



Peacekeeping Exits and Statebuilding Legacies: Improving UN Transitions Based on Empirical Evidence?

About the seminar



On 1 June 2023, the *Challenges Forum* and the *University of Oxford*, together with Challenges Forum Partner the *United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO)* organized a panel discussion on *United Nations (UN) peacekeeping transitions*¹. The hybrid event gathered some 80 participants, both on-site and online, consisting of practitioners, academics, students, and representatives of the Challenges Forum partner organisations.

The event launched the research brief by Prof. Andrea Ruggeri and Dr. Maline Meiske, titled *What is the State of the State when UN Peacekeeping Operations Leave?*², as part of a series sponsored by the *Challenges Forum*, the *Swedish Defence University* and the *Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA)*. Based on empirical evidence from 16 UN peace operations, the research brief shows that state-building gains in governance, economy, health and education can often not be sustained after the departure of peace operations.

Key Takeaways on improving UN Transitions

- **Planning, integration, and coherence:** Closing peacekeeping operations is a gradual process and must not be planned as a single event. Well-planned transitions are more successful if they are succeeded by follow-up arrangements, either through the UN and/or regional initiatives. Transition but should be anchored in UN planning processes. The entire UN system should calibrate its support, with the right people in the right place, based on comparative advantage and with a long-term planning horizon.
- **Awareness through better diagnostics:** All transition contexts are unique and require specific plans and strategies, based on more systematic assessments of national capacities and host society fragilities and dependencies. This includes a better understanding of local needs. Missions need to strengthen their data collection and analytical capacities to guide decision-making with a particular attention to political economy.

¹ **Transitions** are situations involving significant changes to the configuration of the UN presence in a country in which at least one peace operation is present, such as when a peace operation is replaced by a different peace operation or when a peace operation closes and hands over responsibilities to a UN Country Team. For more information please refer Security Council [resolution 2594 \(2021\)](#).

² Full research brief: https://challengesforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/MeiskeRuggeri_2023.pdf

- **Additional skills:** Data and facts are a prerequisite for successful transition. UN headquarters needs to resist over-tasking staff who are already overburdened, but instead provide specific support with new staff and new skills on data collection and analysis.
- **Benchmarking:** To consolidate the successes of peacekeeping operations, pro-active planning is key to sustainable transitions. Evaluating benchmarks allows for a step-by-step approach and continued engagement and dialogue with stakeholders at multiple levels—local, national, and regional.
- **Building political partnerships and national capacities:** Transitions are complex political change management processes in fragile contexts and should be anchored in political strategies and partnerships that extend in the post-mission phase. Transitions need to happen gradually focusing on national ownership and enhancing national planning capacities.
- **Avoiding the “attention” cliff:** Closing peace operations often leads to an “attention” cliff negatively impacting the international/regional political and financial engagement in host countries. Overcoming silos in the UN and in Member States, as well as better coordination and strategic coherence with International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and regional bodies, is needed to avoid attention gaps.
- **Operationalising normative progress:** Transitions are high on the agenda at the UN and in Member States and much progress has been made in UN Security Council practice (e.g. UN Security Council resolution 2594) and UN guidance (e.g. UN Secretary-General’s Planning Directive for the development of consistent and coherent UN Transition processes). The UN Project on Transitions – a joint project by UNDP, UN DPO, and UN DPPA – is currently operationalising this normative progress bringing the UN system together. In view of upcoming transitions of the large multi-dimensional missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mali, amongst others, continued attention and support in this regard is needed.



From left: **Richard Caplan**, Professor of International Relations and a Fellow of Linacre College at the University of Oxford, **Andrea Ruggeri**, Professor of Political Science and International Relations and Director of the Centre for International Studies at the University of Oxford, **Pernilla Rydén**, Director of the Challenges Forum International Secretariat, **Simon Blatchly**, Deputy Chief Constable at Derbyshire Constabulary, **Jessica Di Salvatore**, Associate Professor in Political Science and Peace Studies, University of Warwick. Participating online: **Jascha Scheele**, UN Department of Peace Operations.