

Pivoting from Crisis to Development: Preparing for the Next Wave of UN Peace Operations Transitions

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Introduction

UN peace operations are going through a renewed and accelerated period of reconfiguration and drawdown. Between June 2017 and March 2018, long-standing peacekeeping missions in Côte d’Ivoire and Liberia closed, while the mission in Haiti was reconfigured to focus on justice and policing, and more recently into a special political mission. Looking ahead, the Security Council has mandated the closure of the mission in Darfur and the initial drawdown of the peacebuilding mission in Guinea-Bissau.¹ The council’s attention is beginning to shift to other missions, including the mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whose 2019 mandate requests that an independent strategic review articulate options for the mission’s exit strategy.

All of these reconfigurations are taking place in a climate of increased scrutiny around the effectiveness of peacekeeping, as well as financial pressure for the UN to consolidate and do more with less. At the same time, to build on the experience of recent transitions, the secretary-general has issued a directive to all multidimensional missions on planning and managing UN transitions, requesting missions and UN country teams (UNCTs) to plan integrated transitions more proactively by creating transition calendars that highlight critical national developments and their possible impact on transition-related activities.

This issue brief explores experiences and lessons from recent UN transitions in Côte d’Ivoire, Haiti, and Liberia.² However, whereas those transitions took place in environments marked by relative stability and peaceful democratic transitions of power, the next wave of peacekeeping transitions will likely grapple with unfinished political settlements, continued protection challenges, huge geographic territories with limited state presence, and weak host-state consent to the UN’s presence.³ These transitions also face a fundamental limitation: peacekeeping operations are not designed to solve all of the structural challenges facing a country in conflict. The UN and its

1 The Security Council has mandated the closure of the UN Mission in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI); the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL); the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which transitioned to the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH); the UN Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS); and the joint UN-AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

2 This publication builds upon IPI’s case studies on UN peacekeeping transitions: Namie Di Razza, “Mission in Transition: Planning for the End of UN Peacekeeping in Haiti,” International Peace Institute, December 2018; Alexandra Novosseloff, “Lessons Learned from the UN’s Transition in Côte d’Ivoire,” International Peace Institute, December 2018; and Daniel Forti and Lesley Connolly, “The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying: Liberia’s Peacekeeping Transition,” International Peace Institute, December 2018.

3 Peace operations in Darfur (UNAMID), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Haiti (MINUJUSTH), Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), and Mali (MINUSMA) are among those identified by the UN as priorities for future transition planning processes.

member states need to grapple with these challenges no matter how successful the peacekeeping transition.

This issue brief offers lessons and reflections to manage politics and recalibrate policies in order to better shape future transitions. It considers the Security Council's strategic and political role in shaping transitions and encouraging long-term exit strategies and the importance of trying to align council decisions with host-country dynamics. It assesses the multiple layers of coordination required both within the UN system and with regional, national, and local actors to drive coherent planning processes, as well as the tensions that can arise. It highlights the substantive and operational repositioning required of UNCTs—in terms of political engagement, expertise, and resources—as international engagement pivots away from simply managing crises toward pushing for national ownership of peacebuilding and development priorities. It examines the complementary roles that regional actors, multilateral organizations, and international development partners can play during transition periods. The brief ends with forward-looking recommendations for the next wave of transitions at a time when the UN is reviewing its guidelines: the Policy on UN Transitions (2013) and the Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning (2013).

Lessons from Recent Transitions

Recent transitions offer a number of lessons for the UN as it plans for the next generation of transitions. These include the importance of managing politics in the Security Council and developing benchmarked exit strategies tailored to the context. Recent transitions also highlight the need for coordination, including within the UN through an integrated approach between the mission and UNCT, with national actors, and with international partners. Finally, they underscore the ongoing role of the UN's follow-on presence in supporting peacebuilding priorities after a mission leaves

through ongoing programming and sustained financial support.

MANAGING SECURITY COUNCIL POLITICS

Transitions are inherently political, and their trajectories are often influenced by the national interests of Security Council members or the compromises they reach.⁴ The issues over which they compromise often include assessments of changing conflict dynamics (including what constitutes a threat to international peace and security), tensions among the five permanent members over the role of the UN in prioritizing human rights and democratic governance, and financial pressures to close peacekeeping missions and shift resources. Because the Security Council initiates transitions and oversees their implementation, these politics are ultimately important determinants of how transitions unfold.

These dynamics have resulted in Security Council decisions that are not directed by the needs of the country and provide unclear political guidance to the mission, ultimately leading to poorly mandated transitions.⁵ The result has often been peacekeeping transitions that occur too close to critical national moments; rushed timelines that provide insufficient time for political consolidation and operational planning; an overriding focus on security without sufficient attention to the civilian aspects of the transition; and insufficient clarity about the Security Council's strategy for engaging on politics, human rights, and protection during and after a transition.

For example, council debates on Resolution 2333 (2016) on the closure of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) did not meaningfully consider its proximity to the date of the national elections. As a result, the compromise deadline mandated in the resolution exacerbated national political tensions in the run-up to a watershed election period.⁶ Similarly, the establishment of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), its fixed two-year timeframe, and its composition (specifically of civilian and police components) were in part the result of

4 UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UN Department of Field Support, "Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal," April 2013.

5 Arthur Boutellis, "UN Peacekeeping Transitions: Perspectives from Member States," International Peace Institute, August 2012.

6 For a detailed example, see Forti and Connolly, "The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying," pp. 22-25.

compromises among council members.⁷ The limited timeframe ultimately undermined the mission's effectiveness, as it must now spend half of its mandated duration (twelve out of twenty-four months) starting up and drawing down. While compromise is inherent to the Security Council, compromises over transitions can result in mandates and concepts that do not adequately account for what the country needs.

