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A UN Operational-Level Headquarters

Indispensable to filling the vacuum at the operational level of the UN is creating a headquarters unit. It should be capable of rapid deployment under the authority of the Security Council and at the strategic direction of the Secretary-General, and it should function as an integral part of the UN Secretariat. Such a headquarters, which might consist of between 30 to 50 persons, would be responsible for the development of generic contingency plans and, as a crisis appeared to be imminent, for mission-specific contingency plans. Various proposals have been made for the creation of such a unit. The most basic have focussed upon a Member State making available to the UN the required planning and command and control element on a standby basis. Though they represent an improvement over the current system, such proposals fall short of the need in terms of multi-dimensionality, contingency planning capability and, above all, reliability.

Another approach at the operational level would be to envisage the establishment of a standby, deployable military and civilian headquarters drawn from a number of Member States, with individual contributions remaining in their countries in a "double-hatted" capacity. Personnel assigned to this headquarters would receive prior training so that they could be brought together periodically for exercises. They would receive mission-specific training from a crisis action team located in the UN Secretariat prior to an operation. This option provides for a joint, multi-functional, multinational operational-level headquarters. However, it could not be brought together sufficiently quickly for effective deployment in a crisis. Moreover, its ability to train effectively or to conduct sustained contingency planning would be extremely limited.

The most promising approach in the short to medium term, therefore, is the creation of a permanent cadre headquarters or dedicated operational-level planning cell, whose focus is the development of plans in accordance with political/strategic guidelines and tailored to available tactical assets. As the prospects of deployment neared, it would be charged with elaborating a mission concept of operations and advising the Secretary-General on the nature of a mission mandate. It would be multinational, drawing its personnel widely from Member States of all regions. It would also be multidimensional, reflecting the requirements of the more complex operations of the 1990s, with a substantial civilian staff of diverse experience in the areas of civilian police, humanitarian assistance, human rights, and legal affairs. This staff, seconded or loaned by Member States to the UN Secretariat, could be deployed into a theatre of operations under the authority of the Security Council and at the direction of the Secretary-General but without further authorization at the national level.

This operational-level headquarters should be capable of directing at least 5000 personnel, possibly more if the headquarters is augmented at the time of deployment. It would be intended to conduct a "first in, first out" operation, moving into an area rapidly but capable of being removed equally quickly, three to six months later, once an operation had terminated or a more traditionally-organized peace operation had been mounted. When not deployed, the headquarters would function in fixed accommodation at a specific location. Mobile equipment would be provided by Member States or purchased by the UN and stored nearby for training purposes and rapid deployment with the headquarters.