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Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network

The Effectiveness of UN Peacekeeping Operations

The Impact and Response to Misinformation, Disinformation, Malinformation and Hate Speech in the Digital Era

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The Impact and Response to Misinformation, Disinformation, Malinformation and Hate Speech in the Digital Era

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2. Executive Summary

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Over the past decades, the use of misinformation, disinformation, malinformation and hate speech (MDMH) has contributed to the escalation of violence in environments where the United Nations deployed Peacekeeping Operations (UN PKOs), including in Rwanda and Yugoslavia.[1] In today's mission contexts, the use of MDMH and the subsequent pollution of the information environment creates significant challenges for UN PKOs, posing risks to civilians, which the UN is deployed to protect, as well as the safety and security of UN peacekeepers by targeting them individually and as groups. The widespread utilisation of modern technology in UN PKO environments raises the magnitude of the MDMH threat. In some settings, MDMH places communities and peacekeepers at risk of harm, but more broadly, MDMH places UN PKOs in ever more challenging situations, which they are often incapable of responding to. Through the misrepresentation of efforts and the distortion of perceptions, MDMH can impact the mission's (as a collective and within units/teams) ability to respond and adapt to the context, which undermines its ability to protect civilians.[2]

The availability of Internet access and frequent use of social media and other outlets has enabled an exponential and uncontrollable online explosion of MDMH. As a result, an evolving information disorder is mounting characterised by:

> information pollution at a global scale; a complex web of motivations for creating, disseminating and consuming these 'polluted' messages; a myriad of content types and techniques

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1   UN. (n.d.). Hate Speech and Real Harm.
     https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/hate-speech-and-real-harm

2   Vermeij, L., Bigwood, C., von Gienanth, T., Kumalo, L., Issa, S., Kone, F.R. et al. (2022). UN Peacekeeping Operations at a Crossroads: The Implementation of Protection Mandates in Contested and Congested Spaces. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. https://effectivepeaceops.net/publication/un-peacekeeping-operations-at-crossroads

for amplifying content; innumerable platforms hosting and reproducing this content; and breakneck speeds of communication between trusted peers.[3]

This trend has created severe risks in terms of amplified tensions and divisions during times of emergency, crisis, key political moments and/or armed conflict and is directly impacting the work of UN PKOs.

The spread of information by actors as part of hearts and minds campaigns and other information strategies to bring populations on the ground on the missions' side is nothing new. Simultaneously, the diffusion of rumours and false information can contribute to the escalation of tensions between and within groups and communities and result in widespread violence. Historically, information was mainly spread through analogue means, including word-of-mouth. The use of MDMH in today's conflict settings has significantly evolved, particularly because now the focus has been not on actors or parties to the conflict, but on those trying to keep the peace. Current contexts and environments allow for a much wider and rapid spread of different types of information through new communication tools that are used online, offline, and in hybrid formats. All of these can support and contribute to the intensification and acceleration of MDMH, impacting the conflict dynamics and the use of indiscriminate violence. The online uptake of MDMH may further aggravate these dynamics. It can undermine the stability of mission environments, lead to local conflicts and indiscriminate use of violence by non-state and state actors, impact detrimentally on human rights, and jeopardise overall processes of achieving and sustaining peace and supporting its processes.[4]

Therefore, this highlights how the spread of MDMH can negatively affect the work of UN Peacekeeping missions. In this report, we find that the use of MDMH is a growing challenge for UN PKOs across the globe, especially in the cases covered by this report with armed rebel groups as well as the not-so-friendly host states to malign the peace operations. While freedom of expression must be protected at all costs, we do find that social media is not just weaponised within conflicts but that its use can also decisively influence how, when and whether conflicts manifest, when and where violence is manifest, and the people it targets. While the UN at different levels of operation is doing its best to tackle the challenge through working groups, support to missions through training and information and additional analysis, more support is needed from the member states through financial and resource-based means to support missions to fulfil their mandates. When the spread of mis- and disinformation threatens mission personnel's ability to deliver on their mandates, it places mission personnel at risk or triggers violence and hate with intent to harm. UN PKOs must have the capacity and the readiness to respond – without the risk of affecting information integrity on digital platforms. If nothing is done to support the UN PKOs long term in this area, the gap of understanding

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3   Wardle, C., and Derakhshan, H. (2018). Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking. Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-report-version-august-2018/16808c9c77

4   Khan, I. (2022). A/77/288: Disinformation and freedom of opinion and expression during armed conflicts. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a77288-disinformation-and-freedom-opinion-and-expression-during-armed

between the UN PKO, its staff and local communities will create environments where distrust continues to fester, which, over a long period, will undermine the legitimacy of the field mission. As a result, missions already struggle with perception or legitimacy challenges due to past historical inabilities and will be faced with a mountain of questions over their abilities, especially when this interferes with delivering on protection mandates and contributing to long-term, sustainable peace and development. Finally, in the longer term, UN PKOs need to shift toward preventive approaches, including proactively reshaping narratives about the UN and contributing to a healthier information environment through support to local journalists. While work is underway by the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) Information Integrity Unit, the UN needs to widen the mandate of this unit, increase its resources, and provide support to the work it is doing. At the mission level, adopting a whole-of-mission approach across uniformed and civilian components to foster networked communication in the field will be beneficial. For this, military, police and civilian officers need further training before they are deployed to the mission and during deployments.

3. Introduction

The rise and use of misinformation, disinformation, malinformation and hate speech (MDMH),[5] referred to as weapons of war by the UN Secretary-General (UNSG), appears to be a growing challenge for UN Peacekeeping operations (UN PKOs), host countries and local communities. While UN PKOs are designed to keep the peace where there is peace to be kept, in several situations, UN PKOs have come under increased pressure to deal with emerging challenges to peace, such as the use of MDMH. In many situations, MDMH impacts the daily work of UN PKOs and, more broadly speaking, their ability to deliver on their mandated objectives. In the 2023 report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, the Committee "emphasizes the importance of enhancing the safety and security of peacekeepers, and notes with great concern the increasing amount of disinformation and misinformation directed against United Nations peacekeeping operations, which may negatively impact missions and peacekeepers".[6] The growing change in the use of MDMH in and around environments where UN PKOs operate places UN PKOs under increased pressure from actors who utilise and manipulate information through digital channels and technologies, including social media platforms.

PKOs "are political interventions that ultimately rely on building and maintaining the trust and good will of different stakeholders through a mix of community engagement, political

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5   The following UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2018) definitions will be used in this paper: misinformation is defined as "information that is false but not created with the intention of causing harm." Malinformation is defined as "information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, social group, organisation or country". Disinformation is defined as "information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organisation or country". UNESCO. (2018). Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education. https://en.unesco.org/fightfakenews

6   UNGA. (2023). Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, A/77/19. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4011842?ln=en&v=pdf

engagement and informational outreach".[7] In peacekeeping environments, the use of MDMH can directly impact the conflict or the mission's ability to support a host state to achieve peace. MDMH has been used for centuries. Information operations launch information asymmetry and information warfare campaigns that have been common aspects of armed conflicts across the globe. While communicating through specific or manipulated information – both true and false – parties have sought to influence the outcome of armed conflicts and the direction of travel or arguments.[8] This includes information spread as part of hearts and minds campaigns and other information strategies to gain support from populations in conflict areas. Simultaneously, the diffusion of rumours, false information and hate speech has contributed to the escalation of tensions between and within communities as well as widespread violence in conflicts across the globe, and this "can be a precursor to atrocity crime including genocide".[9]

> While communicating through specific or manipulated information – both true and false – parties have sought to influence the outcome of armed conflicts and the direction of travel or arguments.

Historically, information was mainly spread through word-of-mouth and other analogue means, such as radio broadcasting. The use of information in today's conflict settings has significantly evolved, where in the current context, it includes different types of information through new communication tools that are used online, offline and in hybrid formats. All of these can support and contribute to the intensification and acceleration of conflict dynamics as well as the use of indiscriminate violence. The online uptake of MDMH may further aggravate these dynamics, having the potential to undermine the stability of mission environments, escalate local conflicts and the indiscriminate use of violence by State and non-State actors, impact detrimentally on human rights, and jeopardise overall processes of achieving and sustaining peace and supporting its processes.

The ability to widely and rapidly spread information through online channels creates a limitless space which can be used to package, repackage, and distribute different forms of narratives which play into the hands of MDMH – often exploiting and/or manipulating factual or true information. As the spread of MDMH through these channels appears to be on the rise globally, there has been a growing awareness among the UN and its Member States of the dangers that arise from the way MDMH is being used and deployed in fragile and conflict-affected settings. In response, the Secretary-General launched the Strategy and Plan of Action on

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7   Sherman, J. and Trithart, A. (2021). Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations: From an Afterthought to an Operational Necessity. International Peace Institute (IPI), August.

8   Kalyvas, S.N. (2004). The Paradox of Terrorism in Civil War. *The Journal of Ethics*, 8(1), 97–138.

9   UN. (n.d.). Hate Speech and Real Harm. op. cit.

Hate Speech (2019), and the UN General Assembly (UNGA) requested the establishment of a framework to address mis- and disinformation in 2022.[10]

> The use of information in today's conflict settings has significantly evolved, where in the current context, it includes different types of information through new communication tools that are used online, offline and in hybrid formats. All of these can support and contribute to the intensification and acceleration of conflict dynamics as well as the use of indiscriminate violence.

Starting in late 2022 with the establishment at the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) of a dedicated team to address MDMH in UN Peacekeeping settings, a consistent approach has been advised for missions. Since then, the UN DPO Information Integrity Unit, which was initially called the UN DPO Addressing MDMH Team, has worked to address challenges that were related to blurriness around language and definitions, creating more clarity to enable the formulation of MDMH policy and guidance for UN PKOs, as well as the development of training on addressing MDMH. This approach has been encapsulated in the forthcoming strategic policy on Information Integrity in Peacekeeping contexts (2024). The policy promotes an integrated whole-of-mission approach to address MDMH, supports the establishment of mission Working Groups on MDMH involving UN personnel from across civilian and uniformed mission components, and encourages systematic approaches to monitoring, analysis, responses, and evaluation of MDMH. According to respondents the research team engaged with, several UN PKOs are working on the rollout and implementation of these initiatives to address the MDMH challenges in their respective contexts.

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10 The strategy provides "guidance for the United Nations system to address hate speech at the national and global level" and the framework involves taking "all appropriate steps to track sources of disinformation and misinformation, to analyse trends, and to mitigate any negative impacts" (A/RES/76/274, June 2022). In addition to these actions, since 2019, the UNSC has progressively included language on mis- and disinformation and hate speech into the mandates of MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and UNMISS. Reinforcing this, several initiatives have been undertaken at UNHQ level to address MDMH, including the UN Strategy for the Digital Transformation of Peacekeeping. The UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect is working to implement the Secretary-General's Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. The Strategy and Plan of Action seek to "enhance United Nations efforts in support of Member States to address root causes and drivers of hate speech and enable effective United Nations responses to the impact of hate speech on societies." In launching the Strategy and Plan of Action, the Secretary-General also asked each UN entity – including PKOs and Special Political Missions – to formulate their own plans for implementation, consistent with their respective mandates. In line with this, the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) developed a DPO-DPPA Plan of Action on Hate Speech in 2020, and several UN peace operations have similarly developed their own Action Plans.

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This report by the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON), in collaboration with NORCAP and Training for Peace, sets out to explore some of these key developments and challenges. The following questions are posed:

1. What is the impact of MDMH on UN PKOs and their ability to implement their mandates effectively?

2. What efforts have the selected UN PKOs taken to respond to MDMH?

3. What are the lessons identified and recommendations for UN PKOs to address MDMH?

The report draws on four UN PKOs as case studies and hinges further analysis on two UN PKOs to provide and understand context-specific examples of the rising challenges that UN PKOs face with MDMH. The first case the study conducts further analysis on is the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the second is the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). It also draws on examples from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). In doing so, the report identifies lessons and provides recommendations for how UN PKOs can broadly start to tackle MDMH and how to reinforce related efforts within these missions.

> The report draws on four UN PKOs as case studies and hinges further analysis on two UN PKOs to provide and understand context-specific examples of the rising challenges that UN PKOs face with MDMH.

Methodology

This research project was carried out from February 2023 to February 2024 with extensive desk-based research in consultation with UN Headquarters (UNHQ), UN PKO personnel and several permanent missions to the UN. In this report, we draw on the EPON methodology, which

employs three analytical tools: a context analysis, an identification of effects, and a review of explanatory factors. Each mission-specific study starts with an analysis of the conflict dynamics and the principal characteristics of the context in which the peace operation is taking place. Additionally, the report draws on interviews with UN personnel, civil society organisations (CSOs) and academics in and around where the UN PKOs operated. Over a period of one-and-a-half years, the research team spoke to UN officials at UNHQ as well as past UN colleagues. Finally, the team deployed a small team of national experts who were critical in providing the report with key information and context-specific details about the incidents used as examples in this report. The use of national and local researchers provided valuable insights into why particular incidents occurred and how the UN PKO and the people the mission is designed to protect – who responded or did not respond – dealt with the situation. In essence, the report found that in several situations, UN PKOs were trying to deal with MDMH but often had little resources or capacity to adapt or respond adequately to the broader and/or context-specific use of MDMH. As a result, the team observed that in some cases, UN PKOs end up in a "negative spectral time-lapse", where the mission faces challenges such as communities being dissatisfied with its performance and the mission not having buy-in or legitimacy from the people. In other situations, the team observed communities feeling that UN PKOs were not fulfilling their mandate in areas such as protecting civilians. The missions continued to push forward despite the broader range of challenges and evidence that their efforts are not working as they continue to view things from a two-dimensional perspective. In other cases, missions may simply choose not to react or further entrench themselves internally, which played into the hands of those using MDMH.[11]

Definitions

Considering the difficulties surrounding definitions and a lack of agreement or common understanding of different information typologies, this report uses MDMH as an umbrella term covering various concepts such as misinformation, malinformation, disinformation, and hate speech while referring to specific typologies when appropriate and needed. There are no universally accepted definitions for the different information typologies. Currently, outside and within UN PKOs, various forms and concepts are used by different entities, often meaning the same thing or with some subtle differences, demonstrating the complexity of MDMH within and around UN PKOs. However, to provide some coherence in our analysis, the report utilises the definitions of misinformation, malinformation, disinformation and hate speech used by the UN DPO. These definitions are included in the UN DPO Policy on Information Integrity in Peacekeeping Settings (forthcoming, 2024).
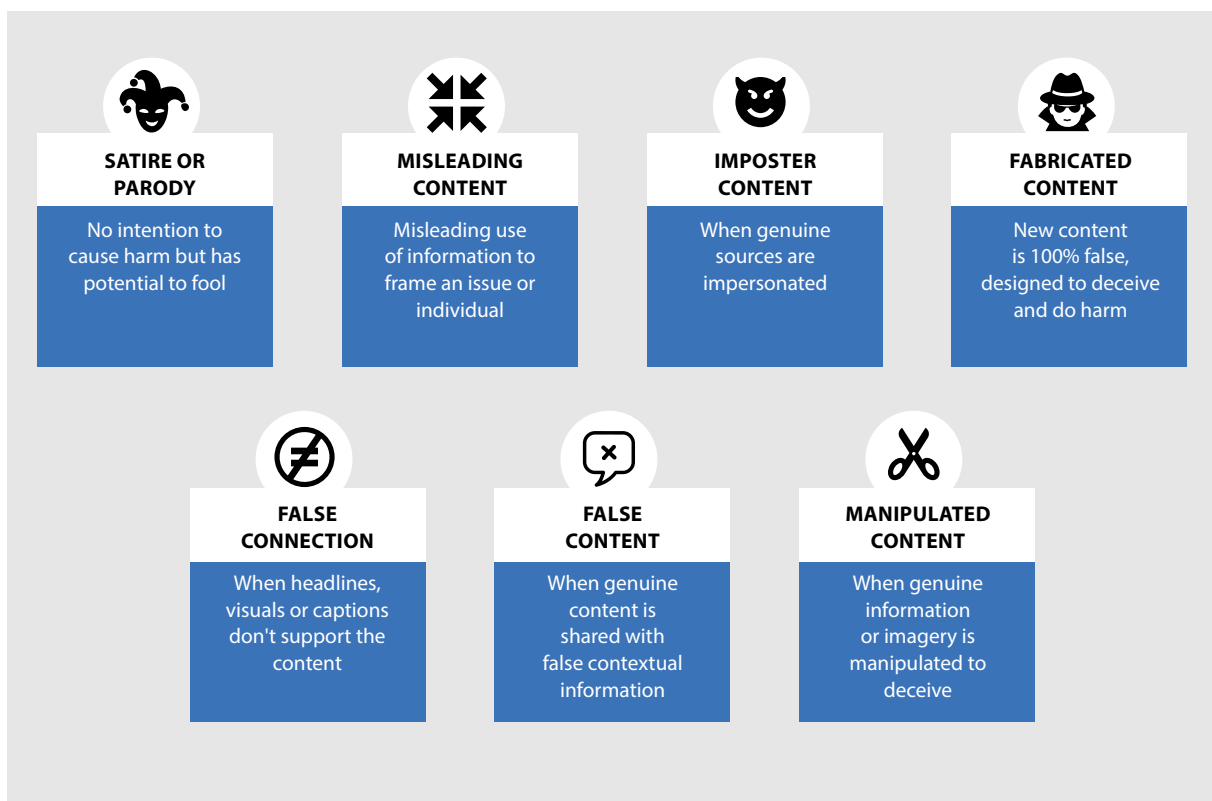
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11   Tchie, A.E. (Forthcoming, 2024). The negative spectral timelapse effective on United Nations Peacekeeping in Africa.

