

# Lessons Learned from the UN's Transition in Côte d'Ivoire

ALEXANDRA NOVOSSELOFF



**Cover Photo:** Aïchatou Mindaoudou Souleymane (left), Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), attends the inauguration ceremony of the Centre for Listening to Women in Duékoué, Cote d'Ivoire. May 22, 2015, UN Photo/Abdul Fatai Adegboye.

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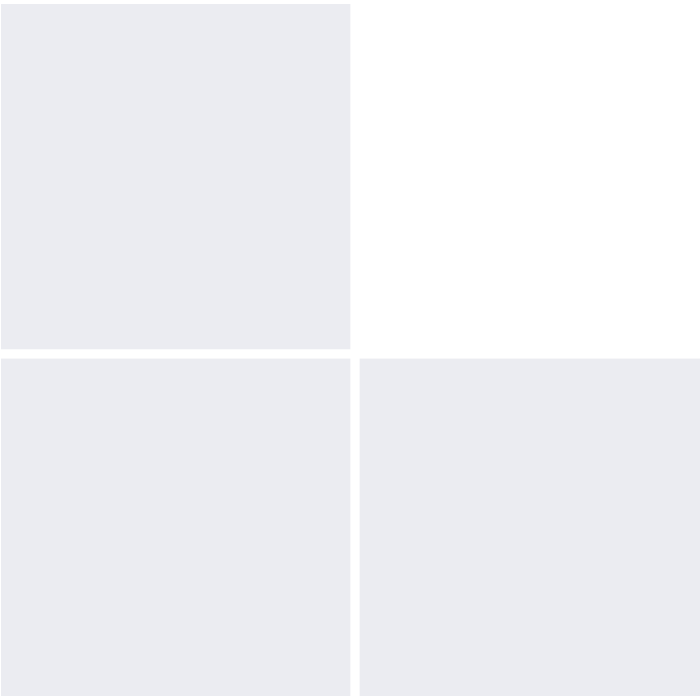
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## Abbreviations

DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DPA	UN Department of Political Affairs
DPKO	UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations
SRSg	Special representative of the secretary-general
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNMIL	UN Mission in Liberia
UNOCI	UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire
UNOWAS	UN Regional Office for West Africa and the Sahel



## Executive Summary

In April 2016, after four years of progressive downsizing, the Security Council decided to close the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) within a year. Over the course of thirteen years, the mission had extended throughout the country and overcome many challenges, in particular the 2010–2011 post-election crisis. After this tumultuous post-election episode, the security situation stabilized quickly, inaugurating a new era for the UN in the country. The peaceful holding of the 2015 presidential elections made the drawdown of the mission a certainty.

This decision to close UNOCI reflected the international context, dynamics in the Security Council, and views of the host-country government. In 2013–2015, the Security Council, and the UN at large, were in search of a demonstrable success for peacekeeping in Africa, as the UN prepared to open two new major missions. For their part, the Ivorian authorities wanted to show the rest of the world that they no longer needed a peacekeeping operation—particularly after the 2015 elections, and their campaign to get a non-permanent seat in the Security Council. This convergence in interests led to a consensus that it was time for UNOCI to leave and hand over to the UN country team with no follow-on mission.

The transition encompassed several steps, starting with the parallel drawdown of the military, police, and civilian components. The mission also elaborated benchmarks and indicators to guide the sequencing of the transition. While these were not widely used, they helped the mission shape its internal transition plan—one of several plans developed over the course of 2016.

Despite this transition planning, the UN country team lacked adequate capacity to take on the responsibilities the mission passed on to it in June 2017. There was no proper handover at UN headquarters, and mission leadership in the field was largely preoccupied with completing its mandate. As a result, the country team was left unaware of some of the mission's activities and had little capacity to take over tasks in areas such as

political analysis and the rule of law. Moreover, many donors were scaling back their presence at the same time as the mission, leaving the country team with no additional funding to support its expanded responsibilities.

Ultimately, the transition of UNOCI highlighted two main challenges. First, the Security Council viewed the transition as a political process, intended to send a political signal. In Côte d'Ivoire, the council's objective of withdrawing the mission superseded all others, leading it to underestimate, if not overlook, the continued peacebuilding needs of the country. Second, the transition was accompanied by waning donor interest, undercutting programming by the country team in priority areas like reconciliation, security sector reform, human rights, and land tenure. As a result, the transition was abrupt, without sustained dialogue, capacity transfer, or financial fluidity between UNOCI and the country team—issues that might have been mitigated by a political mission. Rather than an end in themselves, peacekeeping transitions should be conceived as a means to ensure sustainable peace.

## Introduction

In April 2016, after four years of progressive downsizing, the Security Council decided to close the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) within a year. During its thirteen years in the country, the mission's presence had extended to sixty-four locations, and it had overcome many challenges, in particular the 2010–2011 post-election crisis.<sup>1</sup> As the secretary-general pointed out in one of his last reports on UNOCI, Côte d'Ivoire was “at the edge of a precipice” when the mission deployed in April 2004, but “five years after the post-elections crisis of 2010–2011, Côte d'Ivoire is well along on the path to enduring peace and stability, as well as economic prosperity.”<sup>2</sup>

After this tumultuous post-election episode, the security situation quickly stabilized, inaugurating a new era for the UN in the country. Special Representative of the Secretary-General Choi Young-jin (from the Republic of Korea) was replaced by Bert Koenders (from the Netherlands). UNOCI also shifted toward new priorities

<sup>1</sup> For a full account of the work of UNOCI and lessons learned from its mandate, see Alexandra Novosseloff, “The Many Lives of a Peacekeeping Operation: The UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire,” International Peace Institute, June 2018.

<sup>2</sup> UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2016/297, March 31, 2016, para. 74.



including supporting President Alassane Ouattara, who wanted to take full ownership of the post-crisis stabilization of his country, particularly after his victory in the presidential elections of December 2015 further strengthened his legitimacy.

If before the 2015 presidential elections the transition of the mission was a possibility, it became a certainty afterward. The Security Council and UN Secretariat envisaged a drawdown of UNOCI and a transfer of its residual activities to the government, the UN country team (UNCT), and other bilateral and multilateral partners. A two-year transition process led to the formal closing of the mission in June 2017 (two months after operations were terminated) and handover to the UNCT.

This policy paper examines the political dynamics in Côte d'Ivoire and in the Security Council that led to the decision to withdraw UNOCI. It also looks at the different stages of the withdrawal and handover (in terms of context, calendar, and process), analyzing the gaps and shortcomings, both external and internal, that left the UNCT ill-prepared to take over.<sup>3</sup>

## The Context: Rapid Stabilization after the Post-Election Crisis

In 2015, the Security Council, and the UN at large, were in search of a peacekeeping success story in Africa.<sup>4</sup> Despite the many challenges faced by the mission, UNOCI's management of the 2010–2011 post-election crisis provided the needed success. The presence and actions of the peacekeepers on the ground upheld the results of democratic presidential elections and ultimately forced out the defeated incumbent. In the mandate and posture of UNOCI, there was clearly a pre- and post-2011. As stated by the secretary-general, "The apprehension of former President [Laurent] Gbagbo closed a

painful chapter in the history of Côte d'Ivoire."<sup>5</sup> It also inaugurated a new era for the UN presence in the country.

With the rapid stabilization of the country's security after the post-election crisis, there was pressure within the Security Council to put the downsizing and closure of UNOCI on the table. The progressive withdrawal of UNOCI started in the summer of 2012 when the Security Council endorsed the secretary-general's proposal to reduce the authorized strength of the military component from 9,792 to 8,837 personnel.<sup>6</sup> At the time, this initial step was viewed less as the start of a withdrawal than an adjustment to bring the level of troops back to what it had been before the post-election crisis. Nevertheless, it initiated UNOCI's drawdown, which accelerated after the successful presidential elections of December 2015.