Security Council politics have also been reflected in how the council prioritizes a mission's mandated tasks during a transition. During the early stages of a drawdown, Security Council resolutions have tended to focus disproportionately on the withdrawal of troops and police and security-oriented tasks such as the handover to national security institutions and security sector reform, as in the successive mandate renewals for UNMIL and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI).⁸ This emphasis has come in part from host governments, which recognize that transitions are opportunities to consolidate their own security services while potentially minimizing scrutiny over their progress on peacebuilding (or lack thereof). Due to this focus on security, mandates have not consistently focused on preparing for the civilian transition. When they have—usually during the penultimate or final mandate—the emphasis has been on transferring mission tasks to the UNCT, national government, and other stakeholders. Not only is this too late in the transition process, but it also masks a critical tension: transitions are not linear processes, and other actors cannot carry out the mission's tasks in the same way. As a result, this approach can strain both missions and UNCTs, which must substitute rapid responses for long-term planning processes and operational transformations.

EMPLOYING PRAGMATIC, BENCHMARKED EXIT STRATEGIES

Benchmarked exit strategies have been integrated into mission mandates since 2009. They identify the Security Council and Secretariat's expectations for progress in areas regarded as critical for an effective transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding, such as reconciliation, protection of

civilians (including internally displaced persons and returning refugees), human rights, rule of law, the humanitarian situation, and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). Systematic reporting on benchmarks provides a means for the council and the Secretariat to track progress, measure a mission's impact, identify where to strengthen political engagement, and assess whether to adjust a mission's mandate. In principle, it can also guide the council in shifting the composition of the UNCT and the long-term substantive priorities underpinning its work.

Clearly defined benchmarks can help national actors and the UN define a shared political vision. However, progress toward benchmarks often depends on a wide range of factors both within and outside of the mission's control, including the political will of key actors and dynamics on the ground. Benchmarks can be designed and prioritized in different ways depending on the country's needs and due to political negotiations within the Security Council. When designed with precision, benchmarks can not only assess mandate implementation but also support transition planning by clearly identifying long-term political objectives, as well as the national and regional actors best placed to achieve those objectives. However, transition plans are distinct from benchmarked exit strategies. A benchmarked exit strategy lays out the Security Council's desired trajectory for a mission to draw down and exit, while a transition plan is largely driven by the UN mission, UNCT, and Secretariat, which together determine how the process will unfold.

Benchmarks and transitions can be at odds when council members differ in their emphasis on either the "end state"—meaning that the achievement of certain benchmarks should determine the timeline for a transition—or the "end date"—meaning the timeline should dictate how ambitious benchmarks should be. This debate was evident during the transitions of UNOCI and UNMIL, including in how the missions' benchmarks were designed and evaluated, and it is unfolding again as council members consider UNAMID's drawdown. While anchoring transitions in "end states" is likely to

7 Di Razza, "Mission in Transition," p. 22.

8 See UN Security Council Resolutions 1938 (2010), 2008 (2011), 2066 (2012), 2116 (2013), 2190 (2014), and 2239 (2015).

produce transitions that are more aligned with conditions in the country, internal Security Council pressures often lead its members to prioritize the withdrawal date over progress on key benchmarks.

Holding missions and governments accountable for progress (or lack thereof) in achieving benchmarks in an exit strategy is important for navigating transitions in less-than-ideal environments. Accountability requires balancing political pressures within the Security Council with operational realities and political dynamics on the ground. During UNOCI's transition, council members and the Secretariat did not require the Ivorian government to meet all of the established benchmarks, thus conforming to Côte d'Ivoire's strong push for reframing its own narrative as a country that has moved beyond a period of political turmoil.⁹ The Security Council reluctantly accepted benchmarks for the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti's (MINUSTAH) transition to MINUJUSTH—which diplomats considered “vague, difficult to measure, and unrealistic”—in order to stay on its predetermined schedule.¹⁰ Without clearly prioritized benchmarks, these transitions failed to situate the UNCTs in positions to accomplish all of their additional responsibilities.

INTEGRATING, COORDINATING, AND PLANNING TRANSITIONS

Integration, coordination, and planning within the UN are essential ingredients for successful transitions. Mission and headquarters officials must decide on important substantive and operational questions, each with its own tradeoffs. For example, what are the critical components of the mission's transition plan, and how will they be linked to other planning, development, or peacebuilding frameworks for the country? What are the proposed timelines for executing key deliverables, and what are the external factors that may force deviations from the plan? How can the mission coordinate with counterparts in the UNCT and headquarters? How these decisions unfold

plays a big role in determining how planning and implementation will be coordinated between mission and UNCT staff, between UN field and headquarters staff, and between the UN and the host government.

Recent transitions have demonstrated how different components of the mission and UNCT either come together or do not.¹¹ Successful integration between the mission and UNCT has depended upon factors including the vision and oversight of senior leadership, a dedicated team to implement the process, and existing peacebuilding and development frameworks. On the other hand, integration has been hampered by insufficient incentives and accountability from headquarters, resulting in inadequate ownership of and political support for leadership transitions; successive changes among leadership that disrupt planning processes; weak integrated planning capacities; competing planning frameworks and processes; and an overemphasis on bureaucratic planning processes at the expense of a coherent vision.

Taking an integrated approach throughout a mission's lifespan can preclude such challenges. Many contemporary peacekeeping missions operate with an integrated reporting structure, in which one of the deputy special representatives of the secretary-general (DSRSG) is “triple-hatted” as DSRSG, resident coordinator (RC), and humanitarian coordinator (HC). The secretary-general's transition planning directive designates the DSRSG/RC/HC as the substantive lead in such “integrated” missions. With one foot in the leadership of the peace operation and the other firmly planted in the development and humanitarian roles of the UNCT, DSRSG/RC/HCs are optimally placed to align the whole of the UN's presence in a country toward supporting the transition.

