# Addressing Misinformation, Disinformation, and Hate Speech Threats in United Nations Peace Operations for Military and Police Units




Based on the Department of Peace Operations Reinforcement Training Package for UN Military and Police Units on Addressing Misinformation, Disinformation, and Hate Speech Threats in United Nations Peace Operations

**Series Editor**

Ramona Taheri

Peace Operations Training Institute®

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*Major General Aroldo Lázaro (second right), Force Commander for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), visits a Nepalese UN position 8-33 on the Blue Line. 07 November 2023. UN Photo by Pasqual Gorriz.*

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# Introduction

## Background

The increasing prevalence of misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech (MDH) presents a significant challenge to UN peacekeeping operations. False allegations directed at UN peacekeepers encompass a range of accusations, from trafficking weapons to supporting armed groups and exploiting natural resources. MDH, often amplified through digital and social media, not only obstructs the implementation of peacekeeping mandates but also places the safety and security of peacekeepers at risk. Acknowledging the severity of this threat, the UN Security Council has integrated language addressing MDH into the mandates of peacekeeping operations.

## Aim

The main aim of this course is to strengthen participants' understanding of MDH and the associated threats within UN peacekeeping operations. This course offers a comprehensive training package that integrates conceptual, legal and operational elements to bolster the tactical readiness of units deploying to peacekeeping missions. It combines aspects of the DPO Policies on Information Integrity in Peacekeeping Settings, Strategic Communications and Peacekeeping-Intelligence. It applies them to existing analytical and planning tools used by uniformed personnel in peacekeeping missions. The course includes learning activities and a scenario-based exercise to enhance students' understanding of MDH and ways to address threats against military and police units arising from such activity. This course is intended for use in both pre-deployment and in-mission training. It is divided into three modules:

- Module 1: Conceptual Framework
- Module 2: Legal Framework
- Module 3: Operational Framework

## Target audience

The primary audience for this course includes military and police unit commanders and their respective staff. Additionally, the course has utility for military and police decision-makers and staff officers who are deploying or already deployed to a field HQ in a UN peacekeeping mission.

## Annexes

- Annex A: List of acronyms.
- Annex B: Core reference materials.

## Note/Post Script

Following an internal decision, the term MDMH, previously used to denote Misinformation, Disinformation, Malformation, and Hate Speech, has been revised to MDH, with the concept of Malformation removed in line with updated policy considerations. As a result, the title of the Reinforcement Training Package (RTP) as well as the majority of the document on which this course is based have been updated to reflect this change. However, it should be noted that some references to Malformation may still appear within the document pending a full update. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the *2024 Policy on Information Integrity in Peacekeeping Settings* formally adopts the term MDH, and these training materials have been aligned to ensure full compliance with all relevant policy provisions.

## Method of Study

*This self-paced course aims to give students flexibility in their approach to learning. The following steps are meant to provide motivation and guidance about some possible strategies and minimum expectations for completing this course successfully:*

- Before you begin studying, first browse through the entire course material. Notice the module and section titles to get an overall idea of what will be involved as you proceed.
- The material is meant to be relevant and practical. Instead of memorizing individual details, strive to understand concepts and overall perspectives in regard to the United Nations system.
- Set personal guidelines and benchmarks regarding how you want to schedule your time.
- Study the module content and the learning objectives. At the beginning of each module, orient yourself to the main points. If possible, read the material twice to ensure maximum understanding and retention, and let time elapse between readings.
- At the end of each module, take the End-of-Module Quiz. Clarify any missed questions by re-reading the appropriate sections, and focus on retaining the correct information.
- After you complete all of the modules, prepare for the End-of-Course Examination by taking time to review the main points of each module. Then, when ready, log into your online student classroom and take the End-of-Course Examination in one sitting.

» ***Access your online classroom at <www.peaceopstraining.org/users/user_login> from virtually anywhere in the world.***

- Your exam will be scored electronically. If you achieve a passing grade of 75 per cent or higher on the exam, you will be awarded a Certificate of Completion. If you score below 75 per cent, you will be given one opportunity to take a second version of the End-of-Course Examination.

