

Backgrounder

IMPROVING THE UN'S RAPID REACTION CAPABILITY: A CANADIAN STUDY

Introduction

At the UN General Assembly in September 1994, Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet proposed a concrete step toward the goal of enhancing the UN's responsiveness in the field of peace operations. In committing Canada to making a direct contribution to this end, Mr. Ouellet said:

The experience of the last few years leads us to believe that we need to explore even more innovative options than those considered to date. Recent peacekeeping missions have shown that the traditional approach no longer applies. As we have seen in Rwanda, rapid deployment of intervention forces is essential.

In light of the situation, the Government of Canada has decided to conduct an in-depth review of the short-, medium- and long-term options available to us to strengthen the UN's rapid response capability in times of crisis. Among these options, we feel that the time has come to study the possibility, over the long term, of creating a permanent UN military force. We will ask the world's leading experts for their input and will inform all member states of the results of the study.

The Government of Canada has now begun this extensive study.

Context

The rapid increase in the size, scope and number of peace operations since the end of the Cold War reflects both the ongoing transformation of the international system and the new expectation that the United Nations can and should play a pivotal role in the emerging global order. There have been both startling successes and troublesome failures among the over 21 new missions launched since 1988. However, no firm consensus has developed regarding how and why UN peace operations succeed, or on when the UN should avoid engagement in a given situation that is not yet amenable to an effective peace mission.

Certainly, there have been many recent improvements in how the UN undertakes peace operations. These range from greater political understanding of the mechanism itself in member state capitals, to enhancement of the means available to the Secretary-General in