
BROADCASTING IN UN BLUE: THE UNEXAMINED PAST AND UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF PEACEKEEPING RADIO

By Bill Orme
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The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), a project of the National Endowment for Democracy, aims to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of media assistance programs by providing information, building networks, conducting research, and highlighting the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies around the world. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development.

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For his work at the Committee to Protect Journalists, Orme received the First Amendment Award from the U.S. Society of Professional Journalists. He is an alumnus of Friends World College and has taught post-graduate courses in journalism and Latin American studies at the University of Southern California. He lives in Brooklyn, NY.

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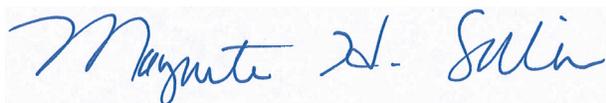
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PREFACE

The Center for International Media Assistance is pleased to publish *Broadcasting in UN Blue: The Unexamined Past and Uncertain Future of Peacekeeping Radio*, a thought-provoking paper that we hope will stimulate a lively and sustained discussion among media assistance practitioners. The purpose of this report is to examine the effect of UN peacekeeping radio on media in post-conflict societies.

CIMA is grateful to Bill Orme, an expert on UN peacekeeping efforts and media with many years of experience in this field, for his research and insights on this topic. His paper lends itself to analysis and discussion. It represents the personal views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of CIMA or its parent organization, the National Endowment for Democracy. Orme's views and insights should be of interest to a wide range of media assistance advocates.

We invite you to read the report, think about the ideas, and share your thoughts by commenting on the report on CIMA's Web site (<http://cima.ned.org/reports>) or by e-mailing CIMA@ned.org with "UN peacekeeping radio" in the subject line.



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For almost two decades, United Nations peacekeeping missions have routinely set up local radio stations that almost immediately have become the dominant national broadcasters of those post-conflict countries.

From Cambodia to Liberia, these UN stations have helped end violent conflict and make political transition possible. They have provided citizens with trusted local news programs and nonpartisan discussion forums, often for the first time. The UN radio stations were also often the first to reach all corners of these war-ravaged countries.

In national elections after peacekeeping interventions, the UN stations were the main if not the only source of nonpartisan voter information and campaign coverage, crucial for any functioning democracy.

And then, when the UN missions ended, the stations would abruptly close.

The management, impact, and ultimate fate of these UN stations—a dozen to date, five of which remain in operation in volatile African countries—has largely escaped the notice of policymakers, including within the UN itself. To this day, there is not even an official record of past and present UN mission radio services.

By almost any measure—political impact, infrastructural improvement, giving voice to dissent and minorities, raising local journalism standards—these peacekeeping radio stations

contributed more to media development in certain post-conflict countries than any other concurrent media assistance programs, including the many journalism-targeted projects run through other UN bodies. But those achievements were disappointingly ephemeral, due to a lack of both long-term UN planning and a commitment to media development as an integral part of post-peacekeeping democratization.

The UN's radio exit strategy has often been just to pull the plug—literally—once the Security

Council peacekeeping mandate expired, and put the broadcasting equipment back into containers for the next mission. In Cambodia the UN station closed weeks after the country's 1993 elections, leaving a media vacuum that has not been filled to this day. In East Timor in 2002, the UN station hardware

was handed over to the new government for a state broadcasting service under direct partisan control.

A repetition of either scenario in the remaining UN radio stations would undermine long-term nation-building efforts in Africa, where seven peacekeeping operations now account for more than two-thirds of all UN peacekeeping spending and personnel worldwide.

A media map of post-conflict Africa would highlight the startling yet overlooked dominance of current UN radio operations.

From Cambodia to Liberia, UN stations have helped end violent conflict and make political transition possible. They have provided citizens with trusted local news programs and nonpartisan discussion forums, often for the first time.

Start with the contiguous West African countries—Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, and Sierra Leone—that have together been a focus of international peacekeeping for the past 10 years. The most extensive news services in all three, in terms of listenership, geographical reach, and round-the-clock programming, are still provided by UN-operated radio stations started on a temporary basis as part of each respective peacekeeping mission.

Move southeast to the giant of central Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the eight-year-old UN-maintained Radio Okapi has become the one universal and indispensable news service for a country with almost 70 million people, volatile borders with nine countries, and the largest peacekeeping mission in UN history.

To the northeast, in Sudan, Africa’s largest and—for diplomats and peacekeepers—most challenging country, the UN’s Radio Miraya provides a uniquely nonpartisan service to audiences in the formerly warring north and south, though with far more liberty in the latter.

In Sierra Leone, which now has a “peacebuilding” or post-peacekeeping mission, the UN radio station stayed on the air due to a unique Security Council mandate for the UN to promote “independent public broadcasting” in the country. In December 2009 Sierra Leone’s parliament unanimously passed a bill, drafted with UN support, to convert the pro-government state broadcaster into a public corporation with an autonomous board and a commitment to editorial independence. The UN station will soon cease operations and bequeath studios, transmitters, and start-up aid to the new Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation.

This is one replicable model for UN radio transitions to local control, and merits

attention at UN headquarters and in neighboring Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire where the peacekeeping missions and their radio services are due to wind down soon. The UN radio services, though run quite professionally and effectively, were created with little strategic thinking about the local media landscape and without long-term planning for local alternatives upon their eventual disappearance. This is not a criticism of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which was never asked nor equipped to be in the media development business. It is, however, a criticism of UN peacekeeping planning, beginning with the Security Council itself.

Peacekeepers on the ground have been acutely aware of the stations’ importance to their long-term missions; surveys have confirmed their popularity and credibility with national audiences; and local journalists have lauded their contributions to media diversity and journalism standards. It would be not just shortsighted but reckless for the international community to let this good work go to waste and deprive the citizens of post-conflict countries of the professional news and information services to which they have become accustomed and now rightfully expect.

There are a number of policy steps that would help UN radio services fulfill UN ideals and make lasting contributions to free media in the countries that peacekeepers are sent to stabilize. Among them:

- ▶ The Security Council should consistently require legal and technical facilities for UN-backed broadcasting and related digital communications as an integral component of peacekeeping missions—and it should back up those mandates with resources, clear policy guidance, and insistence on local compliance.

- ▶ The UN should draw a bright operational line between its public relations and information apparatus and its management of broadcasters providing news programs to local audiences.
- ▶ The UN should approach creation of a national broadcasting service as part of the UN's institution-building responsibilities in post-conflict countries, much as the UN does now with support for independent election authorities, human rights commissions, and other autonomous democratic bodies.
- ▶ All UN-backed local broadcasting should abide by the norms for independent media promulgated and championed by UNESCO and relevant regional institutions (such as the African Union, the Organization of American States, the European Commission).
- ▶ Before setting up its own radio stations, the UN should first consider partnerships with credible and capable local media outlets, such as nonpartisan public broadcasters or community radio networks, if such institutions exist.
- ▶ UN radio partnerships with nongovernmental media organizations should be pursued systematically and transparently, including through open bidding.
- ▶ The UN departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Public Information should develop and deploy an on-call roster of experienced media managers and trainers, including through collaboration with UNESCO (which has a mandate and expertise in media work but lacks field resources) and UNDP (which has large field operations and a complementary media development mandate).
- ▶ UN peacekeeping media strategies should be shaped through dialogue and data-sharing with local media groups and bilaterally and privately funded media projects in countries with or targeted for peacekeeping missions.
- ▶ Peacekeeping radio services currently operating should begin planning for their eventual closure and should help to build local broadcasters that could provide similarly professional and nonpartisan programming.
- ▶ Wherever possible, UN missions should support the development of local public service broadcasters with editorial autonomy and a commitment to professional newsgathering and nonpartisanship, as an integral part of the UN mandate to aid national transitions to representative and responsive democratic governance.

OVERVIEW

TWO DECADES OF BROADCASTING BY UN PEACEKEEPERS

As part of its peacekeeping mandate in the two decades following the end of the Cold War, the United Nations has created and operated radio stations that have become, by design or default, the dominant local news and public information provider in several post-conflict countries.

From Cambodia to the Congo, these stations have helped to put an end to violent conflict and make peaceful elections possible. They have provided citizens with a trusted local news source and nonpartisan discussion forum, often for the first time. The UN radio stations were often the first to reach all corners of these war-ravaged countries with broadcasting in all major local languages.

Yet the management, impact, and ultimate fate of these local

UN radio services has largely escaped the notice of international policymakers—including within the UN itself—as well as of most media development professionals.¹

Within the UN, basic policy questions have not been asked: Should the UN even be running national radio stations in sovereign countries? If so, why, for how long, and under what terms? Are these radio services simply on-site extensions of the UN's public information operations, serving UN communications needs as defined by the UN mission, or do they have

an obligation to provide news and information to the local populace, in accord with UN guidelines for public service broadcasting and independent media generally? Who has the ability and/or responsibility in the UN system to answer these questions? What does the record tell us about best practices, or even routine practices? How have these stations affected the local media culture during and after their years of operations?

These radio stations are symptomatic of the continuing expansion of the UN's peacekeeping mandate, with the UN no longer fielding just truce-maintenance forces but also full-scale security and governance operations. Mission leaders are given broad responsibility for disarmament, political reconciliation, refugee resettlement, economic reconstruction, and a return or introduction to democratic elections.

As part of its peacekeeping mandate in the two decades following the end of the Cold War, the United Nations has created and operated radio stations that have become, by design or default, the dominant local news and public information provider in several post-conflict countries.

Radio, by far the most important information medium in most of these peacekeeping theaters, has proved essential to all these tasks. Radio is also an overlooked key to the eventual transition out of these full-scale UN interventions to some form of stable, sustainable national government.

A media map of post-conflict Africa today would highlight the startling centrality of these UN radio operations. Start with the three contiguous West African countries—Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone—that have been a focus of international peacekeeping for the

past 10 years. The most extensive news services in all three countries, in terms of listenership, geographical reach, and round-the-clock programming, are still provided by UN-operated radio stations started on a temporary basis as part of each respective peacekeeping mission.

Move southeast to the giant of central Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where UN-maintained Radio Okapi has become the one universal and indispensable news service for a country of almost 70 million people, with continuing internal violence, volatile borders with nine countries, and the largest peacekeeping mission in UN history.

To the northeast, in Sudan, Africa's largest and arguably most politically challenging country, the UN's Radio Miraya provides a uniquely nonpartisan radio service to audiences in the formerly warring north and south. The UN obtained permission from Sudan to run an independent national radio service as part of its oversight role in the 2004-05 north-south peace accord, but the government in Khartoum has so far refused to provide access to the promised FM or AM frequencies. Only in southern Sudan does Miraya reach a mass audience around the clock. In greater Khartoum and elsewhere in northern Sudan, Miraya relies on part-time short wave transmissions. But Miraya still reaches more Sudanese than any other media outlet not under state control.

In Darfur, increasingly treated by the UN as another post-conflict zone, the hybrid African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) peacekeeping force is trying to expand into radio with Miraya's shortwave help, while the UN negotiates with Chad across the border on radio services for border refugee settlements and local communities alike. In the continued absence of independent national broadcast media, Radio

Miraya will be essential for the credibility of the Sudanese national elections in April 2010 and the referendum on north-south unification in 2011—elections that are mandated by the peace pact and cornerstones of U.S. and UN strategy in the country.²

Sierra Leone, meanwhile, now has a “peacebuilding” or post-peacekeeping UN mission, appropriately for a country that has now celebrated two consecutive post-conflict elections marked by the peaceful transfer of power.

But UN Radio continues in Sierra Leone due to strong local demand and a unique Security Council mandate for the UN mission to support “independent public service broadcasting” in the country. More than anywhere else, Sierra Leone holds the promise of post-peacekeeping radio offering an even-handed approach to national news.

At the end of 2009, the Sierra Leone parliament unanimously approved a bill drafted with UN support that will convert the government's traditional state broadcaster into a public broadcasting service. The new Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation will operate under an elected civil society board and an explicit mandate for editorial freedom and strict nonpartisanship; it is slated to begin transmissions on April 27, 2010, the anniversary of Sierra Leone's independence day. The now-dominant UN radio station will cease operations and bequeath its studio equipment, transmission network, and—through competitive hiring—some of its staff, to the new corporation, which will also receive transitional funding from the nascent UN Peacebuilding Fund.

Whether this experiment will succeed remains to be seen: the president will appoint

UN Peacekeeping Missions with National Radio Service



UN Peacekeeping Mission with National Radio Service	Years of Service	Transition Plan (Yes-No)	Freedom House Press Freedom Country Ranking ⁱ
Cambodia: UNTAC	1992-3	No	Not Free (61)
Somalia: UNOSOM II	1993-4	No	Not Free (84)
Rwanda: UNAMIR ⁱⁱ	1994-6	No	Not Free (85)
Central African Republic: MINURCA	1998-2000	Yes	Not Free (61)
Sierra Leone: UNAMSIL, UNIOSIL, UNIPSIL	2000-present	Yes	Partly Free (56)
East Timor: UNAMET, UNTAET	1999-2002	No	Partly Free (37)
Democratic Republic of Congo: MONUC	2001-present	No	Not Free (81)
Liberia: UNMIL	2003-present	No	Not Free (63)
Cote d'Ivoire: UNOCI	2004-present	No	Not Free (67)
Sudan: UNMIS	2006-present	No	Not Free (78)
Sudan-Darfur: UNAMID3	2009 – UNMIS	No	Not Free (78)
Chad-CAR: MINURCAT	2008-present	No	Not Free (76)
Croatia: UNTAES ⁱⁱⁱ	1996-7	No	Partly Free (38)
Haiti: MINUSTAH	2007-present	Yes	Partly Free (53)

ⁱ Freedom House's annual Freedom of the Press index assigns each country surveyed a score from 0 (best) to 100 (worst) on press freedom, based on questions assessing the legal, political, and economic environment for media. Countries scoring 0 to 30 are classified as having "Free media"; 31 to 60, "Partly Free" media; and 61 to 100, "Not Free" media.

ⁱⁱ Limited operations; Rwandan authorities refused UN requests for national FM frequency.

ⁱⁱⁱ Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium only: http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/untaes_e.htm.

the new broadcaster's director (on board recommendations), and political pressures on the news staff will intensify as Sierra Leone enters its 2011 election season. But it is a serious and positive step. A respected former information minister with the party now in opposition will head the board, and UN Radio (its official name in Sierra Leone, as opposed to UN radio operations in general) provides a nonpartisan model that the new corporation is designed to emulate. The increasingly vibrant private broadcasting sector will provide competition and monitor the new corporation's independence. The Sierra Leone case offers one possibly replicable model for a transition to local control for UN mission radio stations, yet its example has yet to be examined closely elsewhere in the peacekeeping community.

The neighboring Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia peacekeeping missions are both due to wind down soon; there are no formal plans to date in either to continue their radio stations or transform them in whole or in part into national broadcasting

services. In both countries state radio remains under the control of the executive, with more of a public information than journalism ethos, while some private stations provide independent news, primarily in the capitals. Neither the DRC nor Sudan appears close to any post-peacekeeping phase, though Radio Okapi's advisors are contemplating various scenarios for independent local control even before the mission's eventual end.

The good news is that in a dozen countries the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) quickly built the infrastructure for needed national radio stations, hired

and trained scores of local journalists and technicians, worked to inculcate standards of accuracy and impartiality, won loyal audiences in most regions and ethnic communities, and became the provider of trusted national news services without which transition from civil war to electoral democracy would have been impossible.

In the process, the UN peacekeeping mission has often become the country's only true public service broadcaster. These UN peacekeeping radio stations comprised, in many cases, the single biggest intervention in the local media landscape by the international community. Tens of millions of dollars in UN peacekeeping funds have been devoted to these radio services, and many millions of listeners came to rely

on the UN stations for local as well as world news and other essential information.

Yet most big UN peacekeeping donors remained unaware of their impact or scale, as the radio operations are buried

in peacekeeping budgets and mission reports that are dauntingly opaque. There were rarely any thorough in-house or external evaluations of the stations' functions or performance, nor any institutionally agreed-upon goals or editorial standards for the radio services. Public opinion polls and other field surveys documented the large national listenership attracted by these stations but did not try to measure their impact on civic engagement, including citizens' knowledge of public affairs or their views on local peace processes and election campaigns.

Bureaucracies, like lawyers, tend not to pose questions to which they do not already

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have answers. In the case of peacekeeping radio, there is remarkably little institutional information at hand. Indeed, there are no comprehensive UN budgetary or performance records of these radio services, because there has never been any demand from member-states or UN officials for any such accounting.