### Key Features of Your Online Classroom »

- Access to all of your courses;
- A secure testing environment in which to complete your training;
- Access to additional training resources, including multimedia course supplements; and
- The ability to download your Certificate of Completion for any completed course.

MODULE 1

# Conceptual Framework

## Module 1 at a Glance

### Overview

Module 1 provides students with a comprehensive understanding of MDH and its potential threats to UN peacekeeping operations. The module begins with an introduction to each concept: misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech. Students will explore the techniques used to disseminate MDH and understand its potential impact on military and police operations and force protection.

Furthermore, the module will introduce the UN principles for addressing MDH and underscore the importance of various measures, including strategic communications, in mitigating the impact of harmful narratives. Finally, students will be informed of the necessity of a whole-of-mission integrated approach in addressing MDH.

### Module 1: Addressing MDH Conceptual Framework

In an era dominated by information and communication technologies, the dissemination of false, inaccurate or misleading information, and hate speech has become an ever-present challenge in UN peacekeeping efforts. This dissemination of information has the potential to negatively impact the ability of a peacekeeping mission to execute its mandate and the safety and security of mission personnel.

Over the past few years, UN peacekeeping operations, particularly missions in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Mali (MINUSMA), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) have faced a growing barrage of MDH. Among these are false allegations that UN peacekeepers are trafficking weapons to armed groups, supporting terrorists, and exploiting natural resources. These false claims make it harder for peacekeeping missions to implement their mandates and have put the safety of peacekeepers at risk.

These training materials aim to help military and police commanders address MDH that threatens a unit's ability to undertake operations and its personnel and highlight their role in mitigating such threats.

That said, everyone must understand that while MDH has far-reaching implications for the whole mission, it also directly impacts the local civilian population. These forms of false and harmful information can exacerbate existing tensions and ignite new conflicts, potentially leading to violence and human rights abuses and violations. Furthermore they can foster hatred and division among communities, perpetuating a cycle of conflict, and impeding reconciliation.

Understanding the devastating impact of MDH on civilian populations is paramount for UN peacekeepers, as addressing these threats and mitigating their consequences is essential to achieving sustainable peace and stability in peacekeeping missions. Consequently, much of what you learn during this training package can be applied to addressing MDH threats impacting the civilian communities we serve.

These training materials are solely focused on MDH and their potential to threaten UN military and police personnel and their ability to conduct operations.

# MODULE 1 Conceptual Framework



Module 1 provides students with a comprehensive understanding of MDH and its potential threats to UN peacekeeping operations.

*The flag of the United Nations. UN Photo by John Isaac.*

## Module 1 Contents »

- Introduction to MDH.
- Impact of MDH on operations and force protection.
- MDH techniques.
- Principles for addressing MDH.
- Overview of strategic communications and public information.
- An integrated approach to addressing MDH.

By the end of this module, students will gain a comprehensive understanding of MDH, including the definition for each concept and the range of techniques used to disseminate them. You will appreciate the impact MDH can have on military and police operations and force protection, recognising how it can compromise the effectiveness of UN operations. Moreover, the module will emphasise the role of strategic communications in countering MDH and the importance of an a-whole-of-mission approach that is integrated with other stakeholders in the fight against these types of threats.

LESSON
# 1.1

# Introduction to MDH



*The flag of the United Nations. UN Photo by John Isaac.*

It is crucial to recognise the threat posed by hostile actors employing MDH tactics.

## Lesson Contents »

- What is MDH.
- Understanding MDH.
- Reasons why MDH is used against peacekeepers.

## Learning Outcomes »

- Understand the concept and characteristics of MDH.
- Understand the drivers of MDH.
- Understand why MDH is used against peacekeepers.
- Gain awareness of historical instances where MDH has impacted UN uniformed operations.

By the end of this lesson, students will have a comprehensive understanding of MDH, including its core characteristics, the underlying drivers behind its use, and the motivations of groups that employ such tactics to threaten UN uniformed personnel and disrupt operations. Moreover, participants will acquire an awareness of historical instances where MDH has had a significant impact on UN peacekeeping operations.



