United Nations Peacekeeping

Challenges Obtaining Needed Resources Could Limit Further Large Deployments and Should be Addressed in U.S. Reports to Congress

What GAO Found

UN peacekeeping operations since 1998 have taken on increasingly ambitious mandates, been located in more challenging environments, and grown in size and scope. UN operations in 1998 averaged three mandated tasks, such as observing cease-fires; in 2008, they averaged nine more ambitious tasks, such as restoring government institutions. Operations in 2008 were located in some of the world’s most unstable countries, were larger and more complex than in 1998, and deployed thousands of civilians.

Based on trends in peacekeeping and recent UN planning options, GAO analysis indicates that a potential new operation would likely be large and complex, take place in sub-Saharan Africa, and have nine mandated tasks. This potential new operation would likely require member states to contribute 21,000 troops and military observers, including those in engineering and aviation units, and 1,500 police to carry out the mandate. The UN would likely need to deploy 4,000 to 5,000 civilians. The operation’s logistics needs also would be large and complex.

The ability to fully deploy any potential new operation would likely face challenges, in view of current UN resource constraints. As of September 2008, ongoing UN operations had about a 20 percent gap between troops and military observers authorized to carry out operations and actual deployments. For police, the gap was about 34 percent; it was similar for civilians. (See figure.) Some gaps reflect UN difficulties in obtaining and deploying resources to carry out operations. Lack of these resources, such as special military units, prevented some operations from executing mandates. Lack of infrastructure in the potential new operation’s environment would challenge the UN to provide logistical needs.

What GAO Recommends

To ensure Congress has the information needed to consider U.S. budget and other requests for peacekeeping, GAO recommends that the Department of State (State) include in its reporting to Congress information about UN challenges and gaps in obtaining resources needed to carry out peacekeeping. In response to State’s comment that GAO should not specify the reports in which this information should be provided, GAO modified the recommendation. The UN concurred with the conclusions of the report.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on GAO-09-142. For more information, contact Joseph A. Christoff at (202) 512-8979 or christoffj@gao.gov.