

## Lesson 2.9



# Strategic Communication and Information Integrity

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### Aim, Relevance and Learning Outcomes

#### Aim

To explain the importance of strategic communication and information integrity and the strategic and operational threat posed by misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH).

#### Relevance

As peacekeeping personnel, you must know how important strategic communication and information integrity are. Strategic communication in peacekeeping has become more important in the current operational and global climate, due to changes in divisions among Member States, patterns of violence, spread of MDH, shrinking budgets and resources and technological advances.

MDH can impact a mission's credibility and ability to implement mandates, and its security and legitimacy. The rapid evolution of digital and social media has increased the speed and reach of harmful information to target audiences. This is also the case in conflict-affected environments where UN missions are deployed. Disinformation has been used by conflict actors for strategic goals, including targeting peacekeeping missions.

MDH can be harmful. While engaging with local communities, all peacekeepers should be able to explain the mission's role and responsibilities, have a conversation about them and build trust. A whole-of-mission approach is required to strengthen both strategic communication and information integrity as well as addressing MDH.

### Slide 1



2.9 Strategic Communication and Information Integrity 

**Aim**

- To explain the importance of strategic communication and information integrity and the strategic and operational threat posed by misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH)

**Relevance**

- As peacekeeping personnel, you must be aware of the critical role of strategic communication as a political and operational necessity that requires a whole-of-mission approach.
- MDH can impact the credibility, ability to implement mandates, security and legitimacy of a UN mission, and mitigation and risk management should be integrated in all areas of mission work.

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### Learning Outcomes

Learners will be able to:

1. Understand the importance of strategic communication and information integrity to build awareness of and support for UN Peacekeeping.
2. Explain the evolving challenges of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH), the harms they can create and what missions should do about it.
3. Understand their role as communicators and how they can contribute to preventing and/or addressing information threats.

### Slide 2



2.9 Strategic Communication and Information Integrity 

**Learning Outcomes**

1. Understand the importance of strategic communication and information integrity to build awareness of and support for UN Peacekeeping.
2. Explain the evolving challenge of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH), the harms they can create and what missions should do about it.
3. Understand your role as communicator and how you can contribute to preventing and/or addressing information threats.

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**Lesson at a Glance**



**Minimum lesson duration: 45 minutes** (including learning activity 2.9.1).

<b>The Lesson</b>	<b>Pages</b>	<b>Slides</b>
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Approach to Addressing MDH in Peacekeeping Settings	23–28	17–20
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<b>Optional Learning Activities</b>	
Optional Learning Activity 2.9.2: What is the Role of Strategic Communication in UN Peacekeeping?	<i>See 2.9 Learning Support</i>
Optional Learning Activity 2.9.3: How Can Individuals Support UN Peacekeeping to Address MDH and Strengthen Information Integrity?	



**Trainer Tips:** See 2.9 Learning Support for tips on starting the lesson, learning activity instructions, optional learning activities, learning evaluation and references.

## The Lesson

# Strategic Communication in Peacekeeping Operations

## The Role of Strategic Communication in Peacekeeping

Strategic communication is a political and operational necessity that is critical in enabling peacekeeping operations to deliver on their mandate. Strengthening strategic communication and information integrity is a priority for the Secretary-General.

In the context of peacekeeping operations, strategic communication is the ability to explain to key stakeholders and clients nationally, regionally and internationally what the mission is there to do and how it will do it.

Peacekeeping operations are political interventions that ultimately rely on building and maintaining the trust and goodwill of different stakeholders through a mix of community engagement, political engagement and informational outreach.

Strategic communication plays a central role in all these areas. It is a crucial part in missions achieving their mandates, both directly and indirectly.

As this lesson will highlight, strategic communications and information integrity are everyone's business and senior leadership play a critical role in them. From the beginning, strategic communication must be fully integrated into all planning and risk management processes, so the mission can achieve key communications objectives including:

- Managing expectations and fostering support by explaining the mission's roles, responsibilities and capabilities
- Demonstrating the value and tangible impact of the mission's work
- Anticipating and responding to information risks, as required.

## Definition

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2.9 Strategic Communication and Information Integrity 

**Definition**

**Strategic communication**

- Purposeful or directed communication with the objective of building support for an organizational objective

**In UN peacekeeping, strategic communication are used to:**

- Build understanding and support for the work carried out by peacekeepers
- Build support for the mission to create the conditions required to carry out the work of the UN

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**Key Message 1:** The success of a UN peacekeeping mission depends on how people see it. Strategic communication helps build support.

Strategic communication is purposeful, directed communication with the aim of building support for what an organization wants to do. In the context of UN peacekeeping, it builds understanding and support for the work carried out by peacekeepers. Reputational risks can be as damaging to a mission as any other risk. We need to build support for the mission to create the conditions required to carry out the work of the UN.

