A RAPID REACTION FORCE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS: MIDDLE POWERS, HUMAN SECURITY, AND THE MULTINATIONAL STANDBY HIGH READINESS BRIGADE (SHIRBRIG)

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary threats to human security have prompted middle powers to call again for the establishment of a rapid reaction force even as they failed to implement the Multinational Standby High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG) over a decade ago. Despite this failure, much of what has been written on middle powers simply assumed that they successfully contributed to human security. Previous studies on rapid reaction force and SHIRBRIG also lacked a theoretical examination - merely identifying lessons learned and offering policy recommendations. Utilising Ronald M. Behringer's conceptualisation of middle power theory which posits that middle powers use the concept of human security to design instruments that address contemporary security challenges, this article attempts to bridge the gaps in the literature by arguing that middle powers were only successful in creating a rapid reaction force, but not in providing the material capabilities to implement it. Ultimately, the concept of human security was not enough to make middle powers commit vital resources to SHIRBRIG.

Keywords: middle powers, human security, rapid reaction, United Nations, peacekeeping, SHIRBRIG

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) introduced the concept of human security in 1994 as an alternative to realism's narrow approach to international security. Launched in the wake of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Somalia, the concept of human security emphasises the security of the individual rather than the state and recognises that threats could come from military and non-military sources (UNDP, 1994, p. 30). This novel approach offered middle powers a framework for shaping their foreign policies and strategies in the post-Cold War period. The Multinational Standby High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG), which was created in 1996 to help the United Nations (UN) respond faster to conflicts, was among these strategies. Unfortunately, SHIRBRIG failed to carry out the role it was designed to play and was disbanded after a decade of operation. Recently, middle powers have pushed for the establishment of a new rapid reaction force amid contemporary threats to human security. Thus, revisiting the case of SHIRBRIG is necessary for practical and theoretical reasons. In terms of practical reasons, doing so will support efforts to build a rapid reaction force by examining whether lessons have been learned. Fundamentally, it will help assess whether such an instrument is an appropriate solution to contemporary security challenges. In terms of theoretical reasons, it will provide a more

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refined understanding of middle power contributions and help determine whether making such a categorisation is a useful exercise.

To these ends, this article raises the following questions: to what extent were middle powers successful in implementing a human security initiative through SHIRBRIG? How did they convince other states to adopt a rapid reaction force? How did SHIRBRIG contribute to the protection of human security? This article argues that middle powers were only successful in creating a rapid reaction force for the UN, but not in providing the material capabilities to implement it. The causes and consequences of the conflicts that emerged at the end of the Cold War compelled these states to create a rapid reaction force even as they had perceived its function and organisation differently. Regrettably, this newly built capability was increasingly reduced to a planning unit amid internal and external constraints before it was eventually terminated in 2009. Since then, there have been efforts to establish a similar instrument at the international and regional levels as threats to human security have intensified, but implementing those capabilities remains a challenge amid a widening gap between those who supply troops and those who fund missions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article adopts Ronald M. Behringer's conceptualisation of middle power theory, which posits that middle powers use the concept of human security to design instruments and strategies that address contemporary security challenges. Middle power theory provides an alternative to realism, which fails to explain and address changes that have been taking place in the international system since the end of the Cold War.

Unit of analysis

Realism considers states as the primary actors in the international system whose main objective is to survive under anarchy through constant military expansion. Great powers—the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC)[1], are the most important given their capability to command overwhelming force. Conversely, middle power theory highlights the role of states that "could not challenge the international peace and order—as could the great powers—but… possessed sufficient resources together to protect the order against aggressive states" (Neack, 1995, p. 183). However, identifying a middle power could be more challenging given its highly contested definition.

Some scholars describe a middle power based on its material and immaterial capabilities, the role that it plays in the global arena, or a set of behaviors that are not often found in great powers and small states (Fels, 2017, p. 209-210). Cox (1989, p. 824) defined middle powers as those whose "primary national interest… lay in an orderly and predictable environment that embodies some limits to the ambition and the reach of the dominant powers." For Behringer (2012, p. 22), a middle power uses the concept of human security to devise instruments, such as SHIRBRIG and the Mine Ban Convention, to address contemporary security challenges. Given the lack of a consensus as to what constitutes a middle power, middle power theory inevitably drew criticisms.

