Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal

This Policy was endorsed by the Secretary-General on 4 February 2013 following its endorsement by the Integration Steering Group.

1. Purpose and Rationale

1.   This Policy provides strategic guidance to UN headquarters offices and field presences on how to plan and manage the transition of UN operations where a peacekeeping or special political mission (hereinafter referred to as UN missions) is deployed and the UN presence is preparing for, or involved in, a significant drawdown or withdrawal of the mission. It establishes key principles that apply across all UN mission transition processes and clarifies roles and responsibilities of UN actors at headquarters and in the field. It also establishes the links between transitions and other related policy streams.

2.   This Policy was developed in response to increased demands from the field and headquarters offices as well as Member States for improved planning and management of UN transitions. Its scope and content is informed by an analysis of recurring challenges and lessons identified in areas such as planning, political process, capacity development and staff management and logistical support.

2. Scope and Definition

a) Definition

3.   As countries emerging from conflict undergo critical changes, the way the UN engages with them needs to adapt. UN transitions are therefore first and foremost a response to significant change in a country's political and security situation and its economic and social development. UN transitions can be as diverse as the contexts in which they take place and are heavily influenced by decisions made by national governments. While the goal is for post-conflict countries to reach a point where no further UN presence is required and for UN transitions to lead to a handover of responsibilities to national actors, experience has shown that the UN often remains engaged over a long period of time, albeit in an adjusted form, and that UN transitions will require the handover of some mission tasks to UN and other international partners.

4.   In the broadest sense, transitions involving UN missions cover significant changes in the Security Council mandated presence, including start-up, reconfiguration, and drawdown or withdrawal of a UN mission.[1] This Policy focuses specifically on transition scenarios involving a significant drawdown or withdrawal of a multi-dimensional UN mission which operates very closely, or in an integrated setting, with UN agencies, funds and programmes. Such transitions may be to another smaller UN mission (either

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[1] This includes exceptional cases where missions have been mandated by the General Assembly.

peacekeeping or special political mission), or a reconfiguration to the exclusive presence of the UN country team (UNCT).[2]

5. Aside from those transitions that involve UN missions, there are also other types of UN transitions such as transitions from humanitarian response to development coordination and programmes. These have major repercussions for the overall UN configuration and capacities in the field and intersect with mission drawdown and withdrawal. However, these transitions are not part of the scope of this Policy.

b) Triggers for UN Transitions

6. 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. Transitions may also be triggered by the withdrawal of consent of the host government or by other political or security developments that necessitate a change to the UN presence. UN mission drawdown and withdrawal processes do not always occur in conducive environments and the UN's ability to plan for and implement UN transitions will be affected by the nature and timing of the trigger. This Policy provides guidance for UN transition scenarios where planning is possible. However even in cases when opportunities for planning are limited by circumstances, the principles set out in this Policy should be followed to the extent possible.

c) Policy coherence

7. UN transitions take place in the context of broader peacebuilding and development, and in some cases, ongoing humanitarian efforts. This Policy aligns with the Secretary-General's agenda on peacebuilding as outlined in the Secretary-General's Report on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict (2009) and subsequent reports, as well as ongoing efforts to follow up on the International Review of Civilian Capacities.

8. UN transitions rely on the effective and consistent implementation of integration policies and guidelines. This Policy takes into account the Secretary-General's Decisions on Integration of 2008 and 2010 as well as the Secretary-General's Guidelines on the Integrated Mission Planning Process (IMPP).

9. This Policy intersects with a number of other specific policy initiatives.[3] Where appropriate, references are made in this document to these related policy streams and efforts should be made by all UN actors to incorporate UN transition considerations into relevant existing and newly developed guidance.

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[2] The focus on the context of mission drawdown and withdrawal is also due to the comparable lack of strategic guidance for such scenarios. DPA and DPKO/DFS have issued Guidelines on the start-up of special political and peacekeeping missions in 2012 and 2010 respectively.

[3] This includes, but is not limited, to UN-wide efforts to develop principles and guidance for more effective use and development of national capacity, the Global Field Support Strategy and processes – both within and outside the UN – to sustain and coordinate international political and financial support for peacebuilding, including the 2011 World Development Report on Conflict, Security and Development and the International Dialogue on Statebuilding and Peacebuilding.

3. Key principles

10. Five key principles should be applied by Headquarters and field presences across the United Nations system in all transition scenarios that this policy applies to:

    I. **Early planning**: Planning for UN transitions needs to begin early, take into account different potential scenarios, and remain flexible throughout.

