



CHAPTER ONE

WHY RAPID REACTION?

"Are we to go on from crisis to crisis improvising in haste? Or can we now pool our experience and our resources, so that the next time we, the governments and peoples whom the United Nations represents, will be ready and prepared to act?"

Lester B. Pearson, 1957

The UN at 50

Fifty years after the creation of the United Nations (UN), the Organization is at a decisive time in its evolution. For fifty years, it helped to avoid major wars and contain the damage and destruction of conflict. In the area of international peace and security, it built a solid foundation for peacekeeping, perhaps its most famous and successful innovation. It met the newer conflicts of the post Cold-War era with adaptability and imagination, mobilizing the international system to confront a new range of difficulties through peacekeeping operations of increasing size and complexity.

Despite these evident accomplishments, the UN has come under assault in recent years. In the area of peace operations, a few unsuccessful operations have sullied the Organization's name and led to increased criticism of its performance. The range and complexity of the conflicts in which the UN has been invited to act have increased the risks to peacekeepers and led to doubts about the Organization's capacities. In some cases, publics have grown sceptical about peace operations and governments have become resistant to the financial demands of an over-burdened international system. The UN is now in financial crisis, with the peacekeeping system of the past forty years in serious danger.

Yet in the face of this adversity, the Secretary-General, members of the UN Secretariat and military and civilian peacekeepers drawn from more than 75 UN Member States have continued to serve with distinction in their quest for stability and security through more effective multilateral cooperation. Fifty years after San Francisco, there continues to be a recognition that multilateral cooperation is preferable to unilateralism, and that action by the UN in the name of the international community confers a legitimacy that is well worth the difficulties of blending the efforts of many states of varying backgrounds and cultures.

This study examines the current UN approach to providing a more rapid response to crisis situations. Its essential conclusion is a reaffirmation of broad support for the general directions of the Secretary-General and the UN Secretariat in building its peace operations capability for the future. At a time of financial crisis, and in the midst of several significant operations, it is turning what was once a modest foundation for peacekeeping operations into a modern instrument for the promotion of peace and the management of conflict through adherence to the objective of unity of purpose and effort. The task is not an easy one. It would be difficult enough even with adequate resources. In the face of considerable financial pressures, it is a monumental task, all too little appreciated in many parts of the world.

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