In theory, integrated missions have an advantage over missions like UNAMID, where the mission and the UNCT are operationally distinct.¹² But integration through senior leadership structures is not a panacea: MINUSTAH, UNOCI, and UNMIL (all with triple-hatted DSRSGs) still required

9 Novosseloff, “Lessons Learned from the UN's Transition in Cote d'Ivoire,” p. 10.

10 Di Razza, “Mission in Transition,” p. 43.

11 Forti and Connolly, “The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying,” pp. 29-32; Di Razza, “Mission in Transition,” pp. 45-46.

12 This is because UNAMID operates exclusively within Sudan's Darfur region, while the UNCT is responsible for the entire country. UNAMID and the Sudan UNCT are now undergoing their own integration processes while simultaneously planning the transition.

extensive efforts to systematically strengthen how the mission and the UNCT collaborated in planning their transitions.¹³ Moreover, some DSRSG/RC/HCs have expressed that they feel sidelined from “big politics” within the national context, which reduces their ability to align UN programming with national peacebuilding needs and contemporary political dynamics.

Joint programming between missions and UN agencies—a relatively recent innovation—is a way to promote stronger integration between the mission and the UNCT on substantive issues. In Liberia, a joint program on rule of law between UNMIL and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) gained momentum while UNMIL was still in the country. It then continued under UNDP and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) after UNMIL left, albeit with reduced capacities. In Côte d’Ivoire, joint programming, much of it supported by the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), proved critical to the UN’s substantive work in DDR and security sector reform. UNOCI also supported the SRSR’s good offices functions until the very end of its mandate. As early as 2009, the PBF supported projects providing short-term employment opportunities for ex-combatants, militias, women affected by conflict, and at-risk youth. UN police and UNDP also undertook joint programming to strengthen the capacities of the Ivorian police.

In Haiti, the mission and UNCT established a joint rule of law program to support a legal assistance system and implement community policing and community violence reduction plans.¹⁴ Similarly, through the state liaison functions, UNAMID and the Sudan UNCT staff work together on joint peacebuilding programming, funded through UNAMID’s assessed contributions. Elsewhere—for example, in Somalia—missions and UNCTs have collocated staff working on complementary issues, resulting in a single UN justice or protection team with common analyses and programming rather than two separate ones. Such practices could support the UNCT’s capacity as missions begin to drawdown.

ENGAGING WITH NATIONAL ACTORS

The core objective of transitions is to shift responsibilities for peacebuilding, development, and security from the UN back to national actors. National engagement in and ownership of the process are imperative for aligning transition planning with the needs of the communities most impacted by the transition, fostering common understanding of peacebuilding priorities among national actors and development partners, and managing expectations for the transition. While host governments are central to these processes, a diverse range of national actors also play complementary roles. Broader engagement with diverse stakeholders is critical to ensuring communities feel represented in the process, especially when differences of vision and priorities arise between the UN and the host government (e.g., over the need for continued human rights monitoring or security and justice reforms).

During transitions, senior UN leaders, especially the SRSR and DSRSG, are expected both to oversee the transition process and to ensure that the host government’s senior leadership understands how the transition will unfold and efforts are made to align substantive. This way, national actors can constructively influence the UN’s substantive priorities following the transition. Recently transitioned peacekeeping missions undertook significant efforts to sustain high-level government interest in the transition process to varying degrees of success. In the case of Liberia, this was done well in two instances. One was the positioning of the Liberian Government to lead on articulating the substantive priorities in the Liberia Peacebuilding Plan.¹⁵ And secondly, the UN made dedicated efforts to engage all of the country’s political leadership during the election cycle. UNMIL’s last SRSR, Farid Zarif, met regularly with Liberia’s government and political leaders—including opposition parties—to sustain substantive and operational support for the transition. This regular engagement contributed to smooth planning and implementation of the transition and strengthened the UN’s relationship with the government.

13 Di Razza, “Mission in Transition,” p. 11; Forti and Connolly, “The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying,” pp. 21-22.

14 Di Razza, “Mission in Transition.”

15 Forti and Connolly, “The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying,” p. 14.

Nonetheless, after the election of President George Weah, Resident Coordinator Yacoub El Hillo had to reestablish relations with an entirely new government. This task was made easier by the fact that El Hillo had been serving with UNMIL as DSRSG/RC since August 2016 and that the government and UN already had a constructive relationship.¹⁶

In Haiti, on the other hand, MINUSTAH struggled to maintain President Jovenal Moïse's interest in the transition from 2017 onward, leaving the mission in a politically weak position.¹⁷ When engaging with a reluctant host government, the UN may need to work through different channels of engagement (e.g., the secretary-general, deputy secretary-general, or special envoys), work more closely with regional or subregional organizations, or reframe the transition process to better support implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which all member states have endorsed, covers a broad range of substantive issues, and can serve as a politically palatable framework for pursuing similar programming objectives.

While national governments are often the immediate entry points for the UN, effective transitions also depend on engagement with NGOs and civil society organizations, traditional and religious communities, marginalized groups, and vulnerable communities (such as internally displaced persons). All of these groups benefit from positive externalities from peacekeeping missions, especially the provision of security and basic services. However, the UN does not consistently engage with such national actors in an effective or inclusive manner. To improve in this area, the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs is leading a working group tasked with developing system-wide guidelines for inclusive engagement with civil society actors throughout all UN programming in the field.

Comprehensive strategic communications plans for the drawdown, exit, and reconfiguration are another important facet of sustained national engagement. Strategic communication during transitions involves explaining why the transition

is occurring, building trust in the UN, and emphasizing substantive areas that require sustained engagement. Recent transitions have highlighted that strategic communications depend on a variety of factors and approaches. First, the UN needs to clearly and concisely convey that it will remain in the country even though peacekeepers are leaving. National actors often see the UN as one massive presence without distinguishing between peacekeeping contingents and civilian staff from the mission or the UNCT. Second, the mission and UNCT need to coordinate clear messages through an integrated communications plan early in the drawdown process, including through the UNCT's Communications Group. Third, a clear strategy to identify the national actors best positioned to complement the UN's own messaging is imperative for effectively reaching the communities most impacted by the drawdown process. Finally, the UN's communications infrastructure (specifically UN radio stations) offers valuable conduits for reaching the population that can be handed over to the national government or other international partners to promote programming on peace and development.

