquarters deployed to Liberia in late-September 2003 for one month to provide an Interim Force Headquarters, consisting of approximately 25 staff (two of which were Canadian), to bridge the handover between the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) and the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Although numerically a small contribution, the gap-filling assistance SHIRBRIG provided enabled the follow-on UN headquarters staff the time to develop basic operating procedures, and to receive pre-deployment training in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

SHIRBRIG’s limited involvement in non-Sudan missions in 2003 and 2004 – a period that witnessed a resurgence in UN peacekeeping missions – is, in part, explained by the decisions of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN DPKO). UN DPKO was well aware of impending peacekeeping operations in Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, and Sudan, and had a general sense of the potential troop-contributing nations. With the exception of a potential mission in Sudan, each of the crises in the respective countries was being addressed in part by the deployment of peacekeepers from regional organizations

DND Photo ISD01-3123 by Master Corporal Ken Allan, J5PA/DGPA Combat Camera



24 May 2001 – Senafe, Eritrea – During a mounted patrol in a new Light Armoured Vehicle (LAV 3), Canadian peacekeepers pass by a new Internally Displaced Persons camp.

(African Union in Burundi and the Economic Community of West African States in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia). It was envisaged (as later occurred) that the establishment of UN missions would largely consist of “blue-hatting” the existing peace support operation. However, no regional organization had indicated that it was planning to undertake a mission to address the North-South dimensions of the Sudan conflict. Given significant Western interest in the Sudanese peace process, UN DPKO identified SHIRBRIG as a critical contributor for an impending mission.

Desiring to maintain its focus upon Sudan, the SHIRBRIG presidency, then held by Austria, also gave only cursory consideration to a role in establishing the follow-on UN mission in Haiti to the Multinational Interim Force in June 2004. Had SHIRBRIG not been slated for Sudan, it might have played a role in assisting the UN in Haiti, given Canada's participation in both missions.

The continuing focus upon Sudan did enable SHIRBRIG to undertake contingency planning for an eventual mission. Indeed, upon UN Security Council authorization for the UN Advance Mission in Sudan,¹² SHIRBRIG was in a position to provide 14 of the 27 military staff, drawn largely from the Planning Element, authorized for the special political mission, and Canada provided two people to this team. Members were also able to train together at the SHIRBRIG Planning Element location in Denmark before deployment. SHIRBRIG's long focus upon an impending mission in Sudan, and its participation in UNAMIS, made a

role in the eventual peace support operation that was to follow a foregone conclusion. What remained to be determined were the scope of SHIRBRIG's involvement and the timing of the mission.

The commander of SHIRBRIG, Brigadier-General Mitchell, was also designated early on in the mission planning process as the eventual Deputy Force Commander. SHIRBRIG deployed its headquarters to provide the nucleus of the mission headquarters and provided a multinational composite headquarters company, which provides administrative, transport, logistical, and security support for the headquarters. In addition to supplying the commander and staff

officers for the headquarters, Canada also provided five Canadian Forces members for the leadership of the headquarters company, bringing its total contribution to 15 personnel. Although SHIRBRIG played a critical role in ensuring that UNMIS was able to achieve its initial operating capability, the deployment of units from other troop-contributing nations was greatly hampered by a number of difficulties.

In accordance with the SHIRBRIG concept, the SHIRBRIG elements deployed to Sudan in early April, and returned in October 2005 after six months in-theatre. During the 26th Steering Committee meeting, Brigadier-General Mitchell advised that SHIRBRIG could be asked by the UN to return to Sudan, should UNMIS be requested by the UN Security Council to take over from the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), and extend its mandate to the Darfur region. Bearing a possible return to Sudan in mind, members agreed that SHIRBRIG should be reconstituted and once again be available for deployment by 1 March 2006.¹³ SHIRBRIG also developed contingency plans to support a possible expansion of the UNMIS mandate.

While the SHIRBRIG deployment to Sudan proved important, Steering Committee members also recognized that SHIRBRIG was not delivering a full brigade as originally intended, and its credibility had suffered. Indeed, as early as late February 2005, members had agreed that the SHIRBRIG concept should be reviewed to ensure that it remains relevant to the UN, consistent with the capabilities of its member-states.



23 January 2001 – Adi Ugri, Eritrea – Canadian soldiers from Reconnaissance Platoon Task Force East Africa study their surroundings and talk to passers-by from the turret of their Coyote armoured reconnaissance vehicle.