In the Security Council, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire had always been left in the hands of France, as Liberia had been for the United States. The other members of the council tended to go along with the conflict analysis and recommendations of France.<sup>7</sup> After the crisis and throughout the mission's withdrawal, member states of the council were united on the need to close the peacekeeping chapter of Côte d'Ivoire's history, for various reasons.<sup>8</sup>

France and other members of the council wanted to reduce the budget of peacekeeping operations amid deliberations on two new large, multidimensional operations in Mali (MINUSMA, in 2013) and the Central African Republic (MINUSCA, in 2014), each with more than 10,000 uniformed personnel. There was a need to shift attention to these new crises and operations and to take an item off the agenda of the council. The United Kingdom and the United States—which also had financial considerations in mind—wanted to show that the council would not keep a UN mission on the ground beyond when it was needed. For the United States, closing UNOCI was also a way to keep the

3 This policy paper draws on a series of interviews conducted in Côte d'Ivoire in November 2017 and in New York mainly in June 2018.

4 The United Nations also successfully closed the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) in 2011, the UN Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) in December 2012, and the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) in March 2014.

5 UN Security Council, *Twenty-Eighth Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2011/387, June 24, 2011, para. 78.

6 UN Security Council Resolution 2062 (July 26, 2012), UN Doc. S/RES/2062.

7 A notable exception was the post-election crisis, when Russia and South Africa, in particular, disagreed with France's position. See Arthur Boutellis and Alexandra Novosseloff, "Côte d'Ivoire," in *The UN Security Council in the 21st Century*, Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone, and Bruno Stagno Ugarte, eds., New York: IPI/Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2015.

8 Interview with diplomat from a permanent mission, New York, June 2018.



UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) open longer, as Liberia was not yet ready to see its peacekeeping mission leave.<sup>9</sup> China and Russia, as well as the African countries on the council,<sup>10</sup> went along with the closure to support the request by the government of Côte d'Ivoire that UNOCI withdraw.

The Ivorian authorities wanted to show the rest of the world that with 9 percent annual growth, their country did not need a peacekeeping operation anymore, particularly as it was campaigning for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for 2018–2019. The government wanted to move away from the image of a country in crisis toward one that was peacekeeping-free. It also sought to have sanctions lifted as soon as possible—though that process unfolded gradually, with the sanctions lifted “just before deciding to terminate the mandate of UNOCI.”<sup>11</sup> The whole process was what the authorities called a “normalization.”<sup>12</sup>

The credible and peaceful 2015 elections, which Alassane Ouattara won with over 83 percent of the vote, further strengthened the president's legitimacy, as well as his calls for the mission's withdrawal.<sup>13</sup> This reduced the influence of UN leadership and entities on the contents of the transition plans put on the table (including UNOCI's transition plan and the 2016–2020 national development plan; see below). After the Security Council initiated the process of withdrawal, the Ivorian government largely shaped the transition to fit its official rhetoric, with support from the French government in particular.

Ultimately, the UN mission, UNCT, and UN leadership in New York could not or were not willing to provide checks and balances on the government. In particular, they did not offer a

counterargument to the government's prioritization of economic growth over justice and reconciliation, nor its related desire not to have a follow-on political mission. Moreover, they swiftly reduced personnel in the mission's human rights section, which many considered should have remained open until the end of the mission (it closed in 2016).<sup>14</sup> As the secretary-general acknowledged,

For many observers, the human rights efforts of the United Nations in Côte d'Ivoire concluded prematurely, given the fragility of national human rights institutions. Although the Government was not willing to consider the establishment of a stand-alone human rights office within the United Nations country team after the closure of UNOCI, the continuing engagement of an independent human rights expert could have played a useful role in advising the Ivorian authorities as they build stronger human rights and transitional justice mechanisms.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the government's narrative and the UN's reluctance to counter it, the Security Council and the secretary-general reiterated, until the end, the remaining challenges facing Côte d'Ivoire. The Security Council presidential statement of June 30, 2017 stressed the “important work ahead to further advance peace and justice and to secure equitable prosperity for the benefit of all Ivoirians.” It also emphasized “the need for continued progress, following UNOCI's withdrawal, in the fight against impunity, the advancement of national reconciliation and social cohesion, the full and equal participation of women in government and public institutions, the reform of the security sector, the promotion and protection of human rights..., as well as the management of refugee returns, statelessness, and land tenure.” As a result, in 2017, Côte d'Ivoire was added to the agenda of the secretary-general's Executive Committee, where it

9 See Daniel Forti and Lesley Connolly, “The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying: Liberia's Peacekeeping Transition,” International Peace Institute, December 2018.

10 Morocco, Rwanda, and Togo in 2013; Chad, Nigeria, and Rwanda in 2014; Angola, Chad, and Nigeria in 2015; and Angola, Egypt, and Senegal in 2016.

11 As explained by the last report of the Secretary-General, “The sanctions were a tool for the Security Council to encourage progress on an action plan for the Kimberley Process and to set up internal controls system for trade in rough diamonds, as well as progress on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration and security sector reform, national reconciliation and the fight against impunity.” UN Security Council, Special Report of the Secretary-General on the role of UNOCI, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 66.

12 Cyrille Louis, “Ouattara veut normaliser la Côte d'Ivoire par les urnes,” *Le Figaro*, December 9, 2011.

13 However, the participation rate was less than 54.63 percent, down from more than 80 percent five years earlier, and the elections were partially boycotted by the Ivorian Popular Front (Front populaire ivoirien, or FPI), the party of former President Laurent Gbagbo. “Présidentielle ivoirienne: La carte des résultats et du taux de participation région par région,” *Jeune Afrique*, October 29, 2015. See also Christian Bouquet and Irène Kassi-Djodjo, “L'élection présidentielle de 2015 en Côte d'Ivoire: Une victoire pour Ouattara, mais pas un plébiscite,” *EchoGéo*, February 15, 2016, available at <http://echogeo.revues.org/14454>.

14 According to one interlocutor, “This proposal was made by the mission and approved by the Secretariat without the knowledge and consent of the deputy SRSR in charge of the pillar.” Interview with former UN official, Abidjan, November 2017.

UN Security Council, Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of UNOCI, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 99.

15 UN Security Council, Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of UNOCI, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 80.

remains under review to date.<sup>16</sup>

This convergence of international and domestic factors therefore led to a consensus that it was time for the UN operation to leave Côte d'Ivoire. In April 2016, the Security Council decided to extend the mandate of UNOCI "for a final period until 30 June 2017."<sup>17</sup> The French Operation Licorne, which had had 4,000 troops at its height, was replaced on January 21, 2015, by the French Forces in Côte d'Ivoire with a contingent of about 400 soldiers. The February 2016 strategic assessment commissioned by the secretary-general led to the conclusion that "the trajectory of Côte d'Ivoire is positive and consequently no successor United Nations presence is recommended beyond that of the country team... which is consistent with the views of the Government."<sup>18</sup>

At the time, many upheld a circular logic that if UNOCI was planning to exit, the country must be on the right track. That discourse, based largely on

economic indicators, shaped the transition process. All sides felt the need to present a success story and facilitate a rapid transition. Yet, as one interlocutor pointed out, the argument should have been the other way around: "The country is on the right track, so UNOCI can leave."<sup>19</sup>

As a result, while UNOCI had been able to build on the work of a political mission when it first deployed,<sup>20</sup> it had to phase out without any follow-on special political mission that might have made the transition more gradual. As pointed out by the secretary-general in his last report, "no United Nations successor mission was seriously considered, owing primarily to the position of the Government and given the country's relatively strong national institutions."<sup>21</sup> The result was that UNOCI had to immediately hand over to a small and underfunded UN country team (there were only three or four international staff in the office of the resident coordinator), as well as to the UN

**Table 1. Security Council decisions on withdrawal and transition of UNOCI**

<p><b>Resolution 2062</b> July 26, 2012</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Endorses</i> the Secretary-General's recommendation for a reduction of the equivalent of one battalion as part of UNOCI's military component.</li> <li>• <i>Requests</i> the Secretary-General to submit a special report containing (i) benchmarks to measure and track progress towards the achievement of long-term stability in Côte d'Ivoire and to prepare the transition planning; (ii) recommendations on possible adjustments in UNOCI's structure and strength, in particular its military and police components, based on the prevailing situation on the ground and threats to Côte d'Ivoire's sustainable peace and stability and the capacity of Ivorian institutions to effectively meet such challenges.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Resolution 2112</b> July 30, 2013</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Decides</i> that UNOCI's uniformed personnel shall be reconfigured by 30 June 2014.</li> <li>• <i>Affirms its intention</i> to consider a further reduction so that UNOCI shall consist of up to 5437 military personnel by 30 June 2015, based on the evolution of security conditions on the ground and an improved capacity of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to gradually take over UNOCI's security role.</li> <li>• <i>Requests</i> the Secretary-General to conduct a review of UNOCI's mandate by undertaking an analysis of the respective comparative advantages of UNOCI and the UNCT.</li> </ul>

16 Security Council Resolution 2284 (April 28, 2016), UN Doc. S/RES/2284.

17 UN Security Council, Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of UNOCI, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 80.