Chapnick (2000, p. 188) claimed that a middle power was a "myth." The theory is also said to be tautologous because it identifies middle powers for policymakers, prescribes behavior that their states should play in the world, and uses that behavior as a proof of being a middle power (Black, 1997, p. 103). Responding to critics, Robertson (2017, p. 13) argued that "[d]efining and redefining the term is a futile exercise… If the study of middle powers is to advance beyond its current sclerotic state, we require a more pragmatic approach to definition."

The nature of conflict in the post-Cold War era

Realists believe that war between states is a natural and inevitable feature of the international system (Mingst & Arreguín-Toft, 2016, p. 275). One state's decision to strengthen its military to boost its security only worsens the insecurity of others, leading them to respond with similar measures. Such a view of international relations has made realism a self-fulfilling prophecy (Jervis, 1976, pp. 76-77). Yet, most conflicts in the post-Cold War period occur within the state and threaten international peace and security through mass refugee flows, a proliferation of small arms, and the rise of local mercenaries (Enuka, 2012, p. 19). Behringer's conceptualisation of middle power theory highlights the security of human populations and recognises that threats could come from military and non-military sources. While the security of states remains vital, the protection of human populations should be at the centre of a country's foreign policy (Axworthy, 2001, p. 20). The UNDP (1994, p. 30) noted that there are seven areas in which human security could be threatened: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political. For this study, human security deals with personal security, threats to which include threats from the state (physical torture), other states (war), and other groups of people (ethnic tension).

Rapid reaction force and human security

Middle powers invented peacekeeping during the Cold War to prevent interstate conflicts from escalating to a point where the United States and the Soviet Union would be directly involved, essentially preserving the balance of power. Thus, one can argue that the contributions of peacekeeping during the Cold War can be seen primarily through realist lenses. When the bipolar structure ended, peacekeeping became ineffective in the face of new conflicts. The failure to prevent the 1994 Rwandan genocide was the most striking example of the impotence of UN peacekeeping. Not one of the 19 member states that had signed up with the fledgling UN Standby Arrangement System (UNSAS)[2] and had pledged to have troops on standby contributed to the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda. This prompted Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to declare that the UN should "give serious thought to the idea of a rapid reaction force" that would be at the disposal of the Security Council (United Nations Secretary-General [UNSG], 1995, p. 11).

In response, middle powers used the concept of human security to justify the creation of such an instrument. The Netherlands observed that "much precious time [was being] lost between a Security Council decision to deploy troops and the actual deployment of those troops" to intrastate conflicts that "[were claiming] more than a thousand lives" (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 1995, p. 3). Canada argued that given the UN's "often torpid response" to conflicts, a rapid reaction force was necessary amid the "new realities of the emerging international system"

(Government of Canada [GOC], 1995, p. 4). Similarly, Denmark noted that "recent conflicts [had shown] the appalling consequences of slow reaction in terms of human lives and suffering. In this connection, preventive deployment of peacekeeping forces might prove to be useful" (UNGA, 1996, p. 14). By shifting the focus away from the state to the individual, middle powers succeeded in creating a rapid reaction force in the form of SHIRBRIG. Unfortunately, it was terminated in 2009 for a host of reasons. Recently, middle powers have called for the establishment of a new rapid reaction force as threats to human security have intensified. Revisiting the case of SHIRBRIG, therefore, is necessary.

METHODOLOGY

This article uses a qualitative research design to facilitate exploratory research and theoretical development (Creswell, 2009, p. 201). Given that data taken from primary and secondary sources are mostly descriptive, a qualitative research design allows for an interpretative analysis of the information available. To reduce bias, this article uses primary sources such as UN reports, official statements by the countries being examined, minutes of committee meetings, and verbatim records. This research also adopts the case-oriented comparative method as it is sensitive to historical specificity (Ragin, 2014, p. ix). Such an approach is particularly interested in historical causes and consequences across a set of similar cases. Historical outcomes require complex and combinatorial explanations, which are difficult to prove by employing the more quantitatively inclined variable-oriented approach. The following section discusses the causes and consequences of intrastate conflicts as well as the middle power-led rapid reaction force proposals in response to these conflicts.

