



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE RECORD OF RAPID REACTION: RECENT EXPERIENCE

*"On 7 August 1990 President Bush directed the deployment of US forces in response to a request for assistance from the Government of Saudi Arabia. The first US soldier was on the ground within 31 hours of the alert order. What followed was the fastest build-up and movement of forces across greater distances in less time than at any other point in history."*

*US Department of Defense, Report to Congress,  
April 1992*

### The Concept of Rapid Reaction

The concept of a rapid-reaction capability is not a new one. In recognition of the need to deploy large numbers of persons in relatively short periods of time, many states and multinational organizations have created elements for this purpose, mainly but not exclusively within their armed forces. The deployment of a mission consisting of several thousand personnel to an area devastated by natural disaster or by conflict is a massive undertaking. Infrastructure may well have been destroyed. There may be significant numbers of displaced persons or refugees requiring assistance of all kinds. Measures may need be taken for the control of contagious disease, often in appalling conditions. Where there is a breakdown of order, banditry may be rampant. Distances between the crisis centre and transportation and logistics resources may be substantial, with important consequences for the supply of personnel and goods.

In response to these situations, states and organizations have built rapid-reaction capabilities which, although functioning in different ways, focus mainly on planning, decision-making, personnel, logistics, transportation and equipment. These and other "generic components" of rapid reaction are the elements which the UN must also acquire if its future rapid-reaction capability is to be as successful and effective as the efforts of states and other organizations. To assess these generic components of rapid reaction, and place them into a UN context, this study has examined three examples of proven and effective rapid-reaction capabilities. Two are national examples (France and the United States), and one is an international organization (NATO). In all three cases, a rapid-reaction capability was developed in response to a perceived need to react quickly to crises, designed to address both general and specific challenges to national or international interests.

In all three of these cases, a strong emphasis has been placed on joint planning, encouraging the involvement at all stages of the planning process of agencies likely to be involved in the implementation phases. The result is an integrated and coherent approach, indispensable for success, which we have described at the political and strategic levels as "unity of purpose" in peace operations. In a national context, the military component of such an operation can only achieve maximum effectiveness if it is organized in strict adherence with the principle of "unity of command". In a multinational context, with a number of different military units and both military and

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