LEVERAGING THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

Other actors within the UN, as well as multilateral partners outside of the UN system, can play complementary roles during transitions by supporting high-level political engagement and mobilizing development funding. Recent transitions demonstrated the invaluable support provided by the UN's regional offices and the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). During UNOCI's transition, the SRSG for the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mohamed Ibn Chambas, regularly visited the country. UNOWAS also helped the government and its neighbors establish regional policies and programs to counter cross-border threats and convened open dialogue among national stakeholders. During Liberia's 2017 election period, UNOWAS coordinated and supported the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in

16 Forti and Connolly, "The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying," pp. 23, 30.

17 Di Razza, "Mission in Transition," pp. 20, 40-41.

presenting common messaging and engaging national political leaders to defuse election-related tensions. However, these regional offices should be viewed as assuming backstopping functions, not as cure-alls, as they do not have the bandwidth or country-specific expertise to provide the same levels of political analysis as a dedicated in-country presence.

The PBC's formal and informal platforms are increasingly recognized by member states as valuable complements to the Security Council's role overseeing peacekeeping transitions, especially in New York. The PBC can help host countries generate attention on their progress and challenges and offer an informal, supportive space for member states to discuss transition-related issues together with a diverse range of actors, including international financial institutions, civil society, and regional organizations. When countries hosting transitioning peacekeeping missions are also on the PBC's agenda (for example, Liberia and Guinea-Bissau), the chairs of these country-specific configurations have served as unofficial advocates on behalf of the transition by sustaining momentum and engagement in the Security Council. In the case of Liberia, the PBC helped consolidate national development plans; supported the implementation of, monitoring of, and reporting on the Liberia Peacebuilding Plan; and created space in New York for deeper analysis of the UN and the government's preparations for the transition and elections. The PBC and the Security Council also increasingly share analysis under the initiative of countries like Sweden and Germany, which have simultaneously held seats on both bodies.¹⁸

However, the PBC cannot play an overarching role in every transition. Some countries that host peacekeeping missions do not want the additional attention provided by the PBC, fearing increased scrutiny. Security Council members can also use a host country's engagement with the PBC as a pretext for advocating for an accelerated drawdown. In addition, while the PBC can mobilize financial support for a transition from member states, it cannot directly provide funding.

As a result, the PBC is better positioned to complement other actors in supporting transitions rather than to tackle them head-on.

Regional and subregional organizations will likely play stronger roles in future UN transitions as the UN becomes increasingly dependent on their support to achieve durable political solutions in complex environments prior to transitions. They have greater proximity to the affected country than the UN and have vested interests in remaining engaged after the transition. In countries that are resistant to UN engagement or are undergoing complex political processes, regional and subregional organizations can complement the UN by offering additional political legitimacy and providing new entry points to engage national actors, as the AU and ECOWAS did in Liberia.¹⁹ Beyond this supplementary support, the UN could enter into more formal arrangements with its regional partners in its follow-on configuration. Looking ahead, the AU and subregional organizations are likely to play critical roles in supporting transitions in Darfur, Guinea-Bissau, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

However, greater involvement of regional and subregional organizations is not a simple solution for the UN and requires constant engagement (including before a transition begins) to forge a common political strategy. Divergences in how these organizations understand and respond to conflict dynamics can impede collective approaches. In addition, the UN's in-country capacity and resources often dwarf those of other international organizations, so the UN cannot assume they will provide significant programmatic or operational support, or that these organizations inherently understand the intricacies of the UN's transition politically or operationally. Finally, the extent to which regional and sub-regional organizations are positioned to engage following a transition somewhat depends on the extent to which they engaged the UN during the mission's lifespan.

Bilateral donors and international financial institutions (like the World Bank, African Development Bank, and Inter-American Development Bank) are also well-positioned to

18 During their terms on the UN Security Council, Sweden and Germany served as informal focal points between the UN PBC and the UN Security Council.

19 Forti and Connolly, "The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying," pp. 23-25, 33-34.

complement the UNCT's programmatic and financial priorities. Development support channeled through the UN represents only a small percentage of the total development assistance any country receives. Most support comes from bilateral partnerships and programs from the World Bank and regional banks, which can support a host country's development priorities. However, neither member states nor the UN should view these organizations as pools of money to supplement the UN's work. The international financial institutions add the most value complementing the mission and country team by channeling their resources into areas where they have comparative advantages (such as large infrastructure development and rehabilitation projects).

TAILORING FOLLOW-ON CONFIGURATIONS TO SUPPORT PEACEBUILDING REQUIREMENTS

When the UN's presence in a country undergoes a transition, a shift from the core mandated tasks of peace operations toward peacebuilding-oriented priorities is often necessary. This is most true in contexts where a country's longer-term development and justice needs have been put on the back burner for years or where the government's primary focus has been to secure funding for projects that may not align with identified priorities. This shift toward peacebuilding is not a simple task, and the UN's follow-on configuration after a peace operation is central to supporting it.

Decisions by the Security Council about whether to transition to a special political mission or directly to the UNCT have often been informed by council dynamics rather than in-country needs. Special political missions provide the Security Council with greater political leverage and substantive and operational oversight of the UN's work in a country. More specifically, they can support conflict prevention, peacemaking, and post-conflict peacebuilding activities with funding from the UN's regular budget. However, they are more challenging to secure support for among council members precisely because they draw from the UN's regular budget and keep a high level of Security Council attention on the country.

