

TOWARDS A RAPID REACTION CAPABILITY FOR THE UNITED NATIONS



implications. Initially, it gathered information on five countries, but it is expanding its range of analysis to 55 countries during 1995. Its aim is to produce weekly general reports, early-warning signals and country profiles which will be shared with DPA and DPKO. DPA is also working on a promising project to rationalize and coordinate the incipient early-warning systems among DPA, DHA and DPKO. Some thought is now being given to enlarging this circle of cooperation to include the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis and focusing all of these activities in the Office of the Secretary-General.

Outside the Secretariat, various UN agencies, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), have developed the equivalent of early-warning structures. UNHCR's Documentation Centre in Geneva also prepares country profiles, somewhat along the lines of the HEWS system in DHA. As the Rwandan crisis of 1994 so graphically demonstrated, however, early warning is not the problem. Many parts of the international community — the UN, specialized agencies, member states, NGOs, the media — were fully aware that disaster was around the corner.

The UN's problem is not the absence of information. Rather, it is the absence of a path for information to flow, linking early warning to the other processes crucial to rapid reaction, especially political decision-making and contingency planning. Early warning should be a crucial first step to enable the political and strategic levels to be seized of a situation and to implement measures before a crisis erupts. Reforms within the UN Secretariat in the past two years have taken the organization in the right direction. Although information-sharing between UN headquarters and field operations had once been inefficient, because of absences of procedures and an incompatibility between policy and operations, the Secretary-General has addressed most of the significant gaps. The creation of the Situation Centre provides the nucleus of a 24-hour operations centre at headquarters specifically responsible for the dissemination of information.

Early-warning systems are not yet coordinated, however, with contingency planning or crisis management functions, or with any other elements essential to rapid response, such as logistics and transport. Ideally, early-warning signals should trigger contingency planning, or at least "contingency thinking", to initiate preparatory actions. The Generic Planning Section of the Mission Planning Service within DPKO is now tasked with devising several "templates" of peace operations, along with model standard operating procedures, and will refine them in the light of experience. These templates will help contingency planning efforts. With a limited staff, however, it has insufficient strength to do more than generic planning. A sensitive political issue within the UN is contingency planning for particular countries or regions. Although there is bound to be sensitivity to the drafting of crisis scenarios, resistance is gradually being overcome, as Member States recognize that the absence of contingency planning effectively renders the UN unable to react rapidly to crisis situations.

The logical extension of contingency planning is preparatory activity, such as the preparation of maps, the identification of sources of equipment and supplies, the prepositioning of communications and the identification of possible troop contributing states. Such is the extreme sensitivity of Member States, however, that no action has been taken on an internal recommendation of 1994 that "DPKO should undertake a study of the political issues involved in preparatory activity prior to the adoption of a mandate for a peace-keeping mission."¹⁴ Ideally, on the basis of an early-warning

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