

TOWARDS A RAPID REACTION CAPABILITY FOR THE UNITED NATIONS



which are capable of covering all necessary functions in a peace operation and which are able to work together on short notice.

A key problem in the UN's response to crisis situations has been a shortage of civilian personnel with a full range of experience and expertise who could serve on relatively short notice in headquarters operations or in field missions. Urgent operations trigger enormous increases in workload, with commensurate demands for staff for deployment into the field or as staff for offices assigned to Special Representatives. These demands can rarely be met easily by a UN Secretariat which is not particularly large in the first place. This is particularly true when confronting new geographic situations, when there is likely to be a deficiency in linguistic capability or a lack of immediate diplomatic experience with the country or region concerned. Crisis situations can only be managed effectively by drawing on the good will and resources of interested Member States, which might be able to provide short-term assistance to the UN. The Secretary-General, in cooperation with Member States, should prepare for these contingencies by developing systems which can supply civilian personnel on short notice in the event of crisis.

15. In order to develop a pool of expertise to assist the UN in responding to urgent situations, Member States should explore the advance identification of personnel with expertise in relevant areas who could be seconded into the UN Secretariat for short-term assignments.

In order to refine further the Standby Arrangements System, the UN, in conjunction with Member States, should consider convening annual meetings of all states with standby arrangements, as well as those which have given notice of their intention to conclude a MOU. These meetings would focus on key operational issues likely to arise as standby arrangements are triggered by the UN: training standards, the formation of capability components, guidelines to promote inter-operability, etc. While they need not constitute a formal, decision-making body, these meetings would build familiarity with the standby arrangements system, help to instill greater confidence among troop contributors and work towards changes in practice which could enhance the ability of Member States to work together.

The Operational Level

The most serious problems in peace operations within the UN system are found at the operational level, where there is a virtual vacuum in terms of any reasonable capability. The planning and organization of missions are invariably undertaken on an *ad hoc* basis, delaying a coherent UN response to conflict by months in virtually every case. The former Commander of NATO's AMF(L), Major-General (ret'd) A. G. Christie, has written, the UN "is forced to begin planning for every operation virtually on a clean sheet of paper under tight time pressures.... As a result, the UN has often been criticized for its slow response to meet the operational requirement."³³ While missions are being planned, functions best undertaken at the operational and tactical levels are attempted at the strategic level, thus fostering an unhealthy degree of centralization at UN headquarters, confusion among levels of authority, and slow reaction time where rapidity and effectiveness are paramount.

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