

# UN Transitions in a Fractured Multilateral Environment



A view of UN peacekeepers of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).  
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**2023, No. 4**  
8 December 2023

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## Executive Summary

Transitions have emerged as a major focus of attention with a spate of drawdowns, reconfigurations and terminations of UN peace operations. At the time of writing, peacekeepers from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) are leaving Mali under difficult circumstances following the abrupt ending of the mission's mandate in June 2023. The UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is also undergoing a transition, with the Congolese government calling for its accelerated drawdown to begin by the end of

2023. With the ongoing conflict in Sudan and a request by the authorities that the UN Integrated Transition Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) depart, the Council terminated the mission's mandate on 1 December 2023. Other multidimensional peacekeeping missions, such as the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), have initiated transition planning, while several Special Political Missions (SPMs) have submitted transition calendars in line with the Secretary-General's 2019 planning directive, which calls for

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such calendars that outline transition milestones and objectives with a view to adequate preparation for mission withdrawal and UN reconfiguration.

As this report notes, transitions, such as those underway in Mali and the DRC, are particularly difficult when relations are strained between the mission and the host country. Stark divisions in the Council diminish its influence on host country leaders, who can exploit these differences to their advantage. The difficult Council discussions and negotiations on the mandates of UN peace operations in recent years are likely to persist.

In this political climate, missions may not have the luxury of a gradual and phased drawdown and exit, instead being forced to leave under pressure from host governments without minimum conditions having been fulfilled. Hasty withdrawals risk undermining the gains made during the presence of UN peacekeeping operations and can also leave civilians in grave danger if the resulting security vacuum is not filled. This is a challenge that departing missions, and those currently undergoing transitions, are grappling with.

In the face of strong demand from host countries for longstanding missions to draw down and exit, the Council has little option but to comply: host country consent is a key tenet of peacekeeping operations, and constructive engagement with host governments and local communities is fundamental to the success of transition processes. Such engagement has proven increasingly difficult, however, in light of the growing challenge posed by misinformation and disinformation, which underlines the importance of strengthening strategic communications by missions.

With the drawdown and exit of some of the bigger multidimensional peacekeeping missions in Africa, the role of SPMs and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) has attracted greater attention in the Council. While UNCTs have already been assuming residual tasks from UN peace operations, there is some interest in having SPMs with regional mandates, such as the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), assume responsibilities from departing and transitioning missions. For UN regional political offices to be effective in their transition-related responsibilities will require enhancing the capacities of both SPMs and UNCTs and addressing their resource constraints. The

role of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in supporting the peacebuilding needs of countries in transition, and partnership with the international financial institutions (IFIs), have also become critical.

Interest has grown in regionally-led peace support operations, particularly those under the auspices of the AU, in places where UN peace operations are reducing their footprint or withdrawing. This issue has gained renewed momentum in late 2023 with the resumption of negotiations among Council members on a framework resolution regarding the financing of AU-led Peace Support Operations (AUPSOs).

In light of these developments, this research report recommends the following:

- The Security Council should request peace operations to plan for various scenarios under which they may have to depart. This may reduce the element of surprise in the event of an accelerated drawdown or the abrupt termination of their respective mandates.
- As missions may be compelled to depart before host country conditions attain the minimum for keeping civilians safe and securing the best prospect of sustainable peace, Council members could opt to focus on benchmarks relevant to avoiding a vacuum around security and the rule of law.
- If UN peacekeeping operations are to hand over security responsibilities to other regional forces, rather than to the host government, particular attention should be given to the mandate and capacity of those forces to protect civilians.
- Where host countries take over security responsibilities, Council members should consider supporting their capacity to develop a protection plan that is realistic and implementable.
- In the absence of national security forces to fill the void created by the withdrawal of UN peace operations, Council members may consider enhancing community-based protection, an approach that is being used in some mission settings to engage conflict-affected communities in preventing or reducing protection risks.
- Council members may wish to follow up on recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's 19 April 2023 report on the strategic review of strategic communications across UN peacekeeping operations.

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- Regarding planning processes, missions may need to pay special attention to building the capacity of relevant government authorities at both the central and local levels involved in planning and implementing transition processes.
- Council members may need to make sure that “Security Council mandates are crafted based on a realistic understanding of country team capacities and capabilities and that sufficient resources are projected and committed to supporting peacebuilding activities to avoid funding cliffs after the departure of a mission”,<sup>1</sup> in the language of the Secretary-General’s June 2022 report on transitions.
- As the Council does not mandate the activities of the UN’s agencies, funds, and programmes, it could consider making greater use of the PBC’s convening role to enhance its familiarity and engagement with UNCTs.
- The PBC’s mandate to sustain international attention to countries affected by conflict (with their consent), and to convene all relevant actors, including national authorities, UN missions, country teams, regional organisations, IFIs and civil society, makes it well-placed to support transitions in both the planning period and after a UN mission concludes.
- Given that the PBC has not been involved in several recent transition situations, when the Council decides to draw down a peace operation or mandates the UN to prepare a transition plan, the Council may, at the same time, encourage host countries to engage the PBC to review, identify, and raise awareness of resource gaps and requirements of the plan. PBC representatives could also visit countries undertaking transitions to discuss with authorities the value of PBC engagement and foster trust between the government and the Commission.
- Depending on the evolution of the discussion on the financing of AUPSOs, a possible trend is of UN peacekeeping operations transitioning into support missions mandated to provide political and operational backstopping to AUPSOs. Council members should recognise and proactively anticipate this development, giving it special consideration.

## Introduction

It has been nearly a decade since the Security Council authorised its most recent UN peacekeeping mission, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in 2014. During this time, four UN peacekeeping missions—in Côte d’Ivoire (2017), Haiti (2017), Liberia (2018), and Sudan/Darfur (2020)—wound down their operations and saw their responsibilities transferred to the host government, SPMs and/or UNCTs. In June 2023, the Malian authorities asked the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to leave by the end of the year (see “The Termination of MINUSMA’s Mandate” below). The authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, too, requested that the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) begin its departure by year-end. New SPMs were deployed in Colombia (2016) and Yemen (2019), and in 2019, the Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) replaced the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). The UN Integrated Transition Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) was established in 2020, following the UN-AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID): in mid-November 2023, as fighting raged in Sudan, the authorities asked that it, too, be shut down.

These transitions have taken place as the nature of conflict itself is changing and particular conflicts are becoming more protracted, reflecting geopolitical rivalries involving major powers and the

involvement of transnational actors, with wider regional implications. As well, host countries and communities have grown frustrated with the perceived ineffectiveness of UN peace operations, at times influenced by disinformation campaigns. The declining appetite for multifaceted UN peace operations also reflects rising fiscal constraints, with some major financial contributors determined to trim the UN peacekeeping budget. During the Trump administration (2017-2020), in particular, the US stressed the “need to find value, and not just financial value” in UN peace operations, according to Nikki Haley, the US Permanent Representative to the UN.<sup>2</sup> In this regard, the US insisted on the need to evaluate the performance and effectiveness of UN peace operations through strategic reviews and pushed for the development of exit strategies to facilitate the drawdown and restructuring of some operations that had been in existence for decades.

Since 2019, all remaining multidimensional peacekeeping operations have been requested to “initiate or intensify transition planning”.<sup>3</sup> The number of uniformed UN personnel and the UN peacekeeping budget have fallen sharply. In 2015, over 100,000 uniformed personnel<sup>4</sup> served in the field, supported by an \$8 billion peacekeeping budget.<sup>5</sup> Eight years later, in 2023, the UN has three-quarters of the uniformed personnel<sup>6</sup> and peacekeeping budget,<sup>7</sup> numbers that will continue to tumble with the anticipated closures of MINUSMA and MONUSCO.

1 United Nations Secretary-General, “Report of Secretary-General on Transitions in United Nations peace operations.” 29 June 2022.

2 United Nations Security Council, “Meeting record of the 7918th meeting on United Nations peacekeeping operations.” 6 April 2017.

3 United Nations Development Program, “UN Transitions Project, Mid-Term Evaluation”. 27 June 2022. The UN groups missions into four categories based on the stages of the transition process. Missions may be undergoing an active transition based on a Security Council directive; engaged in early transition planning based on a reference in their mandate or an explicit request by the Security Council for an exit strategy; without a specific Council directive, but are integrated and have initiated transition planning based on the Secretary-General’s 2019 Planning Directive for the development of consistent and coherent UN transition processes (for more, see the next section); or in the post-transition phase.

4 United Nations, “Troops and Police contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations.” 31 December 2015.

5 United Nations General Assembly, “Meeting coverage of the 97th meeting of the 69th General Assembly Session.” 25 June 2015.

6 United Nations, “Troops and Police contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations.” 31 July 2023.

7 United Nations General Assembly, “Meeting coverage of the 35th meeting of the Fifth Committee.” 30 June 2023.

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Stark divisions among Council members have also affected support for UN peace operations. Recent years have seen more contentious mandate renewal negotiations with a greater number of abstentions. Tensions among permanent and elected members along ideological lines, the enhanced leverage of host countries taking

advantage of Council divisions and diminishing the influence of penholders, and the increasing tendency of some permanent and elected members to advocate host country positions have become a feature of Council negotiations on mission mandates and sanctions regimes. (For more, see the section on Council Dynamics.)

## The Termination of MINUSMA's Mandate

Resolution 2690 of 30 June 2023 ended the mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and requested the mission immediately to start the transfer of its tasks and the drawdown and withdrawal of its personnel, with the objective of completing the process by 31 December 2023. The Security Council's decision to end the approximately 15,000-strong mission came only two weeks after Mali's transitional Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdoulaye Diop, during a 16 June Council briefing, called for MINUSMA's "withdrawal without delay". The demand occurred in the context of deteriorating relations between MINUSMA and transitional authorities since coups d'état in 2020 and 2021, a volatile security environment, and the direct involvement of the Wagner Group, a Russian private security group. With Mali fragile and riven by conflict, most Council members had serious concerns about the security and humanitarian risks – for both Mali and the region – of ending MINUSMA, as well as the short timeline for its withdrawal. But members took the decision nonetheless, recognising that the peacekeeping operation could not continue without host country consent.

In an 18 August 2023 letter to the Council, the Secretary-General said that "the timeline, scope and complexity of the withdrawal of MINUSMA are unprecedented". Challenges include Mali's vast terrain, the presence of terrorist groups and the volume of the mission's equipment. The letter also pointed to recent developments following the 26 July coup in neighbouring Niger, which is a key transit country both for the supply of MINUSMA during the drawdown and the exit of its personnel and equipment. It also observed the risks that MINUSMA's departure poses to the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali between former rebel armed groups in the north and the government.<sup>8</sup>

The Secretary-General's letter included a plan for the transfer of MINUSMA's tasks, which resolution 2690 had requested him to present by 15 August. Unsurprisingly, the Secretary-General said that it would not be possible to hand over some tasks because of the "compressed timeline" of the withdrawal.<sup>9</sup> Even those activities that the plan suggests could be assumed by entities such as the UN country team and the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) still lacked the agreement of the Malian authorities. The abrupt withdrawal of MINUSMA is why the UN prefers to reference the "transfer" of MINUSMA's tasks, rather than "transition", given how little time it has had to develop a typical transition strategy.

MINUSMA's ability to conduct a "safe and orderly" withdrawal, notwithstanding the short time period, has been imperilled by the resumption of hostilities between Malian forces, backed by the Wagner Group, and former separatist groups in the north, as well as the intensification of host country restrictions on the mission. The latter have heightened concerns about efforts to intentionally undermine the peacekeeping force's orderly departure so authorities can take control of MINUSMA's equipment.

Fighting resumed in August as Malian forces and northern armed groups competed to take control of bases that MINUSMA was vacating. Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) has also sought to oppose the Malian army's deployment in the north, imposing a blockade on

the Timbuktu region. On 2 October, transitional authorities began a military offensive in the Kidal region, placing MINUSMA in the middle of the fighting. In a 14 October 2023 note to correspondents, the UN said that the "heightened tensions and increasing armed presence" in northern Mali were "likely to impede the timely and orderly departure" of MINUSMA and endanger the safe transit of UN personnel and assets belonging to troop-contributing countries (TCCs).<sup>10</sup>

Host country restrictions on MINUSMA's freedom of movement, in violation of the status of forces agreement, were already a serious problem before the Council decided to end MINUSMA. These included authorities denying authorisation for UN surveillance and reconnaissance flights, which are critical for securing mission convoys. Bans on these overflights have continued during the withdrawal, as have restrictions on other mission air activities.

From 24 September, Malian authorities blocked MINUSMA convoys in Gao from travelling to the Kidal region to retrieve equipment from the mission's three camps in Aguelhok, Kidal city, and Tessalit, citing the security situation. In a 22 October note to correspondents, the UN announced that it had had to destroy equipment, such as vehicles, ammunition, generators, and other assets, before vacating the Tessalit base on 21 October.<sup>11</sup> Only days earlier, on 19 October, a MINUSMA aircraft was hit by small arms fire while landing at Tessalit; while there were no injuries to the crew or major damage to the aircraft, the incident prompted MINUSMA to accelerate its departure from the base. Similarly, MINUSMA accelerated its closure of bases in Aguelhok (23 October) and Kidal city (31 October), again destroying and decommissioning sensitive equipment belonging to troop- and police-contributing countries. It took UN forces eight days to move 350 kilometres from Kidal city to Gao in over 140 vehicles, travelling without air surveillance because of the restrictions, during which time 37 peacekeepers were injured by improvised explosive devices.<sup>12</sup>

Other administrative restrictions during the withdrawal include obstructions on imports, such as spare parts for MINUSMA aircraft, fuel and fertilisers (the latter are required for the environmental cleaning of sites in compliance with the UN Guidance on Field Entity Closure). New customs requirements have apparently also complicated MINUSMA's ability to remove equipment from the country. Mis- and disinformation by supporters of all conflict parties has also heightened risks to the mission during its withdrawal.

Security Council members discussed the worrying situation in closed consultations with Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare on 19 October under "any other business".<sup>13</sup> After this meeting, many Council members engaged Malian authorities bilaterally to request greater cooperation, which a Secretariat white note described as "critical in the completion" of MINUSMA's withdrawal from Kidal region. The Council is likely to continue monitoring developments; even if MINUSMA can complete the withdrawal of its uniformed personnel by 31 December, the UN has estimated the need for an 18-month liquidation period<sup>14</sup> that is likely to prove contentious with authorities.

8 United Nations Security Council, "Letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council", 18 August 2023.

9 Ibid.

10 United Nations, "Note to Correspondents: on Mali/MINUSMA", 14 October 2023.

11 United Nations, "Note to Correspondents: MINUSMA withdrawal from northern bases", 22 October 2023.

12 United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, "MINUSMA closes its camp in Kidal, marking the end of its presence in the region", 31 October 2023.

13 Security Council Report, "Mali: Meeting under 'Any other Business' on the Withdrawal of MINUSMA", 19 October 2023

14 United Nations Security Council, "Letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council", 18 August 2023

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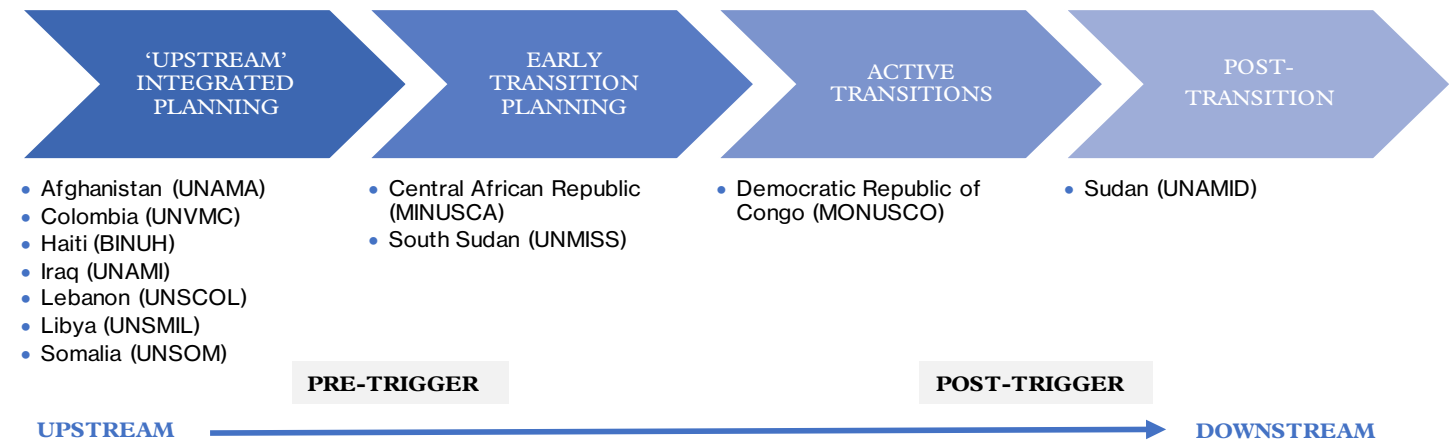
With little current appetite among states for larger multidimensional UN peace operations, there seems to be a growing recognition that current conflicts, with no sign of resolution, require more mobile and agile forces willing to take greater risks in countering violent armed groups and terrorists. Regional peace support operations may be better suited for such tasks, as discussed in the Secretary-General’s policy brief, the New Agenda for Peace (NAfP).<sup>15</sup>

In this context—and facing some chaotic and unscheduled departures of UN peace operations, which may leave a security and protection vacuum—the UN may need to revisit its policy and practices in managing transition processes. While past transitions have largely focused on the UN and the host government, recent developments underline the need to enhance partnerships for transitions with other

non-UN entities, including the AU and its regional mechanisms, as well as other regional organisations such as the EU and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs).<sup>16</sup>

This *Security Council Report* research report provides insights into the evolving discussion on transitions. It examines some transition cases to explore Security Council practice, analyses emerging trends, identifies challenges, and draws lessons for planning and managing future transitions. Additionally, it looks at the efforts of the Peacebuilding Commission to build and sustain peace during and after transition processes. Lastly, the report anticipates Council dynamics and presents concluding observations.