Misinformation: "Inaccurate information that is unintentionally shared in good faith by those unaware that they are passing on falsehoods".[12] Misinformation refers to inaccurate, false, or misleading content that is shared without the intent of being harmful, as illustrated in the UN DPO diagram in Figure 1. Examples of misinformation might include satire and parody, but also false information shared by net citizens without malicious intent.

Disinformation: "Information that is inaccurate, intended to deceive and shared in order to do serious harm".[13] Disinformation is fabricated, manipulated, or impostor content with the intent to harm. The non-profit coalition First Draft highlights that "producers of disinformation typically have political, financial, psychological, or social motivation".[14] Mis- and/or disinformation can be created using or combining numerous techniques, as seen in Figure 1.[15]

Figure 1: Seven types of mis- and disinformation[16]

SATIRE OR PARODY	MISLEADING CONTENT	IMPOSTER CONTENT	FABRICATED CONTENT
No intention to cause harm but has potential to fool	Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual	When genuine sources are impersonated	New content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm

FALSE CONNECTION	FALSE CONTENT	MANIPULATED CONTENT
When headlines, visuals or captions don't support the content	When genuine content is shared with false contextual information	When genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive

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12   UN. (2023). Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 8: Information Integrity on Digital Platforms. June. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-information-integrity-en.pdf, p. 5.

13   UNSC. (2021). Report of the Secretary General on countering disinformation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. December. https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/416/87/PDF/N2141687.pdf

14   Wardle, C. (2018). Information Disorder: The Essential Glossary. Harvard Kennedy School and First Draft. https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/infoDisorder_glossary.pdf

15   UN. (2023). MINUSMA Misinformation and Disinformation Working Group Terms of Reference.

16   Ibid.

Malinformation: "Information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, social group, organisation or country".[17] Malinformation is based on accurate information but is used in a misleading manner to inflict harm.

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 other identity factor. According to this definition, hate speech can only be directed at individuals or groups of individuals. It does not include communication about States and their offices, symbols or public officials, nor about religious leaders or tenets of faith."[18] The use of hate speech can occur in different ways and manifest in behaviour, writing and speech aiming to transmit hateful messages based on identity factors of a group or a person. The International Committee of the Red Cross' (ICRC) definition of hate speech also includes a focus on digital environments, stating that "when these forms of expression are shared or amplified through digital means, this can be referred to as digital hate speech".[19] While different organisations agree on the definition of hate speech, it should be mentioned that the link and distinction between hate speech and mis-, mal-, and disinformation is yet to be fully defined. To avoid confusion regarding the lack of clear interlinkages, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in the Rabat Threshold Test, also uses the term *hatred* for "intense and irrational emotions of opprobrium, enmity and detestation towards the target group".[20] *Hatred* or *incitement to hatred* can hence also be found in the context of mal- and disinformation.

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17   UNESCO. (n.d.). Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation. op. cit.

18   UN. (n.d.). What is Hate Speech? https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/what-is-hate-speech

19   ICRC. (2021). Harmful information. Misinformation, disinformation and hate speech in armed conflict and other situations of violence. July.

20   UN OHCHR. (2020). One-pager on "incitement to hatred".
     https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Rabat_threshold_test.pdf

Figure 2: UN DPO diagram explaining various types of information[21]
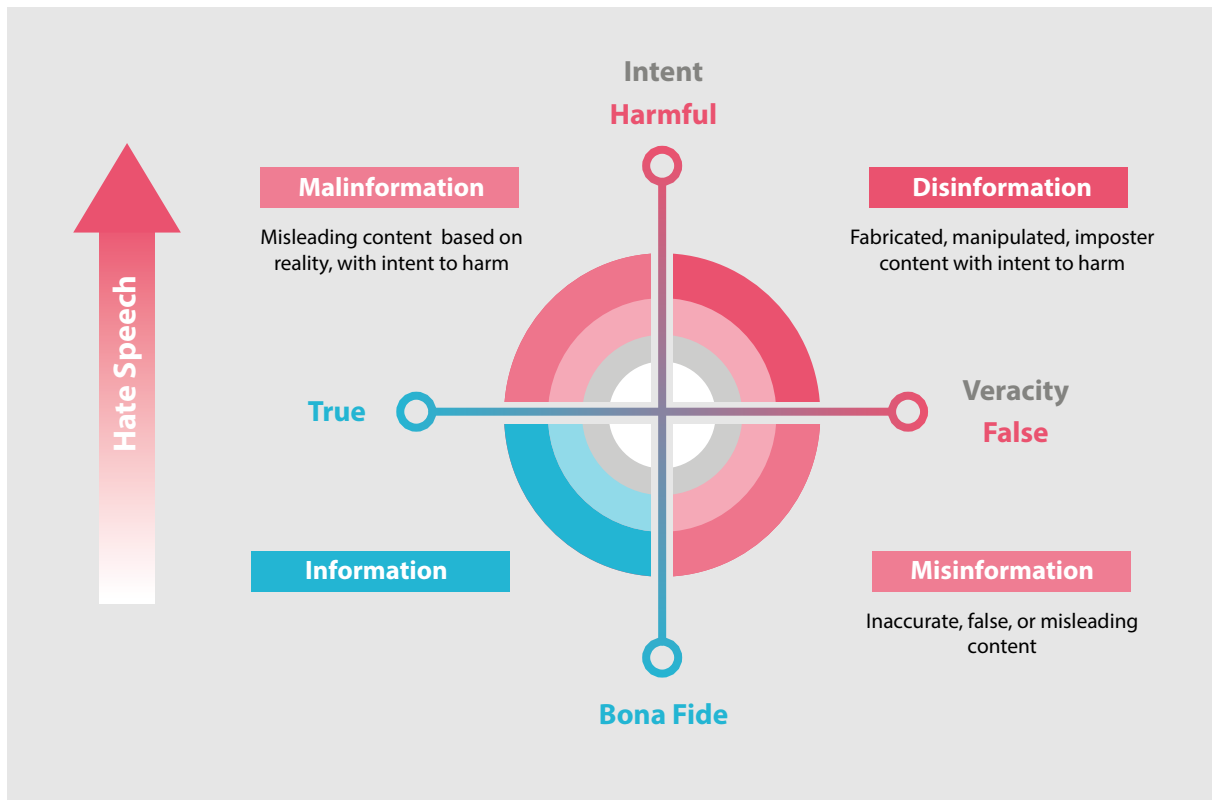
It should be noted that the intentional act of spreading disinformation can turn into unintentional misinformation sharing "as it gains traction and spreads, as most people do not share false information with malicious intent". A similar evolution can be seen with "mal-information [that] can blur into disinformation when ostensibly true information is stripped of nuance or context".[22]

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21 UN DPO. (Forthcoming, 2024). Policy on Information Integrity in Peacekeeping Settings.

22 Trithart, A. (2022). Disinformation Against UN Peacekeeping Operations. International Peace Institute (IPI), November.

Figure 3: Misinformation, dis-information and mal-information

Figure 4: Pollution of the information ecosystem[23]

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23   UN. (2023). Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 8. op. cit.

Figure 4 illustrates the pollution of the information ecosystem and threat to human progress that is posed using misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech. The exclusion of malinformation illustrates its limited use in UN strategies and policies until 2023. The 2024 UN DPO Policy on Information Integrity in Peacekeeping Settings covers misinforma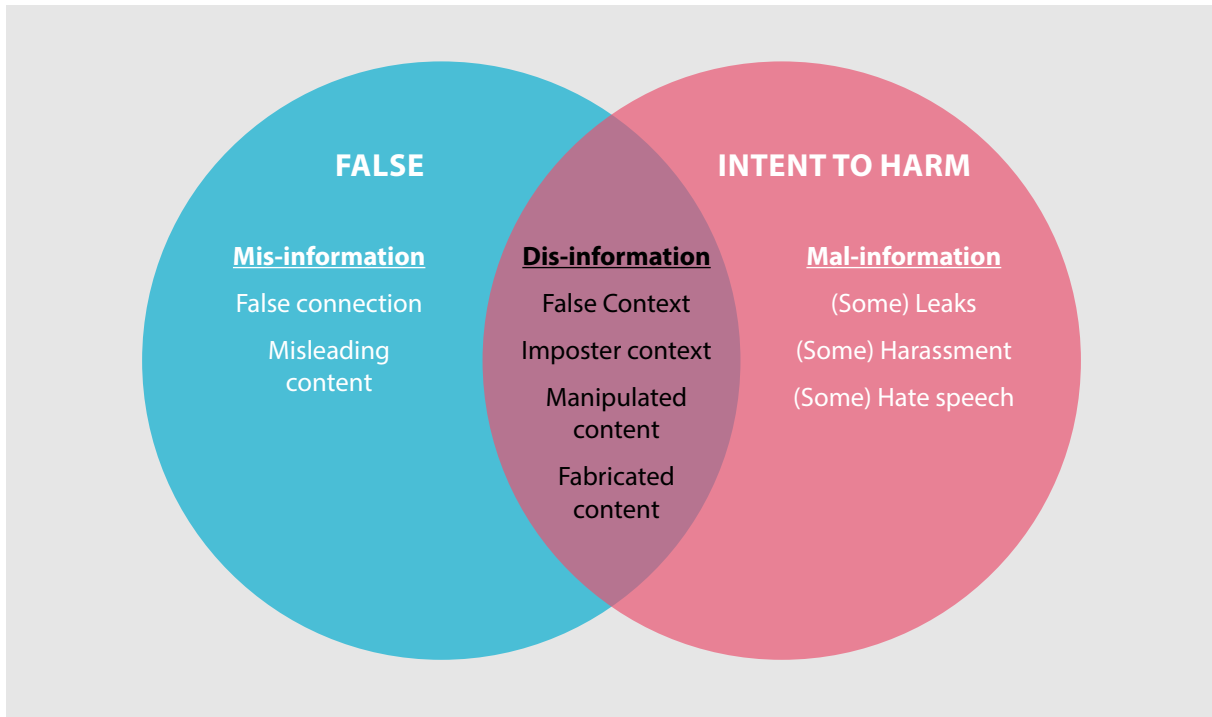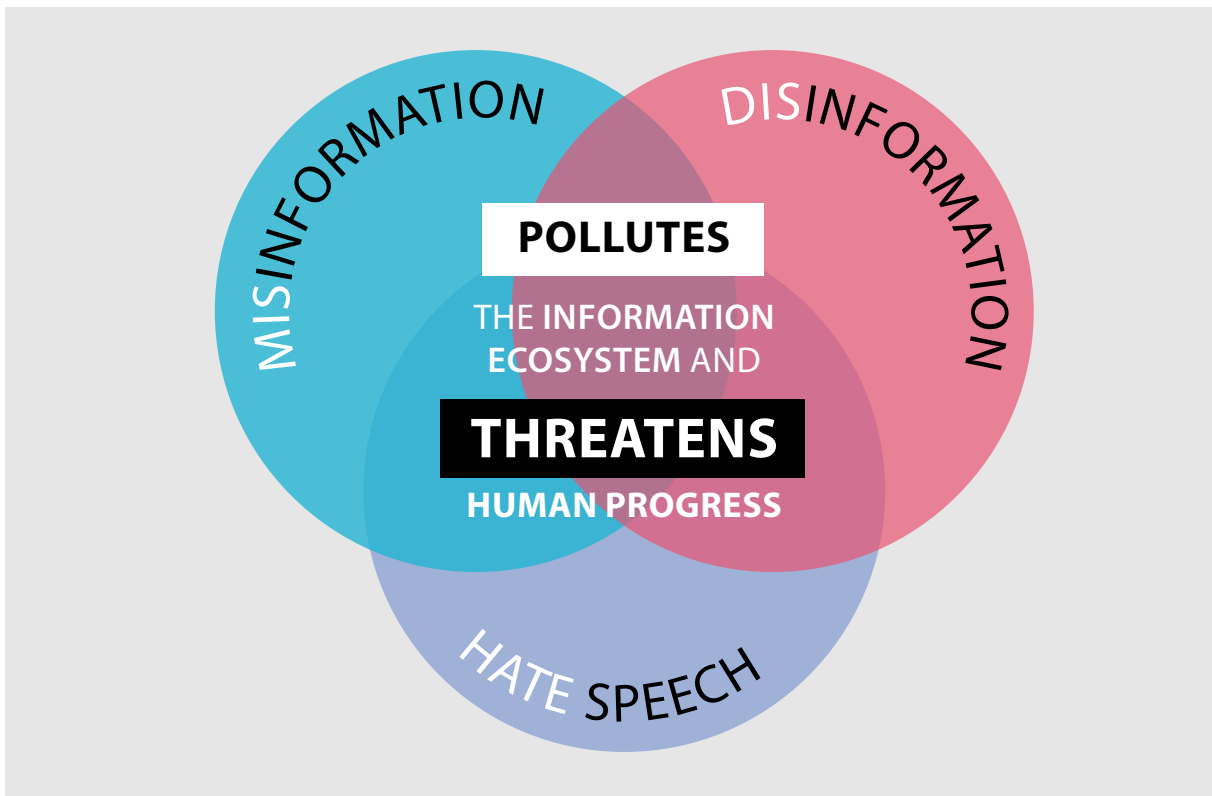tion, disinformation, malinformation, and hate speech (MDMH). In line with the latest UN guidance, this paper refers to MDMH as well.

The definitions outlined above cover only concepts contributing to the information disorder which peacekeepers face. This disorder is further affected by legal and conceptual blurriness characterised by a lack of agreed terminology. In addition to the concepts, different terminologies are used by different actors to discuss the creation and dissemination of (false) information. This includes concepts such as "fake news", referring to "deliberate disinformation or hoaxes spread on social media or other online outlets". However, this does not necessarily capture the many and various ways "in which information can be used as a vector of harm and a means of undermining professional journalism".[24] Additionally, concepts such as ill-information, propaganda, rumour, distortion, lies, satire, parody, and gossip are frequently used to describe different types of information that is factually incorrect.