*Secretary-General António Guterres briefs reporters on his Information Integrity on Digital Platforms policy brief. "Our proposed Global Digital Compact, New Agenda for Peace, and Accord on the global governance of AI, will offer multilateral solutions based on human rights." said the Secretary-General. 12 June 2023. UN Photo by Mark Garten.*

## Starting the Lesson

It is crucial to recognise the threat posed by hostile actors employing MDH tactics. These tactics are not just about deception but can be a powerful tool used to achieve diverse objectives, some of which directly threaten the safety and effectiveness of UN peacekeeping personnel and operations.

By instigating confusion, fostering mistrust and fueling animosity among the local population, these groups seek to undermine the very essence of UN missions, casting doubt on their effectiveness and eroding their credibility. Their aim is to perpetuate conflict and instability, maintaining the status quo that serves their interests.

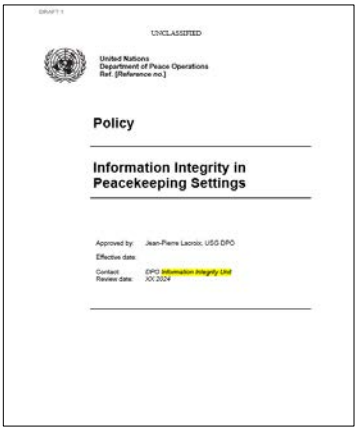
This lesson will introduce the definitions and drivers behind MDH tactics. By understanding these fundamentals, we lay the groundwork for devising strategies to counter such threats and fortify the mission's objectives.

## Introduction to MDH

In this lesson, we consider three information harms: misinformation, disinformation and hate speech — collectively referred to as MDH. In today's peacekeeping missions, understanding the distinctions between these different concepts is essential to being able to identify and, where appropriate, counter such activity, especially when it threatens UN military and police peacekeepers and their ability to conduct operations.

This lesson provides a basic understanding of each concept, shedding light on their unique characteristics, potential consequences, and broader implications online and in the physical world. By the end of this lesson, you will be equipped with the knowledge needed to understand and be able to describe the various forms of MDH that permeate peacekeeping missions.

### Policy: Information Integrity in Peacekeeping Settings


UNCLASSIFIED

United Nations
Department of Peace Operations
Ref. [Reference no.]

Policy

Information Integrity in Peacekeeping Settings

Approved by: Jean-Pierre Lacroix, USG DPO
Effective date:
Contact:
Review date:

**Key message »**

The UN Department of Peace Operations has recently published its policy on information integrity. The policy defines Information integrity as "the accuracy and reliability of information."

This policy sets out the approach, parameters, methods, and processes by which UN HQ and peacekeeping missions will strengthen information integrity and tackle MDH. The policy has been developed in response to the grave and growing challenge to information integrity posed by MDH in UN peacekeeping settings. False and/or manipulated information weakens consent for peacekeeping, hinders mandate implementation, threatens the safety and security of peacekeepers, and fuels divisions in host countries.

These training materials have used the policy and integrated it into current military and police working practices such as the peacekeeping-intelligence and planning processes.

## What is MDH?

Misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech (MDH) are three distinct but related concepts that involve the dissemination of false, misleading, or harmful information.

**Key message »**

MDH represents three interconnected yet distinct concepts: misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech.

The spreading of false information, rumours, and hate speech has long been a factor in contexts in which peacekeeping missions operate; however, the transformative shift lies in the speed and reach with which this information can now spread, negatively impacting the effectiveness of such operations. Traditionally, this type of information has been disseminated primarily through traditional media and word-of-mouth, often taking longer to reach a wider

audience. However, the advancement of digital communication enables instant transmission across a wide audience, enabling MDH to swiftly exacerbate tensions, manipulate perceptions and undermine the credibility and impartiality of peacekeeping efforts, making their mitigation and management all the more crucial in maintaining peace and stability.

MDH occurs in various contexts, often intensifying during crises, conflicts, or significant political and social events.