The institutional tendency to overlook these radio services is due less to an underestimation of the importance of communications in peacekeeping than to prosaic budget-driven realities of bureaucratic decision-making. Peacekeeping missions are hugely expensive, now costing in aggregate about triple the operating budget of the rest of the UN Secretariat's myriad departments and dependencies.³ These radio services comprise just a sliver of the peacekeepers' modest telecommunications and public information and logistics budgets, and hence attract little oversight or interest from peacekeeping contributors. Even these direct costs are not broken out in any readily visible way, with the two biggest items—local radio personnel and transmission infrastructure—typically subsumed within payroll reports on local support staff and overall IT budgets.

And within the public information reports from peacekeeping missions, there is little institutional differentiation between the standard use of radio as a vehicle for UN communications—from public-service announcements on local stations to sponsored UN programs about UN activities—and responsibility for a full-time, stand-alone local broadcasting service.

Yet of the nearly 50 peacekeeping missions that were authorized or re-authorized by the UN Security Council in the past two decades, a dozen set up and ran full-scale radio stations at some point in their tenure.

By almost any measure—political impact, numbers of journalists trained, infrastructural improvement, the elevation of professional ethics and reporting standards, the inclusion in the national dialogue of marginal regions and ethnic groups and legitimate dissent—these UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations radio stations contributed more to democratization and media development in post-conflict countries than the media programs of the rest of the UN combined, including the many targeted media projects of UNESCO and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The bad news, however, is that these radio services were created and managed with little strategic thinking about the local media landscape and eventual exit strategies—that is, without planning for the long-term sustainability and independence of these important national broadcasting services, or the creation of viable locally run alternatives.

The end-mission plan has been usually just to pull the plug—literally—and put the radio equipment back into UN shipping containers until the next mission. In some cases broadcasting equipment and the borrowed frequencies and a skeleton staff have been turned over to a state-controlled broadcaster, with varying but rarely heartening results. The result in some cases has been that the overall media environment took unfortunate and avoidable steps backwards, reverting to the status quo ante, or worse. Cambodia and East Timor are two such examples, despite broad UN governance mandates in each.

This is not a criticism of DPKO, which was never asked nor equipped to be in the media development business. It is, however, a criticism of the UN peacekeeping planning process, which before and during UN interventions could and should draw on the

expertise and national/regional contacts of UN media and communications professionals in UNESCO, UNDP, the Department of Public Information (DPI) and elsewhere in the system, both at headquarters and in the field. Furthermore, there should be information-gathering and dialogue with bilaterally and privately funded media projects in countries targeted for peacekeeping missions.

In contrast to the micromanagerial scrutiny to which the rest of the peacekeeping mission operations are routinely subjected, there is little apparent policymaker interest in the UN's radio services. With some exceptions, the stations were rarely mentioned in the Security Council proceedings, queries to the missions, or in the secretariat's regular mission reports to the Security Council.

Nor were they highlighted in the periodic in-house reviews of UN peacekeeping practices, such as the landmark August 2000 report by Lakhdar Brahimi⁴ (despite its focus on UN public information issues) or the more recent restructuring under Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, which included the January 2008 DPKO "Capstone Document" on "Principles and Guidelines" for UN peacekeeping, with recommendations that UN public information officials support the development of independent media.⁵ It is telling that in the most complete and astute recent account of the field realities of UN peacekeeping, Samantha Power's biography of Sergio Vieira de Mello, the veteran UN trouble shooter killed in the bombing of the UN's Iraq headquarters in 2003, there is no mention at all of these radio services—though Vieira de Mello personally presided over the creation of two of the most important stations, in Cambodia and East Timor, and was immersed between those postings in media-control issues in the Balkans.⁶ One result of this benign neglect is the

lack of any systematic appraisal of these ambitious broadcasting operations over the past two decades, or any clear guidelines for the structure and strategy of future UN radio services in peacekeeping zones. The UN has never compiled an official list of these radio services, much less analyzed their structure or cost or impact.⁷

Indeed, remarkably little is known about these radio operations, even among senior UN policymakers and Security Council diplomats, excepting those who have served in peacekeeping zones themselves. And many of those who have such experience on the ground still underestimate radio's importance to the UN missions: While the local UN station's broadcasts may be ubiquitous in the streets, shops, and buses of the host country, they are rarely heard within the confines of UN officials' offices or homes, as UN expatriates are far more likely to listen to the BBC or Radio France Internationale or watch foreign cable television channels.

SHOULD THE UN BE IN THE RADIO BUSINESS AT ALL?

Many media professionals question whether the UN should own or operate local radio stations in any circumstances. It is a legitimate question, and it should be considered and answered as a serious policymaking process. Making a compelling case *against* UN radio services isn't difficult, moreover.

Even in UN public information circles it is readily conceded that there are conflicts between a UN mission's desire to use media for its own (albeit generally desirable) ends and its responsibilities as a local radio manager to adhere to UN-endorsed standards for independent journalism. The senior UN staff overseeing the stations has public information

rather than media development responsibilities, and is evaluated in a communications or public diplomacy context rather than by democratic governance criteria. The UN as now structured does not have enough qualified staff to manage all facets of its peacekeeping radio operations, including local partnerships and eventual transitions to local control. Normal UN hiring procedures for outside expert assistance are too slow for most peacekeeping operations. Recommendations for the recruitment of specialized media personnel on a standby basis as part of the UN's "surge capacity" for responding to crisis situations have been discussed internally but not implemented.

There can also be serious problems with local market disruption in developing countries where emerging private radio news operations or even national public broadcasters cannot compete with the UN's salaries, nationwide transmission infrastructure, or exemption from local regulatory requirements. The large, often dominant audience share that has been typical of these UN radio services can be seen as an audience that would otherwise have been loyal to locally owned media. Rather than welcome UN radio as a constructive presence in the local media landscape, media entrepreneurs and analysts sometimes fear that a UN station may inadvertently stunt the growth of a nascent independent media culture.

Some media analysts object further to any essentially military force, whether local or international, being empowered

to run a parallel broadcasting network in competition with commercial or state radio services. These critics would see little distinction between UN peacekeeping radio in Liberia and the U.S.-funded Radio Sawa⁸ broadcasting in Iraq and would object to both on principle, despite—or because of—their popularity with local audiences.

National governments, meanwhile, often see a UN radio service as an impermissible intrusion on their sovereignty, especially in countries where opposition parties or minority groups have rarely had equitable access to the media. Some nations have refused to permit UN radio stations for precisely this reason. The Security

Council and secretary-general have generally accepted these refusals as a member-state prerogative, regardless of the stations' potential utility to the peacekeeping mission or the country at large.

And sometimes the UN can overreach. In Kosovo, for example, the UN sought to run its own

radio service while the European Union concentrated on creating a Kosovar public broadcasting service and USAID-backed media development professionals worked in parallel to support independent private radio and television. Both the EU and the United States shot down the UN's radio proposal, which they considered at best superfluous and at worst actively detrimental to their own broadcasting development efforts.

This refusal was all to the good—even if neither the private nor public broadcasters in Kosovo

Rather than welcome UN radio as a constructive presence in the local media landscape, media entrepreneurs and analysts sometimes fear that a UN station may inadvertently stunt the growth of a nascent independent media culture.

ultimately lived up to the nonpartisan multiethnic ideal that their backers had promoted.⁹ The UN should start its own radio stations only where there is no independent broadcasting alternative for UN information purposes or for general news and public affairs programming.

Yet it is the position of this paper that UN peacekeeping radio services are legally and strategically defensible, and in practice politically beneficial as well—though they should be managed better, with clearly defined editorial policies and a commitment to local media development consistent with the UN’s democratization mandate.

First, it is utterly reasonable for peacekeeping commanders to expect—if not demand—some means to communicate with the local populace, and to do so with international support. The UN missions are asked to put thousands of foreign troops in harm’s way and use hard-won international resources in difficult and often dangerous circumstances. To keep the population informed about the UN’s intentions and actions is not just prudent, it is an ethical and managerial obligation. And in the process to provide broader information to people who otherwise lack access to accurate national news reports is both the right thing to do, as a public service, and the smart thing to do, as the news service gives needed context to the UN’s presence and ultimate purpose in the country.

Second, there is often no practical alternative. If there are credible media outlets that provide

or could provide a comparable news and information service, the UN should use those channels, not build their own. But almost by definition, that is rarely an option.

Countries with peacekeeping missions tend to share some general characteristics. Socioeconomically, they rank near the bottom of UNDP’s Human Development Index.¹⁰ Telecommunications infrastructure, like that for electricity or potable water, is minimal. Foreign aid contributes half or more of all hard currency earnings, and a bigger share of the national budget, with no short-term prospects for economic self-sufficiency.

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Politically, these countries are usually a volatile mess. Even after the worst of a war’s violence passes, they will typically remain in the “not free” category of Freedom House’s annual report on world freedoms.¹¹ They score equally badly in comparative governance assessments, such as the Ibrahim Index.¹²

In press freedom indices the countries are also poorly rated, due to the lack of legal guarantees for independent media and the continuing security risks faced by working reporters.¹³ A legacy of internal warfare leaves a population divided, distrustful, and—in most cases—poorly informed. Independent news operations with significant national newsgathering and news-dissemination capacity are extremely rare. A professional radio news service operating with international immunity and subsidy can be a transformative, even revelatory institution in such circumstances.

Third, though some countries will try to limit the impact of peacekeeping missions on political liberties, including press freedom, the UN should push back. A peacekeeping intervention is by definition a state of exception, with the peacekeepers being sent by the international community into harm's way, at great cost and risk to both military and civilian personnel and to the UN as an institution. Local authorities, to the extent that they are even still functioning throughout the national territory, are axiomatically no longer able to maintain order or command the loyalty of much of the population. Making matters more complex, the blue-helmeted troops hail from far corners of the planet—Mongolians are dispatched to Liberia, Guatemalans to the Congo—with little knowledge of local tongues or mores.

Peacekeeping commanders responsible for the safety of their troops and the success of their missions have properly been given wide leeway in security matters, with their authority and freedom of mobility usually accepted by local military and police, at the insistence of the international community. But a kind of institutional schizophrenia sets in when UN intervention also extends into the political arena and meets resistance. Complaints of political interference often cause the UN to back off, even when deep political dysfunction provoked the conflict that drew the UN in to begin with.

However, if a peacekeeping intervention is not accompanied by political opening and dialogue, including improved communications and the free flow of information, the mission is unlikely to achieve lasting success. Running a radio station should be considered as legitimate a use of UN resources as sending out troops on border patrol.

Finally, why the UN? Again, there is often no real alternative—and the UN

also has some inherent advantages in both motive and opportunity.

Due to the special status of its peacekeeping missions, the UN has a unique institutional license to create and manage broadcasting services in post-conflict countries, and the presumably unobjectionable purpose of these services is to help ensure the success of those missions. The fact that the UN has already set up a dozen of these stations, with most winning large audiences and the support of local opinion leaders and peacekeeping professionals alike, is persuasive evidence that they have filled a real need. Unlike radio services backed by foreign governments, a UN radio station carries with it an aura of geopolitical neutrality, without real or imputed neocolonial baggage. Host governments, as UN member-states, can have a sense of partial ownership over a local UN venture that would rarely be the case with media wholly managed or supported by U.S. or European aid agencies.

That sense of ownership can cut both ways, of course. UN missions usually err by being too close to the local government rather than by being too much at odds. In managing its own radio stations, however, the UN can point to its own internationally ratified principles for independent media, from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to recent UNESCO-sponsored press freedom commitments. That these principles are not always observed by UN media is a reflection of UN personnel and policy gaps, rather than any intrinsic UN resistance or mandate restrictions. These guidelines can and should be followed.

Granted, the UN motivation to run its own radio stations is as much negative—driven by fears of “hate media” or a perceived need to refute destabilizing rumors or combat anti-UN sentiment and xenophobia—as it

is the positive desire to provide something resembling independent media. The specter of Rwanda's Radio Mille Collines fueling ethnic hatred and genocide haunts peacekeepers' thinking about broadcasting, as well it should.

The UN desire to defuse conflict is sometimes at odds with a straight journalism approach to breaking news, with UN missions loathe to give what they see as free publicity to recalcitrant rebels, bona fide newsmakers though they may be. The internal UN conception of these stations is that of a platform for public information about the UN's peacekeeping actions and mandate, and not necessarily as a vehicle for objective newsgathering or long-term democratization. The stations are sometimes viewed simply as more ambitious stand-alone versions of traditional UN communications initiatives where features on UN news and views are distributed through non-UN broadcast outlets.

But with the hiring of a local radio staff, an audience hungry for national news, and a powerful UN-built national transmission network, the net result is often a real national broadcasting service, with local news as well as local music and call-in shows on such popular and apolitical topics as dating and sports. Protected by the UN's special status and widely trusted for accurate and timely reporting, the stations fill a market void that would ideally be occupied by local public service broadcasting or competitive, independent private news organizations.

As almost everyone working for the UN stations is a local hire, their on-air character is more national than "international." News broadcasts reflect this local reality. The large audiences won by this approach are often envied by national governments with staid, propaganda-tinged state broadcasters.

So what happens when the mission ends?

UN support for "civic engagement" and "democratic institution-building" will be expected to continue outside the framework of a large and well-financed international military operation. Local media is left much as it was before the peacekeeping intervention, with skewed partisan leanings or corrosive ethnic biases or simply a lack of newsgathering and broadcasting capacity.

The UN radio stations close, their staff is dispersed, and their equipment is packed up for another peacekeeping mission, or turned over to a state broadcaster with little independence or professional capacity. The equipment, of course, is the least of it. The UN's broadcasting tools are rarely state of the art, especially after years of field use. What gives the hardware its value is UN protection and maintenance—from transmission towers on remote hilltops to studios in turbulent, impoverished cities—and its creative use by a professional local broadcasting staff.

After examining case histories of past peacekeeping radio stations and the challenges facing current UN stations in Africa, UN policymakers should formulate a more consistent and effective approach to UN media aid in post-conflict countries. This requires learning from the mistakes as well as the successes of the past, and planning for a post-UN radio future when peacekeeping radio stations are first conceived—not when they are about to be put back in packing crates, per the UN's historic pattern.

Before making a decision on whether or how to operate a peacekeeping radio station, the UN should also convene bilateral donors and media NGOs with experience in media assistance projects in the country in question to avoid replication and build on existing knowledge and partnerships.

The optimal scenario would be to build peacekeeping radio as a bridge to an autonomous public broadcaster that could be established before the peacekeepers depart. Though this would require national government support—a major hurdle, as UN media aid should be predicated on nonpartisanship—it brings the great advantage of creating an institution that would serve the entire populace and thus be a candidate for the typical UN-backed mix of multilateral and bilateral funding. This approach would be also consistent with the UN’s accepted mandate in peacekeeping and post-peacekeeping countries to assist in the creation of new democratic institutions in such fields as elections management, human rights enforcement, and anti-corruption oversight.

In some cases it may be better to use UN media resources to strengthen fledgling community radio networks, with the goal of aiding multiple independent broadcasters in the country. The UN can predicate its cooperation with local stations—from providing UN-backed public affairs programming to training and technical resources—on a commitment to UN standards of ethics and nonpartisanship. By promoting and monitoring adherence to such norms, the UN would be serving its immediate needs while contributing to the professionalization of local media.

To further this work, the UN would need to bolster its in-house roster of media professionals

and, ideally, subcontract long-term media development work to implementing partners. Potential bidders would include recognized global media development organizations—such as Internews Network, the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), the International Center for Journalists, BBC World Service Trust, the Reuters Foundation, the AFP Foundation, the Copenhagen-based International Media Support, and the Hirondelle Foundation, the Swiss nonprofit that helps manage several UN-backed radio services. Also well-qualified are such regionally-based groups as the Southeast Asian Press Alliance and the Media Institute of Southern Africa. Training centers linked to public broadcasters in Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands have also indicated willingness to aid UN-backed public media projects in post-conflict countries.

The optimal scenario would be to build peacekeeping radio as a bridge to an autonomous public broadcaster that could be established before the peacekeepers depart.

What doesn’t make sense is simply to close up shop and walk away from the UN’s investment in local media. Leadership from the permanent Security Council members and other major peacekeeping contributors is required to change this paradigm:

to build on the best of what the peacekeeping missions have accomplished in broadcasting, and to ensure that after the closure of these missions, the countries will be left with some equivalent professional media outlets. A first step to better understanding the challenges facing the stations the UN is still operating today would be to review policies and practices that have guided peacekeeping radio in the past.

RADIO: WHY IT MATTERS

The UN radio stations in post-conflict countries are an almost accidental byproduct of the exponential growth of peacekeeping over the past two decades and can only be understood in this broader context. This expansion has been not just budgetary or geographic but definitional, with peacekeepers routinely assigned responsibility for election management and other basic nation-building tasks.

These political stabilization endeavors constitute not just worthy ends in themselves, but a kind of insurance policy—or so it is hoped—against the need for future UN redeployments to prevent these states from failing anew.

