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# What is the State of the State when UN Peacekeeping Operations Leave?

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WHAT ARE THE STATE-BUILDING LEGACIES of United Nations' peacekeeping operations (UN PKOs) after their exit? In our research, we analysed whether the closure of UN PKOs impacts the host state's capacity and whether states that have hosted UN PKOs manage to perform state functions after PKO exit. Our findings show that while many state capacity-related indicators improve during UN PKO deployment, UN PKO withdrawal can have both negative and positive correlations for state-building outcomes; depending on the indicator, the time period, and the country under scrutiny. Furthermore, for a transition to be well-planned, it must take all relevant stakeholders into account, and context-specific factors must be considered. National ownership and engagement at multiple levels is key to a smooth transition.



## Policy recommendations

- 1. The closure of PKOs must be planned as a single step** in a transition, not as a single event. Well-planned transitions tend to be more successful if they are succeeded by a follow-up arrangement either through the UN and/or a regional initiative.
- 2. As all PKOs operate within a specific context**, each closure requires specific plans and strategies. This includes paying attention to the local context, being aware of and assessing the differences in priority, and the PKO footprint are all of key importance in the transition process.
- 3. To consolidate the successes of PKOs**, early forward-looking planning and sustainable transitions are of vital importance. This includes a benchmark process, clear exit strategies and integrated approaches, as well as continued engagement and dialogue with stakeholders at multiple levels—nationwide, local, and individual.

# Introduction

**IN THIS RESEARCH BRIEF**, we first introduce the motivations and processes behind peacekeeping closures and transitions, before synthesising the findings and policy implications of our comparative and statistical analyses exploring the relationship between UN PKO withdrawal and several indicators of (former) hosts' state capacity.

Recent years have seen a convergence of closures of UN PKOs: the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) ended in 2017; the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2018; the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) in 2019; and, most recently, the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in December 2020. While the UN has been putting in-

creased emphasis on the management of mission closures and transition from peacekeeping—particularly since the establishment of the UN Transitions Project in 2014—academic research has paid little attention to the question of what happens to a country after UN operations withdraw. Numerous empirical studies have shown that PKOs reduce the duration of conflict, the intensity of battlefield violence, contain the space of armed conflict, produce more durable peace, and protect civilians.<sup>ii</sup> However, this project examines the effectiveness of other less-studied facets of multidimensional PKOs—such as political development, economic performance, public health, or the rule of law—and produces new insights into the lasting legacies of peacekeeping after mission closure.

## The Closure of Peacekeeping Operations<sup>iii</sup>

**PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS ARE NOT PERMANENT** solutions but rather temporary arrangements which will eventually end.<sup>iv</sup> The decision over when and how to close a UN PKO can be informed by multiple factors. For one thing, the implementation of the operation's mandate and progress towards the achievement of stable peace (or the failure thereof) is oftentimes a key criterium. Elections have, for a long time, been viewed as a critical juncture in triggering PKOs' exits; such as the UNTAG mission in Namibia. At other times, the termination of a PKO has been governed by pre-determined deadlines. More recently, specific benchmarks have been used to measure progress towards the achievement of mandated goals and to determine the appropriate time to exit; for example, in the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). Benchmarks are usually devised in relation to political dialogue and elections, stability and security, governance and the rule of law, human rights, and the extension

of state authority. Other rationales informing the decision to close a PKO may relate to political considerations on the part of UN Security Council members, troop-contributing countries, or host countries. The withdrawal of the UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) in 2010, for instance, was initiated at the request of the government of Chad, which dismissed the continued need for MINURCAT to protect civilians and provide humanitarian aid to refugees.

