

# **The Role of Post-Intervention Security in Peace and Relief Mission Negotiations: Responding to Local Populations**

by Victoria Edwards  
Department of National Defence

After the Fall: Theory and Practice of Post-Intervention Security  
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## **Introduction**

I have been asked to talk today about the Role of Post-Intervention Security in Peace and Relief Mission Negotiations.<sup>1</sup> Drawing in particular on lessons from conflicts in El Salvador, Columbia, and Kosovo, the paper considers the theory and practice of post-intervention security in the context of field negotiations. I consider how post-integration security is integral to the success of the mission, since without the provision of basic security and social order there can be no negotiation. How can the locally-engaged language assistants pose post-intervention security challenges in the areas of confidentiality, bias and safety?

### **Summary: Role of Post-Integration Security**

#### **Context**

- If force suppresses violent conflict, control remains as long as force is applied; however, voluntary cooperation leads to sustainable peace.

#### **Tools**

- Negotiation and Communication.

#### **Aims (Risks)**

- To facilitate peace & relief efforts.
- To contain conflict (reduce violence).
- To promote peace (justice, fairness & rule of law).

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<sup>1</sup> This paper could not have been written without the support and interest of many at the Pearson Peacekeeping Training Centre (PPC), Cornwallis Park and access to ideas generated at workshops and other events offered at the centre during the course on peacekeeping negotiation (CO2).

When one thinks of peace and relief mission negotiations, high-level international accords between the leaders of the various nations come readily to mind. These negotiations, as a rule, are highly visible and use professional negotiators and extensive support staff, including highly-trained professional interpreters. Often these negotiations take place far from the action, perhaps a luxury hotel in Geneva, or an Air Force base in the United States. Field negotiations, however, between military members, aid organizations and civilians in the context of contemporary peace and relief missions (in dangerous, ever changing conditions), using locally-engaged language assistants constitute another level of negotiation and another level of risk. Ambassador Holbrook said in 1996 about Bosnia that,

[i]n this negotiation, dealing with people who are liars and in some cases killers, dealing with people who are desperate, dealing with traditions, you have to get very tough.

United Nations staff found dealing with one negotiator, who was usually drunk, unwashed, and foul-mouthed, and who discussed rape squads and ethnic cleansing techniques,<sup>2</sup> to be particularly demoralizing. Dealing with this negotiator was frustrating since the staff had frequently risked their own lives to arrange for the belligerents' safe passage through the battle lines.

Negotiation is a practical mechanism used in peace and relief missions to help contain armed conflicts and settle them by peaceful means. Negotiation is the process wherein two or more people communicate with the aim of reaching an agreement. We negotiate, because voluntary cooperation of the local parties is more likely to lead to a sustainable

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<sup>2</sup> Personal conversation with UN UNPROFOR I and II peacekeeper (former Yugoslavia) (C02: Cornwallis, August 2001).

peace. In contrast, if force is used to suppress violent conflict, it will remain under control only for as long as that force continues to be applied. In a post intervention environment, the tools to manage the conflict include negotiation and communication. Post integration security is necessary to facilitate the peace and relief assistance. The peace and relief mission negotiator assists the parties to change their behaviour from the previous state they were in – a state of violent conflict – to a new state of positive peace (positive peace goes beyond peace defined as the absence of violence to include the presence of justice, fairness and the rule of law).

### **Summary: Peace and Relief Mission Negotiation**

#### **Context**

- Process wherein two or more people communicate.
- Resolve disputes between stakeholders:
  - e.g., parties to conflict, NGOs, police/peacekeeper.
- Respond to needs of local populations:
  - e.g., authorities, community leaders, civilians.

#### **Aims (Risks)**

- To reach an agreement.
- To de-escalate a conflict.
- To promote a secure environment.
- To develop peaceful/lasting solutions to conflict.