In keeping with that broadened mandate, local UN-run radio stations have gradually become an integral part of most big peacekeeping missions, though this was rarely explicit in the Security Council's marching orders or acknowledged in the UN's regular mission assessments. Communications have historically not been a priority of UN peacekeeping, in part because of a military-rooted culture and command structure and in part due to donor antipathy to anything they think smacks of UN self-promotion. (It is telling that one common position of recent U.S. envoys to the UN from both parties—from the acerbically anti-UN John Bolton to the generally supportive Richard Holbrooke—has been a demand for budget cuts in the UN Department of Public Information.)

Still, a radio station is now seen as one more standard option in the peacekeeping toolkit, subject to initial negotiation with local authorities—free use of a local frequency is typically requested under the “status of forces agreement” governing the UN presence in the country—but once operating, answerable only to the head of the UN mission. Since 1990, a dozen UN peacekeeping missions have run their own local radio services. Five remain on the air today, and the internal UN assumption is that future missions will and should include similar radio services.

In all these peacekeeping and nation-building tasks, a nonpartisan radio service has proven to be an essential tool, as attested by their now routine inclusion in the work plans submitted by UN mission chiefs.

More important, it is becoming clear in the field that these stations are equally critical to mission exit strategies, as peacekeeping gives way to “peacebuilding,” beginning with elections but encompassing longer term political, legal, and administrative reforms. In all these peacekeeping and nation-building tasks, a

nonpartisan radio service has proven to be an essential tool, as attested by their now routine inclusion in the work plans submitted by UN mission chiefs. But those plans do not include proposals to convert the stations into national radio services before the mission's closure, or to find some other way to turn the UN investment in a radio staff and infrastructure into a lasting contribution to local media development.

Instead, peacekeeping budget contributors and overseers expect missions to shut these stations down at the end of their tenure, along with all

other seemingly expendable or extraneous operations. Media professionals would argue that this is counterproductive tactically—the radio services are a critical bridge to a post-peacekeeping future—and inefficient from a budgetary standpoint, as the big up-front investment in hardware and training has already been absorbed. Ongoing operating costs are relatively minor, especially if radio staff is paid in accord with local professional salary scales, as opposed to UN salary levels.

Yet as the Security Council and the secretary-general seek to rally support for new peacekeeping interventions, they must also demonstrate a disciplined resolve to disengage from countries where such missions have been deemed successful. It is symbolically

dissonant as well as politically intrusive for the UN to continue operating its own broadcast station in a sovereign nation that is again considered stable and fully self-governing.

Unless some conversion to local control of the station is well under way at that point, it is usually too late to save it. And, as noted, plans for such conversions are rare, with one consequence being the abrupt and arguably premature closures of past UN radio operations, as in Cambodia and East Timor. There is a risk that without a re-examination of UN peacekeeping-media principles and planning at the headquarters level, the same may happen in Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with unfortunate consequences.



PEACEKEEPING'S PAYMASTER: THE U.S. STAKE IN UN RADIO

Though the Obama Administration has embraced UN peacekeeping, U.S. diplomats remain wary of the UN's political and administrative limitations as the UN is asked to take on more such missions. As the biggest peacekeeping paymaster, the U.S. government understandably wants greater clarity in mission goals and prefers transitions when feasible from blue helmets in the thousands to civilian "peacebuilders" in the hundreds.

Just a decade ago the annual budget for UN peacekeeping was roughly equivalent to that of all other UN operations overseen by the secretary-general put together, or about \$2 billion. Now it is \$7.8 billion yearly and climbing, while the remainder of the UN budget has stayed almost static. Today nearly 100,000 troops plus some 20,000 civilians are deployed in 17 UN peacekeeping missions, an eightfold increase since 1999.¹⁴ Africa has become the central focus, with the seven missions there accounting for two-thirds of all peacekeeping personnel worldwide. With mission expansion now authorized in Darfur and contemplated in Somalia, African peacekeeping is all but certain to continue expanding.

The United States contributes almost none of these forces. Fewer than a hundred U.S. military officers are assigned to UN peacekeeping, and that minimal representation is unlikely to change, U.S. officials say. But under UN

formulas the United States is responsible for the largest share of the total peacekeeping bill: 26 percent, or about \$2.2 billion in 2009.¹⁵

The Obama administration has vigorously defended these contributions as both cost-effective and strategically essential. This summer, the U.S. government delivered about \$2 billion in pending and past-due U.S. debts for peacekeeping operations to the UN and promised to keep current with future obligations. Ambassador Susan Rice, the U.S. permanent representative to the UN, pointed

to a U.S. Government Accountability Office estimate that in the case of Haiti, a U.S. military deployment would have cost the U.S. taxpayer eight times more than the UN force of equivalent scale.

At the UN General Assembly in September 2009, President Obama

took the unusual step of meeting with leaders of the main troop-contributing nations to underline U.S. support for UN peacekeeping operations. He assured them of U.S. backing not only for peacekeeping itself but for more focus on conflict prevention and resolution, so that peacekeeping is not just applied as "a band-aid for where there is insufficient diplomatic attention," according to a report to the press afterward by Samantha Power, the White House senior director for multilateral affairs.¹⁶

It is inarguably true that UN peacekeeping missions are a relative bargain in contrast to

Though the Obama Administration has embraced UN peacekeeping, U.S. diplomats remain wary of the UN's political and administrative limitations as the UN is asked to take on more such missions.

U.S. or European military interventions. Most troops come from poor Asian, African, and Latin American countries and are paid accordingly. It is also true that the entire UN peacekeeping budget represents a minuscule share of global military spending—about half of one percent.

Nonetheless U.S. officials and other diplomats are concerned about the UN's ability to finance and manage the peacekeeping missions' ever-expanding budgets and mandates, which now typically include the training of local security forces, broad legal and administrative reforms, public health campaigns, and the oversight of bitterly contested elections.

With a budget of \$1.3 billion annually, the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo—MONUC, for its French name—has for a decade been the biggest and most expensive mission in UN history, involving more than 19,000 troops and 3,000 civilians.¹⁷ Yet in the 2009-10 peacekeeping budget, MONUC's appropriation was surpassed by the \$1.6 billion allotted to UNAMID, the "hybrid" UN-African Union force in Darfur.¹⁸

Neither MONUC nor UNAMID are likely to get smaller anytime soon. Indeed, both missions are considered by peacekeeping professionals to be undersized and underfunded, given the huge scale of the two territories, the millions of lives already lost, and their continuing volatility. In either case a failure to achieve relative stability internally would almost ensure renewed cross-border violence and regional political upheaval.

In both the DRC and Sudan, the UN has assumed increasing responsibility for local political processes as well as basic security. In the DRC in 2006, in an undertaking more daunting and costly than the contemporaneous election preparations in Iraq and Afghanistan,

the UN registered 26 million voters in what was in effect the country's first real census and citizen-identification exercise since its independence in 1960.¹⁹ The subsequent UN-supervised elections were generally considered free and fair, despite anti-UN invective from opposition forces in the capital. Yet the intense UN involvement left the UN with a clear stake in the elected government's success, as judged by its ability (and willingness) to govern.

In Sudan, meanwhile, the UN is laying the groundwork for national elections in 2010 and a referendum of greater potential import in 2011. In the 2011 plebiscite, voters in the south will decide whether to remain part of greater Sudan or to secede and establish an independent state—an outcome neither Khartoum nor the UN would welcome but a cause for which millions of Sudanese have died.

With these and other major missions expected to continue for at least the next few years, and future missions being contemplated in Somalia and elsewhere, UN donors and policymakers are uneasily contemplating an annual peacekeeping bill approaching \$10 billion by 2012, if not sooner.

It is not primarily the escalating expense of peacekeeping operations that UN officials and mission chiefs find worrisome. Of greater concern is the institutional risk represented by open-ended commitments not just to peacekeeping but to long-term nation-building, especially under the troop-heavy peacekeeping model.

The UN's managerial and logistical capacity is strained to its limits by its current peacekeeping commitments, donors and UN officials concur. Scandals over sex crimes and other abuses by peacekeepers—including alleged rapes and the prostitution of minors and

accusations of complicity in other human right violations by Congolese troops—can be seen as a symptom of a system where field responsibility is delegated to on-site military commanders, and oversight from the small permanent DPKO and Department of Field Support (DFS) staff in New York is largely limited to policy guidelines, provisioning needs, recruitment support, confidential political counsel, and liaisons with the Security Council and secretary-general’s office.²⁰

“We need peacekeeping operations to be planned expertly, deployed more quickly, budgeted realistically, equipped seriously, ably led, and ended responsibly,” Ambassador

Rice said in a September 2009 review of U.S. policy towards the United Nations.²¹

There is a consensus in the Security Council and Department of Peacekeeping Operations alike on the need for clear mission goals and some notional exit strategy before the UN commits to another blue-helmet force. But on a case-by-case basis, there is little consensus on exactly what those goals and strategies should be, or on what tools and funds are required to achieve them. Nor is there consensus on perhaps the most difficult question: the target country’s anticipated longer term needs and related UN obligations, if any, after the Security Council declares success and the peacekeeping mission ends.

PERCEPTIONS FROM UN HEADQUARTERS: RADIO BARELY AUDIBLE, FISCALLY INVISIBLE

The UN is attempting to answer such questions after the fact through its fledgling peacebuilding commission and fund, begun experimentally in Sierra Leone and Burundi and now expanding to Liberia, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, the Central African Republic, and eventually the Congo and Sudan. In Sierra Leone, the UN Peacebuilding Fund is aiding a planned transition from UN Radio to a restructured national public broadcaster, the first such UN-backed transformation of a station left over from a peacekeeping mission.

Yet Sierra Leone remains an exception to the rule. One question rarely asked is whether ending a peacekeeping mission “responsibly” should include ending its radio service, as has been the practice. This is in part because a radio station is not usually on the de facto UN peacekeeping checklists, the Security Council rarely having specifically authorized a local station to begin with (even if permission to do so was later negotiated under a UN “status of forces agreement” with a mission-country government).

This is the case even in the largest and most strategically critical of the UN peacekeeping radio services, Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Without Okapi, which the UN started operating in early 2002 to fill a broadcasting void in the country, almost none of MONUC’s initial work on disarmament, political reconciliation, or national elections preparations would have been possible, according to UN governance advisors and security experts there at the time. Radio Okapi reached virtually all of the immense territory of the DRC with local public affairs shows that immediately drew a vast national audience.

As the DRC’s only real national news service, managed with broad autonomy by a Swiss NGO—the Hironnelle Foundation—and an otherwise Congolese staff, Okapi has been considered essential ever since to MONUC’s task of pacifying the country and building the capacity of a shaky elected government. Yet establishing a national radio service was never part of MONUC’s original Security Council mandate, which in 2000 simply authorized the UN peacekeeping mission to carry out the usual unspecified UN “public information” activities in the country.

The radio question is also rarely asked because radio costs are just too small and too hard to tease out of mission budget reports to attract the attention of peacekeeping funders.

The total yearly UN peacekeeping bill is now about \$8 billion and rising fast; direct costs of local UN radio services are subsumed within the small “communications” budget line for the combined peacekeeping missions. That entire communications allocation (\$88 million in the current annual budget) accounts for just over one percent of all peacekeeping expenditures, and includes related internal communications and UN “public information” activities and salaries.

At the peak of any major peacekeeping mission, local radio broadcast expenses remain at the level of a rounding error. As missions conclude their intense security phase and begin drawing forces down, however, the radio operations become ever more prominent features of the local UN landscape, as if left suddenly and unexpectedly exposed by the receding blue tide.

CREATING GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION RADIO

All radio stations set up by UN peacekeepers were originally envisioned, authorized and structured as platforms for UN “public information” communications, not as quasi-independent news services for mission countries nor as long-term contributions to democratization or media development. The basic decision as to whether a station should be set up at all, in accord with UN peacekeeping guidelines, was based almost solely on whether existing broadcasters in the country were judged willing and able to transmit UN messages to the populace, from daily information about UN peacekeeping actions to the public statements of UN mission chiefs and their designated local counterparts.

Even when peacekeeping missions began to run national radio services almost routinely, the stations were still perceived at UN headquarters—to the extent that there was awareness of their existence at all—as field extensions of the UN communications apparatus. In the UN secretariat, this is the shared domain of the Department of Public Information (DPI) and the separate press relations office of the secretary-general’s spokesperson. Both units have considerable media expertise, including former journalists on staff with experience in peacekeeping missions and other conflict zones.

In a UN peacekeeping mission, however, a radio service is run as an integral part of an in-house public information office overseen by a “head of mission” who reports in turn to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York. While DPI often advises and lends personnel to peacekeeping media operations, it has no direct line authority; the peacekeeping

mission itself is the ultimate arbiter of editorial policy. Even further removed from management or consultative processes in peacekeeping radio are media support specialists working for UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, and other agencies.

On the staff level, UN radio managers are well aware of the inherent tension between providing a country with objective news and public affairs programming and the task of promoting the UN mission, even if the mission has the wholly laudable goal of ending violence and promoting peaceful alternatives. The UN is itself a central newsmaker in a peacekeeping country; its actions often provoke intense local discussion and vocal dissent.

Yet the UN cannot objectively cover itself, nor will it usually try. Its radio station is primarily seen in the UN not as an objective information provider but as a mission mouthpiece, the multilateral equivalent of a state information service. Any perceived conflict between those two roles is usually resolved in the favor of the latter, even when news programming is delegated to a local or international media partner.

In practice it may often be impossible to square this ethical circle. Local listeners themselves expect a UN radio service to provide authoritative information on UN views and projects and policies, and the station is often the best or only available media platform for UN missions to explain their plans or actions to the public.

But there are ways to draw comprehensible demarcations between UN programs and arms-length local news and public information

content. The best UN radio stations have attempted to enforce such editorial distinctions in their daily programming. But these are voluntary staff-led decisions rather than the result of guidelines adopted after due consideration of such issues by policymakers in New York. High-level UN discussions of the peacekeeping broadcast operations have been rare.

The most comprehensive recent internal review of UN peacekeeping policies was the *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations* overseen by veteran diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi and presented to the Security Council in August 2000.²² This was after the UN had set up national radio stations in Cambodia and East Timor and when it was poised to create similarly ambitious services in the Central African Republic, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Brahimi Report, as it is known, stressed both the strategic importance and chronic underfunding of the communications component of UN peacekeeping. “An effective public information and communications capacity in mission areas is an operational necessity for virtually all United Nations peace operations,” the report to the Security Council states, calling for an increase in trained UN media personnel and more active communications outreach to the residents of conflict zones.

“Effective communication helps to dispel rumor, to counter disinformation and to secure the

cooperation of local populations,” the report claims. “It can provide leverage in dealing with leaders of rival groups, enhance security of United Nations personnel and serve as a force multiplier. It is thus essential that every peace operation formulate public information campaign strategies, particularly for key aspects of a mission’s mandate, and that such strategies and the personnel required to implement them be included in the very first elements deployed to help start up a new mission.”

Yet the Brahimi Report made no mention of the UN’s own radio services in these conflict

zones, which had made missions no longer simply sources of information about UN peacekeeping but major national media managers and news providers in their own right.

The UN’s most recent peacekeeping policy paper, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*,” adopted in 2008 and known by DPKO as

its “Capstone Document,” echoed the Brahimi emphasis on public information, while similarly overlooking DPKO’s own radio services.²³ The Capstone Document properly calls for “a public information assessment gauging the most effective ways of reaching the population ... prior to the launch of any field mission” and the strategic use of communications to “increase confidence in the peace process, build trust among parties to a conflict, and generate support for national reconciliation.”²⁴

“It is essential that every peace operation formulate public information campaign strategies ... and that such strategies and the personnel required to implement them be included in the very first elements deployed to help start up a new mission.”

— *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, 2000*

The Capstone Document goes beyond the Brahimi Report in explicitly acknowledging that media development efforts contribute to the UN's own communications goals as well as longer term efforts to build democratic institutions. The UN's local public information activities should strive to counteract "the negative effects of irresponsible, hostile and controlled media," the document states, while at the same time helping "to establish an environment that promotes the development of free and independent media, and the adherence to the highest journalistic ethics and standards."²⁵

This latter directive has been followed to some extent. Peacekeeping missions have organized local journalists to sign UN-drafted "codes of conduct" related to elections coverage and sponsored reporting excursions and workshops on varying themes—but there has been little systematic involvement in press freedom issues, media law, journalism institution-building, or other structural reforms. The missions' biggest contribution to local media development, most involved would agree, is in providing a professional model for emulation through the UN's radio news and public affairs shows, which feature a wide sampling of national voices and put a premium on respectful language and accuracy.

But that can stop well short of true journalistic evenhandedness, as UN stations will not readily provide a microphone to local forces flouting a UN-negotiated truce or boycotting a UN-advised election. In its instructions on communications to UN peacekeepers, the Capstone Document's primary emphasis is on using media "to promote consensus around the peace process."

The document urges the use of local public radio and television, if available, but adds that "where no local dissemination capacity exists, a United Nations capability should be deployed at the earliest stages, while helping concurrently to build local capacities."

