

Peacebuilding Commission Working Group on Lessons Learned

Informal /Informal expert-level preparatory meeting on “The Transition of UN Missions” 10 June 2014

Main findings

I. Introduction

- On 10 June 2014, the Working Group on Lessons Learned (WGLL) of the Peacebuilding Commission convened an informal expert-level meeting to discuss the transition of UN Missions. Following-up on the meetings of 3 April and 6 May 2014, the objective of this specific meeting was to hear briefings from key UN officials and to exchange views on the key challenges of the UN missions’ transitions.
- The meeting was opened by H.E. Mr. Jun Yamazaki, Deputy Permanent Representative of Japan, and benefited from presentations by Mr. Christopher Coleman, Deputy Director of the DPA’s Africa II division, Ms. Mari Yamashita, Director of DPA’s Asia and Pacific Division, and Dr. William Durch, the co-director of Stimson's Future of Peace Operations program and the former project director for the Panel on UN Peace Operations (the Brahimi Report).

II. Summary of Presentations by Panelists

Mr. Coleman highlighted three key challenges for countries undergoing UN Missions’ transitions as follows:

- 1) The withdrawal of Security Council-mandated missions can be economically destabilizing by causing a “financial cliff” because the Mission’s activities and personnel generate economic activities that generate important financial support to the country. In addition, the closure of a mission has usually led to a reduction in voluntary contributions at a stage when the country still requires financial support.
- 2) UN Missions provide a center of gravity for political accommodation. In many cases, major opposition actors who have signed up to political agreements tend to be less committed to these agreements following withdrawal of missions. Governments begin to sense the risk to their standing vis-à-vis oppositions when international financial support begin to decrease and they, consequently tend to become less accommodating. In this situation, neighboring countries have a major role to play. They can either advocate for a peaceful political dialogue or they can be a source of further destabilization if they support one party against the other.
- 3) The withdrawal of UN Missions might lead to a decreased impetus for inclusive institution building. All parties should see national institutions as mechanisms to ensure political accommodation.

Mr. Coleman then argued that these three challenges are not so much controlled by the UN funds and agencies, but more influenced by member states. One approach to overcome these challenges, he argued, is that the host country and the international community should agree on shared objectives for institution building before the closure of peacekeeping Missions and create a mutual accountability framework to implement these objectives.

Ms. Yamashita shed light on the experience of the drawdown of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). She noted that UNMIN operated in Nepal for a pre-determined period of three years (between 2007 and 2010), which made planning for transition already a priority from the first day of its deployment. UNMIN was mandated to monitor the management of arms and armed personnel of the Nepalese Army and the Maoist fighters, assist in the monitoring of ceasefire arrangements, and provide technical assistance to the Election Commission in the planning, preparation and conduct of the election of a Constituent Assembly.

She further noted that not all these tasks were accomplished in time for the drawdown of UNMIN, hence was the necessity to establish a DPA liaison office as part of the UN Country Team in Nepal. The office was funded through voluntary contributions and was tasked with ensuring continued political engagement following UNMIN's withdrawal. Building upon already established relationships and political networking, the Office reached out to Nepalese political leaders, engaged the different political stakeholders, and facilitated political dialogues. In parallel, the Resident Coordinator worked with and coordinated the activities of the donor community in order to ensure sustained attention to the needs of Nepal during the country's transition, while also ensuring that the programmatic engagement is aligned with a clear political strategy.

Dr. Durch gave a presentation using power-point (which is attached here). He first summarized the legacy of the Brahimi Report and ongoing reform efforts within the UN to enhance its capacities to support post-conflict states. He also pointed out the reality that the UN Security Council repeatedly exceeded political-security capacities of implementers. There is also insufficient or inconsistent high-level political back-up to the operational level.

He then addressed baselines and benchmarks for UN missions' transitions. He emphasized that what is most easily measured for benchmarking may not be what matters most for peace. He presented, however, some innovative ways to measure or scale the progress of post-conflict states, which could help to calibrate the transitions of UN missions, while noting that many factors affecting transition are not under missions' control, such as policies and goals of implementing partners, from the host state to major donors.

He therefore suggested that the compact or mutual accountability framework is very good and useful to help promote collaborative approaches between the host states and the international community. The question is, again, how to evaluate progress in mutual ways. He concluded the presentation by pointing out that there is the risk of gaps in terms of trust and expectations by people in post-conflict states if there is no substantial progress or changes by the governments in the first few years after peace-building efforts start.

III. Main findings

• On the basis of the presentation and interactions between the panelists and the Member States, the following represents the main findings from this meeting:

1) From the onset of the UN missions' deployment, there is a need to agree with the Government, regional actors and the international partners on shared objectives for the mission. This will help:

- Manage expectations and strengthen mutual accountability between these actors.
- Address the potential financial cliff following the drawdown of the mission
- Provide sustained political accompaniment beyond the draw-down of missions

2) There is a need to think of UN transitions in the context of the overall country transitions which continue to require sustained international support. In this context, the reconfiguration of international presence in the countries experiencing missions draw-down should be adapted to the current needs of these countries, as well as to the progress made in the overall peace/political process.

3) The involvement of regional actors during and beyond UN missions' transitions is critical in maintaining open channels of communications that would help mitigate the prevalence of competing political agenda.

4) Conducting opinion surveys is one important approach to evaluating trust and confidence in government, while we need to be aware of the risks of arbitrary results manipulated by the governments of post-conflict states.
