





# INTRODUCTION

## INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

### Why Study International Communication?

John Dewey (1926, p. 166) was correct in asserting that "of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful," then international communication must surely be the most wonderful of all. Studying it leads to one complex issue after another. International communication encompasses political, economic, social, cultural, and military concerns. It requires a focus on human rights, technology, and the right to own the products of the mind itself—that is, intellectual property. The following list contains some examples of the activities of international communication.

In 1984 the United States, which had led the effort to form the international telecommunications satellite organization (Intelsat), decided that competition in international satellite communication

would better serve its national interests. The U.S. government assumed that competition would be a useful device to drive down the costs of international satellite communication, particularly between North America and Europe. U.S. pressure on Intelsat eventually resulted in new services, each of which had to be coordinated, under the Intelsat treaty, with the existing system. Many other countries objected to this approach, however, since they saw competition as a potential threat to their own interests, as well as to Intelsat's economic viability. The failure of Intelsat, they thought, would result in poorer service for them, since profit-making satellite companies would not want to serve low-density satellite routes.

- In late 1987 President Ronald Reagan sent a group of FB-111 fighter-bombers, based in England, to bomb Libya in retaliation for Moamar Ghadaffi's support for

international terrorism. Voice of America (VOA), one of the United States' international radio services, broadcast an appeal to Libyans during that time calling for them to overthrow Ghadaffi. Such an appeal arguably violated international law prohibiting the use of propaganda to incite violence or to interfere in the internal affairs of another country.

- In May 1989, during the student protests in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, against corruption in the government of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese government began to jam the transmissions of VOA and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), a practice that it had abandoned in 1978. The government acted ostensibly because the students were listening to these radio services to gauge the degree of their public support in China, and the Chinese government therefore saw them as an encouragement to further unrest (Trescott, 1989). Following the June crackdown on and massacre of students and workers in Beijing, Chinese students in the United States began to use facsimile (fax) machines to send news stories appearing in the U.S. press to their peers in China.
- Two Pakistanis visiting the United States for the first time in 1989 were relieved to discover how friendly Americans were. They had expected, they told me, to confront aggression and violence, based on what they had seen in U.S.-made films and television programs. They couldn't understand why U.S. film and television producers, when they created their entertainment material, didn't consider what members of their foreign audiences would think about the United States.
- In August 1991, during the short-lived Soviet coup, Russian President Boris Yeltsin

was able to announce the coup and ask for help from contacts in Washington DC, using a fax machine. Soviet President Gorbachev, detained in a vacation dacha by the military, was able to monitor events in Moscow by listening to the BBC and VOA on a shortwave radio. Other information made its way to the West via electronic mail systems employed by Soviet academics using personal computers and modems.

These examples indicate some of the activities that comprise the international communications system. Through this system, journalists report news nearly instantaneously from anywhere in the world; governments communicate directly with foreign citizens via state-operated radio stations; individuals carry on telephone conversations, send faxes of documents, or retrieve information from computer databases in other countries. This system also allows people to access banking, stock transaction, and airline reservation systems, and companies to trade in film, audio, and video products.

The United States has a major stake in the development and use of this international system. U.S. citizens and businesses own over one quarter of all the telephones in the world, a third of the radios, the highest percentage of personal computers, the greatest number of satellite earth stations. The United States has the world's most extensive network of communication satellites, and it exports more films and television programs than its next four competitors combined. Its citizens and companies also hold more patents than any other industrial democracy. In addition, it broadcasts more hours of international radio programs than any other nation and spends a billion dollars a year on public

place in the world, or to call home from abroad. They also expect to be able to send money across international boundaries or to have credit cards honored worldwide, but don't give much thought to the international communications and financial systems that make such transactions possible.

Normally, people expect to have the actions of their country understood and appreciated abroad. They expect that a speech by a president or their concerns about the budget deficit will be communicated to other countries, although many of them would be surprised to express to explain exactly how that might occur. In fact, however, it does occur on a daily basis, through the activities of foreign journalists working in the United States and reporting to their home countries through the reports carried by the United States' official international radio transmissions, such as VOA, and increasingly through the worldwide activities of CNN. International communication, in other words, is significant in U.S. citizens' lives in those of other peoples around the world. This is true despite the fact that few people give it much thought or are able to explain how it occurs. If it suddenly ceased, however, many citizens in nearly every country of the world would notice it in short order: International telephony would cease; international stock and commodity trading, and financial transactions would grind to a halt; the significant actions of foreign political and military figures would suddenly be forgotten; U.S. citizens living or traveling abroad would effectively "disappear" for days or weeks at a time. The world would suddenly seem more threatening, and its politics more anonymous. The age of mass media (or publicity and openness) would end, and the world would be cut off from light to all the world by communications

would cease, and a new age of fear and darkness would again be possible.