This latter clause encourages peacekeeping missions to manage UN broadcasting operations in a way that will strengthen domestic media capacity in the long run, with public service broadcasting as a model. And the hands-on managers of UN radio stations have as a rule consciously viewed their own staff training efforts and adherence to professional standards of fairness and accuracy as contributions to the country's overall media environment, and they are right to do so. Yet their resources are limited, as is their mandate, which is usually confined to running the radio operations on a day-to-day basis, typically as the sole international broadcast specialist on the local UN staff.

RADIO ENTRANCE AND EXIT STRATEGIES: THE PUBLIC OPTION

There is no example anywhere to date of a UN peacekeeping mission making it a planning priority or dedicating significant resources to build better national media independently of the UN's own radio service. This was the case even in the final peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone, which was specifically instructed by the Security Council in 2005 to support "independent and capable public radio capacity" in the country.²⁶ Neither the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) mission in Freetown nor DPKO had the expertise or resources to carry out such an assignment, and there was little pressure from the Security Council to follow its instructions. Nor did DPKO in New York or the national authorities in Sierra Leone consider independent radio a priority. But now, with the peacekeeping mission ended and UN programs in Sierra Leone overseen by a small civilian "peacebuilding" office, the UN Radio service there has been retained and recognized by UN and government officials alike as one of the UN's biggest contributions to democratization and national reconciliation.

Of the four current UN peacekeeping missions running radio stations, only one, MONUC in the DRC, has actively explored options for placing its radio service under nonpartisan national control after the mission closes. Still, there has been little progress to date on a viable

transition for Radio Okapi, and no formal UN evaluations of tentative proposals prepared by Okapi's managers at the Hironnelle Foundation.

Typically in UN missions, in tandem with the permanent civilian UN presence in the country, UN staffers strive to build or strengthen semiautonomous democratic institutions such as election commissions, anti-corruption agencies, and human rights bodies. This work, which has attracted broad international support, draws on

a global corps of UN and other specialized professionals, who bring well-established guidelines for their work and a track record of accomplishment. Technical consultants and other service providers are commonly contracted to help with these projects through an open bidding process. This is a readily adaptable

model for UN media development work in post-conflict countries, including the creation, management, and eventual handover of UN-backed broadcasting operations.

This model perhaps most readily lends itself to support for independent public service broadcasting, in keeping with the UN preference for institution-building that is national in scope and politically inclusive by design, with established international norms. The alternative of direct support for private media, even where this might be a desirable

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alternative, is more difficult for the UN, with its strict constraints on commercial alliances, either real or perceived. A public service approach is also more likely to win wide donor support, especially from Europe, expanding the resources available for media aid.

In public service broadcasting, the United Nations can cite its own definitions of what constitutes “public service” in a media context. These guidelines have been ratified in various forums and declarations by UN member states, increasing their utility in post-conflict nation-building.

These accepted UN definitions—most developed under UNESCO’s aegis—have been endorsed by the African Union and other regional bodies. In March 2008, the UNESCO-linked International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), governed by an ideologically varied board of UN member states, adopted a wide-ranging framework of media development indicators that is based partly on a synthesis of accepted UN principles and international best practices relevant to the overall enabling environment for media freedoms, effectiveness, and professionalism.²⁷

The IPDC media development indicators define public service broadcasting as follows: “Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) is broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public. It is neither commercial nor state-owned, [and it is] free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces. Through PSBs, citizens are informed, educated and also entertained. When guaranteed with pluralism, programming diversity, editorial independence, appropriate funding, accountability and transparency, public service broadcasting can serve as a cornerstone of democracy.”²⁸

The UN Media Indicators “framework” elaborates further:

The key element is that a public service broadcaster, even if state-owned, should be non-partisan, non-profit, with a public-interest remit and, usually national coverage and a national mandate ... Public service broadcasting is premised on the assumption that the market cannot meet all the nation’s broadcasting needs. The defining characteristic of PSBs is that they are protected from interference, particularly of a commercial or political nature, in respect of their governance, budget and editorial decision-making. Their public service remit usually includes obligations to ensure that the public receives politically balanced information, especially at election times. In addition, they typically strive to ensure that their transmission system covers the whole territory of a country, and that they serve all regions, cultures and linguistic groups ...

PSBs typically carry limited amounts of advertising, or none at all. They should be either free at the point of delivery or available at a cost that the vast majority of the population can afford. Their remit may also include requirements to provide comprehensive and balanced news coverage; a forum for public debate; a minimum amount of locally-generated content (possibly through the use of quotas) and creative, diverse and original programming.

These guidelines, while arguably incomplete and imperfect, provide parameters sufficient for the UN to pursue the “PSB” option in peacekeeping missions. This presumes both a verified local need for such a broadcasting service, and the acceptance of such a goal by governments and opposition groups alike. In most cases this would require either the

transformation of an existing state broadcaster into a more autonomous institution or the creation of a new national broadcaster that would operate in parallel with traditional government media. In either case the UN mission would find itself playing both advisory and technical support roles in needed legislative reforms, training programs, and other institution-building assistance.

Again, this parallels tasks already routinely undertaken by the UN in post-conflict settings in elections management, security sector reform, and other governance areas.

The accepted UN description of what constitutes a public service broadcaster also conforms closely to the mandates for the UN radio services in peacekeeping missions, which have similarly sought to reach all geographical areas and population groups while providing fair access to the airwaves to all political parties in election periods

(especially when the UN plays a supervisory or advisory role). The UN radio stations also strive to be complementary to independent local private media, with which they do not compete for ad revenue and with which they sometimes collaborate in newsgathering and other programming ventures, especially during election periods. This ethos, and the national staff training and psychology that goes with it, can make a UN peacekeeping station a useful stepping stone to a national public broadcaster. Where the UN model does not suffice, however,

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is in financial self-sufficiency. This is not a media management area where the UN has much relevant experience or expertise. But it is essential for a viable public broadcaster to get its business plan right; high-minded principles and journalism skills alone are not enough.

Structures to make public service broadcasters self-sustaining and economically protected from undue political influence will vary widely depending on national economic and political circumstances. In most post-conflict countries this will require a mix of domestic public funds and international donor assistance, at least

transitionally. While the UN country team can help convene and persuade potential contributors, the advisory services required to create viable financial structures would be best provided by public broadcasting specialists, such as the European Broadcasting Union, or the Southern African Public Broadcasting Association,

or other such professional bodies. In the U.S. media development community, management experience with Public Broadcasting Service or National Public Radio could prove highly relevant to these projects, especially as the typical African broadcasting landscape lies somewhere between U.S. and European norms in terms of the balance between private and public media. There is also significant unexplored potential for U.S.-style corporate support for public broadcasting in much of Africa.

The UN is seriously exploring the public broadcasting transition option for the first time in Sierra Leone, where a small UN peacebuilding office has now replaced UN peacekeeping forces. The UN radio station in Sierra Leone was kept temporarily in operation after the nine-year peacekeeping mission to facilitate the public broadcasting transition project, and the new UN Peacebuilding Fund is providing short-term aid to the new broadcaster.

The radio transition project has been explicitly endorsed by the Security Council, which gave birth to the initiative when it originally instructed the previous UN mission to help build “independent public radio capacity” in Sierra Leone. In recent Council deliberations on West Africa, the U.S. mission to the UN singled out the Sierra Leone radio project as an example for post-peacekeeping democratization in the region.

One source of support for the Sierra Leone transition comes from UN media professionals in the departments of public information and peacekeeping operations who saw opportunities lost for such transitions in past radio services. In looking back at the brief histories of UN radio in Cambodia and East Timor, and the absence of any such history despite the opportunity for UN broadcasting in Angola, there is hope that prospects will be better for the survival in some local form of current UN radio services in Sudan, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Sierra Leone experiment might provide one pathway, but problems the UN has faced with its past radio services—some country-specific, but others generic—should be examined to avoid similar obstacles in the future.

RADIO OPENINGS AND CLOSINGS: SPECIFIC CASES

The UN peacekeeping radio experience began shakily and tentatively, with some countries refusing to accede to UN broadcasting requests and others tolerating a UN radio service only for brief periods. But the biggest constraints were self-imposed, with the stations designed to serve the UN's self-identified "public information" needs rather than those of the citizenry.

Several of these stations quietly evolved into full-service national news broadcasters without any explicit mandate to do so. Others remained limited to a UN information and peace-promotion function. Almost all had some constructive impact on the overall local media environment, though, with the most ambitious UN stations—such as those still operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone—credited with raising standards for broadcast journalism in the country.

Yet there were also missed opportunities for lasting contributions to media development in countries where the UN had a large local presence and even greater potential influence. These experiences have rarely been closely examined, internally or externally. One commonality is that they illustrate the UN's almost unique ability in post-conflict settings to launch a new local broadcaster quickly with both international and national support. Yet these cases also reveal UN ambivalence about the stations and the shortcomings inherent in managing local radio from UN public

information offices and not as a conscious exercise in democratic institution-building.

ANGOLA

The first big peacekeeping mission where the UN sought to set up its own radio service was in Angola, one of the earliest and longest peacekeeping interventions of the post-Cold War era, with three successive "verification missions" and a final "observer" mission between 1989 and 1999. The Angola radio

proposal was prompted in part by the perceived beneficial impact of UN programs produced for local radio by the much larger mission next door in newly independent Namibia. There were no comparable broadcasting alternatives in war-ravaged Angola, however.

Advisors to the first UN Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM), charged with overseeing the withdrawal of Cuban

troops from the country, wanted some way to communicate with the Angolans directly about the UN's activities and mandate, without any perceived alignment with either side of the country's internal conflict. But the de facto government of President José Eduardo dos Santos turned down the UN request for its own radio frequency—a portent, in retrospect, of what became an enduring pattern of state media control and broader intolerance of dissent or outside scrutiny. Dos Santos's Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA, in its Portuguese

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acronym) had little incentive to welcome an autonomous UN radio station. From its base in the capital, Luanda, the MPLA controlled the sole national radio network as well as the country's only television station and daily newspaper. The rebel National Union for the Total Independence of Angola's (UNITA, in its Portuguese acronym) radio station, based during the years of conflict in apartheid-era South Africa, reached a far smaller local audience, mainly through part-time shortwave broadcasts. There were no private or otherwise independent broadcasters in the Angola.²⁹

Democratization was never part of the UN's original mandate in Angola, however. And UN peacekeepers didn't then expect to be staying in Angola for a full decade. The first UNAVEM mission had a traditional focus on disarmament and truce enforcement, and the UN didn't press the Angolans very hard for the right to run a radio station. Nor did it do so even when under UNAVEM II the UN's mandate was expanded to include election monitoring, though the MPLA's overwhelming media advantage gave it a crucial edge in the close 1992 presidential contest.

The UN's job of implementing the peace accord between the warring parties included support for the pact's goal of making Angola a multiparty democracy. Nonpartisan, nongovernmental news media was presumably necessary for such a transformation. But lingering Security Council divisions over the long Angolan war—principally between Russia and the United States, patrons of the MPLA and UNITA, respectively—probably precluded a more unified and assertive position on UN broadcasting.

The MPLA won the 1992 elections seemingly conclusively, but the results were angrily rejected as fraudulent by UNITA, sparking a return to civil war for most of the next

decade. Efforts of the UN in the country focused anew on ending open warfare, not on building democratic institutions in the media or elsewhere. Angola remained deeply polarized along interrelated ideological and ethnic lines, divisions intensified by highly partisan media and the near-complete absence of more dispassionate and balanced sources of national news.

The UN remained aware of radio's importance in any long-term solution to the conflict, however. In the 1997 resolution establishing the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA, for its Portuguese acronym), the observer mission that succeeded the three "verification" missions, the Security Council called for UNITA's radio station to become a nonpartisan broadcaster as part of the broader goal of transforming UNITA from a guerrilla force into a political party. Yet without a radio service of its own or some other local template for nonpartisan media, and with the governing MPLA still controlling most broadcast news without any comparable Security Council directive on nonpartisanship, the UN would have faced a difficult challenge in the best of circumstances.

As it was, the UNITA radio proposal and other UN reform efforts failed utterly, as did repeated truce attempts, until UNITA imploded after the death in combat of its leader, Jonas Savimbi, in 2002. President dos Santos's hold on power—and on the press—has only increased since. It is hard to know if Angola's media and wider political landscape would have evolved differently had the UN been more insistent. The UN missions' original (and unachieved) peacemaking and election-management goals would have been aided by direct communications with the wary, war-weary populace. It also seems reasonable to assume that 10 years of a professional UN-backed radio news service would have had some

beneficial impact on political pluralism and press freedom in the country. In recent years only the Catholic Church’s radio outlet and a part-time Portuguese-language Voice of America service have challenged the government’s de facto monopoly over broadcast news, a key component of its enduring political monopoly. In Luanda, several small newspapers now report critically on public affairs, but Angolans outside the capital still have little access to independent media of any kind.

The government held Angola’s first post-peacekeeping legislative elections in 2008, taking four-fifths of the seats, but has yet to schedule a presidential election. The political contrast with Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa is striking, but despite calls from Western governments for democratic reforms, oil exports have given Angola a steady income and solid business relations with Europe and the United States. During her visit to Angola in August 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reiterated previous U.S. urging of swifter democratization, including “an independent and free press.”³⁰ Her Angolan hosts responded that their country needs more time to develop before it will be ready for an open, competitive democracy. Five months later, the MPLA legislative majority amended the constitution so that the parliament, not the voters, will choose the president, ensuring President dos Santos’s almost indefinite hold on power, including over the media, according to local observers. As the Associated Press noted in a January 22 analysis: “It becomes almost impossible for opposition politicians to make

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— *Associated Press*

inroads when an iconic party also has control of the state broadcaster—often the medium with the widest reach in Africa; earns the loyalty of a civil service that comes to see itself as part of the party; and fails to control corruption.”³¹

Within the UN itself, meanwhile, the acquiescence to Angola’s opposition to a UN radio operation—without any countervailing effort to provide alternative independent media to the country—would be echoed with more serious consequences later in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, where the UN was also denied permission to broadcast nationally as part of its peacekeeping missions.

As in Angola, the UN missions in Rwanda and in Bosnia-Herzegovina did not or could not press their broadcasting requests with the full force of Security Council insistence. Whether autonomous UN broadcasters in either could have ever openly informed the public

about genocidal killings appears doubtful in retrospect, given the intense local political pressures, internal Security Council divisions, and acute UN security concerns about its own personnel. But demanding such permission would still have been a battle worth fighting.

SUDAN

In Sudan, the UN faces continued resistance from national authorities to a planned countrywide UN FM service that was explicitly authorized by the 2005 “status of forces agreement” under which the government permitted a UN mission there.

The UN agreement with the government of Sudan states unequivocally that the UN has the right to broadcast uncensored news and other programming to the Sudanese public under exclusive UN editorial control, and that the government should allocate available radio frequencies (FM or AM) for this purpose within 15 days of the signing of the accord. That never happened.

Impartial, professional news and public affairs programming on a national level is a generally accepted prerequisite for the credibility of the planned elections in 2010 and north-south unity referendum in 2011. But the UN has never made compliance with this broadcasting agreement a priority in its negotiations with Khartoum. As a consequence, the UN mission's much-praised Radio Miraya consistently reaches a mass audience only in southern Sudan and is limited to part-time daily shortwave broadcasts in the Arab-speaking north and intermittent shortwave transmissions for Darfur.

Security Council insistence on the enforcement of this provision in Sudan would not guarantee operational results, but the absence of such pressure almost certainly guarantees failure.

CAMBODIA

In Cambodia, also among the first post-Cold War peacekeeping ventures, the UN had far more clout, and far more resources. With roughly 20,000 foreign peacekeepers and 5,000 local staff, the 19-month 1992-93 UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) would ultimately cost \$1.6 billion.³² UNTAC was almost a de facto government,

charged with overseeing the withdrawal of occupying Vietnamese forces as well as a return to Cambodian self-rule.

UNTAC's main responsibility was organizing what was to be Cambodia's first free national election. A nonpartisan national radio service was deemed essential, as there was no existing impartial means for candidates or UNTAC officials to communicate with the population at large. State radio, overtly partisan, was the only national broadcasting service reaching most of the population, but its coverage was still mostly confined to major towns and cities. Private radio was almost unknown. The UN radio proposal encountered some initial government resistance but was ultimately allowed to

proceed, with explicit backing from both the Security Council and Cambodian authorities. Among the specific tasks assigned to UNTAC by the Security Council was public information, and "Radio UNTAC" was to be its primary instrument.

The Cambodia mission marked the first time that the UN had taken the step of creating its own autonomous radio service in a peacekeeping zone. Setting up the studios and transmission network and hiring and training a local staff cost UNTAC about \$3 million—a small expenditure in the context of a major peacekeeping mission but quite large by the standards of Cambodian media investment.³³ The goals for the radio station were limited, however, as were those for the mission itself.