Following deliberations throughout 2005, the Steering Committee determined that in order to preserve its credibility, SHIRBRIG should concentrate on providing a headquarters and a headquarters company, much as it did for UNMIS, and inform the UN accordingly. However, it also indicated that SHIRBRIG should retain the flexibility to deploy a full brigade, if available. To date, however, no changes to the SHIRBRIG concept in the Memorandum of Understanding have been envisaged.¹⁴

The Relevance of SHIRBRIG to the UN

UN peace operations have long been characterised by their *ad hoc* nature; the requirement to cobble together forces with little or no interoperability at the outset of every mission. With its standing headquarters, pre-established pool of forces, and regular training, SHIRBRIG held the promise to provide an effective framework to overcome this challenge. Indeed, in recognition of SHIRBRIG, the Brahimi Panel report had recommended that:

Member States should be encouraged, where appropriate, to enter into partnerships with one another, within the context of the United Nations Standby Arrangements System (UNSAS), to form several coherent brigade-size forces, with necessary enabling forces, ready for effective deployment within 30 days of the adoption of a Security Council resolution establishing

a traditional peacekeeping operation and within 90 days for complex peacekeeping operations.¹⁵

However, since its first deployment to Ethiopia-Eritrea in 2000, SHIRBRIG's operational history has demonstrated an increasing priority accorded to deploying the headquarters elements, culminating in the Steering Committee decision, during its 26th meeting, to preserve its credibility by focusing on this element. This reflected the ability of member states to contribute personnel and units to SHIRBRIG missions and the priority accorded to the organization. Although SHIRBRIG maintains the brigade structure in the force pool, its practical contribution to the UN has consisted of providing the nucleus of an operational-level headquarters.

Nonetheless, the rapid deployment of an effective headquarters at the outset of a peace support operation fulfils a critical UN requirement. However, Under-Secretary Guéhenno highlighted a continuing gap in UN rapid reaction capabilities in his statement to the UN Fourth Committee during October 2005:

There are gaps in the Brahimi reform process that continue to weaken our operations today. Not all of the recommendations accepted by you [UN member-states] five years ago have been implemented. One such example is arrangements for the development of a system for the rapid deployment of brigade-sized forces.¹⁶

While a headquarters capability is essential, the rapid deployment of capable manoeuvre units, such as an infantry battalion and an armoured reconnaissance regiment, and enabling units, such as logistics, medical, communications, and movement control formations, remain important in establishing a credible UN presence at the outset of a mission.

The UN's experience with the Australian-led intervention in East Timor has demonstrated that "early" commitments from troop-contributing nations also strengthen the UN's hand in securing consensus from the government that will host the peace operation. Undoubtedly, the UN Secretary-General and Security Council would have been in a stronger position to leverage Sudanese acceptance of a UN force had they had significant commitments of highly capable forces.

In addition to forces required to stand up an operation quickly, the UN also has highlighted the need for a self-sustaining "over-the-horizon" force capable of reinforcing existing missions on short notice. In his memorandum to DPKO staff outlining five priorities to improve UN peace operations by 2010, Under-Secretary Guéhenno again highlighted the need to strengthen the UN's "capacities to rapidly deploy military capabilities to assist peace operations in crisis."¹⁷

The capacity of the force to undertake 'robust peacekeeping' and to protect civilians is also a requirement that has taken on increasing importance. Drawing upon experiences of the UN in Rwanda, Srebrenica, and other areas, the Brahimi Panel report highlighted the need for UN peacekeepers to be able to deal effectively with 'spoilers' to a peace agreement. The subsequent and uneven responses by UN forces to challenges (i.e., in Haiti's Port-au-Prince, and in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo) has led the UN to recognize the need for reaching consensus upon what such an approach entails. Moreover, since 1999, UN mission mandates increasingly have contained provisions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter authorizing UN forces to protect civilians under imminent threat of violence, within capacities and means.

To some extent, the UN is relying increasingly upon regional organizations and 'coalitions of the willing' to meet its rapid reaction requirements. However, this approach can provide only a limited solution. By virtue of their ad hoc nature, coalitions of the willing are dependent upon a nation that is ready and capable of taking on the leadership of the force. However, when a lead nation steps forward, coalitions of the willing have proven effective, as demonstrated in East Timor in 1999, and Haiti in 2004. In Africa, the experiences of ECOWAS in West Africa, and the African Union in Burundi and Darfur,

despite great bilateral assistance from Western countries and through NATO, have demonstrated that there are limited capacities to undertake peace operations effectively. And ongoing international efforts to enhance African capacities are unlikely to generate substantive results for many years to come. Although NATO is the most effective military regional organization in the world, interventions in Africa are politically sensitive, since a NATO-led mission, by its very nature, would signal a lack of effective capacity on the continent and undermine the regional organizations situated there. In theory, NATO could also be called upon to support a UN mission and/or provide a strategic reserve, although these possibilities are unlikely, given the present operational demands upon the organization. A European Union-led mission in Africa could also have an undermining effect. However, the EU has buttressed the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) at critical moments in the mission's history, particularly to quell violence in eastern DRC in 2003 and to support Congolese elections in 2006. As these deployments were established outside of the MONUC framework, the EU seems unlikely to play a key role in the start-up of a UN mission, although it has demonstrated that it can provide the UN with a strategic reserve capability for selected missions.