18 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2016/297, March 31, 2016, para. 83.

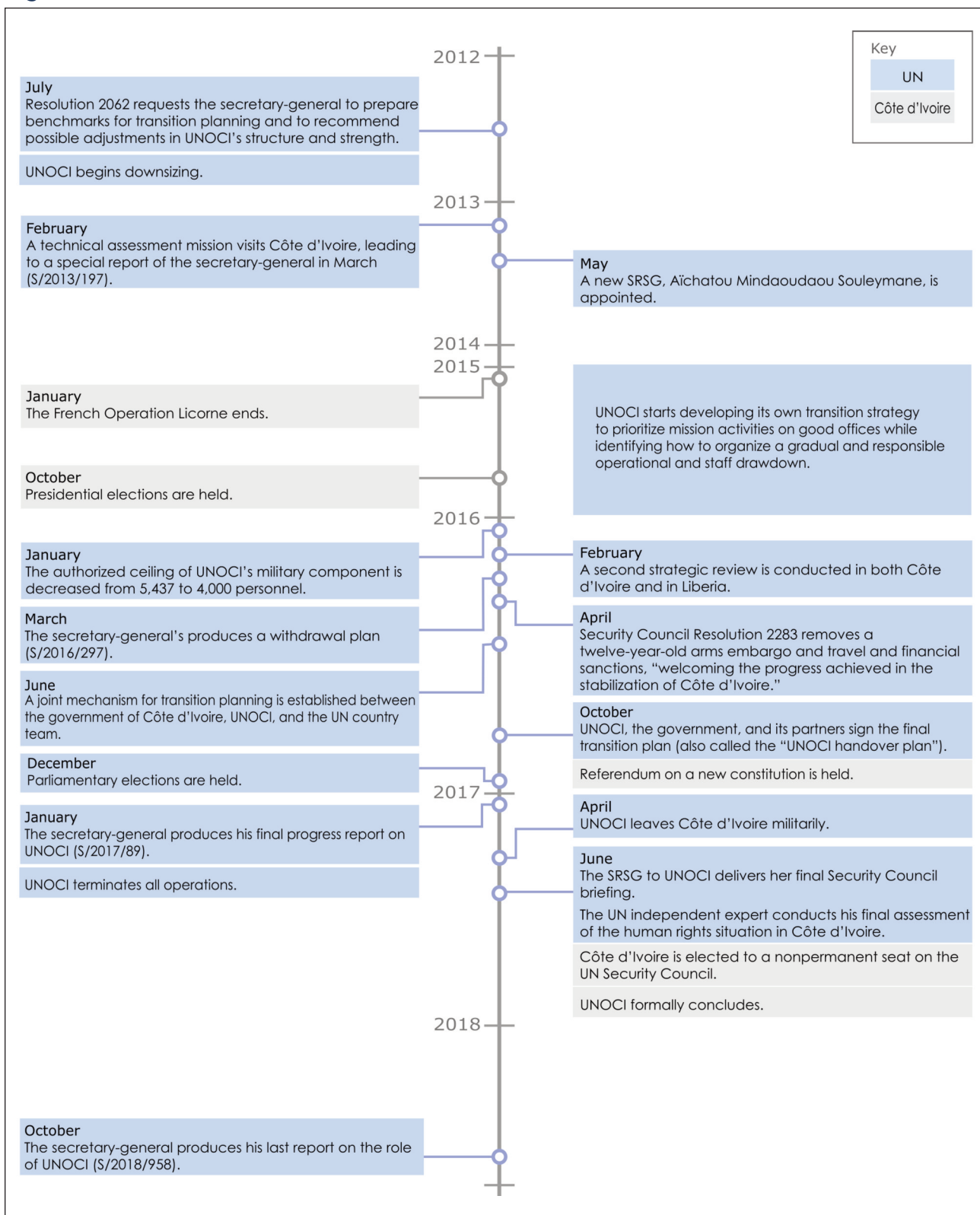
19 Interview with non-UN official, Abidjan, November 2017.

20 After the signing of the Linas-Marcoussis agreement (February 2003) and another cease-fire agreement, the Security Council decided in Resolution 1479 (May 3, 2003) to establish a UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI) to monitor implementation of the French-brokered agreement and form a liaison group of about seventy military observers to build confidence and trust between the armed groups. It was deployed alongside the Economic Community of West African States' Peace Force for Côte d'Ivoire (ECOFORCE), which had difficulty deploying its troops.

21 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 70. According to one interlocutor, the SRSG would have initially be in favor of such a configuration. Interview with official at UN headquarters, New York, June 2018.

<b>Resolution 2162</b> June 25, 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Affirms its intention</i> to consider further downsizing UNOCI, reviewing its mandate and its possible termination after the October 2015 presidential election based on security conditions on the ground and the capacity of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to take over UNOCI's security role.</li> </ul>
<b>Resolution 2226</b> June 25, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Acknowledges</i> the reconfiguration of UNOCI's military presence to concentrate resources in high-risk areas, as decided in its resolution 2112 (2013), expresses support for the new mobile concept of operations of UNOCI's military component, and requests UNOCI to further update its configuration in this regard after the additional downsizing of its military personnel, with a view to consolidating its locations and bases, focusing on the west and other high-risk areas as appropriate, while shifting to a mobile posture and enhancing its situational awareness and early warning capabilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Resolution 2260</b> January 20, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Decides</i> to decrease the authorized ceiling of UNOCI's military component from 5,437 to 4,000 military personnel by 31 March 2016.</li> </ul>
<b>Resolution 2283</b> April 28, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Decides</i> to terminate, with immediate effect, the measures concerning arms and related materiel in paragraph 1 of resolution 2219 (2015), first imposed in paragraph 7 of resolution 1572 (2004), as well as the travel and financial measures imposed in paragraphs 9 to 12 of resolution 1572 (2004) and paragraph 12 of resolution 1975 (2011), as subsequently renewed, including in paragraph 12 of resolution 2219 (2015).</li> <li>• <i>Decides</i> further to dissolve with immediate effect the Committee established by paragraph 14 of resolution 1572 (2004) and the Group of Experts established pursuant to paragraph 7 of resolution 1584 (2005), and subsequently extended, including in paragraph 25 of resolution 2219 (2015).</li> </ul>
<b>Resolution 2284</b> April 28, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Endorses</i> the Secretary-General's withdrawal plan, including phased force reductions, as recommended in his special report of 31 March 2016 (S/2016/297).</li> <li>• <i>Decides</i> that from 1 May to 30 June 2017 the mandate of UNOCI shall be to complete the Mission's closure as described in paragraph 61 of the special report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/297) and to finalize the transition process to the Government of Côte d'Ivoire and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), including through any remaining political facilitation that may be required.</li> <li>• <i>Decides</i> to decrease UNOCI's military component and police component with the view to its complete withdrawal by 30 April 2017.</li> </ul>
<b>Presidential Statement 2017/8</b> June 30, 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Requests</i> the Secretary-General to undertake within a year, and within existing resources, a comprehensive study of the role of UNOCI in the settlement of the situation in Côte d'Ivoire since its establishment, taking into account the contributions of political mediation, the sanctions regime as well as other relevant factors as appropriate, that allowed for the successful completion of UNOCI's mandate. The Security Council looks forward to the results of this study, including further lessons learned and recommendations, and expresses its intention to consider options for taking them into account in the context of its ongoing work to enhance the overall effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping.</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Timeline of the transition in Côte d'Ivoire



Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to avail of its good offices as necessary.