### Slide 4



2.9 Strategic Communication and Information Integrity 

**The Importance of Strategic communication**

- The success of a UN peacekeeping mission is impacted by perception
- Strategic communication helps build support



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### New Risks and Challenges

Peacekeeping environments are constantly evolving. UN peacekeepers are operating in increasingly complex and hazardous environments due to terrorists, criminals, armed groups and their allies. They face people who have access to powerful modern weapons. These weapons are not limited to guns and explosives. MDH is used as a weapon of war. They are used with the aim to dehumanize, threaten vulnerable communities, jeopardize the mandate and risk the lives of peacekeepers themselves.



**Key Message 2:** Each peacekeeping mission's communication strategy is different, depending on the context and challenges, the information environment, target audience, resources and objectives. It is important for you to be aware of threats specific to the mission.

A peacekeeping mission's communication strategy and approach is heavily influenced by political and security challenges. These will be different in each mission.



### Examples

- Rising global tensions leading to peace processes coming to a stop
- More complex conflicts and proliferations of armed groups and criminal and transnational interests
- Climate change fuelling conflict over scarce natural resources
- Ambitious mandates without enough resources allocated for their realization
- Reduced host-government and population support
- Surge of information without integrity that is sophisticated and aggressive
- Growing frustration and questions about the value and impact of peacekeeping.

The strategic communication and public information (SCPI) component supports the effective implementation of the mission's mandate. Under the authority of the special representative of the Secretary-General / head of mission, the chief of SCPI or focal point is responsible for defining and sharing the mission's communications strategy.

SCPI staff engage with local populations and help build support for the mission among ordinary people. Every peacekeeper should be aware of the context and threats so they can support communications goals of the mission in the most effective way.

### **Strategic Communication is Everyone's Business**

It is important we communicate about what we do as peacekeepers in an engaging manner that everyone can understand.



**Key Message 3:** Strategic communication is everyone's business. Civilian, police and military peacekeepers, at all levels of the mission, must work together and contribute essential information that will shape communication efforts.

Strategic communication cannot be thought of only after other tasks are completed.

Strategic communication is every peacekeeper's responsibility. Senior leadership must lead communications efforts by enabling proactive and rapid communication to demonstrate the mission's value and build support.

We must communicate proactively in good times and bad because we know that staying silent leaves a vacuum of information that will be filled by others with malicious intent. Strategic communication is an important way to counter these threats.

This requires a coordinated, whole-of-mission approach, including to improve information-sharing and ensure coherence in messaging. Communications teams must be trusted and fully embedded into all important meetings, planning, crisis and risk management discussions and decision-making.

They must have information to help prevent or navigate crisis situations – and should not be brought only at the end as an afterthought to fix problems only when it is too late.

For UN Peacekeeping to succeed, all of us must play our part to help promote a positive image with key audiences.

## How Peacekeepers can support UN Peacekeeping's communications approach

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### How Peacekeepers Can Support the Communications Approach

**Internally, within the Mission:**

- Communicate proactively in good and bad times, as staying silent leaves a vacuum of information.

**Externally:**

- Communicate about what we do as peacekeepers in an engaging manner that everyone can understand.
- Play your part to help promote a positive image of the mission with key audiences.

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**Key Message 4:** We must tell our story in a way that connects with audiences on an emotional level to build trust and credibility, rather than just trying to get something we want. We count on every peacekeeper to identify how they can support communication goals in their own way, depending on their functions, experience and access to different target audiences.

As a peacekeeper, you must help where you can to promote the work of peacekeeping with key audiences. We are all messengers of the mission's key messages.

UN Peacekeeping's communications approach relies on sharing clear messaging on the mission's role, responsibilities, capacities and impact, explaining challenges, offering possible solutions and demonstrating achievements.

We need to be telling good stories that are simple, human-focused and backed by facts and testimony to create an emotional connection. These narratives must be authentic, realistic and honest to build trust and credibility.

With support from strategic communication mission personnel, you can find ways to be part of the conversation, to reach the right people with the right message at the right time.

This can be done in several ways, including:

- During your operational assignments, when you can share information in person with key audiences about the mission's work and impact
- When you participate in community outreach initiatives or partnership building exercises organized by the mission's engagement teams or others
- By helping the strategic communication component identify compelling stories to tell on their channels in the context of communications campaigns
- During your operational assignments or other key moments, you may consider using your smartphone to collect footage (photos, video) as appropriate, following guidance from the strategic communication component
- By sharing your own story on the mission's channels, to raise awareness about your work and impact
- By using your own accounts (social media, blogs, etc.) to share messages, in line with the mission's communications strategy (see the next section for additional guidance on this).

Each mission will have a number of channels to reach target audiences depending on its strategy. These can include traditional channels (print, radio, television) and digital channels (online news outlets, social media, blogs, podcasts).

