



CHAPTER SIX

A VISION OF THE FUTURE:

THE LONG-TERM PROSPECTS FOR RAPID REACTION

"The fact that the theoretically best solution is not at present politically feasible does not mean that the system must simply muddle on indefinitely in its present condition. A great deal can be achieved without constitutional change, by changes in such salient features as geography, legal mandates and behaviour."

Sir Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers, 1993.

Balancing Pragmatism and Vision

The focus of this report is on identifying practical proposals to enhance the UN's rapid-reaction capability in the short to medium term, given the current and foreseeable political and financial conditions of the UN system. These conditions do not preclude innovation. Indeed, most of the recommendations of the report call for significant changes in the way the UN conducts peace operations. But current conditions, especially on the financial side, define the parameters within which options can be considered practical. Simply put, the ideal may not be practicable in light of various constraints binding today's UN.

The search for the practical, however, should not stifle vision. Current conditions are not immutable. In conducting this study, we have therefore sought to strike a balance between pragmatism and vision, placing emphasis on what is feasible under current and foreseeable conditions, while seeking to engage the debate on what may be desirable in the longer term.

The recommendations already outlined are practical and realizable under present or foreseeable political and financial conditions. They may prove insufficient, however, in remedying all of the deficiencies in the UN's capacity to react rapidly. Clearly, the first step is to implement these ideas before embarking upon more far-reaching schemes which may in the end prove unnecessary. Ultimately, whether further action is required will depend upon the perceived gravity of the outstanding problems, as well as the cost and effectiveness of measures needed to rectify them. Because reform may prove to be a slow process, it is relevant now to begin longer-term thinking about logical next steps.

In looking ahead, this chapter addresses four separate issues. The first is the question of how new, advanced technologies can be placed at the service of the UN both to increase effectiveness and also to reduce costs, mainly those associated with the deployment of personnel. The second issue is increasing the supply of specialized components of a rapid-reaction capability, especially civilian police, where demands have become especially acute. The third concern is the viability of a UN Standing Emergency Group. Lastly, the chapter looks at financial issues and the need for the UN to secure an independent source of revenue over the long term.

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