Under the Blue Flag: Leadership and Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations

I. Introduction: context of strategic communications for leadership in UN Peace Operations

United Nations Peace Operations (UNPOs) play a critical role in today's increasingly complex and fractured international landscape. Political rifts and diverse agendas can promote stasis, half measures and inertia in the Security Council; major conflicts continue to smolder and flare and whether in Syria, Ukraine, Yemen, Libya or elsewhere, the global community frequently seems unwilling or unable to intervene in a timely and effective manner. But for hundreds of millions of the world's most vulnerable, UN interventions remain the best and sometimes only chance to find a modicum of safety and security. For all of their shortcomings, UNPOs—whether a complex, multidimensional Peace Operation, a mediation deployment, a Political Office, a Human Rights mission or a sectoral-specific support deployment—provide assistance and protection and perhaps most critically, hope. These deployments send the unambiguous message to fragile communities emerging from conflict that the international community has not forgotten their plight. It shows that the world is watching and offers the prospect of a future that is brighter than the past. Sierra Leone, Liberia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia and others have all been at one time called the "worst place in the world"[1], and today—long after the peacekeepers have gone home— things are, simply, better. Peace operations helped to give the people in

1 Senior UN Peacekeeping Official who worked under SG Boutros-Ghali, private interview, December 2016.

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these countries a fighting chance for a better life. But to succeed, these operations have to be led effectively and their work needs to be explained effectively to all stakeholders. Telling the story is critical.

Peace operations are likely to remain an indelible feature of the international system for the foreseeable future. Those missions will be led by women and men—whether police, military or civilians—who will need to understand that:

(1) Strategic Communications is a central component of a successful UN engagement;

(2) The communications revolution has fundamentally changed how the UN's main audiences expect to receive information, and;

(3) It is a command responsibility for UN leadership to oversee and direct this capacity as part of command responsibilities.

From the Headquarters (HQ) side, implementation will require a shift in mindset, re-design of backstopping architecture and an augmentation of resources to ensure that leadership is empowered personally and bureaucratically to succeed in this fundamentally new context. This critical link between leadership and strategic communications is central to the successful conduct of peace operations. It is also the subject of this paper.

Using a combination of public and internal source material and interviews with relevant UN stakeholders, this paper looks at the state of play of strategic communications for UN leadership in UNPOs. It explains the existing communications architecture, highlights areas of weakness in the regime and recommends a new, more integrated and holistic approach while explaining the overall requirements and rationale for this shift. It concludes by outlining a number of general principles for this new approach—the "six Ms"—specifically the requirement to *mainstream* strategic communications considerations; to *modernize* the UN's approach in line with contemporary communications practices, expectations and technologies; to *merge* capacities to eliminate redundancy and duplication of effort; to *manage* communications at both UNHQ and in the field in an deliberate, integrated and flexible manner; to *measure* success through an efficiency-minded, data-driven, impact-oriented approach; and to *message* effectively at both a local and a corporate level to demonstrate the intrinsic value of the UN and the multilateral approach it embodies.

The UN's great strength, primary tactical comparative advantage and the most powerful weapons in UNPO leadership's arsenal are its legitimacy, its promotion of collective action and its universality—none of which are oriented around the sharp edged application of "hard" power. The UN is fundamentally political and its primary governance

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structures, in particular the Security Council, reflect this fact. Political solutions are sustainable solutions and success for the World Body is conditioned primarily by, and dependent on, the effective application of "soft" power—backed up as necessary by effective deterrence and the credible, determined threat of escalation. Ensuring political "buy in" while demonstrating seriousness of purpose and a willingness to stay the course facilitates both an inclusive political process and the creation of sustainable institutions of governance. Even if the UN were to acquire the ability to fight and win wars—to impose the international community's preferred solutions on unwilling or reluctant constituents—lasting peace, stability and pluralism are achieved through dialogue, mediation, and political solutions. None of this can be achieved at the point of a bayonet.

"Soft" power is thus a fundamental key to mission success in peace operations and requires a clear plan to explain to key stakeholders and clients nationally, regionally and internationally what the mission is there to do and how it will do it. This is the essence of strategic communications for the UN and in particular for the UN officials tasked with leading peace operations. Strategically designed and well-executed public communications, whether through traditional or digital media, are critical to mission success in that their effective application can dispel misconceptions, deter spoilers, provide greater situational awareness, solidify support, create partnerships, alter perceptions, promote a "two-way" dialogue and critically, generate political will and buy-in for a peace process. Effective internal communications, whether to UN personnel on mission or interpreted more broadly to mean the entire UN family, are also a necessary and under-utilized aspect of mandate implementation for UN leadership on modern peace operations. Ensuring that UN staff understand what they are there to do and what their leadership's vision is for implementing these frequently complex tasks is as important as outreach to external constituencies. Conversely, with both external and internal communications, a lack of attention to the issue has as many serious risks as effective implementation has benefits. UN leadership ignores this central feature of today's peace operations at its peril.[2]

II. What is Strategic Communications for the UN? State of play 2017

Public advocacy on behalf of specific missions and the UN in general has long been recognized as an important component of the international community's overall approach to the successful implementation of

