



International Peace Academy

SEMINAR ON STANDBY HIGH READINESS BRIGADE (SHIRBRIG)



Opening panel at the IPA seminar on lessons learned from the rapid deployment (left) of the Standby High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG) in the UN Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia (above, L to R): Ambassador Dirk van den Berg of the Netherlands, IPA President David Malone, and David Pratt, Chairman of the Canadian Parliament's Committee on Defense and Veteran Affairs. Right: Ambassador Ellen Margrethe Loj of Denmark was part of a panel presenting the SHIRBRIG perspective. Denmark hosts the planning element of the force (see page 4).



Seminar on First Use of SHIRBRIG Highlights Key Lessons Learned

The first use of the Standby High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG) to establish the UN Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE) was a success, but there were numerous problems. Both aspects were fully discussed at a seminar in New York convened by the International Peace Academy in April. Over 100 participants, including diplomats, expert practitioners, senior UN staff, academics and representatives of non-governmental organizations, discussed the operational lessons learned and considered how the conceptualization of SHIRBRIG, and more broadly, of rapid deployment, had withstood the acid test of reality.

Rapid Deployment

The need for rapid and effective deployment of peacekeeping forces has long been emphasized by UN policy makers. The 1991 *Agenda for Peace* saw it as an essential requirement, as did the report of the Brahimi panel in 2000. The rapid deployment of SHIRBRIG in Ethiopia and Eritrea was the first such exercise, and it highlighted the central importance of the political approval processes within States. In terms of preparation, the deployment, brought to light inadequacies in staff training, and the limitations of logistics support from the pool of available national forces.

A particular concern throughout the seminar was the handling of the hand over from SHIRBRIG to a more tradi-

tional UN force. While the former had established standing operating procedures and the strong political and logistics support from its member States — all Western and developed — the successor UN force, drawn from the more heterogeneous UN membership, had neither.

SHIRBRIG Concept

SHIRBRIG's role in getting UNMEE off to a good start breathed life into what had been till then, an academic concept. Senior officials from the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and SHIRBRIG, as well as diplomats from a number of countries, were in general agreement that the experience had provided a solid foundation on which to build.



SHIRBRIG MEMBER STATES

Austria, Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden were the founding members of SHIRBRIG. A handful of others have associated themselves with the Force since it was established.



In addition to the transition from a rapid deployment formation to a replacement force, the seminar examined three principal issues related to the basic SHIRBRIG concept: its membership; its limited institutional mandate; and the possibility of creating additional rapid deployment formations as a way of enhancing political and operational flexibility. Key issues related to the future of SHIRBRIG included its continuing relationship with the UN and improved internal flexibility in policies, guidelines and practices.

Development of Concept

It has long been recognized that the period immediately following a cease-

fire or peace accord is often critically important in establishing stability and confidence in a post-conflict situation. As opportunities lost during that period are hard to regain, the need to get a UN peacekeeping force into the area as early as possible has thus been a priority recognized since the initiation of such activities in 1948. However, a formal recommendation on the matter was not made till the mid 1990s, in the context of the dramatic increase in peacekeeping activity in the post Cold War period. In his 1992 report on an "Agenda for Peace" and in a 1995 "Supplement," the Secretary-General of the United Nations recommended that States keep troops

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Panelists on the session on the UNMEE perspective (l to r): Ambassador Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Husseini of Jordan, Ambassador Dumisana Shadrack Kumalo of South Africa, Colonel Apoorva Kumar Bardalai from Indian Army Headquarters in New Delhi, and Colonel Evans Muhia from the Kenya Department of Defense.



Major-General Patrick Cammaert, Force Commander, UNMEE (l), with former UN Under-Secretary-General Brian Urquhart



Vanessa Kent (l) and Isabelle Massip of the Regional Security and Peacekeeping section of Canada's Foreign Ministry

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ready for service under UN auspices and improve the speed at which an international force could be deployed. In the 1995 "Supplement," he suggested specifically that such a force might consist of units from a number of Member States, trained to the same standard, and using the same operating procedures and inter-operable equipment. SHIRBRIG was launched in 1994 following discussions between Danish authorities and the then Head of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Kofi Annan.