## Steps toward the Transition: An Effective Handover?

The transition formally started with the multidisciplinary assessment mission sent by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) at the request of the secretary-general in February 2013. The 2015 presidential elections, however, were the main benchmark for deciding on the rhythm of the withdrawal of UNOCI. While the pace of downsizing was cautious before 2015, the process was fast-tracked after the successful elections.

Nonetheless, the downsizing of the UN mission was only one aspect of a transition process that the UN never defined as such, and each step was made conditional on the evolution of the security on the ground. The various steps of the transition were therefore predicated on the conclusions of strategic reviews conducted in February 2013 and February 2016. The first review concluded that “given the prevailing situation on the ground and the still-limited capacity of Ivorian institutions to effectively address continuing threats to the country’s long-term peace and stability, the

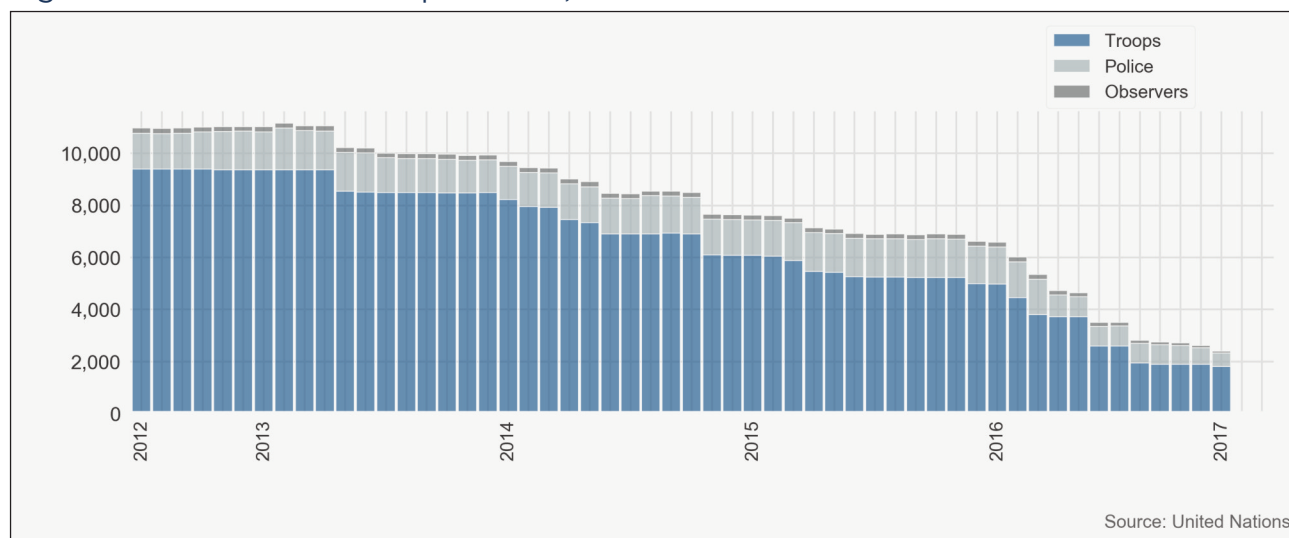
UNOCI presence remains necessary, albeit with some adjustments in its structure, strength and priorities.”<sup>22</sup> The second one, however, clearly concluded “that the situation in Côte d’Ivoire no longer poses a threat to peace and stability in the region.” It recommended that “all UNOCI military and police, as well as almost all civilian personnel, would depart the country by 30 April 2017, with the full closure of the mission completed by 30 June 2017.”<sup>23</sup>

The 2013 review also coincided with the appointment of a new SRSG, Aïchatou Mindaoudou Souleymane (a former minister of foreign affairs of Niger and former president of the Economic Community of West African States), on May 17, 2013.<sup>24</sup> When she took over the mission in July 2013, it was clear that she would be the SRSG who would oversee the transition of UNOCI.

### DOWNSIZING UNOCI: THE FIRST STEP

A drawdown starts a transition. In February 2012, the secretary-general sent an assessment mission to Côte d’Ivoire to look at initial measures that could be taken to begin the process of downsizing the mission (see Figure 2). The goal was to close the mission as soon as the political and security conditions on the ground would allow, “taking into account the holding of the legislative elections, the

Figure 2. Uniformed UNOCI personnel, 2012–2017



22 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2013/197, March 28, 2013, para. 55.

23 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2016/297, March 31, 2016, para. 82.

24 United Nations, “Secretary-General Appoints Aïchatou Mindaoudou Souleymane of Niger Special Representative for Côte d’Ivoire,” UN Doc. SG/A/1405-AFR/2621-BIO/4472, May 17, 2013.



prevailing security challenges and progress made in rebuilding national capacities.”<sup>25</sup> The assessment mission recommended a cautious reduction of the authorized military strength of UNOCI only in Abidjan by the equivalent of one battalion (600–850 troops).<sup>26</sup> That reduction was endorsed by Security Council Resolution 2062 in July 2012 (see Table 1). The resolution also requested another special report to suggest further force and structural adjustments, as well as “options to reinforce inter-mission cooperation arrangements between UNOCI and UNMIL, including for the conduct of coordinated and joint operations along and across the border” (where a direct attack on UNOCI had killed seven blue helmets from Niger on June 8, 2012).

Even as UNOCI was progressively downsized, the Security Council and Secretariat were constantly concerned with keeping the mission’s full operational capacity to support and secure the organization of the presidential elections in October 2015, a referendum on a new constitution in October 2016, and legislative elections in December 2016. Nonetheless, the mission planned for a smaller, monitoring role in these elections, as it no longer had a certification mandate as it had in 2010.

To ensure UNOCI had the capacity to support these elections, the council asked the mission to look at arrangements such as inter-mission cooperation with UNMIL. This cooperation entailed enhancing formal liaison and information sharing, conducting coordinated patrols, adopting a joint road map for addressing border security challenges, and agreeing on confidence-building activities in border areas.<sup>27</sup>

As an even more innovative measure, it created a “regional quick-reaction force” of 650 soldiers, “configured and equipped to address incidents in Côte d’Ivoire and, at the same time, to rapidly respond in Liberia in the event of a serious deterioration in security.”<sup>28</sup> As the secretary-general explained, this force was meant to “serve as a rapid response capability within the existing resources of

the missions and as a mitigation measure to address potential crises under the framework of intermission cooperation, with the added flexibility that the Secretariat could, in extremis, take the decision to deploy the unit outside of its parent mission.”<sup>29</sup>

Security Council Resolutions 2112 (July 30, 2013) and 2284 (April 28, 2016) authorized further reductions in the military and police force, reducing the mission’s strength from 9,792 military personnel in 2012 to 7,137 by June 30, 2014 (see Figure 1). UNOCI’s rule of law and corrections sections closed down in 2014. With Resolution 2162 (June 25, 2014), the council went even further than the recommendation of the 2013 strategic review and decided on a reduction of two battalions, bringing the number of uniformed personnel to 5,437 (instead of the recommended 6,037) by June 30, 2015. Resolution 2226 (June 25, 2015) maintained the strength of the operation during the electoral period. However, it also reaffirmed the council’s “intention to consider further downsizing UNOCI, reviewing its mandate and its possible termination after the October 2015 presidential election based on security conditions on the ground and the capacity of the Government of Côte d’Ivoire to take over UNOCI’s security role.”

After the 2015 elections, the process of downsizing the mission morphed into a transition phase that ultimately led to its closure. After the second strategic review in February 2016, Resolution 2284 (April 28, 2016) endorsed the secretary-general’s “withdrawal plan” for a further drawdown of the military component, leaving a residual presence of 4,000 military personnel by March 31, 2016 “with the view to its complete withdrawal by 30 April 2017.”