### 1.3

## The Origins of International Communication

International communication has no precise origins. It clearly existed as soon as communication began between modern nation-states, which themselves began to form in the 11th century.<sup>1</sup> It also existed prior to that, however, since the great ancient empires of Rome, Greece, Egypt, Babylon, and the like all established means to communicate across vast territories comprised of many distinct political, linguistic, and cultural entities (see Innis, 1972).

The late Canadian economic historian Harold A. Innis suggested that these empires could be understood by examining the artifacts of communication — the clay and stone tablets, papyrus scrolls, signet rings, and roads — that defined for them their methods of political control and authority. It was the "bias" of these "technologies," he said, that defined the nature of the societies themselves. Some of these early technologies were time-biased, he argued, based in media that were difficult to transport but that lasted for decades, even centuries, such as carved stone or pressed clay tablets. Others were space-biased, based in easily transported, lightweight, and disposable media, such as papyrus. The time-biased media favored tradition and continuity over the years, while space-biased media favored the expansion of political authority geographically, that is, imperialism (Innis, 1951, pp. 3–60, and 1972, pp. 12–115). These same territories today encompass dozens of nations around the Mediterranean basin.

Clearly it would be unfair to discount the "imperial" communication established by these regimes; their systems for rule and linkage via communication were indeed international.

## 1.4

### Defining International Communication

International communication, simply defined, is communication that occurs across international borders, that is, over the borders of nation-states. It is sometimes referred to as transborder or transnational communication, particularly among economists who study transborder data flow, or TBDF.

This definition says both too much and too little. It suggests, for instance, that a Belgian and a Frenchman standing on either side of their border and conversing are practicing international communication. While they are indeed doing just that, it is more the province of "intercultural" communication, which examines the *interpersonal* contact of peoples of different cultural backgrounds. The definition also says too little, however: obviously it does not define the parameters of communication. Does it include a letter sent from Ghana to the United Kingdom? Or a telephone call from Buenos Aires to Lima? Or does it include only the activities of international broadcasters and associations such as Intelsat?

This chapter is designed to establish a clear definition of international communication. The practice of international communication includes many activities, as well as specific treaties, organizations, and events, that receive more comprehensive treatment later on.

## 1.5

### The Characteristics of International Communication

There are six significant characteristics of international communication. While these attributes will not confine the concept so completely that all questions about whether any instance of communication is, in fact, international, they do provide important dimensions to consider when assessing particular activities. They will serve to include rather than exclude communication transactions.

These dimensions are significant as a means to avoid simplistic views of international communication. While it is easy to suggest that international communication is comprised primarily of radio and television activities directed across national frontiers, for instance, this notion is misleading. Equally misleading is the emphasis on international news flow (thereby excluding non-news content) or on the economic impact of data communication, or the exclusion of international voice, fax, or telex transmissions.

Studies in the sphere of international communication, however, typically do concentrate on only a single aspect of this global phenomenon, and perhaps inadvertently prevent complete understanding. The dimensions of international communication included here are means to avoid too narrow a focus. At the same time, however, this book cannot discuss everything. Its focus, therefore, will be on *electronic* communication, including radio, television, voice, fax, telegraph, **telex**, satellite, data, and news content. It will not address person-to-person communication or non-general-audience (i.e., diplomat-to-diplomat) diplomacy, and will have little to say about film or newspaper distribution, although these

er topics are occasionally included in the  
 ysis.

What, then, are the characteristics of in-  
 ternational communication?