Understanding MDH and the implications of each concept is paramount for you to be able to consider such activities when working with other mission components, planning your operations, and considering force protection. Each concept carries its unique characteristics, but they all share the potential to impact UN peacekeeping efforts.

Let us begin by defining each of these concepts to understand what they mean.

## Misinformation

Inaccurate information that is unintentionally shared in good faith by those unaware that they are passing on falsehoods.

Example
Spreading rumours about a military unit providing food to an armed group, not knowing it to be false.

**Interactive »**

Think of examples of misinformation that have been shared either in your own country or while deployed to a peacekeeping operation.

Misinformation is defined as inaccurate information that is shared without the intent to deceive, often circulated with good intentions by individuals who genuinely believe it to be true and are unaware that they are passing on falsehoods.

Misinformation typically involves the spread of unverified or unconfirmed information or stories, often through word-of-mouth, social media, or other communication channels. While such messaging may not always be intentionally false, it can contain inaccurate or misleading information, leading to the dissemination of incorrect or unverified facts.

Here, you see an example of rumours about a UN military unit providing food to a particular armed group, which could easily cause anger among certain communities.

## Disinformation

Information that is inaccurate, intended to deceive and shared in order to do serious harm.

Example
An information campaign falsely accusing UN mission staff of arms trafficking and, for that reason, calling for violence against the mission.

**Interactive »**

Think of examples that you have witnessed where disinformation has been shared either in your own country or while deployed on peacekeeping operations.

Disinformation is defined as the deliberate dissemination of inaccurate information with the intent to deceive, often shared with the aim of causing serious harm.

Disinformation campaigns or messages are commonplace in peacekeeping missions. Here you can see an example of disinformation where the UN is falsely accused of arms trafficking and calling for violence against the organisation — this type of messaging has been seen against the UN in Mali, the Central African Republic, and other missions.

## Malinformation

Information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, social group, organisation or country.

Example
Information highlighting the cost of a UN mission, without any relative comparison to the cost of non-UN military operations, saying it is a waste of money that could be spent on more important things, and that people should force the UN to leave the country.

*Note: Following an internal decision, the term MDMH, previously used to denote Misinformation, Disinformation, Malformation, and Hate Speech, has been revised to MDH, with the concept of Malformation removed in line with updated policy considerations. As a result, the title of the Reinforcement Training Package (RTP), as well as the majority of the document, have been updated to reflect this change. However, it should be noted that some references to Malformation may still appear within the document pending a full update.*

Malinformation is information grounded in truth but manipulated or shared deliberately with the intention of inflicting harm on individuals, social groups, organisations or even entire countries. Disinformation or malinformation may employ various methods, including selectively presenting facts, framing information to influence perceptions, quoting out of context, strategic timing of releases, and the amplification of content through social media and influencers.

Malinformation can also involve the promotion of conspiracy theories, false attributions, casting doubt on established facts, fearmongering and using inflammatory content to provoke emotions and division. Recognising and combatting malinformation requires fact-checking, cross-referencing sources and media literacy to protect against its impact and influence. It is important to note that all negative or critical information about a mission is not malinformation. Rather, it is when this information is used with the intent to harm, manipulate, or deceive that it becomes malinformation.

## Hate Speech

Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or identity factor

Example
Hate speech targeted against a uniformed contingent related to the ethnicity of that contingent's peacekeepers.