THE ORIGINS OF SHIRBRIG

Deep-seated ethnic, nationalist, and religious tensions resurfaced at the end of the Cold War, frequently erupting into a kind of conflict not seen before. Intrastate conflicts became so widespread that UN resources for peacekeeping were spread thin, which often led to slow deployment and inaction. On average, it would take the UN six to 12 months to get troops on the ground (UNGA, 2010, p. 9). To address this problem, middle powers sought to create a rapid reaction force, and in 1996 they succeeded. The causes and consequences of intrastate conflicts compelled middle powers to establish such an instrument even as their notions of its function and organisation differed.

Conflicts in the post-Cold War period

Ethnic rivalry and competition for natural resources triggered many intrastate conflicts in the early 1990s. Ethnic rivalry occurs when two or more ethnocultural groups feel different from each other (Yilmaz, 2007, p. 13). When one of them feels marginalised under the existing political order, a conflict could erupt. Such was the case in the former Yugoslavia where Serbian Slobodan Milošević manipulated Serbian nationalism and ordered the invasion of the other republics, leaving behind 200,000 people dead (Ariye, 2015, p. 327). In Rwanda, the Parmehutu, which had been in power since 1962, carried out a pre-planned genocide and executed approximately 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in 1994 (UNSC, 1999, p. 3). Competition for natural resources also fueled

intrastate conflicts. As Cold War aid subsided, many armed groups started to rely on revenues from oil, timber, or gems, which often became the object of conflict. Diamonds funded the 1991 civil war in Sierra Leone, leaving behind approximately 70,000 dead and displacing more than half of the population (UNDP, 2006, p. 71). The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)[3] broke out due to ethnic rivalry and later descended into the plunder of natural resources, namely cobalt, coltan[4], copper, diamonds, and gold (UNSC, 2001, p. 41). Overall, the causes of the kind of conflict that proliferated after the Cold War were distinct from those of interstate wars.

The aftermath of intrastate conflicts was also different since they caused immense human suffering and structural consequences that compounded the agony of civilians. These effects were often so severe that nations collapsed into anarchy. Immense human suffering included civilians being routinely killed or maimed in unprecedented numbers (UNSC, 2018a, pp. 1-2, 11). Children were also recruited to fight on behalf of the government or rebels. Furthermore, people fled their homes and livelihoods in search of safety, facilitating the transnational spread of arms, combatants, and hostile ideologies (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006, p. 335). The structural consequences pertained to the disintegration of state institutions, the health of the citizenry, and the environment that altogether exacerbated the suffering of civilians. The collapse of state institutions often paralysed governance and law and order (UNSG, 1995, p. 5). The health of populations also suffered long after the conflicts were over (Iqbal, 2006, pp. 633-634). Apart from direct damage to medical facilities, conflicts crippled elements of the larger infrastructure like transportation, water supply, and power grids. Moreover, resources were often redirected from public health to military uses, undermining the capability of war-torn societies to address public health-related issues. The displacement of people during a conflict also facilitated the spread of diseases, such as cholera in Liberia in 2003. Finally, intrastate conflicts created long-term problems to the environment as governments adopted policies like scorched earth techniques to alter the terrain where insurgents operated (Gurses, 2012, p. 255). Given the causes and consequences of intrastate conflicts, a novel approach to the maintenance of international peace and security was in order.

Responding to new types of conflict

The concept of human security provided the Netherlands, Canada, and Denmark a justification to create a rapid reaction force, but their proposals differed in terms of function and organisation. In terms of function, the Netherlands envisaged a standing army that could be deployed in imminent crises, during the period between the authorisation of a peacekeeping mission and its arrival in the field, and humanitarian emergencies (UNGA, 1995, pp. 8, 11). The Dutch believed that the brigade should be deployed to a country even without the consent of its ruler, and that the use of force should be permitted not only to defend the brigade but also for "deterrent and locally decisive action." Canada outlined 21 recommendations to strengthen UN peacekeeping, the highlight of which was the Vanguard Concept. Building on the UNSAS, the Vanguard Concept could be deployed either to meet an immediate crisis or to anticipate the arrival of follow-on forces or a more traditional peacekeeping mission (GOC, 1995, p. 52). The Danish proposal was unique because it was prepared by a working group[5] composed of middle powers. Denmark borrowed concepts from the two previous proposals and argued that some countries could form a "pre-established" brigade that could establish relations with the local community, mediate between parties involved

to defuse the situation, and liaise with non-government organisations (UNGA, 1996, pp. 9, 16). It could also monitor the implementation of ceasefires; establish a secure environment in the mission area; conduct crowd control tasks; develop a public information programme; and maintain the security of the brigade.