Throughout this process, the civilian and police components of the UN mission downsized in parallel to the military component. The number of individual police officers progressively decreased, reaching 250 by December 2016, with a focus on mentoring and providing operational support to the national police, gendarmerie, and transnational

25 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2012/186, March 29, 2012, paras. 1, 16.

26 *Ibid.*, para. 62.

27 UN Security Council, *Thirtieth Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2012/506, June 29, 2012, para. 53; *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2013/197, March 28, 2013, para. 28.

28 UN Security Council, *Thirty-Fourth Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2014/342, May 15, 2014, para. 68.

29 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 29.

crime unit.<sup>30</sup> The remaining officers were all fully repatriated in February 2017.

As prescribed by the two strategic reviews, the civilian component went through “a phased drawdown” while maintaining a focus on “its core priorities, in particular the protection of civilians, security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.” This continued substantive focus seemed to contradict the simultaneous drawdown, as staff were occupied looking for other opportunities outside the mission.<sup>31</sup> Between June and December 2016, nearly 560 civilian staff left UNOCI.<sup>32</sup> Further reductions in civilian staff occurred on a monthly basis through to April 30, 2017, at which point only 159 personnel remained, including 148 associated with the liquidation of UNOCI and 11 supporting the SRSG.<sup>33</sup>

The number of field offices was only reduced after the 2015 presidential elections. During the transition, these offices continued to monitor the overall situation in the country, provide ongoing analysis of developments (including in relation to the security situation) and support local mediation efforts.

#### ELABORATION OF BENCHMARKS: A WAY TO SHAPE A TRANSITION PLAN AND INVOLVE THE UNCT

In his first special report, the secretary-general mentioned the need for UNOCI and the UN country team to continue supporting the Ivorian authorities. This was necessary in order to

strengthen the political process, rebuild national capacities, support the conduct of sensitive security-related processes, strengthen State authority, promote justice and reconciliation, provide basic services, promote and protect human rights, and address the root causes of the conflict, while supporting efforts with respect to humanitarian assistance and economic recovery.<sup>34</sup>

To that end, the Security Council requested, in

Resolution 2062, that both entities “reconfigure within their existing capacities and reinforce their field presence, in order to enhance their coordinated support to the local authorities throughout Côte d’Ivoire.” It also requested the secretary-general to submit another special report containing “benchmarks to measure and track progress towards the achievement of long-term stability in Côte d’Ivoire and to prepare the transition planning.”

UN headquarters sent a multidisciplinary assessment mission to Côte d’Ivoire in February 2013 to help elaborate these benchmarks “in a few strategic areas, such as political and reconciliation; security and stability; extension of State authority and human rights; and humanitarian and socioeconomic development.” The aim was to “set out minimum conditions that would allow UNOCI to begin drawing down and preparing for the transition to a post-peacekeeping presence.”<sup>35</sup>

After consultation with the mission and the UN country team, three benchmarks—on security and stability; political dialogue and reconciliation; and justice and human rights—were presented in the secretary-general’s report of June 2013 (see Box 1).<sup>36</sup> In Resolution 2112 (July 30, 2013), the Security Council considered these benchmarks too broad and requested the secretary-general to refine them “by presenting detailed and actionable objectives.” Indeed, these benchmarks looked more like long-term governance and development objectives aimed at maintaining the presence of the UN rather than ending it. In a subsequent report, after “extensive consultations” and an agreement between the UN and the government, the secretary-general added a fourth benchmark on “the consolidation and restoration of State authority.”

The report also included a seven-page table on detailed “indicators of progress” for the period 2013–2016.<sup>37</sup> Some indicators were easy to assess,

30 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2016/297, March 31, 2016, para. 58.

31 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2013/377, June 26, 2013, para. 60; *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2016/297, March 31, 2016, para. 60.

32 *Final Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire*, UN Doc. S/2017/89, January 31, 2017, para. 52.

33 *Ibid.*; Interview with former UNOCI staff member, Abidjan, November 2017.

34 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2012/186, March 29, 2012, para. 60.

35 *Ibid.*, para. 67.

36 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2013/377, June 26, 2013, para. 70.

37 UN Security Council, *Thirty-Fourth Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2013/761, December 24, 2013, para. 64 and Annex I.



**Box 1. Benchmarks for drawdown and transition of UNOCI<sup>38</sup>**

**Security and stability:** Sustainable progress towards national reconciliation through inclusive political and social dialogue and the establishment of a credible and peaceful electoral cycle starting in 2015.

**Political dialogue and reconciliation:** Sustained progress in the reduction of armed threats, the reintegration of 65,000 ex-combatants and the reform of national security institutions to address domestic and cross-border threats.

**Justice and human rights:** Establishment and progressive functioning of an independent, accessible and impartial judicial system in accordance with international norms and standards.

**Consolidation and restoration of state authority:** Significant increase in state authority across the country through legitimate and accountable republican institutions at the central, regional and local levels.

others less so. For example, for 2015–2016, one of the indicators of progress in political dialogue and national reconciliation was that “Ivorian institutions ensure the smooth running of elections (organization, funding, security, dispute management), with minimal international support”—something feasible to assess. Another, however, was that “the land law is implemented effectively by the State”—a vague indicator of a long-standing issue in Côte d’Ivoire that was one of the drivers of the 2002–2004 crisis.

The use of benchmarks and indicators is a key issue the Security Council and UN Secretariat are grappling with in deciding how to sequence mandates and transition UN missions more effectively. In the case of UNOCI, these benchmarks did not constitute a roadmap for the transition; they were instead mainly used to assess the mission’s achievements in the reports of the secretary-general. UN member states did not use them in their regular interactions with the Ivorian authorities, and the Security Council did not hold the Ivorian government accountable when it did not meet them. It is unclear if they were used by the mission leadership in its interaction with the Ivorian government. Nonetheless, the benchmarks

did help the mission shape and elaborate on its internal transition plan.

### ELABORATING A PLAN FOR HANDING OVER TO THE UN COUNTRY TEAM

The 2013 benchmarking exercise was also a way to review UNOCI’s civilian functions “with a view to identifying the partners most likely to eventually assume those responsibilities, as well as tasks that could already be handed over to the country team or the Government.”<sup>39</sup> Within the mission, the benchmarking process led to the establishment of a task force mandated “to map all mission activities, identify tasks for possible handover and develop strategies and mechanisms for taking the broader civilian transition process forward.”<sup>40</sup> This task force brought together actors at both the strategic level (the SRSG and appropriate government ministers) and at the more technical level (UNOCI’s heads of sections and of the UNCT). It developed a calendar for handing over from UNOCI to the UNCT, as well as from UNOCI to the Ivorian government, and elaborated a transition plan. The secretary-general’s December 2013 report therefore included a list of the respective comparative advantages of UNOCI and the UNCT.<sup>41</sup> At this early stage, it was decided to

38 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2013/377, June 26, 2013, paras. 71–76; *Thirty-Fourth Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2013/761, December 24, 2013, para. 64 and Annex I.

39 UN Security Council, *Thirty-Fourth Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2013/761, December 24, 2013, para. 65. The report finds that “preliminary results have revealed areas where the country team could in the near future assume some of the responsibilities of UNOCI, in particular those related to gender, child protection and HIV/AIDS, as well as opportunities for increased synergies in areas such as juvenile justice and the rule of law.” The UN country team included twenty-one agencies, funds, and programs: the UN Development Programme, the UN Population Fund, the UN Office for Project Services, the UN Environment Programme, UNICEF, UNESCO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Maritime Organization, UN Habitat, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization, UN Women, the World Food Programme, the International Labor Organization, the UN Industrial Development Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, UNAIDS, the International Organization for Migration, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

40 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2013/761, December 24, 2013, para. 65.

41 Ibid., Annex II.

transfer functions related to child protection, gender, and HIV/AIDS from the mission to the UNCT.