In what some of those involved later considered a historic mistake, the UN team focused narrowly on the mechanics of the election process, almost devoid of broader

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considerations about the political environment in which Cambodians would campaign or vote and in which those elected would then govern. As one consequence, the radio service was a short-lived operation, functioning for less than a year and closing shortly after the 1993 election.

In its brief life span Radio UNTAC was hailed as Cambodia's first and only open platform for free national discussion and debate, with opinion polls showing wide listenership and public trust, despite denunciations of the UN from the Khmer Rouge and others. It was also the first station in memory to reach almost all of Cambodia's territory.

The Cambodian production staff quickly developed a loyal national audience and a reputation for fairness and accuracy (as well as for creative good taste in their popular Khmer music programming). Radio UNTAC's broadcasts were credited by election observers with helping to drive voter turnout in 1993 to an extraordinary 95 percent of the registered electorate, far beyond the UN's original expectations. All political parties were guaranteed free and equal access to Radio UNTAC during the campaign period, which was also marked by considerable freedom in the nascent national print media, thanks in large part to UN encouragement and arms-length oversight.³⁴

But those free-expression gains proved ephemeral. Prime Minister Hun Sen angrily rejected the election results, which showed him losing to his rival, Norodom Ranariddh. The UN radio station came under threat, both verbal and physical, with Ghanaian troops deployed outside to protect it against government loyalists.³⁵ The UNTAC mission ended soon afterwards. Radio UNTAC was shuttered and silenced, its local staff dismissed, its equipment flown back to DPKO warehouses in Italy. There was

no UN effort to keep Radio UNTAC on the air under UN auspices, or to transform it into a nationally controlled radio service, though the new Cambodian constitution in theory permitted the establishment of independent broadcasters in the country. The UN saw its mission as guiding Cambodia through a historic national election process, with nonpartisan radio as one tool, and that mission was over.

Cambodia has been less than a beacon of free speech and democracy since. An uneasy post-election concordat between Hun Sen and Ranariddh violently disintegrated four years later, with Hun Sen consolidating power. He has retained that power to this day under a system where most broadcast media are under direct or indirect state control, and journalists who report on corruption or otherwise challenge authorities risk harassment, censorship, imprisonment, or physical attack, including homicide.³⁶

International donors have invested millions of aid dollars since 1991 in the training of Cambodian journalists, according to UNESCO estimates, and several print publications and some small radio outlets have shown great courage and enterprise in independent news reporting.³⁷ But these are exceptions, not the rule. In a country where radio remains the dominant information medium, there is a consensus among local and foreign journalists alike that the last time most Cambodians had access to professional, nonpartisan national news coverage was the day before Radio UNTAC closed.

EAST TIMOR

Nowhere did the UN have a better opportunity to create and bequeath an independent broadcaster than in East Timor, where another UN "transitional administration"—the United Nations Transitional Administration in

East Timor, or UNTAET—directly governed the tiny nation-to-be as an international protectorate from late 1999 to 2002.

The UN had already built a territory-wide radio service with programming in all main languages in support of the August 1999 UN-supervised plebiscite on secession from Indonesia. The overwhelming voter verdict for independence provoked immediate bloody reprisals from Indonesian militias, resulting in thousands of deaths, a half million internal refugees, and the destruction of most public facilities and services, including radio stations and most other telecommunications systems. The UN returned in force in October with 9,000 troops and a wide-ranging mandate to create the conditions and institutions East Timor needed to secure its independence.

The UN's revived radio service, Radio UNTAET, seemed one of the more successful of these new institutions, with a large and loyal listener base. Radio was by far the dominant news medium in East Timor, and Radio UNTAET was the only station reaching most of the populace. Its straightforward, factual reporting set a tone for the emerging local print press and several new small community radio stations.

But unlike with, say, developing the courts or the parliament, there was little long-term thinking about making this de facto national broadcaster a viable indigenous institution. To the extent that it was considered at all, Radio UNTAET was conceived and managed as a means to the UNTAET mission's ends.

Any lasting UN contribution to Timorese broadcasting from Radio UNTAET was seen more as one of infrastructure than that of a living national institution. References to radio in UNTAET reports and in later accounts of the mission's achievements are conspicuous by their absence.

To its credit, the UN encouraged the adoption of legal safeguards for independent media in East Timor, along with other civil liberties protections. Timorese independence leaders publicly embraced these reforms, and press freedom guarantees were included in the new republic's constitution.

Radio was by far the dominant news medium in East Timor, and Radio UNTAET was the only station reaching most of the populace. Its straightforward, factual reporting set a tone for the emerging local print press and several new small community radio stations.

A 2002 law called for the post-independence establishment of a new East Timorese public broadcasting service, Serviço Público de Radio Difusão de Timor-Leste (Public Broadcasting Service of Timor-Leste, or PBS-TL); its name was later changed to Radio-Televisão Timor Lester, or RTTL. PBS-TL was envisioned as Radio UNTAET's de facto successor, with

a national television service as well. But the statute was drafted hastily under UN auspices, with little input from public broadcasting experts or other media development specialists. An overarching media and telecommunications law, which included the special status of the putative public broadcaster, was also drafted with UN support but never enacted.

The new broadcaster was to be governed by a five-member board, with two members nominated by the RTTL staff and the three

others selected by parliament, the president, and the prime minister, with the latter naming the board chairman. This gave the ruling party effective control over RTTL, though the broadcaster was in theory obligated to practice nonpartisanship and its director was promised editorial freedom. Crucial details on the station's financing, legal status, and relationship to government were omitted or ambiguous in the founding statute.

At the UN, it was agreed to turn over the assets (furniture, office and studio equipment, transmitters) of Radio and TV UNTAET to RTTL when UNTAET closed and East Timor gained independence. The UN's conceptual mistake, which continues to bedevil UN thinking about its broadcast operations, was to confuse this modest allotment of hardware with Radio UNTAET as a whole. A radio station is ultimately software. Its real assets are its staff—their skills, their voices, their programs, and the loyalty of their audience. And here, without operational funding or skilled technicians and managers, RTTL would be starting almost from scratch.

In contrast to most other peacekeeping stations, the East Timor radio service, as with the rest of the UN administration in Dili, was run almost wholly by expatriates. Editorial decisions were the exclusive province of UN managers. The small station was completely dependent on UN mission services and equipment, from tape recorders and telephones to computers and air conditioners. The UN provided the station with cars and drivers and security guards. UN professionals handled procurement, personnel and financial management as part

of the overall UNTAET mission. Skilled UN engineers maintained the transmission towers and relay stations needed to send the radio signal across the rugged territory. Now these managers, technicians and support staffers were suddenly gone, as was the UN money that paid for them. But Radio UNTAET and TV UNTAET were officially “handed over” to the newly established RTTL.

As predicted by media assistance professionals working in East Timor at the time, this was a formula for failure. And fail it did.

The new RTTL found itself without experienced editors, managers, administrators, and broadcast engineers, and no operating funds. Programming faltered, as did transmission capacity, and the

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station almost ceased operations entirely. As the Swiss-run Hirondelle Foundation reported in a 2003 USAID grant request for emergency support to RTTL: “When the UNTAET mission closed and the assets of what was to become the PBS were handed over, there were no

administrative and management staff in place ... Most key positions related to programming management and editorial positions were left vacant ... The journalists have no experience in journalism in a democratic society where all voices must be heard, and are easy targets for bribes or illicit incentives.”

It took several years and considerable outside help for RTTL to re-establish a credible and technically capable national broadcasting service. With advisory support from USAID and others, the first board had tried to steer a reasonably independent line. But in 2006 the government increased its direct editorial

control by replacing its three original board members with more pliant political appointees, who immediately initiated efforts to fire the existing managing director and appointed a new one with no media experience. At the same time it increased pressure on the press generally, passing a strict criminal defamation law. RTTL's news programming increasingly resembled a state information service rather than an autonomous public broadcaster. And so it has continued to date.

In 2009, RTTL was converted into a public corporation—a government dependency with some operating autonomy, but less than was originally envisioned for East Timor's main national news provider.

Making the overall media climate worse, the UN in East Timor provided legal advice and implicit institutional backing for a proposed 2009 law featuring mandatory licensing of journalists and other mechanisms for state control of the press. This included a parliament-run “media council” with authority to impose steep fines on reporters for a variety of vaguely defined transgressions. Small community radio stations were to be prohibited from forming cooperative networks that might challenge the de facto RTTL monopoly. The UN supervised drafting of the planned law exclusively in Portuguese, an official language but one not read or spoken by most Timorese nationals, including the majority of working reporters.

Protests by local journalists coupled with denunciations by Asian press freedom groups and scathing foreign media coverage prompted the government to put the bill on hold and the UN to reconsider its support.³⁸ But the episode showed that press freedom appears to be under greater threat years after independence than it was in more turbulent times when the international presence and

interest in East Timor was at its peak. It showed further that the moment when the UN was able and in principle willing to help East Timor foster independent media has also apparently long since passed. A more responsible UN transition strategy for Radio UNTAET a decade ago might have averted this outcome.

THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

On June 13, 2007, in the eastern Congolese city of Bukavu, Serge Maheshe, the top journalist at the local offices of UN-backed Radio Okapi, was walking out of a friend's home towards his UN car when two gunmen opened fire, killing him almost instantly.

Just 17 months later, on November 21, 2008, another Radio Okapi reporter, Didace Namujimbo, was also ambushed and murdered in Bukavu.

Serge Mahashe was the first journalist for any UN radio station to be killed in the line of duty. Didace Namujimbo was the second. There was little doubt among their colleagues or their national listening audience that both attacks were deliberate assassinations intended to intimidate any local broadcaster who dared to report on corruption, political intrigue, or the continuing violence against civilians by rebels and government forces alike.

The deaths shocked local UN officials and were strongly condemned by the secretary-general's office in New York.³⁹ The UN closely monitored and then protested what it considered a legally flawed and politically suspect Congolese prosecution and sentencing to death of Mahashe's alleged assassins, including two of the murdered reporter's close friends. An unusually blunt November 2009 UN report on the trial underscored the recanting of alleged

confessions by these purported accomplices, overt military interference in the proceedings, and what it called “numerous breaches” of the rights of the accused to a fair trial.⁴⁰

It was tragically unsurprising, however, that the only UN radio employees ever to be murdered in reprisal for their work were both reporters for Okapi, the most important and independent news operation in one of the largest and most turbulent countries in Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Political violence there has claimed three million lives and UN troops have been stationed for a decade in the biggest peacekeeping action in UN history, now reaching over 20,000 uniformed personnel.⁴¹ The DRC mission has itself been tarnished by its military collaboration with government forces that have been repeatedly and credibly accused of human rights abuses against unarmed civilians, including rape, torture, and homicide. MONUC, as the mission is known, was extended by the Security Council in December 2009 to May 2010, with new orders to cease joint operations with specific national army units, and to protect civilians more effectively.⁴²

Radio Okapi reported openly on all of this. In any analysis of UN peacekeeping radio ventures, Radio Okapi—named for the giraffe-like animal that serves as an unofficial national symbol—stands out as not just the biggest but probably also the most vital to keep on the air in some form after the peacekeepers

eventually leave. Since it first went on the air in early 2002, it has become a cherished national asset in a country with very few such respected and unifying institutions.

Like the ten-year-long MONUC peacekeeping mission itself, Okapi has from the start been larger, more complex, and more consistently in danger than any comparable UN operation. The national reporting and broadcasting environment remains extraordinarily daunting, in terms of both the risks to reporters and the sheer scale and difficulty of the terrain. Aside from the two slain Okapi reporters, at least seven other

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DRC journalists have been murdered since 1992 in cases believed to be linked to their work, and death threats against Okapi reporters escalated in the past year.⁴³ Yet Okapi has maintained a staff of more than 200 throughout the DRC, in eight provincial studios as well as in its UN-protected headquarters in Kinshasa, the capital. Its transmissions reach most of the Congolese population through

10 regional FM frequencies, about 20 repeater stations, short-wave broadcasts, and partnerships with 27 local radio stations across the country.

The DRC has no other comparable radio service. One reason is that Okapi, uniquely in the Congolese media, is financed entirely with foreign donor funds. Operating costs have been reported internally by the UN at approximately \$14 million annually, of which the UN directly provides about \$9 million. This is almost certainly an underestimate, not taking fully

into account the real expense or market value of the UN logistical, telecommunications, and security support on which Okapi depends.

No other UN station has reached even half this size, with most operating with barely a tenth of Okapi's personnel and budget. Yet UN officials concluded early on that the investment in Okapi was well worth it. To cite one critical example: without Okapi's vast national audience and its credibility with that audience, they say, it would have been much harder—if not impossible—for the UN to achieve the massive participation in the DRC's 2006 voter registration drive and subsequent national elections, both firsts in the country's 40 years of independence.

What makes Radio Okapi stand out beyond its sheer scale is its unusual structure and editorial character. Okapi began as an uncharacteristically bold UN experiment in local broadcast news and soon became both a model for peacekeeping radio and an object lesson in the perils of UN policy ambiguity and deferred transition planning.⁴⁴

In contrast to other mission-run stations, Okapi was launched with personnel and management responsibility shared by or divided between MONUC and the Hironnelle Foundation, a small nongovernmental media development organization. This hybrid UN-NGO model has made Okapi the success that it objectively is, with much more of a defined national brand identity than has been the case with other UN radio outlets, as well as a stronger in-house commitment

to local newsgathering. As an international NGO, the Hironnelle Foundation could recruit and hire local staff and international advisors more quickly and economically than was possible under cumbersome UN personnel procedures. And Hironnelle offered its own newsroom management and training expertise, which MONUC lacked.

In an equally important departure from standard UN radio operating procedures, Okapi was launched with an explicit UN commitment to seek a continuation of the radio service under alternative management and financial arrangements after MONUC's eventual closure.

The UN formally stated in a pact with Hironnelle that it would consult with both Hironnelle and the government to “determine the most appropriate manner of ensuring that the radio station remains in the DRC at the end of MONUC's mandate.”

But there were inherent difficulties sharing these key responsibilities, leading

to tensions that persist today, including disagreements on possible structures and leadership of Okapi's post-MONUC future.

At the beginning, the division of labor between Hironnelle and DPKO seemed straightforward. Hironnelle was assigned responsibility for direct, day-to-day editorial management, including the hiring and payment of a national reporting and broadcasting staff to be funded by non-UN donors also recruited by Hironnelle. The UN would provide technical support, security, transportation,

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electricity, and the use of relevant parts of its own national telecommunications infrastructure—and, most important, its critical institutional affiliation. The direct UN contribution, including more than a hundred Okapi employees on the direct MONUC payroll, has been unofficially estimated by MONUC at \$8 million to \$10 million yearly.

Hirondelle, meanwhile, has nearly a hundred Radio Okapi journalists, producers, editors and technicians on its own Okapi payroll, paid largely by funding from European governments. (Hirondelle reported to the UN that it receives donor contributions of about \$5 million annually for Okapi, though neither Hirondelle nor the UN provides public information about Okapi's income or expenditures.) The Hirondelle contribution includes Okapi's top managers, who are obligated by foundation policy to enforce politically independent editorial standards at the station.

The MONUC public information department, under the direct supervision of the secretary-general's special representative, the senior UN official in the country, retained ultimate editorial control under the original agreement, however.

When Okapi was on the air, which was essentially all of the time, the UN's own reputation was on the line, UN officials reasoned. Without direct UN oversight and support, moreover, Okapi reporters would have been more vulnerable to threats and attack, as would the station's physical installations. And the UN affiliation gave Okapi special credibility with international media. Wire service reports from the country regularly credit "UN-backed Okapi radio" as the primary source for a local news item, with the implicit recognition of Okapi as an accurate and authoritative information provider. As MONUC is acutely aware, this

also places an implicit onus on the UN should Okapi's information prove to be otherwise.

In the event of any major editorial disagreement between MONUC superiors and Okapi's Hirondelle-hired news chiefs, the original memorandum of understanding with Okapi was clear: the UN would prevail. Okapi was still a UN radio service, not an independent or national or NGO operation. Yet the division of editorial labor gave the UN useful plausible deniability when Okapi's reports were not to the government's liking, as was often the case.

Still, there have been inevitable editorial clashes. One example was the continuing challenge of reporting on Jean-Pierre Bemba, the powerful warlord, former vice-president, and defeated presidential candidate in the 2006 elections who then angrily rejected the vote's outcome and roused supporters to violent protest. Bemba was later indicted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes by rebel troops under his command.

Okapi, like other local and international media organizations, interviewed Bemba as a newsmaker and leading political figure. But the UN saw Bemba as a dangerous challenge to its own authority and the country's stability, especially in the capital area. As a consequence, Okapi was asked by UN officials to edit or delay broadcasting of Bemba's taped remarks due to fears of their possibly inflammatory impact. Only through Okapi could Bemba's words reach a wide national audience. Okapi editors reluctantly acceded to these requests, postponing the airing of interviews.