Transitioning from a peacekeeping mission directly to a UNCT is more convenient politically and signals the UN's shift toward a more development-oriented approach. However, Security Council mandates have consistently framed the transition from a peacekeeping mission to a UNCT as the handover of core peacebuilding responsibilities. This framing overlooks the fact that UN peacekeeping missions are neither intended nor designed to address systemic, structural drivers of conflict. As a result, UNCTs confront massive expectations without the same level of political attention from the Security Council that missions are afforded, giving them less influence over national actors. In addition, transitioning directly to a UNCT risks council members turning their attention elsewhere, reducing political and financial support for the country. This was especially evident during the transitions in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia.²⁰

The format and focus of a follow-on configuration depend on the host country's explicit peacebuilding and development priorities and its expectations about how the UN should support them. From the UN Secretariat's perspective, leaders in the field and at HQ recommend a follow-on configuration based on the role they see for the UN in engaging on key political and development questions; the extent to which there may be outstanding protection issues; the complementary roles of bilateral and multilateral partners; the political environment within the host country and at the UN; and the financial resources available. At the council level, changing perceptions of conflict dynamics on the ground, national and international politics, and financial pressures can all impact the final configuration.

Typically, planning for follow-on configurations is triggered only when the Security Council requests configuration options (usually after a final deadline is established). Transition planning in Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, and Liberia only gained momentum when the Security Council set a deadline for the mission's exit; this led the missions and the UNCTs to rush through the processes of defining substantive and operational priorities,

20 On UNMIL, see Resolution 2333 (2016) and the 2016 report of the secretary-general. Forti and Connolly, "The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying," pp. 8-10; Novosseloff, "Lessons Learned from the UN's Transition in Côte d'Ivoire."

initiating liquidation, securing post-mission financing, and adequately communicating the withdrawal and transition to external stakeholders.²¹ Rushed transition planning can also hamper the UN's engagement with the government—especially where relations are already ambivalent—or produce outcomes that are not aligned with government priorities. Follow-on configurations that are planned early, flow from a collective political strategy for the UN, and are based on the available capacities in the country can help mitigate these challenges.

Resident coordinators (RCs) and resident coordinator offices (RCOs) play a lead role in the UN's follow-on configurations, especially when a peace operation transitions directly to a UNCT. The role of RCOs was strengthened by the UN development system reform, enacted system-wide in January 2019 and in Liberia following the peacekeeping transition in March 2018. Under this “empowered RCO” model, the UNCT has greater capacity for political analysis, engagement, and coordination.²² During transitions, the UNCT, its counterparts in UN headquarters, and the UN's Development Coordination Office focus on identifying development and peacebuilding needs for the country early on. Specifically, they focus on which UN agencies are most relevant to support these needs (e.g., UNDP and OHCHR during Liberia's transition) and where additional capacities are or are not needed.

Empowered RCOs nonetheless face significant challenges, particularly following transitions. Capacity and resource gaps can limit the RCO's effectiveness. The administrative and financial separation of the RC and RCO from UNDP represents a significant change in its business model: while it previously could leverage UNDP to channel programmatic funding and serve as an

administrative backstop, each RCO is now required to negotiate with UN agencies for financial and capacity support. There are also questions about whether there are sustainable funding channels to support the enhanced RCOs, as funding from member states for the UN's RCO Special Purpose Trust Fund is voluntary and done on an annual basis.²³ Moreover, while the newly configured RC position is anticipated to play a more political and prevention-oriented role, some member states continue to express concerns that these development functions will be overtly politicized and infringe upon their sovereignty.

SUPPORTING RESIDUAL PEACEBUILDING PRIORITIES FOLLOWING MISSION WITHDRAWAL

Despite ambitious mandates, peacekeeping missions cannot conclusively resolve the diverse structural causes of violence; this often requires long-term engagement from UNCTs. Recent transitions have taken place during highly contested elections and in countries that have made incomplete progress in guaranteeing human rights, upholding the rule of law, and fostering reconciliation. Upcoming peacekeeping transitions will occur in contexts like Darfur and South Sudan where civilians are likely to face significant security threats from state and non-state actors alike. In this light, follow-on UN configurations are likely to take on more comprehensive responsibilities related to peacebuilding, protection, and human rights.

To undertake these additional responsibilities, the UN needs a comprehensive understanding of the capacity gaps emerging during transitions and the in-country actors best positioned to fill them. Capacity assessments can improve the council's strategic engagement with transitions and better inform how it makes final decisions by providing a

21 See Forti and Connolly, “The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying”; Di Razza, “Mission in Transition,” pp. 5-7; and Novosseloff, “Lessons Learned from the UN's Transition in Côte d'Ivoire,” pp. 4-5.

22 As part of the development reforms, the position of RC is delinked from UNDP and reports to the UN secretary-general. For more detail, see Lesley Connolly and Laurie Mincieli, “Sustaining Peace in Liberia: New Reforms, New Opportunities?” International Peace Institute, May 2019.

23 With the UN development system reforms, UNDP is no longer the primary funder for the RC system; rather, the system is funded through a three-tiered formula outlined and agreed in General Assembly Resolution 72/279 and managed by DCO. One-third of this funding is by voluntary contributions from member states; one-third by UN agencies through a cost-sharing formula that takes into account size and ability to pay; and one-third through a 1 percent levy on all third-party, non-core contributions to UN development-related activities earmarked to a single agency or project. The secretary-general has estimated that \$281 million is needed to fund the RC system and had initially hoped that the majority of that money would come from assessed contributions. In the end, a hybrid model was agreed upon, with 6 percent of funding also coming from UN entity cost-sharing contributions and a 1 percent levy on tightly earmarked donor contributions. To date, twenty-eight member states and nineteen UN entities have contributed to the Special Purpose Trust Fund for the RC system, and total resources amount to close to \$190 million in pledges, commitments, and contributions received, leaving a gap of almost \$90 million. During the 75th session of the General Assembly, the secretary-general is expected to submit a comprehensive review on the functioning of the RC system, including the funding arrangements.

realistic picture of what peacebuilding and development responsibilities the UNCT will be able to take on and what additional expertise and resources are required. In Liberia, for example, the UNCT's capacity-mapping exercise underscored the significant investments required by UN agencies to meet the goals in the Liberia Peacebuilding Plan and ensure a smooth substantive and operational transition as UNMIL withdrew. One of the central challenges with this process, however, was that the findings from the exercise were only delivered to the Security Council after it had adopted the resolution on the closure of UNMIL and therefore did not feed into the council's deliberations.