The proposal to establish SHIRBRIG emerged from a group of States with considerable experience in UN peacekeeping and took into account not only the limitations encountered in implementing the UN's Standby Arrangements System (SAS), but the difficulties and challenges that had been encountered by peace operations in Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda. The founding group included Austria, Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden. A political/military Steering Committee established by these countries provided guidance for the creation of a Brigade-size force capable of accomplishing peacekeeping and humanitarian tasks under Chapter VI (peaceful settlement of disputes), of the UN Charter. The force was conceptualized to do the following:

- ▶ Operate independently of home-based support structures and be self sufficient for a period of 60 days;
- ▶ Be based on a pool of forces from contributing nations;
- ▶ Be ready for deployment at 15-30 days notice;
- ▶ Be capable of extended self-defence and, if necessary, extrication from untenable situations;
- ▶ Conduct rapid reaction operations for a maximum of 6 months and then handing over to other (UN) forces, allowing SHIRBRIG to return to its high readiness stance.

In addition to the seven founding members, SHIRBRIG member States now include Argentina, Italy and Romania. In addition, Finland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain have signed various documents related to membership in the

group. SHIRBRIG today is a rapid deployment formation, available to the UN as part of its Standby Arrangements System. With a Headquarters component of 85 officers and a company of 150, SHIRBRIG when fully deployed, comprises 4,000 to 5,000 troops. Decisions on the magnitude of contributions by each member State to an operational mission remain a national prerogative. Since the 6-month deployment to Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2000/2001 SHIRBRIG undertook a "reconstitution cycle" that included taking stock of the experience and necessary doctrinal and operational changes. The force has been available to the United Nations again as of 1 January 2002.

Lessons Learned

The seminar examined the lessons learned from the UN Mission in Ethio-



Colonel Ray Romses, Deputy Force Commander, SHIRBRIG



Colonel Kurt Mosgaard, Military Adviser, Denmark Mission to the UN

pia and Eritrea (UNMEE). SHIRBRIG officials, UN DPKO senior staff and representatives of member states, were in general agreement that the SHIRBRIG contribution to UNMEE was relatively rapid and effective but not without problems. Operationalization of the unproven SHIRBRIG concept raised as many questions as the previous 4 or 5 years of conceptualizing and planning. Many of the lessons learned were applicable to virtually all peace operations. These include the need for agreed standing operating procedures, clear policy on the size and composition of national reconnaissance parties, a policy for NSEs, the need for staff orientation and training, policies on staff accommodation, and the need for secure communications and current maps. In addition to these, the seminar discussed also a number of lessons specific to the pre-deployment and operational phase of SHIRBRIG.



Under a June 2000 peace agreement mediated by the Organization of African Unity between Ethiopia and Eritrea, it was agreed that a United Nations force should secure and monitor the disputed border between the two countries.

SHIRBRIG officers were invited to participate in the planning for what became the UN Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE). When the mission was deployed in November, SHIRBRIG provided the headquarters, drawing on officers from all its member States. The Netherlands also contributed an infantry battalion, the Canadians an infantry company, and Denmark a headquarters company.

The SHIRBRIG component of UNMEE was deployed for six months. Following its May 2001 withdrawal, a comprehensive review indicated that the basic concept of SHIRBRIG had been validated. However, a number of questions had been raised which needed a broad international airing. The IPA seminar was the venue of that discussion.

National Decision Making: Since this was the first commitment of the SHIRBRIG there was an understandable degree of caution on the part of national governments, and especially so as memories of Bosnia, Rwanda, Somalia and other troubled missions were fresh in the minds of key decision-makers. With the prospect that control of SHIRBRIG units would shift to the United Nations as soon as they became part of UNMEE, there was some hesitation. This underlines the first lesson to be learned: that rapid deployment is heavily dependent upon national decision-making processes. SHIRBRIG doctrine is that troops are to begin deploying within 30 days of "respective national approval processes". The Security Council mandated UNMEE deployment on 15 September 2000; the lead elements of SHIRBRIG did not arrive in the operational theatre until 16 November. (Not all of the headquarters staff was made available by States — 55 of a possible 85 were deployed — and only 3 governments committed troops. However, most SHIRBRIG members did provide troops to UNMEE directly through the UN SAS.) The headquarters was staffed and functioning by 24 November, and the core SHIRBRIG Canadian and Dutch forces were operational between the middle and end of December.