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2 There is an extensive number of scholarly articles and papers on the subject but see in particular, Fabrizio Hochschild, "In and Above Conflict: A Study on Leadership in the United Nations", Geneva, 2010 and Robert Gordon and Peter Loge, "Strategic Communication: A Political and Operational Prerequisite for Successful Peace Operations", International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations, November 2015; Also see 2015 USIP panel https://www.usip.org/events/strategic-communications-new-era-un-peace-operations.

today's increasingly complex mission mandates. In general, strategic communications for UN peace operations can be defined as: "a comprehensive effort to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or maintain conditions favorable for the advancement of the mission's interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programmes, plans, themes, messages, and products that employ images, actions and words to achieve a desired and measurable effect through a variety of channels".[3]

Under the supervision of the leadership appointed by the Secretary-General, all UNPOs have to a varying degree and with different levels of success, communicated regularly to the public. However, this has not always been done in an integrated, coherent and strategic manner. The seminal document of modern Peacekeeping is the Brahimi Report of 2000[4] which argues that "An effective public information and communications capacity in mission areas is an operational necessity for virtually all United Nations peace operations. Effective communication helps to: dispel rumour, to counter disinformation and to secure the cooperation of local populations. It can provide leverage in dealing with leaders of rival groups, enhance security of United Nations personnel and serve as a force multiplier."[5] It also highlights the importance of creating a pool of competent public information staff, emphasizes internal communications and stresses the value of effective high-level spokesmanship. "It is thus essential", Brahimi argues "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."[6] Brahimi is generally silent, however, on the question of the role of leadership in practically implementing the recommendation he articulates.

Subsequent major peace operations reform initiatives, including the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change [A/59/565] (2004)[7], "Peace operations 2010" (2006)[8], the "Capstone Doctrine" (2008)[9], and "The New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping" (2009)[10] all recognize the role of public communications, as does the current UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who has consistently highlighted the centrality of strategic communications in his official communications with UN staff. In 2015, then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched his own major reform initiative, the High-level

"Effective communication helps to: dispel rumour, to counter disinformation and to secure the cooperation of local populations."

3 See e.g. James P. Farwell, "Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communication", 2012; Laurie Lewis, "Organizational Change: Creating Change Through Strategic Communication", 2011 Tatham S A Cdr, RN. "'Strategic Communication : A Primer'" . UK Defence Academy. December 2008; and Hallahan, K., Holtzhausen, D., Van Ruler, B., Veri, D., & Sriramesh, K. Defining strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 2007.
4 "The Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations", http://www.un.org /en/ga/search/view_doc. asp?symbol=A/55/305; 2000.
5 ibid, para.146
6 ibid, para.147
7 http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/59/565, 2004
8 http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/60/696, 2006
9 https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/Capstone_Doctrine_ENG.pdf, 2008
10 https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/newhorizon_0.pdf, 2010

Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO).[11] The multidisciplinary HIPPO team, made up of high-level experts with a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, recognized the importance of strategic communications throughout the complex range of operations being undertaken by the United Nations. In fact, strategic communications is a recurring theme of the Report, which was presented to the Secretary-General on 16 June 2015.

One of the many formal recommendations reads: "The Secretariat and missions should put in place at every stage of the mission life cycle strategies for planning, recruitment, resourcing of mission communications teams aimed at ensuring interactive two-way communications with the local people and ensuring UN peace operations use modern and appropriate communications approaches and technologies".[12] The HIPPO implementation report, prepared at the Secretary-General's request by former Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette, also points out the importance of communicating to local populations and other key audiences.[13] Better strategic communications, and the centrality of this capacity to UN leadership, have been identified as a key area for development and have been part of the reform agenda for years. However, the structural and doctrinal expression of this imperative has as of yet not kept pace with the requirement.

At UNHQ[14]

At headquarters, implementation of strategic communications requirements and responsibility for the oversight of their application in the field are spread in practical terms amongst the Department of Public Information (DPI) and other relevant departments such as the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the Department of Field Support (DFS) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA). Overall responsibility for the Organization's strategic communications rests with DPI, which chairs the UN Communications Group (UNCG). Made up of communications personnel from Departments and Agencies, Funds and Programmes (AFPs), the UNCG is the main integrative body on communications issues.

At the decision-making level, the UNCG "Principals" meet once a year, although those meetings are more discussion-driven than decision-oriented. Several ad hoc mechanisms exist at UNHQ, such as the Public Information Working Group (DPI/DPKO-DFS-chaired with DPA, OCHA, and other HQ-based AFPs participating), the morning communications meeting (chaired by the Secretary-General's Executive Office, EOSG) the Spokesman's daily morning meeting (chaired by the

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11 High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations [S/2015/682] 2015;http://peaceoperationsreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/HIPPO_Report_1_June_2015.pdf
12 ibid, para.282-284
13 http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/682, para 64
14 Please note that this information was current at the time of writing and does not take the 2019 reform of the peace and security architecture or the ongoing DPI reforms into account.