In many countries, UNDP's mandate for conflict prevention, peacebuilding, rule of law, reconciliation, and support to state institutions overlaps with the peacekeeping mission's substantive priorities. Due to its institutional mandate, large staff, and financial capacities, UNDP is a natural successor to undertake the mission's programmatic work. During recent transitions, UNDP country offices have recalibrated their strategic approaches, programming, and allocation of resources to better address the remaining priorities and, where possible, continue work initiated under the mission.²⁴ In Liberia, UNDP effectively navigated the transition by conducting a high-level review of its programmatic and operational footprint and using this review to identify where surge capacity was needed. However, the capacity of UNDP's country offices pales in comparison to that of missions, and they often struggle to completely assume these responsibilities.²⁵

Independent human rights monitoring represents another substantive gap created by transitions. Many of the UN's largest multidimensional missions have extensive human rights components with wide geographic coverage. These components integrate human rights into UN policy frameworks, provide support to national human rights institutions, and inform the mission's

political engagement with national and international actors.²⁶ In some countries, independent OHCHR offices can provide follow-on monitoring, investigation, and capacity building after a mission withdraws. However, these offices often lack the same capacity and political leverage, and expanding the UNCT's capacity to monitor human rights is often contested by the host government or subject to practical limitations. For example, a small team in a capital may not have the necessary geographic range or political backing to cover countrywide human rights needs.

The extent to which OHCHR can reposition itself and fully execute its mandate depends on the national political environment, whether leadership in missions and at headquarters can sustain political will, and whether there are national human rights institutions around which OHCHR can frame its engagement and national support. Transition plans for MINUSTAH, UNOCI, and UNMIL all recommended strengthening human rights capacities following the transition. OHCHR established a stand-alone office in Liberia in 2018, and a joint OHCHR-MINUJUSTH office is on track to become an independent office following the mission's exit.²⁷ By contrast, the Ivorian government did not permit the creation of a stand-alone OHCHR office, limiting the opportunities for the UN to provide technical inputs as the government sought to strengthen its human rights and transitional justice institutions.²⁸

AVOIDING FINANCIAL CLIFFS

Mission drawdowns and withdrawals signal massive declines in resources provided to the host country at a time when the UN is inherently undergoing significant changes and financial assistance is most crucial. Peacekeeping transitions are often seen as success stories by many member states, and they signal financial relief for the largest donors. In a global environment of massive humanitarian crises and perpetually underfunded responses, traditional donor countries often redirect the resources saved from peacekeeping

24 Forti and Connolly, "The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying," p. 31.

25 For more information, see UN in Liberia, "Mapping UNCT Technical and Operational Capacities to Support the UN Commitments in the Liberian Peacebuilding Plan," May 2017, available at https://unmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unct_capacity_mapping_findings-22may2017_0.pdf.

26 OHCHR, "Human Rights Components of UN Peace Mission," available at www.ohchr.org/en/countries/pages/peacemissionsindex.aspx.

27 Forti and Connolly, "The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying," p. 33; Di Razza, "Mission in Transition," p. 44.

28 S/2015/958, P.99.

closures to other countries.²⁹ To compensate, host countries are left to scale up efforts to capitalize their national development plans.

As transitions are UN-wide priorities, resource mobilization for transitions should also be UN-wide. However, mobilizing resources during and after transitions is a challenge for both the UN development system and peacekeeping missions. While sustaining funding during drawdowns is a challenge in its own right, the UN development system also needs to ensure sustainable funding after the mission's departure. UNCTs are often expected to assume responsibility for a wide array of substantive tasks without commensurate increases in financial resources. These financial gaps extend to both operations (e.g., salaries, fuel and transportation, rent, and facilities) and programs, and are amplified following the RC system's financial de-linking from UNDP.³⁰

Programmatic funding from assessed peacekeeping contributions can complement project-based funding from the UN Peacebuilding Fund and member states during transitions. For example, it can fund joint programs between the mission and UNCT that allow the UNCT to safeguard progress following a reconfiguration and to maintain relationships with national actors. For example, UNAMID's recent budgets have allocated approximately \$15 million annually from its programmatic budget to finance the state liaison functions. However, programmatic funding from assessed contributions is subject to political scrutiny from member states during debates over the funding mechanisms and the substantive priorities for which they are employed. Moreover, because the mission has little flexibility to hand over these funds to the UNCT, assessed funding usually ends when a mission withdraws.

Multi-partner trust funds can mobilize and channel additional financial resources while

strengthening the host government's role in prioritizing projects, together with the UN. The Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund (LMPTF) is a prime example of such a structure. However, the LMPTF was only approved and created a few months before UNMIL withdrew and was only fully operational and partially funded three months after the mission's departure, missing the transition's most critical period.³¹ Moreover, member states have multiple avenues for financing peacebuilding in any given country (including preexisting bilateral aid commitments) and are often hesitant to contribute through more than one. Already sensitive to the challenges of operationalizing multi-partner trust funds, the secretary-general has attempted to compensate for this dynamic by asking the principal contributors to peacekeeping budgets to voluntarily commit the equivalent of 15 percent of a closing mission's final budget to country-level pooled funds for peacebuilding activities managed by the RCO.³² These dynamics underscore the importance of the mission and UNCT preparing integrated, detailed fundraising strategies well before a mission begins its final drawdown and transition period.