Negotiations have enormous potential in de-escalating a conflict, to promote a secure environment and to develop peaceful and lasting solutions to a conflict. At the management/command level, the peace and relief mission negotiation is with and among the parties to the conflict and other stakeholders. The negotiators may attempt to resolve

disputes among themselves, with or between parties or between local people, the local authorities and/or community leaders.<sup>3</sup>

In a post-integration environment, individuals serving in Peace and Relief Missions require more negotiation skills than they might require in carrying out the same duties under peaceful circumstances in their own country. The Peace and Relief Mission negotiation environment is much more complex than one is used to under normal circumstances due to a tense political and social context often characterised by mistrust, rumours and preconceived negative stereotypes of each other. The negotiator will typically be communicating with someone from another culture, without a common language, often under threatening or tense situations in a context where people are stressed and easily irritable.

### **Summary: Negotiate with Local Populations**

#### **Aim**

- To clarify the relationship or roles between peacekeepers and the parties or local authorities:
  - Patrol moves through a village.
- To secure agreement to certain behaviour to prevent escalation or reoccurrence of conflict:
  - Patrol comes across fighting between two villages.
- To coordinate the relief logistics:
  - Vaccination campaign.
  - Return of internally displaced persons or refugees.
  - Distribution of supplies.

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Training and Evaluation Service Standardized Training Generic Modules Level 1, Military Division, Department of Peacekeeping Operations SGTM 11; Communication and Negotiation SGTM 05b.

As a military patrol moves through a village, the negotiation may relate to the relationship or roles between peacekeepers and the parties or local authorities. Where a military patrol comes across fighting between two villages, the peacekeepers may negotiate with the parties with a view to secure agreement to certain behaviour to prevent escalation or reoccurrence of conflict. To coordinate the logistics for a specific humanitarian relief event, for example, the negotiations may support a vaccination campaign, the return of internally displaced persons, refugees or the distribution of supplies.

Early peace negotiations are frequently not supported by local opinion and are therefore held secretly, "Most Colombians think it is unacceptable to negotiate with guerrillas as they are known to be supported through drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping and murder"<sup>4</sup> During secretly held negotiations between the Colombian government and guerrilla leaders, a Colombian waiter explained that he had left Colombia because there were "too many guerrillas ... guerrillas everywhere."<sup>5</sup> Despite the gaffe in protocol, the waiter's comments helped the negotiations.

The importance of language is succinctly captured by the following relief mission interview. A UN worker tried to offer a few words of comfort in Spanish to a grieving widow he was interviewing. Owing to his poor pronunciation, his actual message was "don't feel bad [about your dead husband], I have no penis."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Personal conversation with government lawyer (Colombia) (C02: Cornwallis, August 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Personal conversation with government lawyer (Colombia) (C02: Cornwallis, August 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Personal conversation with peacekeeper who served in the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL: July 1991 - April 1995), (C02: Cornwallis, August 2001).

At a roadblock, an *ad hoc* negotiation may involve the freedom of movement of peacekeepers, non-governmental organization or population through area controlled by one of the parties. During the Rwandan conflict, roadblocks were often staffed by child soldiers. Consequently, one peacekeeper preferred to hand out soccer balls to guarantee safe passage rather than traditional bribes of alcohol, tobacco or money.<sup>7</sup>

### **Summary: Roadblock**

#### **Context**

- Negotiation with a child soldier at a roadblock.
- Threatening or tense situation.

#### **Aim**

- To ensure the freedom of movement of peacekeepers, NGOs or local population through area controlled by one of the parties.

#### **Result**

- Peacekeeper provided a soccer ball to guarantee safe passage versus alcohol, tobacco or money.

Every culture has developed customs and tradition to regulate formal communications like negotiations. Regardless of whether the negotiations are *ad hoc* or planned, the negotiation, always takes place amongst a small group of representatives of the parties. As the agreements need to be implemented by a much larger group, the follow-up and information sharing with these wider constituencies are very important. Think about who needs to be involved in the negotiation and implementation process.

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<sup>7</sup> Personal conversation with member of the International Civilian Police (CIVPOL) in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996 (C02: Cornwallis, August 2001).