Office of the Spokesman, OSSG) and other issue-specific task forces pulled together as needed and usually chaired by DPI (e.g. the Ebola Communications Group). These groups meet regularly, have broad and inclusive memberships and are staffed both at the strategic and the working level. Information flow is fairly reliable and consistent and clearances for external products are relatively straightforward. However, there is no one, overarching mechanism through which strategic communications activities are coordinated at UNHQ and leadership in the field is not regularly provided with widely consulted, timely and integrated communications guidance.

The approach outlined above is theoretically hard-wired into all field deployments and is reflected in the structures of existing headquarters capacities charged with overseeing strategic communications for the field. However, while there is thus no shortage of strategic communications fora at which these issues can be and are raised, the member organizations retain their own bureaucratic identities while participating in these mechanisms. Overall authority for implementation of decisions on strategic communications issues rests with the Secretary-General or perhaps the Under-Secretary-General in charge of DPI but in practice reverts to the individual departments, with little overall oversight either on follow-up and assessment of impact or achievement of goals. The peace operations universe is increasingly interconnected in its outputs, but the messaging and communications campaigns and regimes that flow from the various bodies are not overseen and evaluated by any one specific entity or unit. Common messaging has become more usual, thanks to good cooperation, high quality DPI leadership and regular messaging meetings, but the lack of regularized, coherent and authorized oversight does impact on the system's ability to promote maximum efficiency in harnessing all communications capabilities at the UN's disposal. The downstream effect of this lack of integration is that UN leadership on peace operations seldom receives "master messaging" from HQ to inform the mission or office's core narrative. In fact, leadership at UNHQ has also yet to put forward updated and consulted core narratives against which the line departments are responsible to harmonize. This is a lost opportunity to harness all the capabilities available to the UN to tell its stories, shape (and if necessary, change) perceptions, build support, promote dialogue and address reputational issues.

On Missions
Supported at UNHQ by DPI, OSSG and other communications entities, UNPOs traditionally brief both local and international media as necessary and usually issue press communiqués on at least a semi-regular basis. In this standard public relations and crisis communications oriented model there is frequently also an electronic media arm (FM radio and/ or TV) and a publications section that produces publicity materials such as calendars and other promotional items. This approach helps to raise

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the overall awareness of the mission's existence with local populations able to access these channels. The traditional approach is also generally non-threatening to the host government and other major actors in a post-conflict environment, although the timely provision of objective information can undercut the narratives of former combatants and other potential spoilers to the process.

Large peace operations have sizable strategic communications capabilities, including in some cases high-value infrastructural capacities such as wide coverage FM radio stations, with varying levels of coordination with and direction by the mission leadership. The "activity owner" of the mission's strategic communications plan (which lays out how the mission will design, implement and monitor the communications activities required to fulfill the mission's overall strategic objectives in line with the Mission Directive and Concept of Operations) is the Head of Mission but other key senior officials such as the Deputy Head of Mission, the Force Commander, the Police Commissioner and in certain cases, some of the Heads of Divisions and Units (e.g. Head of Human Rights Component) also play critical roles in overseeing the operationalization of the mandate. The tactical lead is frequently the Chief of Public Affairs or Public Information at the mission level. On the technical side, DFS is largely responsible for ensuring that all relevant equipment is procured, delivered and maintained in cooperation with Strategic Communications and Public Affairs units. But for the most part this is done as a logistical exercise rather than as part of the mission's overall strategic plan and in line with the Mission Directive and Concept of Operations.

Strategic Communications personnel may be considered as part of an operation's senior staff (as recommended in the Brahimi report[15]) but that does not always mean that they are folded directly into the decision making. The reporting chains in the field can vary dramatically, with some Public Information Units reporting directly to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), some to the Chief of Staff and others even to the Director of Mission Support. "Chains of Command" for strategic communication capacities on missions are also ill-defined, with no one entity unambiguously responsible for providing support and backstopping to the field. Some missions work primarily with DPKO/DFS, some with DPA, some directly with DPI. Because there is no explicit requirement for UN leadership to communicate strategically as part of managerial responsibilities, whether this takes place—and how successful these efforts are—tends to be very driven by individual personalities and ad-hoc coordination. This ambiguity also promotes a real risk of irrelevance, as the further an operational entity gets from the mission's center of gravity, the more invisible it tends to become to planners and the less effective it becomes operationally.