### Intentionality

International communication can be either  
*intentional* or *unintentional*. That is, the  
 communication can be directed purposely  
 across an international border, or it can  
 cross it. The activities of international  
 broadcasters, such as VOA or Radio Russia,  
 which target audiences in foreign countries,  
 are obviously intentional international com-  
 munication. The spillover of U.S. radio and  
 television stations' signals into Canada or  
 Mexico, or that of U.S. domestic communi-  
 cations satellites (DOMSATs) into the  
 Caribbean, is also international communi-  
 cation. Such spillover (both terrestrial and  
 satellite) has often generated more contro-  
 versy than communication obviously di-  
 rected across borders by rival political  
 groups.<sup>2</sup> It can have cultural, political, and  
 economic consequences for the country into  
 which it spills, particularly when commer-  
 cially financed, like that of the United  
 States, or politically threatening, like that of  
 West Germany to those in the German  
 Democratic Republic prior to German  
 unification.

### Channels

International communication can be either  
*public* or *private*. Public communication is  
 available to all. Broadcasting is obviously  
 public, although it can use either public or  
 private channels. International high-fre-  
 quency shortwave (SW) broadcasters use  
 public channels; such channels are not as-  
 signed or reserved for individual services.<sup>3</sup>

Public communication occurring on private  
 channels (or channels reserved for non-  
 public use, for example, dedicated channels  
 requiring special decoders or receivers  
 tuneable to particular frequencies) does not  
 currently have much application. An exam-  
 ple of such communication domestically  
 would be the use of radio signals to carry  
 information that can only be heard on spe-  
 cial receivers.<sup>4</sup> The proposed systems for  
 international **direct broadcast satellites**  
**(DBS)** would qualify, as would experiments  
 run by India using the American ATS-6 sat-  
 ellite.<sup>5</sup> Such systems use small satellite re-  
 ceiving dishes to tune in signals.

Private communication, however, is avail-  
 able to a restricted audience. Private com-  
 munication occurring over public channels  
 would include telegraph and telephone traf-  
 fic carried through submarine cables or via  
 satellites from country to country. Often  
 such communication is **encrypted**, or  
 coded, to prevent unintended recipients  
 from determining its meaning. Its content  
 may include military or trade secrets, finan-  
 cial information, or personal data that  
 should not be widely shared.

Private communication can also occur  
 on private channels, when, for instance,  
 an American transnational corporation  
 (TNC) leases a satellite transponder for its  
 exclusive use in linking corporate offices  
 with manufacturing plants or sales offices in  
 other countries, or embassies establish  
 satellite links with their home countries.  
 Some private communication is also en-  
 coded to prevent "listening in" by others. It  
 is thus doubly protected by encryption and  
 restrictions on private channel access. In  
 both cases, too, the content (whether en-  
 coded or not) may be identical: The differ-  
 ence is in the access afforded to individuals  
 or organizations by the owners of the  
 channel.

## **Distribution Technologies**

Information in the international-communications system is transmitted via *radio waves*, contained within *wires* or *cables*, or transported on *film stock* and *audio- or videocassettes*. Radio waves carry terrestrial radio and television signals and the microwave signals used for both up- and down-links between satellites and earth transmitting and receiving stations.<sup>6</sup> Wires and cables, which may take the form of twisted copper pairs and coaxial or fiber optic cables, also carry communications traffic. The essential difference between these two distribution forms is the type of communication they carry. Radio waves typically carry broadcast communication, although they can be used for the point-to-point communication normally carried by wire and cable systems. Companies and governments use ships or airplanes to move recorded material for duplication and redistribution, either legally or illegally.

## **Content Form**

International communication can take a variety of forms. It includes the entertainment, public affairs, and news programming carried by international radio services; the raw news copy carried by international wire services such as the Associated Press or Reuters, computer data and software provided by international data processing and database companies; voice and telegraph traffic carried by companies such as AT&T; encrypted messages carried on military frequencies for organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); and diplomatic messages exchanged between embassies. It also includes faxes and telex messages requiring specialized transmitting and receiving equipment and electronic addresses.

## **Cultural Consequences**

All communication, since it is a symbolic activity, has cultural consequences. Some scholars have argued that the international communications system allows dominant countries to impose their cultural values (including news values, social mores, and political and economic values) on weaker states (see, for instance, Schiller, 1971, 1976, 1989; or Mattelart & Schmucler, 1985). Debate rages between countries that try to protect what they define as indigenous culture (or meaning-laden) practices and forms of communication, and those that claim such practices are destructive of transcultural values, such as the free flow of information and the right to communicate (see chapter 8).