All peacekeepers can make important contributions to strategic communication by sharing information and participating in campaigns and content creation, including stories, videos, photos, social media products, media interviews and outreach events. These activities should be conducted under the direction and guidance of the mission's strategic communication component.

### Social Media Guidelines

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**Social Media – What Can Peacekeepers Do?**

- Be consistent with the principles of the UN Charter, Standards of Conduct and Staff Regulations and Rules
- Promote understanding of the objectives and work of the UN, but consider reputational risks
- Think before posting and use common sense
- Understand that disclaimers do not protect you
- Understand that nothing is private
- Respect the privacy of colleagues

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**Key Message 5:** Social media can be a great way to share the mission's key messages with your own network, especially by sharing content from the mission's accounts. However, misuse of social media can pose a threat to operational security and put you and your colleagues at risk.

The misuse of social media by mission personnel can pose a significant threat to operational security by compromising sensitive information and/or endangering personnel.

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#### Social Media Risks

- Misuse of social media can pose a threat to operational security and put you and your colleagues at risk
- Do not use the UN emblem or official email to create personal accounts
- Do not to disclose office information
- Do not create false identities to post or comment



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It is important you understand:

- You have the right to freedom of expression, but you have to be consistent with the principles of the UN Charter, Standards of Conduct and Staff Regulations and Rules
- You should promote understanding of the objectives and work of the UN, but consider reputational risks
- You should think before posting and use common sense
- Disclaimers do not protect you
- Remember, nothing is private
- Do not use the UN emblem or official email to create personal accounts and be careful not to disclose information related to the office and your duties
- Do not create false identities to post or comment
- Respect the privacy of colleagues.

All personnel must adhere to United Nations values and the Code of Conduct. They must protect and enhance the reputation of missions and foster public support for their activities.

Personnel must also adhere to the Staff Regulations of the United Nations and Provisional Staff Rules. These state that “they shall avoid any action and, in particular, any kind of public pronouncement that may adversely reflect on their status, or on the integrity, independence and impartiality that are required by that status.” This means they must not do or say anything in public that makes them look bad or unsuitable for their work.

## Information Integrity

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**Information Integrity**

- **Information integrity:** refers to the accuracy and reliability of information
  
- **Information integrity is:**
  - When information is accurate, reliable and free from discrimination and hate
  - When freedom of expression is fully enjoyed
  - When information is open, inclusive, safe and secure

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Information integrity is when information is accurate, reliable, and free from discrimination and hate. It is when freedom of expression is fully enjoyed and information is available to all in an open, inclusive, safe and secure information environment.

MDH is often present in the online and offline information environment and affect information integrity. This in turn impacts the safety and security of peacekeeping missions, including the ability of each mission to implement its mandate.

The Security Council, through resolution 2686 (2023) has mandated individual peacekeeping missions to monitor hate speech, racism and acts of extremism that negatively affect peace and security.

- **Information integrity:** the accuracy and reliability of information.

### What is misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech (MDH)?

Information can harm people and prevent us achieving our goals, particularly when it is not true. There are different types of bad information that may be shared, including MDH. What each type is will be explained below. All these types of bad information reduce people's trust in others, make complex issues seem black and white and force people to pick sides, make conflicts worse and make people and their communities unsafe. They can also interfere with political processes such as elections and ceasefire monitoring.

MDH in UN peacekeeping contexts is complicated. It is driven by a combination of political, social and psychological factors. The reasons people have for spreading MDH can vary depending on the context and the groups involved. Hostile actors may see UN peacekeeping missions as obstacles to what they want to do, and therefore seek to undermine their credibility and effectiveness.

Instances of MDH have increased dramatically in recent years. The growth of digital and social media has enabled an unprecedented production and amplification of inaccurate and unreliable information that distorts facts and influences what people think in conflict-affected countries. These harmful stories are impacting the ability of peacekeeping missions to fulfil their mandates and the ensure the safety and security of their personnel.

In response, the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) has established a dedicated unit to support missions with policy and guidance, training, and direct support in monitoring, analysing and responding to all the ways that information, true and untrue, is exchanged. All peacekeepers must understand that MDH has far-reaching implications for the whole mission and local population, and that all peacekeepers play a role in promoting correct information and ensuring it is the only information that is shared.

This part of the lesson will outline concepts and terminology about MDH. It will explain the impact of MDH on peacekeeping operations and the people we serve, and how DPO is addressing this challenge.

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### What is Misinformation, Disinformation and Hate Speech?

- M – Misinformation**  
Bad information shared by people who believe it is true
- D – Disinformation**  
Bad information shared on purpose by people who know it is false
- H – Hate Speech**  
Speech used to attack people based on who they are

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**Key Message 6:** MDH refers to three types of information harms: misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech.