The UN's concern was not only or even primarily the potentially disruptive consequences of Bemba's statements; it was at least equally that whatever the interview's ultimate effect, the UN would

bear responsibility for having aired it. For Okapi, the interviews were not only legitimate news but a competitive necessity, as Bemba was also speaking to foreign broadcasting services, which could be heard locally by shortwave and other means.

This conflict epitomized the inherent tensions between UN public information imperatives and the independent journalism ethos championed by Hironnelle. Frictions persist, as Okapi reports on the credible accusations of brutal human rights violations, including the rape and murder of civilians, by DRC army units working in tandem with UN peacekeepers in continuing conflict zones in the north and east. The UN peacekeepers themselves have been accused of sexual assault and other abuses. To the UN's credit, there has been little apparent interference with Okapi's news reports on these highly sensitive issues. (Neither Hironnelle nor MONUC will comment publicly on any internal discussions about Okapi's reporting.)

Hironnelle then assumed primary responsibility for charting a post-MONUC future for Okapi, either through commercial ownership, continued donor support, turning it into a nonprofit institution, or some combination of the three. No viable transition plan has yet been put forward, however. And the UN has its own instincts and preferences on the matter, and no obligation to accept recommendations from Hironnelle, the DRC government, or any other interested outsiders.

Any transition plan for Okapi should be informed by a thorough review of the overall national media environment, including broadcast regulations, economic structures, right-to-information guarantees, and the countrywide information infrastructure (everything from cellphones to newspaper circulation). The best UN tool for such a diagnosis is the IPDC-

UNESCO media indicators framework.

The IPDC committee is comprised of an ideologically diverse cross-section of UN member-states, and the new media indicators framework therefore represents a consensus UN-endorsed view of regulatory best practices and media assessment touchstones.

The basic options for Okapi are clear:

- *Transformation into a nonpartisan, nonprofit public service broadcaster, which would require government support for a legislative framework and some form of public financing (whole or partial), yet also a government commitment to non-interference in news programming and other content:* The UN can base its support for such a transition on institutionally-endorsed UN guidelines for public broadcasting, as the UN Peacebuilding Office and Peacebuilding Fund are doing in the analogous post-mission UN radio transition in Sierra Leone. The UN would be required legally and politically to secure approval from the national government. Yet few observers of the DRC would expect a state-backed broadcaster to maintain its independence from government policies, personalities, press-office "guidance" and other such pressures. President Joseph Kabila's administration has been accused of increasing intimidation of local media, including tolerance or collusion in physical attacks and indirect commercial controls over private broadcasters.⁴⁵
- *Sale or transfer to commercial broadcasters, linked to some public-service pledge to continue Okapi's commitment to nonpartisan national news:* Many regional media experts

consider the commercial option to be the best long-term guarantor of Okapi's independence, and perhaps its very survival. Earnings from advertising sales could be significant; no other media outlet approaches Okapi's audience reach, and the DRC is one of the continent's biggest potential consumer markets. There is no guarantee, however, that commercial proprietors would maintain any initial commitment to editorial independence, or would not themselves become partisan political players. And for the UN, conversion to private ownership is almost insurmountably problematic. The UN cannot "sell" its publicly owned assets to a private party, nor can it enter into commercial partnerships with profit-making ventures.

Even if these constraints could be overcome, how would the UN decide which private party to favor? The highest bidder, or the bidder most likely to

keep Okapi professionally and editorially sound? If the latter, how would that be determined? And, should such a transfer go forward, would it be fair to other local private media companies to suddenly face competition in the ad market from an internationally subsidized giant with an unrivaled national transmission network, audience, and work force? Finally, how would even high-minded private owners avoid a market-driven "race to the bottom," with audience-pleasing music, talk, and sports displacing costly and controversial newsgathering?

Many regional media experts consider the commercial option to be the best long-term guarantor of Okapi's independence, and perhaps its very survival.

- *Placing Okapi under the umbrella of a new national NGO, with possible linkage to international NGOs and/or aid agencies:* The nonprofit, nongovernmental option is in many ways the most attractive, but it presupposes that such an NGO could be willed into being, with a nonpartisan, multiethnic ethos comparable to the UN's, as well as a commitment to professional journalism and the skills to fulfill that commitment. For the UN to support such an institution it would have to be genuinely national in character, technically competent, and not perceived as a threat by government authorities. And even if a start-up Okapi NGO met all those requirements, there are no guarantees that in the

long term it would be any more immune to partisan bias or political intimidation than a private entrepreneur. Or that it would endure at all, with its probable dependence on fickle donors and an underpaid and often transient NGO staff. A better alternative,

perhaps, could be a nonprofit media house based in a university or some other established national institution not beholden to the government of the day. But that would first require building and testing such a partnership. Strong local leadership and broadcasting journalism expertise would be key.

- *Creating a hybrid commercial and nonprofit structure, with an independent Okapi news agency serving a network of commercial and community stations that would underwrite and broadcast its reports:* A nonprofit

model for the news service would facilitate additional donor subsidy and, arguably, editorial independence. It would also be far smaller in staff and budget than the current massive Okapi structure, with its satellite stations and responsibility for a national transmission infrastructure. The network stations could each evolve independently, including with development of their own local news capacity, which would provide content to the national Okapi network while benefiting from Okapi's expertise and resources.

- *Continuing UN backing, perhaps through UNDP, in a post-peacekeeping era several years from now:* Preferred by some observers, this option assumes that local UN influence will remain strong for years after the end of MONUC's mandate, due to the DRC's inherent fragility, volatility, and geopolitical importance to all of sub-Saharan Africa. This scenario pragmatically recognizes the political and logistical benefits of UN affiliation and the difficulties facing local independent alternatives. Yet it contradicts the UN's own goal of assisting the creation of viable democratic institutions in post-conflict countries, rather than perpetuating dependence on international aid and tutelage. It is a temporary solution at best—though temporary in the DRC could mean another five or ten years. Continued UN backing for Okapi after MONUC may seem the best practical alternative, but it would just postpone Okapi's inevitable reckoning with reality. It could also make an eventual transfer to local control even more difficult. The UN's best opportunity to broker and aid such a transition is

while its in-country presence remains robust, not after it draws down.

MONUC's mandate has been extended yet again by the Security Council, until May 2010, and the UN is expected to keep peacekeepers in the country for at least a few years more. The time for Okapi to begin its post-UN evolution is now, however. The MONUC mission is increasingly focused on the vast, violent east and north of the country, far from Kinshasa, the capital, where Okapi and MONUC are headquartered. The government would like to see MONUC restructured, renamed, and permanently relocated northwards before the 2011 presidential elections. The Security Council wants to restrict UN involvement with national army units implicated in systematic human rights abuses. The UN peacekeeping infrastructure will diminish accordingly, beginning in the capital, and Okapi could take advantage of this coming new semblance of normality to begin its transformation from a UN enterprise into a national institution.

In the meantime, the first step toward transition may be reconciling the often seemingly incompatible subcultures of MONUC and Hironnelle.

Okapi seems to be seen by Hironnelle as a project only incidentally dependent on the UN, and journalistically pure in a way a UN news operation could never be. The UN mission chiefs, meanwhile, consider Okapi one of their proudest achievements, a tangible contribution to nation-building that without UN support would have never been possible. These internal cultural conflicts are to some extent unavoidable, and disagreements are usually acknowledged and managed by both sides in ways that contribute to Okapi's strengths. But real tensions remain, presenting a barrier to the joint conception and realization of a viable transition plan.

At UN headquarters in 2008, the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Public Information sponsored the screening of a Hirondelle Foundation film about Radio Okapi and a follow-up panel discussion with UN and Hirondelle officials. The movie began with the portrait of a bright, brave young Okapi reporter going on her rounds in the Congolese countryside, chauffeured by a UN driver in a big, white UN Toyota Landcruiser. The image inadvertently underlined the paradox of a UN news operation in a peacekeeping zone, with the reporter clearly committed to journalistic independence and yet visibly dependent on an armed international force for mobility, security, and even social status. Yet the film's narration portrayed Okapi as a seemingly independent entity that would serve the Congolese long after UN troops and diplomats left their barbed-wired compounds and choppered away into a post-mission sunset.

The DPKO officials watching the film grew increasingly irked.

In the discussion that followed they openly voiced irritation at what they saw as deliberate obfuscation of Okapi's UN identity and UN support system, and an unfair depiction of MONUC as some remote, transient, bureaucratic entity in a country where more than a hundred peacekeepers have been killed in action and where their ten-year deployment made Okapi possible in the first place. Okapi's Swiss NGO advisors countered that they see long-term benefits in downplaying Okapi's UN association and emphasizing instead its Congolese identity, as does Okapi's own Congolese staff.

The great achievements of this UN-Hirondelle collaboration should not be underestimated or squandered. Hirondelle's leadership gave Okapi its sense of journalism as a vocation. MONUC's sponsorship gave Okapi its sense of nonpartisan nation-building mission. It is a powerful combination, one that neither the UN nor its Swiss partner would have achieved on its own.

Equally critical has been international donor support, also a result of combined UN-NGO efforts. This outside funding will remain essential if Okapi is to retain its ambitious national newsgathering operation. But the pool of available international funds will shrink, assuming MONUC's long-term success

in peacekeeping and the DRC's increasing stability.

Okapi is already the functional equivalent of a national public service broadcaster, and PSBs everywhere require public subsidy. In post-conflict Africa, public funds are to a large extent donor funds: foreign aid

provides nearly half of most national budgets in sub-Saharan Africa, with percentages rising higher in war-wracked countries like the DRC. Virtually all public services in the poorest African countries are dependent on foreign support, and most major donors have pledged to maintain or increase these levels of aid through 2015 or beyond. There is no reason for nonprofit media operating in the public interest in post-conflict Africa to be excluded from this dependence on foreign assistance.

That is not to say that there are no local sources of potential revenue for a public broadcaster.

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In South Africa, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) gets most of its income from advertising, a formula devised in theory to make it less dependent on government funds, and hence government influence. While the DRC is far from South Africa's levels of market development, it boasts a growing retail economy that requires and can pay for advertising platforms. Corporate subsidy along the PBS and NPR model in the United States is also an option, especially if the country attracts more multinational investment.

Excessive reliance on commercial advertising can be unfair, however, to private competitors who are neither inheriting a national transmission network nor receiving major funding from international donors. You can't have it both ways: either you are a nonprofit public service broadcaster, with the attendant social responsibilities and fiscal privileges that implies, or you are a private business enterprise like all the rest.

Private philanthropy can also help. But the scale of Okapi, like that of MONUC and the DRC itself, requires resources dwarfing most current foundation budgets for all media assistance in Africa. The funds will have to come mainly from official sources, including from EU and U.S. governance and economic development funds for Africa. Bilateral assistance is where the real money is. But in contrast to the otherwise defensible trend of channeling foreign aid into direct budgetary support, aid to the media should go directly to the media without passing through government intermediaries.

Much as with donor support for MONUC itself, and for the multi-billion-dollar DRC elections, the

case can be made that investment in Okapi and professional free media in the DRC generally is a *regional* necessity, as many consider the DRC's evolution into a functioning democratic state a prerequisite for stability and progress throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The UN and its major peacekeeping contributors could not only make that case, but also provide up-front funding for its near-term implementation.

Assuming that a scaled-back network-based Okapi concentrating on national news could function on less than \$10 million a year, and assuming further that some local income could be generated through fees and contributions, a multi-donor investment of \$40-50 million could guarantee an independent Okapi's survival for another six or seven years.

That may sound expensive, but not when compared to the huge sums already invested by the international community in the stabilization of the DRC: at least \$13 billion since 1999, with a further \$1.3

billion already allotted for 2010.⁴⁶ Okapi represents just fractions of pennies on the peacekeeping dollar, but its demise would set back the cause for which peacekeepers have labored in the DRC for the past decade.

SIERRA LEONE

When UN peacekeepers were first dispatched to Sierra Leone in 1999, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations did what is now routine for these missions: it set up its own radio station. Within months, UN Radio was broadcasting across the length

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and breadth of the country, 24 hours a day, providing Sierra Leone with a reliable nonpartisan national news and information service for the first time in its recent history.

Ten years later, UN Radio was still on the air and still the country's dominant broadcaster, but it was slated to close for good in early 2010. The station's life had been temporarily extended beyond the end of the UN's final Sierra Leone peacekeeping mission in 2008—the first time that the UN had authorized and financed continued broadcasting from a DPKO radio outlet after the peacekeepers had departed.

The reason for this exception to the peacekeeping rule was that the UN peacekeepers were under specific orders: the Security Council had explicitly requested the UN mission in Sierra Leone to help build “independent and capable public radio capacity” in the country, the first time the UN's governing body had issued such a media development directive.⁴⁷

To fulfill this mandate, UN Radio was kept on the air as part of a planned UN-backed transition from both the UN and government radio services to a new public broadcaster with an autonomous board and a commitment to nonpartisanship. The UN also provided requested advice on governance and administrative structures that would comply with internationally accepted principles of independent public broadcasting—and arranged for transitional financing from the new UN Peacebuilding Fund if the new broadcaster met those broad criteria.⁴⁸

At the end of 2009, following two years of discussions with the UN, national media stakeholders, and others, and after a few false starts in parliament, the government presented a bill to abolish its traditional state broadcasting service and create a new Sierra Leone Public Broadcasting Corporation, with a board elected by a cross-section of civil

society groups and a charter pledging fealty to nonpartisanship and professionalism.⁴⁹

The government backed away from earlier pledges to cede full managerial power to an independent board. President Ernest Bai Koroma reserved the right to name both the board chair and the corporation's director—though under recommendations from the board and with parliamentary approval, and with provisions for the director's operational autonomy, including a fixed four-year term. As a sign of good faith, President Koroma let it be informally known that he planned to appoint as board chairman a respected opposition party figure and former journalist who served as information minister under the previous administration. The bill passed in parliament unanimously in late December 2009, and the new Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) was slated to take to the air on April 27, 2010, the 49th anniversary of Sierra Leone's independence.

This experiment, if SLBC proves reasonably independent in practice, would meet the Security Council's original requirements for UN support and set a possible precedent for other peacekeeping radio transitions. Yet this will be difficult. Few governments anywhere have voluntarily relinquished control of a state broadcasting service; such reforms are usually the consequence of involuntary regime change. Though Sierra Leone's government had quickly embraced the concept in principle—helped by the UN pledge to provide the new broadcaster with its own studio and transmission equipment as well as financial and technical support—it was also concentrating on what promises to be a closely contested 2011 re-election bid. Giving up the long-established state radio service seemed to some governing-party officials like voluntary unilateral disarmament, with only ephemeral international plaudits in return.

The UN, meanwhile, was in new thematic terrain, with little experience in long-term media development and a small civilian peacebuilding staff of about a hundred who had inherited various ambitious nation-building obligations from peacekeeping missions that had more than 18,000 personnel at their peak.

The absence of any established UN policy for UN radio management or transitions made the task more difficult for the local UN hierarchy. While UN support was predicated on the new broadcaster's independence, there is no agreed UN system or arbiter to verify compliance, and no clear fallback for the UN should the government prove reluctant to let go of the broadcaster's reins. The UN has provided crucial support for nominally independent but presidentially controlled electoral bodies and anti-corruption commissions in Sierra Leone, officials in government and the UN pointed out. Why should tax-supported broadcasting be any different? Was there any written UN policy stating that "independent" radio necessarily meant "nonpartisan" and/or "nongovernmental" radio?

The stakes were high, as UN officials and Sierra Leonean authorities were acutely aware.

In March 2009, post-war political tensions still simmering after eight years of fragile peace boiled over in downtown Freetown, as youth mobs from the two main parties clashed in the streets and attacked each others' offices. The headquarters of the opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) was soon erupting in flames. One target of the rampage was the studio of the SLPP radio station, which had infuriated loyalists of the governing All People's Congress (APC) with what were seen as unbalanced and provocative partisan attacks. The APC had its own party radio station, which SLPP followers found equally offensive, skewed, and inflammatory.

It was the worst outbreak of political violence since the war years, and radio was in the middle of it. The government responded by ordering both party stations temporarily closed until their ultimate fate would be decided by media regulatory authorities.⁵⁰

In a UN-mediated accord designed to prevent further partisan violence, the two parties called for a series of confidence-building measures, including the creation of a nonpartisan public broadcasting service that would make party radio stations theoretically unnecessary. That thesis will now be tested, with the new broadcaster poised to begin operations in early 2010. Political leaders and UN officials in the intraparty negotiations were highly aware that the only neutral, nationally trusted source of independent news about the clashes and their aftermath was the UN's own radio station—and that station was scheduled to be closed within months.

