

The Multinational Stand-by High Readiness Brigade for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (SHIRBRIG) Concept and Future Developments

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Background

In 1994, the Danish minister of defense Hans Hækkerup took the initiative and invited a group of like-minded nations, all with extensive experience and high standards in the field of peacekeeping, to explore the option of creating a rapid deployment force within the framework of the United Nations Stand-by Arrangement System (UNSAS). The idea was discussed in a working group hosted by Denmark and it was recommended to establish a Standby High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG) for United Nations operations.

The initiative got additional impetus when in his 1995 Statement "Supplement to an Agenda for Peace", the UN Secretary General recommended that the UN should consider the idea of a rapid deployment force, consisting of units from a number of member states, trained to the same standard, using the same operating procedures and inter-operable equipment, and taking part in combined exercises at regular intervals.

Subsequently an implementation group was formed to prepare the legal and technical documents and in December 1996, Austria, Canada, Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Sweden signed a letter of intent committing themselves to the establishment of SHIRBRIG. Intensive work to develop the details of the concept continued and a Memorandum of Understanding for the Steering Committee (MOU/SC), a Memorandum of Understanding for the contribution of units to the SHIRBRIG Force Pool (MOU/SB), and a Memorandum of Understanding for participating in the Planning Element (MOU/PLANELM) were formulated and signed.

With the establishment of the Steering Committee (SC) and a the official inauguration of the permanent Planning Element (PANELM) by the UN Secretary General Kofi Anan which took place in 1997 at the official brigade headquarters in Hoevelte Barracks the organizational framework for the brigade was in place.

Two years later in 1999, participating nations felt that SHIRBRIG forces had reached a sufficient level of operational capability, to declare SHIRBRIG available for UN operations as of January 2000. In November of that year, SHIRBRIG deployed its Headquarters, an Infantry battalion and a Headquarters Company to the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE). The SHIRBRIG units returned six months later, in May 2001, after completion of a successful mission.

In March 2003, SHIRBRIG provided a planning team to assist the UN and ECOWAS in the planning of a peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire. Later, in September 2003, SHIRBRIG deployed 20 members to assist the UN in forming the core of the interim headquarters for the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

Since March 2004 SHIRBRIG is deployed to the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) providing the core of the Force Headquarters in Khartoum and a Joint Monitoring Coordination Office as well as other vital support elements.

As of today, 14 nations (Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden) are actively participating in SHIRBRIG, with 7 more nations (Chile, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Jordan, Portugal and Senegal) being observers.

The SHIRBRIG Concept

The SHIRBRIG concept, as proposed by the founders, endeavored to provide the UN with a well-prepared, rapidly deployable multinational brigade at high readiness based on the UN Stand-by Arrangement System (UNSAS). The participating nations agreed on a number of conditions setting the framework for the concept as follows:

- Any deployment must be mandated by the UN Security Council under Chapter VI of the Charter.
- Member countries decide on a case-by-case basis whether or not they will participate in any given mission. Thus national decision making procedures and thereby national sovereignty is in no way affected by membership in SHIRBRIG.
- After a maximum of six months, the mission will either be terminated or SHIRBRIG will be replaced by non-SHIRBRIG forces.
- The Brigade's reaction time will be 15 to 30 days following the decision of the participating nations to make forces available for deployment upon request by the UN.
- The availability of forces will be based on a brigade pool of resources that will include capabilities to carry out a peace support operation as well as provide for redundancies in such capabilities.
- Units committed to the brigade should be self-sufficient for 60 days.

In principle, SHIRBRIG could be deployed anywhere in the world. However, certain operational, legal, geographic or climatic conditions could impose a limit on SHIRBRIG's ability to carry out a particular mission. Upon deployment, SHIRBRIG integrates and cooperates fully with other UN forces in the mission area, under command of the UN Force Commander. After six month deployment SHIRBRIG forces would be replaced and undergo a one-year period of regeneration before being made available to the UN once again for a new peace support operation.

Organizational Framework

Three elements, the **Steering Committee**, the **Planning Element**, and the **Brigade Pool of Forces** form the organizational framework for SHIRBRIG.