In terms of organisation, the Netherlands envisioned a UN brigade headquarters (HQ) that would develop doctrines and training standards and arrange deployment logistics (UNGA, 1995, pp. 25, 37). On the ground, troops would need capabilities like general and civil engineering, transportation, and medical to provide humanitarian assistance. Moreover, the brigade would require weapons for self-defense. Should the brigade have to be withdrawn, support of member states or regional organisations would be needed to extract the troops. Canada recommended that a set of generic and mission-specific training standards be developed (GOC, 1995, pp. 47, 54, 62). It also suggested that the UN negotiate arrangements with commercial firms and member states to ensure the availability of essential equipment like strategic air and sea lift capabilities. Finally, Denmark proposed the creation of a Planning Element, which would support the UN in conceptual development, generic operational and logistics planning, and the development of standardised training requirements before deployment (UNGA, 1996, pp. 17-26). Denmark also recommended establishing a brigade pool, which would contain duplicates of various units to ensure troop availability. When deployed, the brigade would have a mobile HQ and communications facilities; three or more protected infantry battalions; light reconnaissance units of company size; and units for engineer and logistic support, including transportation, supply, maintenance, health services, and military police. The brigade would also have self-defense capabilities. The middle powers finally built a rapid reaction force for the UN – SHIRBRIG, in 1996, based on the Danish initiative, with Austria, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Sweden as its founding members. Denmark's proposal offered a middle ground between the radical vision of the Netherlands to create a standing army and the modest plan by Canada to improve the existing UNSAS.

THE EVOLUTION OF SHIRBRIG

While middle powers succeeded in creating SHIRBRIG, implementing it was an entirely different story as its success as a human security initiative—and the whole concept of a rapid reaction force—depended on its ability to form a brigade and arrive at the area of conflict as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, troop generation became a challenge, preventing SHIRBRIG from exercising its function. SHIRBRIG was forced to reduce its role as a standby brigade to a planning unit because of internal and external challenges.

From full brigade to a niche unit

The optimism that surrounded the founding of SHIRBRIG was short-lived as it failed to function as a standby brigade and instead was increasingly reduced to a planning unit. According to the Danish proposal, SHIRBRIG would have 4,000-5,000 troops that could arrive in the area of operations within 15-30 days following the issuance of a UNSC mandate (UNGA, 1996, pp. 14, 18). On paper, SHIRBRIG seemed to be the solution to the UN's slow deployment times. In reality, SHIRBRIG never reached even

the lower end of its target brigade size and deployment still took longer than planned. It provided assistance to five UN peacekeeping operations, but only one was as a standby brigade, namely the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) in 2000. SHIRBRIG was deployed to observe a truce between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which had gone to war with each other in 1998, while preparations were being made for UNMEE (Armstrong-Whitworth, 2007, p. 27). Unfortunately, SHIRBRIG gathered just 1,200-1,500 troops who arrived two months after the issuance of Security Council Resolution 1320 (Koops & Varwick, 2008, pp. 20-21). Following this disappointing performance, SHIRBRIG was forced to limit its subsequent deployments to sending personnel from its Planning Element.

The Planning Element did not have an extensive description of its activities in the Danish proposal, but it played a more active role by supporting the UN and regional organisations in Africa. According to the proposal, the Planning Element would plan missions for SHIRBRIG; record lessons learned; coordinate troop contributions; and support the UN through conceptual development, generic operational and logistic planning, and development of standardised training requirements (UNGA, 1996, pp. 21-22). In practice, the Planning Element supported the UN as well as regional organisations in Africa. With respect to the UN, the Planning Element helped develop operational plans for the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and the UN Advance Mission in Sudan (UNAMIS) (Koops & Varwick, 2008, pp. 18-20). The Planning Element also helped form the HQ of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). Outside the UN, the Planning Element supported regional organisations in Africa in their efforts to create their rapid reaction forces by providing capacity-building assistance to the Eastern Africa Standby Brigade (EASBRIG) and the Economic Community of West African States Standby Brigade (ECOBRIG). EASBRIG and ECOBRIG officers were frequently invited to SHIRBRIG HQ for joint training and workshops. Planning Element officers also launched a comprehensive scheme for sharing their expertise with EASBRIG in 2004. But despite the prominence of the Planning Element, this article argues that SHIRBRIG's contribution to the protection of human security was limited because it failed to function as its founders had intended (see Appendix for a comparison of traditional UN peacekeeping, the three rapid reaction force proposals, and SHIRBRIG in practice).