SHIRBRIG's relevance to the UN is dependent upon its capacity to fulfil the UN's requirements for rapid reaction. With its current focus of deploying a headquarters capability, SHIRBRIG provides the UN with an important, albeit small, contribution to peace operations. SHIRBRIG's operational history has demonstrated that it has been able to overcome its employment limitations. However, the SHIRBRIG concept, as outlined in the MOU establishing the brigade, needs to be updated to reflect the requirement for robust peace support forces that operate in difficult environments and with Chapter VII clauses to protect civilians. While SHIRBRIG has indeed made a small, but important contribution to international security, the retention of the brigade structure maintains the possibility for SHIRBRIG to provide even greater assistance to the UN.

"The capacity of the force to undertake 'robust peacekeeping' and to protect civilians is also a requirement..."

SHIRBRIG, the UN and Canada

As mentioned at the outset of this article, Canada played a key role in SHIRBRIG, culminating in holding the presidency in 2003 and providing the brigade commander from 2004 until mid-2006. As such, Canada is, in part,

responsible for the extent of SHIRBRIG's contribution to international security. Unfortunately, SHIRBRIG's availability for UN operations has also coincided with one of the most challenging times for the Canadian Forces. Budgetary cuts and the subsequent sustainability crisis have affected Canada's ability to contribute to



SHIRBRIG Photo

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) – Meeting the local population, autumn 2003.

Canadians have long recognized that a rules-based multilateral system offers the greatest potential for international stability, and have taken great pride in contributions to these organizations. The UN plays an invaluable role in developing an international legal order to promote international peace and security. Canada has also frequently succeeded in enhancing its relative power and status within a rules-based framework, through coalition building and by making important contributions to the effective functioning of organizations. Canada's roles in establishing peacekeeping; the negotiation of the Ottawa Treaty to ban landmines; the adoption of the "Responsibility to Protect" agenda; as well as encouraging NATO to take on a role in Afghanistan, are but a few examples of how Canadians have taken advantage of rules-based multilateral frameworks to advance their objectives. They also have greatly shaped how Canada is perceived internationally.

In considering what role Canada should assume, Canada's relationship with the United States is of paramount concern, and, indeed, it provides a cornerstone for the rationale for Canada's lead role in the south of Afghanistan. When US relations with the UN are strained, it is not always obvious how Canada can enhance its relations with the US by supporting the UN. However, strong US support for UN efforts in Haiti and Sudan, particularly Darfur, highlight how the UN can contribute to US objectives in areas where the United States is not in a position to undertake a lead role.

SHIRBRIG. However, increased financial support, Canadian Forces transformation, particularly to increase its expeditionary capability, and personnel increases will create opportunities for Canada downstream to help ensure that SHIRBRIG has the resources to make a greater contribution to the UN. But should Canada undertake such a role?

In his second speech to the Conference of Defence Associations on 16 February 2007, the Minister of Defence reiterated Canada's pledge to fulfilling its UN and NATO commitments and outlined three major responsibilities of the Canadian Forces in advancing Canada's national interest:

- to serve Canadians wherever they live;
- to help protect the North American continent (shared with the United States); and
- to play a lead role on the international stage.¹⁸

It is worth examining how this third responsibility contributes to Canadian security.

Failed and fragile states constitute some of the most significant threats to international stability, Canadian values, and to security. Although regional organizations have played increasingly important roles in this domain, the UN remains an eminent security actor, particularly in Africa. Today, the UN manages 18 peace operations with over 101,000 personnel deployed worldwide (two-thirds of which are deployed in Africa), all of whom are working to address failed and fragile states. Not only is UN peacekeeping one of the most important indicators of the overall performance of the organizations, as demonstrated by the failures of the UN and its member-states in Rwanda and Srebrenica, Canada also provides 2.8 percent of the UN peacekeeping budget.¹⁹ With a peacekeeping budget now in excess of US\$5 billion, this amounts to providing approximately US\$140 million annually in assessed contributions. Canada has an interest in ensuring that UN peace operations succeed and its investments deliver returns.

Any recommendation of support for an organization must also consider the weaknesses and challenges of the organization. An institution that must factor in the views of 191 member-states is, by its very nature, faced with a complex and arduous task. Additionally, as the UN World Summit highlighted, the main bodies of the organization, including the Secretariat, are overdue for reform. Indeed, the degree of reforms being proposed by the UN Secretary General in his report, “Investing in the United Nations: for a stronger Organization worldwide” (A/60/692) highlights the scope of the problem, but also underscores proposals and work being done to address the issue.

“Canadians have long recognized that a rules-based multilateral system offers the greatest potential for international stability...”