In mid-2015, UNOCI also “developed an internal transition plan focusing on staff drawdown and how to prioritize mandate implementation” related to good offices work.<sup>42</sup> This plan was developed through an internal process and has been kept strictly confidential. At this point, some sections of the mission already started to conduct their activities in close cooperation with UNCT partners and national authorities. The civil affairs section, in particular, worked closely with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Ministry of Social Cohesion to facilitate the handover; a handful of Ivorian civil servants were even placed within UNOCI to build their capacity and ensure a smoother transition.<sup>43</sup>

Only in 2016, after the presidential elections, did the mission elaborate an integrated transition plan through six thematic technical committees co-chaired by UNOCI, the UNCT, and the Ivorian government. These committees discussed each of UNOCI's main residual functions as defined by Security Council Resolution 2284 (2016): (1) social cohesion; (2) human rights and transitional justice; (3) security sector reform; (4) disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), weapons management, and civil disarmament; (5) defense, security, and law enforcement; and (6) communication.

The working groups' discussions focused on

consolidating the achievements of the mission and looking at which of its residual activities required continuation after its departure. The working groups also tried to identify which institutions these activities would be transferred to and what resources and competencies they would need. The working groups subsequently developed concept notes on remaining challenges, activities to be transferred to the government of Côte d'Ivoire (and the budgets associated with them), and activities to be continued by the UNCT and development partners.

Under the leadership of the deputy SRSR/resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator (DSRSG/RC/HC), the UNCT also continued to develop its own transition plan, outlining what resources it would require to address the gaps resulting from UNOCI's withdrawal. In this context, UNOCI's civilian affairs section, together with the government, the UNCT, and bilateral and multilateral partners, mapped the international community's support for Côte d'Ivoire in key areas that would remain challenges after the mission's withdrawal (especially resolution of local disputes).

These working groups met throughout July 2016, but with only one year left before the closure of the mission, this was already late in the transition process. UNOCI was able to dedicate some staff to attending the working group meetings and follow up on their activities. The UNCT, however, participated more irregularly because of its lack of capacity. As later acknowledged by the secretary-

## Box 2. Objectives of UNOCI's handover<sup>44</sup>

The mission worked in close collaboration with the government, the UNCT, and international partners to define and implement a successful and sustainable transition process. It had three main objectives:

- Consolidate achievements by ensuring UNOCI's gradual withdrawal and the transfer of residual activities to the government, the UNCT, and international partners;
- Identify the remaining challenges and suggest proper follow-up and specific activities to be developed in close consultation with the government, the UNCT, and international partners; and
- Sustain capacity building and ensure the availability of skills and resources to support Côte d'Ivoire in consolidating the achievements after UNOCI's withdrawal.

42 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 69.

43 Interview with former UNOCI staff member, Abidjan, November 2017.

44 United Nations, “The End of the United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire: Consolidating Peacekeeping Gains,” October 2016.

general, this process “revealed that the country team lacked the personnel and financial resources to assume additional responsibilities from the peacekeeping operation, leading to the risk that critical tasks would be discontinued after the closure of the mission.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, while the leadership of the mission and UNCT met regularly, interaction and meetings at the technical and operational levels were less regular, which some interlocutors highlighted as a serious constraint to integrated planning. Some interlocutors in New York also found that there had been not enough engagement between UN headquarters and the UNCT; at times, the SRSO was seen as keeping activities on the ground close to her chest without involving her colleagues in New York or on the UNCT.

The outcome document produced by these working groups—the official “transition plan”—was entitled “The End of the United Nations Operation in Cote d’Ivoire: Consolidating Peacekeeping Gains.” It was aimed at reinforcing peacebuilding achievements and ensuring the transfer of residual activities to the government, UNCT, and development partners in order to avoid an abrupt discontinuation of the mission’s key peacebuilding activities that could jeopardize hard-won progress. Among the tasks transferred to the Ivorian government were the overall coordination and monitoring of security sector reform, including weapons management and reintegration of former combatants; support to social cohesion and intercommunal dialogue initiatives; human rights monitoring, reporting, and investigation; and management of ONUCI FM radio, the only nonpartisan radio station in the country.<sup>46</sup> In each of these areas, more technical tasks were also transferred to the UNCT and other UN partners, such as the continuous strengthening of territorial administrators’ and community leaders’ capacities

in conflict prevention and resolution, support to the effective implementation of the national strategy to fight against gender-based violence, provision of expertise in transitional justice and reconciliation, continued monitoring of community-based reinsertion projects, and social cohesion projects as part of the DDR process.<sup>47</sup>

The plan was formally signed by UNOCI, the government (represented by the prime minister), and international partners (represented by the French ambassador) on October 17, 2016—only six months before the closing of the mission. The challenges identified in the transition plan were further mainstreamed into the government’s national development plan for the period 2016–2020 and the Peacebuilding Support Program through the establishment of a UN Transition Coordination Working Group.<sup>48</sup> This group aimed to facilitate coordination and information exchange among all stakeholders.

According to some interlocutors, however, the transition plan was seen as mainly an internal UN handover plan that did not include Ivorian civil society or nongovernmental organizations that could have played a greater role. It was a plan focused on state institutions—though paradoxically the Ivorian government did not feel much ownership over it—that neglected the importance of consultation with civil society. It was also developed without consultation with representatives of regional organizations and international financial institutions.

### A Lack of Capacity for a Real Handover in the Field and at Headquarters

UNOCI handed over to the UN country team in June 2017. Was the UNCT fully ready for that final step? Many interlocutors considered that there has not been a real handover from UNOCI to the UNCT. The resident coordinator’s office was not

45 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 68.

46 A memorandum of understanding has been concluded, and the broadcasting studio has been set up at the Fondation Félix Houphouët-Boigny pour la recherche de la paix, while the government has taken charge of the twenty-four transmitter sites. ONUCI FM has been renamed the “Peace Radio” (*la Radio de la paix*). As explained by the last report of the secretary-general, “Throughout its existence, ONUCI FM provided impartial news, informing the public about the peace process and other developments, promoting peace and reconciliation, and organizing political debates. The radio broadcasted 24 hours per day, seven days a week, for more than 13 years, reaching approximately 76 per cent of the country, with programming in French and five major Ivorian languages. While the radio was particularly useful in the run up to the elections and during the electoral crisis, it also greatly contributed to preserving stability in the post-election phase, and to promoting UNOCI’s work across all of its components.” UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 56. See also UN Security Council, *Final Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire*, UN Doc. S/2017/89, January 31, 2017, paras. 55, 58.

47 United Nations, “The End of the United Nations Operation in Cote d’Ivoire: Consolidating Peacekeeping Gains,” October 2016.

48 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 100.

strengthened in anticipation of the transition, and the UNCT's technical and analytical capabilities were not expanded to take over residual tasks.

At UN headquarters, the transfer of the Côte d'Ivoire file from DPKO to the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) was not part of discussions or consultations on the departure of UNOCI, contrary to the recommendation of the UN policy on transitions.<sup>49</sup> This handover was a priority for DPA, which (in line with usual practice) had monitored the situation in Côte d'Ivoire throughout the peacekeeping presence in the country despite not being the lead department. It had also been part of the various strategic reviews. The handover was supposed to be accompanied by the transfer from DPKO to DPA of one staff member who had been following the file. This person departed earlier than expected, however, and there was no proper handover of files, contacts, and archives.<sup>50</sup> After the transfer of lead responsibilities within the Secretariat took place on July 1, 2017, a task force co-chaired by DPA and UNDP was established, linking headquarters in New York, the resident coordinator in Abidjan, and UNOWAS in Dakar.<sup>51</sup>

The SRSG remained at the helm of the transition process until the end. She was reluctant to look beyond her own tenure and mandate, despite the Security Council's resolutions on the need for UNOCI to collaborate with the UNCT in order to get ready for the post-mission phase. The role of the resident coordinator did not grow as the mission's withdrawal neared, which could have in particular facilitated communication between the mission and UN agencies on the transition. In his last report on the role of UNOCI, the secretary-general acknowledged, "An important lesson is that the Resident Coordinator must be fully empowered with the requisite capacities, authority and

resources to ensure that the United Nations Country Team is able to continue relevant peacebuilding activities after the closure of the peacekeeping mission."<sup>52</sup> The Resident coordinator's office was not strengthened in anticipation for the transition; the technical and analytical competencies of UNCT were not expanded to be able to take over residual tasks. For example, "the absence of a mechanism to ensure the deployment of a peace and development adviser led to extensive delays in enabling the Resident Coordinator with such capacity."<sup>53</sup>

As a result, according to some interlocutors, some UN agencies were not fully aware of all the plans and activities conducted by UNOCI.<sup>54</sup> The deputy SRSG, who remained the head of the UNCT after the mission left, remained the only element of continuity throughout the transition process and was able to bring some institutional knowledge to the UNCT.