## Catagories of Transitions<sup>17</sup>



Source: UN Transitions Project

# Evolution of the Discussion on Transitions

UN transition processes have historically been triggered by the Security Council’s recognition of sufficient progress towards the implementation of the mission’s mandate, the withdrawal of host government consent for the mission, or political or security developments that required mission reconfiguration or termination.<sup>18</sup> (For more on the issue of host-country consent in UN peacekeeping, see the 25 September 2023 research report by the Stimson Center.<sup>19</sup>) The post-transition UN presence varies: it may mean the reconfiguration of an SPM into a UN peacekeeping operation, such as in the CAR; from a peacekeeping operation to an SPM, such as in Haiti; or the handover of residual tasks from a UN peacekeeping operation to the UNCT, as in Liberia.

A United Nations University (UNU) research report<sup>20</sup> outlines how transition discussions evolved in the post-Cold War era, which witnessed a significant expansion of UN peace operations. During the 1990s, a variety of missions, large and small, were deployed, and successor missions were also introduced. These UN peace operations ceased or underwent modifications without a clear exit strategy. Reflecting this gap, the Security Council discussed exit strategies in November 2000<sup>21</sup> and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the matter.<sup>22</sup> The report, published in April 2001,<sup>23</sup> set out circumstances that may prompt the exit or alteration of UN peace operations and explains the roles of the Security Council and other

15 United Nations Secretary-General, “Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace.” July 2023.  
 16 United Nations Security Council, “Letter dated 27 January 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations addressed to the President of the Security Council.” 27 January 2021.  
 17 The chart is amended to reflect latest developments with the termination of MINUSMA’s and UNITAMS’ mandates. MINUSMA was in early transition phase, while UNITAMS was in pre transition phase.  
 18 “Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal”, endorsed by the Secretary-General, 4 February 2013.  
 19 Julie Gregory and Lisa Sharland, Host-country consent in UN Peacekeeping, Stimson Center, September 2023.  
 20 Adam Day, “UN Transitions: Improving Security Council Practice in Mission Settings.” United Nations University, 21 January 2020.  
 21 United Nations Security Council, “Meeting records of the 4223rd meeting of the Security Council”, 15 November 2000.  
 22 United Nations Security Council, “Letter dated 30 November 2000 from the President of the Security Council to the Secretary-General”, 30 November 2000.  
 23 United Nations Secretary-General, “No Exit without Strategy: Security Council decision-making and the closure or transition of UN peacekeeping operations”, 20 April 2001.

## Evolution of the Discussion on Transitions

principal UN organs in formulating and implementing these decisions. Although the report identified key objectives that needed to be fulfilled for a successful transition—namely, consolidating security, improving governance, and promoting economic and social rehabilitation and transformation—a lack of practical guidance for managing transitions remained.

Subsequently, the UN developed policies and practices in this regard, issuing the 2013 Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal.<sup>24</sup> The policy document outlines principles that should underpin all UN transition processes, including:

- early planning that anticipates different scenarios;
- integration of the whole UN system at headquarters and in the field in planning and managing transitions;
- national ownership of the host country through high-level political engagement, as well as the support and participation of a wide range of national stakeholders;
- national capacity development to ensure an effective and sustainable handover of responsibilities to national partners; and
- an effective communications strategy to carefully manage the expectations of national and international stakeholders.

The policy defines the roles and responsibilities of various UN departments at headquarters, as well as missions and UNCTs in the field, in the planning and management of transitions.<sup>25</sup>

In 2014, the UN launched a project in partnership with bilateral donors to support transitions. The transitions project involves several UN secretariat departments—namely the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), and the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO)—and a UN agency, the UN Development Programme (UNDP). It has so far supported transition processes in Côte d’Ivoire, Haiti, Liberia, and Sudan, among others.<sup>26</sup> The deployment of transitions specialists has been instrumental in supporting field missions in integrated transition planning processes.<sup>27</sup>

The closure of the UN Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI) in 2017 and the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2018 capped successful examples of the UN’s engagement in assisting countries moving from conflict to peace. Other examples of transitions include Haiti, where MINUSTAH became the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) in 2017, and then the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) in 2019. In Sudan, UNAMID was succeeded by the UN Integrated Transition Assistance

Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) in 2020. By 2023, however, these countries faced major security concerns and political instability, calling into question the timing of past transitions and, in Sudan, the continuation of the mission.

Transitions are not merely administrative or technical processes; they are essentially political undertakings. According to the UN, “the overarching goal of a successful transition is to prevent relapse into conflict and ensure that the host country is on a pathway towards sustainable development”.<sup>28</sup> The implementation of this goal in large part depends on the support of host country institutions and UNCTs to sustain the gains made during the presence of UN peace operations.<sup>29</sup>

Reviews and institutional reform processes initiated by the Secretary-General across the peace and security, development, and management pillars of the UN system have fed into UN policy and practice on transitions.<sup>30</sup> The UN Transitions Project has extracted valuable lessons and good practices from transition processes to improve policy, planning, and management by addressing recurring challenges.<sup>31</sup> Rather than simply leaving unfinished mission tasks to the host country, the reconfiguration of the UN presence has increasingly become geared towards peacebuilding, while working earlier at securing national ownership of transition processes. The joint development of exit strategies and peacebuilding plans with the host government and other stakeholders has grown.

In April 2019, the Secretary-General launched his Planning Directive for the “development of consistent and coherent UN transition processes”.<sup>32</sup> Crucially, this directive calls for transition calendars that outline transition milestones and objectives with a view to adequate preparation for mission withdrawal and UN reconfiguration. This allows missions and UNCTs to engage in transition planning well before the Security Council requests an exit strategy. In line with this directive, almost all UN peace operations have submitted their integrated transition calendars to UN headquarters, in consultation with UNCTs. Briefing the Council on 18 July 2019, the Secretary-General identified the facilitation of successful transitions as a priority for the entire UN system. This is echoed in his Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+), which outlines the eight priorities of peacekeeping reform in 2021 and beyond.<sup>33</sup> The Secretary-General also convenes biannual meetings on transitions of his Executive Committee, which brings together senior UN management and the Deputies Committee chaired by the Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination.<sup>34</sup>

24 “Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal”, endorsed by the Secretary-General, 4 February 2013

25 Ibid.

26 UN Development Coordination Office, Department of Peace Operations, Department of the Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UN Development Program, “UN Transitions Project: Sustaining Peace and Development Beyond Mission Withdrawal: Annual Report July 2020–June 2021.” 2021.

27 United Nations Development Program, “UN Transitions Project, Mid-Term Evaluation”. 27 June 2022.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 The reviews include the reports of the High-Level Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture, and the Global Study on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000.

31 UN Development Coordination Office, Department of Peace Operations, Department of the Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UN Development Program, “UN Transitions Project: Sustaining Peace and Development Beyond Mission Withdrawal: Annual Report July 2020–June 2021.” 2021.

32 UN Secretary General, Secretary-General’s Planning Directive for the Development of Consistent and Coherent UN Transition Processes, In Line with Executive Committee Decision 2018/38, February 25, 2019 (internal document).

33 United Nations, “A4P+ Priorities for 2021-2023.”

34 United Nations Security Council, “Meeting records of the 8579th meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace”. 18 July 2019.

## Evolution of the Discussion on Transitions

TRANSITION	PLANNING PHASE	ACTIVE PHASE
Timeline	Well before drawdown and reconfiguration	Approximately 24 months before withdrawal and reconfiguration
Activities	Development of transition roadmap	Articulation of detailed transition plans
Focus	Long-term focus on strategy	A specific, detailed plan for disengagement
Objective	Establishing direction and goals for transition	Guiding completion of mandated tasks, mobilizing resources for peacebuilding activities
Duration	Extends well before drawdown and reconfiguration	Approximately until the end of the mission mandate

*Source: UN Secretary-General, Secretary-General's Planning Directive for the Development of Consistent and Coherent UN Transition Processes, In Line with Executive Committee Decision 2018/38, February 25, 2019 (internal document).*

While the UN has made strides in enhancing its transition planning and management, challenges remain. One is resource gaps: the post-transition drop-off in international support precisely when a country is expected to shoulder greater security and peacebuilding responsibilities can undermine national peacebuilding efforts. The World Bank, through its Fragility, Conflict and Violence Strategy, has created a new financing instrument to enhance its support for countries to address the root causes and drivers of conflict and strengthen their resilience.<sup>35</sup> This is being used to support some of the countries undergoing transitions, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In 2018, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) also created a new financing window for transitions, which was instrumental in supporting transition processes in Liberia and Haiti, for instance, but remains inadequate to meet the huge

demand.<sup>36</sup> (For more, see the section on peacebuilding financing.)

A second challenge is security. Major peacekeeping missions departing without the full readiness of host country institutions to assume security roles may open the possibility for renewed violence and heightens risks for the protection of civilians, particularly in disorderly and complex mission terminations. The sudden termination of MINUSMA's mandate is likely to have adverse implications for civilians, the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and the implementation of the Malian peace agreement.<sup>37</sup>

Difficulties between UN peacekeeping operations and host countries can flare in drawdown environments, as evident in Mali. In the DRC, where MONUSCO began implementing a transition plan in 2021, the Congolese government in 2023 expressed disappointment in MONUSCO's inability to curtail the violence in the eastern DRC and urged the mission to expedite its drawdown and exit.<sup>38</sup>

The pushback against UN peacekeeping operations in the DRC and several other conflict situations in Africa has featured governments seeking robust regional and international involvement to address the threats posed by terrorists and other armed groups, functions that UN peace operations are not designed to fulfill. To address their security challenges, governments have entered into bilateral security arrangements with neighbouring countries, sought military support from regional mechanisms, or turned to mercenary groups. Among countries on the Security Council's agenda, the DRC in 2022 welcomed forces from the East African Community (EAC) to fight against the M23 rebel group (but appeared poised to dismiss and replace these forces in 2023); Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) have worked with the Wagner Group, a Russian private security company; and the CAR has received military support from Rwanda. The involvement of external forces has further complicated the work of UN peace operations on the continent. Where it is also leading to their expedited exit, the "transition" occurs against the backdrop of "unfinished political settlements, continued security challenges and protection gaps, and limited presence of governance and rule of law institutions throughout the territory of the host country".<sup>39</sup>

## The Security Council on Transitions

The Council has played a critical role in overseeing and observing the management and implementation of transition processes, including during its visiting missions to the field. On one such trip to Timor-Leste in November 2012, Council members observed the drawdown and exit of the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT). They visited Haiti in June 2017 to review the transition from MINUSTAH to MINUJUSTH. A similar visit to Côte d'Ivoire

and Guinea Bissau in February 2019 allowed Council members to take stock of these countries' transition processes and engage with UN officials in the field on what lessons and best practices could be drawn from these transitions. Council members visited the DRC in March 2023 to, among other things, assess progress in the implementation of MONUSCO's transition plan.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> World Bank Group, "World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence 2020–2025" (English). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. 27 February 2020.

<sup>36</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, "Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund 2020–2024 Strategy". 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Josh Jorgensen, "MINUSMA's Termination and the Future of Protection in Mali." Global Observatory. 21 July 2023.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Letter dated 1 September 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council", 1 September 2023.

<sup>39</sup> UN Development Coordination Office, Department of Peace Operations, Department of the Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UN Development Program, "UN Transitions: Sustaining Peace and Development Beyond Mission Withdrawal: Thematic paper." 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Security Council Report, "Security Council Visiting Missions."

# The Security Council on Transitions

The Council has held several thematic discussions on transitions, spearheaded by elected members. In November 2000, the Netherlands, an elected Security Council member in 1999-2000, organised an open debate under the theme “no exit without strategy” to discuss the role of the Council in transitions.<sup>41</sup> Following the debate, the President of the Security Council wrote to the Secretary-General, requesting him to submit a report on this issue.<sup>42</sup> Published in April 2001, the report describes the circumstances that may prompt the exit or alteration of UN peace operations and explains the roles of the Security Council and other principal organs in formulating and implementing these decisions.<sup>43</sup> In July 2019, Peru, which served on the Council in 2018-2019, organised a briefing on peacebuilding and sustaining peace with a particular focus on strengthening partnerships for nationally-owned transitions.<sup>44</sup> In December 2020, Tunisia, an elected Security Council member in 2020-2021, convened a meeting of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations, as its Chair, to discuss “Transitions and exit strategies in peacekeeping operations: taking stock and looking forward”. During the meeting, Council members exchanged views on challenges and lessons learned from previous transition processes, including in Haiti, Liberia and Sudan.<sup>45</sup> Ireland, an elected Security Council member in 2021-2022, convened an open debate in September 2021 on transitions within the broader context of peace operations, covering a range of UN approaches, including peacekeeping, SPMs, and UNCTs, representing various UN configurations in the field.<sup>46</sup>

The Council has adopted two thematic outcomes on transitions. In a 21 December 2017 presidential statement, facilitated by Egypt, the Security Council noted the importance of adequately resourcing the peacebuilding components of UN peacekeeping missions, including during mission transitions and drawdowns, and emphasised the need to draw upon the advice of the PBC in discussions on mission mandates and transitions.<sup>47</sup> Council members recognised that properly managed and executed transitions can help to avoid a relapse into conflict, sustain the gains made in conflict management

and resolution, and continue paving the way for durable peace.

As an outcome of the September 2021 open debate initiated by Ireland, the Council adopted resolution 2594, which defines the transition of UN peace operations as “a strategic process which builds towards a reconfiguration of the strategy, footprint, and capacity of the United Nations in a way that supports peacebuilding objectives and the development of a sustainable peace, in a manner that supports and reinforces national ownership, informed by the operational context and the national priorities and needs of the host State and its population”.<sup>48</sup> The resolution considered UN transition processes as a unique global partnership that draws together the contributions and commitments of the entire UN system and stressed the need for a coherent, integrated, and planned approach to transitions at the earliest possible stage. It also underlined the need to engage the local community and civil society, and, where relevant, regional and sub-regional organisations, and other stakeholders, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, in transition processes.<sup>49</sup>

The resolution recognised the importance of strong coordination, coherence, and cooperation with the PBC and reaffirmed the Council’s intention to draw on the PBC’s advice on the longer-term issues of peacebuilding and sustaining peace in transitions. It also encouraged the PBC to continue utilising its convening role to mobilise UN bodies, member states, national authorities, and all other relevant stakeholders, including regional and sub-regional organisations and IFIs, towards ensuring an integrated, strategic, coherent, coordinated, and gender-responsive approach in transitions processes.<sup>50</sup>

Pursuant to resolution 2594, the Secretary-General submitted a report to the Council on 29 June 2022, providing an update on the status of ongoing and recently completed transitions since September 2019—including in the DRC, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, and Sudan—as well as early transition planning in CAR and South Sudan.<sup>51</sup> Ireland convened informal meetings to discuss the report, but at this writing there has been no formal Security Council follow-up meeting, even as transitions have assumed added importance and urgency.

## Policy Issues in Transitions

The Secretary-General’s report highlighted several policy issues identified across multiple transitions, including in terms of ensuring integrated planning, promoting national ownership, enhancing programmatic coherence within the UN system, securing the necessary resources for transitions, managing liquidation processes and the transfer of mission assets, and preparing for the post-transition period.