Internal and external challenges and SHIRBRIG's transformation

The disappointing performance of SHIRBRIG as a rapid reaction force could be attributed to problems within and outside the organisation. Internally, SHIRBRIG's strict membership criteria and institutional deficiencies impaired troop contributions. Prospective members of SHIRBRIG had to be small or middle powers; have peacekeeping experience and participate in UNSAS; pay for the training of their troops; make units available at the required level of readiness; come from different regions of the world; and accept the four documents[6] that constituted SHIRBRIG's framework (Behringer, 2012, p. 65). Inadvertently, these criteria generated problems. Developing countries, which have been the biggest source of peacekeepers since the mid-1990s, as well as great powers, which could have shouldered the heavy financial and material burden, were excluded (Koops & Novosseloff, 2017, p. 7). A severe capability gap also existed between troops provided by SHIRBRIG member states and by non-SHIRBRIG member states. Most of the peacekeepers that arrived a month after SHIRBRIG had withdrawn from UNMEE in May 2001 were from India, Jordan, and Kenya which did

not have the resources that SHIRBRIG member states had for training and equipment (United Nations Department of Peace Operations [UNDPO], 2001). Thus, those units did not function as effectively as those from SHIRBRIG member states.

Institutional deficiencies, specifically SHIRBRIG's lack of an effective communication link with decision-makers at the UN and with the public, also impaired troop contributions. SHIRBRIG established the Contact Group to be able to coordinate with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) at the UN. The Contact Group was based in New York and was composed of the ambassadors and military advisors of the permanent missions to the UN of SHIRBRIG member states (Koops & Varwick, 2008, p. 24). However, no additional staff that could specifically deal with SHIRBRIG matters was provided. The DPKO ended up negotiating directly with SHIRBRIG member states and, since no single channel between the two organisations existed, it was likely that contradictory information was conveyed. The public also lacked knowledge about SHIRBRIG and its activities. SHIRBRIG put up a website in 2003, but it failed to stimulate interest. Even SHIRBRIG officials admitted that they never visited the website. This lack of visibility contributed to an absence of political debate about SHIRBRIG. For this reason, the Steering Committee, which was the organisation's executive body, was often staffed with desk officers instead of high-ranking decision-makers, while the chairmanship was headed by a low- to a high-ranking active or retired general who had limited access to the decision-makers. Hence, promoting the interests of SHIRBRIG at the appropriate decision-making level became challenging (SHIRBRIG Planning Element, 2009, p. 11).

Externally, rivalries developed between SHIRBRIG and other international organisations. First, SHIRBRIG's relationship with the DPKO, now called the UNDPO, was problematic from the start and worsened when the former shifted its role to mission planning. When SHIRBRIG was still being developed, several developing countries like Pakistan and Thailand had opposed the initiative because it allegedly favored Western countries (UNGA, 1998, p. 6). The relationship between the two organisations deteriorated when the former shifted to mission planning, which was perceived by the DPKO as an encroachment on its area of expertise. In retaliation, the DPKO did not use Planning Element officers as a coherent force HQ during the missions in Sudan and were distributed to fill vacant spots instead. The DPKO also failed to include SHIRBRIG in its early planning process (SHIRBRIG Planning Element, 2009). Second, SHIRBRIG had to compete with the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) over the same resources. The EU developed its own rapid reaction force called the EU Battlegroups in June 2004. Eighteen battlegroups have been developed, but none have been deployed to date (Langille, 2014, p. 18). Similarly, NATO created the NATO Response Force as a "highly ready and technologically advanced, multinational force made up of land, air, maritime and Special Operations Forces components" that could be deployed anywhere within five to 30 days (NATO Press Office, 2019). Its tasks include peacekeeping, evacuation and rescue operations, humanitarian crisis response, and counterterrorism. Of the 13 SHIRBRIG member states that agreed to make units available on standby, 11 also had a membership with the EU and 10 with NATO. These organisations ended up competing for resources from the same member states. Ultimately, it became impossible for SHIRBRIG to perform its role, leading to its termination in 2009.