▪ **The Steering Committee**

This executive body is a political-military structure responsible for oversight and supervision, for the SHIRBRIG decision-making and force generation process. The Chair of the Steering Committee rotates annually amongst the participating nations and constitutes the Presidency for SHIRBRIG. The Presidency is responsible for leading and coordinating all activities and projects of the Steering Committee and serves as a point of contact. In addition, the Presidency coordinates and maintains contact with the UN. To that end, it is supported by a Contact Group, which is based in New York and consists of the SHIRBRIG nations' Ambassadors and their Military Advisors from the Permanent Missions to the UN. The Military Advisor of the presidency nation acts as the main point of contact with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

▪ **The Planning Element**

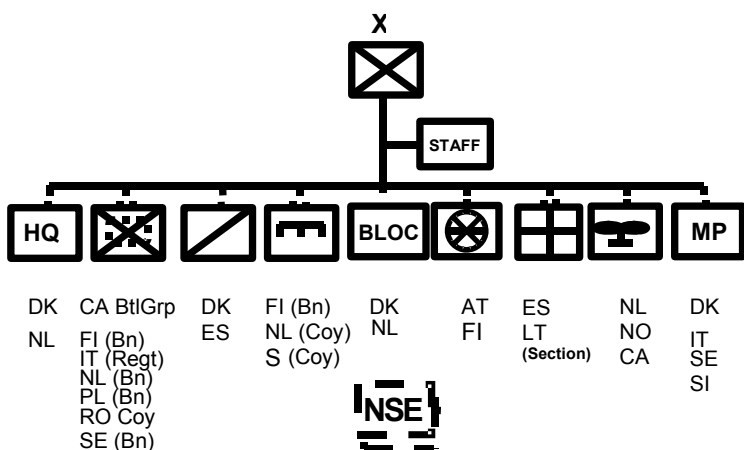
The Planning Element is located at Høvelte Barracks in Denmark and is permanently manned by 15 officers. The Planning Element develops standing operating procedures, carries out operational preparations for

deployment, and conducts training of the SHIRBRIG staff and unit commanders. During operations, the Planning Element serves as the nucleus of the brigade headquarters and is augmented by non-permanent staff from the participating nations.

The Brigade Pool of Forces

The Force Pool provides a full range of capabilities comprising of units to ensure the deployment of the brigade. All SHIRBRIG units are part of the UNSAS, are based in their respective nations, and train with a set of common training standards and procedures. Forces earmarked for the SHIRBRIG brigade remain under national command until deployed. The SHIRBRIG pool of resources also allows flexibility in structuring the force for a specific mission (see graph below).¹¹

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Training

Some of the greatest value of SHIRBRIG is the training activity, which produces a cohesive body of well trained officers who know the UN-procedures and can work together in an international environment. Through the regular common training they develop a personal relationship which is of extraordinary value in real operations. The annual training activities comprise of commanders conferences, staff branch conferences, staff and command post exercises and staff training on brigade level. Most of the training activities are hosted by SHIRBRIG nations. This helps to increase the visibility of SHIRBRIG in regard to the national military authorities of the host nations.

Concept Development

Since its inception SHIRBRIG focused on brigade level operations potentially including preventive deployments, surveillance of truce-agreements, supervision of the separation of forces and humanitarian assistance. To better respond to new requirements of modern peacekeeping and to improve its own credibility a range of additional employment options were examined.

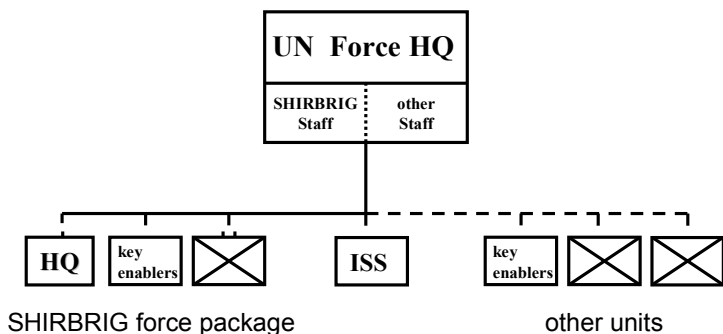
In June 2003 the Steering Committee approved five basic employment options for SHIRBRIG:

1. Employ SHIRBRIG for UN Peace Keeping Operations

2. Employ SHIRBRIG (-) for UN Peace Keeping Operations
3. Employ SHIRBRIG for observer/ monitoring missions
4. Employ SHIRBRIG HQ as nucleus of a Force HQ
5. Employ PLANELM to assist UN in planning a new mission

With these employment options SHIRBRIG maintains the flexibility of deploying either key personnel to form the nucleus of a UN Force Headquarters, a force package which comprises at least of a Headquarters Company, a major infantry unit and key enablers to provide the framework for a brigade or a full brigade-sized force (see graph below).¹²

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Finance

The main costs for SHIRBRIG are for the posting of Officers to the Planning Element, attendance by national staff Officers and unit commanders at the various training activities and conferences, attendance of national policy Officers at the Steering Committee Meetings, and the shared cost of maintaining the Planning Element. Since its inception, the Planning Element has operated with an annual budget of about USD \$450,000. This amount is shared equally by the 10 nations participating in the Planning Element.