The report underscored the following needs based on lessons learned, including:

- to promote proactive, integrated, and gender-responsive transition planning as well as alignment and support of the governing bodies of UN agencies, funds, and programmes to ensure successful transition processes;
- to improve strategic and operational coherence between missions and UNCTs (an emerging practice has been the establishment of integrated

offices headed by a double- or triple-hatted deputy special representative, consisting of staff from both the mission and the resident coordinator office with additional planning, monitoring and evaluation capacities, as well as dedicated planning capacity in the departments and offices at UN Headquarters to support their counterparts in the field and facilitate improved coordination);

- to promote coherence in policy decisions and budget allocations related to missions and the agencies, funds and programmes to ensure that informed decisions are made regarding transition timetables;
- to craft Security Council mandates based on a realistic understanding of UNCT capacities and capabilities;
- to ensure that sufficient resources are projected and committed to supporting peacebuilding activities after mission departures;

41 United Nations Security Council, “Meeting records of the 4223rd meeting of the Security Council”, 15 November 2000.

42 United Nations Security Council, “Letter dated 30 November 2000 from the President of the Security Council to the Secretary-General”, 30 November 2000.

43 United Nations Secretary-General, “No Exit without Strategy: Security Council decision-making and the closure or transition of UN peacekeeping operations”, 20 April 2001.

44 Security Council Report, “UN Peacekeeping.” September 2021 Monthly Forecast. 31 August 2021.

45 United Nations Security Council, “Meeting records of the 8851st meeting of the Security Council.” 8 September 2021.

46 Security Council Report, “Open Debates on UN Transitions.” What’s in Blue. 7 September 2021.

47 United Nations Security Council, “Statement of the President of the Security Council S/PRST/2017/27.” 21 December 2017.

48 United Nations Security Council, “UN Security Council Resolution 2594.” 9 September 2021.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 United Nations Secretary-General, “Report of the Secretary-General on Transitions in United Nations peace operations.” 29 June 2022.



# The Security Council on Transitions

- to give adequate consideration during the mission life cycle to strengthening national capacities for transition planning, as well as the areas necessary for sustaining peace during and after the transition;
- to bring in other major actors – including international financial institutions, regional and subregional organisations and bilateral development agencies – to increase the coherence of international assistance during transitions;
- to ensure that UN assets are handed over to and used by appropriate government agencies for the benefit of the population and in line with the human rights due diligence policy;
- to address the misalignment of planning horizons between mission

The UN’s discourse on transitions has shifted in response to major challenges to UN peace operations, including changes in the nature of conflicts and geopolitical dynamics arising from tensions among major powers. Frustration among host countries and communities because of the perceived ineffectiveness of UN peace operations has complicated the operating environment. In light of these developments, the UN has emphasised the need for strengthened partnerships with regional and sub-regional arrangements, particularly in Africa. The New Agenda for Peace (NAfP), which outlines a vision for the UN’s work on peace and security in a changing world and an era of geopolitical competition, recognises the challenges posed by long-standing and unresolved conflicts, without peace to

- transitions on the one hand and the country strategies of development actors on the other, and ensure that transition plans are tailored to meet realistic expectations for the funding landscape and accurately present the peacebuilding needs of the country;
- to maintain capacity for mandate implementation in the face of planned and unplanned staff departures, the emergence of requirements specific to closure and liquidation activities and the need to ensure sufficient capacity in the reconfigured UN presence; and
- to safeguard the hard-fought achievements of the departing peace operation and to ensure that the follow-on presence can succeed.

keep. It acknowledges the gap between UN peacekeeping missions’ mandates and what they can deliver in practice. It also proposes a serious and broad-based reflection by the Security Council and the General Assembly on the future of UN peace operations, calling for a move towards “more nimble, adaptable and effective mission models” and for support for peace enforcement missions, where needed, by regional and sub-regional organisations. In relation to UN peace operations transitions, the NAfP stresses the need to plan exit strategies early and in an integrated and iterative manner to achieve successful mission drawdowns and consolidate the gains to avoid the risk of relapse into conflict.<sup>52</sup>

## Council Dynamics

Over the years, Council members have acknowledged that well-planned and managed transitions have the potential to prevent a relapse into conflict, sustain the progress achieved in conflict management and resolution, and lay the groundwork for lasting peace. Ireland, which played a leading role in the adoption of Resolution 2594 in September 2021, called on the Security Council to exercise its authority towards achieving this goal, which requires “time, planning, and patience”. Nevertheless, since the adoption of this landmark resolution and Ireland’s departure from the Council, no other member appears to have prioritised transitions or convened a follow-up discussion on the Secretary-General’s June 2022 report on transitions in UN peace operations.<sup>53</sup>

While transitions are addressed within the framework of specific missions, Council members may allocate little time to discussing and analysing them. A handicap throughout the mandate cycle is that not all Council members have deep knowledge and understanding of transition processes. Members who participate in peace operations as troop-contributing countries (TCCs), or serve on the Council frequently, find it easier to contribute meaningfully to the discussions on transitions.

Council members generally concur on the “primacy of politics”, a phrase from the 2015 High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations denoting that political solutions create enduring peace

in driving transition processes. They recognise the significance of national ownership in the form of transition plans that align with the host countries’ priorities. But at the 8 September 2023 open debate on peacekeeping, Russia cautioned against “overburden[ing] the Secretariat and host countries with a predetermined set of goals and general parameters, which are often not directly related to the resolution of the crisis in a particular country”.<sup>54</sup> Other Council members stressed the importance of political, security, humanitarian, and other benchmarks in determining the end state of transition processes.

Council members agree on the need for early integrated planning and effective coordination within the UN system. Some note the significance of triangular cooperation among the Security Council, the Secretariat, and TCCs in transition processes, and stress the importance of drawing lessons from past experiences to inform future transition planning processes. There is also an understanding among Council members of the need to enhance partnerships with IFIs to address resource shortages following the departure of peacekeeping operations. Several Council members advocate a strengthened role for the PBC to maximise its “advisory, bridging, and convening capacities”<sup>55</sup> in support of transition processes.

Different groups of Council members emphasise different aspects of transitions. China and Russia tend to highlight the role of

52 United Nations Secretary-General, “Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace,” July 2023.

53 United Nations Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on Transitions in United Nations Peace operations,” 29 June 2022.

54 United Nations Security Council, “Meeting records of the 8851st meeting of the Security Council,” 8 September 2021.

55 Ibid.

## Council Dynamics

peacekeeping operations in supporting the implementation of peace processes, extending state authority, and conducting SSR. China, in particular, calls for international support to build the national capacity of post-conflict countries by focusing on key sectors that are vital to their long-term peace and stability. It points to the failure of international efforts in Afghanistan and Haiti in this regard and underscores the need to learn from the lessons of these experiences. Russia argues that “providing States with long-term assistance in the areas of development and human rights through peacekeeping organizations is not appropriate”.<sup>56</sup> While acknowledging the links among peace and security, development, and human rights, it maintains that this should not “serve as a pretext for mixing the mandates of United Nations organs and offices of the Secretariat”.<sup>57</sup>

Other Council members, including the other permanent members (P3)—France, the UK, and the US—acknowledge the need to engage host countries and listen to their views and perspectives, but also stress host countries’ responsibilities in improving governance, promoting inclusivity and protecting civilians. They argue that the success of transitions hinges on the support of dedicated and accountable host governments and underscore the necessity of inclusive transition processes that provide equitable political opportunities for women, youth, and marginalised and underprivileged populations. These members tend to focus on the potentially destabilising impact of transitions on the security environment, particularly the risks that arise as physical protection provided by peacekeeping missions ceases, potentially endangering vulnerable populations. They underscore the fundamental responsibility of host countries in safeguarding civilians throughout their territory and actively contributing to the effective implementation of national plans for civilian protection. They draw attention to the issues of human rights, women’s participation in political processes, the rule of law, and transitional justice as crucial factors for a country’s transition from conflict to peace. In recent years, some members have also advocated for the integration of adequate analytical and programmatic capacity within transition processes to support host countries and communities in addressing climate-related security risks and strengthening their resilience to these risks.

These differences among Council members reflect contrasting views on what UN peace operations are expected to accomplish and manifest themselves in mandate renewal negotiations. Several members seek to advance thematic language in these negotiations on issues such as human rights, justice and accountability; women, peace, and security; and climate change, among others. On the other hand, China and Russia tend to prefer more focused and concise mandates, with Top of Form China arguing that the “unchecked expansion of mandates interferes with the Council’s core mission, strains peacekeeping resources, and raises excessive expectations

for missions”. It has further emphasised the need to “streamline and optimise the mandates of peacekeeping operations so that missions can focus on fulfilling their core tasks.”<sup>58</sup> Russia makes similar arguments, calling for reducing “peacekeepers’ secondary and non-core tasks, especially those related to human rights, social issues, and gender considerations, which divert peacekeepers from their primary functions and necessitate substantial funding”.<sup>59</sup>

These discussions are taking place against the backdrop of complex conflict settings with difficult regional and geo-political dimensions. While transitions in Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire went fairly smoothly in a Council atmosphere of relative unity and consensus, the current trend of significant disunity among Council members can be expected to continue. Complicating matters is that the P3 (France, the UK, and the US)—which, at the time of writing in October 2023, among them hold the pen on 11 out of the 12 UN peacekeeping operations and eight out of the 12 SPMs mandated by the Security Council—now appear to have less leverage over host countries.<sup>60</sup> (“Penholding” is the “informal arrangement whereby one or more Council members...initiate and chair the informal drafting process” of outcomes, according to the most recent compendium of the Council’s working methods.<sup>61</sup>)

Some host countries, particularly in Africa, are critical of the penholding arrangements, spurred also by prevailing divisions within the Council and the support for these positions from China and Russia, as well as other like-minded members.<sup>62</sup> The Malian government, for example, openly rejected France’s role as the penholder on Mali in a formal letter to the President of the Security Council on 1 March 2023.

At times, some permanent members that provide significant support to the peacekeeping budget have emphasised the need to cut costs. For example, the US during the Trump administration (2017–2021) pushed for a review of UN peace operations for financial reasons. But at the rhetorical level, Council members generally take the view that financial considerations should not dictate the drawdown, reconfiguration, and exit of missions. During the 8 September 2021 debate on transitions, India argued that “the cost of relapsing into conflict is always much higher than any short-term savings”.<sup>63</sup>

Members also believe that missions should be given the resources to support fragile countries in transition, lest hard-won gains be reversed. The Council has no direct engagement with UNCTs, but several Council resolutions refer to their role in transition processes.<sup>64</sup> Council members recognise that UNCTs lack the capacity to effectively support countries in transition, however, and note the huge gap between the resources provided to peacekeeping operations and the UNCTs, which are expected to carry out residual tasks when these missions withdraw.<sup>65</sup> For example, resolution 2690 of June 2023 called for the establishment of financial arrangements

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Security Council Report, “2023 Chairs of Subsidiary Bodies and Penholders.”

61 United Nations Security Council, “Note by the President of the Security Council.” 30 August 2017.

62 Julie Gregory, “Sharing the Pen in the Security Council: A Win for Inclusive Multilateralism?” IPI Global Observatory. 7 April 2023.

63 United Nations Security Council, “Meeting records of the 8851st meeting of the Security Council.” 8 September 2021.

64 For example, resolution 2690, which terminated MINUSMA’s mandate, refers to the possible contribution of the UNCTs to take over residual responsibilities from the mission.

65 United Nations Security Council, “Meeting records of the 9413th meeting of the Security Council.” 7 September 2023.

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to support UNCTs in implementing residual activities initiated by MINUSMA.<sup>66</sup> A multi-donor trust fund is the most common such mechanism; these rely largely on traditional donors, including the P3, and some Council members want to see funding sources diversified, and consider China and some of the Gulf countries as likely candidates in this regard.

As well, Council members recognise the role of regional and sub-regional organisations in transition processes, as they may have a better understanding of the peace and security situation in their respective regions. Some welcomed the Secretary-General's NAfP

recommendations in this regard during the annual Security Council briefing on peacekeeping on 7 September 2023.<sup>67</sup> France noted that “the future of peacekeeping lies in strengthening partnerships”<sup>68</sup> and looked forward to making progress on the discussion regarding the financing of AU-led peace support operations. Russia insisted on the need to account for the full range of views of member states on the NAfP and follow the guidance of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34), which it describes as the main platform for discussing developments regarding UN peacekeeping.

## The Peacebuilding Commission

The PBC was established in December 2005 to help prevent post-conflict countries from falling back into conflict.<sup>69</sup> Secretary-General Kofi Annan had proposed its creation earlier that year in his report “In Larger Freedom” to fill a “gaping hole” at the UN, maintaining that “no part of the United Nations system effectively addresses the challenge of helping countries with the transition from war to lasting peace”.<sup>70</sup> The PBC's founding resolutions by the General Assembly and the Security Council—which also created the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO)—gave the PBC a unique mandate: to convene all relevant actors and advise on peacebuilding strategies; promote coordination of international support; and support resource mobilisation. Another impetus behind the PBC's creation, outlined in its mandate, was the extension of the international community's attention to countries' post-conflict recovery beyond the “duration of a peacekeeping presence”.<sup>71</sup>

The PBC's work in its first ten years was largely limited to six African countries via “country-specific configurations”, each chaired by a UN permanent representative. Through its Sierra Leone configuration, created in 2006, the PBC maintained international attention to the country after the withdrawal of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Mission in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) in March 2014. The PBC's Liberia configuration also provided a forum to consider the planned departure of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The Commission's Burundi configuration remained one of the international community's main interlocutors with the government after the authorities called for the end of the UN mission there, and the configuration's chair, the permanent representative of Switzerland, sat on the transition steering group that helped develop and then monitor implementation of a transition plan.

### A Reinvigorated PBC

The ten-year review of the UN's peacebuilding architecture (PBAR), followed by reforms started in 2017 by the new Secretary-General

António Guterres to reduce the UN system's fragmentation and increase its focus on conflict prevention, reinvigorated the PBC. The review introduced the term “sustaining peace”, intended to raise awareness that peacebuilding is essential for conflict prevention and is not limited to post-conflict situations. It also established that peacebuilding is a responsibility of the entire UN system and not only of its peacebuilding architecture.

The ten-year PBAR culminated in April 2016 with the General Assembly and Security Council adopting identical resolutions that included highlighting the PBC's role in transitions. Resolution 2282 expressed the Council's “intention to regularly request, deliberate and draw upon the specific, strategic and targeted advice” of the PBC, “including to assist with the longer-term perspective required for sustaining peace being reflected in the formation, review and drawdown of peacekeeping operations and special political missions' mandates”.<sup>72</sup> It further emphasised “the importance of drawing upon the advice of the Peacebuilding Commission when major agreements that relate to United Nations mission mandates and transitions, are agreed between the United Nations, national governments and authorities, and other relevant stakeholders”.<sup>73</sup>

One of the PBC's comparative advantages is its “bridging role”—a term used in the PBAR resolutions about the Commission—providing a space to address issues that lie between peace and security, and development. This is because its membership is drawn from member states representing the UN's different organs (seven member states each from the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council [ECOSOC] and the General Assembly), as well as five top troop- and police-contributing countries to peacekeeping operations and five top UN financial contributors. It further serves as a forum to convene stakeholders, including representatives of host countries—both from national and sometimes local governments—regional organisations, international financial institutions, the UN (including peace operations and country teams), and civil society.

66 United Nations Security Council, “UN Security Council Resolution 2690.” 30 June 2023.

67 United Nations Security Council, “Meeting records of the 9413th meeting of the Security Council.” 7 September 2023.

68 Ibid.

69 United Nations Security Council, “UN Security Council Resolution 1645.” 20 December 2005; United Nations General Assembly, “UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/60/180.” 30 December 2005.

70 United Nations Secretary-General, “In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all.” 21 March 2005.

71 United Nations Secretary-General, “In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all. Addendum: Peacebuilding Commission Explanatory note by the Secretary-General.” 23 May 2005.

72 United Nations Security Council, “UN Security Council Resolution 2282.” 27 April 2016.

73 Ibid.

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# The Peacebuilding Commission

Unlike the Security Council, the PBC only discusses countries with the consent of the government concerned. This practice signals that the government is open to discussing in the PBC risks to peace, such as political-security issues that bodies such as ECOSOC and

the General Assembly are less able to consider. After a peace operation has departed, and in cases where the country is no longer on the Council agenda, the PBC may become the only UN forum to consider that country's peace and security risks.