CONTEMPORARY SECURITY THREATS, PEACEKEEPING, AND THE CONTINUING NEED FOR A RAPID REACTION FORCE

Since the closure of SHIRBRIG, threats to human security have evolved. But against the backdrop of a more complex security environment, middle powers continue to believe that a rapid reaction force is an appropriate solution to these challenges. At the 2016 General Assembly debate, Poland, one of SHIRBRIG's founders, said that improving rapid deployment capabilities should be one of the priorities of the UN and that a successful conflict resolution required the capacity to deploy conflict prevention and mediation teams promptly (UNGA, 2016, p. 5). Canada also vowed to commit a rapid reaction force of 200 soldiers for the UN (Blanchfield, 2017). Examining middle power contributions amid a changing security environment is necessary to determine whether lessons have been learned from the SHIRBRIG experience. While contemporary threats to human security continue to warrant the creation of a rapid reaction force, the divide between those who supply troops and those who fund missions has widened.

Novel responses to modern threats

Climate change and transnational crimes have become the main sources of threats to human security given the rate at which they aggravate tensions. The former has made small island states and countries in Africa particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events. During an open debate at the UNSC, the Alliance of Small Island States declared that the very existence of their 37 members has been threatened by unpredictable rain patterns, floods, coastal erosion, and saltwater contamination of agricultural land and freshwater reserves, the consequences of which would be loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, and risks to natural resource base (UNSC, 2018b, p. 26). In Africa, UN peace efforts have been severely hampered. For example, tension over water and land between cattle herders and farmers in Somalia has made it difficult for the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia to implement its mandate (Bhalla, 2019). Transnational crimes like terrorism and organised crime have also fueled conflicts in the contemporary period. Terrorist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Boko Haram, the Taliban, and Al-Shabaab have exploited the world's increasing interconnectedness to commit atrocities and have made blue helmet soldiers a frequent target of their attacks, with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) becoming one of the most dangerous missions for UN troops. Organised crimes like drug trafficking, human trafficking, trafficking in firearms, and money laundering have also driven conflicts.

According to the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (2000, p. 1), an organised criminal group is –

> "… a structured group of three or more persons… acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences… in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit."

Organised criminal groups compete with the state to continue an insurgency, such as in Afghanistan where the Taliban and Haqqani networks tax the opium narco economy, and they also settle in places where the state is absent, and exploit the natural resources using their militaries such as in the Central African Republic, the DRC, and Sierra

Leone (van der Lijn, 2018, p. 2). Overall, the combined effects of climate change and transnational crimes have posed a major threat to human security and could contribute to the continued fragility of countries. Despite the more complex security environment, efforts to improve rapid deployment capabilities at the international and regional levels have been limited.

At the international level, states replaced UNSAS in 2015 with the Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System (PCRS) whose goal, much like that of its predecessor, is "to establish a more predictable and dynamic process of interaction" between the UN and member states to guarantee "timely deployment of quality peacekeeping capabilities" (UNDPO, 2019, p. 13). Another initiative is the vanguard capability, which was designed to allow the UN to insert a quickly responding military force into a new mission area or to reinforce an existing mission (UNSG, 2015). Troops would be sourced from the pledges made at the PCRS and would be used to form "a permanent core command element, a brigade-size force of infantry units, two formed police units and the required force multipliers and enablers" (UNDPO, 2019, p. 13). The UN said that it had received enough pledges for a vanguard brigade of around 4,000 units (United Nations Department of Global Communications, 2017). Still, it remains to be seen how much impact they will have on peacekeeping operations.