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15 Brahimi report, para .147

This existing communications architecture described above is underpinned by a diverse open-source information gathering/media monitoring regime, which when diligently applied can give UN leadership an accurate, real-time picture of how mission activities are being reported by local and international news gathering organizations. This is usually reflected at the mission/local level where the Public Information/ Strategic Communications units of a peace operation, or in some cases the office of the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator or the UN Information Centre, provide a daily monitoring update and in many cases, analytical reporting. This regime is generally fairly easy to oversee and implement with a small team of moderately competent public information staff and can and has produced solid results in a variety of contexts. However, what is missing from this approach is a hard wired, "outreach" driven mentality that focuses on how missions deliver messages and measuring whether it is being done effectively. A generally conservative, twentieth-century-minded,one-size-fits-all approach ultimately represents a lost opportunity for leadership to engage in a more sophisticated, "campaigning" (rallying the public behind specific issues or events with the goal of promoting a specific action or actions) oriented style of measurable and direct engagement with stakeholders and key audiences using an array of modern channels. It also works contrary to contemporary best practices in related industries and enterprises and does not position the UN to keep pace with the general shift towards people-centric, dialogue promoting, direct engagement that is a hallmark of the modern "two-way" communications recommended in the HIPPO Report.[16] Large peacekeeping operations in particular tend to be top down and one-way oriented in their communications. In this regard, the field mirrors HQ in that in practice, coordination and cooperation are usually quite good amongst a diverse number of stakeholders but the lack of overall coherence of a system designed to maximize resources and impose accountability, while also ensuring coherence, is a gap which promotes a degree of institutional weakness, inefficiency and vulnerability. What is missing from the equation is a clear instruction as to:

(1) how this critical component of all UN activities should be directed and sustained,

(2) how and to whom it will report and;

(3) how it will be assessed.

No one is explicitly in charge and no one is either directly accountable for failure or responsible for success. This requires leadership at UNHQ to help better prepare leadership in the field. It also will require a

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16 HIPPO recommendation, "The Secretariat and missions should put in place at every stage of the mission lifecycle strategies for planning, recruitment, resourcing of mission communications teams aimed at ensuring interactive two-way communications with the local people and ensuring UN peace operations use modern and appropriate communication approaches and technologies." para 284

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fundamental, almost philosophical change in outlook if those selected to plan, direct and lead UNPOs are to make full and effective use of strategic communications tools and techniques. This will mean training.

Training leadership for UNPOs
There is little required training, no agreed list of requirements and little accountability for implementing a mission-specific communications strategy for the UNPOs for which UN leadership is prepared, responsible and accountable. Ensuring that the UN retains high quality leadership has been a concern for as long as the UN has deployed field missions. But this has not translated into the institutionalization of a training regime that prepares senior managers to communicate effectively as UN officials after they have been appointed. Many, if not most, of the senior staff members selected for high level UN positions already have excellent basic public communications skills. However, the range of capacities required to ensure that UN operations are taking full advantage of the benefits offered by embracing and prioritizing strategic communications while avoiding the pitfalls inherent in ignoring their effective application are not inherently within the traditional remit of, for example, career diplomats from generally conservative foreign services. While many typical UN officials have, for example, extensive experience in public speaking, many have not received specific training in the essentials of modern communications, including:

(1) Embracing the digital revolution through, inter alia, an active and advocacy-driven social media presence;

(2) Promoting a proactive, candid and non-defensive style of public interaction, in particular with the media;

(3) Accepting the shift from top-down "one-way" messaging to a dialogue-driven approach that builds engagement and partnerships, creates conversations and allows a series of distinct but harmonized voices to tell compelling stories (rather than a "voice of God," one-channel approach) and;

(4) Harnessing the combined power of the international civil service, the UN family and the national staff through effective internal communications.

But the question remains as to how to ensure that this proposed regime is actually implemented as a matter of course. Additional training in these capacities, as well as expansion of more traditional communications skills such as interview techniques and media relations will need to be put in place to ensure that this mindset shift translates into concrete action in the field. If the international community is going to rely on peace operations leadership to execute its complicated and sensitive tasks, it is imperative that it ensures that those same command personnel—civilian,

military and police—are adequately prepared to enable them to succeed.

As it currently stands, there are a few limited segments on strategic communications in the leadership courses delivered by the Integrated Training Service of UN peacekeeping's Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training. A 60-minute generic briefing is provided to the participants of the Senior Leadership Programme (a mandatory course intended to newly appointed staff serving at a D2 level and above) and a 45-minute session is included in the Intensive Orientation Course for Heads of Military Components. A more detailed segment, which contains a case study and role-playing, is included in the Senior Mission Leaders' course, a programme intended mostly for potential senior leaders of UNPOs. The UN System Staff College offers a number of related courses under their "Communications and Advocacy" programme line, although these are not mandatory for leadership deploying to UN field operations. Other Departments (notably DPI), peace operations and AFPs also offer ad hoc training in a range of communications topics, including media relations, public engagement and digital advocacy, although this is not done either uniformly on all missions or using any considered and agreed curricula. UNHQ strategic communications units and public affairs staff on missions offer training on a variety of communications and advocacy issues, including on digital communications and campaigns. Critically, passing some iteration of a of a training course or regime is not a requirement for UN leadership.

