

I THE POLITICAL-MILITARY-HUMANITARIAN TRIANGLE

- (i) **Of all the factors which affect the alliance between the humanitarian and military aspects of intervention, the most important is the political directive.** Without political directive, the other mechanisms can only cope with the effects of conflict; they cannot deal with the underlying causes or produce long-term solutions. The triangular relationship between politics, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance is the key to effective coordination, and political control is at the apex of this triangle. Peacekeeping and humanitarian action can only be effective if there is also a political initiative to seek a durable solution.
- (ii) **The key position in the command triangle is that of Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), who is a high level official given decision-making authority by the Secretary-General on both political and operational matters in the conflict area.** He or she will usually be the international community's senior representative in the field. The significance of both the role itself and the quality of the incumbent has been increasingly recognised during the course of the 1990s, however only recently has an attempt been made to formalise responsibilities and terms of the reference.¹
- (iii) **It is particularly urgent to establish clear guidelines for the relationship between an SRSG and his or her two principal subordinates: the Peacekeeping Force Commander and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator.** Up to now, this crucial working partnership has been established on a case-by-case basis and it has been up to individuals to make it work effectively. Some flexibility will always be desirable, because operational conditions will inevitably vary from those envisaged when the guidelines are written. But more formalisation is now required, if only to establish firmly the position of the SRSG. Military commanders and humanitarian coordinators will always tend to step into a political vacuum when clear political leadership or direction is not being given. SRSGs need to have clear authority and to use it wisely but firmly. Ultimately, however, much will depend on the quality of the individuals concerned.