The definitions of information typologies frequently overlap. As such, when attempting to distinguish between different types of information, it is often difficult to draw clear lines between facts and falsehoods, and to prove the absence or presence of intent to cause harm. In UN PKO environments, this can create significant challenges in terms of identifying the existence of misinformation versus disinformation, for example. Rather than attempting to identify the exact type of information used in peacekeeping contexts, this report will focus on the impact of MDMH on UN PKOs and their effectiveness in delivering on their mandate.

Additional resources

The report presents an analysis of the language used in UN PKO mandates (in section two), which builds on a table published in an IPI paper in 2022.[25] The approach focuses on the mandates of four multidimensional UN PKOs and how misinformation, malinformation, disinformation and hate speech are included. The report then considers how these typologies are used in the mandated reporting of the UNSG to the UN Security Council (UNSC) on the work of UN PKOs. The UNSC Resolutions (UNSCRs) considered in this analysis start in the year of the introduction of the language in the respective mission's mandate up to the end of September 2023.

24   ICRC. (2021). Harmful information. op. cit.

25   Trithart, A. (2022). Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations. op. cit.

Therefore, the first two sections of this report draw on the UNSG reports on MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO and UNMISS, additional reports, and analysis of the language in the reports. The analysis includes the frequency of words used per year and in what context or association. Additionally, the authors draw on UNSG reports starting the year prior to the introduction of language of concern in the respective mission's mandate up to mid-March 2023. Hence, for MONUSCO, a total of 21 reports were analysed, covering the years 2018 to the end of March 2023, as language on the matter was only introduced in the mandate in 2019. For MINUSMA, a total of nine reports covering 2021 to the end of March 2023 were included, as the mandate was introduced in 2022. For UNMISS, a total of eight reports were collected, covering 2021 to the end of March 2023, as the mandate was introduced in 2022. Finally, MINUSCA has nine reports covering 2020 to March 2023, as the mandate was introduced in 2021.

> Therefore, to deal with misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, to contribute effectively to the information environment, and to build quality relationships with key actors, these factors must be taken into consideration in addition to the technical approaches considered in this paper.

Limitations of the report

It is acknowledged that the dynamics linked to MDMH impact the effectiveness of UN PKOs, yet the extent of this cannot be measured or quantified. Nevertheless, first, it is acknowledged that competing narratives (and associated influences) of external powers with regards to the direction taken by both the state and the mission can play a role in the use of MDMH. Second, at the national level, the government and opposition parties, as well as CSO and other entities, compete for the support of the population through their contributions to the information environment. All of these roleplayers, at different points, can utilise false information or call for the incitement of violence. It is often difficult to discern between what might be described as 'normal politics' and narratives that are of concern to the mission. In short, the holders of opposing positions can regard the 'other' as a contributor to MDMH. Third, the report acknowledges that controversy surrounding certain international norms and rights that are yet to significantly progress, which include but are not limited to gender equality, sexuality, and secular politics, may not be fully covered in the analysis. This, in part, was due to the mission's positioning and projection on these issues, but more broadly, because several missions were still grappling with the effects of MDMH in these areas, which often resulted in the provocation of certain actors to oppose related efforts including using MDMH. Fourth, the paper acknowledges the problematic and illegal behaviour that persists among peacekeepers, but this is not the only focus of the report. As such, it is recognised that missions face considerable challenges in ensuring that

their efforts are aligned with UN PKO doctrine and principles in the face of both geopolitical changes at the regional and global levels and political transitions at the national level. It is further recognised that missions face challenges in contextualising their support for international norms and rights to avoid provoking the opposition and ensure a realisable theory and arc or timeframe for change. Therefore, to deal with misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, to contribute effectively to the information environment, and to build quality relationships with key actors, these factors must be taken into consideration in addition to the technical approaches considered in this paper.

The report is organised into six sections. Section one focuses on the information environment, identifying potential MDMH actors and UN global initiatives addressing MDMH. Section two analyses UN PKO mandates and UNSG quarterly reports with a specific focus on MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, and UNMISS, analysing the introduction and development of MDMH language for UN PKO contexts. Section three and four zoom in on the use of MDMH in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR), respectively, and section five outlines some of the initiatives that have been taken by UN PKOs to address MDMH. Section six provides recommendations on how to strengthen the work of UN PKOs on MDMH.

4. Information Environment

Although the spread of MDMH is not a new phenomenon, the information environment in the current digital age renders the phenomenon more challenging as it has the potential to intensify and accelerate information distribution during conflict dynamics and violence more broadly, impacting the peace and security of a society where a UN PKO has been deployed. In the current information environment, the difficulty of differentiating between actors using MDMH from those that fall victim to it or counter it is becoming increasingly challenging. States and their actors, non-state actors, and regional and international actors who have significant communications capabilities can all play a role in the use of MDMH during different moments in a conflict cycle. Furthermore, outsourcing to artificial intelligence (AI) software and private actors and contractors, who are part of a rapidly growing industry offering related services, can also pose a risk. The widespread access to the Internet and increased use of social media and other outlets can help to spread positive messages and awareness of MDMH but can also exacerbate the spread of MDMH, which can make it harder to fact-check. This rapid spread of information may lead to an 'infodemic', implying that there is "too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments", causing confusion and risk-taking behaviours, as well as mistrust in authorities and undermining of public responses.[26] In addition to this, public discourses of hate speech can be weaponised for (geo)political and military gain, including through exploiting and utilising social media and other forms of communication "with incendiary rhetoric that stigmatizes and dehumanizes" people.[27] Thus, MDMH can also infiltrate and be a threat to stability in states or regions in conflict, impacting "democratic values, social stability and peace".[28]

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26 World Health Organization. (n.d.). Infodemic. https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_1

27 UN. (2019). UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech.
    https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/advising-and-mobilizing/Action_plan_on_hate_speech_EN.pdf

28 Ibid.

As a result, this section maps key public and private actors contributing to the information environment in conflict settings. It presents a non-exhaustive list of actors to illustrate the complexity of information environments and the associated challenges. This complexity and the challenges to addressing different types of MDMH, especially the identification of "perpetrators" and "victims", introduces the question of who should be protected, by whom, and from what. Of particular concern are times when MDMH is intentionally created and spread against UN PKOs and international organisations, adding to a narrative where the affected population further questions the existing legitimacy of the UN PKO and the effectiveness of their presence. This can lead to a rapid situation where UN PKOs experience additional reputational damage, erosion of trust and acceptance, and heightening insecurity.[29]

> The widespread access to the Internet and increased use of social media and other outlets can help to spread positive messages and awareness of MDMH but can also exacerbate the spread of MDMH, which can make it harder to fact-check. This rapid spread of information may lead to an 'infodemic', implying that there is "too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments", causing confusion and risk-taking behaviours, as well as mistrust in authorities and undermining of public responses.

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29   For example, ICRC. (2021). Harmful Information. op. cit.

Possible actors in information environments in UN Peacekeeping settings

Table 1 represents different actors that may be linked to MDMH, including by using or instrumentalising information with the intent to harm, by being its target, by contributing to its dissemination without intent to harm, or by being caught up in the dynamic through playing multiple roles, consciously or unconsciously.

Table 1: Mapping types of actors linked to MDMH

Type of actor	Characteristics	Tools of use/modus operandi	Intent	Impacts
State actors, political actors, politicians, and political parties	Public figures depending on public opinions May use MDMH or be targeted by it MDMH used against the opponent	Social media platforms and online tools Traditional media Word-of-mouth Outsourcing communications activities to private companies[30] Restricting access to information	Pursuit of political, military, and ideological objectives Influencing views, attitudes and behaviours of adversaries, population, and public opinion[31] Challenged by international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) discourses	Targeted, prosecuted and silenced journalists, political opponents, whistle-blowers and human rights defenders[32] Limitations on UN PKO activities
Non-state (armed) actors, armed groups, extremist or terrorist groups	Participate in conflict and control or administer territory Have public information approaches to support ideology	Social media platforms and online tools Traditional media Word-of-mouth	Ideological objectives Radicalise and recruit members Undermine social cohesion Incite violence Undermine the work of aid organisations	Implication on security situation Trigger response by state forces Rise in human rights concerns[33]

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30 Goldstein, J.A., and Grossman, S. (2021). How disinformation evolved in 2020. TechStream, 4 January. https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/how-disinformation-evolved-in-2020

31 Khan, I. (2021). A/HRC/47/25: Disinformation and the right to freedom of opinion and expression. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3925306?ln=en&v=pdf; Khan, I. (2022). A/77/288: Disinformation and freedom of opinion. op. cit.

32 UNSG. (2022). Countering disinformation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Resolution A/77/287.

33 Khan, I. (2021). A/HRC/47/25: Disinformation and the right to freedom of opinion. op. cit.; ICRC. (2021). Harmful Information. op. cit.

Type of actor	Characteristics	Tools of use/modus operandi	Intent	Impacts
Private companies and contractors	"Disinformation for hire" in a growing global industry supporting the spread of information Can coordinate and collaborate with official state entities[34],[35]	Interfere in elections worldwide Hack, sabotage and spread disinformation on social media Use of AI Army of fake profiles: "blogger machine"[36] Manipulate public opinion Disrupt or sabotage campaigns Instrumentalise data from social media profiles Systematically place disinformation in respected news outlets[37] Psychological warfare[38]	Provide services for clients or sponsors who have much to gain	Destabilising the public Instrumentalising existing frustrations Contributing to fuel violence Satisfied clients or sponsors by delivering services Instrumentalising and manipulating the existing online information environment and blurring the accountability Abusing trust relations Impacting and sabotaging elections and public opinion
Population groups and communities	Youth groups Women groups Cultural groups Minority groups Religious leaders LGBTQI+ Civil society groups Can contribute to MDMH and/or be targeted by it	Democratisation of who can participate in public discourse[39] Increased use of social media, messaging applications, facilitating the dissemination of disinformation becoming misinformation	N/A	Confirmation bias[40] Influence effect[41] Survival depends on access to correct, verifiable information[42] Disproportionate burden of the impact of MDMH on women, children and LGBTIQ+ persons[43]
Individual political influencers, including regional influencers	Online influencers who are sometimes called "videomen". Some are locally based, and others are based in the diaspora	Social media	Often join certain "information campaigns" at any given time without a particular/apparent affiliation to a specific organisation	The reach and speech of these influencers can reach across countries, including in francophone Africa Individually and collectively these actors have more impact on online public discourse than many media platforms

34   *The Guardian.* (2023). Dark arts of politics: how 'Team Jorge' and Cambridge Analytica meddled in Nigerian election. 16 February. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/16/team-jorge-and-cambridge-analytica-meddled-in-nigeria-election-emails-reveal

35   The Guardian. (2023). Revealed: the hacking and disinformation team meddling in elections. 15 February. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/15/revealed-disinformation-team-jorge-claim-meddling-elections-tal-hanan

36   Ibid.

37   *The Guardian.* (2018). Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach. 17 March. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election

38   Ibid.

39   Fondation Hirondelle. (2020). Informing in the Era of Social Media. *Mediat*ion, 4, January.

40   Ibid.

41   Trithart, A. (2022). Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations. op. cit.

42   Khan, I. (2022). A/77/288: Disinformation and freedom of opinion. op. cit.

43   Ibid.

Type of actor	Characteristics	Tools of use/modus operandi	Intent	Impacts
UN PKOs	Foreign civilian and uniformed components in the host country to support the government to have peace and stability in their country Can contribute to MDMH and/or be targeted by them	Social media platforms and online tools Traditional media Word-of-mouth	N/A	Population questioning the legitimacy of the PKO causing reputational damage, erosion of trust and acceptance, and heightening of insecurity[44] Hinders the execution of activities and implementation of mandates Use of violence against peacekeepers and their supporting infrastructure Challenge to communicate proactively on the complex structure, functioning, and political links of the UN system in general, and Peacekeeping in particular
Humanitarian actors and human rights defenders	Can contribute to MDMH and/or be targeted by them	Social media platforms and online tools Traditional media Word-of-mouth	..	Disinformation can have severe consequences for the people the organisation seeks to help and its own ability to carry out its operations False and manipulated information can increase the risk faced by both (population and humanitarians)[45] Disinformation campaigns spread unfounded accusations against aid organisations[46]
Information companies, media, and journalists	Media companies and journalists aiming to disseminate true and verified information They can be threatened by mis- and disinformation as well as actively contributing to disinformation campaigns	Social media platforms and online tools Traditional media Word-of-mouth	National journalists living on commission have constrained freedom in delivering critical articles	Receiving violent threats to constrain them to report in certain ways Targeted murders in reprisal for reporting[47]

44   For example, ICRC. (2021). Harmful Information. op. cit.

45   ICRC. (2023). Burkina Faso: International media investigation reveals impact of disinformation on humanitarian work. 17 February. https://www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-burkina-faso-impact-disinformation-on-humanitarian-work

46   Khan, I. (2022). A/77/288: Disinformation and freedom of opinion. op. cit..

47   Committee to Protect Journalists. (2023). Deadly year for journalists as killings rose sharply in 2022. 24 January. https://cpj.org/reports/2023/01/deadly-year-for-journalists-as-killings-rose-sharply-in-2022

Type of actor	Characteristics	Tools of use/modus operandi	Intent	Impacts
Technology and social media companies	Need Internet connection for people to consult and contribute to the online platforms Platforms for sharing correct information, misinformation, and disinformation Changing the information structure Limited responsibility and response from tech companies to regulate the digital space[48],[49]	Algorithms Internet Social media platforms and online tools Traditional media	…	Clouding accountability[50] Democratisation of who can participate in public discourse[51] Facilitating the establishment of "false or misleading accounts"[52] Considerable impact on the scale and speed at which such information reaches multiple target audiences online[53] Difficult to identify fact from fiction[54]

As this overview demonstrates, the possible intentions of different actors, their vulnerability, and political or public position can contribute to a dynamic that facilitates the spread of MDMH. These factors can inadvertently render targeted audiences contributors and, in some cases, collaborators of MDMH within the information environment, impacting conflict and conflict-affected settings, overall stability, and the legitimacy of UN PKOs. Additionally, it illustrates how actions can unintentionally fuel and validate malicious intent and make it very difficult to identify who should be held accountable when the lines become significantly blurred. MDMH thus becomes further embedded in a cycle of conflict and society. Hence, the lines between perpetrators producing and creating MDMH with intention, contributors unintentionally disseminating MDMH, and victims targeted by MDMH are unclear, which creates an unhealthy dynamic dragging actors into it unknowingly. The same issues can interfere in election contexts where UN PKOs are deployed. Actors producing MDMH can use existing oppositions to fuel divides in the population to impact electoral results and potentially contribute to violent actions. While using MDMH to influence settings such as elections or the presence of UN PKOs is nothing new, the use of new technologies renders it faster and more threatening, especially when MDMH producers do not fear or intend to ignite violent escalations. For example, the quotes

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48   See, for example, the case of Myanmar: Warofka, A. (2018). An Independent Assessment of the Human Rights Impact of Facebook in Myanmar. 5 November. https://about.fb.com/news/2018/11/myanmar-hria; Wong Sak Hoi, G. (2022). How to counter lies and propaganda in war zones. Swiss Info, 18 March. https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/how-to-counter-lies-and-propaganda-in-war-zones/47436492

49   Concerns have been raised about X (previously Twitter), which failed to fight hate speech. According to an independent expert appointed by the Human Rights Council, there a has been a "sharp increase in the use of the racist 'N' word on Twitter" following its acquisition by Elon Musk. Volker Türk, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, has written an "open letter to Twitter CEO Elon Musk, emphasizing that free speech did not mean 'a free pass to spread harmful disinformation that results in real world harm'". See UN News. (2023). Urgent need for more accountability from social media giants to curb hate speech: UN experts. 6 January. https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/01/1132232

