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# **CANADA'S PAST, PRESENT AND POTENTIAL FUTURE CONTRIBUTIONS TO A UNITED NATIONS HIGH-READINESS, RAPID REACTION MILITARY CAPABILITY**

**by Major David A. Wu**

*The delay in reaction by the international community to the genocide in Rwanda has demonstrated graphically its extreme inadequacy to respond urgently with prompt and decisive action to humanitarian crises entwined with armed conflict. We have failed in our response to the agony of Rwanda and thus have acquiesced in the continued loss of human lives.*

United Nation Secretary General  
Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 31 May 1993

**T**he traditional type of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations involving ad hoc military units assigned to stop or limit conflicts between states has evolved into different types of operations such as peace enforcement, delivery of humanitarian assistance, organizing elections, de-mining, rehabilitation of discharged soldiers, and economic and social development. The increasing number of operations has also become more complex, diversified and multifunctional, involving civilian, military and humanitarian aspects in many of today's *interstate* and *intrastate* conflicts. On many past occasions, such as that experienced with the Rwandan genocide, opportunities to influence events could not be exploited because of the lengthy time period between passage of a Security Council

decision to mandate an operation and actual commencement of the peacekeeping force's operations. As a result, there have been many attempts within the UN over the years to have member states contribute standby high-readiness forces to react and deploy on short notice.

This article will present the argument that Canada's future contributions to a UN high-readiness, rapid reaction capability should emphasize specialized, enabling activities, such as logistics, communications and theatre activation/force bed-down, to support the deployment of troops on short notice. It will examine past peacekeeping contributions that were of a high-readiness nature in capability, commencing with the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in 1948, up to United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in 1992. It will also examine the current commitments to the UN Standby High-Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG) force pool, recent contributions, including the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) in 1999 and the planning for the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMISUD). Lastly, based on identified deficiencies, there

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Brigadier H.H. Angle (left) was the first Canadian to command a UN mission. As the Chief Military Observer of the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), he is seen here greeting Pakistani officers in Kashmir, autumn 1949.

will be a discussion of areas in which Canada can make future contributions, specifically in the fields of logistics and communications, and in preparing a theatre for operations or theatre activation.

### Historical Review

The SHIRBRIG organization is a relatively recent concept. However, since the founding of the UN, there have been numerous attempts to form a UN high-readiness force, with Canada often playing a prominent role in these attempts. In 1946, shortly after the Greeks asked for assistance against Communist guerrillas operating across the Bulgarian border during the Greek Civil War, the UN tried to deal with the aggression by attempting to raise an international UN force on short notice. Nonetheless, both the Americans and the Soviets could not agree on its composition or how it would be funded. Although the

UN Military Staff Committee met often, no consensus could be reached on the way ahead, and it was 1948 before Canada would contribute to the debate concerning such a force. In June, UN Secretary General Trygve Lie stated that a small UN Guard Force (Guard) was to be established under the Security Council. Canada supported the idea through its Department of External Affairs, the staunchest proponents being Lester B. Pearson and Norman Robertson, with Pearson being a particularly strong supporter of creating a permanent armed force serving the UN.<sup>1</sup> The Guard was to consist of a permanent force of 300 personnel at the UN Headquarters in New York or another specified location, with a reserve cadre of another 500 members recruited multi-nationally and held equipped and ready in their own countries for service at the call of the UN.<sup>2</sup> The Guard was to be initially formed to provide traffic control for the UN's Palestine operations, but Lie also thought that it could be used to guard polling stations during plebiscites, or to

guard small UN trust territories.<sup>3</sup> Canada's next contribution to the debate occurred shortly thereafter in August 1948. Canada's views, as offered by the Chiefs of Staff Joint Planning Committee, proposed that the UN forgo the creation of a large standing army in favour of the following:

A more moderate requirement to make available to the United Nations a small force to deal with the series of disputes of a minor nature which have arisen since the war of 1939-45: Indonesia, Palestine and Kashmir. The presence of a small and accredited UN force would, by the moral force of its presence, exert an effect out of all proportions to actual members.<sup>4</sup>

However, there were too many unanswered questions involving equipment, contravention of sovereignty, structure, training and funding,<sup>5</sup> with the planned Guard Force eventually becoming a field service component comprised of a 49-person multinational technical staff and security team.<sup>6</sup>

Canada would eventually deploy troops, often on very short notice, in support of the UN, but not as part of a formed, high-readiness force. Doctor Sean Maloney has argued that NATO and NORAD were the fundamental building blocks upon which Canadian peacekeeping in support of the UN was constructed. This allowed many of the rapid deployments to occur, mainly due to the high readiness levels required for NATO and NORAD service.<sup>7</sup> Four of these Canadian peacekeeping deployments will be examined further here because of the significant number of troops that were deployed (over 500) on each occasion.