- **Misinformation:** inaccurate information that is shared by people who do not know it is incorrect and think they are doing the right thing.
- **Disinformation:** inaccurate information designed to mislead that is shared by people who know it is incorrect and want to lie and do serious harm.
- **Hate speech:** any kind of communication (written, spoken or through actions) that attacks or uses judgmental or discriminatory language about a person or a group because of who they are. This may be based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or any other aspect of their identity.

The boundary between mis- and disinformation is fluid, as what may begin as intentionally false messages are often spread by those who believe the messages to be true or at least do not know that they are false.

*"[Hate speech] threatens the common values and principles that bind us together. ... It promotes racism, xenophobia and misogyny; it dehumanizes individuals and communities; and it has a serious impact on our efforts to promote peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development."*

*Secretary-General António Guterres, 2022.*



**Trainer Tips:** Consult the United Nation's website on countering disinformation ([un.org/en/countering-disinformation](https://www.un.org/en/countering-disinformation)) for the latest reference materials when preparing their lessons. For example, the 2022 Secretary-General's report on Countering Disinformation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms provided key proposals for the States to counter disinformation, such as refraining from Internet shutdowns and blocking of websites.

## Effects of Misinformation, Disinformation and Hate Speech (MDH)

### Slide 10



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#### Psychological and Emotional Effects of MDH

- **Fear:** False narratives can evoke a sense of fear
- **Anger:** Misdirected anger can escalate conflicts
- **Mistrust:** Can affect civilian collaboration with the UN
- **Confusion:** Can leave communities vulnerable to manipulation



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**Key Message 7:** Using misinformation, disinformation or hate speech (MDH) to make people think and feel things can manipulate communities, especially in peacekeeping mission areas with limited access to reliable information.

The policy on Information Integrity states that MDH can be linked to six types of harm. They are:

- Physical
- Economic/financial
- Societal/political
- Emotional/psychological
- Social/cultural
- Operational.

There are four types of emotional and psychological effects on individuals and communities from these types of harm that can have consequences for peacekeeping missions.

**Fear:** Sharing MDH about threats or dangers makes people and communities feel stress and worry. This can lead to them being on edge all the time, creating an atmosphere of fear within the community.

**Anger:** MDH can make people and communities feel anger and resentment. These stories may capitalize on legitimate grievances and then demonize the UN for its failure to bring peace and security to a region. This can lead to bad feelings towards the UN and contribute to social unrest. The results can be violent attack, protests or hate speech.

**Mistrust:** MDH can take away trust between communities and UN peacekeeping missions, including military and police forces, by making sources less reliable. This mistrust hinders collaboration, creating barriers to effective strategic communication and cooperation, and builds support for stories that harm others.

**Confusion:** MDH serves the interests of hostile actors by making people confused and uncertain on purpose. Spreading stories and information that do not agree with one another leaves individuals uncertain about what to believe. This uncertainty makes communities vulnerable to manipulation. This is worse if there is an information vacuum, especially during times of crisis or uncertainty, for example, during elections or coups. This is especially true in conflict-affected areas, where many people have limited access to news media.

In summary, MDH can exploit people's emotions, particularly fear, anger, mistrust and confusion. The intentional creation of confusion and uncertainty through stories that do not agree with one another leaves communities open to manipulation, especially in peacekeeping mission areas with limited access to reliable information.

### Tactics and Techniques used by Disinformation Actors

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**Tactics and Techniques used by Disinformation Actors**

- Amplifying lies
- Faking support
- Weaponizing multimedia
- Making emotional appeals
- Presenting the context inaccurately
- Pretending to be someone else



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In a time where information is readily accessible and disseminated at unprecedented speeds, separating what is true from what is false has become increasingly challenging.

Disinformation actors employ various tactics, techniques and procedures to exploit and manipulate legitimate criticism and dissenting voices through the production and distribution of information online.

- **Amplifying falsehoods:** This can be achieved in multiple ways, including through **coordinated content sharing**, which is the repeated resharing of content across a network of associated sources to make it seem like many people agree with the content and to make it go further and be seen more often. Actors may also use **cross-platform propagation** to share similar stories across different social media platforms, adapting the content to better suit the platform's audience.
- **Faking support:** For example, **astroturfing** is the creation of false grass-roots support or opposition through various tactics, including the creation of fake organizations employing paid participants and covertly sponsored campaigns. This is used to change what people are talking about by presenting a false sense of widespread agreement on a topic.
- **Weaponizing multimedia:** To engage audiences and make false stories appear more true, actors may use a range of multimedia content. This includes **manipulating real photos and videos** through editing techniques and deepfakes, e.g. creating a video of a UN soldier carrying a placard with text that will make people angry from a video of a different person.
- **Emotional appeal:** Using emotive language (anger, frustration, sadness) to engage the audience and spread false information, e.g. a newspaper story could read "a UN soldier is celebrating while at the same time people are dying in a nearby neighbourhood".
- **Contextual misrepresentation:** Presenting true information in a confusing way by, for example, taking it out of context, e.g. by using a photo with a title that reads "UN soldiers watching football rather than protecting civilians".
- **Impersonation:** Pretending to be someone else or pretending to represent an organization, for example, a fake social media page claiming to be a verified account for a peacekeeping mission, or showing "a UN soldier" even though there is no insignia on his or her uniform.



