



## TOWARDS A RAPID REACTION CAPABILITY FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

stage in the development of a standing UN capacity, the base headquarters would ensure that there were at least two deployable mission headquarters capable of assuming operational control in a peacekeeping mission. The deployable military elements assigned to each mission headquarters would include a variety of capabilities, including deployable civilian elements, providing the UN with well-trained military and civilian units for most contingencies.

Contingency plans would need to identify the resources required to provide lift capabilities at short notice. Major Member States, such as the United States and Russia, who are uniquely placed to provide strategic air and sea lift, might be requested to provide contingency planning teams and operational units to the UN base. The UN could then negotiate a detailed stand-by arrangement or memorandum of understanding that ensured the prompt availability of strategic lift on short notice.

In order to tackle the fundamental issue of reliability in a UN response to crisis situations, consideration must eventually be given to moving beyond common basing of national units to the concept of a UN Standing Emergency Group, under the exclusive command and control of the Security Council and the Secretary-General. The size and general structure of this rapid-reaction capability would largely remain as described above, with a standing headquarters, at least two deployable mission headquarters and accompanying units and support personnel. By drawing on qualified personnel from national units to serve as the basis for this UN Standing Emergency Group, the UN would have a highly competent nucleus for the training and development of new recruits.

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As professional volunteers develop into a cohesive UN force, they can assume responsibility for some of the riskier operations mandated by the Council but for which troop contributors have been hesitant to contribute. UN volunteers offer the best prospect of a completely reliable, well-trained rapid-reaction capability. Without the need to consult national authorities, the UN could cut response time significantly, and volunteers could be deployed within hours of a Security Council decision. As the 1995 Commission on Global Governance noted, "The very existence of an immediately available and effective UN Volunteer Force could be a deterrent in itself. It could also give important support for negotiation and peaceful settlement of disputes. It is high time that this idea — a United Nations Volunteer Force — was made a reality." No matter how difficult this goal now seems, it deserves continued study, with a clear process for assessing its feasibility over the long term.

It should be acknowledged that the concept of a standing UN force is an expensive option. The study of a UN Rapid Deployment Brigade by the Netherlands concluded that a unit of some five thousand persons might involve a cost to the UN of some US\$380 million annually.<sup>39</sup> The recent study of the Independent Working Group on the Future of the United Nations, concluded that a force of 10,000 might involve annual costs of some US\$500 million with a one-time start-up cost of US\$500 million.<sup>40</sup> Although these are expenses beyond the current capacity of the UN, there might be a time when they can be accommodated in the framework of a coherent peace and security program within the UN. In the meantime, the option, including its costs, should continue to be studied.