

Helpdesk Research Report: UN Peace Support Mission Transitions

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Query: What analysis exists on UN peace support mission transitions generally, including from Peacekeeping Mission to Peacebuilding Mission and from UN Mission to UN Country Team?

Enquirer: UK Government Stabilisation Unit

Author: Oliver Walton (oliver@gsdrc.org)

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1. Overview

This report provides an overview of the available analysis on UN peace support transitions. The term transitions refers to situations where peace support operations withdraw and hand over responsibility to national authorities, another UN body such as a UN country team, an alternative international presence, or other regional and local actors. The available literature is mostly focused on transitions from peacekeeping missions to peacebuilding missions. There is relatively little analysis of transitions from UN missions to UN country teams, although many of the general points raised in relation to peacebuilding missions are relevant to country teams. This report should be read in conjunction with three case study reports, which focus respectively on transitions of UN missions in Sierra Leone (M'Cormack 2012), Haiti (Fraser 2012) and Nepal (Walton 2012).

High levels of global peacekeeping deployment have led to growing pressure for UN peacekeeping missions to scale down (CIC 2011). At the same time, there have been parallel pressures for UN peace support missions to take on a wider range of roles (including support for statebuilding and improved governance) (CIC 2011). These twin pressures have led to growing analysis about transitions primarily in the official UN literature but also in the academic literature (expert comments). The majority of UN analysis is oriented towards improving current practice rather than reflecting deeply on experience.

It is important note that UN missions are transitioning amid very different operating environments (CIC 2011). In some contexts, such as Liberia, UN missions drawdown in a relatively stable environment and in an orderly fashion, while in others UN missions are abruptly ended when local consent is withdrawn (as occurred in Chad and the Central African Republic) (CIC 2011). These varied dynamics present different organisational and political challenges.

The next section provides an overview of the literature's suggestions for improving peace support mission transitions, highlighting several key recommendations:

- Promote integrated missions
- Ensure a clear mandate from the start
- Ensure clear and realistic benchmarks
- Start planning early and coordinating with other actors
- Promote national ownership
- Focus on economic recovery and provide security guarantees

Section three highlights several key problems facing transitions:

- Deployment issues
- Funding issues
- Growing political opposition

2. Key factors to ensure effective transitions

Promoting integrated missions

An integrated peacebuilding mission is a framework in which the UN supports peace 'through subsuming actors and approaches within an overall political-strategic crisis management framework' (Eide et al 2005, p.3). Over the last few years there has been growing consensus within the United Nations that integrated missions help to support 'less risky and less abrupt' exit strategies (UNGA 2009, UNSC 2010a). Integrated missions support smooth transitions by ensuring that interim arrangements are in place before the ultimate transition to the UN resident coordinator system (UNSC 2010a). Successful examples of integrated missions include Sierra Leone and Burundi. The 'great advantage' of integrated missions over the resident coordinator system is that integrated missions 'still have a political mandate', which allows them to 'make political interventions and promote conflict prevention measures' (UNSC 2010a).

Integrated missions are considerably cheaper than peacekeeping missions, but can perform some of the same conflict prevention functions. As such they may enable an earlier exit for peacekeeping forces (UNSC 2010a). Another advantage integrated missions have over peacekeeping forces is that they avoid many of the negative effects associated with posting soldiers in a country for prolonged periods of times, which are highlighted in the case of Haiti (see Fraser 2012).

The UN coordinator in Sierra Leone has argued that an integrated mission should imply a shift in focus from peace and security to peace and development and an integration of a political with various development mandates (UNSC 2010a). Integrating these various aspects requires a Joint United Nations strategy. In the case of Sierra Leone, this was supported by the Peacebuilding Commission (UNSC 2010a). One of the key benefits of integrated missions is in leadership and planning where they provide a structure for better succession planning for staff (UNGA 2009).

There is not much critical analysis of integrated missions available in the literature. One expert contacted in the preparation of this report noted that ‘integrated missions’ are rarely truly integrated. Genuine integration would require an integrated vertical reporting chain and consolidated budgeting (expert comments). Instead, ‘integrated missions’ normally simply represent efforts to coordinate activities amongst UN actors, redistribution of roles and re-sizing of the mission (expert comments). This critical perspective is to some extent supported by the case of Haiti, which experienced problems operationalizing an integrated approach (see Fraser 2012).

