



This meeting note was drafted jointly by staff at the International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training at the United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support. It highlights key insights from the roundtable discussion, “UN Transitions: Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal,” which took place at IPI on March 22, 2012.

The high-level discussion first focused on the political dimensions of UN transitions, looking in particular at the impact of withdrawal on host countries. It then addressed challenges and successes related to planning and managing UN transitions.

This note reflects the *rapporteurs’* interpretation of the themes that emerged during the discussion and does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations, IPI, or the participants in the meeting. The meeting was convened under the Chatham House rule of nonattribution.

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UN Transitions: Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal

AUGUST 2012

Background

On March 22, 2012, the International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training (DPET) of the United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support (DPKO/DFS) organized a high-level roundtable discussion on UN transitions. It brought together permanent representatives to the UN, representatives of UN entities engaged in UN transitions, and experts from independent research and policy institutions, among others.

The roundtable provided a platform for the UN and member states to discuss experiences and key lessons from past and ongoing transition processes. It provided a timely opportunity for dialogue ahead of the meeting of the UN Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations (March 23rd) and the Security Council debate on peacekeeping (March 26th), which both focused on transitions as part of a broader discussion on peacebuilding.

While the term “UN transition” encompasses all significant changes of the UN presence on the ground, the roundtable discussion focused on the drawdown or withdrawal of peacekeeping or special political missions. During the first session, member states expressed their views on the political dimensions of transition processes and reflected on the importance of having a shared understanding of the situation on the ground to determine the right timing for transitions. The second session focused on the UN’s attempts to manage transition processes, particularly through early and integrated planning, to avoid the drawdown or withdrawal of UN missions jeopardizing prior peacebuilding gains.

The Political Dimensions of UN Transitions

The panel opened with an acknowledgement that while discussions on UN transitions are not new, they have recently re-emerged among member states, as several UN missions are currently undergoing or planning for transitions.¹ Participants agreed that UN transitions are inevitable as the UN presence adjusts to larger national transition processes in host countries. As such, UN transitions involve various stakeholders and should be seen as reconfigurations of the UN presence on the ground rather than the exit of a peacekeeping or political mission from a host country.

¹ With regard to earlier discussions on UN transitions, participants referred to the report of the United Nations Secretary-General, *No Exit Without Strategy: Security Council Decision-Making and the Closure or Transition of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, UN Doc. S/2001/394, April 20, 2001.

As part of the panel, participants explored ongoing and past transitions from a host-country perspective. Emphasis was placed on the importance of the host government having ownership over the process of determining when the time is ripe for peacekeepers to leave, and participants noted that no country wants to keep peacekeepers on their soil longer than necessary. In this context, one participant emphasized the risks associated with a precipitous drawdown or withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Liberia. The participant noted the need to assist postconflict countries to build resilient and inclusive institutions that reduce the risk of renewed conflict, guarantee security in the country, and respond to potential new threats such as transnational organized crime and piracy. In the context of Burundi, it was noted that while the presence of peacekeeping missions can help relieve the host government from security pressures, it can also give the impression of continued instability and discourage potential investors. Against this background, participants reiterated the importance of ongoing dialogue between the UN Security Council, the UN Secretariat, and the host country, as well as regular joint evaluations on the ground that take into account mandates, roles, responsibilities, and the capacities of all involved.

Participants recognized that the drawdown of peacekeeping missions can have a negative socio-economic impact on the host country, and that the international community should be mindful of the “funding gap” that usually results as a consequence of the withdrawal of a peacekeeping mission. Some urged the UN to do more by transferring assets to the host country and helping them to retain donor support as peacekeepers withdraw. While this is part of the Peacebuilding Commission’s mandate, the UN country team, regional organizations (whose capacities should be strengthened), and “groups of friends” should also be involved.

Planning for UN Transitions

The second session offered UN actors the opportunity to react to issues raised by member states and to share their thinking on how challenges and successes relate to the management of transition processes. All panelists stressed the importance of

collaborative and coordinated action to ensure that the changing UN presence does not destabilize the host country. Reflecting this realization, the UN Integration Steering Group (ISG), chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, is in the process of developing a common policy on UN transitions based on lessons and good practices from across the UN system.