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## The Peacebuilding Fund and Peacebuilding Financing

The PBF was created in 2006 to help finance countries' peacebuilding needs<sup>74</sup>, which tend not to receive traditional donor support, and to play a catalytic role that could encourage additional funding. It has two mechanisms: an Immediate Response Facility to allocate emergency funding, and a Peacebuilding and Recovery Facility, which makes up the majority of the PBF's funding and is used for longer-term projects. In 2018, the PBF established three "priority windows": (1) supporting cross-border and regional approaches; (2) facilitating transitions; and (3) promoting the engagement of women and young people. In 2021 the PBF exceeded its 35% funding target for transitions, reaching 39% through support to nine countries.<sup>75</sup>

The PBF allocated \$70.9 million to 17 countries during the period from 1 January to 31 December 2016.<sup>76</sup> In 2017—the year Guterres called for a "quantum leap" in the PBF's capacity—the PBF approved \$157,111,033 for 31 countries.<sup>77</sup> This amount has steadily increased, but remains significantly less than the Secretary-General's annual objective of \$500 million. The PBF's 2020-2024 strategy has set a more modest goal of \$1.5 billion in PBF allocations over the five-year period.<sup>78</sup> In 2022, the PBF approved support amounting to an all-time high of \$231,455,573 in 37 countries; the Secretary-General's annual report on the PBF noted that this total exceeded current donor contributions to the PBF, which risks reducing PBF allocations in 2023.<sup>79</sup>

Meanwhile, the General Assembly has made incremental progress

towards establishing more adequate, predictable, and sustained peacebuilding financing. Since 2022, the General Assembly's Fifth Committee has been considering the Secretary-General's request in March 2022 to appropriate \$100 million annually from assessed contributions for the PBF.<sup>80</sup> In September 2022, the General Assembly adopted its first resolution on peacebuilding financing.<sup>81</sup> The resolution noted that voluntary contributions have not been sufficient to meet increasing demands on the PBF. It recognised that the provision of assessed contributions for peacebuilding financing would represent a shared commitment by member states and encouraged the General Assembly's Fifth Committee to continue and conclude its consideration of the Secretary-General's request. (Member states that are large financial contributors to the UN have traditionally opposed using assessed contributions for the PBF, an idea first proposed during the ten-year PBAR. However, these objections have lessened, and member states have been making progress in the Fifth Committee towards a possible agreement to allocate some funding from assessed contributions to the PBF.) The General Assembly resolution underscored the "importance of transition finance plans established at an early stage, and stress[ed] the importance of sufficient funding to support peacebuilding activities during transitions and throughout the life cycle of peacekeeping operations and special political missions, especially in the period immediately after their departure or reconfiguration".<sup>82</sup>

## The PBC's Advisory Role

Since the ten-year PBAR in 2015 and 2016, the PBC has expanded its engagement from its six country configurations, having considered 26 country and regional situations by the end of 2022.<sup>83</sup> Rather than creating new country configurations, the PBC's Organizational Committee—to which its 31 member states are elected—has provided the forum to meet on new situations, such as Colombia and South Sudan, as well as on cross-cutting issues like youth, peace and security and women, peace and security. The PBC's engagement with the Security Council has also expanded, and the Commission has given greater attention to its advisory role to ECOSOC and the General Assembly.

One notable development has been the PBC's sending written advice to the Council. This began in 2018 when the chair of the PBC's CAR configuration wrote to the Council with recommendations ahead of the mandate renewal of the UN Multidimensional

Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA). Previously, the PBC's formal communications to the Council were largely limited to oral briefings. While the PBC still provides advice orally, it has increasingly relied on submitting written advisories, which require a request from the Council presidency. The PBC sent 12 written advisories in 2022 and nine in 2023 by late October. The Commission has regularly submitted written advice for the mandate renewals on MINUSCA. It also did so ahead of the mandate renewal of the UN Office of West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in January 2020 and for the final mandate renewal of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) in February 2020. But its advisories have not been limited to mandate renewals or anticipated Council resolutions: they have included Council debates or briefings on country situations and broader regional and thematic issues.

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## PBC Advice

While the PBC has worked to strengthen its advisory role to the Council, Council and PBC members recognise that the substance of this advice needs to be improved.

The PBC chair, with the support of the PBSO, prepares the PBC advice, which is revised based on the comments of PBC members. At the outset, the PBSO helps to coordinate with relevant UN regional divisions on input that

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74 Countries' peacebuilding needs may include but are not limited to the following: demobilizing and reintegrating combatants; assisting the return of refugees and displaced persons; helping organize and monitor elections of a new government; supporting security sector reform and institution building; enhancing human rights protections and fostering reconciliation after past atrocities.

75 Salif Nimaga and Anne Moltè, "Final Report mid-term review of the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund Strategy 2020-2024." January 2023.

76 United Nations Secretary-General, "Peacebuilding Fund Report." 14 February 2017.

77 United Nations Secretary-General, "Peacebuilding Fund Report." 9 February 2018.

78 United Nations Secretary-General, "Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund 2020-2024 Strategy". 2020.

79 United Nations Secretary-General, "Peacebuilding Fund Report." 17 February 2023.

80 United Nations Secretary-General, "Investing in prevention and peacebuilding report." 1 March 2022.

81 United Nations General Assembly, "UN General Assembly A/RES/76/305." 12 September 2022.

82 Ibid.

83 "Report of the Peacebuilding Commission on its sixteenth session." 17 February 2023.

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could be useful for the PBC to consider. Since June 2022, the PBC usually holds an initial expert-level meeting so Commission members can share views on the advice. Indicating the Council's increased openness towards the PBC, the Security Council agreed, through an exchange of letters with the PBC chair (S/2022/202; S/2022/250)<sup>84</sup>, in March 2022 to share with the PBC advance copies of relevant Secretary-General's reports to help the Commission determine what information to include in its advice. This practice was prompted by resolution 2594 on transitions, which requested that the Secretary-General "liaise with the Peacebuilding Commission in advance of relevant reporting to the Security Council to facilitate the provision of complementary and timely advice from the Commission to the Council".

The Commission's requirement of consensus among its 31 member states creates significant challenges to the PBC advisories, where agreement is difficult on issues that often divide the Council, such as climate change and

## The PBC's Role in UN Transitions

In December 2018, the Council adopted a presidential statement on the PBC advisory role. It "acknowledge[d]" the Commission's role in advising the Council during transitions, in particular, the "usefulness of the Peacebuilding Commission's advice during the drawdown of UNMIL in Liberia and UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone".<sup>85</sup> Subsequently, in Resolution 2594 on transitions, the Council reaffirmed its intention to request and consider the PBC's advice. The resolution "strongly" encouraged the PBC to continue to fully utilise its convening role, "in particular, to facilitate the development of joint objectives and priorities prior to transitions".<sup>86</sup>

Diplomats and Secretariat officials often cite Liberia as the best example of the PBC's role in a transition. The PBC played a particularly active role in the consideration of the "peacebuilding plan" that the Secretary-General had developed, at short notice, at the Council's request when it renewed UNMIL for a final 15-month period in December 2016. This plan identified potential sources of instability and set out a division of labour among the UN country team, UNOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the World Bank to support the government in residual tasks to be carried out following UNMIL's departure.

The Liberia configuration, chaired by the permanent representative of Sweden, convened meetings on the peacebuilding plan and a subsequent capacity mapping exercise of the UN country team to assume tasks in the plan. These exercises were considered useful in identifying and raising awareness, before UNMIL's departure, of financial and capacity gaps, which donors could help fill by contributing to a new Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF). However, most of the funding (\$130 million for the peacebuilding plan's first two years) did not materialise. This has been attributed to the MPTF's late creation during UNMIL's drawdown, and donors—which often allocate funding for three- to five-year periods<sup>87</sup>—having already decided on their distribution of assistance for Liberia.

The PBC's country configurations for Liberia and Sierra Leone

human rights. This leads to the use of agreed language from other UN products, limiting the scope of the PBC advice. On the other hand, the consensus rule is seen as giving the PBC's advice greater authority. A further challenge in preparing the advice is the limited capacity of the PBSO team that supports the PBC. Cooperation with the PBSO from relevant UN actors, including the DPPA-DPPO regional divisions, also remains a longstanding difficulty.

Efforts continue for the PBC to develop more actionable recommendations or advice that can help shape a Council mandate. In 2023, the PBC has sought to submit more concrete advice, organised around bullet points, rather than advisories that read like a policy document or political statement. The Commission may also consider reducing the situations and issues on which it seeks to advise the Council, in favour of producing more strategic, substantive advice.

remained the main international forums to discuss country developments and raise awareness of the governments' priorities and support needs. For example, in 2018 as Sierra Leone prepared for its first general elections in the absence of a UN peace operation since the end of its civil war, the chair of the PBC's Sierra Leone configuration, the permanent representative of Canada to the UN, visited the country to be updated on electoral preparations and convened meetings of the PBC with representatives of UNOWAS and the UN country team. This may have contributed to greater attention, support, and coordination of international messaging for what was ultimately a successful electoral process. At the request of Sierra Leone, the PBC configuration ended in December 2020, though the Commission has held periodic meetings on the country since then in the Organisational Committee.

The PBC's country configuration on Guinea-Bissau, where UNIOGBIS concluded on 31 December 2020, has played a similar role. In written advice to the Security Council on the mission's final mandate renewal, the configuration said that it intended to work with UNIOGBIS on transition planning and implementation, and would continue to convene stakeholders to support Guinea-Bissau's peacebuilding priorities and to promote a shared understanding of challenges in the country.<sup>88</sup> Controversy over the outcome of Guinea-Bissau's presidential election in December 2019, leading to delays in forming a new government, and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, hindered the UN's ability to engage the authorities on their priorities. This, in turn, appeared to limit the PBC's ability to support transition planning in the way that it had in Liberia.

The Guinea-Bissau configuration has, as with Liberia and Sierra Leone, provided a platform for sustaining international attention and political accompaniment since UNIOGBIS' closure. In February 2022, it met on the situation following a failed coup d'état in which 11 people were reportedly killed in a gun battle at the presidential palace. In February 2023, Brazil's permanent representative, who chairs the configuration, visited Guinea-Bissau to

84 United Nations Security Council, "Letter dated 8 March 2022 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission," 9 March 2022; United Nations Security Council, "Letter dated 18 March 2022 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission," 21 March 2022.

85 United Nations Security Council, "Statement of the President of the Security Council S/PRST/2018/20," 18 December 2018.

86 United Nations Security Council, "United Nations Security Council Resolution 2594," 9 September 2021.

87 OECD, "Mission drawdowns: Financing a sustainable peace". OECD. 2020. [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/mission-drawdowns-financing-a-sustainable-peace\\_a0b4c681-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/mission-drawdowns-financing-a-sustainable-peace_a0b4c681-en)

88 United Nations Security Council, "Letter dated 24 February 2020 from the Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission addressed to the President of the Security Council." 24 February 2020.

## The Peacebuilding Commission

consider preparations for the June legislative elections to re-establish the parliament after President Umaro Sissoco Embaló had dissolved the National Assembly in May 2022; the elections were successfully held and won by an opposition coalition.

Since the ten-year PBAR review, the PBC has increased its cooperation with UN regional offices, especially UNOWAS, as part of the Commission's engagement on West Africa and Sahel issues. UNOWAS officials have briefed at PBC meetings on Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, and accompanied configuration chairs during visits to the region. In the context of transitions, the Council requested or backed transition plans to have UNOWAS make its good offices available to the governments and UN resident coordinators in Côte d'Ivoire,<sup>89</sup> Guinea-Bissau,<sup>90</sup> Liberia,<sup>91</sup> and Sierra Leone.<sup>92</sup> UNOWAS' mandate since 2020 has highlighted that the office should provide specific attention to countries undergoing reconfiguration or transition.

Despite reforms over the past seven years that have produced a more active PBC and invigorated interest in strengthening its impact, the Commission's support for transitions has mostly remained limited to situations where the PBC had created country configurations during its first decade. In other transitions (Côte d'Ivoire, Darfur, the DRC, and Haiti), the PBC has either not discussed these processes, or, in the case of the DRC, has had only limited discussions of the MONUSCO drawdown, through its regional meeting formats on the Great Lakes.

Why has the PBC not become involved in these situations? Notwithstanding the Security Council highlighting the PBC's potential to support transition situations, its non-involvement in several transition processes reflects countries' fear of stigmatisation and their scepticism about the benefit of engagement with the Commission. The case of Côte d'Ivoire illustrates this: as it emerged from the conflict of its 2011 post-electoral crisis, the government touted its strong economic recovery, and apparently saw engagement with the PBC during the drawdown of UNOCI as signalling that the country still faced significant problems. Moreover, as a middle-income country, Côte d'Ivoire also apparently questioned what the PBC could offer, reflecting a traditional scepticism about the PBC's added value.

Haiti's rejection of the PBC appeared linked to its distrust of the UN more broadly, founded on UN peacekeepers' responsibility for a cholera epidemic and sexual exploitation during more than two decades of UN peacekeeping, which itself failed to resolve Haiti's recurrent instability. Haiti may also have questioned the benefits of the PBC, given the continued existence of ECOSOC's Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti, which ECOSOC created in 1999 to ensure sufficient, coherent, and coordinated sustainable development assistance to the country.<sup>93</sup> The Group, long chaired by Canada, is not so different from the PBC's country configurations, the main difference being that as an ECOSOC body, it is limited to considering

socioeconomic issues and is less able to address the security-political dimensions that the PBC can consider. (An ECOSOC advisory group on Guinea-Bissau stopped meeting after the creation of the PBC Guinea-Bissau configuration in December 2007.)

The Secretary-General encouraged the Haitian government to address the Commission about its peacebuilding priorities when Haiti became eligible for PBF funding during its transition in 2019. The Council open debate that Peru organised in July 2019 on "Strengthening partnerships for successful nationally-owned transitions" appeared, in part, intended to increase Haiti's openness towards the PBC. At Peru's invitation, both the PBC chair and Haiti's Foreign Minister, Bochit Edmond, participated and the country's transition featured prominently at the session.<sup>94</sup> Still, Haiti rejected overtures to engage with the Commission. Sudan was encouraged to brief the Commission after being declared eligible for PBF funding in October 2019, although it, too, apparently never had the appetite to be considered by the Commission.

To date, the PBC has not become significantly involved in MONUSCO's transition. PBC discussion on the DRC occurs through its regional meetings on the Great Lakes. The PBC chair's summary of its meeting on the Great Lakes in October 2022 does not mention the MONUSCO transition plan.<sup>95</sup> In a sign that the Commission may increase its involvement in this transition process, PBC chair Ambassador Ivan Šimonović, while briefing the Council at its April 2023 biannual meeting on the Great Lakes region, made a general reference to this transition process, recommending that the Council continue to reiterate the "importance of a strategic and coherent approach by the United Nations and stakeholders, to sustain peacebuilding gains, in particular in the context of the transition of [MONUSCO]".<sup>96</sup>

Similarly, with the anticipated closure by the end of 2023 of MINUSMA, the PBC, which discusses the Sahel as a region, could provide a forum to consider the residual functions that the UNCT is expected to assume from MINUSMA, and thus the gaps and challenges that it will face. The abrupt withdrawal of MINUSMA, which follows Mali's request in June to end the mission "without delay"<sup>97</sup>, is why the UN prefers to reference the "transfer" of MINUSMA's tasks, rather than "transition", given how little time it has had to develop a typical transition strategy. The Malian transitional authorities' antipathy towards the UN—leading to its demand for MINUSMA's departure—suggests that it would be difficult for the PBC to gain Mali's consent to discuss the transfer of MINUSMA's functions or the situation in Mali after MINUSMA has departed. Mali notwithstanding, as this history demonstrates, the Council and the PBC will need to find ways to promote more systematic PBC involvement with UN transitions if member states and the UN value the role of the Commission.

89 United Nations Security Council, "Statement by the President of the Security Council S/PRST/2017/8." 30 June 2017.

90 United Nations Security Council, "UN Security Council Resolution 2512." 28 February 2020.

91 United Nations Security Council, "Statement by the President of the Security Council S/PRST/2018/8." 19 April 2018.

92 United Nations Security Council, "Statement by the President of the Security Council S/PRST/2014/6." 26 March 2014.

93 United Nations. "ECOSOC Ad hoc Advisory Group on Haiti."

94 United Nations Security Council, "Meeting records of the 8579th meeting of the Security Council." 18 July 2019.

95 Peacebuilding Commission, "Ambassadorial-level meeting on the Great Lakes region: Chair's summary." 31 October 2022.

96 United Nations Security Council, "Meeting records of the 9307th meeting of the Security Council." 19 April 2023.

97 Security Council Report, "Mali: Vote on Resolution Ending the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali," 29 June 2023.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

The UN has come a long way in enhancing its policies and practices in transition planning and management, even though the results have often been less than ideal. At face value, UN peace operations are generally taking the steps prescribed in the relevant policies and guidelines on transition planning and management while incorporating lessons learned from past experiences. Although each transition is unique, the UN has developed best practices to support transition processes, including joint planning and management through a “whole of UN system” approach, ensuring national ownership, conducting inclusive, gender-responsive analysis, and establishing partnerships with regional and international actors to support effective transitions.