Ensure a clear mandate from the start

Several recent key UN documents have emphasised the critical importance of considering the exit strategy of a peace support operation when drawing up the mission’s mandate at its initiation (UN News Centre 2010, UNSC 2010a). This involves assessing early on when and how a peace support operation should be drawn down based on an examination of the strength of national governance structures and the prospects for socio-economic recovery (UNSC 2010a). Mandates should be unambiguous and realistic (UNSC 2010a).

A lack of clarity in a mission’s mandate can lead to a mismatch between expectations and the mission’s capacities as has been demonstrated in the case of Liberia (UNSC 2010a), and in the case of Haiti where there was uncertainty around MINUSTAH’s¹ security functions (see Fraser 2012). At a meeting on transitions at the Security Council in 2010, the head of the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Alan Doss, stated that ‘[r]arely, if ever, do we plan the exit strategy at the outset of a mission’ (UNSC 2010a, p. 8). The case of Nepal highlights the difficulties of an inflexible mandate. In this case, the UN mission’s very limited mandate made it difficult for it to play a more politically engaged role as political circumstances changed and the peace process came under strain (Walton 2012). The case of UNIPSIL² in Sierra Leone, by contrast, highlights the benefits of a clear mandate: ‘UNIPSIL’s clear and focused mandate has made articulation of benchmarks, according to which exit can be planned, straightforward’ (CIC 2011, p. 49 cited in M’Cormack 2012, p.6).

Ensure clear and realistic benchmarks

A clear mandate should ideally be combined with benchmarks to guide the eventual process of transition, although it is important to acknowledge that progress in conflict-affected regions is likely to be tentative and potentially subject to reversals (UN 2010a). In the past, missions often relied on elections as the key benchmark for transition. Prompted by the bad track record of post-conflict elections in the 1990s, however, peace support missions began to focus on a wider range of state-building and governance outcomes (CIC 2011).

The Department for Peacekeeping Operations’ (DPKO) Capstone Doctrine on peacekeeping makes explicit reference to benchmarks, noting ‘reliable benchmarks and indicators are required to determine when the United Nations peacekeeping operation can begin the process of hand-over and withdrawal, without jeopardizing ongoing efforts to consolidate the peace’ (DPKO 2008, p. 88). A number of documents examined for this report stated that the defining factors for withdrawal of a mission should be progress in the peace process and in the capacity of national institutions (Jones et al 2009, UNSC 2010a).

¹ United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti.

² United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone

The UN has published a guide to benchmarking for peace consolidation, which highlights the following key points:

- Prepare for benchmarking from the outset of a UN peace operation.
- Engage the host government and civil society
- Specify core tasks that will enable a host government and its international partners to meet their shared objectives
- Share resources where possible with other monitoring systems
- Identify sound contextual benchmarks and indicators
- Be realistic when defining benchmarks
- Keep the focus on the core intentions of the benchmark system (UN 2010).

Many of these points are reiterated in other UN documents. A UN Security Council meeting report from 2010, for example, stresses the importance of making benchmarks comprehensible and accessible to national partners, ideally incorporating goals and targets already adopted by the national government (UNSC 2010a). It emphasises that benchmarks should also distinguish between core goals (relating to the security and political mandates of the mission) and contextual goals (broader goals such as poverty reduction that may not be achieved during the lifetime of a mission) (UNSC 2010a).

Jones et al (2009) highlight several challenges to measuring 'success' through benchmarking. First, there is a diverse understanding of what constitutes minimum progress towards stability. Second, the key benchmark – the emergence of a viable national political process – is very difficult to measure (Jones et al 2009). Similar problems are noted by Zaum (2009) who stresses the danger that benchmarks will not reflect the political and resource constraints faced by the operation on the ground or will be too vague to be useful. Zaum (2009) also highlights the risk of leaving the determination of benchmarks to the mission itself, noting that this raises the possibility that they can be manipulated to ensure the 'right' outcome – 'either to prolong statebuilding efforts or to shorten them' (Zaum 2009, p.196). He describes situations such as Kosovo where norms and benchmarks are used strategically by local elites to push for a faster transition, and states that as a result 'exit rarely coincides with the achievement of the normative ambitions of statebuilders, or of the full implementation of their mandates' (Zaum 2009, p.204).

A number of studies have emphasised the importance of maintaining flexibility in order to respond to changing circumstances on the ground (UNGA 2009, UNSC 2010a). Transition strategies should not be conceived as a linear exercise with one step leading inevitably to another. 'Progress is neither inevitable nor predestined' (UNSC 2010a, p.9).