Speakers at the meeting highlighted recurring challenges encountered in the management of transition processes, such as expectation management, leadership continuity, national ownership, national capacity building, and staff management (an ISG concept note was shared with participants that described these challenges in further detail). The best way to address these challenges is through integrated and early planning on the basis that only integrated transition management will be sustainable in the long run. This entails the development of realistic benchmarks at the outset of a mission’s life as well as their review and adjustment through continued dialogue between the host country, the Security Council, and the UN. While peacekeepers can contribute initially to building functioning and legitimate institutions, partnerships with the World Bank, UN agencies, bilateral donors, and regional partners, on the basis of each actor’s comparative advantages, should guide long-term support to the host-country authorities.

Discussions during the second panel also echoed the first panel’s concern about continuity of political support and financial resources after a transition: as peacekeeping missions withdraw, the financial and logistical support funded through assessed contributions disappears. Follow-on missions led by the UN’s Department of Political Affairs or UN agencies, funds, and programs are often expected to continue implementing peacebuilding priorities without the financial means to do so. It was therefore recommended that transition plans include strategies to address funding gaps. In this regard, the review of civilian capacities in the aftermath of conflict provides useful recommendations aimed at strengthening interoperability and flexibility across the UN through better use of UN resources, including assessed contributions, to support peacebuilding priorities and harmonize service delivery across

agencies.² Member states were called upon to sustain political and financial support for ongoing peacebuilding efforts in host countries throughout and beyond transition phases and to ensure that they speak with one voice in their various capacities as Security Council members, donors, and troop and police contributors.

Conclusion

Participants agreed that UN transitions, rather than being seen as an event, should be seen as a gradual reconfiguration process, during which the existing UN presence adapts to larger transition processes of the host country. As such, UN transitions are inherently linked to national ownership and need to be driven by a shared understanding of the situation on the ground rather than by political, financial, or other considerations of member states. Achieving this goal requires improved information sharing and dialogue between host governments, member states, and the various UN actors through informal and candid discussions like this one. More importantly, it requires joint analysis, planning, and evaluations of the situation on the ground throughout the lifetime of a mission. Only such

regular reviews can lead to better-calibrated adjustments in mandates rather than a one-dimensional focus on troop and police reductions.

The definition of roles and responsibilities also remains a work in process, including expectations regarding the UN presence, other international partners, and the host government. On one side, the UN and its partners need to do more to define the role of peacekeepers as early peacebuilders and to clarify what the mission can and cannot do. On the other side, the international community's expectations of the UN, the host government, and local stakeholders should be reasonable and commensurate with their capacities.

Recent developments such as “country compacts” and the “New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States” reflect the fact that several fragile countries increasingly want ownership of their own postconflict recovery.³ Aligning UN transition planning and larger peacebuilding goals with national priorities helps to ensure continuous engagement with host governments and other key stakeholders throughout and beyond the drawdown and withdrawal of peacekeepers.

² United Nations, *Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict: Independent Report of the Senior Advisory Group*, UN Doc. A/65/747-S/2011/85, February 22, 2011.

³ For more on these developments, see Christina Bennett, “Aid Effectiveness in Fragile States: Lessons from the First Generation of Transition Compacts,” New York: International Peace Institute, April 2012; Rachel Locke and Vanessa Wyeth, “Busan and Beyond: Implementing the ‘New Deal’ for Fragile States,” New York: International Peace Institute, July 2012.

Agenda

UN Transitions: Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal

March 22, 2012

12:30 – 12:45

Buffet lunch

12:45 – 13:45

Political Dimensions of UN Transitions

Chair

Mr. Youssef Mahmoud, *Senior Advisor, International Peace Institute*

Speakers

Ms. Marjon V. Kamara, *Permanent Representative of Liberia to the United Nations*

Mr. Herménégilde Niyonzima, *Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations*

Mr. Philip Parham, *Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations*

The first session will provide the perspectives of member states on the political context in which transitions take place, taking into account current and past transition processes. It will explore ways to foster dialogue among the UN Secretariat, host-country authorities, and the Security Council on the timing, phasing, and nature of transition and follow-on arrangements.

13:45 – 14:50

Planning for UN Transitions

Chair

Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, *Director, Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training, United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support (DPET/DPKO/DFS)*

Speakers

Mr. Dmitry Titov, *Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)*

Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, *Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Department of Political Affairs (DPA)*

Ms. Marta Ruedas, *Deputy Assistant Administrator and Deputy Director, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (UNDP)*

The second session will focus on the UN's response to transition processes and its integrated efforts to adjust its field presences to the changing circumstances on the ground. Specifically, it will look at ways to best address transitions from the planning stage and manage the expectations of stakeholders (host government, local population, international community, UN country team) throughout the life cycle of the mission.

14:50 – 15:00

Closing Remarks

Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, *Director, Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training, United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support (DPET/DPKO/DFS)*

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