United Nations Peacekeeping

Lines of Authority for Field Procurement Remain Unclear, but Reforms Have Addressed Some Issues

What GAO Found

The United Nations (UN) is in the process of restructuring and strengthening its organization for peacekeeping management, but has not resolved the issue of authority for field procurement, which is fundamental to the restructuring. Instead, the authority for field procurement remains divided between two departments, leaving the lines of accountability and responsibility for field procurement unclear. See figure. Member states are also concerned that the head of the new Department of Field Support reports to and takes direction from the head of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on matters related to peacekeeping missions. The UN has not yet appointed several key senior-level staff for both departments, at a critical time in the restructuring.

UN Field Procurement Process (for procurements requiring HQ review; $500,000 and above)

The UN has made some progress in implementing procurement reforms to improve internal controls and processes. For example, the UN Secretariat has established financial disclosure requirements for all staff involved in the procurement process, expanded training for peacekeeping staff and updated its procurement manual. However, these efforts have not addressed some previously identified concerns, including difficulties in attracting and retaining field procurement staff and in applying procurement processes in the field.

The UN Logistics Base (UNLB) in Brindisi, Italy, provides important communications and logistical support to peacekeeping operations and has expanded considerably since 2002. UNLB maintains the UN’s worldwide information and technology network and provides peacekeeping missions with stocks that are essential during start-up. In response to peacekeeping mandates, UNLB has further expanded to take on tasks such as training and aviation support. However, its growth over the past 5 to 6 years has raised concerns of the General Assembly, which requested that it clarify its role and future development plans.