## **Political Nature**

All international communication is political in one way or another. The communication can be overtly political or subtly political, or can merely be affected by countries' politico-economic policies. Political considerations, however, are intrinsic to the practice of international communication, even if the practices of particular organizations, such as international religious broadcasters, are not usually aimed at the exercise of political power. They are political because they cross the boundaries of nation-states, and because uncontrolled information threatens monopolies of knowledge used as the basis of political power (see Innis, 1951, pp. 35–38; and Carey, 1989, pp. 149–156).

### ***Overt Political Communication***

Overtly political communication is obvious. The programs of VOA or Radio Moscow, designed to present official points of view or to analyze world events from a U.S. or So-

et viewpoint, are obviously politically motivated. So is **propaganda**, which the United States Information Agency (USIA) defines as information "so selective and biased as to constitute propaganda . . . [information] adapted to indoctrinate, convert and influence the viewer. . . ." Finally, so is "**disinformation**," or the practice of planting false information that will be picked up and reported by domestic media in another country, and then possibly rebroadcast by international broadcasters and wire services. The United States often complained about alleged Soviet disinformation campaigns, but it used disinformation itself to mislead Iraq prior to beginning the February 1991 ground offensive into Kuwait. During the 1987 Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Washington, USIA director Charles Z. Wick sought assurances that the Soviet Union would discontinue disinformation used against the United States. On January 9, 1988, USIA claimed, the Soviets began a new campaign, however, using old accusations that the United States was "developing a biological weapon designed to kill individuals of a particular ethnic group or race." These stories were reportedly circulating in Africa, and originated in Accra, Ghana (Ottaway, 1988b).

### *More Subtle Political Communication*

More subtle political considerations affect debates held under the auspices of the United Nations. These would include such activities as treaty discussions in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) or meetings called by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), or in working groups that prepare for ITU-sanctioned meetings. They also would include the activities of other specialized UN

organizations, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), or commissions, such as the temporary International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems. Although such organizations, commissions, and assemblies are ostensibly apolitical, their proceedings and recommendations cannot help but be affected by the realities of shifting international rivalries, the difficulties of coordinating the interests of wealthy and technologically advanced nations with those of poorer and less technologically sophisticated countries, and the desires of all countries to have their concerns accepted and taken into account during negotiations or discussions. It is through such debates and ongoing negotiations that international organizations assign **electromagnetic frequency** assignments for radio services, determine the rules governing assignments of **satellite orbital slots** or **spillover** of satellite signals, adopt the technical parameters for new communication services such as **high-definition** or **advanced television** (HDTV or ATV), and arrange other guarantees for protection of "national sovereignty" in an information and communication age. Political commitments, alliances, and animosities affect not only the paper outcome of these discussions, but also the activities of what might be considered nonpolitical entities, such as AT&T or international commercial broadcasters.

### *Political and Economic Policies*

Perhaps most difficult to pinpoint are the political and economic policies that impinge on international communication. These policies can affect the practice of international communication in two principal ways. In the arena of radio and television broadcasting, many countries have adopted various



measures to restrict the import of electronic equipment. These restrictions can take the form of import quotas, heavy duties or other taxes and fees, or simple refusal (or inability) to import at all. Although such practices are justified in many cases by the need to protect hard currency reserves or by the lack of such reserves, they restrict the availability of reception equipment needed to participate in international broadcasting activity. The recent difficulties of African and Latin American countries in repaying massive foreign debts have compounded the problem, since many of the radio receivers imported in the 1960s (the age of inexpensive transistor radios) are, 20 years later, becoming inoperable. New receiver designs, and the "bells and whistles" added to them, have made the receivers of choice very expensive to import (see Fortner & Durham, 1986; or Fortner, 1991c).

In telecommunications a similar difficulty exists. Many countries establish discriminatory pricing policies for telecommunications circuits that favor domestic or regional links over longer distance international ones — even when there is no cost factor that demands such practices — to generate revenue from TNCs or to discourage long-distance communication. Some countries also require equity participation to grant franchises or sign cooperation agreements allowing private networks to function in conjunction with international links.

Such policies in both broadcasting and telecommunications do generate revenue for many poorer countries and provide hard currency necessary to trade in world markets, but they also provide the means to suppress citizen contact with the outside world, particularly where people are too poor or isolated to avoid government controls. International communication can amount to only a trickle in such cases. Peo-

ple in remote areas, for instance, who have no telephone service or electricity have, until recently, had little access to the outside world except through battery-powered radios. Also, these radios have been operational only when batteries were available. Loans from the World Bank for telecommunications development, the advent of videocassette recorders (VCRs) and battery-powered televisions, and construction of homemade satellite dishes, among other developments, are now beginning to remove age-old barriers to communication.