50   Fondation Hirondelle. (2020). Informing in the Era of Social Media. op cit..
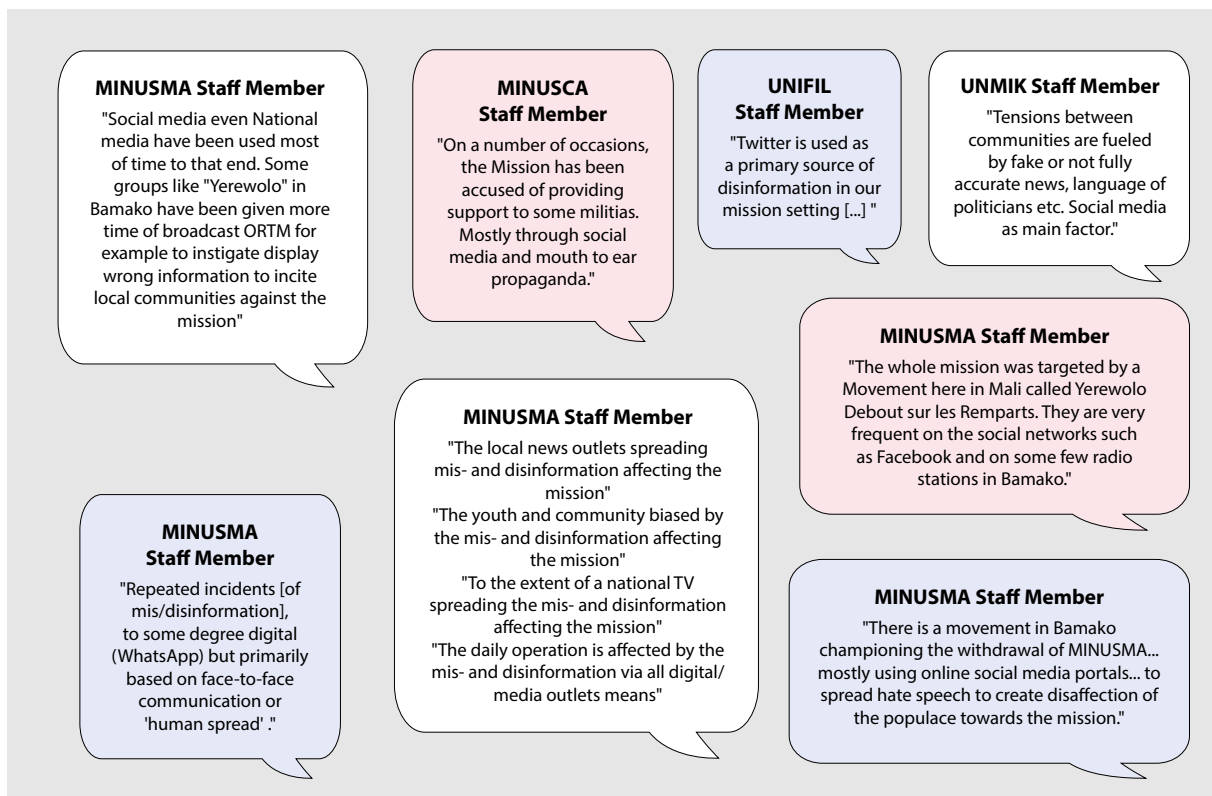
51   Ibid.

52   Ibid.

53   ICRC. (2021). Harmful Information. op. cit.

54   Wong Sak Hoi, G. (2022). How to counter lies and propaganda in war zones. op. cit.

in Figure 5 in speech balloons were captured by a UN DPO perception survey on MDMH and illustrate how MDMH spreads through a variety of communication channels.

> Hence, the lines between perpetrators producing and creating MDMH with intention, contributors unintentionally disseminating MDMH, and victims targeted by MDMH are unclear, which creates an unhealthy dynamic dragging actors into it unknowingly.

Figure 5: Mis- and disinformation survey responses for UN PKO personnel, June 2023

MINUSMA Staff Member
"Social media even National media have been used most of time to that end. Some groups like "Yerewolo" in Bamako have been given more time of broadcast ORTM for example to instigate display wrong information to incite local communities against the mission"

MINUSCA Staff Member
"On a number of occasions, the Mission has been accused of providing support to some militias. Mostly through social media and mouth to ear propaganda."

UNIFIL Staff Member
"Twitter is used as a primary source of disinformation in our mission setting [...] "

UNMIK Staff Member
"Tensions between communities are fueled by fake or not fully accurate news, language of politicians etc. Social media as main factor."

MINUSMA Staff Member
"The whole mission was targeted by a Movement here in Mali called Yerewolo Debout sur les Remparts. They are very frequent on the social networks such as Facebook and on some few radio stations in Bamako."

MINUSMA Staff Member
"The local news outlets spreading mis- and disinformation affecting the mission"
"The youth and community biased by the mis- and disinformation affecting the mission"
"To the extent of a national TV spreading the mis- and disinformation affecting the mission"
"The daily operation is affected by the mis- and disinformation via all digital/ media outlets means"

MINUSMA Staff Member
"Repeated incidents [of mis/disinformation], to some degree digital (WhatsApp) but primarily based on face-to-face communication or 'human spread' ."

MINUSMA Staff Member
"There is a movement in Bamako championing the withdrawal of MINUSMA... mostly using online social media portals... to spread hate speech to create disaffection of the populace towards the mission."

The complexity of this situation has contributed to challenges in developing system-wide UN guidance on how MDMH should be mitigated and addressed, as well as how roles and responsibilities can be divided, including in UN PKO environments. To capture the developments so far, the next subsection of the report briefly examines UN policies, guidance, handbooks, and reports that have been developed at the strategic level to address MDMH that impacts conflict dynamics and violence against civilians and UN PKOs.

5. UN Global Initiatives: Policies, Guidance and Handbooks

While we observe that there have been recent efforts undertaken across different parts of the UN to address MDMH from various angles, efforts can be traced back to 1993, when the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression (UNSR-FOE) was established with the aim of protecting rights holders against States' attempts to infringe on their freedoms. The Human Rights Council decided to extend the mandate for another three years in March 2008 (Resolution 7/36).[55] The mandate was renewed for an additional three years again in March 2011 (Resolution 16/4),[56] March 2014 (Resolution 25/2),[57] March 2017 (Resolution 34/18),[58] March 2020 (Resolution 43/4),[59] and March 2023 (Resolution 52/9).[60] The Human Rights Council created the mandate of the UNSR-FOE to protect and promote freedom of opinion and expression, offline and online, in the framework of international human rights law and standards. The mandate covers threats to and violations of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including against journalists or other professionals in the information environment. The role of the UNSR-FOE is to make recommendations to promote and protect the right to freedom of opinion and expression in all its manifestations and to provide technical assistance or advisory services to the OHCHR. According to their mandate, the Special Rapporteur examines illegal types of expression, including hate speech, to protect and promote the right to freedom of opinion and expression and combat intolerance, discrimination and incitement to hatred.

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55   UN HRC. (2008). Resolution A/HRC/RES/7/36.
     http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_7_36.pdf

56   UN HRC. (2011). Resolution A/HRC/RES/16/4. https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/16/4

57   UN HRC. (2014). Resolution A/HRC/RES/25/2. https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/25/2

58   UN HRC. (2017). Resolution A/HRC/RES/34/18. https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/34/18

59   UN HRC. (2020). Resolution A/HRC/RES/43/4. https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/43/4

60   UN HRC. (2023). Resolution A/HRC/RES/52/9. https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/52/9

Supplementing the above effort, a decision was made in 2004 to establish the Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG). The OSAPG works under the auspices of the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect.[61] The core of the OSAPG mandate focuses on work against hate speech and the prevention of incitement to violence, particularly actions that could lead to atrocity crimes.[62] Given the particular influence that religious leaders have on the dissemination, prevention and countering of hate speech and incitement to violence, the OSAPG engages leaders to promote their role in prevention efforts.

> In addition to these two appointments, an interagency working group led by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was established to coordinate initiatives undertaken by UN entities to tackle MDMH. While this is a good practice for avoiding a siloed approach to a transversal issue, the challenge remains to have a shared understanding and approach to address MDMH.

In addition to these two appointments, an interagency working group led by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was established to coordinate initiatives undertaken by UN entities to tackle MDMH.[63] While this is a good practice for avoiding a siloed approach to a transversal issue, the challenge remains to have a shared understanding and approach to address MDMH. For instance, the different types of MDMH are addressed differently, depending on the thematic association and whether the approaches and skill sets are necessarily linked to each other. Hate speech, for instance, has its own strategies and action plans, while other typologies, such as misinformation or disinformation, are yet to be commonly agreed upon and included in concrete actions to be taken. Table 2 summarises policy and guidance developed by various UN entities, exploring the content and thematic association covered and whether they are implemented by UN PKOs.

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61   UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. (n.d.). Mandate. https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/office-mandate.shtml

62   The mandate of the Office's work is based on: (i) Article III of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/our-work/Doc.9_Convention%20 on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf), which lists "direct and public incitement to commit genocide" as a "punishable act"; and (ii) Paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome document (https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/487/60/pdf/N0548760. pdf?OpenElement), adopted by the General Assembly in Resolution 60/1, in which Member States commit to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, and agreed that this responsibility "entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement."

63   Consultations at UNHQ, 27-30 March 2023.

Table 2: Overview of UN initiatives

Year	Initiative	UN entity	Content	Thematic association	Implemented by UN PKOs[64]
2012	Rabat Plan of Action	OHCHR	Prohibition of national, racial or religious hatred Apply IHRL to hate speech Respect for freedom of expression Six-part threshold test Hatred ban to be transposed through language	Addressing hatred and respecting freedom of expression	YES. OHCHR monitors hate speech through the threshold test. In UN PKOs, the Human Rights Division monitors and should collaborate with the Protection of Civilians (PoC) Unit on addressing it.
2017	Beirut Declaration	OHCHR	Responsibility of religious leaders in countering incitement to hatred Defending and protecting against discrimination and violence 18 commitments on "Faith for Rights"	Addressing hatred and respecting freedom of expression	N/A
2017	Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence	OSAPG	Prevent and counter incitement to violence Enhance capacity, dialogue, and collaboration, including with the media Contribute to building peaceful, just and inclusive societies Fez Declaration and Fez Plan of Action	Addressing hatred and respecting freedom of expression	N/A
2018	Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training	UNESCO	Recognising the pervasive and rapid spread of mis- and disinformation through social networks and social messaging Training model for journalists to face the problem of disinformation Offering definitions used by many UN entities, including the DPO, despite the persistent lack of an official commonly agreed-upon understanding	Journalism	N/A

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64   By the four UN PKOs covered in this report: MINUSMA, UNMISS, MINUSCA, and MONUSCO.

Year	Initiative	UN entity	Content	Thematic association	Implemented by UN PKOs[64]
2019	UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech	UNSG	Addressing hate speech as distinct from limiting or prohibiting the freedom of speech Protecting democratic values and social stability; preventing armed conflict, atrocity crimes and terrorism; and ending violence against women and serious human rights violations Acknowledgement that the lack of a legal framework at the international level 13 key commitments that should be undertaken by UN entities Need to address hate speech in all its manifestations (word-to-mouth, traditional media, online websites, social media) Referring to the use of technology and the digital age	Addressing hatred and respecting freedom of expression	N/A
2020	UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech; Detailed Guidance on Implementation for UN Field Presence	UNSG	Guidance for UN entities in the field Primary duty bearers are State actors, while underlining the "importance of a clear, common and concrete approach to address and counter hate speech, one that is coherent, comprehensive and coordinated system-wide, and one that protects and promotes human rights in accordance with international law."	Addressing hatred and respecting freedom of expression	N/A
2020	Countering Online Misinformation Resource Pack	UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)	Misinformation and disinformation are spreading fast in times of a pandemic Impact on health responses Introducing the concept of infodemic, namely "false claims circulate more easily, hampering public health responses, creating confusion, distrust and causing harm to people" Offering available resources to tackle misinformation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccinations	Health	N/A

Year	Initiative	UN entity	Content	Thematic association	Implemented by UN PKOs[64]
2021	Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping	UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO), Department of Operational Support (DOS) and Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC)	Supporting UN Field Missions in their mandate implementation by "harnessing the potential of digital technologies as well as mitigating their risks".[65] Drive innovation Maximising the potential of current and new technology Understanding threats to the safety and security of peacekeepers and to the mandate implementation, including an integrated approach to misinformation, disinformation and hate speech[66] Ensuring responsible use Currently customised measures taken by Missions, depending on the needs Need for an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach that would help to better equip and prepare missions to address these information threats[67]	Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	YES, through a mission-based focal point network
2021	UN Common Agenda	UNSG	12 commitments from the declaration on the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the UN Including digital inclusivity, improving digital cooperation and global digital compact, and upgrading the UN (including digitally)	Actions for multilateral agreements	N/A
2022	Disinformation and freedom of opinion and expression during armed conflicts	UN SR-FOE	Parties to the conflict and other actors manipulate and restrict information for political, military and strategic objectives Capacity to do this is amplified by digital technology Right to information is a "survival right" on which people's lives, health and safety depend, and it needs to be protected	Addressing hatred and respecting freedom of expression	N/A

65   UN Peacekeeping. (2021). Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping (one-pager). https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/strategy-digital-transformation-of-un-peacekeeping

66   Ibid.

67   Ibid.

Year	Initiative	UN entity	Content	Thematic association	Implemented by UN PKOs[64]
2022	Countering disinformation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms	UNSG	Report on information and best practices shared by States, UN entities and relevant stakeholders on countering disinformation Describing challenges posed by disinformation and possible responses to it Setting out a relevant international legal framework and discussing measures that States and technology enterprises are reported to have taken "Countering the different manifestations of disinformation requires addressing underlying societal tensions, fostering respect for human rights, online and offline, and supporting a plural civic space and media landscape"[68]	Addressing hatred and respecting freedom of expression	N/A
2023	Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 8: Information Integrity on Digital Platforms	UNSG	Based on the Common Agenda, the UNSG gives a policy brief on information integrity on digital platforms (in June 2023)[69] "Outlines potential principles for a code of conduct that will help to guide Member States, the digital platforms and other stakeholders in their efforts to make the digital space more inclusive and safe, while vigorously defending the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to access information"[70]	Actions for multilateral agreements	N/A

Table 2 provides an overview of some MDMH policy and guidance work undertaken across the UN system. In the early days of this work, hate speech was mainly understood as a threat to the civilian population, while mis- and disinformation were understood as threats to the UN itself. According to UN officials that the research team engaged with, the UNSC, to a degree, used this approach in reaction to developments in the CAR and DRC when mis- and disinformation incidents targeted UN peacekeepers, leading to fatalities. While we note that there has been an awareness largely due to the spread of hate speech in Rwanda and Yugoslavia, which it could be argued supported the establishment of peacekeeping radio stations by missions and deployment of public information components, the spread of mis- and disinformation has come into focus during recent years due to a number of developments.[71] As is often the case with

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68   UNSG. (2022). Countering disinformation. Resolution A/77/287. op. cit.

69   UNSG. (2023). Secretary-General's opening remarks at press briefing on Policy Brief on Information Integrity on Digital Platforms. 12 June. https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2023-06-12/secretary-generals-opening-remarks-press-briefing-policy-brief-information-integrity-digital-platforms

70   UN. (2023). Our Common Agenda. op. cit.

71   Interview with UN official, March 2024.

novel developments, this reflected the UNSC's understanding of the nature of the threat and who it was directed at. This insight provides an understanding of how MDMH threats may be identified, monitored, analysed, and responded to by the UN and how its approach will likely continue to develop over time. Given that UN initiatives to address MDMH are evolving, it is likely that areas for improvement will be identified on an ongoing basis. However, this approach comes with the potential of introducing bias in the UN's approach and risks introducing limitations. Consequently, focusing on institutional policy only and not on innovation that utilises policy also places the UN and its PKOs in a "negative spectral time-lapse". In other cases, some UN PKOs may simply choose not to react or further entrench themselves internally, which also plays into the hands of those using MDMH[72] and setting the UN PKO into this approach.

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72   Tchie, A, E. (Forthcoming, 2024). The negative spectral timelapse effective. op. cit.