    II. **UN integration**: UN transitions involve the reconfiguration of the overall UN presence and objectives, not only the drawdown and withdrawal of a mission. As such they must be planned, coordinated and managed jointly by all UN actors present in the country from the outset and at both the field and headquarters level.

    III. **National ownership**: The success of UN transitions hinges on national ownership, leadership and political will in the host country, which should be secured through high-level political engagement, as well as support from a broad and representative range of national stakeholders.

    IV. **National capacity development**: The existence and development of relevant national capacities is critical to ensure an effective and sustainable handover of mission responsibilities to national partners.

    V. **Communication**: UN transitions can cause anxieties and diverging expectations among national and international stakeholders, including mission staff and UNCT members. UN leadership in the field and at UNHQ need to carefully manage expectations, inter alia, through clear and consistent messaging.

4. Roles, responsibilities and coordination mechanisms

11. A decision to draw-down a peacekeeping or political mission is ultimately made by the Security Council. This section provides guidance on how different UN actors should work together to advise the Secretary–General on what possible follow-on UN presence will best serve the needs of the host country. It also provides guidance on relevant roles and responsibilities once a Council decision on drawdown has been made and planning for a reconfigured UN presence begins.

a) Mission and UNCT leadership

12. Planning for a UN transition is the joint responsibility of the UN leadership[4] on the ground, working in close coordination with national partners, the UNCT and UNHQ. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General or Head of Mission (SRSG/HOM) and the wider UN leadership in the field play a critical role in creating and sustaining momentum for UN transitions by proactively engaging the political leadership and other key national and local stakeholders in a dialogue on the transition process. The UN leadership must keep

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[4] UN leadership refers to senior managers in both the UN mission and the UNCT.

their respective UNHQ offices informed of developments on the ground and regularly consult them on key issues relating to transition.

13. The SRSG/HOM should clarify transition responsibilities at the beginning of the process and designate focal points across the mission for transition planning. Equally, the Resident Coordinator should designate UNCT transition planning focal points. Strategic planning units in the mission and in the Resident Coordinator's office should be adequately resourced and staffed to address the increased planning needs. The process should take into account humanitarian planning and should involve the Humanitarian Coordinator (when distinct from the Resident Coordinator) and any Regional Humanitarian Coordinator.

b) UNHQ

14. UNHQ offices should provide timely support to UN missions and UNCTs that are planning for or undergoing transitions. The lead Secretariat department must provide strategic leadership and advice in close consultation with UN partner organizations at UNHQ. The Integrated (Mission) Task Force (I(M)TF) should be the primary consultation forum to provide such support from headquarters. The lead department should also engage the host country and other key external partners[5] at early stages of a planned transition.

15. When it becomes apparent that a UN transition will lead to the establishment of a new mission, discussion should begin immediately among the headquarters offices concerned. If there is a change in lead departments, the current lead department should invite the new lead department to enhance its engagement with the I(M)TF. The new lead department must take on the responsibility to lead the planning for the configuration of the new UN mission prior to mission withdrawal.

16. When a UN transition leads to the return of an exclusive UNCT presence, discussion should begin immediately with DPA and the relevant regional UNDG, and they should be invited to strengthen their I(M)TF engagement. The regional UNDG and DPA should also take into account all possible options to strengthen backstopping of the remaining UNCT presence (see section 5 c).

5. Integrated Assessment and Planning

a) Planning requirements

17. Recognition of the need for early and integrated transition planning needs to be firmly in the minds of the UN leadership from the very outset of the deployment of a mission. This means that UN missions should identify clear objectives and associated performance measures, such as benchmarks, once a mandate has been issued. These should be regularly reviewed to measure progress and, if required, adjusted. Subsequently, as soon as it becomes clear that the mission is approaching a drawdown phase, missions may integrate transition issues, including support implications, into existing planning tools such as an Integrated Strategic Framework (ISF) or, where required, initiate a specific transition planning process.

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[5] External partners include, but shall not be limited to, IFIs, regional organizations, bilateral diplomatic presences and donors and the Peacebuilding Commission, where relevant.

18. Mission drawdown and withdrawal often means a significant adjustment, start-up or surge of activities for internal and external partners alike. Assessment and planning processes should take into account the roles and capacities of UN and non-UN partners in broader peacebuilding and development efforts in view of the eventual transition.