The Department of Public Information and DPKO-DFS recently promulgated the "2016 Strategic Communications and Public Information Policy" that sets out a broad vision for communications in peacekeeping missions. It is being followed in 2017-18 by a series of guidance documents advising missions on practical steps to implement policy recommendations, including on a number of substantive and technical issues inherent in the oversight of both large and small Strategic Communications teams. And of course, many incoming UN appointees at the political/leadership level arrive with some level of communications training, either as a product of the requirements of previous professional positions or due to specific training provided by their national authorities. But again—and importantly for the purposes of ensuring that UN leadership in peace operations are equipped with the tools they need to execute all required strategic communications functions—there are no fixed standards, reporting mechanisms, agreed skill sets and mandatory training provided as a matter of course. This puts leadership on UNPOs at a disadvantage with many of their key stakeholders. It also puts the UN and the field presences, upon which the Organization's fortunes rise or fall, at direct risk, as not effectively explaining what a mission is there to do, or not effectively countering misinformation or responding transparently and rapidly to allegations of misconduct can undermine local confidence, breed hostility and make it next to impossible for a

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mission to achieve its mandated tasks. Avoiding this pitfall simply cannot be done without a leadership corps trained in modern communications techniques and tactics. Leadership must understand that effective and holistic strategic communications are at the very centre of effective mandate implementation and are a core leadership function against which they will be held accountable. Ensuring that this fundamental shift is backed up with the capacities necessary to promote a successful approach will require training at a number of levels and through a variety of means.

Case study of existing capacities: media monitoring
UN leadership currently contends with a number of shortcomings in the existing strategic communications regimes it finds in place on UNPOs. Firstly, with regard to media monitoring which is usually undertaken to track the local political landscape, enrich political analysis, and feed into operational planning and security assessments. However, this capability is not integrated and can thus be duplicative and redundant, with several units frequently tasked with highlighting the same media reports to the same client group. Secondly, most media monitoring and other "awareness" and data analysis tools the UN uses are non-comprehensive, in particular with regard to social media activity which is difficult to track in a meaningful and inclusive manner. Thirdly, while press clips and media reports provide useful snapshots of how public opinion may be trending, they require an analytical overlay to turn anecdotal data points into patterns which can then be analysed and fed into the policy-making framework. A quantifiable "data-driven" approach is both undeniably helpful and entirely necessary, but without a comprehensive, weighted analysis that assigns value to specific stories (or posts) and plots the development of the issue over time, leadership is not provided with the business intelligence that enables fully informed and sound decision making. While individual parts of UNHQ such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have begun to address this gap by employing sophisticated analytical software programmes such as the Radian6 Marketing Cloud, it is not available on demand to the Public Information components that make up the UN Communications Group or indeed to any additional parts of the Secretariat. The individualistic and non-integrated approach weakens unity of effort on specific issues and makes high-level corporate messaging more difficult. So in terms of overall structures available to UN leadership on or deploying to UNPOs, there are a great many capabilities already accessible both at UNHQ and in the field. Much of what there is, while non-uniform and frequently ad hoc, does work, but it is neither cohesive nor easily available and it is not uniformly accessible to the common UN system. The specific example of media monitoring tells the story of the entire strategic communications system—generally functional but not holistic or, ultimately, best-practices driven.

III. UN leadership on peace operations: strategic communications best practices

For both missions deployed to the field and at UNHQ, the question of how the Organization communicates its intentions, organizes its defenses to deter potential spoilers and uses advocacy to garner support from key stakeholders is central to overall success. Modern communications contexts requires UN leadership on a UNPO to explain strategic intentions to promote a change of behavior in key stakeholders, rather than merely to disseminate information. The goal of a successful strategic communication campaign is to inform and shape the narrative, to promote a viable and appealing story and to tell that story in a way that resonates with the target audience as well as to promote dialogue and influence behaviour and perceptions in line with the mission's mandate.[17] Central to successful implementation is:

(1) Crafting a master narrative with clear objectives taken from the mission's foundational documents,[18]

(2) Designing sub-messaging designed to reach previously identified key stakeholders and audiences;

(3) Diversifying message delivery using a variety of channels tailored for the target groups, and:

(4) Ensuring regular measurement of effectiveness and adjustment of messaging to match evolving realities on the ground. Taken together, this represents a generally accepted strategic communications approach for UN leadership.

On the ground and in practical terms, strategic communications for UNPO leadership entails: (1) Defining the narrative rather than allowing it to be dictated, then

(2) Reaching out to specific, distinct and delineated groups to explain why an operation is being deployed;

(3) Clearly articulating what the mission is there to do and how it can do it;

(4) Improving the peace operation's situational awareness (and thus promoting its physical and political security);

(5) Advocating to pre-identified audiences on the value of the mission

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17 From Maj.Gen. Robert Gordon (ret.)'s comments at Challenges Forum meeting on Strategic Communications, 2015.
18 Usually but not limited to: operational paragraphs of UN Security Council resolution, mission directive, SRSG compact and mission concept of operations.

"...leadership is not provided with the business intelligence that enables fully informed and sound decision making."

specifically and the UN in general;

(6); proactively defending the mission in public,countering misinformation and correcting misperceptions;

(7) Ensuring that mission staff and UN personnel are engaged, fully briefed and empowered to assist,

(8) Implementing all aspects of the mandate through purposeful and targeted advocacy and (9) Regular reporting that highlights measures of impact and adjusts overall and specific strategies to reflect ongoing developments on the ground and the inevitable evolution of the mission's mandates and implementation priorities.