6. UN Peacekeeping Mandates and Secretary-General Reports

UN PKOs are often challenged by a variety of actors using MDMH in mission areas, which can intervene in the mission's ability to respond to insecurity effectively, protect civilians as well as its own personnel and assets, and create a safe and secure environment. This can impact the effectiveness and the extent to which UN PKOs are able to implement their mandate. To address these issues, mission leadership, civilian, and uniformed staff of UN PKOs must be capable of progressing their respective agendas and facing down counter-dynamics in the information environment. Acknowledging the urgency of these challenges, reference to MDMH has increasingly been made by the UNSG and UNSC by including language on MDMH in the mandates of MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO and UNMISS. According to some respondents that the research team spoke with, the UN DPO Information Integrity Unit has advised a consistent approach across formal, written, and other exchanges, such as in training and discussions with mission leadership teams. Respondents noted that "this approach had been adopted by four missions at the time of publication of this report".[73] The forthcoming UN DPO Policy on Information Integrity in Peacekeeping Contexts is an important publication, clarifying how to strengthen the MDMH work in conjunction with mandate implementation processes.

This section provides an analysis of UN PKO mandates and UNSG reports on MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO and UNMISS. It analyses and links language used by the UNSC, UNSG and the UNSR-FOE to provide a more holistic understanding and bring the analysis a step closer to answering the questions set out in the introduction. The section also attempts to highlight how language on MDMH has increasingly appeared in the mandates of MINUSCA,

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73   Interview with UN official, March 2024.

MINUSMA, MONUSCO and UNMISS. It then captures how the UNSG quarterly reports include language on MDMH and analyses the development of the language used.

> Acknowledging the urgency of these challenges, reference to MDMH has increasingly been made by the UNSG and UNSC by including language on MDMH in the mandates of MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO and UNMISS. According to some respondents that the research team spoke with, the UN DPO Information Integrity Unit has advised a consistent approach across formal, written, and other exchanges, such as in training and discussions with mission leadership teams.

UN PKO-mandated language

When analysing the mandates of MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO and UNMISS, the concepts mis- and disinformation are generally mentioned together, while on occasion, they are mentioned alongside hate speech or incitement to hatred and violence.[74] There is no systematic or consistent use of the language across UNSC mandates. However, ongoing efforts focus on mis- and disinformation, without clarifying possible interconnections with hate speech and other information typologies. The report focuses on this in section three, four and five. While the concept of hate speech is not systematically mentioned in connection with mis- and disinformation, the latter is often mentioned in connection with provocations and incitements to hatred or violence, disinformation campaigns, or strategic communication.[75] For example, in 2019, MONUSCO became the first UN PKO to be mandated with language on mis- and disinformation, as part of its mandated activities to protect civilians. Three years later, in the mandate renewal of 2022,[76] it was requested that the UNSG quarterly reports on MONUSCO cover issues related to strategic communication to inform the UNSC.

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74 For instance, in MONUSCO S/RES/2666 (2022) under mandated activities, in MINUSCA S/RES/2659 (2022) and MINUSMA S/RES/2640 (2022) under mandated reporting obligations.

75 Therefore, this also raises the question as to whether *hate speech* and *incitement to hatred and violence* are used in a synonymous manner by the UNSC.

76 S/RES/2659 (2022).

> In 2019, MONUSCO became the first UN PKO to be
> mandated with language on mis- and disinformation, as part of
> its mandated activities to protect civilians. Three years later, in
> the mandate renewal of 2022, it was requested that the UNSG
> quarterly reports on MONUSCO cover issues related to
> strategic communication to inform the UNSC.

MINUSCA, the UN PKO in CAR, has no specific mandated activities to address mis- and disinformation outside of reporting on it, which was introduced in its mandate in 2021. While the MINUSCA mandate in UNSCR 2605 (2021) required the UNSG to report to the UNSC on "incitement to hatred and violence"[77] as well as "disinformation campaigns",[78] UNSCR 2659 (2022) requested the UNSG to report on "provocations and incitement to hatred and violence and disinformation campaigns against MINUSCA"[79] as well as on measures to "counter disinformation and misinformation directed against MINUSCA."[80]

> While the MINUSCA mandate in UNSCR 2605 (2021)
> required the UNSG to report to the UNSC on "incitement
> to hatred and violence" as well as "disinformation campaigns",
> UNSCR 2659 (2022) requested the UNSG to report on
> "provocations and incitement to hatred and violence and
> disinformation campaigns against MINUSCA" as well as
> on measures to "counter disinformation and misinformation
> directed against MINUSCA."

Up until its recent closure in December 2023, MINUSMA, the UN PKO in Mali, had mandated activities that (as of 2022) extended to strengthening "its capacities to monitor and to counter disinformation and misinformation that might hinder the mission's ability to implement its mandate".[81] The UNSG was requested to report to the UNSC on "provocations and incitement to hatred and violence and disinformation and misinformation campaigns against

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77   S/RES/2605 (2021).
78   S/RES/2605 (2021).
79   S/RES/2659 (2022).
80   S/RES/2659 (2022).
81   S/RES/2640 (2022).

MINUSMA"[82] and "measures to improve external communication of the mission and to counter disinformation and misinformation".[83]

> Up until its recent closure in December 2023, MINUSMA, the UN PKO in Mali, had mandated activities that (as of 2022) extended to strengthening "its capacities to monitor and to counter disinformation and misinformation that might hinder the mission's ability to implement its mandate".

Finally, in its 2022 mandate, UNMISS, the UN PKO in South Sudan, was requested to use:

> strategic communications to support implementation of the mission's mandate and the mission's protection, information gathering, and situation awareness activities, and to counter disinformation and misinformation that might hinder the mission's ability to implement its mandate.[84]

It did not, however, include any reporting requirements. Interestingly, the 2023 UNMISS mandate resolution excluded any references to mis- and disinformation or hate speech.

The UNSCRs mandating the UN PKOs highlighted above demonstrate the differences in language used and point to a need for more consistency in the application of the language by the UNSC. It also illustrates that mis- and disinformation are primarily mentioned in protecting a mission's mandate implementation capacity and the safety and security of its civilian, police and military peacekeepers. The UNSC language is not consistently applied, which could allow UN field offices (FOs) to learn from each other or understand and share knowledge on existing UN policies (as will be discussed in the next section). Finally, while these mandates try to be context-specific, it is also clear that their broader focus means that UN PKOs are placed in a never-ending race to fulfil a mandate without any new or additional technical support or resources. This could impact the various missions' ability to adapt to the context in which they operate and, more broadly, its ability to provide context-specific solutions, resulting in the mission pushing forward on a pathway that produces negative results but with the mission being insistent on moving in the same direction.

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82   Ibid.
83   Ibid.
84   S/RES/2625 (2022).

6.1. UN Secretary-General reports

MONUSCO

Out of the 21 UNSG reports analysed for MONUSCO in the period 2019-2023, MDMH-related concepts appeared in 15 reports. "Confidence-building" is the first concept appearing in the report of March 2018,[85] in the context of the presidential elections. During the period leading up to the presidential elections in DRC (postponed to January 2019), each UNSG report[86] referred to "confidence-building" in relation to the political situation, political agreements and elections. The reports of the UNSG published after the elections made no reference to any of the respective concepts. The report of the UNSG of March 2019[87] mentions "hate speech" against an ethnic group and the incitement to violence that increased in Tshikapa city (Kasai province), followed by three quarterly reports covering the other periods of 2019, which made no reference to any of the respective concepts.

> While mis- and disinformation were first included in MONUSCO's 2019 mandate, the concept of "misinformation" appears for the first time in the first quarter UNSG report of 2020. The report only refers to misinformation, not disinformation, by mentioning the need to "address malicious misinformation about peacekeepers" and "harmful misinformation".

While mis- and disinformation were first included in MONUSCO's 2019 mandate, the concept of "misinformation" appears for the first time in the first quarter UNSG report of 2020. The report only refers to misinformation, not disinformation, by mentioning the need to "address malicious misinformation about peacekeepers" and "harmful misinformation".[88] The report introduces the safety and security impact related to misinformation used against peacekeepers. After these first references to misinformation in quarter one, the second quarterly report of 2020 does not mention "misinformation", "disinformation", "malinformation", "hate speech", "strategic communication", or "confidence-building". The following UNSG report only refers to "confidence-building activities" that had to be suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic.[89]

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85   S/2018/174.
86   S/2018/174, S/2018/655, S/2018/882.
87   S/2019/218.
88   S/2020/214, p. 15.
89   S/2020/919.

However, in the last UNSG report published in 2020, a reference is made to "disinformation" for the first time in the context of anti-MONUSCO sentiments, linking it to safety and security aspects and demonstrations led by groups including CSOs. MONUSCO would later respond by increasing "its engagement with and outreach to the local community in an effort to counter disinformation and reduce anti-MONUSCO sentiment".[90] The first report of 2021 has no references to MDMH or any other related concepts. The second report of 2021 refers to "misinformation" and "hate speech" without mentioning "disinformation". It stated that "in addition, MONUSCO and humanitarian actors intensified communications activities to counter misinformation, hate speech and incitement to violence".[91] This report mentions misinformation, hate speech and incitement to violence. It could have been considered more appropriate to use the concept of disinformation instead, as its definition includes the intent to cause harm, unlike the definition of misinformation.

The following two quarterly UNSG reports covering 2021 continue to refer to "hate speech" and incitement to violence "that would contribute to social or political division".[92] They include a "disinformation" reference, stating that the mission has concerns "over hate speech, disinformation campaigns and related tensions".[93] Additionally, the report mentions that "MONUSCO documented 29 instances of alleged hate speech in the country, which were often enabled by disinformation and took place in the context of armed conflicts and land disputes and targeting groups mainly on the basis of their ethnicity".[94] This example indicates that hate speech can be "enabled" by disinformation and hence directly associates the two concepts for the first time that goes further than simply mentioning the two concepts in the exact phrase. By linking disinformation to hate speech, it seems to recognise the potential impact on the population and, hence, not only focuses on the safety and security of peacekeepers.

The first quarterly UNSG report of 2022 refers only to "strategic communication" in the context of the mission's withdrawal from Tanganyika,[95] while the second report of 2022 refers to "disinformation" and "hate speech" by mentioning that:

> the Mission liaised with provincial authorities to address threats to civilians posed by clashes between The March 23 Movement (M23) and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and facilitated a three-day workshop for media professionals on disinformation and hate speech to forestall and mitigate potential hate speech targeted at communities perceived as being aligned with M23.[96]

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90   S/2020/1150, p. 17.

91   S/2021/587, p. 4.

92   S/2021/807, p. 15.

93   S/2021/987, p. 2.

94   Ibid.

95   S/2022/252, p. 12.

96   S/2022/503, p. 9.

Several references to "hate speech" are made in the context of the M23 presence, the tensions between Rwanda and the DRC, which connects with tensions between people who identify as Congolese and people identify as Kinyarwanda-speaking. While it is clearly stated in the report that hate speech is occurring, the UNSG report mentions that in this context, "disinformation" can be instrumentalised to spread hate speech and target the population, and training media professionals can mitigate its impact. The switch in the use of misinformation to disinformation is also notable. The subsequent report refers again to "misinformation" without mentioning "disinformation", stating that the mission continues its engagement with civil society, aiming to improve mutual understanding "including through efforts to counter misinformation and negative perceptions of the Mission".[97] This same report continues to refer to "hate speech", a reference that appears in the following report, illustrating the ongoing threats facing the populations of Eastern DRC, including Kinyarwanda-speaking people.[98]

The first quarterly UNSG report published in March 2023[99] introduces a new sub-section on "Strategic communication" under the heading "Mission effectiveness", where "misinformation" and "disinformation" are referred to in the context of hostile campaigns and violence against MONUSCO.[100] Furthermore, the concept of "hate speech" is mentioned four times without any connection to "misinformation" or "disinformation" as in previous UNSG reports. In addition to violence, "hate speech" is mentioned in association with social media networks, indirectly linking hate speech to misinformation or disinformation via social media networks and, by association, online information. Finally, the concept "confidence-building" is referred to under the chapter "Protection of civilians", stating that the mission is conducting confidence-building measures with relevant actors "to address continued anti-MONUSCO sentiments."[101]

> In the case of MONUSCO, the concepts of "misinformation" and "disinformation" are not used together or necessarily linked in the same sentences, paragraphs or reports. Each of these concepts is often linked to "hate speech", rendering the clear distinction between misinformation and disinformation challenging to grasp as they are used interchangeably.

In the case of MONUSCO, the concepts of "misinformation" and "disinformation" are not used together or necessarily linked in the same sentences, paragraphs or reports. Each of these concepts is often linked to "hate speech", rendering the clear distinction between misinformation

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97   S/2022/709, p. 8.
98   S/2022/892, p. 2.
99   S/2023/208.
100 Ibid, pp. 14-15.
101 Ibid, p. 6.

and disinformation challenging to grasp as they are used interchangeably. The first use of "mis-information" is linked to the words "malicious" and "harmful". This confuses the use of terminol-ogy, as the definition of misinformation suggests a link to the spread of incorrect information but not with the intent to harm or malicious intent. The use of "malicious misinformation" is further mentioned concerning anti-peacekeepers. This is linked to identity factors, which could be associated with the use of hate speech, namely to the link between mis- and disinformation and hate speech. Further to this, disinformation can enable hate speech and hence exacerbate threats to the civilian population as well as undermine the safety and security of peacekeepers by targeting them individually or as groups.

MINUSMA

In the case of MINUSMA in Mali, eight out of nine reports examined within the period of observation referred to MDMH. Mis- and disinformation were first included in the mission's mandate in 2022. The first references to MDMH were made in the first two UNSG reports in 2021, mentioning "confidence-building" in the context of the peace process.[102] However, the third UNSG report of 2021 has no reference to the respective concepts. The report covering the last quarter of 2021 refers for the first time to "misinformation" by acknowledging the mission's achievements "highlighting tangible impacts of its [the mission's] presence in the country and countering misinformation".[103] The UNSG second quarter for 2022 introduces "disinforma-tion" without referring to any other concept by acknowledging again some activities imple-mented by the mission that "helped to tackle disinformation and improve the understanding of the Mission's mandate".[104] While this report introduces the use of disinformation and its potential impact on the implementation of the mission's mandate, the third quarter report for 2022 mentions the concepts "misinformation" and "disinformation" together for the first time. It raises concern about an observed "significant increase in disinformation activity over the past few months. These disinformation campaigns are increasingly systematic and orchestrated, and synchronized on an industrial scale to utilize local and pan-African networks as well as social media".[105] The report adds that "the mission continues to explore new ways to counter increasing misinformation and disinformation in Mali, including through outreach radio and social media, as well as direct engagement with civil society, cultural actors and the Malian population at large".[106] The report mentions, in the context of disinformation, the discovery of a mass grave in the Timbuktu Region. Some actors accused the French military of responsibility for the killings, while others released drone footage accompanied by "concerns about a disinformation campaign

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102 S/2021/299 and S/2021/519
103 S/2021/1117, p. 13.
104 S/2022/278/Rev.1, p. 13.
105 S/2022/446, p. 13.
106 Ibid, p. 13.

to discredit the departing French forces".[107] The drone footage shows that other (non-Malian and non-French) military personnel were responsible for the incident.

The third quarter report for 2022 continues to refer to "disinformation", stating that "disinformation campaigns against MINUSMA persist across all types of media. They are often amplified through fake social media accounts".[108] To address this threat, MINUSMA:

> has increased the consistency of its use of communication tools which are designed to disseminate factual and tangible actions to protect civilians and to support communities. The image of and appreciation for the mission are dramatically different in regions where it is deployed and where its activities have a tangible and visible impact.[109]

The report associates the threat caused by disinformation campaigns with the protection of civilians (PoC) and communities as well as the mission and its mandate implementation. It endeavours to address the problem through a weekly radio programme called "Le vrai du faux", "in which disinformation trending on social media is deconstructed".[110] The report has many references to mis- and disinformation, and this is reinforced in the subsequent report, which covered the last quarter of 2022, stating that the mis- and disinformation campaigns impact the mission and that the mission has increased its collaboration with national media, journalists, bloggers and others to address mis- and disinformation campaigns.