The task of supporting the resident coordinator with political oversight and analysis of the situation in Côte d'Ivoire was given to the UN Regional Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and its head, SRSG Mohamed Ibn Chambas. UNOWAS has done so without any additional capacity, as part of its regular role in the subregion, despite its lack of a permanent presence in Abidjan, which some interlocutors saw as a serious limitation to the analysis it could provide.<sup>55</sup> Since mid-2017, the head of UNOWAS has paid several visits to Abidjan to assist the resident coordinator, most recently in October 2018 in the context of political tensions during the local elections in October, which many observers considered to be preparation for the 2020 presidential elections.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond the support provided by UNOWAS, the UNCT has been left with little capacity in this area. Two years after the closing of UNOCI, it has only

49 As stated in paragraph 16, "When a UN transition leads to the return of an exclusive UNCT presence, discussion should begin immediately with DPA and the relevant regional [UN Development Group], and they should be invited to strengthen their [integrated (mission) task forces] engagement. The regional [UN Development Group] and DPA should also take into account all possible options to strengthen backstopping of the remaining UNCT presence."

50 Interview with official at UN headquarters, New York, May 2018.

51 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 80.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Interviews, Abidjan, November 2017.

55 Interview, former UNOCI staff member, Abidjan, November 2017.

56 "Élections locales en Côte d'Ivoire: La commune du Plateau au centre des tensions," *Le Monde*, October 15, 2018; "En Côte d'Ivoire, les prémices d'une recomposition politique," *Le Monde*, October 17, 2018. For a deeper analysis of remaining elements of fragility in Côte d'Ivoire, see Francis Akindès, "On ne mange pas les ponts et le goudron": Les sentiers sinueux d'une sortie de crise en Côte d'Ivoire," *Politique Africaine* 4, No. 148 (December 2017), pp. 5–26.



recruited one political and development adviser to provide political analysis to the resident coordinator to help him better engage with Ivorian stakeholders. The UNCT was also unprepared to take over tasks such as those related to the rule of law. As explained by one interlocutor, “It was not possible to transfer UNOCI activities in key areas such as judicial and prison inspection services, the justice reform strategy, and the prevention of the illegal exploitation of mines.”<sup>57</sup> As a result, no UN agencies took over such activities, and the UNCT’s follow-up on the mission’s residual tasks has been irregular at best.

A number of interlocutors also regretted the absence of a formal ceremony to hand over from UNOCI to the UN country team. This was a missed opportunity for communicating the legacy of UNOCI in restoring peace. As an internal UN document pointed out, the closure of the mission in June ended without any official communication from headquarters on the implementation, monitoring, guidance support and reporting on these programs. As a result, one year after the full departure of UNOCI, the presence of the UNCT was almost invisible, all the more so outside of Abidjan.

As one interlocutor put it, “Here nobody is nostalgic for the presence of the UN mission; UNOCI has had its day.”<sup>58</sup> Another said, “We find that national counterparts think that the UN leaves when a peacekeeping mission withdraws”—a false impression in Côte d’Ivoire, where the UNCT was staying.<sup>59</sup>

### An Unfunded Transition Process

Adding to the UNCT’s lack of capacity, no additional funding was secured, such as through a donor conference to finance the transition. The

final report of the secretary-general estimated the cost of the transition plan to be \$500 million, of which \$50 million would be covered by the UNCT. To raise these funds, “a diversified resource mobilization approach was adopted that also included \$3 million of assessed contributions to UNOCI.”<sup>60</sup> However, “owing to the bureaucratic processes involved and the late approval of the budget by the General Assembly in December 2016..., the project implementation period was significantly condensed and the catalytic and strategic value of the funds reallocated from UNOCI to the country team was limited.”<sup>61</sup> As one interlocutor put it, “Heavy bureaucratic processes and regulations hampered innovation” in using the assessed contributions.<sup>62</sup> This assessed funding disappeared once UNOCI withdrew.

The Peacebuilding Fund committed \$5 million “on the understanding that the Government would match those funds with \$10 million in support of residual activities over 18 months.”<sup>63</sup> This came in addition to a \$12 million grant focused on the pre- and post-2015 election period (2014–2016), aiming at strengthening “confidence, peaceful coexistence and security during the electoral period, including fostering women’s participation in the electoral process; and strengthening prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts through capacity building of state institutions.”<sup>64</sup> However, as of October 2018, the government’s pledged funds had yet to be transferred.<sup>65</sup> Bilateral donors committed an additional \$8.5 million in voluntary contributions.<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, the UNCT fell far short of the \$50 million it needed to continue its work.

This lack of funding was partly a consequence of the country’s success in managing its post-conflict recovery. As the security situation stabilized, many UN agencies, funds, and programs, as well as

57 Interview with official at UN headquarters, New York, June 2018.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 72. The transition plan talks about an allocation of \$2.8 million from DPKO. It also indicates that “This financial contribution from the Mission was allocated to UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, IOM, UNWOMEN) who have a comparative advantage regarding the implementation of these activities from 1 January to 30 June 2017.” Memoranda of understanding were signed with each of them in March 2017.

61 Ibid. There was also very strong pushback from some members of the Fifth Committee against using assessed funds for joint projects, including due to concerns around reporting. Interview with official at UN headquarters, New York, June 2018.

62 Interview with former UNOCI staff member, Abidjan, November 2017.

63 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 72.

64 See <http://www.unpbf.org/countries/cote-divoire/>.

65 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, 29 October 2018, para. 72.

66 Ibid., para. 73.

numerous international nongovernmental organizations, scaled back their presence in Côte d'Ivoire. This was even more acute outside of Abidjan. The crisis had created an explosion in the number of international and humanitarian NGOs throughout the country, in particular in the west. When UNOCI left, most of these NGOs also progressively withdrew. Donors have shifted to looking more at the socioeconomic benefits of the country's economic growth rather than peace and security issues. As one interlocutor put it bluntly, the impression was that "We went from the \$500 million of UNOCI's annual budget to almost nothing, and that was hard to accept."<sup>67</sup>

The discourse on Côte d'Ivoire's emergence and economic growth thus drove funders away, even as the political and security situation remained unstable; the main funders (e.g., France, Japan, China, and Morocco) adapted their priorities and focused on infrastructure. As the secretary-general had already predicted in December 2013, "There is a clear risk that, unless additional resources accompany the transfer of critical tasks to the country team, those tasks may no longer be performed at all, possibly undermining gains critical to the sustainability of peace and stability."<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusions: The Difficulty of Sustaining UN Engagement after UNOCI

The transition in Côte d'Ivoire highlighted two related challenges: First, the Security Council viewed the transition only through the lens of withdrawal, leading it to underestimate, if not overlook, the continued peacebuilding needs of the country. Second, the UN country team was not adequately empowered or resourced to take over responsibilities from UNOCI. As a result, the transition was abrupt, without sustained dialogue, capacity transfer, or financial fluidity between UNOCI and the country team.

## A SECURITY COUNCIL FOCUSING ONLY ON WITHDRAWAL

As the 2013 UN policy on transitions explained, a transition entails "significant changes" in a mandated presence: "start-up, reconfiguration, and drawdown or withdrawal."<sup>69</sup> In the case of UNOCI, the Security Council's clear objective was the mission's withdrawal. The primary goal that superseded all others was to take the "situation in Côte d'Ivoire" off the council's agenda and communicate that political gain. This shows that a "transition" is as political a process as any other led by the council.