History

1.6

## International Communication and Political History

As previously stated, international communication has no precise origins. For purposes of analysis, however, this book will look back only as far as 1835, for the following reasons. Successful electric telegraph experiments began as early as 1837. By 1840 France was using an optical telegraph system; it had constructed towers across its territory, and men with flags received and transmitted messages cross-country (see International Telecommunication Union, 1965, pp. 11–16). By 1844 a working telegraph line was operational in the United States, and railroads were under construction that would require international negotiations to establish common rail gauges to facilitate traffic flow between countries (see Czitrom, 1982, p. 6; and International Telecommunication Union, 1965, p. 29). It was the train, steamship, and telegraph that quickened the pace of international news flow, financial transactions, and even interpersonal communication. These technolo-

also tightened the grip of imperial powers on their developing empires (see New, 1857, p. 140; Briggs & Maverick, pp. 21, 22; Burt, 1956, p. 435; and 1990, p. x).

During these middle decades of the 19th century, too, countries began the negotiations that would establish an international communications system, negotiations that national leaders, cognizant of the power of communication, knew technological developments required. These technologies, and those that followed, would eventually provide the power to create mass audiences for propaganda, establish news as a major consideration in international politics, and tie the world's economies into an ever more interdependent whole.

To facilitate understanding, this book is divided roughly into three periods: 1835–1932, 1933–1969, and 1970 to the present. Each of these periods is, in turn, subdivided into subperiods and major historical events. None of these dates, however, are “hard and fast,” and some developments also straddle the boundaries.

### The Period of International Conventions: 1835–1932

The first period witnessed the development of the initial technologies of international communication: electric telegraph (1837), submarine cable (1866), telephone (1876), wireless (1897), and radio (1907).<sup>8</sup> And in the 1920s major developments in international point-to-point telephony using radio took place. The application of electricity to the problem of communication led to the first international convention and organization concerned with communication, the International Telegraph Union, formed in 1865.<sup>9</sup> The newer wireless technologies of

the 20th century led to similar developments. In 1912, in the aftermath of the *Titanic* disaster, various countries signed an international convention requiring ships to have wireless equipment in working order and trained operators on board. National radio administrations began to meet as well, with the first meeting occurring in Berlin in 1903. This meeting resulted in the formation of a working group that became known as the International Radiotelegraph Union, although it never existed officially as an international organization. In 1932 the Telegraph Union and the Radiotelegraph Union merged to form the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). In 1906 the radio convention established fundamental radio regulations that led to certain frequencies being designated for particular services, such as long-distance communication and government use (see Headrick, 1991, pp. 120, 121).

Such efforts shared one major goal: to facilitate international communication. The Telegraph Convention signed in Paris in 1865, for instance, establishing the original ITU, created a body whose tasks included setting technical interconnection standards among nationally directed telegraph services, as well as mechanisms for overseeing tariffs, sharing revenue for telegrams crossing international borders, using encryption, and assuring privacy of messages. Similar problems had to be resolved when countries began to use the telephone for international communication, and again when Marconi introduced wireless services.

The 1903 and 1906 radiotelegraph conferences also dealt with the problem of monopolization. The Marconi companies had adopted a policy that forbade their coastal stations to communicate with ships using non-Marconi equipment. Efforts to break this policy were in vain until the *Titanic*

disaster proved the necessity of non-discriminatory communications policies. The U.S. Radio Act of 1912, for instance, required shipboard wireless stations to be of sufficient power to broadcast "by day over sea a distance of one hundred miles," all receiving stations to give distress signals "absolute priority," and "each shore station open to general public service between the coast and vessels at sea . . . to exchange radiograms with any similar shore station and with any ship station without distinction of the radio system adopted by such stations . . ." (Provisions 8, 9, and 11 of the Radio Act of 1912, passed on August 13, 1912).