The first major Canadian deployment, as part of the UNEF, helped resolve the Suez Crisis in 1956, and resulted in the award of a Nobel Peace Prize to Lester B. Pearson. Other notable Canadians who were also involved in that operation were Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent and General ELM Burns, the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervising Organization (UNTSO) and later Commander of UNEF.<sup>8</sup> In 1956, General Burns wanted a UNEF component that:

...should be so strong that it would be in no danger of being thrust aside, pushed out or ignored, with a multinational division comprising of a tank brigade, a strong reconnaissance element, fighter aircraft, and national units that were a battalion size and logistically self-supporting.<sup>9</sup>

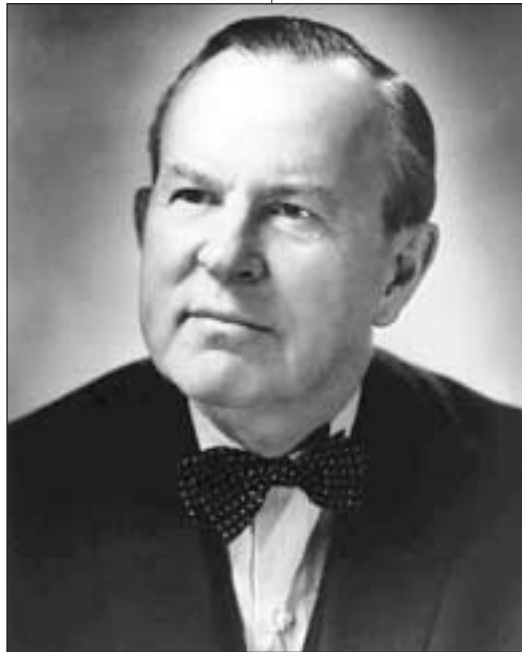
Problems similar to those experienced in establishing the Guard would not allow such a component to be fielded. Once the fighting near the Suez Canal stopped on 7 November 1956, Canadians were prepared to deploy on very short notice, because of their forward positions in West Germany as part of the national NATO commitment. Delays in deployment were experienced, not due to the lack of readiness on the part of Canadians, but due to Egyptian President Nasser's refusal to allow Canadians to participate on UNEF because of the close Anglo-Canadian relationship. The Egyptians objected to the deployment of Canadians as "Her Majesty's Canadian troops" and to the Queen's Own Rifles (QOR), the battalion earmarked for UNEF, because the QOR unit name and the uniforms were too similar to the

British forces that had participated in the Anglo-French landing at Suez. The deployment of the QOR was eventually cancelled and the initial Canadian component, consisting of the 300 service troops originally intended to support the infantry battalion, arrived on 24 November 1956. Six weeks later, on 29 December, the aircraft carrier *HMCS Magnificent* left Halifax and sailed under the Angus L. MacDonald bridge at 10:00 p.m., with 405 personnel of all ranks.<sup>10</sup> This total included 140 Royal Canadian Signals, 140 Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, 91 Army Service Corps members, 34 headquarters personnel, 100 tons of stores, 230 vehicles, and four light aircraft.<sup>11</sup> More support personnel, in the form of a signals squadron, a RCME infantry workshop, two transport platoons, and an RCAF communications squadron

had arrived in theatre by 12 January 1957, bringing the Canadian total to over a thousand personnel, or one-sixth of the entire force.<sup>12</sup>

The second notable Canadian deployment was to the Congo. The onset of the crisis occurred in July 1960, with over 10,000 Belgian troops attempting to bring calm and order to the region as the 25,000-member Congo army and police force mutinied against its white officers.<sup>13</sup>

The UN Security Council passed Resolution 143 on 14 July 1960 for a security force that eventually comprised more than 20,000 soldiers as part of the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC). A month later, on 19 August, the first



Lester B. Pearson. A Nobel Peace Prize winner for his efforts to resolve the Suez Crisis of 1956.