There is also some recognition that monitoring a peace process needs to go beyond benchmarking, and be based on a comprehensive picture that examines subjective aspects such as legitimacy, expectations and authority (UNSC 2010a). This involves listening to and understanding the expectations and perceptions of national authorities and civil society (UNSC 2010a). Effective communication and an inclusive dialogue between national authorities and the population are vital to create realistic expectations of what can be achieved during the transition (UNGA 2009). The importance of widespread awareness-raising among the general public is highlighted in the various transitions between UN missions that have occurred in Sierra Leone (M'Cormack 2012).

Start planning early and coordinating with other actors

Planning in UN missions is generally geared towards the reporting requirements of the budget and mandate cycle (UNSC 2010a). It tends to focus too much on the details of mandate implementation and fails to capture the broader strategic picture. Planning 'should ideally start with the assessment of future risk and probability. On that basis, [the mission] can plan for a variety of outcomes, not just one' (UNSC 2010a, p.9). Initiating strategic discussions with other UN actors, member states, and other development actors such as the European Union, the World Bank and the African Union can be a useful tool for enhancing transition planning (UNSC 2010a).

Promote national ownership

For a number of years, the UN has prioritised national ownership during the process of transition (UNGA 2009, UNGA 2010). The UN has stressed that it is important for national authorities to be involved in the transition process: 'the transition from a peacekeeping presence to a special political mission necessitates appropriate interaction with the host Government, civil society and the broader United Nations system' (UNGA 2010, p.8). In the past insufficient attention has been paid to the need to support national institutions when developing transition strategies with other international partners (Permanent Secretary to the UN 2010). The capacity of national institutions to exercise full ownership may be very limited in many post-conflict countries and therefore building national capacity may require long-term engagement and support (UNGA 2009). Jones et al (2009) note that missions can contribute to enhancing national ownership in three main ways:

- 'Supporting transitional security functions, designed to create and secure space for politics – including by guaranteeing ceasefires, demobilizing combatants, observation, protection of civilians, and defusing tensions.
- Through support to national political institutions and processes – helping to implement a peace agreement, or extend state authority, or both.
- Laying the foundations for secure development by supporting security sector reform and fostering rule of law institutions' (Jones et al 2009, p.ii).

Zaum (2009) highlights the risk of completing the transition to national ownership too quickly. In Timor Leste, local elites became frustrated at the undemocratic nature of the UN mission and threatened to resign if power was not handed over. This led to an ineffective handover where the political leaders lacked the resources to govern effectively (Zaum 2009). Sierra Leone is cited by the UN as a positive example of national ownership: the Joint United Nations Vision is built on top of the Government of Sierra Leone's own Agenda for Change (UNSC 2010a).

Focus on economic recovery and provide security guarantees

The prospects for responsible exit of peacekeeping missions can be enhanced by ensuring adequate focus on economic support and security guarantees. Security guarantees can come either in the form of pre-authorized and pre-committed rapid reaction forces or over-the-horizon forces, provided by Member States or regional organizations (Jones et al 2009). Advanced commitment to return rapidly in the face of deteriorating conditions can have an important deterrent effect (Jones et al 2009).

Reform of the UN system has outpaced reform of the wider international architecture to foster economic recovery in post-conflict situations. 'As CIC observed in its 2008 report *Recovering from War* those tasks fall to an "ad hoc and fractious groupings of bilateral and multilateral development actors who are not mobilized primarily to combat conflict...do not operate primarily in conflict zones...are under-resourced, and have limited authority vis-à-vis their in-country counterparts"' (CIC

2008 cited in Jones et al 2009, p. 9). This means that early initiatives to jump-start economic activity are frequently not launched.

3. Key Issues

Deployment issues

Transition strategies have often been blighted by a lack of quickly deployable civilian capacity to perform law and order functions once peacekeeping forces have withdrawn (UNSC 2010a). This problem is highlighted in the Haiti case study that accompanies this report (Fraser 2012). Some UN representatives have proposed a standing police force to meet this challenge (UNSC 2010a). The UN has emphasised the need to enhance civilian support to conflict affected countries (UN 2011). An Independent Report from the Strategic Advisory Group of the UN on Civilian Capacity outlined a number of ways in which rapid deployment in transitional contexts can be improved to respond to crises and changing circumstances:

- ‘Developing a “corporate emergency” model: To enable rapid deployment and reassignment of staff in emergencies, the circumstances that qualify as an emergency should be clearly defined. A roster should be established of pre-approved, rapidly deployable staff from across the United Nations’.
- ‘Building career paths to retain talented staff: To encourage field service and develop more varied career paths, mobility requirements should be strengthened, service with non-United Nations actors valued and the quality of training improved’ (UN 2011, no page number).