At the regional level, the instruments created by the AU and the EU suffer from the same constraints that plagued SHIRBRIG, namely, limited resources and lengthy decision-making procedures. The issue of resources is particularly serious for the Eastern African Standby Force, formerly known as EASBRIG, which relies mainly on funds from Nordic countries (Ani, 2018). In the case of the EU, some of its member states refused to send troops because they were expected to pay more than others. For example, Germany turned down a possible Franco-German Battlegroup, which would have provided security during the Congolese elections of 2006 (Reykers, 2017, pp. 461-462). As regards decision making, the AU must secure authorisation from the EU, which funds the AU's Peace and Security Council, and from the UN to gain legitimacy for its actions. Similarly, EU member states have varying national decision-making procedures that could impact deployment timeframes (Popa & Stefan, 2019, p. 247). In sum, an effective rapid deployment capability remains elusive even in the face of more complex security threats.

Towards a changing division of labor in contemporary UN peacekeeping

Amid the changing security environment, the divide between those who supply the majority of troops and those who fund missions has widened. In terms of troop contributions, contingents from European middle powers and Canada have recently grown after languishing for a long time, but the size of their forces would not likely match that of developing countries any time soon. The renewed engagement from middle powers has prompted many scholars to call this Europe's "return" to UN peacekeeping (Koops & Tercovich, 2016, p. 598). They have provided "niche capabilities" like a special operations land task group; an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance company; and Apache and Chinook helicopters with aerial medical evacuation teams to missions such as MINUSMA (Boutellis & Beary, 2020, p. 4). It should be noted though that these contributions were re-hatted from NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan that closed in 2014. As one official from a European troop-contributing country said, "if you don't use them, you

lose them" (Karlsrud & Smith, 2015, p. 3). Still, these middle power contributions have remained paltry compared to those by developing countries which supplied 92 percent of the total troop contributions in 2018. In contrast to the more altruistic reasons that drove middle powers to engage in peacekeeping until the mid-1990s, developing countries have sought to gain financial incentives and influence on the global stage, among others. Bove and Elia (2011, pp. 703, 710) argued that "mercenarisation" has been "among the main drivers of peacekeeping." Gaibulloev et al. (2015, p.1) also said that "some countries [have specialised] in supplying UN peacekeepers as a money-making venture." For example, Fiji, a country with barely a million people and "no enemy other than sunburn," has sent many of its citizens to the UN and private security firms abroad (Copetas, 2007). There have been other motivations as well. Regional security has been a major factor for Ethiopia, with virtually all its blue helmets deployed in neighboring Sudan and South Sudan. In countries that spent years under military rule, peacekeeping has served as a way to reassert civilian control and modernise their national armies (Kathman & Melin, 2017, p. 155). Lastly, peacekeeping has helped developing countries enhance their image abroad and build a case for a non-permanent seat at the UNSC, like Ukraine and Uruguay in 2016-2017 and Ethiopia in 2017-2018. For Bangladeshis, peacekeeping has given them a chance to be known for something other than bad politics and natural disasters (International Peace Institute, 2016).

In terms of financial contributions, middle powers have significantly paid more than developing countries. For the fiscal year 2019-2020, UN member states allocated USD$6.5 billion for peacekeeping, with developed countries accounting for about 75 percent of the budget (UNDPO, n.d.). Approximately half of that came from middle powers like Japan, Germany, Italy, Canada, South Korea, Australia, Spain, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. This provided them an "overabundance of decision-making power over the mandates and conduct of interventions" (Abrahamsen & Sandor, 2018, p. 12). They were able to evade deploying to dangerous places that were strategically insignificant although they felt obliged to be involved (Freedman, 2003). Because of their financial and niche capability contributions, middle powers have passed on much of the risk of casualties to developing countries whose reliance on external funding has negatively affected some peacekeeping operations. In 2018, a third of annual payments for personnel, equipment, and sustainment activities were overdue, preventing many developing countries from replacing units and updating contingent-owned equipment (Mir, 2019, p. 8). Developing countries have also had very little influence over the formulation of mandates. For example, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) saw a reduction in its force requirements. In response, troop contributors, which were mostly from the developing world, urged the UNSC to restore the mission's previous strength, arguing that the "timeframes and troop levels… [were] not realistic and would lead to a reversal of the gains made by AMISOM" (Intergovernmental Authority on Development, n.d.). Abdenur (2019, p. 51) argued that this imbalance could significantly impact a mission as wealthy nations could override the authority of peacekeeping commanders, especially where geopolitical interests would be at stake.