### **The Period of Politicalization and Propaganda: 1933–1969**

The second period opened with development of overt international propaganda organs in several countries.<sup>10</sup> The Third Reich emerged in Germany in 1933 under Adolf Hitler, who appointed Joseph Goebbels, advocate of the "big lie," to be minister of propaganda.<sup>11</sup> The BBC, which had started broadcasting internationally in English in 1932, began to consider the possibilities of foreign-language broadcasting in 1935. By the following year an editorial in the *Indianapolis Star* was being quoted by Alan Dudley of the BBC to voice his misgivings about foreign language programming. The editorial claimed that Great Britain and the United States were perhaps the only countries in the world "not broadcasting propaganda in a foreign tongue" (quoted in Mansell, 1982, pp. 43–44). The BBC did begin German language broadcasting during the Munich crisis in 1938, but maintained the position that "all British information should be truthful and objective."<sup>12</sup> On May 26, 1940, however, a British-sponsored clandestine radio station began beaming

material into Nazi Germany, the first of many such operations throughout the war (see Soley & Nichols, 1987, pp. 25–32). The United States created VOA following U.S. entry into World War II to begin broadcasting to the people of the Third Reich.

The politicalization of radio was clearly underway with such operations. Although some services, such as the BBC and VOA, attempted to maintain a nonpropaganda posture, the fact that Great Britain and the United States began such services, and directed programming to hostile countries in foreign languages, indicated the political underpinnings of the broadcasts, irrespective of the actual content.

During the war years, too, submarine cables became military targets, and national news agencies became means to try to influence foreign public opinion.<sup>13</sup> The Nazis established an elaborate system to direct the output of both their domestic and international news operations, and the Allies subsidized or supported their wire services as well. Such activities continued following the war, as did the jamming activity the Nazis had initiated to drown out the clandestine radio broadcasts sponsored by the British. With the onset of the Cold War, the emerging adversaries adopted new strategies, with the United States establishing three separate services capable of reaching behind what was called the "Iron Curtain." These were Radio Free Europe (RFE), directed into Eastern Europe; Radio Liberty (RL), directed into the Soviet Union; and Radio in the American Sector (RIAS), located in West Berlin, a city then surrounded by East Germany.

The Soviets, in turn, directed Radio Moscow to the West, beginning its North American service in 1943, and started jamming frequencies of RFE/RL, VOA, the BBC, and eventually Radio Israel, which in turn began broadcasting to the Soviet Union in 1949.

Throughout the years that followed, tensions between East and West would flare and smolder, ignited by a variety of events.<sup>14</sup> In the United States the "red scare" and the McCarthy years kindled renewed anti-Communist sentiment, as did regular accusations of Soviet expansionism in the developing world.

Throughout this period international communication was always a potential threat to some societies, particularly those that were closely supervised, or actually dictated the content of, domestic media operations. The extent of such threats can perhaps best be seen in the abortive 1956 Hungarian uprising against Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. During this period RFE falsely broadcast messages that Western assistance could be provided to Hungarian rebels fighting Soviet troops. When Soviet troops entered Hungarian cities, their first act was to retake the radio stations that had been occupied by rebels. One station, Radio Free Rakoczi, broadcast a message as it was being attacked: "Attention, Radio Free Europe, hello, attention. This is Roka speaking. The radio of revolutionary youth . . . help, help, help . . . Radio Free Europe . . . forward our request" (quoted in Wise & Cross, 1964, p. 327).<sup>15</sup>

### The Period of Increasing Complexity and Proliferation: 1970–Present

The period of politicalization and propaganda never really ended. But in the third period a newly complex environment emerged, resulting from both the application of new communications technologies and the proliferation of new nations with the breakup of Europe's colonial empires. One could argue that this third period began as early as 1965, when the first Intelsat

satellite was boosted into orbit. By 1975 a critical mass of new technologies had developed sufficiently to alter the dominant politicalization/propaganda bias of the second period by propelling international communication into the third period, one in which economic factors competed equally with political ones in determining international communication activity and content. By 1975 the portable radio, for instance, had waned as the dominant form of consumer electronics expenditure (see *Japan Electronics Almanac 1985*, 1985, p. 176). In both developed and developing countries automobile radios, audiocassette players (both portable and auto), high-fidelity components, televisions, and videocassette players had overtaken the portable radio as consumer technologies of choice. The capacity of satellites had increased many times over, from the 240-voice channel and single black-and-white television channel capacity of the 1965 Early Bird to 12,000 voice circuits and two color television channels on Intelsat V, launched in 1980 (Williamson, 1984). The number of satellite paths (providing point-to-point capability) for Intelsat grew from less than 10 paths in 1965 to over 640 by 1978. And coaxial cable, which was first used for transatlantic telegraphy and telephony in 1956, provided 104,000 circuits by 1978 (Dawidziuk & Preston, 1979, pp. 3.4.11.3–3.4.11.4).