The UN has also recently emphasised the need to provide support to UN country teams rapidly when tensions arise (UNSG 2011). In recent years such services have included assistance to locally-led mediation efforts and technical expertise on ‘electoral processes, constitutional reforms, truth commissions, national dialogues, reconciliation talks and the creation of national dispute resolution mechanisms. Characteristically, this kind of support is provided discreetly, with minimal resources and as a complement to ongoing development and governance programmes’ (UNSG 2011, p.16).

Funding issues

Funding issues have constrained the effectiveness of peace support mission transitions in a range of contexts. The constraints placed on missions by lack of financial resources have been highlighted in each of the three GSDRC case studies (Haiti, Sierra Leone and Nepal) that accompany this report (Fraser 2012, M’Cormack 2012, Walton 2012). A recent UNGA report found that current funding arrangements lack the flexibility to respond to the funding requirements that arise during mission start-up, expansion or transition (UNGA 2011). Transitions from UN peacekeeping forces to special political missions (SPMs) entail a number of problems, highlighted in a recent CIC report:

- ‘The UN financial rules and arrangements have effectively two separate and misaligned systems. The peacekeeping budget is set annually in the middle of each year, while the regular budget – including SPMs – is biannual and agreed at the end of every other year. This means that budgeting for SPMs requires a good deal of guesswork about future needs. Unsurprisingly, the UN Secretariat often has to request supplemental funds for SPMs that expand or face new challenges.
- Exacerbating this problem, political missions receive less individual attention from member states than peacekeeping operations, as their financial requirements are wrapped up with

other elements of the regular budget debate. That limits the oversight by Member States. Similarly, there is no inter-governmental entity equivalent to the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations...that reviews the state of peace operations every year.

- SPMs lack a “support account” to budget headquarters substantive and support backstopping, and lack any proper access to start-up and expansion resources. This means that SPMs are backstopped by fewer staff than peacekeeping operations, directly impacting support and reporting processes’ (Call 2011).

A review by the Secretary General into current funding and backstopping arrangements for special political missions found that these arrangements were inadequate in a number of additional ways:

- ‘Start-up and expansion of special political missions are impeded by the lack of well-defined mechanisms to finance them between conferral of a mandate and approval of a budget;
- Much of the backstopping capacity that special political missions need to draw upon is provided by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support and the Global Service Centre, which are not funded from the programme budget’ (UNGA 2011).

The report advocates an alternative framework that better accommodates for the volatility of political missions’ resource requirements and operational characteristics and facilitates transition between different forms of United Nations presences in support of peace. A recent UN report outlined a number of ways in which funding in transitional contexts can be improved:

- ‘Heads of mission should be given greater flexibility to draw on budgets for civilian personnel when required.
- Tasks should be implemented by the actor with the greatest comparative advantage. This could be UN agencies, national or local actors, or external partners.
- Members of United Nations Country Teams should consider adopting the model used by the World Food Programme working capital facility. This, in essence, enables advance financing against expected contributions to kickstart programmes in the immediate aftermath of conflict’ (UN 2011, no page number).

Growing political opposition

The longer a UN mission stays, the more likely it is to be seen as illegitimate and contested by local elites. In cases such as Nepal, a prolonged UN mission led to growing political opposition (Walton 2012). In more extreme cases, such as Kosovo and Timor Leste, a prolonged presence can lead to violence targeted at the international administration (Zaum 2009). Growing political opposition can force UN missions to leave early without sufficient preparation for transition. When UNTAET³ was closed in 2002, the UN Secretary General commented that withdrawal had been too soon (Zaum 2009).

³ United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor

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7. Additional Information

Experts Consulted:

Prof. Alex Bellamy, Griffith University
Prof. Paul Williams, George Washington University

Prof. Keith Krause, Graduate Institute, Geneva
Morgan Hughes, Centre for International Cooperation, New York University
Madeline England, Stimson Centre
Dr. Nicolas Lemay-Hebert, University of Birmingham
Anja Kaspersen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway
Anna Alvazzi, Small Arms Survey
Eric Berman, Small Arms Survey

Key websites:

[Centre on International Cooperation](#)

[International Peace Institute](#)

[UN Peacekeeping Resource Hub](#)

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