### **Summary: Best Practices—Negotiation**

**Aim**

- To follow the proper custom and protocol.

**Process**

- **Introduction:**
  - Gather information about the specific problem;
  - Consider and clarify assumptions;
  - Agree on a process, purpose and direction.
- **Substantive negotiations:**
  - Clarify and prioritize interests vice positions;
  - Deal with problem and people-related issues;
  - Clarify unspoken interests or outcomes;
  - Agree to the text and draft agreement.
- **Closing session:**
  - Record formal agreement.

It is important to follow the proper custom and protocol during all three stages of the actual negotiation, the introduction (start), the substantive negotiations (discussion) and the closing session (end).<sup>8</sup> Use the start of the negotiations to gather information about the specific problem you are facing. Consider and clarify your own assumptions as well as those of your counterparts. Agree on a process to follow to give negotiations a clear sense of purpose and direction. During the substance (discussion) clarify and prioritize interests (needs, concerns, fears – why), as opposed to positions (offers, demands, requests – what or how). Make sure that the problem at hand is dealt with separately from people-related issues. Be clear about the unspoken interests or outcomes that could influence negotiations. During the substance, the representatives conclude the drafting

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations Training and Evaluation Service, Standardized Training Generic Modules Level 1, Military Division, Department of Peacekeeping Operations SGTM 11; Communication and Negotiation SGTM 05b; Cultural Awareness <http://www.un.org/depts/dpko/training/sgtm/sgtm.htm>

process and the parties informally agree to the text. In the conclusion (end), the formal agreement should be recorded, and/or all parties can sign copies of the agreement.

### **Summary: Best Practice—Respond to Local Populations**

#### **Aim**

- To adopt credible and acceptable approach.
- To be effective at the negotiating table.
- To avoid critical cultural mistakes.

#### **Strategies and tactics**

- Your own mandate and orders:
  - e.g., convoy protocols.
- The other parties' interest:
  - e.g., information about the specific problem.
- The cultural context:
  - history, values, traditions.

To respond to local populations more effectively necessitates improving the credibility and acceptability of your approach to peace and relief mission negotiation, becoming more effective at the negotiating table, and avoiding critical cultural mistakes. The principle factors that will influence successful negotiations are your knowledge of: your own mandate and orders (e.g., convoy protocols); the other parties' interest (e.g., information about the specific problem you are facing) and the cultural context (the history, culture, values, traditions, and conflict).

### **Summary: Best Practice—Co-working Languages**

#### **Context**

- When the local language is not a UN working language.
- For human rights operations.

#### **Aim**

- Local language as mission co-working language.



The International Civilian Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH), a human rights operation, made every effort to use the local language as a co-working language of the mission. All peacekeeping missions should do the same if the local language is not one of the United Nations working languages. This is a particularly strong imperative for human rights operations. The MICIVIH Manual goes on to explain why this is important:

“[I]t is essential that everyone understands why the Mission must operate (and must be perceived as operating) in French and Créole.... the right of each person to express, communicate, blossom, develop, and be respected in one's own culture.”<sup>9</sup>

#### **Summary: Best Practice—Language Assistants**

##### **Context**

- Multi-national nature of peace and relief missions.
- Authorities will debrief locally engaged staff.
- Chuchotage, whispered translation.

##### **Aim**

- To be a cultural intermediary.
- To represent ethnic group or minority community.
- To convey sensitive or involved messages.
- To help solve difficult communication problems.

##### **Risks**

- Ensure the staff's safety while on duty.
- Refrain from discussing confidential information.