These changes, in aggregate, introduced new economic and political imperatives into the practice of international communication. Both international broadcasters and telecommunications providers had to contend with new competition, provide new programming that would alter the context of international programs, and reconcile new expectations with established systems. For instance, the fidelity of both broadcasting and voice circuits became newly significant issues, rekindling the 1930s argument

Wakana  
CD  
distortion

over the superiority of **frequency modulation (FM)** versus **amplitude modulation (AM)** in radio broadcasting. The ability of **telecommunications** systems to provide **broadband** services for television and data transmission became increasingly important. The use of the frequency spectrum itself became a contentious issue as potential users argued for new service assignments, based largely on technical and economic grounds, and developing countries, in response, tried to reserve frequencies for their own future use, asserting political prerogatives.

International meetings on communications issues were often contentious during the 1970s. Numerous declarations were adopted in meetings of developing countries. A new world information order (NWIO) debate emerged, modeled on the earlier disputes over a new world economic order (NWEEO). Both UNESCO and the ITU commissioned major studies on communications problems, particularly as they existed in developing countries.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.7

### The Role of International Conventions

All international communications services depend on agreements signed among sovereign states to work. In broadcasting, for instance, both international and domestic services must use the electromagnetic spectrum, a naturally occurring physical phenomenon that allows radio waves to carry information from transmitter to receiver. International agreements establish particular services, such as **medium-wave** (what "Americans" call AM) radio, **very high frequency** (VHF, or what "Americans" call

FM) radio, television, terrestrial microwave and satellite communication, marine and land mobile communication, and so forth.<sup>17</sup> Since the electromagnetic spectrum is a single worldwide phenomenon, and since radio waves cannot necessarily be confined within the border of a single country,<sup>18</sup> international conventions (or agreements) assign certain portions of the frequency spectrum to particular services. The ITU does not allow uses of the spectrum that have no specific assignments, although experimental services are often allowed, either by the ITU or by domestic agencies such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), within frequency bands that have been reserved for specific uses.

In telecommunications conventions establish the standards that allow communication across international circuits, both wire and wireless, to occur. The connection of wires between two domestic services, for instance, requires that a common standard exist for **bandwidth, impedance, voltage**, and so on, so as to prevent one system from damaging the other. Also, the components of satellite dishes must be designed to **down-link** voice, data, or broadcast information **up-linked** from other countries in a particular form, or only gibberish will result. Incompatible television standards also must be converted at either up- or down-link sites to allow broadcast over domestic cables or broadcast systems. Companies must record videocassettes, too, in appropriate television formats before exporting them to other countries.

International conventions, then, signed by countries that belong to the ITU or by countries in bilateral discussions establish the **frequencies** assigned to specific services — or divide up a band into frequencies to be used by countries bordering one another — determine the technical standards

particular services, and, more generally, what we might call the "moral expectations" of international communications. These general expectations, for instance, condemn the practice of jamming (deliberately interfering with the radio signals of a broadcaster) and require countries using satellites for domestic direct broadcasts to homes to limit the spillover of signals into adjacent countries.

The necessity of such conventions, of course, often politicizes the technical questions that come before the ITU, since countries disagree about what standards ought to be adopted for particular services, or whether frequencies ought to be reserved for specific uses. The most effective sanctions on individual countries' actions are those signed bilaterally and those that establish engineering specifications for equipment linked to foreign systems. Manufacturers prefer worldwide standards for such equipment, since it allows them to make better use of the economies of scale in producing it, and this provides an additional incentive for agreement on such issues.<sup>19</sup> This preference, too, means that competing manufacturing companies press their governments to assure worldwide standards they own through patents. This can slow technological development, frustrate efforts of countries to decide how best to commit limited resources to provide the connection to international communications systems, and politicize what would otherwise be economic or technical questions.

### The Right to Disregard International Conventions

Broadcasting countries find it more difficult to establish universally held conven-

tions. Any country has the right, under the ITU charter, to take a "reservation" on any portion of a protocol adopted by international assemblies. That is, a country reserves the right to disregard those portions of the protocol that it specifically stipulates when signing it. This makes the role of the ITU in policing broadcasting activity difficult, a situation compounded by the lack of effective and dependable sanctions to apply to those defying international conventions.