Future Challenges

▪ Chapter VII versus Chapter VI

When the SHIRBRIG initiative was launched it became quickly apparent that participating nations would not accept any reference to Chapter VII operations. This presented a problem for the UN since almost all of the modern peacekeeping operations are mandated under Chapter VII. After some discussion the Steering Committee decided that SHIRBRIG deployment depended on the circumstances of the mission and that a deployment would be decided on a case by case. This interpretation is helpful but does not really meet the expectations of many critical members of the UN community. In the long run deleting any reference to Chapter VI or VII and referring instead just to “peacekeeping operations” would raise SHIRBRIG’s credibility within the UN.

▪ **Commitment versus participation**

SHIRBRIG has over 5000 troops in its force pool. There are sufficient redundancies for a brigade-size force. Most of these resources are not available when called upon. Overstretched military resources necessitate a national prioritization of commitments. Unlike in the past, the UN and SHIRBRIG are nowadays in none of the participating countries seen as top priority for force contributions. There needs to be a renewed commitment to SHIRBRIG. Participating nations need to commit to a minimum force package, which is kept on stand-by and available for UN operations with a high degree of predictability to make SHIRBRIG a more credible tool for the UN. A proposal has been made to introduce such a system on rotational basis. Not surprisingly it failed to win approval. More commitment as opposed to mere participation will be a key problem to be resolved. Without renewed political commitment this unsatisfactory situation will be difficult to change.

▪ **Decision-shaping versus decision-making**

The decision-making process in the Steering Committee is well defined but does not correspond to the requirements of mission planning and rapid deployment. Participating nations can not or are not willing to early commit forces, if there is only insufficient information on the details of the mission available. This makes it for the UN difficult to calculate the availability of SHIRBRIG for a particular mission and deprives SHIRBRIG from

playing an adequate role in decision-shaping during the mission planning at HQ New York.

▪ **Globalization versus Regionalization**

The United Nations think global and so does SHIBRIG. From the military point of view this creates a dilemma. A wide geographical distribution of participating nations will raise the costs particularly for the vital SHIRBRIG training effort. In addition many nations might also not find it very attractive to spend a lot of money on a brigade level training when practical experience shows, that a full-size brigade composed of SHIRBRIG- units is either not needed or not available. A possible answer to this dilemma to further developed the various employment options. A global participation of nations would make sense for the employment options establishing observer/monitoring missions, providing the nucleus of a Force HQ and assisting the UN in planning new missions. These options could be handled by the SHIRBRIG PLANELM augmented with experts from participating countries. The training requirements would be easier to meet and more nations would be interested and capable to participate. The ambition to establish a coherent brigade should be maintained however would be better achieved by a limited number of nations in a regional cooperation. A combined approach with global and regional focus having military efficiency in mind could lend SHIBRIG new opportunities and wider acceptance in the UN community.

▪ **Partnership versus Membership**

Today the UN is not only organization involved in Peacekeeping operations. Other multinational actors (AU, EU, OSCE, NATO) are also conducting peace support operations and are building military intervention capabilities. SHIRBRIG must take account of this situation and form partnerships with potential lead organizations. SHIRBRIG's African Capacity Building Initiative is to assist the African Union and the various African Economic Regions in their desire to establish similar, regional peacekeeping standby forces. Eventually more regional "SHIRBRIGS" would be available and a network for training and know-how transfer could be established. A SHIRBRIG network would also be a great asset in any real mission deployment.

Conclusion

In summary, SHIRBRIG is a practical and achievable way for nations to contribute to an effective, high readiness, peacekeeping capability for the UN. It has already proven its utility over the years. The Steering Committee has developed an action plan to develop its new employment options, to keep its close ties with the UN and to form new partnerships with potential cooperation partners. If these efforts will be matched by political will SHIRBRIG will stay relevant as a peacekeeping tool for the UN.