The implementation of this guidance often falls short, however. Cooperation with the host country in transition processes can be difficult, especially if the governing authorities are pushing for rapid withdrawal and are unwilling or unable to assume responsibilities for tasks such as the protection of civilians, the development of the rule of law, or the promotion of inclusive political and civic environments. There may also be divisions among external actors, including the Security Council, on how to support particular transitions, which may lead to ineffective or incoherent policies. Financial support after the transition may be lacking, making it difficult to promote economic stability, especially following the withdrawal of a peacekeeping mission that provides jobs and resources.

### Integrated Planning in Sudan

UNAMID was not an integrated mission. For most of its history, the mission's lack of integration with the UN Country Team “prevented more systematic information-sharing, joint analysis and a collective United Nations approach to protection and other critical interventions.”<sup>102</sup> To address this concern, the joint UN-AU strategic review, released in June 2018, noted that “state liaison offices” (later called “state liaison functions”) would be established in El Fasher, El Geneina, Nyala, and Ed Daein as a way of integrating the work of UNAMID and the UN Country Team to address human rights, rule of law and livelihood challenges. In this way, UNAMID and the UN Country Team would work with other partners in an effort to prevent conflict relapse.<sup>103</sup>

As UNAMID began its drawdown in 2018, the state liaison functions contributed to the “integration of the United Nations system across Darfur and enabled the joint planning, programming, and implementation of mandated activities between UNAMID and the United Nations country team, in coordination with government counterparts.”<sup>104</sup> A lack of resources led to the end of state liaison function projects following the closure of UNAMID. The Secretary-General has observed that “while the functions were adequate as a transition modality in more stable parts of Darfur to replace a fully-fledged UNAMID presence, additional mission capacity for early warning and analysis should have been retained longer in areas with recurring outbreaks of violence, such as West Darfur.”<sup>105</sup> Nonetheless, the state liaison functions played a constructive role and informed the Council's thinking when it established

### Planning Processes

An assessment by the UN Transitions Project highlights “substantial deficiencies in a planning capacity, especially in integrated strategic planning coordination between UN missions and the UNCT.”<sup>98</sup> Despite institutional reform efforts towards system-wide integration, challenges persist, with headquarters departments and field-based staff feeling that they work in siloed fashion. In some instances, missions and UNCTs feel inadequately consulted or that their views are not fully taken on board in policy decisions at UN headquarters.<sup>99</sup> There also appear to be different understandings of the peace, humanitarian, and development nexus approach between missions and UNCTs in the field: in the DRC, for instance, MONUSCO is implementing the “nexus approach” to transition planning.<sup>100</sup> Several difficulties have been identified in this regard, including the lack of shared understanding and coordination among the various peace, humanitarian, and development actors.<sup>101</sup>

Although all missions are expected to engage in early and integrated transition planning processes based on the 2019 Policy Directive, the UN Transitions Project has also observed the reluctance of some missions to do so without a clear mandate from the Security Council or a formal request from the host government.

the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS). In resolution 2524, which created UNITAMS in June 2020, the Council requested that the mission and the UN Country Team establish a joint mechanism to coordinate peacebuilding efforts, using lessons learned from these functions.

In March 2020, as part of the transition from UNAMID to UNITAMS, the Secretary-General and the AU Commission Chairperson reported that the UN would deploy a planning team that would work on an integrated strategic planning process in Sudan.<sup>106</sup> This process was to “steer joint discussions with Sudanese counterparts and other key interlocutors, facilitate national ownership and outline the composition of the mission, the sequence of its tasks and implementation details, as well as arrangements relating to the drawdown of UNAMID.”<sup>107</sup> In resolution 2524, the Council requested the Secretary-General to “continue transition planning and management in accordance with the established policies, directives, and best practices in order to ensure that the eventual transition to UNITAMS from UNAMID is phased, sequenced and efficient.”<sup>108</sup>

The planning team—which was led by the Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Sudan, Nicholas Haysom, a highly experienced UN official—was established in April 2020. It visited Sudan between 26 July and 11 August 2020, meeting with Sudanese officials, civil society representatives and political groups, and foreign diplomats serving in Sudan. The team worked with the UN Country Team and UNAMID in planning for the successor mission.

98 United Nations Development Program, “UN Transitions Project, Mid-Term Evaluation”, 27 June 2022.

99 Interviews with UN and Security Council experts.

100 This was raised at a transitions roundtable in September by experts researching MONUSCO's transition based on interviews with stakeholders in the field.

101 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Results Group 4, “Country brief on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: Democratic Republic of the Congo.”

102 United Nations Security Council, “Summary report on lessons learned from the experience of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, S/2021/1099”, p. 10-11, op. 31, 29 December 2021.

103 United Nations Security Council, “Special report of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the strategic review of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, S/2018/530”, 1 June 2018.

104 United Nations Security Council, “Special report of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the strategic assessment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, S/2019/445”, 30 May 2019.

105 United Nations Security Council, “Summary report on lessons learned from the experience of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, S/2021/1099”, p. 11-12, op. 34, 29 December 2021.

106 United Nations Security Council, “Special report of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and a follow-on presence, S/2020/202”, 12 March 2020.

107 Ibid.

108 United Nations Security Council, “UN Security Council Resolution 2524”, 3 June 2020.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

Using the four strategic objectives of UNITAMS as a springboard, it developed nine priorities for the new mission to pursue in Sudan.<sup>109</sup>

UNAMID, the UNITAMS start-up team, and the UN Country Team worked together on planning for the new mission. In this regard, on 5 November 2020, these three actors held a workshop focused on aligning the UN's efforts in Sudan in support of "the transitional Government in the area of peace implementation and the implementation of its national plan for the protection of civilians".<sup>110</sup> As UNITAMS began to scale up its operations in early 2020, weekly coordination meetings were convened between UNAMID and UNITAMS staff. UNAMID and UNITAMS staff developed a framework for identifying key tasks that needed to be transferred from UNAMID to UNITAMS in the following areas: political support to Sudan to create a durable political settlement, peacebuilding matters, and protection issues.<sup>111</sup> To help UNITAMS get up and running, UNAMID provided it with logistical support<sup>112</sup>

### Host Country Engagement

While consultations with host governments and other stakeholders have become customary in transition processes, there are often several practical challenges. As missions engage with government ministries and local-level structures, host government input may not be coherent, particularly because of a lack of national institutional capacity.<sup>116</sup> The UN Transitions Project observed with respect to Haiti that: "The security situation in the country and the absence of a confirmed government during the transition process meant that the national engagement was not at an optimal level."<sup>117</sup> The host state's limited capacity for meaningful consultation was further coloured by its scepticism towards the UN. Haiti's political instability was one of the conditions calling into question the wisdom of the transition in the first place.

While Haiti is an unusual case given its absence of a confirmed government, the MONUSCO transition also illustrates the critical need for host country engagement in transition processes. MONUSCO engaged with the Congolese government to develop the mission's transition plan. It also held consultations with representatives of civil society, including women's groups, that resulted in the joint working group proposing benchmarks with indicative timelines, minimum conditions, and priority actions. MONUSCO, together with the Congolese government, the UNCT, and other partners, established integrated provincial transition teams in various provinces to

and transferred assets (including engineering and communications equipment and vehicles) to the new mission.<sup>113</sup>

A study conducted by the International Peace Institute (IPI) suggests that, while a broad range of UN entities was involved in the transition planning process, "conceptual differences and political interests among the different departments were exacerbated by coordination challenges, limited integration, and differences in planning capabilities".<sup>114</sup> One of the prominent divisions related to the differences in the interpretation of the term "light footprint" referenced in the October 2019 joint UN-AU special report. In the absence of a coherent understanding of "what this entailed in terms of the mission's design, staffing or budget", "light footprint" came to entail a "small, capital-centric mission", and UNITAMS "was only provided 20 to 30 percent of the staff and resources needed to implement all the priorities laid out in the mission concept paper".<sup>115</sup>

create the necessary framework for consultation on the implementation of the transition plan with all the partners involved.<sup>118</sup> However, despite the mission's longstanding presence in the country, a significant number of Congolese citizens have remained unaware of MONUSCO's mandate.<sup>119</sup> Misinformation and disinformation campaigns through social media also significantly marred the mission's reputation among the Congolese populace.

Despite these formal engagements, however, the Congolese government's substantial contributions to the transition process appear to have been somewhat limited. This was partly due to capacity constraints. The mission's relations with the host country were later complicated by the deteriorating security situation in eastern DRC, which hindered the implementation of the transition plan and led the Congolese government to request its revision.

Beyond mere participation in consultations, women and civil society groups may not be fully and meaningfully engaged to make the desired contribution. (See below on "The MONUSCO Transition and the Congolese People".) Faced with the challenges of engaging with the host government and civil society, transition planning can become a largely UN-driven process, which can militate against a shared understanding and vision of transition processes and the conditions that need to be met for a gradual and orderly mission drawdown and exit.

### The MONUSCO Transition and the Congolese People

MONUSCO has worked closely with local communities, and civil society, including women and youth organisations, in support of reconciliation and community stabilisation initiatives.<sup>120</sup> Even though civil society was part of the transition plan's development process and took part in the various monitoring mechanisms, it has at times expressed dissatisfaction. During the

Council visiting mission to DRC in March 2023, representatives of Congolese civil society conveyed their discontent that their suggestion for a review of the government's Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Program (P-DDRCS) had not been accepted.<sup>121</sup> MONUSCO's leadership seems to have recognised the need to actively engage civil society

109 United Nations Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Sudan and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan, S/2020/912", 17 September 2020.

110 United Nations Security Council, "Situation in the Sudan and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan, S/2020/1155", 1 December 2020.

111 United Nations Security Council, "Situation in the Sudan and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan, S/2021/199", 1 March 2021.

112 United Nations Security Council, "Transitions in United Nations peace operations, S/2022/522", 29 June 2022.

113 United Nations Security Council, "Situation in the Sudan and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan, S/2021/199", 1 March 2021.

114 Daniel Forti, "Walking a Tightrope: The Transition from UNAMID to UNITAMS in Sudan", International Peace Institute, page 19, February 2021.

115 Ibid.

116 United Nations Development Program, "UN Transitions Project, Mid-Term Evaluation". 27 June 2022.

117 UN Transitions Project (DCO, DPO, DPPA and UNDP), "UN Transitions: Sustaining Peace and Development Beyond Mission Withdrawal", June 2020.

118 United Nations Security Council, United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, S/2023/451, 19 June 2023

119 International Peace Institute, Security Council Report and Stimson Center, "Prioritization and Sequencing of Security Council Mandates: The Case of MONUSCO," December 2020.

120 United Nations Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," 19 June 2023.

121 Security Council Report, "What's in Blue: Dispatches from the Field: Meetings in Kinshasa with the President, Government Officials, Political Parties and Civil Society Organisations." Security Council Report, 10 March 2023.



# Challenges and Lessons Learned

in terms of implementing the revised transition plan and the mission's reconfiguration. In her 19 June 2023 press briefing, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of MONUSCO Bintou Keita referred to the mission's consultations with civil society and other partners in revising the transition plan and developing options for MONUSCO's reconfiguration in line with resolution 2666 of 20 December 2022 that renewed the mission's mandate.<sup>122</sup>

There is a serious concern that the premature withdrawal of the mission will risk leaving civilians in grave danger.<sup>123</sup> Although there is anti-MONUSCO sentiment among the population, many IDPs under the protection of the blue helmets apparently do not want the mission to leave, as some of them reportedly told Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix during his visit to the DRC in June 2023.<sup>124</sup> MONUSCO's reconfiguration takes into account the role of regional forces in the DRC, but the EACRF does not have the mandate to protect civilians and faces criticism from the host government and local communities because of unmet expectations. The Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) is tied up in North Kivu and does not appear to be able to take over security responsibilities to protect civilians in other conflict-affected provinces such as Ituri, where hundreds of thousands

## Benchmarking

In 2006–2007, the Council, for the first time, requested the Secretary-General to use benchmarks; this occurred during the UN Mission in Liberia's (UNMIL) consolidation and drawdown phases.<sup>128</sup> Since then, they have become an important tool in transition planning and management, providing a sense of direction. Mission benchmarks appear to lack consistency, however, at times being overly broad and unrealistic, extending beyond the likely lifetime of a mission. Some seem to refer to an ideal state, or require a best-case scenario to achieve, such as the steadfast commitment of the host government, sufficient resources, and favourable socioeconomic conditions.

In a “lessons learned” analysis of the Haiti transition, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) said that the lack

of internally displaced persons are hosted in UN sites. The Congolese government's military and civilian capacities remain weak or absent in the other conflict-affected provinces.<sup>125</sup>

Congolese opposition and civil society groups have been concerned about the narrowing of civic space in the country and have questioned the integrity of state institutions, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) and the Supreme Court. Some opposition parties also called for a transparent audit of the electoral registration process.<sup>126</sup> It is in this context that MONUSCO's mandate renewal will take place in December 2023, the same month as the national elections. Some Council members have expressed concerns about the Congolese government's increasing calls for MONUSCO to leave following the elections in December 2023. They argue that the minimum conditions agreed by the Congolese government and MONUSCO in the revised transition plan will not be met and warned that the mission's hasty withdrawal will likely create a security vacuum with devastating effects for civilians. These members have also underscored the need to “learn lessons from previous peacekeeping closures and make sure that we do not repeat mistakes in the Democratic Republic of Congo.”<sup>127</sup>

of progress towards the benchmarks was in part due to the unmet “planning assumption” during MINJUSTH's design “that an initial stable political environment would be maintained during the two-year mission and that the Government of Haiti would be able to adopt key reforms based on cooperative relations between the executive and legislative branches.”<sup>129</sup> While the government's failure to adopt specific reforms was undoubtedly a complicating factor, MINUJUSTH's challenge in devising clear and realistic benchmarks coexisted with the political reality that its drawdown was never in doubt, despite many indicators remaining unfulfilled. Council discussions on Haiti reflect unresolved tensions between an “end state” and an “end date” for the transition. (For more, see below on the MINUJUSTH benchmarks.)

## Historical Background on Benchmarks

A significant practice to emerge over the years in transition planning has been the establishment of benchmarks to assess progress towards the desired end state of UN peace operations. Benchmarks have been used as a planning tool to monitor progress in the implementation of Integrated Strategic Frameworks signed between the UN and host countries. Over the years, the Security Council has also increasingly been requesting benchmarks in the context of transition processes.<sup>130</sup> The Council first requested the Secretary-General to monitor the progress on the stabilisation of Liberia through broad benchmarks in 2006.<sup>131</sup>

For many years, there was no agreed process to engage various stakeholders, including the peacekeeping missions, SPMs, UNCTs, and national authorities, in developing benchmarks. This resulted in the UN Practitioners' Guide to Benchmarking, published in 2010 “to support United Nations system planners in designing and monitoring the implementation of benchmarking frameworks in conflict-affected countries.”<sup>132</sup>

Although benchmarks differ from one mission to another, UNU suggests four priority areas that could broadly apply to all missions:

- security, encompassing the protection of civilians and the reduction of overall instability (security sector reform and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programmes could be considered part of this benchmark);
- political progress, including benchmarks related to the implementation of peace agreements or the holding of elections, which may pose the risk of double transition (elections are considered a major milestone in the political transition of countries emerging from conflict and a key benchmark for the drawdown and exit of missions);
- human rights and the rule of law, including issues of accountability and justice, as well as reform of justice institutions; and
- socioeconomic recovery, such as humanitarian and development benchmarks.<sup>133</sup>

122 United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, “Transcript of the Joint Briefing by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in the DRC, and Head of MONUSCO, Bintou Keita and the Minister of Communication and Media, Patrick Muyaya 19 June 2023 in Kinshasa”, 19 June 2023.

123 Center for Civilians in Conflict. “DR Congo: CIVIC Calls to Strengthen Efforts to Protect Civilians from Armed Groups' Attacks.” 23 June 2023.

124 RFI, “UN Peacekeeping Mission in DRC is to withdraw ‘as quickly as possible’”, 9 June 2023.

125 United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, “Transcript of the press conference by Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Wednesday, June 7, 2023”, 7 June 2023.

126 Security Council Report, “What's in Blue; Democratic Republic of the Congo: Briefing and Consultations.” What's in Blue, 23 June 2023.

127 Security Council, “Meeting records of the 9358th meeting of the Security Council,” 26 June 2023.

128 United Nations, “Monitoring Peace Consolidation: United Nations Practitioners' Guide to Benchmarking,” 2010.

129 United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Evaluative Exercises; A Summary of Lessons Learned Studies and Evaluation, 2021.