## 1.8

### Examples of International Communication Activity

International communication takes many forms. It can occur merely as spillover—that is, as radio or television signals crossing an international boundary, an everyday occurrence, for instance, along the border of the United States and Canada. Or it can be purposeful, using channels dedicated to carrying international messages.

#### *International Broadcasting*

More than 100 countries engage in international broadcasting. The United States, for instance, operates or funds five distinct radio services: Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Martí, which are under the direction of the United States Information Agency (USIA), and Radio Free Europe (RFE), Radio Liberty (RL), and Radio Free Afghanistan (RFA), all under the direction of the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB). In June 1991 VOA broadcast 1,187 hours per week, RFE 539, RL 499, Radio Martí 162, and RFA 14. The United States, then, broadcast a total of 2,401 hours that year, making it the largest international broadcaster in the world, a distinction held

## Researching to Learn *Investigating NGOs Online*

### *Global Policy Forum*

"Paper on NGO Participation at the United Nations" (March 28, 2006). This paper defines NGOs, discusses their relationship with states, businesses, and regional and international institutions.  
[www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/index.htm](http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/index.htm)

### *NGO Global Network*

A website designed to promote collaboration among NGOs.  
[www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/index.htm](http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/index.htm)

### *World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (WANGO)*

A worldwide NGO directory that allows visitors to select geographic regions from which to conduct research on NGOs.  
[www.wango.org/resources.aspx?section=ngodir](http://www.wango.org/resources.aspx?section=ngodir)

### *Department of Public Information (DPI)*

This site provides information on collaboration between the UN DPI and NGOs.  
[www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/index.asp](http://www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/index.asp)

### *The Global Development Research Center: The NGO Café*

This is a virtual library on NGOs. Contains general information on various NGOs.  
[www.gdrc.org/ngo/](http://www.gdrc.org/ngo/)

### *Union of International Associations (UIA) – International Organizations and NGOs Project*

This site provides a list of links to NGOs and IOs along with some information on each.  
[www.uia.org/organizations/home.php#](http://www.uia.org/organizations/home.php#)

### *Global Governance Watch (Formerly NGOWatch.org)*

A website dedicated to monitor actions by NGOs and IGOs and the impact these actions have on domestic policy, primarily in the US.  
[www.globalgovernancewatch.org/](http://www.globalgovernancewatch.org/)

### *Duke University Libraries' NGO Research Guide – Key Resources*

Contains links to various NGOs and NGO directories.  
[http://library.duke.edu/research/subject/guides/ngo\\_guide/](http://library.duke.edu/research/subject/guides/ngo_guide/)

### *United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) – Non-Government Organizations Database*

A searchable database for NGOs with consultative states with the UN Economic and Social Council.  
[www.unog.ch/80256EE60057E07D/\(httpPages\)/3101491B86487F6D80256EFC0061DFD9?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/80256EE60057E07D/(httpPages)/3101491B86487F6D80256EFC0061DFD9?OpenDocument)

business of publicly reporting on and chastising governments for their human right abuses makes AI a target of criticism by governments that don't agree with or appreciate the picture that the organization is painting of them and distributing to the world

## Conclusion

While the nation-state continues to be the prominent actor in the international arena, international organizations such as IGOs and NGOs are playing an increasingly important role. In some cases these organizations are taking over duties that were once the purview of the nation-state, including providing education, health care, and infrastructure development. Although most states are generally willing to give up some degree of sovereignty in order to be part of an IGO, states are primarily motivated by self-interest, which causes them to resist giving IGOs too much power. This unwillingness to relinquish power also limits the effectiveness of

people call for more effective IGOs, states must grapple with the costs and benefits that come with surrendering varying degrees of power to IGOs. As nation-states engage with each other via IGOs, individuals are able to both support and challenge their power through NGOs. Like their IGO counterparts, NGOs often step in to address needs that are not being taken care of by governments, but they are also challenging states to expand their view of self-interest to include notions of global connectedness and human security. Although opposition for global civil society engenders strong resistance in some quarters, it is likely to continue, facilitated by advances in technology and communication that are shrinking the globe and multiplying webs of connections. Technology not only facilitates the growth and proliferation of NGOs, but also makes it easier to monitor both NGO activities and how NGOs are treated in the countries in which they operate.

## Notes

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