One of the areas of the UN system that has already undergone significant reforms is the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. With the implementation of the majority of the recommendations outlined in the Brahimi Panel report, the UN has dramatically enhanced its capacity to plan and manage peace operations as demonstrated in Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, Liberia and Burundi. The clearest indication of the continuing need and increased confidence in the organization is the surge in new missions and number of peacekeepers deployed since 2002.²⁰ However, this is also placing the organization under great strain, further underlining the requirement for effective rapid deployment capacities.

It is clear that the UN contributes to Canada’s security. Canada can enhance the effectiveness of UN peace operations by ensuring that SHIRBRIG addresses UN requirements for rapid reaction. Although Canada’s present capacity is limited, this will improve over time. Of particular interest is the establishment of the Standing Contingency Task Forces, expected to consist of approximately 1000 soldiers deployable with seven to ten days’ notice for limited periods. As one of the largest contributors and with its long experience in peace operations, SHIRBRIG provides Canada with a unique opportunity to undertake a long-term leadership role on the international stage.

A Leadership Role for Canada in SHIRBRIG

Leadership within SHIRBRIG requires a vision and a willingness to work in concert with the other SHIRBRIG nations, particularly Denmark as the host nation. A strengthened SHIRBRIG would be capable of responding to a variety of UN requirements for rapid reaction and contributions to the national security objectives of its members. In addition to quickly establishing an effective and credible force at the outset of a UN operation, this should include

the ability to provide a strategic reserve to bolster existing missions. SHIRBRIG’s flexibility to deploy under a variety of environmental conditions, including missions authorized under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, should be reflected in amended SHIRBRIG MOUs.

It is important to note that an increase in NATO and/or EU operations would pose challenges for SHIRBRIG, due to common membership and competition for limited resources. Efforts to ensure that affected SHIRBRIG members increase their military capability, much as Canada is doing, could provide a mitigating solution.

Over time, Canada, along with the other SHIRBRIG members, should make certain that SHIRBRIG can react to genocide, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity, in keeping with the “Responsibility to Protect” concept. Ensuring that a mechanism such as SHIRBRIG is capable of supporting the principles outlined in this concept would greatly enhance Canada’s credibility in advancing such issues, not to mention the contribution that could be made to humanity in general.

A leadership role in SHIRBRIG would include supporting initiatives, including seeking the SHIRBRIG presidency again and providing additional officers and civilian advisors (police, political, development, and so on) to the Planning Element. Moreover, Canada could enhance its UN peacekeeping situational awareness by providing Canadians to key positions with the UN DPKO and maintaining small contingents in priority peace operations, such as Sudan and Haiti, where SHIRBRIG could deploy as part of a UN strategic reserve. Positioning personnel in such capacities would complement wider Canadian contributions to support peacebuilding efforts, and would provide advance notice of impending requirements for rapid reaction.

Conclusion

Ten years ago, the SHIRBRIG nations came together to develop a mechanism to enhance the UN’s rapid reaction capability. While their efforts have been partially successful, a review of the UN’s present-day requirements suggests that SHIRBRIG has not yet achieved the objectives it set for itself. This article maintains that Canada should build upon its role within SHIRBRIG by leading its transformation from its present emphasis on providing the UN with a headquarters capability, to one where SHIRBRIG is playing a much greater role in fielding a credible UN presence at the outset of

a mission, and can provide the UN with a strategic reserve. A unique opportunity exists for Canada to undertake a leadership role on the international stage. It is one that would contribute in a measured way to the Canada's peace support priorities by ensuring that SHIRBRIG deployments are foremost to areas that coincide with these priorities, and secondly, by enhancing the military effectiveness, credibility, and relevance of the United Nations.

In the April 2006 Speech from the Throne, Canada's Governor-General suggested that "Advancing Canada's interests in a complex and sometimes dangerous world requires confidence and the independent capacity to defend our country's sovereignty and the security of our citizens." By committing itself to a leadership role amongst the SHIRBRIG nations, there is perhaps no greater single opportunity for Canada to achieve this vision.



NOTES

1. Department of External Affairs, "Canada and the United Nations 1945-1975," Ottawa, 1977, pp. 43-44. The Canadian Airborne Regiment was designated Canada's UN Standby Force in the mid 1960s. See Bernd Horn, *Bastard Sons: An Examination of Canada's Airborne Experience 1942-1995* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing, 2001), p. 265. Since its inception, Canada also has committed an infantry battle group and helicopter squadron to the UN Standby Arrangements System.
2. Speaking Notes for the Honourable Gordon J. O'Connor, PC, MP, Minister of National Defence, at the Conference of Defence Associations Institute Annual General Meeting, 23 February 2006, at <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=1860>.
3. Romeo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (Toronto: Random House, 2003), pp. 354, 358-359, 374.
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Members of the Force Protection Company interact with Afghan children during a dismounted patrol in Kandahar City.