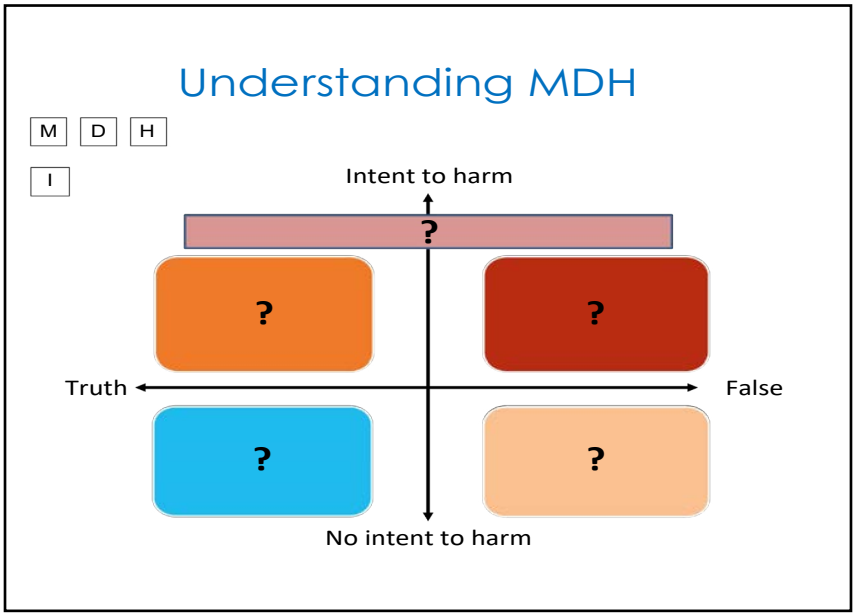
**Interactive »**

Think of any historical examples where hate speech has been used against an individual or group and the impact this had.

Hate speech encompasses any form of communication, whether in speech, writing or behaviour that utilises pejorative or discriminatory language to target individuals or groups based on fundamental aspects of their identity, including religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender, or other identity factors. Certain types of hate speech are prohibited by international human rights law whereas there is no such corresponding obligation for mis/disinformation as they are not defined explicitly in international law. This is a critical distinction when considering the different types of speech — you will hear more on this in Module 2.

Hate speech can and has been used in mission areas between different groups, leading to violence, including the targeting of UN troop and police units. In the image above you can see an example highlighting the risk of hate speech against UN staff, based on ethnicity.

The spread of hateful rhetoric, including in the form of disinformation, can be an early warning of violence — including atrocity crimes. Recognising and addressing hate speech is vital in promoting tolerance, diversity, and inclusivity while preventing the harm and division it can cause in society.



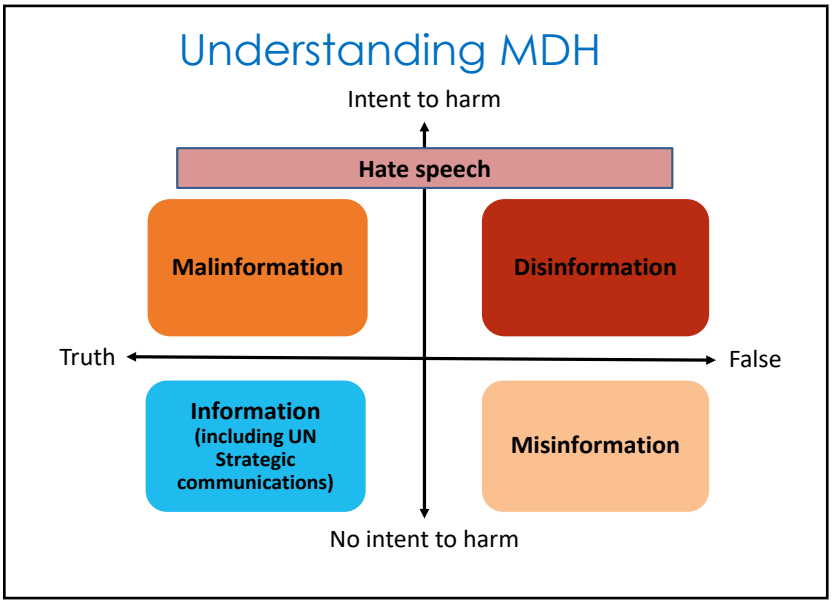

**Interactive »**

One axis considers whether a message has been spread with the intent to cause harm, whereas the other axis signifies whether the information is based on truth or lies.

Consider where on the graph you think the different elements of MDH sit in terms of the veracity of the information content and its intent to cause harm. Also consider where you think authentic information, including UN strategic communications, would sit on this graph.

The next page shows where the different elements of MDH should sit, along with authentic information, such as UN strategic communications.

Place the component parts of MDH onto the graph as individual concepts, as well as authentic information, including UN strategic communications.