Since SHIRBRIG's effectiveness, and indeed the whole concept of rapid deployment, is judged on the time it takes to deploy following adoption of a mandate by the Security Council, participants in the seminar agreed on the need for close coordination of national, SHIRBRIG and UN efforts. Close cooperation between the UN and troop contributing States, and between SHIRBRIG planning staff and DPKO were deemed especially important. Regular briefings of national political authorities and adequate force preparation through joint SHIRBRIG training and readiness planning were emphasized. It was noted that the success of the SHIRBRIG contribution to UNMEE should make it somewhat easier to obtain political approval for future deployments. The SHIRBRIG concept "has been validated and legitimized" said one speaker. Also, military planners had learned a great deal.

Staff Training: The second major lesson was that staff training, while extensive in some cases, was inadequate. The SHIRBRIG contribution to UNMEE headquarters (almost half of the total staff), provided a skillful core, but not all staff from other countries were trained to work efficiently together. Proficiency in the mission language (English, in this case), computer literacy, and training for specific posts, were all problematic. When control passed from the SHIRBRIG core group to a much

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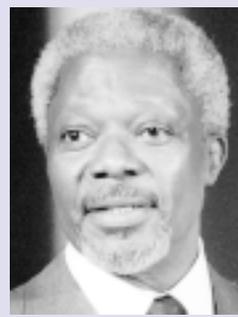
less homogenous collection of individuals in 2001, problems were further compounded in the absence of any previous collective training and little understanding of UNMEE operating procedures. Even though the SHIRBRIG commander, who had been appointed UNMEE commander by the UN Secretary General, stayed on with the mission, headquarters did not function effectively for about 2 months. Matters were not helped by the lack of UN mission start-up kits to replace SHIRBRIG national assets such as computers and communications equipment which were taken by departing staff. Training and hand over procedures both need further attention by SHIRBRIG and the UN.

Logistics: A third lesson was in logistics. The concept of national support elements (NSEs), was discussed from various perspectives. In general, participants agreed that logistics arrangements had proved too rigid and not tailored for the mission. While separate NSEs were considered necessary, it was proposed that common elements such as movement control and transport could benefit from common standards and procedures. It was also suggested that a more robust NSE be considered by key SHIRBRIG troop-contributing nations in order to get the mission up and running more quickly. This would also allow for flexibility in the event of unexpected problems or a significant shift in the operational situation or concept. A

“When crisis erupts and the international community turns to the United Nations for a peacekeeping operation, the Organization must be able to respond quickly and effectively. Indeed, in the early days and weeks following a cease-fire or peace accord are often the most critical period — for stability, for the credibility of force, for peace in general.

The SHIRBRIG concept merits further development. I encourage SHIRBRIG to share its experiences and to strengthen its working level links with the United Nations. I call on other groups of nations to establish similar arrangements and to make forces available for the widest possible range of scenarios, as envisaged in the “coherent brigade group” concept contained in the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations. SHIRBRIG is an important element in the peacekeeping picture, and I look forward to close ties between SHIRBRIG and the United Nations in the years ahead.

From the foreword to a booklet published by the Presidency of the SHIRBRIG Steering Committee



Kofi Annan
Secretary-General
United Nations

further suggestion was that the UN itself needed to grapple with the NSE concept and to establish standards or guidelines. Logistics problems in UNMEE were exacerbated by the need to transfer control after 6 months from a relatively cohesive SHIRBRIG core to a less-cohesive set of new players. This was exacerbated by the fact that the Western nations that comprise SHIRBRIG, especially the principal troop contributors in the UNMEE operation, could deploy NSEs with heavy financial and logistical implications, whereas the States contributing to the follow-on force could not match the nature and scale of support.

