

Exploring the SHIRBRIG's Potential for Protection Operations: Preliminary Workshop

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This is a collaborative project of the Centre for Global Studies, University of Victoria and the Liu Institute for Global Issues, University of British Columbia.

The problem:

The report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty The Responsibility To Protect, revitalized wider interest in the use of force to protect civilians threatened by genocide and mass ethnic cleansing. While helping to initiate a new international norm, it also raised questions about 'how' to protect and 'with what', establishing the need to identify and elaborate upon the alternatives.

An existing arrangement worthy of further consideration and support:

One mechanism that has considerable potential is the multinational Stand-by High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG) for UN operations. Although the SHIRBRIG partnership was partially intended to prevent any future 'Rwandas', the initial arrangement was designed to enable rapid deployment to UN peacekeeping operations authorized under Chapter VI of the UN Charter. While this stipulation facilitated 'start-up' of the multinational brigade and helped to attract broader representation, it formerly impeded the prospect of deployment to more demanding peace operations.

Notably, four of the five recent UN operations included Chapter VII authorization for the limited use of force and four mandates now specify the protection of civilians. These increasingly difficult operations have highlighted the commitment – capability gap and need for more effective, rapid and reliable responses. Yet, there are also indications of progress. Last year, Norway, in its capacity as President of the SHIRBRIG, secured an agreement (in principle) on using this multinational brigade in more robust peace operations, presumably those including Chapter VII authorization. Moreover, the SHIRBRIG partnership has recently expanded from fourteen to sixteen member states and others may emulate this model.

The Focus:

This is an opportune time to review the SHIRBRIG arrangement, examine its potential for adaptation and identify further requirements for future protection operations.

In January 2003, Canada assumed the Presidency of the SHIRBRIG and provided the Chair of the Steering Committee. A Canadian will also be appointed as the SHIRBRIG Force Commander for 2004. As a key partner in efforts to enhance UN rapid deployment capabilities, [including the SHIRBRIG], as well as having initiated the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, Canada is well placed to lead a wider discussion on the modernization and expansion of the SHIRBRIG to facilitate protection operations. Among the questions that warrant further consideration are:

- What are the political impediments to deploying the SHIRBRIG for protection operations?
- Can the diverse positions of the participating member states be reconciled?
- What can be done to attract a broader pool of supportive participants?
- How might similar partnerships be encouraged with other member states?
- Could SHIRBRIG expand from a standby brigade of 4000-5000 troops to a military division of 10000 to 12000 troops?
- What further military requirements can be anticipated at the strategic, operational and tactical levels?
- What can be done to encourage functional role specialization and a coherent division of labour within this multinational partnership?
- How might participating member states be prompted to earmark and train military elements specifically for the SHIRBRIG and protection operations?
- Would the SHIRBRIG benefit from the inclusion of police and civilian peacebuilding elements?
- Would it be cost-effective to co-locate national elements assigned to the SHIRBRIG at a designated multinational or UN base in a standing formation?

In short, the exploratory workshop will attempt to identify constraints, options, further requirements and next steps. A report from this session will be prepared to assist in the development of a tentative agenda for subsequent efforts.

These efforts may include a conference of the SHIRBRIG participants, possibly with representation from their respective Ministers of Foreign Affairs and National Defence, as well as the SHIRBRIG Steering Committee and Planning Element. Such a conference might help to secure support and further commitments to facilitate deployment to protection operations, as well as new memoranda of understanding and status of forces agreements.

There is also a need for a wider multinational forum that encourages further participants and provides guidance to nascent partnerships such as the SEEBRIG and similar efforts within ECOWAS.

Aside from the political challenge of attracting additional commitments and capabilities, a substantive effort will be required to address the current void in understanding and preparing for protection operations, particularly the lack of appropriate doctrine, tactics, training and exercises.

This is a policy- and goal-oriented project intended to prompt progressive change through further cooperation in foreign policy, as well as the defence planning and priorities of the participating member states. It will include efforts to attract new partners, as well as the informed support of a transnational NGO partnership.

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