This requires structural support, clear lines of accountability, a data-driven approach, good analysis, and the effective deployment of a multiplicity of tailored communication technologies. Put simply, to take advantage of the UN's comparative advantages and maximize chances of success by promoting an open dialogue with key audiences, building support, partnerships and managing expectations, effective strategic communication must be treated as a requirement and not an option for UN leadership in peace operations. To ensure that this approach is applied in all contexts, the central voice of a peace operation, usually the SRSG and/or other mission leaders, must be encouraged and indeed mandated to take personal accountability for the communications function. This represents a doctrinal and mind-set shift and would mean that she/he:

(1) Understands that communicating in a timely and purposeful manner is an intrinsic part of the mission's core business;

(2) Oversees the creation and implementation of a mission wide communications strategy that defines key audiences and sets measurable objectives;

(3) Ensures the regular data-driven review and adjustment of both goals and activities and requires reporting on accomplishments;

(4) Embraces throughout a two-way style of communication that creates dialogue, generates engagement and increases situational awareness (and thus promotes staff and mission security) and:

(5) Protects the image and reputation of the mission and the Organization, which speaks to a central UN comparative advantage—credibility and legitimacy.

A great deal of what a mission confronts on the ground is beyond the control of the Head of Mission and its other personnel. But, the ability to design a comprehensive strategy targeting those who can help or hinder, identify allies and potential spoilers, and insist that the full range

of mission assets are utilized to promote engagement, is fully within the competence of all UN senior staff in positions of authority on peace operations. UN leadership in the field is and must be "chief pursuaders" much more than commanders-in-chief. This shift will by definition not be passive, and it requires hard skills to back up this change in approach. UN leadership needs to be made aware of and trained in the modern requirements and techniques of communications in the age of a 24-hour news cycle and the exponential growth of digital media technologies and accept the requirement of the dialogue with key audiences and stakeholders created by this new context. That dialogue is two-way, and requires:

(1) Understanding and listening to public perceptions using measurement tools that can create data-driven analysis and policy recommendations;

(2) Acceptance of the need for direct leadership engagement in these discussions;

(3) Belief in the need for good external and internal communications and consistent messaging starting with a master narrative and continuing with sub-messaging on specific issues and in response to specific events, and;

(4) Expansion of practical media relations skills, including the conduct of press conferences, interviews and the effective use of digital media.

Because of the relentless pace of modern peace operations, a premium is frequently placed on responsive crisis communications. This is undeniably important, especially for missions at critical junctures in their lifespan and in response to critical events, but crisis communications are not strategic communications and visa versa. A more considered, data-driven and metric-centric strategic approach in line with the Mission Directive and Concept of Operations must be the responsibility of mission leadership and overseen by a responsible entity at UNHQ. Going forward, strategic communications must be considered a core responsibility of UN leadership for peace operations, for civilian, military and police personnel. This needs to be hardwired into the thinking and the responsibilities of both missions and those that direct them. On the mission leadership side, this means that a constantly updated mission-level strategic communications plan needs to be mandatory, reflected in all relevant mission operational documents and reporting regimes.[19] On the HQ side, this means clarification of reporting lines for strategic communications, with the expectation that responsible parties will provide feedback and ensure accountability for and harmonization with proposed mission plans. HQ strategic priorities should be echoed in and supported by the field, and vice versa.

Finally, any strategic communication approach begins with a clear

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19 These include but are not limited to Mission Directives, Compacts, Concepts of Operations, special reports on specific issues or incidents, strategic reviews and regular reporting.

"...effective strategic communication must be treated as a requirement and not an option for UN leadership in peace operations. "

articulation of mandate and goals and a knowledge of target audiences. Knowing to whom the UN is communicating and selecting appropriate channels to reach them are a necessary precursor to message segmentation which allows UN leadership to communicate directly with pre-identified stakeholders who can provide much needed support to the work of the mission. However, any successful communications initiative requires measurement and an understanding of what targeted groups believe and think, and how these views are being impacted (or not) by the communications campaigns being undertaken.[20] As previously mentioned, both UNHQ and field presences have a number of comprehensive and useful tools at their disposal. However, the tools are likewise not uniformly shared, approved at a corporate level or required as an inherent part of the mandates of missions, offices or individuals. Public opinion surveys, for example, are an undeniably useful tool in informing sound decision making by UN leadership when properly focused and done over a long enough period of time to enable trend analysis. However, good, analytical surveys are time-consuming and expensive, and require a substantive dedication of resources. The parts of the UN, both at UNHQ and in the field, that have been able to commission public opinion surveys thus tend not to share the capacity with other parts of the UN and the targeting tends to be "parochialized" to reflect the interests of the funding entity.

It is entirely possible for UN leadership on peace operations to make mission-critical decisions on how and to whom to communicate without a full picture of what those key audiences and stakeholders actually want and think. This doesn't mean that they should. Better situational awareness saves lives, but truly realizing the full potential will not mean just seeing what is on the other side of the blast walls, it will be knowing what is being discussed by key audiences and having the skills to engage in that dialogue with avidity, persuasion and determination.