The factors informing when to close a PKO also impact how they are closed—the mode and pace of the drawdown, the structure of the transition process, and any follow-up arrangements. Examination of peacekeeping personnel deployment (and withdrawal) data reveals different patterns of PKO closures. Closures may be rapid or gradual and may be succeeded by a follow-up arrangement. Figure 1 shows the deploy-

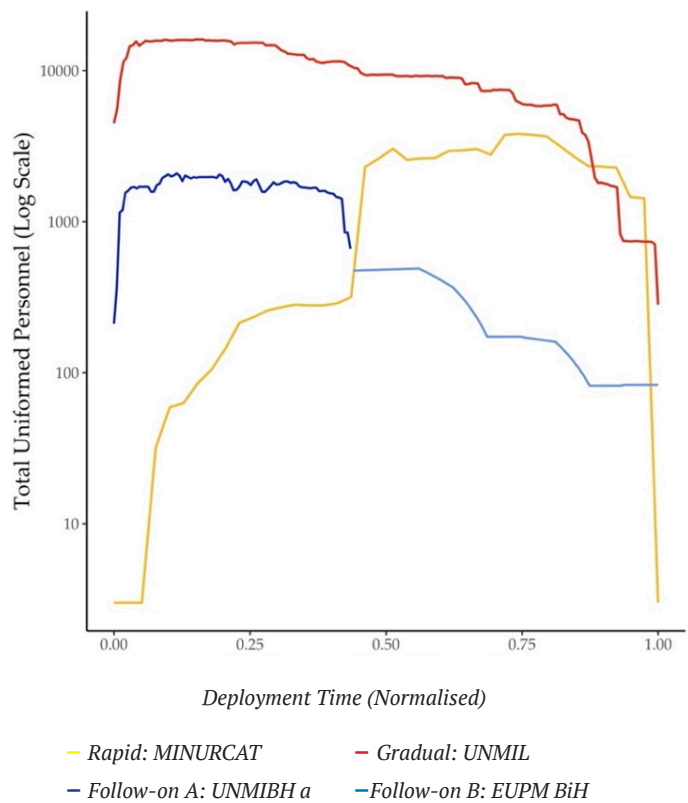
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*Examining peacekeeping personnel deployment (and withdrawal) data reveals different patterns of PKO closures.”*

ment and withdrawal of total uniformed personnel (including troops, police, and military observers) for the MINURCAT mission in Chad and the Central African Republic as an example of rapid withdrawal; UNMIL in Liberia as an example of gradual withdrawal; and the UNMIBH mission and the EU Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia and Herzegovina as an example of a follow-up arrangement.

Importantly, ending a PKO is a process rather than an endpoint. UNMIL gradually downsized peacekeeping troops over the course of ten years and, following a phased approach, transferred responsibility for security to Liberian forces two years before the PKO closed. After the official end of a PKO’s mandate, the international peacekeeping/peacebuilding presence may be reconfigured through the deployment of follow-up arrangements to consolidate any gains made by the PKO and/or to continue with residual activities—such as the succession of UNMIBH by the EUPM in January 2003 to assist and transform the local police force. Out of all the UN PKOs that closed between 1947 and 2018, 42% were followed by another operation conducted by the UN or another (often regional) actor; but the UN may also reconfigure its presence in the form of a political mission or integrated office, or under the banner of a UN Country Team, which usually includes the UN Development Programme, other UN agencies

*Figure 1. Patterns of PKO Closures\**



working on peacebuilding and development, and international institutions such as the World Bank. In recent years, the UN has increasingly incorporated a process-based understanding of ending PKOs—or “peacekeeping transitions”, in UN parlance—and enhanced its cross-system strategy and response. In 2013, the UN developed a Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal; a UN Transitions Project was launched in 2014 to improve how transition processes are planned and managed across the UN; and UN Secretary-General Guterres’ peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace agenda also promotes a whole-system approach to transitions.<sup>vi</sup> Recent UN peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Mali (MINUSMA), Central African Republic (MINUSCA), and South Sudan (UNMISS) have all been required to develop transition strategies long before expected withdrawal of UN operations.<sup>vii</sup>

In the following sections we introduce our data analyses of PKO closures.