The local UN radio service was originally authorized in 1999 to protect the first United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), to explain the peacekeepers' mandate and goals to the Sierra Leonean people, and to help end a conflict that had left tens of thousands dead, scores of thousands disfiguringly injured, and two million homeless. The station would prove equally critical to subsequent disarmament and reconciliation initiatives and, in its most significant early test, the 2002 contest for the presidency, an election that local and foreign observers said could not have been conducted freely and fairly without UN Radio's nonpartisan news coverage and political debate programs.

Crucial to its appeal was that UN radio programming was the product not of its tiny international managerial team, but of Sierra Leonean professionals hired and trained by

the UN, and local partners in community radio and the national university, who collaborated on election coverage and provided their own news programs to the station.⁵¹

On the air and inside the studios, UN Radio was very much a Sierra Leonean enterprise. Most programming was in English and Krio, the distinctive national Creole vernacular born in the melting pot of Freetown, but UN Radio also used the major tribal languages: Mende, Temne, Limba and Kono. With its five FM transmission towers and rebroadcasting through community stations outside the towers' range, UN Radio reached more than three-quarters of the nation's territory and at least four-fifths of its population. No other radio service covered even half the country.

In other post-conflict countries, DPKO radio stations had played equally invaluable roles in peacebuilding and democratization. What was unusual in the case of Sierra Leone was that UN Radio's importance was quickly and publicly recognized by external as well as domestic observers. There was wide concern that should UN Radio simply cease operations when the peacekeepers left, as had always been the case elsewhere, it would leave a potentially dangerous media vacuum. This concern was shared by the government and local UN officials after the 2003 elections and communicated directly to Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Though the government still had its then 70-year-old state broadcaster, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting System (SLBS), it had lost much of its production and transmission capacity

during the war years, when its Freetown studios and satellite up-country facilities were plundered by rebels and looters. Its broadcasts reached only about a third of the national territory, and perhaps half the population.

Professionally, SLBS remained an avowedly pro-government and a technically pedestrian operation, saddled with a dispirited, underpaid but oversized civil service workforce of whom only a minority regularly reported to work. Much of its audience had long since been lost to UN Radio, which was considered more reliable in its news programming, some of it produced at the national university's journalism school, and more polished and entertaining in its music

and talk shows. The UN Radio staff was a tenth the size of SLBS's nominal roster, but the UN was able to recruit superior talent—some of it from SLBS—by paying better and offering a bigger audience and greater opportunity for professional development.

Satellite SLBS outlets in provincial towns were still often the best and sometimes the only source of local news and features, but these community stations received little in the way of financial or technical support from SLBS headquarters. And they also faced new competition, locally and nationally. The government was liberalizing control of the airwaves and licensing private broadcasters, which further diminished SLBS's mass audience and appeal. There were just two independent radio stations in the country in 2000; by 2009 that number had risen past 30.

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Many opposition politicians openly disdained SLBS, which was inherited from the British as the voice of the colonial administration and had been run since independence as a unit of the Ministry of Information and, usually, the mouthpiece of the presidency. A BBC-modeled period of greater professionalism a generation earlier left a legacy of respected local news presenters, but that experiment was another victim of the civil war.

Resentment of SLBS favoritism towards the governing party prompted demands from the opposition for its own radio outlet—demands that would lead to the provisional licensing of zealously partisan stations run by each party, a soon-regretted experiment that threatened to reopen the schisms that had plunged Sierra Leone into civil war.

In the run-up to the 2007 elections, the then-opposition APC made the case to Sierra Leone’s Independent Media Commission, which was responsible for ensuring fair media access to all parties in elections periods, that the APC required its own radio station to counteract SLBS pro-government programming. The commissioners reluctantly agreed, authorizing a provisional license, despite their awareness that it is extremely rare in functioning democracies for political parties to own and operate broadcast outlets. Fast-forward to the post-election period: the APC had won, and the newly-in-opposition SLPP made the salient argument that since the APC now had *two* stations at its command—the

new APC station and the old state-run SLBS—it was only fair that the SLPP be granted a radio license as well. The media commission felt it had no alternative but to authorize a second party station. Throughout this period, as before, UN Radio remained the only neutral national forum for both party viewpoints.

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posed to peacekeeping by imbalanced or openly vitriolic broadcasting, as the UN had so painfully learned in Rwanda. Sierra Leone was a foreign policy priority for the United Kingdom, a permanent council power and a leading peacekeeping policymaker, raising the stakes for the council and the UN leadership both.

In August 2005, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1620, mandating the creation of a successor peacebuilding mission in Sierra Leone as of January 2006. The resolution explicitly directed the new United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) mission to help provide Sierra Leone with its own “independent and capable public radio capacity” as part of its promotion of a “culture of peace, dialogue, and participation in critical national issues.” This marked the first time that the council had officially acknowledged the importance of professional,

impartial local news media to the success of a UN peacekeeping mission and ordered a UN mission to make independent media development a democratization priority.

Yet this was also a classic unfunded mandate. The Security Council directive was not accompanied by any targeted UN budget for the creation of independent public radio capacity in Sierra Leone. Nor were there instructions from the UN in New York to the UN mission in Sierra Leone about what precisely the Security Council meant by “independent and capable” or how and when Resolution 1620 would be deemed to be achieved. No peacekeeping mission was equipped to undertake such democratization tasks on its own. DPKO could call on other UN departments and agencies for support in elections management, for example, but there was no established precedent for media development.

Nowhere does the UN have more influence, obligations, and resources for development than in countries emerging from peacekeeping interventions. The Sierra Leone radio case was a rare instance where UN media development support was both required and requested. But there is no structural linkage between a peacekeeping mission and UNESCO, which is the designated “normative” body for UN media policy but has few media development specialists stationed in the field. There are closer but still indirect ties to UNDP, which handles the UN’s democratic governance assistance, and has a permanent staff in almost all developing nations. A peacekeeping mission can choose to seek the policy advice and support of these agencies but is under no obligation to do so, nor does it need to heed whatever counsel it receives.

Still, the Security Council directive was clear. For guidance purposes, there were

well-established UN definitions of “public” and “public service” broadcasting, such as UNESCO’s commonly used formulation: “Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) is broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public. It is neither commercial nor state-owned, [and is] free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces.”⁵² Other UN-sponsored press freedom texts also differentiate “public” from “state” broadcasting, with the former defined as nonpartisan and autonomous, usually through the supervision of a diverse and independent board.

The African Union had also adopted a clear if aspirational definition of public broadcasting, which it said should be editorially independent, with nationwide transmission capacity and protections from political or economic interference.⁵³

Even more relevant, Sierra Leone’s own Independent Media Commission, which oversees all broadcasters in the country, had its own similar rules for non-commercial, nonpartisan public radio and television, outlined in its Media Code: “A public radio/television station is one set up by legislation, accountable to the public through an independent board, protected against interference of a political or economic nature, with editorial independence and adequately funded in a manner that protects it from arbitrary interference. Its transmission should cover the whole country and its programmes should be politically balanced.”⁵⁴

In contrast to commercial and community broadcasters, a public radio and television does not pay for rights for a broadcast frequency, nor for license renewal, under Sierra Leone’s stated regulations. The Independent Media Commission neither requires a public radio outlet to be state-owned nor precludes state

ownership, stating only that the broadcaster must be managed independently and apolitically, per the Media Code's guidelines. There still are no local broadcasters meeting the commission's standards for this public status, however.

The UN commitment to UN Radio's eventual transformation into a national public broadcasting service was reiterated in a report to the Security Council by the secretary-general in November 2006, which stated: "As a first step towards its strategic goal of transferring United Nations Radio to national ownership, UNIOSIL plans to convert it into an independent public access radio station, through a project managed by the Swiss Hironnelle Foundation, which provides for the production of news and information programmes and journalism training in partnership with Fourah Bay College, University of Freetown."⁵⁵

The report's reference was to a start-up project by Hironnelle, a frequent UN broadcasting partner in conflict zones, to create a student-staffed radio service based in the university's School of Communication, which would provide morning and evening news programming to UN Radio as well as the university's own small FM station.

The Hironnelle-Fourah Bay "Cotton Tree News" went on the air in early 2007 and quickly established a reputation for professionalism and enterprise, under the expert tutelage of a former head of BBC's Africa service. The Swiss NGO retained full managerial and editorial control, with the UN broadcasting Cotton Tree News

to a national audience in prime morning and evening time slots. The partnership offered a potential media development model for other UN radio stations, especially with Cotton Tree's roots in a respected national university. But the donor-financed Hironnelle service was managed entirely separately from UN radio and had no plans, funds or mandate, backed by the UN or otherwise, for conversion into an independent national public broadcasting operation, either on its own or in conjunction with UN radio.

Despite the Council mandate for post-peacekeeping public broadcasting in Sierra Leone, and the secretary-general's reiterations of that commitment, there was still no dedicated

Despite the Council mandate for post-peacekeeping public broadcasting in Sierra Leone, and the secretary-general's reiterations of that commitment, there was still no dedicated UN funding for this task, nor designated UN leadership for a radio transition plan.

UN funding for this task, nor designated UN leadership for a radio transition plan. And there were other priorities for the UNIOSIL team, including support in 2007 for the second national election under the UN's watch. Moreover, DPKO was never asked nor equipped to go into the

long-term media development business.

Yet UNIOSIL recognized that the UN had an obligation and an opportunity in Sierra Leone to help local partners build a viable nonpartisan successor to UN Radio. And if this were done successfully, it could provide a model for similar transitions in other post-conflict countries with peacekeeping radio services, such as neighboring Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.

The 2007 elections again validated the need for such a service: UN radio provided the platform

for national campaign coverage, including debates between the presidential candidates and dispatches from polling places around the country with real-time results. The governing party was narrowly but convincingly defeated, setting the stage for a peaceful transfer of power to the opposition—a huge political step forward for the war-scarred country. Though the vote count was close, the live radio reports gave the tally immediate credibility, and the results were never challenged.

The second successful national election under UN oversight marked the end of the emergency phase of the international intervention in Sierra Leone. A near-decade of UN peacekeeping in Sierra Leone was slated to end with the pre-announced closure of UNIOSIL in 2008, and UN Radio was to shut down along with it. No serious planning had yet taken place, however, to provide Sierra Leone with some kind of successor radio service that would fulfill the Security Council mandate for public radio capacity.

With time running out, UNIOSIL decided to consider some alternatives of its own. Before the 2007 election, UNDP’s Democratic Governance unit drafted an analysis of UN Radio’s assets and different transition options, in consultation with media development NGOs, Sierra Leonean stakeholders, and UNIOSIL’s public information department. At the same time, UNDP and UNESCO convened an informal interagency task force to examine broader policy and funding questions and specific ways of supporting the UN Radio transition process.

Also consulted was the new UN Peacebuilding Commission, which was linked in turn to the UN’s new Peacebuilding Fund, an experiment aimed at bridging the financial and technical support gaps habitually left by the closure of peacekeeping missions. The Peacebuilding

Fund, guided by a group of donor countries in New York and hybrid UN-governmental committees in the field, was launched in 2006 with two pilot countries getting \$35 million each: Burundi and Sierra Leone.

Media was never considered in the conception or ultimate UN marching orders for the Peacebuilding Fund. Yet the Fund’s founding mandate was to “address critical funding gaps and provide support to interventions of direct and immediate relevance to peacebuilding processes” and “provide catalytic funding and encourage more sustained funding mechanisms and engagement by other agencies and donors”—criteria that a post-peacekeeping radio project would satisfy.⁵⁶ Support for public broadcasting in Sierra Leone would also set a useful precedent for Peacebuilding Fund support for comparable radio projects in other post-peacekeeping countries.

The UNIOSIL public information department convened further discussions in Freetown with UN radio partners and other stakeholders, including the Sierra Leone Journalists Association, the Independent Media Commission, and the Ministry of Information. The consultations yielded other scenarios and structures for independent public radio in Sierra Leone, including a new NGO radio consortium and an expansion of the university’s Cotton Tree News service. All the proposals discussed were based on the same premises:

- Radio remained the dominant national communications medium;
- Journalists, politicians, academics, and private broadcasters concurred that UN Radio had become the most trusted source of national news and information—a view documented by BBC data;

- UN Radio and its partners had demonstrated in the 2007 election season—as in past periods of intense political activity and potential volatility—that professional, nonpartisan news and public affairs broadcasting throughout the country is indispensable for national reconciliation and democratization;
- UN Radio’s newsgathering standards, including in its election-reporting partnership with the BBC-World Service Trust, Search for Common Ground, and the Independent Radio Network of private and community stations, had set new and widely emulated norms for ethics, accuracy, and balance in Sierra Leonean radio journalism;
- UN Radio’s reliance on local staff and local programming demonstrated the existing professional capacity in the country for a successor radio service with an national rather than UN identity;
- UN Radio’s closure without any equivalent successor service could threaten the country’s democratization and political stability.

Following the 2007 election, UNIOSIL and UNDP consulted with the new government’s Ministry of Information about options for SLBS reform, including an ambitious plan to rebuild and restructure the dysfunctional broadcaster as an autonomous public corporation.

Over the next year, the Ministry of Information would develop draft legislation with UN input to dissolve SLBS and create a new Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) with power vested not in the executive branch but in an independently elected board of civil society

and media groups, with some guaranteed public funding and a charter committing the station to nonpartisanship and a public service ethos. The Peacebuilding Fund approved a transitional grant of \$900,000 to the planned new broadcaster, contingent on the passage of legislation consistent with the principles of the draft bill. The parameters of a transition plan were now in place, with UN radio to remain on the air until the new broadcaster took its place.

Until—or if. Introduction of the bill in parliament was continually delayed, due to unspecified cabinet misgivings and “technical revisions.” A planned autumn 2008 vote was postponed until early 2009, and then postponed again. Rumors that the putative broadcaster’s promised independence would be compromised with presidential controls were officially denied, but independent journalists were increasingly skeptical about the project. In the summer a new version of the bill was hastily introduced to parliament with an amendment reinstating the president’s power to select the new broadcaster’s chief executive, an amendment the opposition claimed not to have seen after it voted to pass the bill.

After public protests by national and regional journalism groups and private expressions of concern by UN officials, the government agreed to revise and resubmit the bill before its signing into law by the president. The local UN mission proposed what it considered a reasonable compromise: let the president designate the board chair instead, though with ratification by parliament. The final bill that was resubmitted and unanimously passed by the parliament in December kept both provisions: the president will name the board chair and also the director-general, though the latter would be based on recommendations from the board and guaranteed a four-year term. The UN office in Sierra Leone quietly signaled its

support of the new SLBC terms and promised to disburse aid from the Peacebuilding Fund.

The continuing delays and legal changes demonstrated the limits of UN leverage in Sierra Leone, or any other member state. While presidential control over top appointments doesn't conform with accepted UN or African Union definitions of "independent" broadcasting, it is not unique: examples of such executive authority over state broadcasting governance, either direct or indirect, whole or partial, include Lithuanian National Radio and Television, South Korea's Korean Broadcasting Service,⁵⁷ and the increasingly independent and professional Ghana Broadcasting Corporation.⁵⁸

Ultimately, as UN officials would properly stress, any such reform was a sovereign matter for Sierra Leone and its government to decide.

The UN would provide continued support, however, only if the new broadcaster met the original Security Council standards of "independent" and "public." UN aid,

aside from the UN radio equipment and the grant from the Peacebuilding Fund, would likely trigger additional bilateral backing from European donors. Without UN endorsement of the new public radio enterprise, such additional support was unlikely to materialize.

At least initially, international support is essential to the success of any public broadcaster in a post-peacekeeping country. Such support would be both affordable and wise, given the international community's longstanding involvement in the country and continuing regional unrest. Though its war is over, Sierra Leone remains one of the poorest

countries in the world—ranked second from the bottom in UNDP's Human Development Index—with porous borders, unstable neighbors, and high potential for further volatility.

For the general public, reliable, responsibly relayed information without some foreign provenance or subsidy remains a scarce commodity. Private news media, though growing and improving, remain limited in their ability to perform a Fourth Estate watchdog role due to insufficient training, weak ethical standards, economic vulnerability, and some repressive legal structures, including harsh criminal libel laws.

Newspapers and television reach no more than a fifth of the capital city population, it is estimated, and beyond Freetown have almost no audience at all.

Little of the local news provided by either medium could be considered balanced or rigorously documented. Television is a part-time cable-relayed adjunct of SLBS, spotlighting the president's daily

activities and other such official chronicles, plus a private part-time start-up channel, both aimed at an elite urban audience. With a few exceptions, the 20-plus daily papers are combatively partisan and of questionable integrity, with small underpaid staffs dependent on cash handouts from newsmakers, and modest advertising revenues shared through a union cartel. On a good day, their circulation reaches a few thousand. Private radio, economically stronger, tends to be the home of more independent media voices; the best-run private radio stations have also been among the strongest supporters of UN Radio, and of UN involvement in

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a nonpartisan nonprofit national station. Without a UN radio station, the UN in Sierra Leone would no longer have a budget for any radio programs, however. Further media development resources could be allocated through the UN's "democratic institutions" programs, but they would be limited. And without major UN financial and logistical and technical aid, independent radio in Sierra Leone would require other sources of substantial outside support for at least several years. The near-term goal would be to have the new SLBC financially secure and operationally independent at least through the 2011 elections, the country's third successive post-conflict balloting.