IV. Recommendations and considerations for UN leadership and HQ going forward

This paper has argued that a mainstreamed, integrated strategic communications approach must be mandatory for UN leadership and that a number of adjustments must be made in terms of mindset, support structures and training to ensure that this becomes a required capacity rather than an aspirational proposal. Going forward, UN leadership should be required to design, oversee, implement and, when necessary, adjust a comprehensive strategic communications framework, which in terms of

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20 This is commonly referred to as "business" or "corporate intelligence", but at heart it is a more strategic use of big data to help promote security and effective mandate implementation.

output-driven capacities must include but should not be limited to:

(1) Media relations, including spokesmanship, regular engagements with the local media, and targeted strategic media engagements with international and local press;

(2) Crisis communications leveraging all senior staff capacities in the field and in cooperation with relevant entities at UNHQ;

(3) Oversight of mission-specific communications campaigns and advocacy in cooperation with key stakeholders, including AFPs;

(4) Oversight of digital media platforms, including microblogs, individual leadership voice outlets (e.g. blogs), social network accounts and imagery channels;

(5) Outreach, including establishment of official mission public communications, special events, publicity materials;

(6) Multimedia, including TV, radio and content management system harmonization and;

(7) Internal communications, including maintenance of an interactive forum for staff questions and regular engagements with all personnel to update on strategic considerations and tactical developments.

Messaging, particularly the establishment of a core mission narrative that is shared with UNHQ, while not directly output-driven should likewise be the responsibility of leadership.

All aspects of the framework should be undertaken with an eye towards leveraging available capacities and establishing partnerships both at HQ and in the field. The approach would be mainstreamed, enshrined in doctrine, articulated in mission mandate and leadership compact documents, monitored in implementation and measured, evaluated and adjusted using a data-driven approach. Additional resources should be devoted in mission budgets to public information (current percentage of overall budget is typically quite small unless there is an FM radio station) to ensure sufficient personnel and information technology required to get an operation's message out and build effective internal communications links with UN staff (mission and broader UN family) deployed in the field beyond mission headquarters.

To ensure performance standards are met in this regard the following adjustments could be made immediately:

(1) the training regime offered to mission leadership should both be expanded and formalized into existing leadership courses and processes;

(2) Subsequent refresher programmes and issue-specific training could be designed and made available in the field at the request of senior leadership;
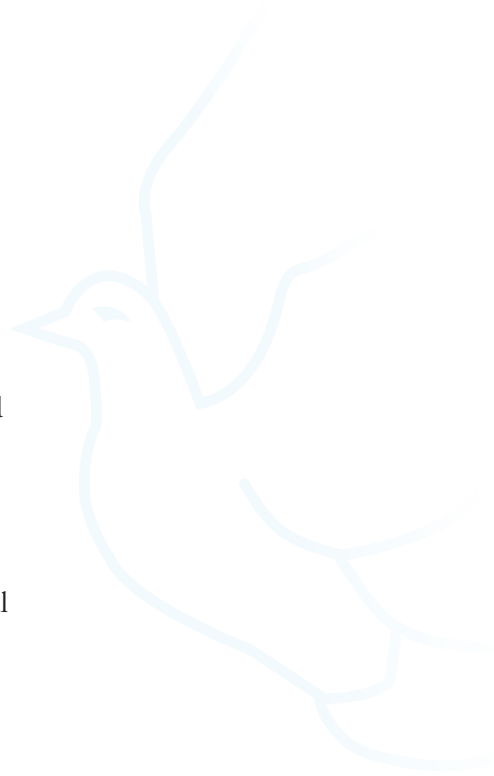
(3) Additional resource materials that offer "deep dives" into all of the output-driven capacities outlined above should be prepared and made available;

(4) Mission budgets should be adjusted to ensure sustainable resource levels for this approach.

"Going forward, UN leadership should be required to design, oversee, implement and, when necessary, adjust a comprehensive strategic communications framework... "

Modern communications are both interactive and image driven, so the centrality of a clear and compelling narrative cannot be overstated. Dry articulations of political intent or formulaic reportage on UN activities will not promote engagement and will not inspire action. To identify, energize and instrumentalize key audiences, the UN must thus learn to tell better stories. This is the expectation of many of the UN's most important constituents, and for the UN to not engage in this manner would be to both fail to meet these expectations and to leave an unnecessary vacuum. UN leadership will play a central role in ensuring that this approach is adopted by the next generation of command officers. The emphasis of particular stories will obviously be altered and amended by different components within a UN peace operation context, but to maximize the impact of the components' individual communications activities, they should be centrally coordinated and harmonized against a central theme. For example, the UN Police may wish to emphasize social media due to the immediacy of the medium and its powerful engagement effect rather than traditional more static outreach tools such as text-heavy periodicals.

Practically, each mission or deployment will be different, but some basic communications narrative principles will apply for leadership in all UN peace operations. They are:

(1) Peace operations are fundamentally an expression of political will. They are thus ultimately a political instrument which relies on building support, empowering local actors and building partnerships to succeed.