Preparing for the Next Generation of Peacekeeping Transitions: Recommendations

The recently concluded transitions of UNMIL and UNOCI, together with the ongoing transition of MINUJUSTH, afford the UN system an important moment for reflection in advance of the next wave of peacekeeping transitions. UNAMID's drawdown and exit from the Darfur region of Sudan is now front and center in the minds of the Security Council, UN member states, and the Secretariat alike. While drawdowns and transitions for the

29 UN OCHA, "Humanitarian Funding Update February 2019," March 6, 2019, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/humanitarian-funding-update-february-2019-united-nations-coordinated-appeals>.

30 Mandated by UN General Assembly Resolution 72/279, the Funding Compact comprises a series of commitments between member states and the UN Sustainable Development Group to improve the "quantity and quality of funding" to UN development activities in support of the 2030 Agenda. For more details about the Funding Compact, see UN General Assembly and Economic and Social Council, *Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 71/243 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System, 2019: Funding Compact—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/74/73/Add.1–E/2019/4/Add.1, April 2, 2019.

31 Forti and Connolly, "The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying," pp. 34–36.

32 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/72/707–S/2018/43, January 18, 2018, p. 14.

missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), and Mali (MINUSMA) are farther on the horizon, the council and the Secretariat have taken forward-looking approaches by encouraging the missions to begin internal and external discussions about exit strategies.

The transitions of these missions are likely to be more complex and challenging. Unlike the recent missions that have transitioned, many contemporary multidimensional peacekeeping operations have protection mandates. These civilians will continue to face significant threats from non-state armed groups and host governments alike, further increasing humanitarian needs, even as peacekeeping transitions proceed. These peace operations also struggle to mitigate asymmetric threats, organized crime (particularly in the case of Guinea-Bissau), and intercommunal conflicts, all of which are likely to continue after the missions withdraw.³³ UNCTs may struggle to address long-term governance deficits while simultaneously addressing these challenges. Moreover, regional and subregional organizations, rather than the UN, are increasingly at the forefront of national political processes and peace agreements in these countries. As a result, the UN will have comparatively less influence over transition strategies, necessitating greater cooperation with national and regional actors to develop shared political strategies.

In this context, the UN will need to prepare for future transitions by sustaining its political engagement throughout the process, coordinating operations among UN entities, and ensuring coherence with development actors. The following recommendations are based on best practices from recent UN transitions while anticipating dynamics that the UN system will confront over the coming years.

ADOPT SHARED AND LONG-TERM POLITICAL STRATEGIES

The Security Council should use peacekeeping mandates to articulate a common political strategy and narrative for transitions. These should reflect forward-looking strategies for the UN's continued political engagement with national actors during

periods of drawdown and reconfiguration.

To support this process, the Secretariat should provide regular, frank assessments to Security Council members when council decision making deviates from the mission or UNCT's assessment of conditions and priorities. The underlying political strategy, informed by joint assessments from the mission and UNCT, should reflect how the UN will sustain its engagement on mandated peacekeeping tasks and long-term peacebuilding priorities. These strategies should explicitly lay out the complementary contributions of the UNCT, mission, and host government toward achieving them.

It is vital that the council acknowledge the difference between end state and end date. The council should use prioritized peacekeeping mandates and benchmarked exit strategy to articulate what it sees as the end state, including, at a minimum, the level of security and political stability required for a mission to withdraw. At the same time, the council needs to encourage the Secretariat to be frank that risks, including protection concerns, will persist beyond the mission.

One way to highlight these risks would be through regular reporting on missions' integrated strategic frameworks (as requested in Resolution 2423 for MINUSMA), which should be included in future mandates of missions undergoing transitions. Such a framework defines joint priorities and an internal division of labor between the mission and UNCT based on their respective mandates and comparative advantages. Integrated strategic frameworks should be driven by common country assessments, continuously evaluated and updated based on progress and changing dynamics, and reported on frequently and in detail to the Security Council.

To sustain its engagement on transition portfolios, the Security Council should request regular, frequent, and frank assessments from mission leadership and the Secretariat on the implementation of its exit strategies. These assessments should include quantitative and qualitative evaluations of progress toward achieving the mission's benchmarks, evaluation of the mission's preparations for reconfiguration and, where possible,

³³ Arthur Boutellis, "Still Flying Blind: Peace Operations and Organised Crime," Oxford Research Group, February 27, 2019, available at www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/still-flying-blind-peace-operations-and-organised-crime.

quantitative analysis of how the reduction of the mission's footprint is impacting the level of violence and the UN's delivery of programming.

While formal reports of the secretary-general and briefings to the council are standard fare, the council can also use more informal briefings, video teleconferences, and closed consultations to engage with national and regional actors and development partners. For example, the council could request regular briefings from the PBC on countries on its agenda undergoing peacekeeping transitions, or the Security Council Working Group on Peace Operations could organize an informal briefing every six months from mission leadership and experts from UN headquarters to discuss best practices on peacekeeping transitions. The council could also dispatch small delegations (possibly jointly with the PBC, when appropriate) during drawdowns and reconfigurations to understand how programs and operations are implemented in practice. Systematic consultation and coordination is particularly important with regional and subregional organizations, which are increasingly crucial partners during UN transitions.

DEVELOP A FIELD-LED PLANNING STRATEGY

Senior leadership in missions—particularly the SRSG and the DSRSG/RC/HC—should shape the substantive vision for the transition, drive transition planning, and provide concrete recommendations for the future UN presence in the country based on their assessments and consultations with the host government, the UNCT, the UN Secretariat, and national civil society. In order for the DSRSG/RC/HC to lead the transition planning for the post-mission presence, they need to have the necessary skill set and profile not only to coordinate regularly with the UNCT and mission but also to plan and drive forward a transition process. They need to have dedicated financial resources and training on relevant rules and regulations, including those related to the budget and liquidation of assets. In addition, when the DSRSG/RC/HC is inheriting the follow-on mission, SRSGs and member states need to give them an avenue for political engagement both with the host state and with the Security Council to brief them on the transition and build a relationship.