The UNSG report on MINUSMA covering the first quarter of 2023,[111] in the section entitled "External communication", continues to refer to "misinformation" and "disinformation", presenting the activities that the mission implements in support of proactive communication. This includes collaboration with local media, bloggers, web activists, and the weekly radio programme "Le vrai du faux", which it claims "deconstructs disinformation on social media".[112] The concept of "hate speech" is mentioned and related to "worrying rhetoric on social media".[113] The report leaves open the possibility of linking hate speech to mis- and disinformation in the online information environment.

Nearly all UNSG reports on Mali for the period under observation refer to MDMH and have a specific sub-paragraph on "External communication",[114] where mis- and disinformation campaigns and dynamics are captured. This section was first introduced in September 2020. Initially, it included no links to MDMH; however, it did refer to the need to start targeted thematic press briefings covering the mission's role, information-sharing networks, and training for local

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107 Ibid, p. 9.
108 S/2022/731, p. 13.
109 Ibid, p. 13.
110 Ibid, p. 13.
111 S/2023/236.
112 Ibid, p. 12.
113 Ibid, p. 15.
114 The first time the sub-chapter with the title "External communication" was introduced in the UNSG reports was in S/2020/952 (29 September 2020), stating that the Mission has taken steps to enhance external communication "to increase awareness and understanding" of the mission's mandate.

media.[115] Furthermore, in contrast to reports covering MONUSCO, there was no association of mis- or disinformation with hate speech, but a clear use of mis- or disinformation *campaigns* that are "increasingly systematic and orchestrated, and synchronized on an industrial scale to utilize local and pan-African networks as well as social media".[116] This introduces the intent to cause harm linked to the respective campaigns. From March 2023 onwards, it seems that an indirect link is made between hate speech and mis- and disinformation, with the mention of hate speech linked to social media platforms and hence to the online information environment that is also a well-known context in which mis- and disinformation can flourish.

UNMISS

Only two out of eight UNSG reports covering UNMISS refer to elements of MDMH. Even though UNMISS had mis- and disinformation included in its mandate in 2022, none of the UNSG quarterly reports mention "misinformation" or "disinformation". The first quarter of the 2023 report does not refer to MDMH, but does refer to "confidence-building" in civil-military relations.[117] Only one report in 2021 referred to "confidence-building" in the context of the "implementation of the Revitalized Agreement and the peace process".[118] Nevertheless, previous references to mis- and disinformation in UNSG reports were excluded from changes made to the UNMISS mandate in 2023, but activities on hate speech were retained.

MINUSCA

All nine relevant reports covering MINUSCA refer to MDMH. While mis- and disinformation were introduced in MINUSCA's mandate in 2021, all the reports of the year before had already referred to these. The first report of 2021 refers to "misinformation" by stating that the mission "was faced with a misinformation campaign to incite violence against four international and local staff members, including through social and local media".[119] This case will be analysed further in section four of this report. The concepts "misinformation" and "hate speech" were used in the same report, but in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to refrain from misinformation or hate speech to allow COVID-19 responses.[120] The report refers to "disinformation" and how "rumours and disinformation relating to COVID-19 fuelled xenophobia".[121] While this report already refers to "misinformation", "disinformation", and "hate speech", it provides additional guidance on "confidence-building" in the implementation of an agreement. Furthermore, the report describes misinformation "campaigns" that were targeted at UN staff.

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115 S/2020/952, p. 13.

116 S/2022/446, p. 13.

117 S/2023/135, p. 8.

118 S/2021/566, p. 6.

119 S/2020/545, p. 13.

120 Ibid, p. 17.

121 Ibid, p. 5.

The pandemic offered additional opportunities to spread disinformation. The next 2020 report[122] mentions "disinformation", "hate speech", and "strategic communication" in the same paragraph by stating that:

> disinformation campaigns in the media targeted MINUSCA, including its leadership, in connection with its electoral assistance and good offices mandate. It then proceeded to mention that the mission strengthened its efforts to improve strategic communications and to prevent, monitor and respond to hate speech and incitement to violence as and when required.[123]

The first report of 2021 refers to "hate speech" and incitement of violence "including against MINUSCA and partners", "confidence-building" to support peace and stability in CAR, as well as to accountability "for perpetrators of violence, their supporters and enablers".[124]

The UNSG report subsequently refers to a disinformation campaign against MINUSCA and acknowledges that they can incite hatred and violence, "particularly on local and social media".[125] While recognising the misuse of social and local media to spread disinformation campaigns, the subsequent 2021 report adds that these campaigns on social media are against "the United Nations and MINUSCA, members of the international community and civil society and opposition" and spread "hate speech and incite violence, largely from platforms and individuals supportive of the ruling party".[126] The first 2022 report continues to refer to "disinformation" campaigns against the UN, international community, political opposition and civil society.[127] In mid-2022, the UNSG report mentions "misinformation", "disinformation", and "strategic communication" for the first time in the same sentence: "MINUSCA diversified its strategic communications to counter disinformation and misinformation, proactively explaining its mandated activities and rectifying false information, including by broadcasting MINUSCA programmes on national television".[128] The concept of "disinformation" is then used in isolation in the context of campaigns against the mission, while the concept of "hate speech" is referred to in the implementation of the national action plan to combat hate speech. The mission undertakes actions to inform the population and fight false information related to its mandate implementation. The next report clearly states that "disinformation" campaigns hinder mandate implementation and mentions the increased use of hate speech and incitement to violence.[129]

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122 S/2020/994.

123 Ibid, p. 3.

124 S/2021/146, p. 15.

125 S/2021/571, pp. 2, 16.

126 S/2021/867, p. 13.

127 S/2022/119, pp. 12, 17.

128 S/2022/491, p. 15.

129 S/2022/762, pp. 8, 14, 16.

Finally, the last UNSG report on CAR included in the present analysis was published in February 2023 and refers to "misinformation", "disinformation", "strategic communication", and "hate speech" in the same report. The mission:

> sought to improve its strategic communication as an enabler to facilitate mandate implementation and to enhance understanding of its role and mandate by the host government and local population across the country. To proactively address misinformation and disinformation targeted at MINUSCA, the mission sponsored a training session on the peace process and fight against misinformation and disinformation... whilst regularly organising joint press conferences.

"Hate speech" is referred to in the context of monitoring hate speech and incitement to violence linked to the political and security situation.

The examples presented above illustrate that definitions accepted by the UNSG reports are used in slightly different ways regarding the context, influencing our understanding and scope to some degree. MDMH can cover aspects related to the safety and security of peacekeepers and the mission's mandate implementation, as well as aspects related to protecting civilians and using hate speech against civilians. The association of mis- and disinformation as a direct threat to the population seems to happen less often but was, for instance, mentioned in the MONUSCO UNSG reports S/2021/987 and S/2022/503.

Furthermore, the uses and associations of the concepts differ in the UNSG reports, depending on the country. This varies even more when comparing UNSG reports with the wording used in UNSC mandate renewals or reports of the Special Rapporteur in the respective countries where the missions operate. This different use and association of the concepts can render the understanding of a concept and responses to action very difficult. While it should be acknowledged that the phenomena can play out differently depending on the country's context, different usages should be avoided as they blur the understanding of MDMH concepts and the threats themselves. However, the present UNSG reports and the assessment of the concepts used, as well as their associations and links, can offer a broader understanding of the problems related to how MDMH is used and how UN PKOs can respond effectively. Table 3 summarises the above findings and shows how the different UN PKOs seem to understand and address this challenge. The periods highlighted in boxes are where mis- and disinformation were first included in the mission's mandate. Interestingly, the concept of malinformation is never used in any of the cited reports, even though it is understood as using information intending to cause harm.

MONUSCO is the UN PKO that has had mis- and disinformation in its mandate for the longest (2019), with 2018 UNSG reports already making references to the respective concepts. However, only in the context of the presidential election does every subsequent year have at least one UNSG report referring to a respective concept. The concept referred to the most is "hate speech", followed by "confidence-building", while "misinformation" and "disinformation" are only referred to in three reports each and never together.[130] In the context of MONUSCO,

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130 The three UNSG reports referring to misinformation are S/2020/214, S/2021/587, and S/2022/709. The three UNSG reports referring to disinformation are S/2020/1150, S/2021/987, and S/2022/503.

mis- and disinformation are almost used interchangeably while often being associated or mentioned with hatred, incitement to violence or hate speech.

Table 3: Use of concepts linked to MDMH in UNSG reports

	Concepts	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		Total	
		# OF REPORTS	# OF WORDS	# OF REPORTS	# OF WORDS	# OF REPORTS	# OF WORDS	# OF REPORTS	# OF WORDS	# OF REPORTS	# OF WORDS	# OF REPORTS	# OF WORDS	# OF REPORTS	# OF WORDS
MONUSCO	Misinformation					1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	**4**	**6**
	Disinformation					1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	**4**	**6**
	Malinformation														
	Hate Speech			1	1			3	12	3	14	1	4	**8**	**31**
	Strategic Communication									1	2	1	1	**2**	**3**
	Confidence Building	3	14			1	1					1	1	**5**	**16**
	Mentioned in how many reports?													**15/21**	
MINUSMA	Misinformation							1	1	2	3	1	1	**4**	**5**
	Disinformation									4	12	1	2	**5**	**14**
	Malinformation														
	Hate Speech											1	1	**1**	**1**
	Strategic Communication														
	Confidence Building							2	2			1	1	**3**	**3**
	Mentioned in how many reports?													**8/9**	
UNMISS	Misinformation														
	Disinformation														
	Malinformation														
	Hate Speech														
	Strategic Communication														
	Confidence Building							1	2			1	1	**3**	**3**
	Mentioned in how many reports?													**2/8**	
MINUSCA	Misinformation					1	3			1	1	1	2	**3**	**6**
	Disinformation					2	2	2	6	3	10	1	4	**8**	**22**
	Malinformation														
	Hate Speech					3	4	2	2	2	2	1	2	**8**	**10**
	Strategic Communication					1	1			1	1	1	1	**3**	**3**
	Confidence Building					1	1	1	1					**2**	**2**
	Mentioned in how many reports?													**9/9**	
Total		**3**	**14**	**1**	**1**	**11**	**16**	**14**	**29**	**19**	**47**	**14**	**24**		

When looking at MINUSMA, the word that was most often referred to is clearly "disinformation", and contrary to MONUSCO, the concept is never associated with hate speech. However, the more systematic use of misinformation or disinformation campaigns introduces it as a tool that can be "orchestrated, and synchronized on an industrial scale to utilize local and pan-African networks as well as social media".[131] By doing so, a malicious intent to cause harm is linked to mis- and disinformation campaigns. Concerning UNMISS, the only reference made to a respective concept, namely "confidence-building", is done in the context of implementing the peace agreement, with no link made to mis- and disinformation or hatred and hate speech. Even though mis- and disinformation were included in the mission's mandate in 2022, no reference was made to the concepts mis- and disinformation, hate speech or strategic communication.[132] The UNMISS 2023 mandate renewal with UNSCR 2677 included language on hate speech and strategic communication, but fell short of referencing mis- and disinformation. One paragraph mentioning strategic communication recognises its relevance to UNMISS being able to implement its mandate in relation to the need to improve the mission's strategic communication capabilities.[133] Finally, when examining the MINUSCA mandates and reports, the captured analysis finds that every report referred to MDMH and that every concept is used except for "malinformation". It further illustrates the complexity behind the understanding and the interlinkages between elements of MDMH and their potential threat to the population, the mission itself, humanitarian organisations, political actors and CSOs. During the observed period, the concept used the most is disinformation, followed by hate speech, indirectly acknowledging the link between disinformation campaigns and hatred.

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131 S/2022/446, p. 13.
132 S/2021/566, S/2021/784, S/2021/1015, S/2022/156, S/2022/468, S/2022/689, S/2022/918.
133 S/RES/2677, p. 5.

7. MDMH Impacting UN PKOs

7.1. Democratic Republic of the Congo

In this section, the report draws on analysis from newspapers, online material on social media platforms and information that had spread on the ground in the DRC to capture some of the MDMH dynamics the mission faces. As a result, it tries to capture some of the dynamics emerging over time to illustrate the practical challenges that missions face. Thus, the focus of the analysis is on MDMH targeting MONUSCO in the DRC. It utilises additional examples from CAR, where MINUSCA is based, to demonstrate some context-specific challenges that missions face. It must be emphasised that while the section draws on the case studies of MONUSCO and MINUSCA, this does not suggest that other missions are not struggling with similar challenges.

Over the last decade, the popularity of MONUSCO has drastically declined. After enjoying a relatively good image during the first ten years of its mandate and in 2013, thanks to its success against the 23rd Movement (M23) insurgency, the mission is now facing recurrent criticism and protests.[134] In September 2023, the President of DRC, Félix Tshisekedi, declared that MONUSCO had failed in its mandate to protect civilians. Stating to the UN General Assembly that "it is to be deplored that peacekeeping missions deployed for 25 years... have failed to cope with the rebellions and armed conflicts." Tshisekedi insisted on accelerating the

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134 Katombe, K. (2013). Defeated M23 ends revolt in Congo, raising peace hopes. Reuters, 5 November. https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL5N0IQ114

mission's withdrawal and bringing it forward to December 2023.[135] Responding to the request, MONUSCO insisted on the importance of an orderly and secure exit.

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Commenting on MONUSCO's mandate, Daniel Levine-Spound and Josh Jorgensen, senior researchers at the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), wrote: "The impact of conflict, coupled with the perception that MONUSCO has not adequately protected civilians, has fuelled anti-MONUSCO sentiment, leading to violent protests and calls for the Mission's departure."[136] Reflecting on the mission's criticism and President Tshisekedi's request for withdrawal, MONUSCO Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Bintou Keita underscored in interviews "that armed groups deliberately propagate falsehoods to incite discontent against the mission. They do so because they have a vested interest in preventing MONUSCO from being a witness to their actions".[137] SRSG Keita's statements followed observations included in the second UNSG's quarterly report for 2023, which noted that MONUSCO:

> is targeted by the inflammatory use of photographs and video footage as calls-to-action, coupled with text messages and coordinated trolling on social media against the mission's leadership. The attacks mainly accused MONUSCO of undermining the host country's sovereignty and interfering with its internal affairs.[138]

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135 Al Jazeera. (2021). DR Congo President Tshisekedi seeks withdrawal of UN peacekeepers this year. 21 September.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/21/dr-congo-president-says-un-peacekeepers-to-begin-withdrawal-this-year

136 Levine-Spound, D. and Jorgensen, J. (2022). MONUSCO's 2022 Mandate: Streamlined, But Missing Key Protection Language.
https://civiliansinconflict.org/blog/monuscos-2022-mandate-streamlined-but-missing-key-protection-language

137 MONUSCO. (2023). Interview: Battling fake news for peace and security in DR Congo.
https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/interview-battling-fake-news-peace-and-security-dr-congo

138 S/2023/451.

> Reflecting on the mission's criticism and President Tshisekedi's request for withdrawal, MONUSCO Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Bintou Keita underscored in interviews "that armed groups deliberately propagate falsehoods to incite discontent against the mission. They do so because they have a vested interest in preventing MONUSCO from being a witness to their actions".

