



CHAPTER FOUR

ELEMENTS OF RAPID REACTION: HOW THE UN SHAPES UP

"In its essential characteristics, the UN system for planning, organising and supporting peacekeeping operations in the field remains largely unchanged since the end of the Cold War. As a system management it evolved out of the experience of peacekeeping in the Middle East, and for its effective functioning it has always relied heavily on improvisation, ad hoc procedures and close working relationships among members of the Secretariat in New York and between officers and civilian personnel in the field..."

Mats R. Berdal, 1993

From "Steady-State" to Rapid Reaction

The rapid deployment of a peacekeeping or peace support operation is a complex undertaking involving all four levels at which governments or inter-governmental organizations function. At the political level in the UN system, the Security Council establishes goals and transforms them into political directives, while Member States and the Council determine the allocation of resources used to achieve these objectives. At the strategic level, the Secretary-General and the UN Secretariat identify the means to achieve these political goals. The link between strategy and tactics is made at the operational level, where resources are allocated and directed to achieve operational objectives in fulfillment of strategic goals. The achievement of tactical objectives in field operations contributes to the accomplishment of the operational mission. In essence, this discussion is an examination of how the UN is organized to manage crises and deploy the forces of Member States in response to crisis. Effective crisis management involves the coordination and integration into the planning and implementation process of all levels, achieving the objectives of unity of purpose and unity of effort.

Deploying missions which can act effectively and rapidly can be an expensive undertaking. Costs mount in direct proportion to the size of an operation, the sophistication of the equipment used and the higher states of readiness of forces from contributing states. When these groups and the infrastructure supporting them are multinational, however, there are advantages of sharing the costs among many participating states. No single state is obliged to assume the high costs of creating a full capability on its own, and each state can offer national assets which reflect its strengths and capacities. Many of the fixed costs of developing a peace operation can be spread among several states, thus lowering the overhead for all participating countries. Nevertheless, there are significant resource implications which must be weighed if an overall rapid-reaction capability is to be cost-effective for the UN.

When one compares the generic components of rapid reaction identified in the previous chapter and the current capabilities of the United Nations, it is evident that the UN suffers from a number of serious deficiencies. The structure and operations of the UN Secretariat have largely been shaped by its experience in implementing "steady-state" peacekeeping operations, which are usually slow to mount, involving months of preparations. During the Cold War, this was the most that could be

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