**Key message »**

MDH represents a spectrum of communication with varying degrees of truthfulness and intent to harm.

In summary, misinformation is typically unintentional and lacks malicious intent; disinformation is intentionally shared to deceive and cause harm; malinformation employs truthful content to cause harm; and hate speech encompasses harmful communication with specific targeting based on identity. Each contributes to a complex information landscape with varying degrees of truthfulness and harm.

Authentic information, including UN strategic communications, on the other hand, uses truthful information and does not intend to cause harm (note that there will be a lesson on strategic communications later in the module).

While the diagram highlights distinct concepts, it is important to note that the lines separating them are not fixed. For example, some forms of disinformation and propaganda can amount to incitement to violence, hostility, discrimination, and war crimes, which are the most severe forms of hate speech prohibited under international law. Intent to harm and veracity is commonly understood as the defining variables of misinformation, and disinformation. These concepts are imperfect and likely to evolve as new information harms and responses emerge. Despite their limitations, they provide parameters to understand the information terrain and to guide responses.

**Interactive »**

Consider whether the following scenario relates to disinformation, misinformation, or hate speech.

Scenario: '*A fake letter from a UN Head of Mission / SRSG was produced, stating he wanted to resign due to a false incident involving a military battalion. The letter was shared on many digital accounts at the same time. The false information was created to seed doubt about the mission's role in supporting the peace process. The messaging originated from outside and within the mission.*' Where on the graphic would this type of harmful information sit?

Is public criticism of UN military and police peacekeepers a form of MDH?

**Key message »**

Not all negative information aimed at UN peacekeepers is MDH.

Legitimate criticism of the UN is not a form of MDH, even though frustrations among the population might result in protests and violence against UN military and police bases and personnel. It is important to understand this distinction. Legitimate criticism is not a falsehood, although a person's perspective of events might be different from yours.

Legitimate grievances should be recognised, and peacekeeping missteps and errors should be acknowledged with humility. Freedom of opinion and expression should be promoted and upheld in actions taken by missions with respect to information integrity.

Examples of legitimate criticism might include accusations that the mission is not doing enough to protect civilians from attacks by armed groups or do not patrol at night when people are at their most vulnerable.

That said, legitimate criticism might be exploited by groups, inciting violence against UN personnel, especially if behaviours continue to stay the same.

### Why MDH might be used against Peacekeepers

- Undermining the UN peacekeeping mission
  - Tarnish UN peacekeepers' reputation in the eyes of the local population
  - Claim bias or ineffectiveness
- Destabilising the peace process
  - Disrupt peace negotiations
  - Undermine diplomatic efforts
- Generating fear and insecurity
  - Create an environment of fear and insecurity
  - Deter local populations from cooperating with peacekeepers

**Key message »**

It is important to note that hostile actors will use MDH for a variety of reasons, often with the intention of achieving their objectives in the context of the ongoing conflict or political situation.

MDH in UN peacekeeping missions is a complex phenomenon driven by a combination of political, social, and psychological factors. While the specific motivations can vary depending on the context and the groups involved, some common driving factors include:

Undermining peacekeeping missions. Hostile actors may see UN peacekeeping missions as obstacles to their objectives. Therefore, they seek to undermine the credibility and effectiveness of these missions. MDH can be used to tarnish the reputation of peacekeepers and missions, portraying them as biased or ineffective and thereby reducing local support for their presence. For example, a 2023 survey of UN peacekeeping personnel showed that "anti-MONUSCO sentiment is still spread by some groups who are overtly calling for the end of the mission in Congo".

Destabilising the peace process. MDH can be used to disrupt peace negotiations or agreements. By creating confusion and mistrust, hostile actors can undermine efforts to encourage warring parties to engage in dialogue

and make concessions. Moreover, it can undermine international diplomatic efforts aimed at promoting these processes.

Generating fear and insecurity. Threats, hate speech and the dissemination of false information about UN personnel intentions or actions can create an environment of fear and insecurity. This may deter local populations from cooperating with peacekeepers and supporting mission activities.