Donor support for independent media projects of this nature elsewhere have too often been predicated on plans for near-term self-sufficiency—that is, a swift weaning from aid dependence to reliance on local resources. That is unrealistic in Sierra Leone, as in other poor countries recovering from

violent conflict. Even in Western Europe and North America, public broadcasting requires state or private subsidy.

If public service broadcasting is considered to be just that—a public service—then the need for donor support is to be expected.

In Sierra Leone, as in other countries in the region, overseas development assistance is an essential contribution to health and education and public works expenditures. Bilateral and multilateral donors directly provide more than a third of the government's billion-dollar budget; this does not count substantial private

aid or bilateral and multilateral support to nongovernmental beneficiaries in Sierra Leone. Nor does it take into account the cost over the past decade in UN peacekeeping, which during the first six-year mission in Sierra Leone averaged close to \$500 million yearly.

In that context, radio comes quite cheap: about \$1 million a year, by the best estimates for the core operations of the new public broadcaster.

Sierra Leone's goals for national reconciliation, democratization, economic recovery, and higher health and education standards would be hard to attain without civic-minded broadcasters and

an audience that trusts in their commitment to factual news coverage. Ultimately, though, the primary issue is not international support, but national political will. The SLBC legal saga highlighted a predictable reluctance on the government's part to cede control of a national broadcasting service to civil society and media groups over which it

has little control. And some in the opposition increasingly expect victory in the next election, accurately or not, and appear to prefer to inherit a presidentially controlled radio service to a genuinely independent broadcaster.

Aside from the inherent virtues of independent broadcasting there are objective incentives for Sierra Leone to carry out promised democratic reforms. As one of the world's most impoverished countries, with little in the way of infrastructure or market development, its peaceful transition back to democracy is its best calling card in its quest to attract investment

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and retain donor support. Putting political capital and scarce resources into what would be one of Africa's first genuinely independent public broadcasting enterprises would be an investment not just in democratic development, but in Sierra Leone's international stature as a force for reform on the continent.

The UN has its own choices to make. Will it stand its ground, and support only a new broadcast enterprise that could objectively be considered independent and public as opposed to partisan and state-run? Should it remain engaged and work with the corporation even under an imperfect governance structure to help it fulfill stated goals of professionalism

and political balance? How should it measure progress toward those ends? Is it appropriate for a UN mission to engage in such subjective judgments at all? What happens if the new SLBC reverts to form and becomes a pro-government information service like its predecessor? And what, if any, are the UN's longer term responsibilities for independent media in Sierra Leone after it has closed its own radio station and supported the government closure of the opposition's only radio outlet?

In the continued absence of clear UN policies on local UN radio services and support for independent media, the UN Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone will be answering such questions on its own.



RECOMMENDATIONS

▶ **Security Council support:** Authorizations for UN peacekeeping missions should explicitly include support for reliable nonpartisan news and public information services in the country, including the establishment of a UN-run broadcasting service, should UN mission leaders deem this necessary. The Security Council should require the UN member state in question to provide suitable frequencies and the legal authority for such broadcasting services within the status-of-forces agreement governing the overall operations of the UN mission in the country.

▶ **Existing media:** Consultations with media development specialists and country experts in and outside the UN system should determine if the peacekeeping mission's communications mandate and practical requirements could be met through existing national media channels, either public or private, of recognized independence and integrity. If so, it should be further determined if these media channels would require UN technical and/or material support to ensure their professional viability and technical capacity to reach all national regions and communities.

Authorizations for UN peacekeeping missions should explicitly include support for reliable nonpartisan news and public information services in the country, including the establishment of a UN-run broadcasting service, should UN mission leaders deem this necessary.

These assessments should be informed by detailed country knowledge, including evaluations of local media institutions and audiences, press freedom conditions, prevailing patterns of radio listenership, the state of the telecommunications infrastructure, and relevant political and cultural factors.

▶ **UN Policy Guidelines:** Should a UN mission choose to run its own broadcast outlet it should be bound by clearly stated UN policies for all such services, including a commitment to local newsgathering in conformity with recognized international journalism standards; the airing of diverse political, cultural, and socioeconomic viewpoints; programming in all major vernacular languages; the technical capacity to reach as much of the population as possible 24 hours a day; and an editorial commitment to UN values as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the specific objectives of that particular UN peacekeeping mission. DPKO and DPI should draft and publish such guidelines for all local UN radio services, emphasizing a clear demarcation between the public information functions of a UN mission and the public service responsibilities of running local news operations.

▶ **Shared UN control:** DPI and DPKO should manage local UN radio operations cooperatively, while drawing on the expertise of UNESCO, UNDP, and other UN agencies to aid local media development generally and prepare for the eventual transition to local control or handover of UN radio assets to local media. Through DPI and DPKO, but with input from UNESCO and UNDP, the UN should develop an international roster of qualified radio managers and other media development professionals to advise and supervise peacekeeping broadcasting services. Radio management and media development partnerships with qualified NGOs should be encouraged but structured as contracts through an open, competitive bidding process, with preferences for implementing partners that include local or regional media groups or specialists.

▶ **Engagement:** UN missions with radio operations should engage voluntarily with national broadcasting regulators in an effort to strengthen their professional capacity, transparency and legitimacy. UN radio services should also engage voluntarily with local media and civil society; mission stations should consider establishing

local advisory boards for news programming and advisory relationships with journalism associations.

▶ **Planning and reform:** UN peacekeeping missions should make it a priority from the start to develop transition plans for their radio operations, in accordance with recognized UN principles of media independence and public service broadcasting. This would preclude the unconditional handover of UN radio assets to executive branch state broadcasters or other partisan outlets and would require engaged UN support for legal reforms and needed infrastructural investment. A UN decision to establish its own radio or television outlet should reflect an informed consensus that the UN broadcasting service would fill a need unmet by existing media operations in the country. That conclusion, in keeping with the UN commitment to development and democratic governance in post-conflict countries, would put the onus on the UN to manage its broadcast operations with the goal of supporting existing or future local broadcasters that could fill this nonpartisan media gap when the mission ends.



APPENDIX: ***Mobilizing Mobile Phones—Alternatives for Peacekeeping Media***

If it is legitimate for peacekeeping forces to seek the free use of local radio frequencies for their own broadcasting services, should the UN stop there?

The potentially most effective parallel platform for UN-backed media in peacekeeping operations is the mobile telephone. Cellphones now rival radio as an information medium in many of these areas, but with the unique capacity for geographically targeted communications as well as two-way dialogue with residents of conflict zones.

Text messaging has also quickly become the tool of choice for rapid long-distance political organizing—and for malicious and often dangerous rumor-mongering, as seen most disturbingly in the post-election turmoil in Kenya in early 2008.⁵⁹

Mobile phones have been largely ignored in peacekeeping-mission communications planning to date. But it's time for that to change. And, as with radio, the way the UN approaches its own use of cellphones for outreach and informational purposes could lead to a stronger local media, a better-informed citizenry, and greater political stability.

Africa has already surpassed Asia as the world's fastest growing mobile phone market, with a "teledensity" rate (phones per 1000 people) of more than 40 percent continent-wide and reaching or fast approaching 100 percent in South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, and elsewhere.⁶⁰ Even the poorest post-conflict countries, such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Congo, have cellphone ratios of one per family or higher, with teledensity rates in urban areas similar to those in stable higher-income neighbors. The technical quality of African cellphone services will continue to improve, in part through the expansion of affordable broadband links throughout the region. (The World Bank recently announced a \$215 million, 11-country broadband project in Central Africa, including such post-conflict countries as Rwanda, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁶¹)

Technologically, Africans are already in the global industry vanguard in their routine use of phones to transfer funds, get weather reports, check farm prices, and accomplish other utilitarian tasks.⁶² Such services are being adapted with UN support to improve rural health care and spur local economic development. In early peacekeeping phases cellphone messaging could also be used to promote disarmament campaigns and to alert locals to continuing security risks in specific towns or transit routes.

As elections are organized, cellphone texting could also be systematically used to assist voter registration drives or to collect and distribute election results. In recent elections in Sierra Leone and Liberia, the use of mobile phones at remote polling places to call in results instantly to electoral authorities and the media, including UN radio stations, has proven an effective guarantor against massive fraud and of public acceptance of the final official tally.

Phones are also increasingly used to receive traditional news services. Again, Kenya is in the regional vanguard, though other countries aren't far behind. Voice of America reported that through its partnership with Safaricom, Kenya's leading mobile provider, there were some 800,000 attempted

downloads of VOA bulletins onto Kenyan cellphones between December 2008 and March 2009. (Apparently many download efforts failed due to unexpectedly heavy local demand for stories on President Obama's inauguration and first weeks in office.)⁶³

The rapid expansion of mobile networks and plummeting costs of "smart phones" throughout Africa virtually ensure that the mobile telephone will become a common platform for written news stories, now carried in printed newspapers. The greatest potential audience for mobile phone news may be found in the hundreds of fast-growing towns that have never been served by serious or affordable newspapers, and probably never will be. Yet, radio aside, most UN local communications in peacekeeping countries, both on the straight news side and through paid ads and public service announcements, is now conducted through newspapers that circulate mainly among capital city elites.

The cellphone also increasingly complements and interacts with radio in ways that the UN missions could use more effectively. An example: talk radio shows in Africa actively solicit text messages, which results in a flood of real-time commentary and questioning from listeners to public affairs programs. At the UN's radio stations in Africa, texting is now the most common source of audience feedback. Texting is cheaper than a phone call and is effectively anonymous, a critical consideration for those voicing political views in many countries.

In some markets mobile companies reduce or even eliminate fees between midnight and dawn as a customer-attracting incentive that costs them little due to low network use at those hours. One result is a spike in both calling and texting to late-night radio. This suggests that there may be a public service argument for giving regular cost breaks to cellphone users who might wish to question political candidates or other officials on public affairs programs, especially when such programs are aired on nonprofit nationwide channels such as those the UN operates.

The less benign political use of cellphones—as in Kenya in early 2008, when text messaging was a convening tool for mob violence—may prove a new challenge for peacekeeping forces, and even more for civilians trying to organize elections and promote civic engagement.⁶⁴

In volatile situations some organized monitoring of these viral messages is certainly warranted—not by electronic surveillance, but through the voluntary sharing of texted rumors and other potentially inflammatory content with civil society groups or local electoral authorities. This would permit quick, targeted responses, with the coordinated texting of rebuttals of deliberate falsehoods or appeals from community leaders against violence. The goal would be to use the same tools to dispel rumors, provide facts, and avert conflict, complementing responsible radio reporting.

The UN should support this kind of innovative peacebuilding work, while ensuring that nationals, not UN officials or other outsiders, are always visibly and operationally in the lead.

If and when peacekeepers make regular use of mobile phones for mass communication, the UN will find itself dealing with pertinent regulatory and economic issues, as is the case now with broadcasting. Handled astutely, this could be an opportunity to promote a public service peacebuilding approach to the cellphone industry, while taking care not to hamper the growth of what has become the most impressive private-sector contribution to Africa's development in recent years.

Most cellphone companies in Africa are private businesses, in contrast to the largely state-run landline companies they have long surpassed. In just a few years and at little public cost, these commercial enterprises have been extraordinarily successful in connecting a formerly disconnected general population to the most advanced global telecommunications networks. Yet the right of these businesses to use their allotted portion of the wireless spectrum remains temporary and regulated by the state, which, as in radio, owns the airwaves as a public good and charges fees for their commercial use. In their radio stations, the UN in effect seeks an exemption from this system, requesting the free use of available FM or AM frequencies for broadcasts that the UN considers both necessary and a public service.

Equally, a UN peacekeeping force could seek the right to send text messages to local cellphone subscribers in emergencies, during elections, or, say, for public health purposes. Cellphones, unlike radio, can be easily microtargeted in specific geographical areas, an extremely useful capability in conflict zones. The UN, with radio as a precedent, could ask regulators to require private mobile phone providers to reserve some small segment of their capacity for such public service messages, without cost to either the sender or the recipient.

This model, analogous to public service requirements for broadcast licensees in many regulatory systems, could be also employed by state agencies for health and education purposes, as well as for weather alerts or other emergencies.

As phones evolve from simple devices for talking into the mobile portals of full-service information networks, their commercial providers should expect to assume some of the same social responsibilities that have long been demanded of broadcasters. A UN peacekeeping mission could help pioneer such a change, both for its own legitimate ends and as a long-term contribution to local media development.

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⁴⁸ The author of this report was a UN advisor on the UN Radio transition process from 2007 to 2009, as policy advisor for independent media development in UNDP’s Democratic Governance unit in New York and subsequently as an in-country advisor to the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Mission in Sierra Leone.

⁴⁹ Cotton Tree News, “President Koroma assents Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation Act,” December 31, 2009, <http://www.cottontreenews.org/content/view/2743/68/>.

⁵⁰ For an on-site video report on the March 2009 violence and radio station controversy, see Part 2 of the April 8, 2009 episode of the “Listening Post” program on *al-Jazeera English*: <http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/listeningpost/2009/05/2009581014779561.html>. Video of Part 2 available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSeQxWPhpFM>.

⁵¹ A joint operation of the University of Sierra Leone’s Fourah Bay College (students and staff of its Mass Communications Department) and the Hironnelle Foundation, “Cotton Tree News” provides UN Radio with six hours of news programming daily: <http://www.cottontreenews.org/>.

⁵² UNESCO and UN IPDC, *Media Development Indicators*, 37.

⁵³ African Union, African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, *Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa*, adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights at its 32nd Ordinary Session, October 2002, <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/publications/africa-declaration-of-principles-on-foe.pdf>. On the topic of public broadcasting (section VI), the declaration states: “State and

government controlled broadcasters should be transformed into public service broadcasters, accountable to the public through the legislature rather than the government, in accordance with the following principles: public broadcasters should be governed by a board which is protected against interference, particularly of a political or economic nature; the editorial independence of public service broadcasters should be guaranteed; public broadcasters should be adequately funded in a manner that protects them from arbitrary interference with their budgets; public broadcasters should strive to ensure that their transmission system covers the whole territory of the country; and the public service ambit of public broadcasters should be clearly defined and include an obligation to ensure that the public receive adequate, politically balanced information, particularly during election periods.”

⁵⁴ Independent Media Commission of Sierra Leone, *Media Code of Practice*, <http://www.imc-sl.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=3rHh-6iKXv0%3d&tabid=63>.

⁵⁵ UN Security Council, *Third report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone*, November 28, 2006, S/2006/922, <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/SL%20S2006%20922.pdf>.

⁵⁶ United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, “United Nations Peacebuilding Fund: Bridging the Gap Between Conflict & Recovery,” a presentation to the UN Peacebuilding Commission, September 12, 2007, <http://www.unpbf.org/docs/PBSO%20PBF%20Presentation%20to%20PBC%2012%20Sept%202007.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Steve Buckley et. al., *Broadcasting, Voice and Accountability: A Public Interest Approach to Policy, Law, and Regulation*

(World Bank Group, 2008), chap.11.

⁵⁸ See Ghana Broadcasting Company, “Mission” and “History”: <http://www.gbcbghana.com>.

⁵⁹ For an insightful analysis of media roles in Kenya’s post-election violence, see BBC World Service Trust, *The Kenyan 2007 elections and their aftermath: the role of media and communication*, April 2008, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/pdf/kenya_policy_briefing_08.pdf.

⁶⁰ *The Economist*, “Mobile Marvels: A special report on telecoms in emerging markets,” September 24, 2009, http://www.economist.com/specialreports/displaystory.cfm?story_id=E1_TQQRPRJG.

⁶¹ The World Bank, “\$215 Million Central Africa Backbone Program Will Bring Low Cost, High Speed Internet to the Region,” press release, October 6, 2009, http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:22340869~pagePK:64257043~piPK:437376~theSitePK:4607,00.html?cid=3001_33.

⁶² *The Economist*, “Mobile Marvels.”

⁶³ *Voice of America*, “Kenyan’s Download VOA Audio/Video Through Safaricom,” March 24, 2009, <http://author.voanews.com/english/about/2009-03-25-safaricom.cfm>.

⁶⁴ For a thorough examination of the role of cellphones, social networking, and other digital technologies in conflict zones, see Ivan Sigal’s CIMA report, *Digital Media in Conflict-Prone Societies*, October 2009, <http://cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Sigal-Digital-Media-in-Conflict-Prone-Societies.pdf>.

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