19. Unforeseen political dynamics and potential security setbacks may influence transitions. Plans addressing the transition phase must therefore be clear and flexible and be regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure they remain relevant and practical.

b) Coherence across different planning instruments

20. To ensure sustainability of transition processes, transition planning needs to reflect national priorities, peacebuilding and/or development plans. Where separate transition planning instruments are introduced, alignment with existing UN planning tools, such as the ISF, United Nations Development Assistance Framework, Mission Concepts and the Results-based Budgets must be ensured. Equally, all component level planning must be informed by the integrated transition plans or other UN-wide or mission-wide plans and strategic decisions on the overall UN engagement in a country.

c) Planning for handover and post-transition UN presence

21. Successful UN transitions are more than the orderly departure of a UN mission. Any UN transition process should aim to handover key lead responsibilities to the national government to the extent possible. Transitions need to ensure continued commitment to larger peacebuilding and development goals and include provisions for the post-transition phase. Planning must include the mapping of key mandated as well as programmatic activities and address their handover to national actors, a post-transition UN presence, and other international partners.

22. To ensure a smooth transition process, the handover of mission tasks should occur over time with the mission gradually reducing its activities while continuously monitoring progress towards completion of tasks and the capacity of national and international partners to take over any residual responsibilities.

23. Planning for a post-transition UN presence requires scenario-based contingency planning, given possible political uncertainties and funding situations. Options for a post-transition UN presence should be determined through an integrated assessment, involving the host government, key UN partners, and be complemented by other tools, such as component-level assessments, as necessary. Robust gender analysis must be utilized to assess potential impacts of the transition on women, men, girls and boys. In all cases, and particularly when transitions lead to the return of an exclusive UNCT presence, consideration should be given to how to strengthen the capacity of the UNCT in areas of handover from the mission.

24. The outcome of this assessment should also inform planning for leadership succession. Where a new mission is anticipated, the lead department, working with relevant UN partners must develop options for the configuration of the follow-on leadership team. Should an exclusive UNCT presence be anticipated, UN agencies, funds and programmes, should reassess their leadership presence, and identify suitable candidates for key UNCT positions, if required.

6. *Managing the political process and stakeholder expectations*

a) Building consensus with key stakeholders

25. UN transitions are highly political processes. Host countries, regional actors and international partners can have diverging views on the timing, phasing, scope and nature of the transition. All aspects of transitions, including technical issues, such as asset disposal (liquidation) and transfer, need to be managed carefully.

26. To be successful, UN transitions require broad national buy-in and ownership, strong support of the Security Council, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), when relevant, as well as key donors and regional partners. Therefore both UNHQ and the UN leadership on the ground should facilitate a dialogue around UN transitions with all relevant partners through regular high-level consultations. These consultations should aim to develop a clear understanding of public perceptions, priorities and concerns and establish consensus on the mission drawdown and withdrawal process as well as possibilities for a post-transition presence which should then inform the Security Council's deliberations and decisions.

27. At the field level, consultations with national actors should not be limited to government officials but should involve other key political actors, including the opposition, minority representatives as well as civil society groups, women leaders and the media, particularly in transition scenarios where different groups face distinct security threats and obstacles to political participation.

28. With due consideration for potential political constraints, as well as the need for flexibility, thought should be given to the inclusion of timeframes and jointly owned monitoring mechanisms in discussions on the mission drawdown and withdrawal between the host country, the Security Council and the Secretariat in order to keep the process on track and allow for effective monitoring and evaluation.

b) Managing expectations through clear and consistent messaging

29. Handling the political aspects of a transition involves managing the expectations of the host government, key national and local stakeholders, the international community and mission staff and requires clear and consistent communication both at the level of the field and UNHQ. Mission transitions can raise uncertainty and anxieties and therefore need to be managed and communicated carefully. Building confidence in the national institutions and the transition process and clearly articulating its implications are critical to successful transition planning. The UN mission and UNCT leadership should work together to develop joint communication strategies, drawing on an analysis of the perceptions, concerns and priorities of key stakeholders. Maintaining a public information officer/spokesperson as part of the liquidation team should also be considered.

30. In relation to internal expectations, as a mission draws down its senior management should engage in an active information campaign from the beginning of the transition planning process in order to reduce anxiety of staff. Such a campaign may include regular town hall meetings, bulletins, broadcast messages, a dedicated intranet site, and regular visits to sections by senior managers.