130 Ibid.

131 United Nations Security Council, “United Nations Security Council Resolution 1712,” 29 September 2006.

132 United Nations, “Monitoring Peace Consolidation: United Nations Practitioners' Guide to Benchmarking,” 2010.

133 Adam Day, “UN Transitions: Improving Security Council Practice in Mission Settings.” United Nations University, 21 January 2020.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

Some benchmarks are considered fundamental to creating peace and security but are hard to achieve in the short term and require significant commitment from host governments (and other stakeholders). The protection of civilians is a key benchmark in several transition processes. Although host countries have the primary responsibility to protect civilians, as Council members often stress, they may not be ready to take over security responsibilities, including the protection of civilians, when missions withdraw.

When the Security Council decided to terminate UNAMID's mandate, the security situation in some regions of Darfur was precarious, with inter-communal violence, human rights violations and abuses, violations of international humanitarian law, and large-scale displacement. Such concerns were relevant to the benchmarks developed in 2018 for the mission's exit, which included the protection of civilians, monitoring and reporting human rights, and the facilitation of humanitarian access, among other issues.<sup>134</sup> However, in 2019, the UN and the AU revised and streamlined the benchmarks, calling them "long-term progress indicators" that focused on the political process, institution building, and long-term support to stabilization.<sup>135</sup> The provisions of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) were also intended to "serve as a basis for indicators of achievement for the eventual exit of UNAMID" in accordance with resolution 2429 (2018). Completed in 2011, the DDPD provided a framework for the peace process focusing on seven areas: human rights; power-sharing; wealth-sharing; justice and reconciliation; compensation of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); ceasefire and

security arrangements; and internal dialogue and consultation. While the protection of civilians is not explicitly referenced in the "long-term progress indicators", the DDPD indicated that a permanent ceasefire and final security arrangements for peace in Darfur should be based in large part on the protection of civilians.<sup>136</sup> In addition, resolution 2525 of 3 June 2020, the final UNAMID renewal before the mission's termination, explicitly authorised UNAMID to support the Sudanese government's capacity to protect civilians.

Several Council members routinely referred to the need to avoid a relapse into conflict following the exit of UNAMID. With the subsequent conflict and political instability in Sudan—as well as the deterioration in the human rights and humanitarian situation and the significant violence against civilians in Darfur—these members have raised doubts about the hasty withdrawal of UNAMID.

The protection of civilians has become a source of serious concern in light of some of the bigger UN peace operations in Africa undergoing transitions (or rapid departures) in 2023. Organisations such as the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) have sounded the alarm, underlining the need to find "local protection solutions" if no other measures are taken immediately to fill the void created by the withdrawal of UN peace operations.<sup>137</sup> In this connection, there are calls for enhancing community-based protection, an approach that is being used in some mission settings, such as MONUSCO and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), to engage conflict-affected communities in preventing or reducing protection risks.<sup>138</sup>

### MINUJUSTH Benchmarks

With resolution 2350 of 13 April 2017, the Security Council decided to close the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and establish the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) as a smaller follow-on presence. In the same resolution, the Council requested the Secretary-General to "set out a well-developed and benchmarked projected two-year exit strategy" for MINUJUSTH.<sup>139</sup> Consequently, this mission was from its very inception a mission in transition, tasked with envisioning a desired "end state" for its exit, yet nonetheless bound to a projected "end date". The latter constraint was largely a result of the combined political pressure of Haitian authorities seeking to put an end to UN peacekeeping in the country, and the Council seeking cuts to the peacekeeping budget.<sup>140</sup> While not unique to the case of Haiti, this emphasis on an "end date" is in tension with the UN's transition policy, which favours an "end state" approach: "Ideally, UN mission drawdowns and withdrawals will be triggered by the Security Council's recognition of sufficient progress made towards the implementation of the mission's mandate."<sup>141</sup> In the case of Haiti, however, it appears to have been a predetermined timetable rather than progress on the ground that dictated the transition's pace.

Within this context, the UN sought to develop benchmarks around a common vision shared by an integrated country presence and Haitian authorities. In his letter dated 20 March 2018, which transmitted the benchmarks to

the Council, the Secretary-General said that they had been "discussed and articulated" by MINUJUSTH's senior management and the UNCT, to align mission initiatives with relevant elements of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2017–2021 that had been developed jointly by the Haitian government and the UN and signed on 30 June 2017.<sup>142</sup> The UNDAF thus served as the basis for formulating exit benchmarks coordinated between UN entities and national authorities, geared towards Haiti's development needs. This approach aligns with guidance from the Secretary-General's transition planning directive, which instructs UN country teams to "utilize the UNDAF as the key planning framework to ensure linkages to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and link to national development plans and priorities where they exist".<sup>143</sup>

The benchmarks were further grounded in MINUJUSTH's mission concept, which envisioned the strengthening and professionalisation of the Haitian National Police (HNP), the adoption of key judicial legislation, and the reform of judicial institutions in accordance with international human rights and rule-of-law standards. Some Secretariat staff who worked on the benchmarks now believe that they may have been too focused on justice and rule-of-law issues at the expense of the country's overall political situation, which remained fragile and would become increasingly volatile as transition

134 United Nations Secretary-General, "Report of the Secretary-General on African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur", 12 October 2018.

135 United Nations Security Council, "Special report of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the strategic assessment of the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, S/2019/445", 30 May 2019.

136 "Doha Document for Peace in Darfur", 2011.

137 Center for Civilians in Conflict. "DR Congo: CIVIC Calls to Strengthen Efforts to Protect Civilians from Armed Groups' Attacks." 23 June 2023.

138 Gay Rosenblum-Kumar, "As UN Missions Draw Down, Strengthening Community-Led Approaches to Protection of Civilians." IPI Global Observatory. 3 May 2023.

139 United Nations Security Council, "UN Security Council Resolution 2350", 13 April 2017.

140 Interview with UN DPPA and BINUH staff members, 4 and 9 August 2023, New York

141 United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Department of Field Support Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training, Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal, 2 April 2013.

142 United Nations Secretary-General, "Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti." 20 March 2018.

143 UN Secretary-General, "Secretary-General's Planning Directive for the Development of Consistent and Coherent UN Transition Processes, In Line with Executive Committee Decision 2018/38", February 25, 2019 (internal document).

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planning progressed. They also acknowledged that the mission's projected two-year lifespan complicated the benchmarking process, contributing among some staff to a conception of the benchmarks as a rough guide to priority areas of work rather than clear standards against which to evaluate the drawdown of the mission – a drawdown that was never really in question in light of the political forces advocating for it.<sup>144</sup>

Arguably for these reasons, the benchmarks were not well received by the Security Council but were nonetheless adopted. As an IPI report observed in 2018:

*"The benchmarks seem to be vague, difficult to measure, and unrealistic. They are framed in terms of ambitious end states, such as that 'by the end of the MINUJUSTH mandate, a solid foundation for longer-term political stability, security and development in Haiti would have been established.' Member-state representatives acknowledged in private that the proposed benchmarks were extremely disappointing, but they officially endorsed them in the April 2018 Security Council resolution to avoid losing time."<sup>145</sup>*

Other key benchmarks such as the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, and Security Sector Reform (SSR), also require substantial and long-term investments. The changing nature of conflict is creating serious challenges to DDR processes with the increasing fragmentation of armed groups, criminal networks, and other groups designated by the Security Council as terrorists, who sometimes operate across borders, one example of the regional and international dimensions of current conflicts. Even where peace agreements include commitments to undertake DDR processes, they are difficult to implement under these circumstances. In response, missions have introduced Community Violence Reduction (CVR) as a bottom-up DDR approach to local-level violence.<sup>148</sup>

While UN peace operations are given the mandate to provide support to security sector reform in countries emerging from conflict, they are "neither the sole provider of assistance nor necessarily the best equipped in terms of capabilities".<sup>149</sup> When the Security Council includes SSR as one of the priority tasks of missions, the UN seems to accept it reluctantly in recognition of the challenges to the effective implementation of SSR processes, which require national engagement and leadership, and adequate coordination. International partners, too, can lack coordination in this sector and may fail to provide adequate and sustained financing to support these efforts.<sup>150</sup>

The Security Council adopted resolution 2553 of 3 December 2020 on SSR<sup>151</sup>, proposed by South Africa, which underlines the need to integrate security sector reform objectives in mission planning and transitions. The Secretary-General's report on this issue, which was submitted on 15 March 2022 pursuant to resolution

The mission later formulated more concrete and quantifiable indicators for each benchmark, which helped measure progress in subsequent reporting from the Secretary-General. Yet as Haiti's domestic situation continued to deteriorate through 2019 – with escalating protests against government corruption and mismanagement triggering violent clashes and eventually the resignation of Prime Minister Jack Guy Lafontant – the Secretary-General acknowledged in his July 2019 report on MINUJUSTH that "despite the progress made in many areas, it is unlikely that the majority of the 46 indicators from the benchmarked exit strategy will be achieved by October 2019", when the transition to BINUH was to take place.<sup>146</sup>

In a subsequent "lessons learned" analysis, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) said that the lack of progress towards the benchmarks was in part due to the unmet "planning assumption" during MINUJUSTH's design "that an initial stable political environment would be maintained during the two-year mission and that the Government of Haiti would be able to adopt key reforms based on cooperative relations between the executive and legislative branches."<sup>147</sup>

2553, described the role of UN peace operations and UNCTs in supporting SSR by citing the example of past transitions in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia.<sup>152</sup> But an independent review of UN support to SSR in peace operations over the period 2014–2020 found "serious deficiencies in mandates, strategy, organization, implementation and learning in United Nations mission practices regarding SSR".<sup>153</sup> The review identified several issues, including limited awareness and interest on the part of the senior leadership of missions, absence of dynamic strategies, poor coordination between the various components of missions, a militarized approach to SSR, and a lack of dedicated resources.<sup>154</sup>

### Resource Mobilisation

The presence of UN missions often provides considerable stimulation to the local economy. In the absence of institutional capacity, host governments depend on the resources and capacity of UN missions to carry out several tasks, including training and capacity building, transportation and logistics, infrastructure development (such as rehabilitating roads, schools, and health facilities), and electoral support, among others. Mission drawdown and departure present economic challenges and capacity gaps. Finding sufficient resources to help these countries overcome this challenge and build their national capacities becomes a herculean task.<sup>155</sup> In the case of DRC, for example, there is already concern about the resource constraints that the country might face once MONUSCO winds down its operation. The UN maintains that the Congolese government will have to shoulder the financial responsibilities once funding from the UN peacekeeping budget comes to an end.<sup>156</sup> MONUSCO, the UNCT,

144 Interview with UN DPPA staff member, 9 August 2023, New York.

145 Namie Di Razza. "Mission in Transition: Planning for the End of UN Peacekeeping in Haiti", International Peace Institute, December 2018.

146 United Nations Secretary-General, "Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti." 20 March 2018.

147 United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, *Evaluative Exercises: A Summary of Lessons Learned Studies and Evaluations*, 2021.

148 Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "The evolving nature of DRR: Engaging armed groups across the peace continuum." July 2021.

149 United Nations Peacekeeping, "Security Sector Reform."

150 Ibid.

151 United Nations Security Council, "UN Security Council Resolution 2553." 3 December 2020.

152 United Nations Secretary-General, "Report of the Secretary-General on Strengthening Security Sector Reform." 15 March 2022.

153 Independent Review Team, "Towards Better Security Governance: Learning from the Road Travelled: An independent review of the United Nations support to security sector reform in peace operations, 2014-2020." 14 December 2021.

154 Ibid.

155 UN Transitions Project, *Final project document (2020-20023): Sustaining Peace and Development Beyond Mission Withdrawal*, 2021.

156 United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, "Transcript of the press conference by Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Wednesday, June 7, 2023", 7 June 2023.

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and other partners have engaged in mobilising resources in light of the intention to accelerate the mission's drawdown and exit, and the UNCT initiated a mapping exercise of its programmatic activities and human resource requirements.<sup>157</sup>

The norm is for host governments and UNCTs (consisting of UN agencies, funds, and programmes, or AFPs) to take over the residual responsibilities from peacekeeping operations. (For example, resolution 2690 envisages the transfer of MINUSMA's tasks to the UNCT, while the UNCT has taken over tasks from MONUSCO in three provinces in the DRC as the mission gradually draws down.) The lack of strategic coordination at the planning level and the alignment of financing systems between UN missions and UNCTs have been identified as major predicaments.<sup>158</sup> UNCTs face capacity challenges because they often depend on project and discretionary funding to support country programmes, whereas UN peacekeeping missions are supported through assessed contributions that are required of all UN member states. In addition, UNCTs tend to find it even more difficult to mobilise funding when these missions leave. The AFPs may also compete amongst themselves for resources. Frequently, they rely on UN peacekeeping operations capacities for physical protection and operational support, adding to their challenges of continuing their programmatic activities, especially in field locations, let alone taking over additional responsibilities.

Multi-partner trust funds are one mechanism to address financial shortfalls.<sup>159</sup> In Liberia, the government and partners were acutely aware of the financial impact of UNMIL's departure, and the practical effect of losing significant logistical enablers and presence outside the capital. In July 2018, the UN established the Liberia Transition Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), a pooled fund under the shared oversight of the government and the UN Resident Coordinator. The PBF remained the sole contributor to this fund. The PBF also opened a new funding window for transitions, which remains inadequate and heavily dependent on a small group of traditional donors.<sup>160</sup> In the case of Haiti, some Secretariat and mission staff observed that implementation of PBF-funded programmatic activities has been slow, uneven, and not strategically connected to BINUH's political advocacy.<sup>161</sup>

Member states acknowledge the need to find innovative financing modalities through strengthened partnerships with IFIs and the private sector. In this regard, the World Bank's Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence and its engagements in support of justice and security sector reforms have been of particular interest to the UN.<sup>162</sup> The Secretary-General's 29 June 2022 report on transitions in UN peace operations refers to the work done by the UN in the **DRC together with the World Bank to develop a public expenditure**

review of the security sector in the country to promote the long-term financial sustainability and affordability of security institutions after MONUSCO's departure. The report says that this was done based on experience from the United Nations transition in Liberia.<sup>163</sup> The World Bank is also providing additional resources through its Country Partnership Framework with DRC to address drivers of fragility and conflict.

### Bucking the Political Winds?

The challenge facing transitions goes beyond better technocratic exercises: adherence to correct transition planning and management procedures, or better benchmarking, will not guarantee success. Transitions are "complex, inherently political and strategic processes"<sup>164</sup>, and experience suggests that political considerations will dictate Council decisions on the reconfiguration, drawdown, and exit of UN peace operations. This is apparent in cases where the lack of cooperation and consent of host governments forces the termination of missions, or where the Council itself pushes for closure. Following the Council's decision to terminate MINUSMA's mandate, at the insistence of the host government, the Secretary-General noted in his 18 August letter pursuant to resolution 2690<sup>165</sup> that this decision "did not allow for a transition period" and, therefore, "some tasks performed by MINUSMA will not be handed over".

Transitions are not linear processes and can be heavily affected by sudden and momentous developments in the political and security environment. UNAMID's transition process was interrupted by the dramatic political changes in Sudan in 2019. Following the overthrow of the Al-Bashir regime in 2019, upon the request of the Sudanese transitional authorities, the Council decided to terminate the mission and mandate a new SPM, namely UNITAMS. The Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support told the Fifth Committee of the UN General Assembly that UNAMID did not have adequate time for a proper drawdown and exit.<sup>166</sup> The UNAMID lessons learned report identified several challenges in this regard.<sup>167</sup> The outbreak of conflict in Sudan in April 2023, particularly the deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in Darfur, raised questions about the hasty withdrawal of UNAMID, with Council members stressing the need to draw appropriate lessons from this experience when planning for future transition processes.<sup>168</sup> For a while, Council members and the UN Secretariat alike were focused on not repeating the over-hasty withdrawal of the UN Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISSET) in 2005. But that memory seems to have faded.

While Council members recognise that UN peace operations cannot be deployed indefinitely, they know that rushed withdrawals

157 United Nations Secretary-General, "Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." 19 June 2023.

158 United Nations Security Council, "Report of Secretary-General on Transitions in United Nations Peace operations." 29 June 2022.

159 United Nations Security Council and General Assembly, "Letter dated 2 July 2020 from the Chair of Peacebuilding Commission addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council." 7 July 2020.

160 Ibid.

161 Interview with UN DPPA and BINUH staff members, 4 and 9 August 2023, New York.

162 World Bank Group, "World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence 2020–2025" (English). Washington, DC: World Bank Group. 27 February 2020.

163 United Nations Security Council, "Report of Secretary-General on Transitions in United Nations Peace operations." 29 June 2022.

164 United Nations Development Program, "UN Transitions Project, Mid-Term Evaluation". 27 June 2022.

165 United Nations Secretary-General, "Letter dated 18 August 2023 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security-Council-." 18 August 2023.