Planning: A number of other specific lessons were learned in relation to planning. The UNMEE experience under-

lined the inadequacy of the pool of forces available to create a brigade; the use of a joint battalion in UNMEE, while politically significant, was not necessarily the most effective operational use of resources. Participants in the seminar said that the operational pool must be enlarged by an increase in the membership of SHIRBRIG. Current members, it was noted, need to review and update their force commitments on a regular basis. The direct involvement of SHIRBRIG with UN strategic planning teams was seen as necessary, especially in view of the critical importance of sequencing SHIRBRIG deployment, with enabling elements preceding others. It was also recognized that SHIRBRIG needs to work more closely not only with the UN and observers on

the ground, but with the whole civilian community engaged in the peace operation and related peace-building and development efforts.

Conceptual Issues

Participants in the seminar agreed that the UNMEE experience had proved both the soundness and effectiveness of the SHIRBRIG concept. However, the problematic hand-over phase focused attention on the need to reconsider several elements, including the duration of the SHIRBRIG commitment, the removal of equipment and the poor functioning of headquarters after the transition. These issues were not the same as those faced by other transitions within UN peacekeeping forces, for SHIRBRIG needed to maintain its own viability after a transition as a short-term, rapidly deployable force. UN planners had to recognize this and not count on SHIRBRIG leaving equipment, staff and troops in place for a long term mission. That did not preclude the UN from approaching troop-contributing countries to extend their commitments. For example, Italy had continued its troop commitment to UNMEE after the withdrawal of SHIRBRIG.

It was also acknowledged that SHIRBRIG’s standard 6-month commitment could, in close consultation and cooperation with UN DPKO and troop contributing countries, be made more flexible. Some participants in the seminar underlined the need for the UN and SHIRBRIG to harmonize headquarters operating procedures. Others said that

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO SHIRBRIG

The rapidity of international response to situations requiring the use of peacekeeping forces did not become an issue till the end of the Cold War. Till then, such situations had been few and far between: in its first 40 years, the UN fielded only 13 peace operations, and given Cold War era realities the responses to real crises were often very swift. For instance, after the Security Council authorized military observers to supervise a truce in the Middle East on 29 May 1948 — UNTSO, the first UN peace mission — observers were on the ground within two weeks.

The 1956 Suez crisis also saw swift action, despite the fact that the Security Council was unable to act because of British and French vetoes. Five days after the General Assembly authorized the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) on 7 November 1956, its Chief of Command and a group of observers had landed in Cairo. Even in the tumultuous conditions prevailing in the Congo in 1960, UN action was quick. A day after the Council acted on the night of July 13-14 to authorize the Secretary-General to provide the government of the Congo with “such military assistance as might

be necessary) an advance party of troops from Tunisia arrived in Leopoldville. By the 18th, the Force Commander and his staff officers had arrived.

Post Cold War

Response time became an issue as UN peacekeeping activity surged in the post Cold War period. There were 32 new missions between 1988 and 1999, and they were large, politically complex, expensive and often dangerous. The phenomenon of “peacekeeping fatigue” was compounded by an overload of available capacity.

To deal with this situation, the United Nations developed a Standby Arrangement System (UNSAS), based upon commitments by States to contribute specified resources. It was designed to allow forces to be “deployed as a whole or in parts anywhere in the world, within an agreed response time.” The effectiveness of the system was limited, however, because not all States were able to meet the readiness and self-sufficiency criteria, and none of the staff officers or the units trained or worked together before deployment. UNSAS did not by itself provide the UN with a well-prepared, rapid deployment capability.

In his January 1995 “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 States, trained to the same standard, using the same operating procedures and inter-operable equipment, and taking part in combined exercises at regular intervals in order to make the force available for deployment at short notice.

Creation of SHIRBRIG

A number of like-minded Member States, all with extensive experience and high standards in the field of peacekeeping (Austria, Canada, Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden), established a working group to explore the creation of a rapid deployment force within the framework of the UN Standby Arrangement System. The working group came up with the concept and outline structure for a Multinational High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG) in August 1996. On 15 December that year, Austria, Canada, Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden signed a Letter of Intent to establish a multinational force

organized according to the Working Group recommendations. This was followed by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on setting up a Steering Committee to supervise the establishment of the Brigade, and a MOU on establishing a “permanent planning element” (PLANELM).