7. National Capacity Development

31. National capacity development is a central tenet of peacebuilding and a consistent priority for both UN missions and UNCT partners, and may require a generational effort beyond the withdrawal of UN missions with the support of UNCT and non-UN partners.

32. UN transitions will only be successful if national actors have capacity to take on responsibilities that should be continued and which have hitherto been undertaken or supported by the mission. Identifying those functions and capacities requires a sound analysis of mission and UNCT functions and local capacities, and must be assessed in partnership with national partners, UN agencies, funds and programmes and bilateral donors. Given the time required to build national capacities, this process should begin in the early stages of the mission lifecycle and should be continuously reviewed. Where national capacities are not sufficiently developed, UN agencies, funds and programmes should assess the requirement and feasibility of continued support to these areas.

33. As local needs and capacities change over time, so should the UN's support including through adjustment of programmatic support, configurations and staff profiles. Throughout a UN mission's deployment, UN efforts on national capacity building need to build on the principles of UN collaboration and comparative advantage.

34. All UN actors should prioritize capacity development from the outset of their presence and build on existing national capacities in all aspects of mandate implementation and support, in line with the recommendations of the Civilian Capacities Review and the emerging principles and guidance. This may include but is not limited to maximizing use of national systems and capacities, prioritizing the recruitment of national staff and continuously developing their professional capacities, co-locating UN and host government staff, where appropriate, and subject to General Assembly approval, donating UN built/owned facilities for subsequent utilization, and strengthening local procurement to the extent possible within the financial rules and regulations.

8. Ensuring sustained support for peacebuilding priorities

35. The continuity of peacebuilding efforts throughout and beyond UN mission transitions requires the sustained political and financial commitment of national and international actors. Therefore, sustaining political support and mobilizing predictable donor funding for ongoing peacebuilding programmes is critical during and beyond UN mission transition processes. Where possible, the lead department at UNHQ should encourage the creation and/or continuation of Member States fora such as "groups of friends" and "contact groups" that can help sustain coordinated support to host countries.

36. To facilitate the mobilization of donor support, transition plans should address ongoing long-term resource requirements and include strategies on how to fill resource gaps. This should include national budget processes as well as UN and wider donor funding and advocacy. The UN leadership should work closely with the World Bank and other partners to encourage that national planning and budgeting processes prepare for financial and capacity gaps that national institutions are likely to experience due to the drawdown and withdrawal of a mission. The UN should support national partners to employ gender-

responsive budgeting to ensure adequate allocation of resources to women's needs and priorities.

37. As voluntary funding of the UN follow-on presence is unlikely to match the resources of the assessed budget of peacekeeping operations and to a lesser extent of the SPM budget, it is important that the UN mission and UNCT leadership carefully manage the expectations of national stakeholders and encourage them to prioritize and make sustainable national plans and programmes. In eligible countries, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) should be explored as an important tool to fill emergency gaps and to catalyse long-term national peacebuilding processes, programmes and sustainable donor support.

38. While decisions on mission mandates rest with the Security Council, the PBC plays an advisory role to the Security Council and the General Assembly on peacebuilding issues. For countries that are on the PBC's agenda, it can play an important role in advising on and advocating for sustained international attention and support focused on the peacebuilding priorities of those countries throughout and beyond the UN transition processes.

9. Mission Support in transition

39. Mission support aspects of UN transition will normally involve the liquidation of the closing mission and, sometimes, the start-up of a follow-on mission. Mission support considerations must be integrated with the political and substantive aspects of transition planning from the outset. This will require strong mission and headquarters leadership and coordination.

a) Logistical support

40. UN mission expertise, facilities, infrastructure, transportation and logistics are often critical for host countries and the UNCT. Therefore, UN missions need to adopt strategies that reduce the negative impact of their drawdown and withdrawal. Consideration should be given, within the financial rules and regulations, to early investments in local infrastructure, support to local procurement and outsourcing of services to promote self-sufficiency. UN missions should also enter into capability development arrangements with their local service providers in order to support their skills development and professionalization.

41. These efforts notwithstanding, the withdrawal of UN missions has the potential to create resource and capacity gaps for both the host government and the UNCT. Transition plans should therefore systematically identify these gaps and develop plans to strengthen national capacities and/or identify alternatives. Where a transfer of assets to national actors is possible under the existing UN rules and regulations, this transfer must be accompanied by adequate capacity development to ensure assets can be operated and maintained effectively after the departure of the mission.

b) Liquidation and start-up of follow-on presence

42. UN mission liquidation processes tend to be influenced by the national political and budgetary context in which they occur. A mission liquidation strategy therefore should be carefully planned, communicated and politically supported by the mission leadership, in

accordance with the DPKO/DFS Liquidation Manual and the liquidation rules specified by the General Assembly.