166 United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare. "Remarks to the 5th Committee."

167 United Nations Secretary-General, "Letter dated 28 December 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council." 29 December 2021.

168 United Nations Security Council, "Meeting records of the 9358th of the Security Council meeting." 26 June 2023.

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can have consequences for the host country's political trajectory and the broader objective of sustaining peace. Abrupt withdrawals can risk a relapse into another cycle of conflict and violence, endanger the lives of civilians, and undermine the gains made during the deployment of UN peace operations. At times, Council members have stressed that the drawdown and exit of UN peace operations be gradual and conditions-based in line with the evolving

security situation on the ground and progress in implementing agreed benchmarks; at other times, Council decisions on mission drawdowns and exits abandon these considerations, and "internal pressure within the Security Council or external pressure from the host government can lead the Council to prioritize the withdrawal date over progress on key benchmarks".<sup>169</sup>

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### UNAMID's Transition to UNITAMS

UNAMID's exit was complicated by several factors, including logistical challenges given its size and the geographical footprint of the operation, and the looting of team sites. There were also largely peaceful demonstrations against the exit of UNAMID, as well as petitions from some communities, including internally displaced persons, who expressed concern about their security after the mission's withdrawal.

In their March 2020 report, nine months before UNAMID's withdrawal, the Secretary-General and the AU Commission Chairperson reported that notwithstanding improvements in the security situation, the underlying sources of conflict and instability in Darfur – such as land disputes, human rights violations, and displacement – remained.<sup>170</sup> In addition, the absence of some of the armed groups from peace talks, such as the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW), continued to promote instability in the country.<sup>171</sup>

Leading up to UNAMID's withdrawal at the end of 2020, several Council members remained concerned that the security situation in some regions of Darfur was precarious, with inter-communal violence, large-scale displacement, violations of international humanitarian law, human rights violations and abuses, and the high incidence of sexual and gender-based violence. There was also limited progress in advancing key elements of the political transition and the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) in the context of significant political, security, humanitarian, and economic difficulties.

Political imperatives, more than objective analysis, tended to drive decision-making on the timing of UNAMID's exit. UNAMID had been in Darfur since 2007 and had worn out its welcome with the host government, as reflected by the 22 October 2018 Security Council intervention by Sudan's ambassador to the UN, who argued that the security and humanitarian situations had improved in Darfur from 2015 onwards and that peacebuilding, rather than peacekeeping, had become the appropriate tool to meet the needs of the region.<sup>172</sup> While some Security Council members urged caution about the pace of the drawdown, others did not and showed considerable deference to the wishes of the host government. In retrospect, an honest

assessment of the security environment might have led to different conclusions about the timing of UNAMID's withdrawal. The Council ultimately terminated UNAMID's mandate on 31 December 2020, in keeping with the AU Peace and Security Council's 21 May 2020 communiqué.<sup>173</sup> This was a compromise between the Sudanese transitional government's call for the mission to end in October 2020 – supported by the African members of the Security Council (then Niger, South Africa, and Tunisia), China, and Russia – and other Council members, who would have preferred an end date of 31 May 2021, to provide additional time for the transitional government to enhance its ability to protect civilians.<sup>174</sup>

When the Council established the UN Integrated Transition Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) in June 2020, it reaffirmed the primary responsibility of the Government of Sudan to protect civilians across its territory, acknowledging the Government of Sudan's National Plan for Civilian Protection, which was officially conveyed to the Security Council on 21 May 2020.<sup>175</sup>

However, some Council members were especially concerned that UNITAMS did not have a stronger mandate to protect civilians, given the lingering instability in parts of Sudan. The US, for example, had advocated "a robust police mission in Darfur with a mandate that supports the Sudan's efforts to address the remaining security challenges in that volatile region".<sup>176</sup> Others (Russia and China among them) opposed the inclusion of robust protection tasks in the UNITAMS mandate, in keeping with the position of Sudan's transitional government, which opposed a Chapter VII mandate for the new mission. During a Council briefing on 28 April 2020, Russia stated: "It seems obvious that a future UN presence should be based on Chapter VI of the Charter of the UN. Let us leave the task of the protection of civilians to the Sudanese authorities".<sup>177</sup> In line with the Sudan transitional government's position, the mandate of UNITAMS was consistent with Chapter VI, although the authorising resolution did not explicitly reference Chapter VI, against the wishes of the three African Council members and Russia.

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169 Agathe Sarfati, "Transitions from UN Special Political Missions to UN Country Teams." International Peace Institute, April 2021.

170 United Nations Security Council, "Special report of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and a follow-on presence, S/2020/202", 12 March 2020.

171 Ibid.

172 United Nations Security Council, "Meeting Record of the 8377th Security Council Meeting", 22 October 2018.

173 African Union Peace and Security Council, "Communiqué PSC/PR/COMM. (CMXXVII)", 21 May 2020.

174 Daniel Forti, "Walking a Tightrope: The Transition from UNAMID to UNITAMS in Sudan", International Peace Institute, February 2021.

175 United Nations Security Council, "The national plan of the Sudan for protecting civilians after the exit of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), S/2020/429", 1 June 2020.

176 United Nations Security Council, "Letter dated 28 April 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council", 29 April 2020.

177 Ibid.

## Conclusions and Observations

Peace operation transitions have emerged as a major focus of attention with the drawdown, reconfiguration or termination of some UN peace operations. At the time of writing, MINUSMA peacekeepers are leaving Mali under difficult circumstances following the termination of the mission's mandate in June 2023. MONUSCO is also undergoing a transition, with the Congolese government calling for the accelerated drawdown of the mission to be underway by the end of 2023. The Secretary-General has submitted his proposal for the mission's reconfiguration, which is likely to inform the MONUSCO mandate renewal process in December 2023. In a 16 October presidential statement, the Security Council expressed its "readiness to decide by the end of 2023 on the future of MONUSCO, its gradual, responsible and sustainable withdrawal and the concrete and realistic steps to be undertaken, as a matter of priority to implement this withdrawal". In this regard, it requested MONUSCO and the Congolese government to develop, by November, a comprehensive disengagement plan with a timetable for MONUSCO's progressive and orderly withdrawal, building on the revised transition plan and its four key benchmarks.<sup>178</sup> With the ongoing conflict in Sudan, and a request by the authorities that UNITAMS depart, the mission is hanging in the balance. Other multidimensional peacekeeping missions, such as UNMISS and MINUSCA, have initiated transition planning, while several other SPMs have submitted their transitions calendar in line with the Secretary-General's 2019 planning directive.

As this report notes, transitions, such as those underway in Mali and the DRC, are particularly difficult when relations are strained between the mission and the host country. Stark divisions in the Council diminish its influence on host country leaders, who can exploit these differences to their advantage. The difficult Council discussions and negotiations on the mandates of UN peace operations in recent years are likely to persist.

In this political climate, missions may not have the luxury of a gradual and phased drawdown and exit. They could be forced to leave under pressure from host governments without the minimum conditions for their withdrawal being fulfilled. As witnessed in some cases, hasty withdrawals risk undermining the gains made during the presence of UN peacekeeping operations but can also leave civilians in grave danger once the mission leaves, if the security vacuum is not filled. This is a pertinent challenge that departing missions, or those currently undergoing transitions, are grappling with.

In the face of strong demand from host countries for longstanding missions to draw down and exit, the Council has little option but to comply: host country consent is a key tenet of peacekeeping operations, and constructive engagement with host governments and local communities is fundamental to the success of transition processes. Such engagement has proven increasingly difficult, however, in light of the growing challenge posed by misinformation and disinformation, which underlines the imperative for strengthening the strategic communication of missions.

With the drawdown and exit of some of the bigger multidimensional peacekeeping missions in Africa, the role of SPMs and UNCTs appears to have attracted greater attention in the Council. While UNCTs have already been assuming residual tasks from

UN peace operations, there is some attention to having regional SPMs assume some responsibilities from departing and transitioning missions. To carry out these responsibilities effectively, however, will require enhancing the capacities of both SPMs and UNCTs and addressing their resource constraints. The role of the PBC in addressing the peacebuilding needs of countries in transition, and partnership with the IFIs, has become critical.

Interest has grown in regionally-led peace support operations, particularly those under the auspices of the AU, in places where UN peace operations are reducing their footprints or withdrawing. This issue will gain renewed momentum in late 2023 with the resumption of negotiations among Council members on a framework resolution regarding the financing of AUPSOs.

Recognising the significance of peace operation transitions in promoting peace and security in post-conflict settings, the Secretary-General has accorded this issue top priority among the UN's ongoing reform initiatives. In light of the formidable challenges currently confronting UN peace operations and the difficult discussions surrounding the drawdown and exit of larger multidimensional UN peacekeeping missions, transitions have taken on heightened relevance for the work of the Security Council, although this body has yet to hold a follow-up discussion on the Secretary-General's 29 June 2022 report on transitions.

Aspects of transitions that particularly merit the Council's attention include the following:

- the role of IFIs in mobilising resources for transitions;
- enhancing partnerships with regional and sub-regional organisations in promoting transitions;
- protecting civilians in transitions;
- promoting better engagement with host countries and communities in transitions; and
- understanding the peace, humanitarian, and development nexus in transitions.

Regardless of how the Council chooses to grapple with this issue—and based on previous experience—there are several observations and lessons learned that can inform the Council's decision-making in upcoming and future transitions.

### Lack of Sufficient Lead Time

Although the Secretary-General's 2019 Planning Directive called for developing a comprehensive transition plan at least 24 months before UN peace operations' withdrawal or reconfiguration<sup>179</sup>, some transition processes have faced insufficient lead time. UN policies and guidelines on transition planning and management need to allow for unpredictable circumstances and less-than-ideal drawdown scenarios. The Security Council should take due cognizance of developments such as the demand for hasty withdrawal in Mali in asking peace operations to plan for various scenarios under which the mission may have to depart. This may reduce the element of surprise in the event of an accelerated drawdown or the abrupt termination of their mandate.

<sup>178</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Letter dated 21 November 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the UN addressed to the President of the Security Council", 21 November 2023.

<sup>179</sup> UN Secretary-General, Secretary-General's Planning Directive for the Development of Consistent and Coherent UN Transition Processes, In Line with Executive Committee Decision 2018/38, 25 February 2019 (internal document).

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### Realistic Benchmarks

Benchmarks can be a useful yardstick for measuring progress in transition processes, and over the years, the Security Council has requested the Secretary-General to develop benchmarks to inform its decisions on the drawdown, reconfiguration, and exit of various missions. The Council recognised that benchmarks should be clear, realistic, and measurable in resolution 2594<sup>180</sup>, but this has not always been the case. Mission benchmarks differ widely. Council members have not addressed the anomaly between seeking benchmarks (that define an “end state”) and demanding, or responding to the host government’s demand for accelerated drawdown.<sup>181</sup> In MONUSCO, benchmarks were developed and indicative timelines were provided to guide the transition process, but in his address to the 78th UN General Assembly on 21 September 2023, DRC President Félix Tshisekedi requested the UN to “move up the MONUSCO withdrawal deadline from December 2024 to December 2023”.<sup>182</sup>

The Secretary-General’s report on transitions dated 29 June 2022 indicates that Council members are expected to differentiate between benchmarks relevant to measuring progress toward key political and security milestones by the host state and those associated with long-term implementation after mission withdrawal.<sup>183</sup> However, 2023 trends indicate that missions may be compelled to depart without the host country meeting the minimum conditions that give the country the best chance of sustainable peace and keep civilians safe.<sup>184</sup> Council members may, in turn, opt to focus on benchmarks relevant to avoiding a potential security vacuum.

If UN peacekeeping operations are to hand over security responsibilities to other regional forces, rather than to the host government, those forces’ mandate, and capacity, to protect civilians should also be a concern. MONUSCO’s reconfiguration takes into account the role of regional forces and envisages, for example, a drawdown of all remaining units from North Kivu based on an assumption that the Congolese government will enhance its presence in these provinces with the support of regional security forces.<sup>185</sup> However, despite the expectations—and criticisms—of the host government and local communities, the EACRF lacks a mandate to protect civilians. Its future is also in doubt, as the Congolese government has sought the deployment of another regional force, from the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Where host countries take over security responsibilities, Council members can consider supporting their capacity to develop a protection plan that is realistic and implementable. Sudan’s National Plan to Protect Civilians, submitted to the Security Council in May 2020 as UNAMID drew down,<sup>186</sup> was a comprehensive document covering areas including the rule of law and human rights, DDR,

humanitarian work, and development, among other areas. While some Council members welcomed its creation and UNITAMS was mandated to support its implementation, the Sudanese government lacked the will and/or capacity to implement it, and Darfur continued to be plagued by violence, which escalated markedly in the region when the civil war broke out in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

In the absence of national security forces to fill the void created by the withdrawal of UN peace operations, Council members may consider enhancing community-based protection, an approach that is being used in some mission settings to engage conflict-affected communities in preventing or reducing protection risks. For example, MONUSCO has been using this approach since the days of the predecessor mission, the UN Mission in the DRC (MONUC) (1999-2010). Its Community Alert Networks are assisting vulnerable communities to contact the mission directly via mobile phones or high-frequency radios to prevent, mitigate, or stop imminent threats to their safety and security.<sup>187</sup> Such approaches are also being used in some of the other bigger multidimensional missions in Africa, such as UNMISS and MINUSCA, with varying degrees of success; exploring these further becomes all the more significant in transition settings.<sup>188</sup>

### Engaging Host Countries and Civil Society

The role of host countries is crucial in the success or failure of a UN transition. This, as well as sustaining peace at the community level, requires meaningful UN engagement with host governments and with civil society, including with women and youth representatives in the field. Many peace operations have noted the gap in public (and, at times, host government) expectations; countering this through strategic communication and public engagement has become more important, and harder, in the face of powerful disinformation campaigns waged against UN field presences.<sup>189</sup> Managing the expectations of host governments and communities is one of the major challenges faced by UN peace operations. The Secretary-General’s 19 April 2023 report on the strategic review of strategic communications across UN peacekeeping operations acknowledges that “[t]he current capacity of peacekeeping missions to gauge public perception of and sentiment towards mission mandates and activities and to evaluate the impact of strategic communications is limited and ad hoc”.<sup>190</sup> The report underscored, among other things, the need to ensure that “the strategic communications capabilities in missions and at Headquarters are aligned with the required functions and with the necessary adaptation to the rapidly evolving communications landscape and organizational priorities...so that United Nations peacekeeping can better meet

180 United Nations Security Council, “UN Security Council Resolution 2594.” 9 September 2021.

181 Agathe Sarfati, “Transitions from UN Special Political Missions to UN Country Teams.” International Peace Institute. April 2021.

182 President Félix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo, “Remark at the 78th UN General Assembly.” 20 September 2023.

183 United Nations Secretary-General, “Report of Secretary-General on Transitions in United Nations peace operations.” 29 June 2022.

184 Center for Civilians in Conflict. “DR Congo: CIVIC Calls to Strengthen Efforts to Protect Civilians from Armed Groups’ Attacks.” 23 June 2023.

185 Ibid.

186 UN Security Council, “Letter dated 21 May 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council,” 21 May 2020.

187 United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, “Civil Affairs.”

188 Harley Henigson, “Community Engagement in UN Peacekeeping Operations: A People-Centered Approach to Protecting Civilians.” International Peace Institute.

189 Security Council Report. “Security Council Visiting Missions.” Council members could consider reinvigorating Council visiting missions, particularly to transition and post-transition settings, to reduce the “expectation gap”. Such missions have fallen sharply from four or five a year prior to COVID-19: between late 2019 and late 2023, the Council undertook two visits to the field.

190 United Nations Secretary-General. “Report of the Secretary-General on Strategic Review of strategic communications across United Nations peacekeeping operations.” 19 April 2023.

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new challenges and demands”. Council members may wish to follow up on this report and its recommendations.

Regarding planning processes, missions may need to pay special

attention to building the capacity of relevant government authorities at both the central and local levels involved in planning and implementing transition processes.

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### Gender-responsive Approaches to UN Transitions

The 2013 UN policy on transitions stresses the significance of robust gender analysis to assess the potential impacts of transitions on women, men, girls, and boys. It also underscores the need to support host countries in applying gender-responsive budgeting to ensure adequate allocation of resources to women’s needs and priorities.<sup>191</sup> The Secretary-General’s 2019 planning directive also attaches particular importance to gender-responsive analyses. Consultations with women groups have become an important feature of engagements with national stakeholders in transition planning processes.<sup>192</sup>

Resolution 2594 on transitions requests the Secretary-General to incorporate “comprehensive gender analysis and technical gender expertise at every phase of mission planning, mandate implementation, and review”. It underlines the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective to ensure the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women throughout the transition process. And it calls on the Secretary-General to integrate women’s needs fully into all prioritised and sequenced stages of a mission mandate and mission transitions.