Criticism of MONUSCO

Over the years MONUSCO has repeatedly been accused of being unable to accomplish its mandate of protecting civilians as it should. Examples where the mission failed to protect civilians as reported by media include Savo in Ituri province, where militia reportedly killed at least 62 civilians in February 2022 in the proximity of FARDC and UN bases.[139] In January 2023, seven civilians were reportedly killed in Bule and MONUSCO was accused of failing to protect civilians again when peacekeepers based in Bayo, around 5 kilometres from the incident site, arrived after the tragedy.[140] Actual failure to protect civilians as well as situations in which the mission was perceived to fail[141] have led to frequent criticism of MONUSCO by local, national, and international stakeholders, including members of the population, CSOs, and the DRC government. As depicted in the illustration in Figure 6, MONUSCO is often criticised for inaction and failure to protect civilians from violence used by armed groups such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

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139 ACTU-30. (2022). Tuerie de Djugu: Les 62 personnes ont été tuées à 2 Km d'un camp des FARDC et à 5 Km d'une base de la MONUSCO. https://actu30.cd/2022/02/tuerie-de-djugu-les-62-personnes-ont-ete-tuees-a-2-km-dun-camp-des-fardc-et-a-5-km-dune-base-de-la-monusco-avocat-general-ituri

140 Radio Okapi. (2023). Ituri: 7 déplacés tués au site de Savo lors d'une nouvelle attaque de la milice CODECO. 19 January. https://www.radiookapi.net/2023/01/19/actualite/securite/ituri-7-deplaces-tues-au-site-de-savo-lors-dune-nouvelle-attaque-de-la. MONUSCO staff highlighted the challenging terrain in which the mission operates, including inaccessible roads and natural obstacles which impact the response time to incidents.

141 A lack of understanding of the population regarding MONUSCO's mandate also plays a significant role in this perception. According to MONUSCO staff, the actual and/or perceived failure to protect civilians has also been instrumentalised by internal and external political actors.

Figure 6: An illustration representing MONUSCO peacekeepers' failure to protect civilians from ADF crimes[142]

> Ten years of violence by the ADF in North Kivu province and the resurgence of the M23 crisis have led to increased criticism of MONUSCO for failing to live up to the high expectation of ending insecurity, especially in eastern DRC.

Responding to criticism, MONUSCO often refers to its mandate by the Security Council to support DRC authorities in protecting civilians while emphasising the government's primary responsibility to protect civilians.[143] Still, the population demands accountability from both the government and MONUSCO. This is because MONUSCO has the mandate to protect civilians as well. Ten years of violence by the ADF in North Kivu province and the resurgence of the M23 crisis[144] have led to increased criticism of MONUSCO for failing to live up to the high

142 DW Kiswahili. (2019). Cartoon. Facebook, 9 August. https://web.facebook.com/dw.kiswahili/photos/a.186084618103540/2708620149183295/?type=3&mibextid=I6gGtw. Various people shared the cartoon with different messages. For example, Joseph Muhindo wrote on Facebook on 19 August 2019: "Finally, with a budget of nearly 1.5 billion dollars each year, what is MONUSCO doing in the DRC, specifically here in Beni? Is it really still protecting civilians? Yet just yesterday, on the night of Sunday to Monday (18 to 19/08/2019), there was an ADF incursion at Mbau (Beni-Oicha axis), and the provisional toll was three dead, five wounded and several kidnappers". See Muhindo, J. (2019). Facebook post. Facebook, 19 August.
https://web.facebook.com/groups/297688473759174/posts/1103408776520469/?_rdc=1&_rdr

143 Reuters. (2022). Protesters ransack UN peacekeepers' offices in eastern DR Congo. 25 July.
https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/protesters-ransack-un-peacekeepers-offices-eastern-dr-congo-2022-07-25

144 Levine-Spound, D. and Niku Jafarnia, N. (2022). New Armed Conflict in DR Congo: A Renewed Call for Civilian Protection. Just Security, 30 June.
https://www.justsecurity.org/82155/new-armed-conflict-in-dr-congo-a-renewed-call-for-civilian-protection

expectation of ending insecurity, especially in eastern DRC. As a result, when M23 captured parts of North Kivu, anti-MONUSCO protests flared up in July 2022. Illustrating the population's frustration, one of the activists said: "MONUSCO came to secure us, but there is only insecurity. It has failed in its primary mission of protecting civilians."[145] Criticism of the mission became anti-MONUSCO rhetoric and culminated in demonstrations targeting the mission in towns across eastern DRC, demanding the mission leave.[146] In response, MONUSCO spokesman Mathias Gillman said: "We are here at the invitation of the government, it is not us who decide that we stay".[147]

> In the last three years, MDMH have become a serious issue, especially connected to the increasing use of social media. This phenomenon mainly affects X (Twitter) and WhatsApp as posts and illustrations can be shared in multiple groups and go viral, and it is hard to identify the initial source.

Anti-MONUSCO protests

MDMH against MONUSCO has often come into play when MONUSCO showed its limits in the protection of civilians, and has contributed to questioning of the mission's effectiveness at large. Over the past decades, there have been multiple cases of false information targeting the mission.[148] However, in the last three years, MDMH have become a serious issue, especially connected to the increasing use of social media. This phenomenon mainly affects X (Twitter) and WhatsApp as posts and illustrations can be shared in multiple groups and go viral, and it is hard to identify the initial source. One of the persistent mistaken beliefs is that MONUSCO profits from endless conflicts in Eastern DRC as it receives millions of dollars, and if the war ends, this funding would no longer be available. This belief, which shows little understanding of how peacekeeping missions are funded, has been shared in conversations on MONUSCO and has been spread widely on social media.

145 Muhindo Sengenya, C. (2022). Why we're protesting against UN peacekeepers in DR Congo. The New Humanitarian, 18 August. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2022/08/18/why-we-re-protesting-against-un-peacekeepers-dr-congo

146 UN News. (2019). UN mission in DR Congo appeals for calm as violent protests continue. 25 November. https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/11/1052151

147 Al Jazeera. (2021). DR Congo: Dozens detained in Beni during anti-UN protests. 8 April. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/8/dr-congo-dozens-detained-in-beni-during-anti-un-protests

148 UNSC. (2002). Council condemns anti-UN accusations, intimidation by rally for Congolese Democracy-Goma in Great Lakes region. 2 June. https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/council-condemns-anti-un-accusations-intimidation-rally-congolese

Figure 7: Illustration suggesting that MONUSCO peacekeepers are complicit with armed group combatants.

Illustration 1 - Girl says to peacekeeper: "He killed my parents, he raped me, help me" Peacekeeper says to girl: "Stay here, I'm going to arrest this rebel, I'll come back" Illustration 2: The peacekeeper sits on a bag of minerals while holding bars of gold. Peacekeeper says: "Hmm! It looks like this poor Congolese woman surprised me! Be careful!" Rebel says: "If she sees us, we'll kill her…I have other bars."- Girl thinks: "He is an accomplice or a traitor". The cartoon was created by Roger Bamungu and published by Scoop RCD online on 21 September 2023[149]

MDMH used against MONUSCO has become recurrent, particularly during the electoral process where politicians adopted and exploited anti-MONUSCO rhetoric, and protests in many cities hindered the mission's work in general. In certain cases, hostilities by the population vis-à-vis MONUSCO hampered the mission's ability to be operational. A tendency by the government and population to blame the security shortcomings on MONUSCO was observed, despite it being the government's primary responsibility to protect civilians. MONUSCO has been used as a scapegoat in some situations. Community leaders and some Congolese officials have even encouraged anti-MONUSCO rhetoric and MDMH, which contributed to the anti-MONUSCO protests over the past years.[150] For example, in June 2022, MONUSCO's communication on M23 sparked criticism and anti-MONUSCO protests in Goma in the context of the M23 resurgence. Addressing the UNSC, the Head of MONUSCO, Ms Bintou Keita, declared: "The M23 possesses firepower

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149 Scoop RDC. (2023). Monusco : UN la journée, NU la nuit, Tshisekedi n'en veut plus! 21 September.
     https://scooprdc.net/2023/09/21/monusco-un-la-journee-nu-la-nuit-tshisekedi-nen-veut-plus

150 Jeune Afrique. (2022). RDC : Critique, la Monusco interpelle discrètement les autorités.
     https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1363448/politique/rdc-critiquee-la-monusco-interpelle-discretement-les-autorites

and equipment, which is increasingly sophisticated, specifically in terms of long-range fire capacities – mortars, machine guns, as well as precision fire against aircraft".[151] This declaration was highly criticised by both Congolese officials and the population in Goma, who stated that she did not have enough courage to name Rwanda[152] as the State backing this well-armed group. The Minister of Communication in the DRC, Patrick Muyaya, declared: "We are in the process of suffering Rwandan aggression, and for a large part of public opinion, MONUSCO should be able to say so openly, but it has not. The upsurge in insecurity in recent days justifies a feeling of anger, which is normal".[153] The Minister seemed to justify both anger against Rwanda and MONUSCO. He suggested that MONUSCO's communication did not consider this legitimate anger against Rwanda, which made the mission the target of the same anger.

Based on field research and interactions with communities in eastern DRC, one can argue that MONUSCO's communication has exacerbated mistrust in the context of the ADF and M23 crises.[154] The acting Head of Mission, Khassim Diagne, clarified that the Security Council "mandates MONUSCO to support the authorities in protecting civilians".[155] The continuing attacks on civilians despite the presence of peacekeepers led critics to believe that the mission was willingly not accomplishing its mandate; some even suggested complicity and relied on misinformation to prove this. An example of the mistrust is a statement by a leader from the city of Oicha in Beni territory, who said: "MONUSCO is either ineffective or complicit. Considering the huge military resources of the mission, the latter is the more plausible".[156]

A few days after the criticised MONUSCO communication on M23,[157] protests erupted. It was fuelled by the President of the Senate, Modeste Bahati Lukwebo, who told supporters in Goma on 15 July 2022 that MONUSCO should "pack its bags". Anti-MONUSCO resentment was again fuelled following the capture of the city of Bunagana and other villages by M23.[158] Deadly protests then took place in Beni, Butembo, Goma and Uvira.[159]

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151 Besheer, M. (2022). UN: Well-Armed M23 Rebels Resurgent in DRC. VOA News, 29 June. https://www.voanews.com/a/un-well-armed-m23-rebels-resurgent-in-drc/6638775.html

152 Levine-Spound, D. (2023). Will the World Respond to Potential Rwandan Aggression Against the Democratic Republic of the Congo? Just Security, 21 June. https://www.justsecurity.org/86976/will-the-world-respond-to-potential-rwandan-aggression-against-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo

153 Jeune Afrique. (2022). RDC : les manifestations anti-Monusco enflent dans l'Est. https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1365100/politique/rdc-les-manifestations-anti-monusco-enflent-dans-lest

154 Field research conducted in eastern DRC from September 2023 – March 2024.

155 Reuters. (2022). Protesters ransack UN peacekeepers' offices. op. cit.

156 Interview in Beni, 2020.

157 Besheer, M. (2022). UN: Well-Armed M23 Rebels Resurgent in DRC. op. cit.

158 VOA Africa. (2022). Goma M23 Capture Target: UN Advisors. 17 June. https://www.voaafrica.com/a/goma-m23-capture-target-un-advisors/6621438.html

159 African News. (2022). US urges DR Congo to protect peacekeepers after deadly unrest. 29 July. https://www.africanews.com/2022/07/29/us-urges-dr-congo-to-protect-peacekeepers-after-deadly-unrest

Figure 8: Anti-MONUSCO protests are depicted in this cartoon published by <u>Actualite.cd</u> and created by Kash in 2022.
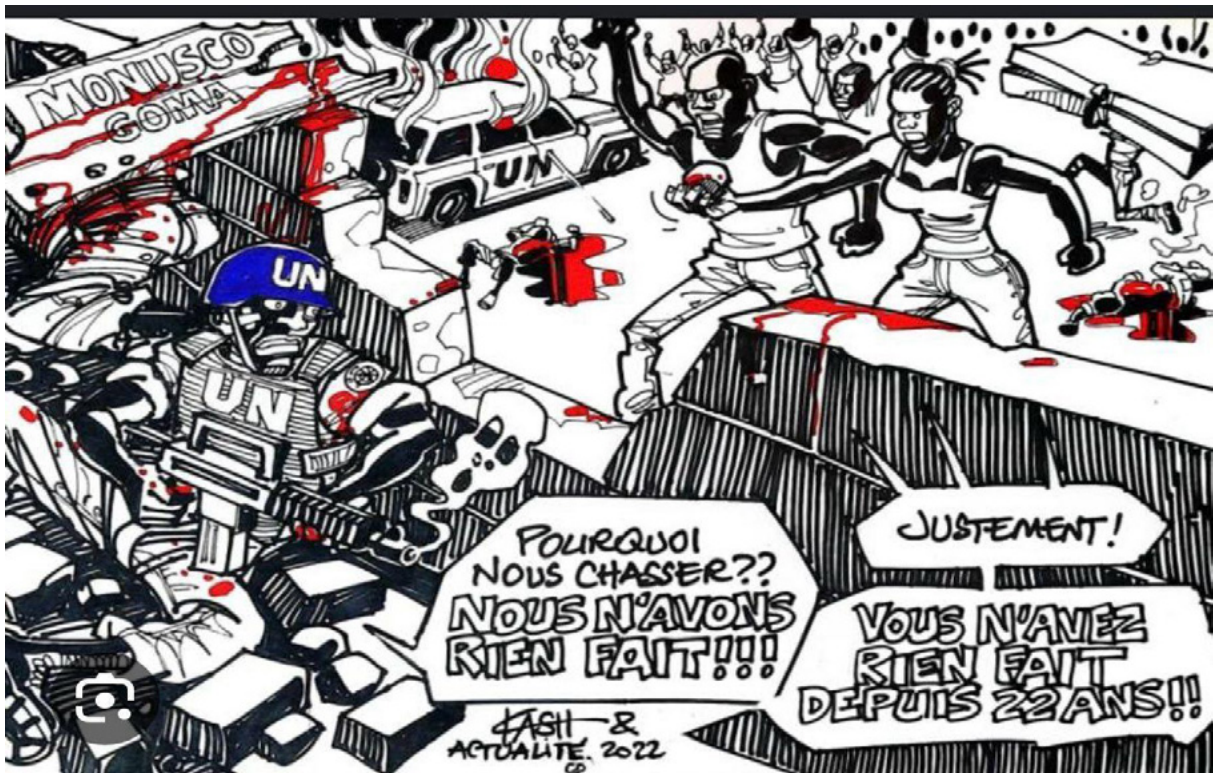
Peacekeepers under attack at MONUSCO base in Goma shout: "Why are you chasing us away?? We didn't do anything!!!" Angry mob responds: "Exactly! You haven't done anything for 22 years!!"

At least 36 civilians were killed, including three personnel of MONUSCO.[160] Reacting to the violence, DRC Minister of Communications Patrick Muyaya acknowledged legitimate frustration toward MONUSCO without condoning violence and looting observed during protests.[161] He suggested that there is a difference to be made between "those who criticise MONUSCO if they feel it is not acting effectively and those who are there to destroy".[162] The mission appealed for calm, stating that "MONUSCO is also concerned about the dissemination of misinformation as well as calls for violence that have been seen on social media."[163] In the case of the July 2022 protests, the mission condemned the attacks on its premises and called for restraint.[164]

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160 VOA Africa. (2022). DRC Reports 36 Anti-UN Deaths. 2 August. https://www.voaafrica.com/a/drc-reports-36-anti-un-deaths/6683548.html

161 UNSC. (2022). Letter dated 16 December 2022 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF-CF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2022_967.pdf

162 Jeune Afrique. (2022). RDC : les manifestations anti-Monusco enflent dans l'Est. op. cit.

163 UN News. (2019). UN mission in DR Congo appeals for calm. op. cit.

164 MONUSCO. (2022). MONUSCO Condemns the Attacks on its Premises in Goma and Calls for Restraint. Press release, 25 July. https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/pr_monusco_condemns_the_attacks_on_its_premises_in_goma_and_calls_for_restraint_.pdf

Lutte pour le changement (LUCHA), a prominent youth movement, blamed the violence on MONUSCO and the brutal intervention of FARDC[165] and emphasised the reason for these protests: "The call for MONUSCO withdrawal is legitimate in view of the ineffectiveness of the mission for years."[166] In the December 2022 midterm report of the UN Group of Experts on the DRC, the UN experts affirmed that the "Rhetoric against MONUSCO and systematic attacks on UN convoys, pelting of UN vehicles with stones and intimidation of UN staff has significantly disrupted the operational capabilities of MONUSCO".[167] The UN Group of Experts identified several politicians and activists who planned these violent events.[168] With the violence observed and after meeting with MONUSCO officials, Lukwebo tried to distance himself from these protests. In 2024, Mumbere Bwanapuwa, one of the people indexed in the report, was elected as a member of Parliament. His radical rhetoric has been at the core of his political success.