**“The Guard was to be initially formed to provide traffic control for the UN’s Palestine operations...”**



Lieutenant-General E.L.M Burns was Chief of Staff of UNTSO and then subsequently the Commander of UNEF.

Canadians arrived, and within a short time, the entire Canadian contingent of more than 500 personnel, including 200 signallers, four North Star aircraft and over 40,000 pounds of food had arrived.<sup>14</sup>

The third Canadian contribution of troops at short notice was to United Nations Emergency Force II (UNEF II) in the Middle East. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 340 on 25 October 1973, and, this time, more than 1145 Canadian personnel would be involved. Within a period of just over two weeks, the first flights had occurred and in less than three days, some 20 flights airlifted 481 troops, 43 vehicles and 115 tons of equipment, one of the largest peacekeeping airlifts implemented in such a short time.<sup>15</sup> Between 26 November and 6 December, a second major group of Canadian personnel was airlifted to Egypt, and the entire Canadian contingent was in place by February 1974.<sup>16</sup>

**“In June 1992, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali presented his *Agenda for Peace* to the Security Council.”**

The fourth and last major contribution of this nature was the United Nations Protection Force in Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR), approved by Security Council Resolution 743 on 21 February 1992, with 2060 Canadian soldiers participating on *Operation Harmony* prior to UNPROFOR being restructured to form three separate but linked peacekeeping operations on 31 March 1995. The Canadian contingent comprised two major units and a logistics battalion.<sup>17</sup>

### The Establishment of SHIRBRIG

Despite the numerous Canadian troop contributions deployed on short notice, many more attempts at forming a high-readiness UN force would fail for a myriad of reasons, such as high costs, lack of commitment by member states and lack of consensus over command and control issues. In June 1992, then United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali presented his *Agenda for Peace* to the Security Council. Ghali identified the need for “preventive action to ease tensions before the result in conflict – or if conflict breaks out, to act swiftly to contain it and resolve its underlying causes”.<sup>18</sup> He then proposed that member states earmark forces to be called upon for “peace enforcement” operations, placed under the control of the Security Council and the Secretary-General. Doctor Mats Berdal, Director of Studies and Adelphi Papers at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London, stated shortly thereafter that “the much vaunted report was little more than a codification of ideas, most of which were first adumbrated in the wake of the Congo operation in the mid-1960s”.<sup>19</sup> In his *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace* presented in January 1995, Boutros-Ghali also recommended that the UN 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 in order to make the force available for deployment at short notice. A number of like-minded member states, all with extensive experience in the field of peacekeeping, decided to establish a working group to explore the option of creating a rapid deployment force within the framework of the United Nations Standby Arrangement System (UNASAS). These recommendations made by Ghali formally recognized and acknowledged the standby arrangements that had been made in many forms over the decades since the founding of the UN in 1945.

In 1994, following the failure of the mission in Rwanda, UN peacekeeping deficiencies received international attention, and many nations undertook initiatives to establish a rapid-reaction capability for the organization. The Dutch government completed a feasibility study of creating a standing brigade composed of soldiers recruited *individually* by the United Nations. The Argentine and Italian governments proposed the creation of rapid-reaction forces for humanitarian purposes. The British and French

governments offered initiatives aimed at enhancing peacekeeping and preventive diplomacy on a regional basis in Africa. Canada studied the feasibility of providing a Rapidly Deployable Mission Headquarters, but Denmark's Standby High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG) initiative was deemed the most congruent with Canada's rapid-reaction headquarters. As a result, Canada joined the Danish project.<sup>20</sup>