### Example - Mali

In 2023 in Mali, the request by the host State authorities for MINUSMA to depart was preceded and accompanied by a barrage of disinformation targeting the mission and portraying it as a negative presence, thus reducing the support for it to stay.

## MDH and Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Legitimate criticism of the UN is not MDH, even though frustrations among the population might result in protest and violence against UN military and police bases and personnel. It is important to understand this distinction. Mislabelling or conflating criticism and negative sentiment with MDH risks undermining freedom of opinion and expression.

## Required Learning Activity 2.9.1

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**Required Learning Activity 2.9.1: The Impact of MDH on UN Peacekeeping Operations**

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**Purpose:** To consider how MDH can be a challenge to peacekeeping

**Time:** 10 minutes

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<b>The Impact of MDH on UN Peacekeeping Operations</b>	
<b>Method</b>	Brainstorming, discussion
<b>Purpose</b>	To consider how MDH can be a challenge to both UN peacekeeping operations and peacekeepers. Use this Learning Activity to further discuss the potential impacts of MDMH
<b>Time</b>	<b>10 minutes</b>
<b>Resources</b>	Case studies

## The Impact of MDH on Peacekeeping Operations

### Slide 13



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**Impact of MDH on UN Peacekeeping**

**This challenge has two angles:**

1. The threat MDH poses to the safety and security of peacekeepers, reputation and operational space for missions.
2. The threat MDH poses to mandate implementation, including the protection of civilians or support to political processes.

*The threats posed by MDH are real and can threaten the operational effectiveness, safety and security of peacekeepers.*

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**Key Message 8:** The dangers posed by misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH) are real and can threaten the operational effectiveness, safety and security of peacekeepers.

DPO recognizes this challenge from two angles:

1. The threat it poses to the safety and security of peacekeepers, reputation and operational space for peacekeeping missions.
2. The threat it poses to mandate implementation, including the protection of civilians and support to political processes.

Disinformation actors may exploit authentic grievances and create confusion around the role and intent of peacekeeping operations. This can hinder the ability of peacekeeping missions to operate safely and effectively. Making the people in mission areas feel negatively about the mission can lead to diminishing consent from local communities. This may in turn lead to restrictions on freedom of movement, targeted demonstrations and even direct attacks on individuals and convoys. Moreover, by undermining the legitimacy of UN peacekeeping and the UN system more broadly, MDH poses a severe threat to political settlements and peace talks. False stories often focus on allegations that missions are failing to fulfil their responsibilities, arming and collaborating with armed groups, propagating hate through their radio networks or even planning coup or assassination attempts. The intent seems to be to delegitimize the UN's role, not only within host communities but also across regions and globally. MDH also targets specific groups in host countries and regions, including ethnic minorities, women and journalists, as well as peace processes and other initiatives the UN supports.



### Examples

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, false narratives accusing UN peacekeepers of killing a protester while delivering weapons to armed groups circulated on social media and contributed to the burning down of a UN office.

In Mali, accusations that the UN was partnering with jihadists contributed to protesters blocking access to a UN base.

In the Central African Republic, targeted information operations against the UN complicated electoral support provided by the mission.

## Overview of MDH Targeting of UN Peacekeeping

### Slide 14



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**Overview of MDH Targeting UN Peacekeeping**

- From sophisticated media environments to traditional media
- Can't be attributed to a single actor
- Manipulation and deliberate amplification by both State and non-State actors
- Marketplace for MDH, including media outfits, troll farms, influencers, and others who profit
- MDH knows no borders

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Missions operate in very different contexts, ranging from sophisticated media environments such as Lebanon, in which there is reliance on traditional media, to much more analogue environments such as South Sudan, in which approximately 12 per cent of the population had Internet access in 2023.

Depending on the context, the approach used by MDH actors is different. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, MDH is **decentralized and participatory** – and cannot be attributed to one single actor. There is a mix of genuine participation by real people who sometimes do not know what they are doing when they spread disinformation and manipulation. Both State and non-State actors deliberately make this genuine participation more powerful.

In these settings, there is a marketplace for MDH, which includes media outfits, troll farms, influencers and others who profit financially or politically from this information environment. Additionally, MDH knows no borders, and there is a regional dimension to certain narratives.

## Impacts of MDH on Peacekeeping Mission

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#### Impact of MDH on Peacekeeping Mission

- Undermines mission credibility and legitimacy
- Weakens trust and confidence in UN peacekeepers
- Makes harmful narratives stronger
- Destabilizes the operating environment
- Bases and personnel at risk of protest and attack
- Affects information collection and decision-making
- Disrupts freedom of movement

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**Key Message 9:** Misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH) can destabilize a mission environment by fostering a sense of distrust towards the UN and/or individuals, communities or institutions/authorities.

