

## TOWARDS A RAPID REACTION CAPABILITY FOR THE UNITED NATIONS



The UN's decision-making processes at all levels have historically been *ad hoc*. Each time an operation is authorized, the Secretariat begins anew, creating a plan, looking for contributions, gathering additional staff for mission-specific planning and establishing procedures. Preparation for implementation does not normally begin until the decision-making process in the Security Council is complete, with enormous implications for the time required to get a mission into a theatre of operations. The Secretary General has noted: "The United Nations has no armed forces, no readily deployable large civilian corps, no significant stockpile of equipment and only a very limited Headquarters staff to manage the Organization's activities for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Organization can levy assessments but has no effective recourse should its Members, despite their clear legal obligation under the Charter, fail to pay on time. In short, its peace-keeping missions can only be realized when the Member States are full and committed partners, willing to provide the personnel, equipment and money to do the job."<sup>15</sup>

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A number of the Secretary-General's recent reform measures have addressed some of these problems. Lacking a crisis management mechanism, he recently formed the Standing Task Force on UN Operations, chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and incorporating among others senior officers of DPKO, DHA and the Office of Legal Affairs. This mechanism should permit much earlier action by the Secretariat in response to early-warning signals and more direct involvement in the formulation of mission mandates by key parts of the Secretariat. It could be strengthened by incorporating other relevant elements of the Secretariat, such as the Department of Public Information.

Problems in UN procedures and structures are also gradually being addressed. One basic problem in the UN system is that virtually all UN field mission activities are expected to operate in "headquarters mode" under the same administrative and operational rules as the rest of the UN Secretariat. In contrast, the field missions of most UN specialized agencies have varied their procedures to address the large difference between field and headquarters operations. Thus, Secretariat rules and procedures are not geared for fast-moving field operations. This situation reflects a tension between the needs of DPKO on the one hand and the financial accountability requirements of the UN on the other. It also reflects, in many cases, a contradiction between the decisions of Member States in the UN's administrative organs, especially the General Assembly's Fifth Committee, and what they aspire to do in other bodies, such as the Security Council or the Fourth Committee.

An effective decision-making process should integrate both those who set the objectives of a mission and those who are responsible for its implementation. Similarly, UN headquarters should have a solid understanding of the field situation and the strengths and weaknesses of the units involved in a mission. One problem is that Special Representatives are generally appointed by the Secretary-General only after the Security Council has authorized an operation. Force Commanders are brought in at an even later stage, sometimes after others have developed the mission's concept of operations. This is difficult enough in a "steady-state" peacekeeping operation. It could prove disastrous in responding rapidly to crises.