



### **A UN Standing Emergency Group**

The Vanguard Concept outlined earlier is based on standby arrangements for nationally-based units linked to a UN operational headquarters. Over the long term, and as the utility of an operational headquarters becomes evident, it would be logical to establish additional, regionally-based operational headquarters. The presence of regional headquarters would provide for greater flexibility and reduce the time required for deployment in respective regions. The effectiveness of such a system would be increased by narrowing the scope of contingencies planned by each headquarters and fostering greater technical and political understanding of the environment in which a UN operation might be deployed. Regional headquarters would also facilitate a closer working relationship with regional organizations, which often play critical roles in various aspects of the international response to a crisis.

**24. Consideration should be given, over the longer term, to the establishment of additional, regionally-based operational-level headquarters, once a first operational-level headquarters has been established and its performance and usefulness have been assessed.**

As noted, reliability is a central principle of rapid reaction. At present, there is no absolute assurance that nationally-based units will be immediately available at the behest of the UN. In 1995, the Secretary-General acknowledged that "a considerable effort has been made to expand and refine stand-by arrangements but these provide no guarantee that troops will be provided for a specific operation".<sup>36</sup> The problem of reliability in the supply of national units poses a significant obstacle to a rapid UN response to crisis. Governments are sometimes reluctant to release their forces for UN duty, for a variety of reasons. Even when Governments are disposed to concur in participation, the process of seeking authorization is often slow. Although these delays can never be eliminated, they can be reduced in a number of ways. One way is to address specific operational concerns which inhibit states from agreeing to the deployment of their forces in specific operations. The second is by enhancing procedures for participation through a variety of measures, like joint training and exercises, which increase troop-contributor confidence and thus foster participation.

Ultimately, however, a UN rapid-reaction capability can be truly reliable only if it no longer depends on Member States of the UN for the supply of personnel for peace operations. If the UN is to build a rapid-reaction capability which is fully reliable, the challenge in years ahead will be to develop its own personnel, independent of state authority. The idea of a standing UN force is as controversial as it is old. It has been studied most recently by the Government of the Netherlands, which produced a technical report establishing the general validity of the idea of a UN rapid-deployment brigade. Nevertheless, it is apparent that no broad or even significant international support, much less consensus, currently exists for taking such a step in the short to medium term. Although current lack of support argues against expending political capital in pursuit of this option, it is not an argument against the idea in itself. As Nobel Laureate Dr. John C. Polanyi has noted:

Fire departments and police forces do not always prevent fire or crime, yet they are now widely recognised as providing an essential service. Similarly, a rapid reaction capability may confront conditions beyond its capacity to control. This

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