Because of the multi-national nature of peace and relief missions, most negotiators will not be able to communicate with the local people of the host country in their own languages or dialects consequently they will typically employ local people as language assistants to assist with translation and interpretation. A language assistant acts as a cultural intermediary between the counterparts speaking different languages. Where

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<sup>9</sup> Orientation Manual and Guidelines for observers of the International Civilian Mission in Haiti (OAS/UN: Port-au-Prince, July 1993) at 2.5.3.

possible, an individual from the ethnic group or minority community concerned should be used to convey sensitive or involved messages or to help solve difficult communication problems. The provision of interpreters would be advisable, for example, when detailed, accurate and/or sensitive information is solicited from, or conveyed to, non-English or French-speaking cultural communities or second language speakers to minimize the potential for dangerous misunderstandings.<sup>10</sup>

Peacekeepers should be prepared to employ interpreters when necessary.<sup>11</sup>

Peacekeeping negotiations in the field often employ *chuchotage* in which the interpreter whispers the translation for up to three persons who are to receive the interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

For best results, the principals should make statements in short paragraph-sized blocks, speak at a normal speed and tone of voice, express their thoughts in clear, logical order and avoid acronyms, slang and jargon.<sup>13</sup>

### **Summary: Best Practice—Language Assistants**

#### **Context**

- Non-professional interpreters.
- Risk of threats, intimidation, and reprisals.
- Stress of working in danger zones.

#### **Aim**

- To maintain high standards.
- To ensure professional expertise and ethics.

#### **Prerequisites**

- Language proficiency.
- Competency.
- Unbiased attitude.

<sup>10</sup> N. McDonald and G. Hasselfield, The McDonald Guide to Managing Diversity (Winnipeg: Cross Cultural Communications International, 1995) at 191.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Training and Evaluation Service Standardized Training Generic Modules Level 1, Military Division, Department of Peacekeeping Operations SGTM 11; Communication and Negotiation SGTM 05b; Cultural Awareness <http://www.un.org/depts/dpko/training/sgtm/sgtm.htm>

<sup>12</sup> M. Sofer, The Translator's Handbook, Third Edition (New York, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Sofer, The Translator's Handbook.

Maintaining high standards in the identification and selection of language assistants is the key to guaranteeing the professional expertise and ethics of the staff. The primary prerequisites for a locally-engaged language assistant are language proficiency, competency, and an unbiased attitude. The candidate must be bilingual in source and target languages. An oral selection process is essential for proper assessment of the general knowledge and aptitude for interpretation of prospective candidates. The candidate must work quickly and accurately. Finding locally engaged candidates who do not hold major biases that will affect the quality of interpretation is a crucial challenge.

Local populations, from which we select language assistants, often undergo traumatic experiences, either directly or indirectly. Persecution, torture, violence, the terrors and hardships of flight and exile are fairly common and may leave psychological scars and problems in their wake.<sup>14</sup> All agents of the peace and relief missions, including the locally engaged translators, must appear to be unbiased by political and ideological beliefs, religious convictions, motivation or involvement maintain confidentiality. In one case, the UN narrowly averted using an interpreter on an important land claim negotiation where his family was one of the litigants.<sup>15</sup> In another case, a UN negotiator's journal containing the sensitive notes on several ongoing field negotiations between Bosnians and Serbs was confiscated at a checkpoint.<sup>16</sup>

It is vital to remember that, in most cases; the locally-engaged language assistant does not leave the field when peacekeepers go. As a result, it is vital to refrain from discussing

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<sup>14</sup> McDonald and Hasselfield, The McDonald Guide to Managing Diversity Cross Cultural Communications, p. 106.

<sup>15</sup> Personal conversation with former UN peacekeeper (El Salvador) (C02: Cornwallis, August 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Personal conversation with UN UNPROFOR I and II peacekeeper (former Yugoslavia) (C02: Cornwallis, August 2001).

confidential information within their range since the authorities will likely debrief locally engaged staff. At minimum, the interpreter should be guaranteed security while on duty since interpreters may be subject to threats, intimidation, and reprisals against themselves or family members.

Peace and relief negotiation can be awkward or erroneous, adding to the success or failure of a mission. Interpreters and locally engaged language assistants provide a communication and negotiation bridge between the disputants that allow progress towards peace arrangements. Interpreters and language assistants play a vital role in this process under dangerous, ever-changing conditions that require interpreting skills as well as personal qualities of courage and persuasion. They form a unique team with the unarmed military officers and non-governmental organization with whom they work.

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