The multinational PLANELM was established in Denmark and developed the concept of operations and standard operating procedures for the Brigade. It organized and conducted joint exercises.

All members of SHIRBRIG have signed also a memorandum of understanding on the contribution of troops. States joining SHIRBRIG in future will be asked to accept these key arrangements for full participation in the establishment, training and employment of SHIRBRIG. States that are currently full members of SHIRBRIG are: Argentina, Austria, Canada, Denmark, and Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, and Sweden. Finland have signed all documents except the PLANELM MOU. Spain has signed the Letter of Intent and Steering Committee MOU. Portugal and Slovenia have signed a letter of intent. ❖

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close and regular consultations with SHIRBRIG are now a feature of UN mission planning.

The issue of criteria for SHIRBRIG membership set by its Steering Committee was an important topic of discussion. Small and medium sized nations that are unable to provide their own brigades for UN duty are considered desirable. (The preference for small or medium sized nations is not a hard criteria; larger nations can contribute engineers, transport, medical and other key enabling elements.) Other criteria are not flexible: countries must have substantial experience in peacekeeping; be part of the UN Standby Arrangements System; pay for their own participation; and provide fully equipped and trained units at the required level of readiness. Participating States also have to agree to the necessary legal policies and modalities. Improved geographic representation is considered desirable, especially the inclusion of some members of the Non-Aligned Movement. SHIRBRIG now has several observer States and some are considering more active participation. Finance is a fundamental difficulty for a number of potential participants; even the training costs are not insignificant. Many countries do not have a deployment capability and cannot afford to sustain an operational force for any length of time.

The seminar also raised the possibility of additional "SHIRBRIGs" from which the UN could select rapidly deployable formations needed to start future missions. While there was considerable reflection on the expansion of the existing SHIRBRIG, many also saw SHIRBRIG as a model that could potentially be duplicated regionally or amongst other groups of nations. Cooperation had already started with the South-East European Brigade (SEEBRIG) and with the Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Peace Support Operations (NORDCAPS). The SHIRBRIG Presidency has begun consultations with countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas. There is clearly potential for a "grouping of the Americas" since several member states of the Organization of American States (OAS) have Peacekeeping Training Centres and have forces that exercise to a peace operations scenario annually. There are similar possibilities within the African Union. Moreover, members of NATO's *Partnership for Peace* train for peace operations scenarios on a regular basis. If the UN did indeed have a choice of such formations, especially access to the formed and trained headquarters, it would serve to overcome one of the key concerns of many Non-Aligned States; that the Secretary General has no option but to select the only force avail-



The Planning Element

SHIRBRIG has a permanent "Planning Element" composed of military staff drawn from all its member States. It normally has 13 officers from 10 countries and is responsible for developing standard operating procedures, overseeing training, and carrying out operational preparations for deployment. The Chief of Staff of SHIRBRIG, a colonel, is in charge of day-to-day running of the Planning Element. During operations, the Planning Element is the nucleus of Brigade Headquarters and is augmented by 69 designated officers and NCOs.

able and appoint its commander automatically to head UN missions.

There was some questioning of the basic conceptual limitations on SHIRBRIG to peacekeeping and humanitarian tasks under Chapter VI of the UN Charter. UNMEE was a more traditional peacekeeping mission, deployed with the full consent of Eritrea and Ethiopia, in a theatre with functioning governments and disciplined armies. In reality this situation is now the exception, since most missions are of the complex variety; characterized by uncertain security environments, severe humanitarian tragedies, massive violations of human rights, an economic crisis and failed states.

Some seminar participants accepted this limitation of SHIRBRIG to a relatively light force that was able to defend itself but not take enforcement action on any scale. Others proposed a

force capable of dealing with today's principal peace operations challenges. Yet others questioned why the initial deployment had been to Ethiopia and Eritrea, rather than to the Congo, Sierra Leone or East Timor. SHIRBRIG and UN officials acknowledged these possibilities but noted the reality that the force can only undertake one 6-month deployment at a time and the SHIRBRIG was already committed to UNMEE when the other possibilities arose. In any case, it was up to individual SHIRBRIG member states to decide upon their commitment to a specific operation: much depended on the mandate, rules of engagement and the actual political and security situation relevant to the mission.