**Undermines mission credibility and legitimacy:** MDH can weaken the mission’s credibility and legitimacy, which will undermine its effectiveness because the host country’s government and population may become less willing to cooperate with the UN.

**Weakens trust and confidence in UN peacekeepers:** MDH campaigns, which spread false or misleading information, weaken trust and confidence in UN peacekeepers while making the story of a hostile actor or group more powerful.

**Makes harmful narratives stronger:** MDH can reinforce the narratives of hostile actors, amplifying their rhetoric and fuelling mistrust among populations. These actors can then exploit existing grievances and build up conflict in the society.

**Destabilizes the operating environment:** MDH can destabilize the operating environment in several ways. MDH actors often exploit existing social, cultural or political differences. By spreading narratives that push people apart from one another, MDH can contribute to social polarization and deepen existing divides within communities.

**Puts bases and personnel at risk of protest and attack:** MDH targeting of the mission may stir hostility and unrest against the UN, resulting in violent protests or physical attacks against peacekeepers.

**Affects information collection and decision-making:** MDH can affect how the local population interacts with UN units and personnel and the credibility of the information they share with them. False or exaggerated information from the local population can impact the planning of operations, negatively influencing military and police commanders to make decisions based on misleading information.

**Disrupts freedom of movement:** MDH can have significant implications on a unit's ability to move around its areas of operations. MDH may lead to inaccurate threat assessments, causing units to become overly cautious, move slowly and avoid contact with local communities. This caution can hinder their ability to build relationships with the local population and gather valuable information.

### Impact on the Safety and Security of Peacekeepers

In 2023, an internal survey distributed to all peacekeeping personnel highlighted that bad information remains a grave challenge to peacekeeping.

When asked to what extent MDH was impacting their safety and security, 66 per cent of respondents noted that it was having a severe effect – a 16 per cent increase from the previous year. In certain missions, this has resulted in the forced relocation of staff for security reasons and, in some cases, violence against staff, infrastructure and equipment.



#### Examples – UNIFIL and MONUSCO

**UNIFIL:** in December 2022, a disinformation campaign preceded a violent attack in Aqibiyah, Lebanon, which resulted in the death of one peacekeeper and the injury of three others.

**MONUSCO:** In July 2022 in the DRC, protests and violence targeting peacekeepers were linked to increased online negative sentiment against the mission. This civil unrest led to the death of at least 12 civilians and three UN peacekeepers. The mission's operations were also severely impacted with as many as 400 UN vehicles unable to move due to the security risk.

## Impact of MDH on Mandate Implementation

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### Impact of MDH on Mandate Implementation

**Protection of civilians:**

- MDH can impact vulnerable groups

**Ceasefire monitoring:**

- MDH can fuel tensions among parties to the conflict

**Strengthening political processes:**

- MDH can weaken political processes through undermining public institutions

**Women, peace and security:**

- Women in the public eye are targeted with gendered disinformation

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Information harms pose a direct threat to civilians in places that already have a difficult road to peace, including through undermining peacekeeping mandated tasks, such as:

- **Protection of civilians (POC):** MDH can significantly impact vulnerable groups in countries with peacekeeping operations. These groups include ethnic and religious minority groups, people with disabilities, human rights defenders and journalists. These groups are disproportionately targeted both online and offline. MDH that directly targets a peacekeeping mission can lead to a diminishing level of consent from local communities, influence the political and operational space of the mission and hinder its capacity to protect civilians.
- **Ceasefire monitoring:** peacekeeping operations can be deployed to stabilize conflict situations after a ceasefire and to create an environment for the parties to reach a lasting peace. MDH may fuel tensions among parties to the conflict and undermine the impartiality of the UN or other actors working towards a peaceful resolution.
- **Strengthening political processes:** MDH that emerges ahead of elections, referendums or peace processes extends beyond false narratives about the UN or peacekeeping. Bad information can weaken political processes in several ways: taking away the credibility of public institutions can lead to voters' stopping caring – "if there are fake votes or if real votes are not counted, what's the point?" The plummeting levels of trust in mainstream media have resulted in a boom in alternative info-ecosystems that often favour fringe interests and extreme views.

- **Women, peace and security:** bad information creates mistrust and violence and blocks women’s participation in political and civic life. Women in the public eye are disproportionately targeted with gendered disinformation online, resulting in the undermining of democratic institutions and fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression and access to information.