# Statebuilding Legacies After Closure<sup>viii</sup>

**RECOGNISING THE RELEVANCE OF PEACEKEEPING** transitions for the achievement of stable peace and security, we set out to analyse the short- and long-term effects of PKO closures. We were particularly interested in what happens when PKOs leave a country and how exit affects the state capacity of the host country. By means of a statistical analysis, we examined numerous outcomes of state-building and analysed: a) whether outcomes change during PKO deployment; b) how outcomes change during the withdrawal year; and c) whether there are any long-term effects. In our research, we examined the broadest possible range of state-building indicators; although we specifically concentrated on areas of governance capacity, including health and education, economic capacity, and security capacity. Overall, we can draw a few conclusions from our research on state-building legacies after the closure of UN PKOs:

- On a positive note, **state-building indicators mostly improve during UN PKO deployment**; both at national and subnational levels.
- **UN PKO withdrawal can have both negative and positive outcomes** depending on the state-capacity area and country under scrutiny.
- However, **results are mostly sobering after the closure of PKOs**. Many indicators of state-building show no change or even a negative effect after withdrawal compared to the pre-deployment baseline. This indicates that state-building and peacebuilding are often not completed with the end of a PKO—and might even reverse. The international community therefore must minimise the detrimental effect of the transition and withdrawal process and better consolidate the progress made during a PKO. Critical to safeguarding gains is to first understand and assess the

deficits and dependencies of specific state-capacity areas and, second, to plan and support sustainable state-capacity development made initially due to the presence of UN agencies and multilateral institutions.

Our research findings show that while several state-building indicators improve during UN PKO deployment, UN PKO withdrawal can have both negative and positive correlations depending on the indicator under scrutiny. For instance, we observe positive trends after PKO closure for indicators related to GDP, agricultural production, and declining infant mortality; but negative trends for several governance indicators, such as electoral indices, civil liberties, and women's rights, educational proxies, government spending, trade, and physical integrity. Importantly, outcomes of state-building do not only vary depending on the outcome but also by the country under scrutiny.

Additionally, we recognised that peacekeeping matters not only at the national but also at the local level and that there is great subnational variation in state capacity in many developing and in-conflict countries. For this reason, we conducted a subnational analysis of states that have experienced PKO withdrawal; unfortunately, we have fewer reliable indicators at the subnational level. We specifically studied subnational regions that experienced UN PKO deployment and withdrawal. We found mostly positive developments at the subnational level during the deployment of a PKO and mixed results thereafter, with an increase in local wealth—gross cell product—but a decline or no effect for nightlight emissions (a proxy for economic activity), depending on calibration of the nightlight measurement.

## Between Missions Analysis

	INDICATORS	DURING PKO	YEAR OF WITHDRAWAL	AFTER PKO
Governance	Democracy score	↗	→	↘
	State authority	↗	→	→
	Elections, free and fair	↗	→	↘
	Corruption	→	→	→
	Civil Liberties	↗	↗	↘
	Women rights	↗	↗	↘
Health &	Education	↗	↗	↘
	Literacy	↘	→	↘
	Infant mortality	↘	↗	↘
	Life expectancy	↗	→	→
	Immunization	↗	→	→
	Death rate	↘	→	→
Economy	GDP	↗	↘	↗
	Employment	↘	→	→
	Government spending	↗	→	↘
Education	Agricultural production	↗	↘	↗
	Inequality	→	→	→
	Trade	↗	↗	↘
Security	Rule of law	→	→	→
	Military personnel	↗	→	→
	Physical integrity	↗	↗	↘
	Conflict	↘	→	→

**Table 1** Statebuilding Indicators Before, During, and After PKO Closure

Our main findings are summarized in Table 1. The arrows show whether we found a (statistically significant) upward or downward change or no change during the deployment of a PKO, in the year of withdrawal, and in the ten years after closure. For example, indicators of levels of democracy (V-Dem,

Polity IV, and Freedom House) show improvement during the deployment of a UN PKO compared to the baseline at the onset of the operation; there is mostly no change during the UN PKO withdrawal; and the democracy scores have negative trends over time after closure.”