Canada was a member of the UN Planning Team that started in 1993 with a mandate to "develop a system of standby forces, able to be deployed as a whole or in parts anywhere in the world, within an agreed response time, for UN peace-keeping operations and missions".<sup>21</sup> By August 1996, this team had addressed the key considerations involved in creating such a force, and had formulated a concept and outline structure for a Multinational Standby Forces High Readiness Brigade. Its capabilities were to include an inherent ability to accomplish likely peacekeeping and humanitarian tasks under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, and to protect itself and associated UN agencies, NGOs and personnel while so engaged. As well, the possibility that one or more participating nations might decide not to contribute troops to an actual mission implied the necessity to establish a Brigade Pool, consisting of a number of units exceeding the force requirement for the Brigade when it was deployed. The Brigade Pool would then ensure that the deployment of the Brigade would not be compromised if a participant nation decided to abstain from providing troops for a specific mission. The Brigade should also have the ability to operate independently at a considerable distance from the home-based support structures for its individual elements, with little or no host nation support. This last requirement therefore demanded that the deploying nation have a significant logistics capability and be capable of cooperating on multinational logistics issues.

On 15 December 1996, Austria, Canada, Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden signed a Letter of Intent with respect to cooperating to establish a multinational SHIRBRIG. This was followed by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) dealing with setting up a Steering Committee to supervise the establishment of the Brigade, and a MOU concerning the establishment of a permanent planning element (PLANELM). The PLANELM would exercise all the

**"As for current operations, SHIRBRIG aims to provide a pre-established structure for a multi-national rapid reaction force of up to 5000 troops for UN operations."**

pre-deployment functions of SHIRBRIG, and, on deployment, it would become the nucleus of the deployed SHIRBRIG staff. A MOU with respect to the SHIRBRIG itself would complete the list of key documents signed by all participating nations.

At the strategic level, the members of the Contact Group are those SHIRBRIG Nations who have at least signed the MOU of the Steering Committee. The purpose of the Contact Group is to coordinate the activities of the Permanent Missions in all SHIRBRIG related matters. Moreover, the Contact Group is to provide a simple and easy way of communication between the United Nations and SHIRBRIG nations. There is also the Steering Committee, a political-military body responsible for the supervision of the PLANELM and all matters pertaining to the establishment of the SHIRBRIG, such as enlargement of the Brigade, the manning of the PLANELM and the Staff, and all concepts and policy documents.



HMCS Magnificent.

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Huge plumes of mud and water fly from the wheels of a CF Ilitis Jeep. The vehicle is particularly adapted for the rugged conditions in the former Republic of Yugoslavia.

### Recent and Current Contributions to SHIRBRIG

The more recent deployment of Canadians on United Nations Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE) was the first use of the SHIRBRIG concept, and this commitment lasted from December 2000 to June 2001.<sup>22</sup> The Canadian contribution, known as *Operation Eclipse*, consisted of an infantry company, a reconnaissance platoon, a National Command Element (NCE), a National Support Element (NSE) and staff for the UNMEE (SHIRBRIG) headquarters. Canadian operational elements formed part of a combined Netherlands/Canadian Battalion tasked with monitoring the central sector of the region. Canada provided 447 all ranks (of which only 275 were on UN establishment) out of a total UNMEE strength of about 4200 personnel.

As for current contributions, SHIRBRIG aims to provide a pre-established structure for a multi-national rapid-reaction force of up to 5000 troops for UN operations. The formation is structured around its permanent headquarters, the PLANELM, based in Høvelte, just north of Copenhagen. The PLANELM is the permanent planning element of SHIRBRIG and is formed on the basis of the provisions in the PLANELM Memorandum of Understanding. A Steering

Committee provides oversight and policy guidance for both SHIRBRIG and the PLANELM. Nations participate in SHIRBRIG by contributing forces to the Brigade Pool, from which contributions would be drawn for a specific mission. The participants, however, reserve the right to decide whether to deploy their troops on a case-by-case basis. The Brigade is available for peacekeeping operations mandated under Chapter VI of the Charter of the UN, including humanitarian tasks. To maintain the Brigade as a tool for rapid deployment, its use is limited to deployments of up to six months in duration. After that, the mission will either be terminated, or other forces will replace the Brigade. High readiness is achieved by requiring forces to be set for deployment from a point of embarkation 21 to 30 days after a national decision to participate has been made. Canada is currently providing the SHIRBRIG commander, as well as a small but fluctuating number of full-time Canadian staff on the PLANELM, with its total of 14 positions, and an additional six augmentation staff to the overall formation total of 84 positions.