## Approach to Addressing MDH in Peacekeeping Settings



**Trainer Tips:** Note that the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council have both called for responses to the spread of disinformation to promote and protect and not to infringe on individuals’ freedom of expression and freedom to seek, receive and impart information, as established by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 19 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

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2.9 Strategic Communication and Information Integrity 

#### Addressing MDH in Peacekeeping

**Seven UN principles to the approach to address MDH:**

- Multidisciplinary
- Integrated effort
- Proactive and preventive stance
- People-centred
- Gender- and age-responsive
- Non-secret
- Respect for data protection and privacy



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Peacekeeping missions are asked to put in place a system to monitor, analyse, respond and evaluate action to address MDH and to strengthen information security.

A number of principles should guide work in relation to countering MDH.

### Overview of Principles

The seven principles that underpin the UN's approach to addressing MDH are:

- **It is multidisciplinary:** A combination of skills and expertise will be applied to understand MDH, devise and implement preventive and responsive measures and strengthen information integrity.
- **An integrated effort:** An integrated, whole-of- mission and whole-of-UN approach makes action more effective.
- **A proactive and preventive stance:** Anticipating when information integrity may be compromised and mitigating the risk and impact of MDH through a proactive, preventive stance.
- **It is people-centred:** Peacekeeping action to counter MDH and strengthen information integrity must consider the aspirations, hopes, concerns and grievances of host communities.
- **It is gender- and age-responsive:** When analysing and responding to MDH, it is essential to identify gender- and age-specific trends and impact. The response should acknowledge the varied gender- and age-specific roles played in contributing to or being targeted by MDH.
- **It is non-secret:** Activities will be conducted openly and in full respect of human rights, particularly in relation to rights to privacy, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and association.
- **Respect for data protection and privacy:** Data gathered for monitoring and analysis of the information environment or used as part of response activities are managed in accordance with UN confidentiality, classification and privacy standards and rules.

### A Whole-of-Mission Approach

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2.9 Strategic Communication and Information Integrity 

#### A Whole-of-Mission Approach

**All components – uniformed and civilian – have the capacity to make important contributions:**

- Joint mission analysis centre (JMAC) conducts in-depth analysis of the information environment
- Political affairs component provides political advice and guidance on MDH
- Human rights component monitors protection of journalists
- The military and police components include preventive, anticipatory and responsive measures into operational plans to address MDH

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**Key Message 10:** Effective action to address misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH) requires a whole-of-mission approach and should be coordinated by a dedicated, multidisciplinary working group or task force, to ensure consistent and comprehensive action.

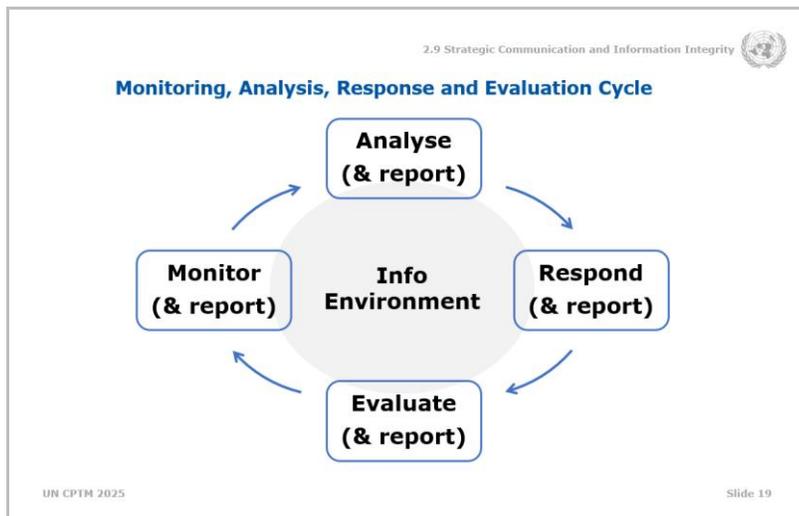
Within peacekeeping missions, **all components – uniformed and civilian - have the capacity to make important contributions.**

- **Civilian mission components** play a key role in monitoring and reporting on MDH happening offline, via word of mouth. For example, community liaison assistants (who are typically coordinated by civil affairs or field offices) build trust between local population and authorities, and support local initiatives for community dialogue and peace. Their role is critical to anticipating and mitigating the risk of bad information.
- **The joint mission analysis centre (JMAC)** conducts in-depth analyses of the information environment, in coordination with the strategic communication component and others.
- **The political affairs component** provides political advice and guidance on MDH stories and risks related to political processes and on outreach, engagement and messaging.
- **The human rights component** contributes to monitoring and analyses related to the individual protection of threatened journalists, advocates, media workers and civil society workers. The human rights component also usually acts as the focal point on hate speech.
- **The military and police components** integrate preventive, anticipatory and responsive measures into operational plans, in line with the mission strategy on MDH, and in consultation with other components.

**All these efforts should be coordinated within the mission e.g. through a working group, task force or focal point network that is dedicated to addressing MDH.**

### **Monitoring, Analysis, Response and Evaluation Cycle**

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The policy on information integrity outlines the monitoring, analysis, response and evaluation cycle implemented in missions to address MDH.