CONCLUSION

Considering the experience of SHIRBRIG and the recent improvements at the international and regional levels, this article offers three conclusions. First, efforts to

develop a rapid reaction force can be compared to a Sisyphean task. Middle powers continue to advocate its creation, but when it is time for them to implement it, they fail to deliver. With the change in the nature of conflict outpacing the ability of states to adapt to the contemporary security environment, a rapid reaction force may not be the best solution to address threats to human security. Against a backdrop of increasing ethnic and religious tensions along with terrorism in some parts of the world, middle powers will have to strengthen their security cooperation with major troop-contributing countries, especially those in Africa and the Middle East. Middle powers will also have to work closely with great powers, namely, France, Russia, and the United States that have a huge influence over these conflict areas.

Second, middle power theory suffers from weaknesses even as it serves as a useful alternative to realism. Middle power theory overlooks the possibility of competition emerging between international organisations that implement similar initiatives. It also neglects internal constraints that could hinder a successful implementation of a human security initiative. Lastly, it ignores the role of great powers. Still, it would be a mistake to abandon the theory entirely. By using the concept of human security, middle power theory brings to global attention issues that would otherwise be ignored by grand theories like realism. As such, the framework remains useful for middle powers as a guide to their foreign policies. Especially now that the global power dynamics are changing, middle powers will keep on punching above their weight to play a bigger role in international security.

Finally, middle powers are not a homogeneous group. Some of them like Canada and Denmark deploy very few troops to UN peacekeeping. Others like the Netherlands are more proactive and are contributing more to the UN. It should be noted though that the country was vying for a non-permanent seat at the UNSC which it eventually acquired in 2018. Moreover, the failure to implement a rapid reaction force has made the definition of a middle power even fuzzier. As the gap between those who supply the troops and those who fund peacekeeping operations widens, the line that divides middle powers and everyone else below them narrows. Therefore, significant progress towards the creation of a rapid reaction force is unlikely to be made any time soon since a compromise will be harder to find despite the proliferation of threats to human security. In the near term, the focus will have to be on improving rapid reaction force initiatives at the regional level and will have to be developed both by middle powers and top troop contributors from the developing world.

Notes

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[1] The five permanent members of the UNSC are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

[2] The UN created UNSAS in 1994 to have detailed information about the number of troops and other capabilities its member states were willing to supply.

[3] The DRC was known as Zaire when the conflict began.

[4] Coltan is a mineral used to make capacitors that are commonly found in consumer electronic products.

[5] The group was composed of Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, and Sweden.

[6] The four documents were the Letter of Intent (LOI), which allowed a state to become an observer nation in the Steering Committee; the Memorandum of Understanding on the Steering Committee (MOU/SC), which allowed states to participate in the development of SHIRBRIG policies; the MOU on SHIRBRIG; and the MOU on the Planning Element (MOU/PLANELM). By November 2008, 23 middle powers and small states were participating in SHIRBRIG at four different levels of membership. Austria, Canada, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, and Sweden signed all four documents. Finland, Lithuania, and Slovenia signed everything but the MOU/PLANELM. Ireland signed the LOI and the MOU/SC. Chile, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Egypt, Jordan, Latvia, Portugal, and Senegal served as observer nations in the Steering Committee (Behringer, 2012, p. 65).

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APPENDIX

Comparison of traditional UN peacekeeping, rapid reaction force proposals, and SHIRBRIG in practice

Variables	Traditional UN peacekeeping	Rapid reaction force proposals			SHIRBRIG in practice				
		The Netherlands	Canada	Denmark	UNMEE	UNOCI	UNMIL	UNAMIS	UNMIS
Length of time to deploy (in days)	180-360	14	7	15-30	61-99	18	5	50	25
Number of personnel deployed		2,000-5,000	5,000	4,000-5,000	1,200-1,500	10?	24	17	308
Tasks	Implement ceasefires between states	Prevent crises and humanitarian emergencies	Implement ceasefires, provide humanitarian assistance	Implement ceasefires, provide humanitarian assistance	Implemented a ceasefire	Developed operational plans	Formed HQ	Developed operational plans	Formed HQ

Sources: Compiled by the author from UNGA (2010, p. 9); UNGA (1995, pp. 22-23, 32); GOC (1995, pp. 14, 18, 16); and, SHIRBRIG Planning Element (2009, p. 49). The number of personnel for traditional UN peacekeeping is left blank since missions vary in size.