As a generic organizational model, SHIRBRIG strongly resembles a Canadian brigade group minus the armour, artillery, and air defence units. The formation has been designed for peace *support*, not peace *making* operations. Consequently, its structure focuses on maintaining a sufficient degree of protection, rather than on offensive-oriented weapons. For its current commitment, Canada

has pledged a battle group size unit and a helicopter squadron to the SHIRBRIG pool. These commitments are also reflected in Canada's commitment to the United Nations Standby Arrangement System (UNSAS).

### Potential Future Contributions to SHIRBRIG

Deployments on short notice mean there is little time to prepare for a contingent's arrival. Thus, a self-sufficient capability for a short period of time at the outset of the mission is essential. Past UN deployments have been characterized as slow and uncoordinated, with insufficient expertise and accountability. If there are difficult conditions, such as the lack of transportation and building infrastructure, or a lack of a functioning economy, a definition of self-sustainment must be agreed upon by the Troop Contributing Nations (TCN). At the very least, this capability must include a minimum standard for accommodations, ablutions, welfare, food services, transport, maintenance, and medical support, all of which are required to conduct operations.

In order for SHIRBRIG to become an effective force, a number of deficiencies requiring rectification have been

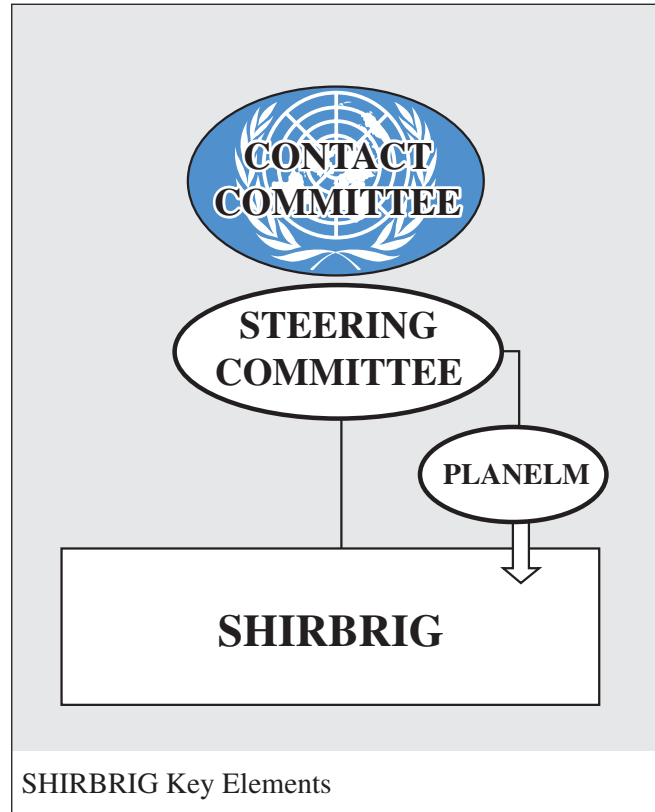
identified<sup>23</sup> by SHIRBRIG PLANELM staff. Canada, with its expertise in certain areas, is uniquely positioned to provide specialist support. Discussions emphasized possible areas where the Canadian Forces Joint Operational Group (CF JOG), comprised of a Joint Headquarters (JHQ), a Joint Support Group (JSG) and a Joint Signal Regiment (JSR), could assist by assuming Role Specialist Nation (RSN) status and also by providing the required capability or expertise in a number of areas. These would include provision of a transportation capability with both personnel and equipment, movement control at the Air Port of Disembarkation (APOD) or Sea Port of Disembarkation (SPOD), procurement expertise, the management of various contracts for provision of support services such as fuel, engineering and food catering services, the provision of container and cargo handling capability, with emphasis upon forklifts, other materiel handling equipment and rough terrain container handling equipment, the provision of communications expertise to support UN strategic reconnaissance teams or other deployments and, finally, theatre activation expertise to include Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (RSOMI). The Joint Support Group, supported by units drawn upon from across the nation, can also play prominent roles in supporting high-readiness UN troops.