(2) The problems that UNPOs address are fundamentally political and thus require political solutions. The UN will thus never sustain peace through the application of hard power alone. The effective and judicious use of force to protect civilians and stabilize a fragile situation may be appropriate for some missions, but it must always be in furtherance of clear political objectives.

(3) Leadership is ultimately responsible for determining how a mission will implement its mandate and/or assigned tasks. A strategic communications approach for UN peace operations leadership must thus be a requirement and not optional for missions and senior personnel deploying to the field.

(4) Communications—both strategic and campaign-driven—must be mainstreamed into policy decision making and planning throughout the

mission's lifecycle.

(5) An advocacy- and campaign-driven approach, which promotes dialogue and uses a mix of traditional and modern techniques and tactics, is critical to promoting situational awareness, assisting in force protection, promoting support from key advocates, deterring spoilers and protecting the mission's overall reputation.

(6) Internal communications, to mission personnel and the entire UN family as appropriate, is also the responsibility of mission leadership and should likewise be subject to all relevant accountability frameworks.

(7) In support of this approach, a holistic, flexible and data-driven strategic communications plan that targets specifically designated audiences using multiple channels in a comprehensive and measurable manner must become the direct responsibility of mission leadership.

(8) Part of the overall mission communications strategy must be the creation of:

•   A core narrative of what the mission is there to do,

•   Master messages explaining the core narrative, and;

•   Issue- and event-specific messages delivered through a variety of pre-identified channels, harmonized against the master messages in support of the core narrative.

(9) Data-driven analytics must be applied to determine the success of messaging activities and specific communications campaigns.

(10) To promote accountability and ensure compliance, mission leadership should be judged against the strategic communications requirement as part of Compacts with the Secretary-General and as part of the Mission Directive, the mission Concept of Operations and perhaps a Strategic Communications Concept of Operations as well.

Need for a culture shift and change management
For leadership to be fully enabled to fulfill these requirements in the field, the HQ context must shift as well. An internal communications-focused change management process should be undertaken in the field and at UNHQ to socialize the cultural and mind-set shift that successful implementation of these recommendations will require. In addition to the creation of an oversight body as already discussed, this paper recommends a number of practical steps that can be characterized as the "six Ms" that would help to create an environment that would empower UN leadership to successfully fulfill these critical requirements in today's complex communications environment. They are:

(1) Mainstream: Strategic Communications considerations—starting with desired outcomes and effects, then creation of an actual plan

including identification of target audiences, then master messages and sub-messaging, then identification of channels for distribution, then measurement of effect and evaluation of impact—should from the planning phase be a feature of all aspects of policy decision making.

(2) Modernize: Today's communications landscape has changed fundamentally from analogue to digital, from one-way/top-down to circular-/dialogue-driven. The UN must pivot to accept these new realities and adjust resources to ensure the required outputs. This will require a bottom-up review of existing communications capabilities and assets to ensure that the UN is fully leveraging all possible capacities in an impactful, deliberate, efficient, effective and quantifiable manner.

(3) Merge: There is undoubtedly duplication in the existing communications architecture at UNHQ. The bottom-up review should identify areas where capacities can be combined and efficiencies realized using existing resources and where outdated assets could be repurposed to fulfill prioritized communications tasks.

(4) Manage: Integrated and coordinated backstopping of field presences will require a clear definition of roles and responsibilities and a willingness to use non-traditional means such as outsourcing and centralization/sharing of technical assets such as FM radio production. This should throughout involve deliberate and contemplative oversight with clear lines of accountability.

(5) Measure: A data-driven, measures of effect-oriented, quantifiable approach will allow a strategic communications approach that demonstrates effective use of scarce resources, value for money and overall impact. Monitoring, through software and other more traditional tools will increase situational awareness and can be a huge asset in this regard.

(6) Message: Leadership-driven, corporate messaging beginning with a core narrative and then flowing into thematic and issue-specific subgroupings will allow the Organization to communicate as one and leverage the diverse resources of the whole UN system to provide a compelling narrative on the intrinsic value of the UN and the multilateral approach it embodies. Specific departments and AFPs will harmonize against these broad themes rather than repeat them, but the diverse voices when properly coordinated and integrated can ensure that the system, and the UN leadership that embodies it, can manage its reputation and communicate effectively and persuasively to a diverse set of target audiences.

V. Conclusion

Strengthening the UN's efforts to promote effective strategic communications by and from leadership in peace operations will help the system deter spoilers, address its critics, rally its supporters, maximize

opportunities and leverage all available resources to help vulnerable populations have a fighting chance for peace. To operationalize the recommendations and practical suggestions outlined in this paper, the logical next step would be to work directly with the UN's training teams to translate related principles into the best practices-driven, practical training for UN leadership on peace operations. It will also require the establishment of integrated strategic communications oversight at UNHQ, a bottom-up review of the strategic communications architecture at UNHQ and on UNPOs,the provision of the necessary digital resources, and the creation an accountability framework to ensure compliance and measure success.

The UN has a remarkable opportunity to raise its voice in the name of those who cannot be heard. It should spare no efforts to make sure the message is loud, clear and effective.

INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR THE CHALLENGES OF PEACE OPERATIONS