## Why MDH might be used against Peacekeepers (Continued)

- Dividing local populations
  - Sow divisions and mistrust among communities
- Recruitment and mobilisation
  - Recruit advocates local population
  - Galvanise support for a group's cause
- Resource control
  - Control resource areas for financial gain

Dividing local populations. MDH can be employed to sow divisions and mistrust among local populations, making it more challenging for peacekeepers to gain the trust and cooperation of the communities they are there to protect. This can hinder peacekeeping efforts.

Recruitment and mobilisation. Hostile actors use MDH to recruit new members or gain support among local populations. They may spread narratives that paint the UN as aggressors or enemies, galvanising support for their cause. This has the potential to escalate violence and increase the complexity of the operating environment.

Resource control. In some cases, hostile actors may seek to control valuable resources in the region where UN peacekeepers are deployed. MDH can be used to intimidate or drive people away from these resource-rich areas.

## Take Aways

- MDH are three distinct but related concepts that involve the dissemination of false, misleading, or harmful information.
- MDH tactics threaten UN personnel and disrupt peacekeeping operations.
- Understanding the definitions and why MDH is used helps to explore ways to address such threats.

In conclusion, hostile actors employ MDH tactics to achieve a wide range of objectives or goals that threaten all UN peacekeeping personnel and disrupt peacekeeping operations. By sowing confusion, mistrust, and animosity, these groups aim to undermine the effectiveness and credibility of UN missions and maintain the status quo of conflict or instability.

By understanding the definitions and drivers of MDH, we can begin to explore ways to address such threats and support the mission's objectives.

In subsequent lessons, we will delve deeper into the impact of MDH on peacekeeping operations and the techniques used to employ them.

# End-of-Lesson Quiz »

**1. How would you characterise the threat posed to UN peace operations by misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech (MDH)?**

A. Peace operations have faced a growing barrage of MDH.
B. MDH is currently a theoretical threat rather than an active threat.
C. So far MDH has not been a problem for peace operations.
D. In the past MDH was a threat, but currently it is not.

**2. MDH _____.**

A. is an image problem for the United Nations, but not a safety problem
B. is a virtual rather than a physical threat
C. is the largest cause of death among peace operations personnel
D. puts the safety of peacekeepers at risk

**3. The impact of MDH is felt by the whole mission _____ the local civilian population.**

A. but not by
B. and by
C. much more than by
D. because of

**4. False and harmful information can _____.**

A. exacerbate existing tensions
B. prevent any new conflicts erupting
C. prevent human rights abuses and violations
D. easily be addressed

**5. The UN Department of Peace Operations policy on Information Integrity defines information integrity as _____.**

A. "the extent to which information serves the mandate"
B. "information that has been manipulated"
C. "the accuracy and reliability of information"
D. "the extent to which information and communication goes viral"

**6. Hostile actors use MDH to _____ among local populations.**

A. foster trust and harmony
B. accurately inform and educate key individuals
C. strengthen ties to local news sources
D. recruit new members or gain support

**7. Misinformation is _____.**

A. inaccurate information shared without the intent to deceive
B. accurate information shared without the intent to deceive
C. accurate information shared with the intent to deceive
D. inaccurate information shared with the intent to deceive

**8. Disinformation is _____.**

A. inaccurate information shared without the intent to deceive
B. inaccurate information shared with the intent to deceive
C. accurate information shared without the intent to deceive
D. accurate information shared with the intent to deceive

**9. Hate speech is _____.**

A. inaccurate information on negative aspects of society
B. any form of communication that utilises pejorative or discriminatory language to target individuals or groups because of their identity
C. accurate information on people's identities shared with the intent to provoke legitimate criticism
D. any form of communication that utilises pejorative or discriminatory language to target military organisations only

*Answer Key provided on the next page.*

# End-of-Lesson Quiz »

**10. Which of the following is NOT a reason why MDH might be used against peacekeepers?**

A. To promote goodwill towards a peacekeeping mission

B. Undermining the UN peacekeeping mission

C. Destabilising the peace process

D. Generating fear and insecurity

## Answer key »

1. A
2. D
3. B
4. A
5. C
6. D
7. A
8. B
9. B
10. A