As a result, the Security Council underestimated and overlooked the UNCT's need for increased capacity to take over residual tasks from UNOCI. It has been a recurrent practice of the Security Council to transfer residual or long-term tasks to the UNCT, as it did in Chad after the withdrawal of MINURCAT in 2010; to a certain extent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2010 when MONUC morphed into MONUSCO with greater emphasis on stabilization; in Sierra Leone when the Integrated Peacebuilding Office closed in 2014; and in Liberia, where the UNMIL closed one year after the closure of UNOCI.<sup>70</sup> But the council often underestimates or even overlooks the practical modalities of that handover and the UNCT's means and capacity to take over residual tasks, seeing this as falling outside of its responsibility and the only issue of importance as being the closure of the mission.

By looking at those practical aspects of the transition in Côte d'Ivoire, the council could have sent a political message that it was not abandoning the country or wasting years of efforts undertaken by the mission, and that there would be follow-up by the UNCT. Moreover, it was unrealistic for the council to expect the mission to continue delivering on its substantive mandate (paragraph 15 of Security Council Resolution 2284) until only two months before the formal closure of the

<sup>67</sup> Interview with former UN staff member, Abidjan, November 2017.

<sup>68</sup> UN Security Council, *Thirty-Fourth Report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2013/761, December 24, 2013, para. 66. This worry was recalled in a 2016 report: UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire*, UN Doc. S/2016/297, March 31, 2016, para. 83.

<sup>69</sup> UN DPKO/Department of Field Support Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training, *Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal*, February 2013.

<sup>70</sup> See Arthur Boutellis, "UN Peacekeeping Transitions: Perspectives from Member States," International Peace Institute, August 2012.

mission while losing staff, closing its field offices, and liquidating its assets. As underlined by the secretary-general, “At the point of downsizing its operations in preparation for liquidation, the mission was supporting 3,500 uniformed personnel with nearly 18,000 assets, all of which made the start of liquidation planning and the closure of the mission proper a challenge of immense proportions.”<sup>71</sup>

Could replacing UNOCI with a follow-up special political mission have mitigated these challenges by ensuring a more gradual transition and handover to the UNCT? Some interlocutors considered that such a mission could have helped avoid the impression that the UN left Côte d’Ivoire too abruptly; others thought that a definite conclusion cannot be drawn as it remains unclear how much political leverage such a follow-on operation would have had.

#### TRANSITIONING: AN UNDER-PRIORITIZED, UNDER-RESOURCED TASK

The case of Côte d’Ivoire showed the need for sustained dialogue between the UN peacekeeping mission and the UNCT to identify capacities that need to be strengthened. To a number of interlocutors on the ground, the transition was opaque, inconsistent, and ineffective. The benchmarks were not seriously used, the transition was conceived as an end in itself, and not enough attention was paid to the UNCT’s lack of sustainable funding. The accidental burning of the archives of the human rights section, which closed in 2016, reflects this general situation.<sup>72</sup>

As a result, there has not been a real handover from UNOCI to the UNCT. The leadership of UNOCI wanted to retain full control and visibility to the end, which contradicts the notion of handing over. The role of the resident coordinator should have progressively taken precedence over that of the SRSG. Ideally, the SRSG should also have ended her term before the peacekeeping operation

withdrew and been replaced by a new head of mission who could have worked with an integrated team for the last year of the mission (as was done in the UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad).<sup>73</sup> In any case, having the transition process led by someone who will stay on and continue the work of the UN in the country (i.e., the resident coordinator or UNDP resident representative) would help ensure continuity between UN configurations.<sup>74</sup> The fact is, however, that when a mission closes, staff look for other opportunities and are reluctant to stay on; it is an unattractive task to close the books of a mission.

The transition also showed that transition planning should focus less on what tasks to hand over (as not all tasks need to be transferred to the UNCT) and more on joint planning and programming with all UN stakeholders in partnership with the government. This planning should have included elements related to mission support to facilitate the transfer of assets and personnel to the UNCT. The UNCT also should have assessed its capacities and adapted its approach to continue providing support to prevent relapse into conflict. Moreover, this approach should have been accompanied by a real strategic communications plan to better promote what has been done, what was achieved, and what needs remain. Such a plan should be part of a transition plan to better communicate this process to the population and the various stakeholders.

The multiplication of transition plans (UNOCI transition plan, UNCT transition plan, UN official transition plan) may have complicated the transition calendar and wasted some time that could have been spent on joint planning earlier in the process. Planning a transition takes time and should be part and parcel of regular planning activities long before the Security Council requests a mission’s withdrawal.

Finally, the transition in Côte d’Ivoire showed the need for greater financial fluidity from one UN

71 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 30, 2018, para. 74.

72 The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has reportedly since developed guidelines for archiving.

73 This needs to take into account the issue of the level of seniority (under-secretary-general, assistant secretary-general, D2, etc.).

74 The secretary-general highlighted that “a positive precedent was the retention of the triple-hatted Deputy Special Representative as the Resident Coordinator, at the level of Assistant Secretary-General, to facilitate the transition and provide senior leadership continuity. There were however no complementary enhancements of the Office of the Resident Coordinator, limiting the important convening role of the United Nations.” UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 79.



presence to another. The departure of UNOCI contributed to the demobilization of donors, international NGOs, and other partners. Most donors in Côte d'Ivoire had already moved into a development mode disconnected from the residual governance and security challenges at the heart of the tasks to be taken over by the UNCT. As noted in the secretary-general's last report on Côte d'Ivoire, "A country-specific pooled fund for the transition could have empowered the Resident Coordinator and the country team, while improving integration and reassuring donors."<sup>75</sup>

As a result of these challenges, while interlocutors at UN headquarters largely considered the transition to have been a success because UNOCI

closed on time, interlocutors in the field deplored the lack of means given to the UNCT to carry out residual tasks.

UNOCI's downsizing, transition, and departure lasted nearly five years. By some standards, this seems like a long time. Yet when the transition from a full-fledged multidimensional peacekeeping operation to a UNCT finally came, it was too abrupt, without adequate planning, programming, or resources to address residual priorities. Political expediency and financial pressure, rather than sustainable peace, drove the transition. The next presidential elections in 2020 may determine whether or not the peacekeeping mission left Côte d'Ivoire in order.

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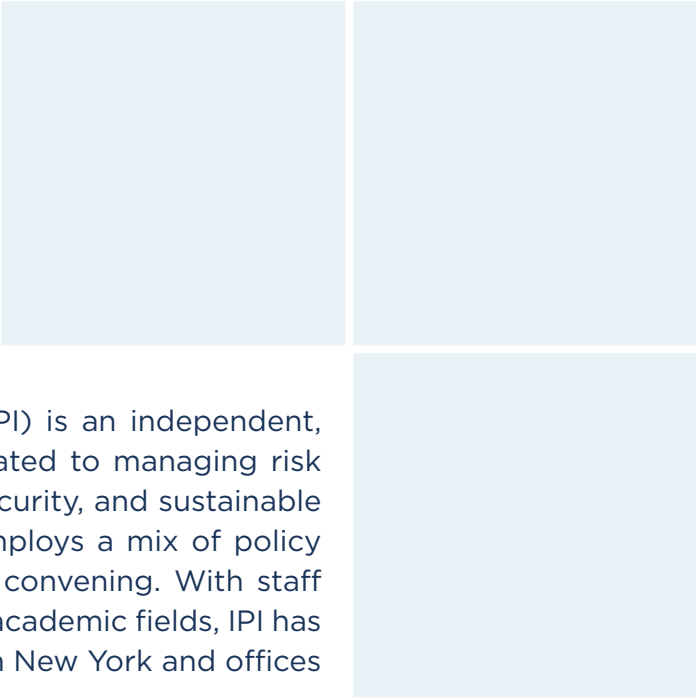
75 UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of UNOCI*, UN Doc. S/2018/958, October 29, 2018, para. 80.











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