## Conclusions and Implications

Engaging national stakeholders long before mission transition and closure can help align state-building priorities and foster national ownership of important initiatives; and long-term partnerships with and a clear division of labour between international partners can streamline resources, allow for a smooth handover, and avoid discontinuities after closure.

Policymakers and, to a more limited extent, academics, have begun thinking about the long-term legacies of peacekeeping and the significance of peacekeeping

transitions. Contributing to this effort, the authors of this brief are working with an international team of researchers to provide a systematic analysis of the legacies of PKO withdrawal (After Exit). Our objective was to assess whether the closure of PKOs and the withdrawal of peacekeeping forces bears any immediate and/or long-term consequences for the governance, and economic and security conditions of the (former) host state.

As the Challenges Forum highlighted in 2020<sup>xiii</sup>, it is critical that peacebuilding efforts to sustain peace inclu-

de women and youth in the missions' activities and that PKO planning operationalises peacebuilding with relevant instruments and actors. Some of these insights, we argue, should also be incorporated when planning the withdrawal of a UN PKO. In this research brief we have summarised findings based on our quantitative comparison between and within UN PKOs. After this, we elaborate on some of the policy implications that build on the work performed by our After Exit research colleagues<sup>xiii</sup>:

1. **Sustainable exit strategies and integrated transitions are required to consolidate PKOs' successes.** Our research has shown that during the deployment of a PKO, many indicators of state-building and state capacity improve—including democratic governance and state authority, personal rights and liberties, education, health indicators, GDP, trade, agricultural production, physical integrity and conflict reduction—but these trends can reverse over the long-term after PKO withdrawal. **Early planning and a forward-looking, integrated approach can help mitigate some of the negative legacies of PKO closure.**
2. **There is no 'one size fits all' transition plan,** as changing local dynamics might require flexibility throughout the transition process. As we have presented above, each PKO closure is motivated and shaped by a different set of factors, and the state-building legacies of PKOs very much depend on the indicator and country in question. Upcoming transitions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and in Mali (with the eventual end of MINUSMA) are set in the context of ongoing instability and security challenges; particularly regarding the protection of civilians, and any exit strategy will need to respect current circumstances, adapt to changing governance, economic, and security situations, and focus on enhancing national ownership regarding the protection of civilians. **Paying attention to the local context but also being aware and assessing the differences in priority and footprints between PKOs will be particularly relevant for the next wave of peacekeeping transitions.**

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*Long-term partnerships and a clear division of labour with international partners can streamline resources, allow a smooth handover, and avoid discontinuities after closure.”*

3. The continuation or takeover of state-building activities after PKO closure needs to happen at multiple levels—not only at international and national levels but also at the individual level. As our colleagues John Gledhill and Sabrina Karim have discovered, perceptions of security after the exit of UNMIL in Liberia in 2018 were influenced by both the external substitution of PKO's activities by other UN agencies, regional organisations, and third countries, but also by state-building activities that were taken over by domestic actors.<sup>xiv</sup> By examining household economies after UNMIL's exit, they also demonstrated that reported declines in households' economic situations (particularly for individuals who were dependent on the PKO for their economic livelihood) could be mitigated through a diversification of their economic portfolio via second jobs and savings, and/or substitution for the role that peacekeepers played via NGOs or remittances. This research highlights that micro-level substitution dynamics play an impactful role alongside the reconfiguration of the UN's presence and international engagement more broadly after the closure of UN PKOs. **Improving the resilience and assisting the mitigation efforts of residents of (former) host states is a key component for ensuring longer-term sustainability of peace- and state-building efforts.**

# Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup>For an overview, see Jessica Di Salvatore and Andrea Ruggeri, “The Effectiveness of Peacekeeping Operations,” in *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Empirical International Relations* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); or Barbara F. Walter, Lise Morje Howard, and V. Page Fortna, “The Extraordinary Relationship between Peacekeeping and Peace,” *British Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 4 (2021): 1705–22.