- **Monitoring and analysis** of the information environment, both online and offline, is critical for immediate-term situational awareness and can contribute to deeper analysis and insights into trends and dynamics in the information environment.
- **A range of responses** should be considered and implemented for greater effect, within the mission’s mandate. Responses include:
  - Strategic communication in the form of press statements, press briefings or social media posts may be considered. All external communications should be coordinated by the strategic communication section.
  - Community engagement: The mission should continue to work closely with communities, through local meetings, women’s groups, civil society, journalists, trainings etc., to build trust and answer any concerns.
  - Political advocacy: Work with host-government counterparts and political stakeholders to ensure the correct and verified information and maintain a joint communications approach.
  - Partnerships: Work closely with UN agencies, funds and programmes on joint communications and projects to develop a one-UN approach, where possible.
  - Protection of journalists, human rights defenders and media workers: National authorities should be helped to ensure the safety of journalists and media workers to stay within international human rights law.
  - Public reporting. Without a new story setting the record straight, disinformation stories that are not true can become an enduring problem that changes the way people think about things in the future. It is

- important to shed light on MDH, by documenting it, sharing information on it and proving that false stories are not true.
- Accountability for creating hostility, discrimination or violence: Where instances of MDH reach the threshold of criminal incitement under the Rabat Plan of Action, a UN initiative to combat hate speech, missions should advocate for impartial, prompt and thorough criminal investigations, and trials to bring perpetrators to justice.
  - Making society stronger and better able to resist bad information in the long term: Actions in support of information integrity include capacity-building of free media, media and data literacy for children and adults, and strengthening the capacity of public institutions to promote the creation and dissemination of accurate information.
- **Evaluation** tracks progress and inform strategies and efforts related to information integrity.
  - **Reporting** should be integrated at all stages of the cycle, to report on short- and long-term monitoring and analysis, and the effectiveness of responses.

### Support Provided by Headquarters

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2.9 Strategic Communication and Information Integrity 

**Support Provided by UNHQ**

**Information Integrity Unit**

- Works with the Strategic communication Section and other UN entities to support missions in addressing MDH, through:
  - Training
  - Policy and guidance
  - Monitoring and analysis expertise
  - Support

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The Information Integrity Unit at UN Headquarters works to support all missions in addressing MDH in the following ways:

- Supporting the operationalization of multidimensional working groups as coordinating mechanisms on all matters related to MDH in missions
- Producing regular monitoring and analysis reports enabling early warning and proactive responses
- Supporting missions to develop and deliver MDH practical action plans

- Training a team of peacekeepers on monitoring, analysis and response development
- Developing and rolling out monitoring and analysis tools and methods
- Providing policy and guidance to structure mission approaches to this challenge
- Managing a community of practice, which is a resource hub with training materials, documents and presentations to encourage knowledge and best practice sharing.

## Lesson Closing

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**Trainer Tips:** *If you have time, summarize the lesson, recalling the aim and learning objectives. Mention that the key messages support the learning objectives. Ask participants if they have questions. Ensure you distribute the Handout – Summary of Key Messages to all participants.*

## Handout - Summary of Key Messages

**Key Message 1:** The success of a UN peacekeeping mission depends on how people see it. Strategic communication helps build support.

**Key Message 2:** Each peacekeeping mission's communication strategy is different and depends on the context and challenges, the information environment, target audience, resources and objectives. It is important for you to be aware of threats specific to the mission.

**Key Message 3:** Strategic communication is everyone's business. Civilian, police and military peacekeepers, at all levels of the mission, must work together and contribute essential information that will shape communication efforts.

**Key Message 4:** We must tell our story in a way that connects with audiences on an emotional level to build trust and credibility, rather than just trying to get something we want. We count on every peacekeeper to identify how they can support communications goals in their own way, depending on their functions, experience and access to different target audiences.

**Key Message 5:** Social media can be a great way to share the mission's key messages with your own network, especially by sharing content from the Mission's accounts. However, misuse of social media can pose a threat to operational security and put you and your colleagues at risk.

**Key Message 6:** MDH refers to four types of information harms: misinformation, disinformation and hate speech.

**Key Message 7:** Using misinformation, disinformation or hate speech (MDH) to make people think and feel things can manipulate communities, especially in peacekeeping mission areas with limited access to reliable information.

**Key Message 8:** The dangers posed by misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDMH) are real and can threaten the operational effectiveness, safety and security of peacekeepers.

**Key Message 9:** Misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH) can destabilize a mission environment by fostering a sense of distrust towards the UN and/or individuals, communities or institutions/authorities.

**Key Message 10:** Effective action to address misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH) requires a whole-of-mission approach and should be coordinated by a dedicated, multidisciplinary working group or task force, to ensure consistent and comprehensive action.