43. The mission Liquidation Team should include expertise in all support components with a strong focus on property management, transportation/movement control, and security. Substantive staff, including a legal advisor, should also be part of the team to liaise with the host government on legal and political matters.

44. When the departure of a peacekeeping mission is followed by a special political mission or the exclusive presence of the UNCT, the resource needs of the successor UN presence should be clarified and articulated prior to the beginning of asset disposal/transfer (liquidation). Where the Security Council has not yet made a decision as to the form and function of the successor presence, these resource needs should be assessed based on jointly developed guidance by the UN leadership and UNHQ in light of the likely contingencies. Implementation of the asset disposal plans will be consistently monitored by headquarters and the Global Service Centre (Brindisi) as required.

c) Staff management and national staff capacity development

45. Staff management is a particularly critical and sensitive aspect of UN transitions as uncertainty can generate anxiety for both national and international staff. The need to keep staff in the mission in support of operations through to the end of the mandate should be balanced with staff's concern to find subsequent postings in a timely manner. Missions should undertake a staffing needs assessment to determine the skills required throughout the liquidation phase and fill critical staffing gaps through flexible contractual arrangements including temporary duty assignments and temporary appointments to replace staff who leave before the end of the liquidation process.

46. At the time of drawdown, decisions on which staff should be retained should take into account staffing requirements of any UN follow-on presence. Although full clarity on the requirements might not exist, early planning and coordination by the new lead department with support from DPKO, DFS and other relevant UN partners is essential.

47. Where a transition involves the start-up of a follow-on mission and a change in mandate and mission profile, planning should balance a need for different staffing profiles with an effort to provide continuity and employment opportunities for existing staff. Transition planning should therefore include the development of a targeted workforce plan, identifying staff numbers, skills, experience and training requirements for the follow-on mission. This should be done as early as possible, in order for DFS to find additional capacity where required and to identify reassignment options for the staff who will be retained through the liquidation process.

48. Successful national capacity development programmes from the outset of mission mandates will permit national staff to assume greater responsibility throughout and after the transition and make them more competitive on the labour market. Particular attention should be paid to certifying nationally-recognised skills, assisting with career résumés, and organizing job fairs or similar opportunities for potential employers to meet national staff as mission closure approaches. SRSG/HOM should provide full support and leadership to such programmes to ensure their accessibility, effectiveness and success.

10. Retaining institutional memory

49. Departmental handovers at headquarters should be accompanied by full knowledge transfer, including through sharing of important mission files such as end-of-mission reports, end-of-assignment reports and handover notes.

50. At the field level, the handover of mission tasks to UN partners should be accompanied by the sharing of relevant files in accordance with existing UN guidance on information management.[6] Handover of information to national actors should also be considered, if appropriate and in accordance with UN rules and regulations on information classification. This requires that information and records management is prioritized at the outset of a mission and not only during the liquidation phase.

51. An effective information management system can contribute to safeguarding the historical record of the host countries as well as the UN's legacy within it. Such documentation should include lessons learned exercises and after action reviews of the transition process and mandate implementation (or challenges thereto) undertaken by the outgoing mission and the lead department. Overall joint IT and online filing systems between all UN actors in the country should be explored at an early stage of any mission.

Normative or superior guidance

- Secretary-General's Decisions on Integration (June 2008 and May 2011)

Other relevant guidance

- Secretary-General's Guidelines on the Integrated Mission Planning Process: Role of the Headquarters (2010)
- Secretary-General's Guidelines on the Integrated Mission Planning Process: Role of the field (2010)
- DPKO/DFS Early Peacebuilding Strategy (2011)
- DPKO/DFS Liquidation Manual (2012)
- DPA Special Political Missions Start-up Guide (2012)
- Secretary-General's Bulletin on Record-keeping and the management of United Nations archives (ST/SGB/2007/5)
- DPKO/DFS Policy on Records Management (amend. 2009)

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[6] DPA, DPKO and DFS shall consult with OHCHR to make special arrangements for the safe handling and separate archiving of documents and files produced by the human rights component. More detailed guidance in this regard is provided in the OHCHR/DPKO/DPA/DFS Policy on Human Rights in UN Peace Operations and Political Missions (para. 20).