Looking to the Future

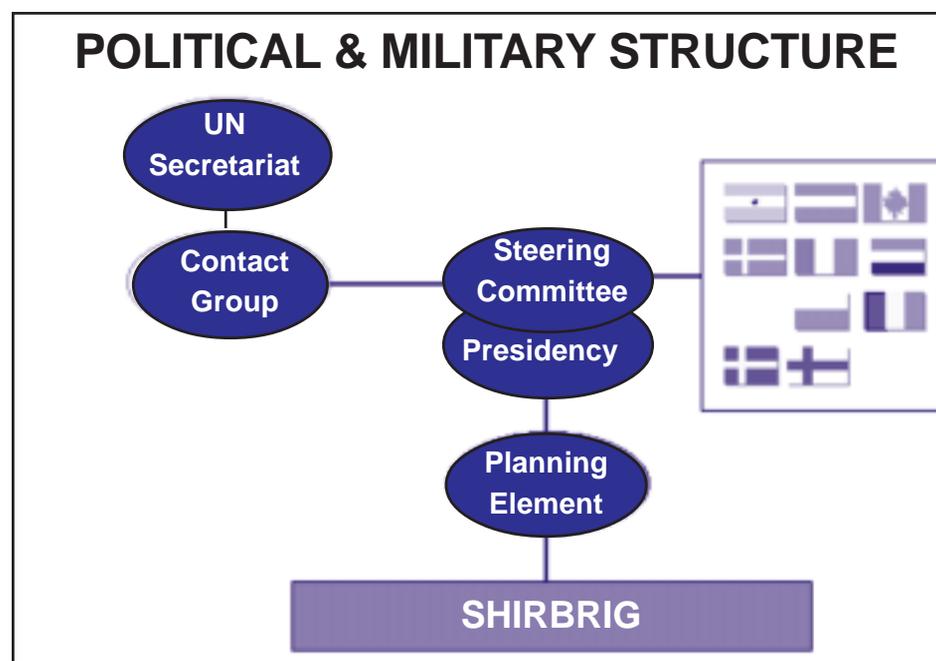
Among the forward-looking issues discussed at the seminar, was the idea that the SHIRBRIG headquarters itself

could be deployed as a stand-alone element. Another issue was the inclusion of SHIRBRIG headquarters staff on the UN's "on-call" list. The UN had, in fact, made that request; SHIRBRIG authorities have declined to do so, asserting that the operational requirements of the force are best served by providing a cohesive, trained, element, rather than individuals. Some speakers noted that SHIRBRIG member countries would probably find it politically easier to approve the deployment of just the headquarters rather than the entire brigade.

There was general agreement that in the future there should and would be greater flexibility in SHIRBRIG policies relating to operational objectives and membership criteria. As mentioned earlier, the commitment to a standard 6-month deployment is being re-examined. Also under consideration is the limitation of SHIRBRIG to classic peacekeeping and humanitarian tasks, the restriction of membership to small or medium countries, and the requirement that member States be self-sufficient in terms of funding. A principal consideration at present is the desire to accommodate additional members, in particular developing countries. The need to strike a balance between the SHIRBRIG and UN support concepts and systems is also an important concern.

In view of the need to allow for both political and operational flexibility, an issue of growing prominence is the creation of more SHIRBRIG-like formations. Close cooperation between the planning staffs of such rapid deployment formations and the UN was deemed essential. Joint planning sessions should consider the precise capabilities, strengths and limitations of each formation, and the overall framework should remain the UN Standby Arrangements System.

Participants in the seminar showed little doubt that the first deployment of SHIRBRIG in support of UNMEE was a success. The experience has obviously tempered what political resistance there was to the concept, for the Brigade proved workable and useful. However, there was recognition that both in terms of concept and practice, there is need for further development and adjustment. Representatives of the United Nations, SHIRBRIG and national governments were in general agreement that a solid foundation has been laid.



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