Before receiving transition timelines from the

Security Council, the mission, the UNCT, and the UN Secretariat should develop an overarching transition planning strategy, timeline, and operational structure, building on the transitions directive issued by the UN secretary-general in February 2019. They should also undertake capacity-mapping exercises evaluating the existing resources of the UNCT and national actors on the basis of peacebuilding priorities identified in a national peacebuilding plan. Undertaking this analysis in advance can ensure it informs how the council sets timeframes and develops the options for the post-mission configuration. It can also help the council understand the capacity and resource gaps that will remain once a mission leaves.

Joint planning structures between the mission, UNCT, and Secretariat should build off any previous transition plans to avoid duplication and promote a common strategic vision (set by clear leadership directives). The transition plan should include focused operational priorities, scenario-based analyses, and a common risk assessment, which should be made available in full to senior UN leadership and Security Council members. The transition plan should explicitly detail who is responsible for engaging the host government, nongovernmental actors, regional and subregional organizations, and major development partners, and how they should do so.

STRATEGICALLY COMMUNICATE THE TRANSITION TO THE HOST SOCIETY

The UN needs to strengthen its approach to strategically communicating on transitions to national actors. Missions and UNCTs should implement joint strategic communications plans at least one year in advance of the mission's closure. The plan should involve the mission's civil affairs and communications sections, as well as all communications teams within UN agencies and the UNCT's Communications Group. The plan should identify national stakeholders and organizations that can best share its core messages with communities where the UN does not have a significant field presence or has already begun reducing its footprint.

The core messaging should emphasize that while the peacekeeping mission is leaving, the UN will remain in the country. Toward this end, the mission should hold symbolic, public closing

ceremonies throughout the host country to signal the official departure of the peacekeeping mission and the handover. This is an opportunity to celebrate the legacy of the mission and outline a process of continued engagement.

Where possible, the mission should hand over its communications infrastructure to national or regional actors and encourage its continued use to support peacebuilding projects. However, the UN should consider whether these actors have the capacity to maintain the equipment and preserve an impartial editorial line and quality standards.

ENGAGE EARLY TO SECURE ADEQUATE FINANCING

Avoiding the financial cliff is one of the greatest challenges the UN faces during transitions due to structural barriers within the UN and waning political and financial engagement from donors. The host government, UN member states, and development partners should undertake coordinated fundraising efforts before the Security Council establishes a final withdrawal date in order to capitalize on debates and discussions surrounding the transition.

At the beginning of transition planning, at the field level, the DSRSG/RC/HC, as the lead in the transition, should play a central role in setting up a pooled funding mechanism with the relevant UN staff based on the type of mechanism that is most appropriate for the context. They should also politically engage with member states on the Security Council, the PBC, and other relevant development partners.

As transition planning advances, the Secretariat should more clearly demonstrate the value of assessed peacekeeping programmatic funding in its budget requests. Specifically, it should highlight recent examples of using programmatic funding to support peacebuilding priorities during transitions. These requests should also illustrate how using assessed contributions for joint programs is in line with UN financial rules and regulations. If the Secretariat does this successfully, the Fifth Committee would be more likely to approve more funds for peacebuilding-related activities during a transition process.

When the UNCT is the primary follow-on configuration after a transition, the UN Secretariat should provide surge capacity in areas like

fundraising and donor coordination to strengthen the RCO. The new UN Development System Funding Compact (expected to be ratified in 2019) should also dedicate additional financial resources for RCOs to undertake programming and fund their staff during the first two years following peacekeeping transitions.

INSTITUTIONALIZE DEDICATED TRANSITION SUPPORT CAPACITY WITHIN THE UN SYSTEM

As transitions become more complex and frequent, and amid growing pressure on UN staff in the field and at headquarters to plan and execute such transitions, member states and the Secretariat need to ensure that the UN has more dedicated, enhanced expertise. Policy and programmatic guidance, operational support, planning expertise, and surge capacities will become all the more important as peace operations are expected to better integrate transition planning throughout a mission's lifecycle. As one example, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Department of Peace Operations, and UNDP collaborate on a joint project to support UN transitions in mission settings. While this is a valuable tool for providing this transition-related support (including through surge capacities and operational expertise), it is funded outside of the UN's regular budget and is not institutionalized within the UN system. There is a clear need for the UN to scale up and institutionalize transitions expertise and capacities.

SUSTAIN LONG-TERM PEACEBUILDING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

One of the biggest challenges during a transition is sustaining international engagement on long-term peacebuilding priorities. The mission and the UNCT should ensure that residual peacebuilding challenges—identified through joint peacebuilding plans and international frameworks led by national actors—are mainstreamed into the host government's national development plans as well as international development frameworks. In doing so, they can establish constructive relations with the government as a basis for continued engagement in meeting these goals. To support and popularize these processes, member states, led by the host government and the Security Council

penholders, should establish formal and informal groupings to improve coordination, information sharing, and analysis of these frameworks and approaches. These could range from informal groups of friends to formal or informal engagement between the host government and the PBC on a case-by-case basis. These groupings would better enable member states, UN officials, and national actors (including the government and civil society) to examine how the transition process is unfolding from different perspectives.

Leveraging the comparative advantages of regional and subregional organizations in transition environments requires sustained engagement throughout a mission's lifecycle and transition process. Missions should explicitly articulate these organizations' possible complementarity during transitions in the early phases of developing a mission-wide exit strategies. In addition, UN mission leadership should proactively engage these organizations (at both the country and headquar-

ters levels) on how the transition is unfolding, briefing them regularly on transition's trajectory, and the possible political and operational impacts on the country and on how those organizations operate.

Conclusion

Transitions are long-term processes that span a range of political and technical issues and require coordination between UN member states and intergovernmental bodies, the host country and regional actors, UN headquarters, the mission, and the UNCT. While many stakeholders involved in transitions in recent years have improved their understanding of and approaches to these issues, the next wave will feature challenges unlike those experienced in the past. Transitions are one of the few processes that bring together the entire UN system, and it is critical that all stakeholders collectively engage on them going forward.

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