Theatre activation is an area in which Canada is amassing considerable expertise. Every land deployment, regardless of the contingent, must have a minimum capability for theatre activation. Depending upon the nation and the length of deployment, standards can differ greatly, and conditions of employment range from being very austere to a camp with many facilities. As a minimum, arriving soldiers must have accommodations, rations and ablutions, with commensurate security and force protection, depending upon the threat and the operating conditions. Theatre activation is simply a new term for a capability that has always been required. When the first Canadian troops of UNEF arrived in Abu Suqair in 1956, they were moved into barracks recently occupied by Egyptian personnel. Canadian Major S.G. Tait stated:

When we arrived... not one window or door remained! Water and power facilities were long gone... We had to repair buildings, build showers, level ground, install power...<sup>24</sup>

Within the last two years, the Canadian Forces (CF), and, particularly, the CF JOG, have gained considerable expertise and experience in theatre activation by preparing two new theatres, in Kabul, Afghanistan and in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Major tasks associated with the activity include the establishment of liaison with the in-place forces and the host nation, the reception, staging, onward movement and integration (RSOMI) of incoming forces, the planning and establishment of support arrangements, the collection of information and intelligence, the setting

**“Therefore, from a political perspective, all nations and their governments, including Canada, must have the will to respond and commit to providing this capability.”**



up of a headquarters with rear link communications, and the establishment of camp support infrastructure, such as accommodations, kitchens and ablutions. This expertise in theatre activation is one of many additional major areas where Canada can assist with a UN deployment.

### Challenges in Meeting Canada’s Future SHIRBRIG Commitments

At the political level, the United Nations Standby Arrangement System is based upon commitments by member states to contribute specified resources to the UN and to decide on a case-by-case basis whether to participate in specific missions. UNSAS has a number of limitations, including troop contributions that do not meet the readiness and self-sufficiency criteria originally foreseen, allocated forces being already engaged in operations and therefore not available to be committed to UN operations, units that are not fully prepared, and, finally, limited opportunities for deploying units to train collectively prior to deployment. Consequently, the UNSAS does not currently provide the UN with a well-prepared rapid deployment capability. Political scientist Adam Roberts wrote: “When in May 1994, the Security Council decided to expand UNAMIR, not one of 19 governments that had undertaken to have troops on standby agreed to contribute.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, from a political perspective, all nations and their governments, including Canada, must have the will to respond and commit to providing this capability. They

should set aside the designated resources as, too often, the 'political will' or willingness of UN member states to contribute forces is lacking, primarily due to other commitments or insufficient resources. The current ongoing crisis in Sudan is yet another area where nations, including Canada, are unwilling to make troop contributions. When asked for contributions, including the likelihood of deploying the Canadian Forces Joint Operational Group (CF JOG) Theatre Activation Team to Sudan as part of the United Nations Mission to Sudan (UNMISUD), the response was that no resources were available. This resulted in a comment being made by a senior Canadian officer that this was a "disappointing response which will ultimately result in the death of SHIRBRIG as a relevant organization."<sup>26</sup> Canada had also served notice that due to ongoing commitments, it could not provide any major force contributions until at least August 2005.<sup>27</sup> Based on the above, Canada must therefore renew its commitment and consider new and additional areas where it can support new missions.

The ongoing debate of how to make use of the Canadian Forces's scarce resources in multiple theatres of operations throughout the world, coupled with the review of our foreign and defence policies now in progress, should guide how the government and the CF's senior leadership can exert influence on the world stage with what our troops can accomplish, rather than the size of the commitment.

## Conclusions

This article has argued that Canada's defence resources in support of the UN's rapid-reaction, high-readiness capability should be directed to assuming responsibility for specialist, enabling activities, such as logistics, communications and theatre activation/force bed-down. Past Canadian contributions have been examined to understand our important contributions, especially those of prominent Canadians such as Lester Pearson, Norman Robertson and General E.L.M. Burns. A review of past major troop deployments on peacekeeping missions has confirmed Canada's commitment to strengthening the UN's role in maintaining international peace and security. Canada is currently committed to the UN SHIRBRIG concept, but the potential deployment of Canadian troops is minimal, due mainly to ongoing deployments. Canada can make future additional contributions in the fields of logistics, communications and theatre activation. It must set aside this high-readiness, rapid-reaction capability and be prepared at the political level to commit these resources without hesitation, thereby gaining a greater influencing role in world affairs out of proportion to the size of its commitments.



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