<sup>ii</sup>This section draws from Richard Caplan, John Gledhill, and Maline Meiske’s, “Peacekeeping Operations: The Endgame,” in Han Dorussen (ed.) *Handbook on Peacekeeping and International Relations* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, forthcoming).

<sup>iii</sup>For an analytical discussion on the meaning of ending conflicts, see the chapter “Peacekeeping and conflict resolution” by Evgenija Kroeker and Andrea Ruggeri in the forthcoming “*Handbook on Peacekeeping and International Relations*” edited by Han Dorussen, Edward Elgar Publishing.

<sup>iv</sup>Note that the deployment time is normalised (0–1 range) and the total uniformed personnel is presented on a log scale to facilitate comparison. Data for Figure 1 is drawn from Corinne Bara and Lisa Hultman, “Just Different Hats? Comparing UN and Non-UN Peacekeeping,” *International Peacekeeping* 27, no. 3 (2020): 341–68; “SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database,” SIPRI, accessed 12 July 2022, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/pko>.

<sup>v</sup>Report: *Improving UN Transitions*, Wilton Park (2019), accessed 12 July 2022, <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WP1719-Report.pdf>.

<sup>vi</sup>Adam Day, “UN Transitions: Improving Security Council Practice in Mission Settings”, United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (2019), accessed 12 July 2022, [https://i.unu.edu/media/cpr.unu.edu/post/3676/UNU\\_UN\\_Transitions\\_FINAL\\_WEB.pdf](https://i.unu.edu/media/cpr.unu.edu/post/3676/UNU_UN_Transitions_FINAL_WEB.pdf).

<sup>vii</sup>This section draws from Maline Meiske and Andrea Ruggeri, “After UN Peace Operations Exit: An Empirical Analysis with Interrupted Time-Series”, paper presented at International Studies Association 2021 Annual Convention, virtual platform, 8 April 2021; and Maline Meiske and Andrea Ruggeri, “Subnational Variation in State Capacity After the Withdrawal of UN Peace Operations”, paper presented at International Studies Association 2022 Annual Convention, Nashville, TN, 1 April 2022.

<sup>viii</sup>We used Interrupted Time Series with AR (1) error disturbance and fixed effects to gauge trends during PKO deployment, possible shifts during PKO withdrawal (“step changes”) and trends after PKO withdrawal. Our sample includes all post-Cold War large-scale (>1000 troops) UN PKOs, or sets thereof where one PKO succeeded another, that have been deployed to intrastate conflicts since the end of the Cold War and then closed.

<sup>x</sup>As with the cross-national analysis, we used Interrupted Time Series with AR (1) error disturbance and fixed effects. Our sample included 33 UN PKOs.

<sup>xi</sup>For an overview of the project, funded by the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, grant number ES/S009590/1), as well as the Folke Bernadotte Academy and the John Fell OUP Research Fund, see <https://afterexit.web.ox.ac.uk/>.

<sup>xii</sup>Annual Forum Report 2020, “Framing peace operations in a changing global landscape”, [https://www.challengesforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CF\\_VCAF\\_Report\\_2020.pdf](https://www.challengesforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CF_VCAF_Report_2020.pdf)

<sup>xiii</sup>The full After Exit research team is composed of Richard Caplan, John Gledhill, Sabrina Karim, Athena Kolbe, Maline Meiske, and Andrea Ruggeri.

<sup>xiv</sup>Sabrina Karim and John Gledhill, “Peace after Peacekeeping: Perceptions of Security in Liberia after the Exit of UNMIL”, paper presented at International Studies Association 2022 Annual Convention, Nashville, TN, 28 March 2022.

<sup>xv</sup>John Gledhill and Sabrina Karim, “BOON, BANE, OR BUSINESS AS USUAL: Perceptions of the Economic Consequences of Peacekeeping Withdrawal from Liberia”, paper presented at International Studies Association 2021 Annual Convention, virtual platform, 8 April 2021.

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