### Enhancing Engagements with UNCTs

The role of UNCTs has been critical in taking over residual responsibilities from UN peace operations and sustaining the UN’s continued political engagement and cooperation with host countries in preserving the peace and security gains in the post-transition phase. Resolution 2594 emphasises the need to engage with UNCTs at the earliest possible stage in integrated planning and coordination on transitions.<sup>197</sup> While UNCTs are increasingly involved in integrated planning processes, their views and concerns may not always be fully taken on board by missions and UN headquarters. The UN Transitions Project, recognising this challenge, has pointed to the need to improve “communication and coherence between missions and the UN Country Team, and [to] strengthen...feedback to Integrated (Mission) Task Forces and Integrated Operational Teams on inter-agency planning issues”.<sup>198</sup>

UNCTs need the capacity to understand the political dynamics in the host country and produce the necessary political analysis to identify potential challenges and chart the way forward. The leadership of the Resident Coordinator (RC) is vital during transition processes, and in some missions, he/she wears a triple hat, as a deputy special representative, resident coordinator, and humanitarian coordinator, overseeing the integrated planning and management of transition processes.

In the face of UNCTs’ resource challenges, Council members may need to take into account what the Secretary-General stated in his 29 June 2022 report on transitions in UN peace operations by making sure that “Security Council mandates are crafted based on

The Secretary-General’s June 2022 report on transitions says that a gender-responsive conflict analysis methodology has been developed jointly by the Department of Peace Operations, UN Women, and UNDP to support transition planning.<sup>193</sup> According to Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix, MONUSCO has “one of the most gender-responsive transitions planned to date”.<sup>194</sup> However, he noted that missions continued to be constrained by inadequate resources and personnel, including a shortage of gender advisers.<sup>195</sup>

The Secretary-General’s report also emphasises the need for additional planning, monitoring, and evaluation capacities, including gender mainstreaming, as part of integrated transition teams in missions. It expresses concerns about the capacity of national security sector institutions to meet their responsibilities in a gender-responsive manner and underscores the need to allocate increased funding towards the development of gender-responsive rule of law and security sector institutions. The report also calls for “clearer and more consistent use of gender-sensitive benchmarks” in transitions, where relevant.<sup>196</sup>

a realistic understanding of country team capacities and capabilities and that sufficient resources are projected and committed to supporting peacebuilding activities to avoid funding cliffs after the departure of a mission”. How the Council would directly address these issues is an open question, however. The Council does not mandate the agencies, funds, and programmes. It could, however, consider making greater use of the PBC’s convening role to enhance engagement with UNCTs. (For more on the role of the PBC, see below.)

### Broadening the Scope of Transition Planning

Council members have recognised the need to strengthen partnerships with regional and sub-regional organisations in transition processes; as well, discussion of the financing of AU-led peace support operations (AUPSOs) has gained momentum. Depending on the evolution of this discussion (at the time of writing, the A3 seems likely to table a draft framework resolution before the end of 2023), a possible trend is of UN peacekeeping operations transitioning into support missions mandated to provide political and operational backstopping to AUPSOs. The Secretary-General’s 1 May 2023 report on the financing of AUPSOs seems to lean towards the UN support office option that is considered flexible and practical in tailoring support to AUPSOs in accordance with specific needs and circumstances, while emphasising that this option should be implemented as part of a coherent political strategy.<sup>199</sup>

These developments may bring about a shift in the UN’s hitherto UN-centric thinking about transitions. If AUPSOs may take over stabilisation responsibilities as UN peace operations draw down and

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191 “Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal”, endorsed by the Secretary-General, 4 February 2013.

192 United Nations Security Council, “Letter dated 27 January 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations addressed to the President of the Security Council.” 27 January 2021.

193 United Nations Secretary-General, “Report of Secretary-General on Transitions in United Nations peace operations.” 29 June 2022.

194 United Nations Security Council, “Meeting records of the 9123rd meeting of the Security Council,” 6 September 2022.

195 Ibid.

196 United Nations Secretary-General, “Report of Secretary-General on Transitions in United Nations peace operations.” 29 June 2022.

197 United Nations Security Council, “UN Security Council Resolution 2594.” 9 September 2021.

198 UN Development Coordination Office, Department of Peace Operations, Department of the Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UN Development Programme, “UN Transitions Project: Sustaining Peace and Development Beyond Mission Withdrawal: Annual Report July 2020-June 2021.” 2021.

199 United Nations Secretary-General, “Report of the Secretary-General on Implementation of Security Council Resolutions 2320 (2016) and 2378 (2017) and considerations related to the financing of African Union peace support operations mandated by the Security Council.” 1 May 2023.



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exit (in contrast to the historical trend of AUPSOs having transitioned into UN peacekeeping operations, as in the CAR, Mali, Liberia, Burundi and elsewhere), the AU will also need capacity in the planning and management of transitions. Council members should recognise and proactively anticipate the potential emergence of this trend, giving special consideration to this issue during their annual consultations with their AUPSC counterparts. As they engage in negotiations for the framework resolution concerning the financing of AUPSOs, Council members can also foster increased cooperation and collaboration between the UN and the AU by exchanging lessons learned and best practices about transitions.

With a focus turning to UN partnerships with regional and sub-regional organisations over the deployment of forces in conflict situations where UN peace operations are reducing their footprints or withdrawing<sup>200</sup>, the UN Transitions Project has a research project with the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) on the role of regional and sub-regional organisations in transition processes.<sup>201</sup> The AU has identified valuable lessons in its 2015 Common African Position on the review of UN peace operations, including the importance of early consultation, the establishment of appropriate benchmarks, the articulation of clear support mechanisms for AUPSOs, and the adaptation of UN procedures to align with the requirements of an AUPSO liquidation process.<sup>202</sup>

### Enhancing the Role of the PBC

The PBC's now defunct Working Group on Lessons Learned (WGLL) conducted a study in 2014 entitled "Transition of UN Missions: What Role for the PBC". As indicated by its title, the study sought to identify practical ways that the PBC could support transitions. Among its recommendations, it suggested that the PBC could point to challenges, including national capacities, that require greater national and international commitments<sup>203</sup>, a suggestion that the Liberia configuration seemed to take up three years later. The study, however, also cautioned that when contemplating the Commission's role during transitions, "the PBC needs to be realistic about what it can offer; the PBC is neither present in the field nor has an operational mandate".<sup>204</sup>

Still, the PBC offers two main and related advantages in the context of transitions. First, it can provide sustained international attention to still fragile countries that easily fall off the radar after a peace operation withdraws. It has done so, for example, in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau. It has also played such a role in The Gambia, providing follow-up attention. This has been done, for example, through what continue to be annual and previously biannual meetings on the country, after the electoral crisis in December 2016 and January 2017, which prompted emergency Council meetings and an ECOWAS military intervention.

Second, the PBC provides a convening forum and political accompaniment by bringing together diverse stakeholders, including the government of the country of concern. This is intended to help

identify and develop a common analysis of peacebuilding challenges and more coherent international support to address continued risks of conflict relapse. The PBC's ability to convene national and international stakeholders, if conducted effectively, can also address criticism that transition planning has often been a largely UN-centric exercise to fundraise for the UN country team.<sup>205</sup>

Another benefit of the PBC is its mandate to focus on the longer-term peacebuilding issues and challenges (which bridge security and development questions) that transition countries still face after a UN peace operation is no longer required.

How could more consistent PBC involvement in transitions be promoted, given the number of transitions in which the PBC has not been involved? On the part of the Council, when it decides to draw-down a peace operation or mandates the UN to prepare a transition plan, it may, at the same time, encourage host countries to engage the PBC to review, identify, and raise awareness of resource gaps and requirements of the plan. Such encouragement from the Council could then strengthen the PBC's hand in convincing a country to engage with it. Another option, though potentially more intrusive, is for the Council to request the PBC to support or provide advice on that transition situation. (It is worth recalling that the PBC's founding resolutions did not require that the Security Council "requests" for advice from the PBC have the consent of the concerned country, as opposed to requests from ECOSOC or the General Assembly). But such a request would probably not preclude the need for the PBC to gain the concurrence of the host country, which is important for effective engagement on the part of the Commission.

Political will is also required of PBC chairs, supported by their vice-chairs. PBC chairs could visit the country concerned. Such visits could seek to convince authorities of the value of PBC engagement and foster trust between the government and the Commission. Additionally, field visits familiarise the chair with the issues facing the transition and the priorities of the host authorities. In a related vein, when the PBC becomes involved in a transition situation, it could consider agreeing with the national government to a "statement of mutual commitment", which the PBC configurations once used as part of their engagement with countries and were considered useful in some instances.

So far, PBC involvement in transition situations has been mostly limited to where it already had existing country configurations (for example, in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Burundi).<sup>206</sup> However, the Commission has not created new country configurations since the ten-year peacebuilding architecture review (PBAR), as it has sought to conduct more of its work in its Organizational Committee. In part, the move away from country configurations occurred because their effectiveness often depended on the commitment and resources of their chairs, which could not be easily changed if they did not function well. The existence of the configurations also deterred a broader range of countries from engaging with the PBC, as many countries perceived this format as more intrusive and potentially of indefinite duration.

200 UN Transitions Project (DCO, DPO, DPPA and UNDP), "UN Transitions: Sustaining Peace and Development Beyond Mission Withdrawal", June 2020.

201 UN Development Coordination Office, Department of Peace Operations, Department of the Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UN Development Programme, "UN Transitions Project: Sustaining Peace and Development Beyond Mission Withdrawal: Annual Report July 2020-June 2021." 2021.

202 African Union Peace and Security Council, "Common African Position on the UN review of peace operations." 29 April 2015.

203 Working Group on Lessons Learned of Peacebuilding Building Commission, "Transition of UN Missions: What role for the PBC?" 2014.

204 Ibid.

205 OECD, "Mission drawdowns: Financing a sustainable peace," OECD, 2020.

206 Aside from the PBC's involvement in transitions through country configurations, there has been very limited discussion of the MONUSCO transition in the context of the PBC's regional meetings on the Great Lakes.

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Still, the configurations have shown some advantages over the Organizational Committee. This includes the continuity of the chair of a configuration and greater familiarity with a situation compared to a PBC chair, who changes annually and leads discussions on a broad number of issues before the Commission. While the formation of new configurations (or similar bodies) could be considered on a case-by-case basis to support a transition, another possibility, considering some of the concerns about this format, is to enhance the role of the PBC's vice-chairs. The PBC has two vice-chairs, one of whom is the PBC chair from the previous year. This vice chair could continue to steer the PBC's work on a transition that began when he or she served as chair, allowing for greater continuity and expertise.

Topically, impetus could be given to having the DRC engage the PBC on the MONUSCO transition. The situation is more complex than other transition experiences of the PBC—fighting continues in the DRC, unlike in Liberia and Sierra Leone at the time of transition—but the PBC still has an opportunity to contribute to this transition process, particularly by monitoring challenges facing the UN country team and other actors that will operate in the DRC after MONUSCO's closure. Given the PBC's involvement in South Sudan since late 2022, another opportunity for the PBC is to support the eventual transition of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

When the Security Council calls for a transition plan, the mission and UN Secretariat, after such a plan is developed, report back to the Council about the envisioned drawdown and transfer of residual tasks. Another role for the PBC is to complement the Council's activities by giving more visibility to the host country's views, as well as those of the UN Country Team and other stakeholders, by allowing them to directly engage New York-based member states and share their perspectives on the transition. As was the case in Liberia, this can create an opportunity to raise awareness of resource gaps. It also should allow for strengthened analysis of the transition or peacebuilding needs that the Commission can convey to the Council.

Despite the PBC's efforts to advise the Council, including its written advisories since 2018, it remains difficult to discern the Commission's advice in Council resolutions. As one Council penholder contended, the PBC's advisories should focus on identifying elements that can be most useful for Security Council members in crafting a mandate.<sup>207</sup> Questions and issues that it could consider when preparing advice on transitions, but also more generally, include concretely identifying the key challenges for peacebuilding in a given country,

as well as key milestones and national processes for sustaining peace, and cooperation frameworks with the UN.

In addition to setting out such challenges and opportunities, the PBC should address issues directly relevant to Council deliberations during a transition, according to the same Council member. It could aim to make recommendations on:

- how to ensure that forthcoming mission reviews assess the risk of conflict relapse and contain possible mitigation measures;
- potential peacebuilding-related benchmarks or necessary conditions for the drawdown and exit of a mission;
- how the Council might ensure that the mission is focused on issues related to coordination with the country team and other stakeholders regarding different challenges or anticipated residual tasks;
- components of a UN mission that may need to be bolstered during a transition, or components of other UN presences that the Council could encourage to be strengthened;
- how to most effectively capitalise on UN cooperation frameworks to advance integrated and coherent approaches among political, security, and development actors within and outside the UN;
- how the Council may reference ways that the wider UN system can provide support to meet a concerned country's core needs;
- what advocacy or encouragement that the Council could provide to mitigate a “financial cliff” and ensure that reconfigured UN or international support is well positioned to assist the host country, such as through a multi-partner trust fund or alignment with a national peacebuilding strategy; and
- how the Council and UN can best cooperate with regional actors to ensure a complementary approach to mitigate risks.

At the same time, as the PBC works to improve its advice, it should not neglect the role that is to more directly contribute to the stability of countries, including transition situations, such as promoting coherent international support and maintaining attention on still fragile states.

Finally, improving its advisory role and support for transitions—or “elevating the work” of the PBC, as called for in the New Agenda for Peace—seemingly requires increasing the capacity of the PBC to support the Commission and continued commitment by member states to develop this still relatively young UN body.

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207 Interview with a Security Council member. 14 August 2023.

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# Selected Documents on UN Peace Operations Transitions

## SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS

[S/RES/2284](#) (28 April 2016) extended the mandate of UNOCI for a final period until 30 June 2017, after which the mission was terminated.

[S/RES/2333](#) (23 December 2016) extended UNMIL's mandate for a final period until 30 March 2018.

[S/RES/2350](#) (13 April 2017) closed MINUSTAH and established MINUJUSTH.

[S/RES/2476](#) (25 June 2019) established BINUH.

[S/RES/2524](#) (3 June 2020) established UNITAMS.

[S/RES/2559](#) (22 December 2020) was on the expiration of UNAMID's mandate.

[S/RES/2594](#) (9 September 2021) is on peace operations transitions.

[S/RES/2612](#) (20 December 2021) welcomed MONUSCO's joint transition plan.

[S/RES/2690](#) (30 June 2023) is terminated MINUSMA's mandate.

## SECURITY COUNCIL PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENTS

[S/PRST/2017/8](#) (30 June 2017) is on the closure of UNOCI.

[S/PRST/2017/24](#) (7 December 2017) is on UN peacekeeping operations.

[S/PRST/2018/8](#) (19 April 2018) is on the closure of UNMIL.

## SECRETARY-GENERAL'S REPORTS

[S/2001/394](#) (20 April 2001) is on "no exit without strategy: Security Council decision-making and the closure or transition of United Nations peacekeeping operations".

[S/2017/826](#) (29 September 2017) is on the strategic review of MONUSCO.

[S/2018/958](#) (29 October 2018) is a special report of the Secretary-General on UNOCI.

[S/2019/842](#) (25 October 2019) is an independent strategic review of MONUSCO.

[S/2020/1041](#) (26 October 2020) is a joint strategy on the progressive and phased drawdown of MONUSCO.

[S/2022/522](#) (29 June 2022) is on transitions in UN peace operations.

[S/2023/36](#) (16 January 2023) is an internal review of MINUSMA.

[S/2023/303](#) (1 May 2023) is on the financing of AU peace support operations mandated by the Security Council.

[S/2023/574](#) (2 August 2023) is on options for adapting the configuration of MONUSCO.

## SECURITY COUNCIL LETTERS

[S/2017/282](#) (4 APRIL 2017) was a letter from the Secretary-General transmitting the Liberia Peacebuilding Plan.

[S/2023/596](#) (14 August 2023) outlines the full range of support options the UN could provide to enhance the security situation in Haiti.

## SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING RECORDS

[S/PV.4223](#) (15 November 2000) is on no exit without strategy.

[S/PV.8579](#) (18 July 2019) is on Strengthening partnerships for successful nationally-owned transitions.

[S/PV.8851](#) (8 September 2021) is on UN peace operations transitions.

## OTHER DOCUMENTS

[S/2015/446](#) (17 June 2015) is the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on uniting our strengths for peace: politics, partnership, and people.

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Security Council Report is a non-profit organisation supported by the Governments of Albania, Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the Carnegie Corporation, and Open Society Foundations.

**Design** Point Five, NY

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