> After the deadly protest, the anger against MONUSCO did not fade; people were suspicious, and incidents of civilians who wanted to search MONUSCO convoys were reported.

After the deadly protest, the anger against MONUSCO did not fade; people were suspicious, and incidents of civilians who wanted to search MONUSCO convoys were reported. While many of these were minor incidents, one was fatal: the Kasindi shooting. On 31 July 2022, Tanzanian peacekeepers were stopped at the DRC-Uganda border post in Kasindi, North Kivu. Despite UN diplomatic privileges, some bystanders at the border wanted the UN vehicles checked before crossing the border[169] as there were rumours that these could contain supplies to armed groups. In this confusion, peacekeepers shot and killed at least two civilians.[170] The MONUSCO officials and the Congolese government announced an investigation. MONUSCO SRSG Keita said that "the perpetrators of the shooting were identified and arrested pending the conclusions of the investigation, which has already started in collaboration with the Congolese authorities."

For several months after, anti-MONUSCO protests led to a situation where peacekeepers could not leave their base, compound or accommodation without risking being stoned. For their safety, the mission removed the UN logo on cars and changed some procedures to fit the situation of hostility in Goma, North Kivu. This shows how the mission tried to adapt to mitigate risks and continue operations in a hostile environment, aiming to fulfil its mandate. At the same time,

165 LUCHA. (2022). X post. 5 August. https://x.com/luchaRDC/status/1555648442285826049?s=20

166 LUCHA. (2022). X post. 26 July. https://x.com/luchaRDC/status/1551983126930460674?s=20

167 UNSC. (2022). Letter dated 16 December 2022 from the Group of Experts. op. cit.

168 Ibid.

169 LUCHA. (2022). X post. 31 July.
     https://x.com/luchardc/status/1553819892792672258?s=46&t=DXsymSKnGq8wp2fHjfaydQ

170 Bujakera, S. (2022). U.N. brigade in Congo opened fire at border post, killing two. Reuters, 31 July. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-intervention-brigade-congo-opened-fire-border-post-causing-loss-life-2022-07-31

given the hostility against the mission, efforts to improve public relations and promote information integrity should continuously be prioritised.

> For several months after, anti-MONUSCO protests led to a situation where peacekeepers could not leave their base, compound or accommodation without risking being stoned. For their safety, the mission removed the UN logo on cars and changed some procedures to fit the situation of hostility in Goma, North Kivu.

During the UN Security Briefing on the DRC and MONUSCO held in March 2023, the US Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs, Ambassador Robert Wood, called on "DRC government officials to denounce hate speech, hold individuals accountable for inciting violence, and to correct these damaging narratives."[171] He stated: "It has become very clear that the level of disinformation and hateful rhetoric directed towards Rwanda, minority groups, and MONUSCO is increasingly putting civilians and peacekeepers in harm's way."[172] MONUSCO has put in place strategies to fight MDMH. In the report published in June 2023, the UNSG announced that MONUSCO had taken measures "to debunk false accusations by producing monthly reports on misinformation and intensified its presence on social networks through video, pictures and voice notes in French and Swahili. The mission also strengthened communication on its efforts to protect civilians." This is a positive development for information integrity, even though it is difficult to assess the impact of these measures as the mission continues to be targeted on social media and multiple factors are at play.

The 30th of August massacre and the effects of false information

After these deadly protests, conscious of the hostility, MONUSCO became less visible on the streets of eastern DRC cities. No significant incidents were reported until a politico-religious group named Natural Judaic and Messianic Faith Towards the Nations, also called Wazalendo, emerged in Goma in mid-2023.[173] With Afrocentric and anti-imperialist rhetoric, MONUSCO and other foreign military interventions were the primary targets of this discourse. The group organised two peaceful marches, including one in front of the MONUSCO Headquarters in

171 Wood, R. (2023). UN Security Briefing on the Democratic Republic of Congo and the UN Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo. https://usun.usmission.gov/un-security-briefing-on-the-democratic-republic-of-congo-and-the-un-stabilization-mission-in-the-dr-congo

172 Ibid.

173 Pierret, C. (2023). The 'Wazalendo': Patriots at war in eastern DRC. Le Monde, 19 December. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/12/19/the-wazalendo-patriots-at-war-in-eastern-drc_6356363_4.html

Goma, while also broadcasting on radio calls to violently attack the mission. Wazalendo planned another protest on 30 August in front of the MONUSCO logistics base in Goma. The mission expressed to Congolese authorities fear over the eventuality of violence in a private communication to General Contant Ndima, the military governor of North Kivu. In response, he sent a letter to MONUSCO assuring that "all has been put in place to prevent any violent protest"[174] and the government took measures against the cult.[175] The night before the planned demonstration, the FARDC raided the Wazalendo radio station and killed at least five civilians. In the morning, at least 50 civilians were killed by the Congolese special forces at the Wazalendo temple.[176]

> The 30th of August massacre in Goma is another example of false information that can result in fatal consequences for civilians as well as UN personnel.

The 30th of August massacre in Goma is another example of false information that can result in fatal consequences for civilians as well as UN personnel. According to authorities, there was information on an infiltration of M23 in the city.[177] The FARDC commandant who raided the Wazalendo radio station justified it as a preventive measure to take down an infiltrated cult. It turns out the information was false. No M23 or any armed person was identified in Wazalendo. While it is not clear what the source of this misleading intelligence was, there were recurrent claims that MONUSCO may have participated in establishing the intelligence that informed the FARDC decision. The mission suspected that the planned demonstration could be violent as calls to attack MONUSCO had been relayed through a local radio station for days, even if the Wazalendo had previously demonstrated peacefully near MONUSCO premises. The mission released the following statement after the massacre: "MONUSCO remains concerned by the threats of violence made prior to the demonstration and reiterates the importance of the peaceful resolution of disputes and concerns through inclusive dialogue."[178] On 1 September 2023, the OHCHR released a statement condemning the massacre and calling for justice. The OHCHR emphasised the people's right "to express themselves freely and to assemble peacefully, even if in protest at the United Nations and other actors. Authorities must facilitate the right to peaceful assembly."[179]

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174 Governor's letter to MONUSCO on 25 August 2023.

175 Irwin, Z. (2022). The Congolese military is accused of a deadly crackdown on a religious sect, killing at least 43. AP News, 1 September. https://apnews.com/article/congo-deadly-protests-un-goma-wazalendo-monusco-c86b5bbe9c2296c8430a91592221cf2b

176 International Crisis Group. (2023). Massacre in Goma Clouds DR Congo's Elections and UN Mission's Future. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/great-lakes/democratic-republic-congo/massacre-goma-clouds-dr-congos-elections-and-un

177 Ibid.

178 Irwin, Z. (2022). The Congolese military is accused of a deadly crackdown. op. cit.

179 Ibid.

The military court decided to prosecute the members of the FARDC who were presented as being involved in this massacre.[180] In October 2023, the FARDC special forces commander in North Kivu was sentenced to death for his role in the massacre.[181] At least 40 members of the cult are still also imprisoned in Goma central jail, prosecuted on charges of participation in criminal activities. This massacre contributed to the Congolese' decision to demand the acceleration of the exit plan and blame part of this situation on MONUSCO's presence. On 1 September, Foreign Minister Christophe Lutundula wrote a letter to the UNSC asking to move forward with an accelerated transition plan immediately. He mentioned "the latest unfortunate incidents in Goma on 30 August 2023, which resulted in the loss of human life" among reasons to request MONUSCO's withdrawal.[182]

MONUSCO's response to criticism and false information against Operation Springbok

On 3 November 2023, while public opinion was focused on the M23 progression in Masisi territory, MONUSCO announced the launch of Operation Springbok at a press conference in Goma.[183] MONUSCO's Force Commander, Lieutenant General Miranda Filho, confirmed peacekeepers would join the military efforts against M23 alongside the FARDC.[184] This announcement renewed some of the anti-MONUSCO rhetoric within communities with criticism recalling the failures of the mission to stop M23, described as a well-equipped armed group.[185] According to confidential UN DPO analysis, when Operation Springbok to counter M23 and protect Goma and Sake was announced:

> online press responded predominantly neutral, while on X (previously Twitter), tweets varied between appreciation, questions, and more hostile stances, notably from pro-Wazalendo influencer accounts, activists, and politicians who use them to garner attention or support their respective narratives, and from pro-M23 accounts.

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180 France24. (2023). DR Congo army officer receives death sentence over protest killings. 3 October.
     https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20231002-dr-congo-army-officer-receives-death-sentence-over-protest-killings

181 Ibid.

182 Radio Okapi. (2023). RDC : le Gouvernement veut le retrait accéléré de la MONUSCO
     avant la fin 2023. 5 September. https://www.radiookapi.net/2023/09/05/actualite/politique/
     rdc-le-gouvernement-veut-le-retrait-accelere-de-la-monusco-avant-la

183 MONUSCO. (2023). X post. 30 November. https://x.com/MONUSCO/status/1720478406289068262?s=20

184 https://actualite.cd/2023/11/05/operation-springbok-la-monusco-et-les-fardc-unissent-leurs-forces-pour-proteger-go-
     ma-et

185 Besheer, M. (2022). UN: Well-Armed M23 Rebels Resurgent in DRC. op. cit.

> Through some of these posts, mis- and disinformation rumours spread that MONUSCO was working with M23 and that this operation was to distract the FARDC while M23 would infiltrate the town.

However, several neutral posts shared by journalists or bloggers in DRC occasionally received more likes than negative comments. Operation Springbok appeared in a few Facebook posts, mainly relayed by media and blogs.[186] Through some of these posts, mis- and disinformation rumours spread that MONUSCO was working with M23 and that this operation was to distract the FARDC while M23 would infiltrate the town. Some politicians expressed distrust toward MONUSCO's offer. Jonson Ishara, a member of a local government division (LGD), implored "the high command of the FARDC not to accept any pooling of forces with MONUSCO as this risks creating a situation of non-state in this region and trapping our armed forces."[187] Others went even further by suggesting that MONUSCO was complicit with the M23. Jack Sinzahera, an anti-MONUSCO activist, stated: "We are against any pooling with MONUSCO; this mission has been complicit in our suffering and let M23 occupy our territory. On December 24, 2023, MONUSCO must go."[188] According to a confidential UN DPO report, on 2 November 2023:

> an influencer with 238K subscribers on YouTube, claimed from the 47th minute of his video post that the MONUSCO peacekeepers and M23 officials were caught in a meeting by the special unit of the FARDC near BUNAGANA, planning a strategy to sow terror or go massacre the Congolese "towards KIBUMBA." This content was viewed 45K times and received 100 comments.[189]

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186 Confidential UN DPO report, received on 19 March 2024. Due to sensitivities, UN DPO deliberately removed names, video content and mentions of WhatsApp groups and these details are therefore not reflected in this report.

187 Kabumba, J. (2023). X post. 5 November. https://x.com/kabumba_justin/status/1721060623482605732?s=20

188 Sindani, S. (2023). X post. 6 November. https://x.com/sergesindani01/status/1721448812697288778?s=20

189 Confidential UN DPO report, received on 19 March 2024. Due to sensitivities, UN DPO deliberately removed names, video content and mentions of WhatsApp groups and these details are therefore not reflected in this report.

Figure 9: An illustration of MONUSCO recognising the implications of Rwanda and created by Edizon in December 2023

Peacekeeper says: "Okay, okay I admit Rwanda's involvement, is it ok if I stay?". DRC response: "Good timing I must admit. But find something else".

Another example was noted in WhatsApp messages about the presence of M23 elements within the MONUSCO Civilian Aviation Authority (RVA) fence in Goma city, accusing the mission of wanting to bring down the city of Goma:

> Two YouTube video contents spread the idea of collusion between MONUSCO, EAC, and Rwanda in the conflict in DRC, particularly around Goma. These conspiracy theories aim to alarm and mobilize the Congolese population against a supposed external manipulation. In another example, a YouTube channel (204K subscribers) claimed that an EAC/MONUSCO alliance seeks to bring down Goma, humiliate the DRC, and pave the way

for Rwanda to win the war in DRC. The video host calls on intelligence services to investigate the bases of MONUSCO and the EAC in Goma to uncover Rwandan troops.[190]

The claims made in these videos were false. In fact, MONUSCO fought alongside the FARDC in Rutshuru in early 2022 and lost peacekeepers when their aircraft was hit.[191] And, with Operation Springbok, MONUSCO has supported the FARDC to protect the civilian populations in Sake and Goma against the M23.[192] Still, against a background of MDMH continuously spreading on social media, CSOs expressed mistrust against MONUSCO and called for vigilance,[193] while other organisations, such as representatives of motor taxis, have called for supporting the mission.[194] On 8 November 2023, the citizen movement LUCHA organised a protest in Goma denouncing the mission. They called out all foreign military interventions and demanded the departure of the UN mission and the East African Community (EAC) Regional Force.[195] A joint MONUSCO FARDC press conference announced Operation Springbok to raise awareness among the local and national population of its planned actions and limit misinterpretations related to the movement of peacekeepers in the Goma and Saké region.196

MONUSCO withdrawal after the demand of the DRC

On 10 November 2023, the mission decided to take a proactive stance by holding a formal meeting with CSOs and activists who had much more radical views on MONUSCO, like LUCHA, who marched against Operation Springbok. Compared to previous anti-MONUSCO protests, the mission seems to have changed its course of action and communication strategy by having direct discussions and addressing the false information propagated about this operation. The mission's representatives expressed their understanding of the population's anger as insecurity persists. They also acknowledged that the FARDC is best placed to stem the country's security problem. LUCHA representatives explained that the main reason to ask for MONUSCO's withdrawal is that their presence helped to make the government less responsible: "The biggest security challenge is that the Congolese army is not sufficiently prepared to confront Congo's enemies. Instead of relying on foreign actors, the security sector needs reforms".[197] The civil society participants unanimously emphasised that Operation Springbok should not

190 Confidential UN DPO report received on 19 March 2024. Due to sensitivities, the UN DPO deliberately removed names, video content and mentions of WhatsApp groups and these details are, therefore, not reflected in this report.

191 Bujakera, S. and Mahamba, F. (2022). U.N. chopper crashes in eastern Congo, 8 peacekeepers killed, army blames rebels. Reuters, 29 March. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/rwanda-says-its-army-did-not-back-m23-rebel-attack-congo-2022-03-29

192 Statement from MONUSCO personnel, March 2024.

193 Kabumba, J. (2023). X post. 4 November. https://x.com/kabumba_justin/status/1720734303686938828?s=20

194 Statement from MONUSCO personnel, March 2024.

195 Kabumba, J. (2023). X post. 8 November. https://x.com/kabumba_justin/status/1722174074636403014?s=20

196 MONUSCO. (2023). North Kivu: MONUSCO and FARDC launch codenamed Operation Springbok to protect the city of Goma. 8 November. https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/north-kivu-monusco-and-fardc-launch-codenamed-operation-springbok-protect-city-goma

197 Minutes of the meeting held at MONUSCO logistics base on 10 November 2023 with 15 civil society activists.

be a pretext to stay, while Congolese have already expressed their desire to see MONUSCO exiting. The mission said they have taken note of the Congolese government's request and are working to ensure a controlled and organised exit. Despite the differences in viewpoints, this meeting was an excellent example of constructive communication which can contribute to the de-escalation of resistance from opposition against the mission.

Reflections on the future of the mission

The Congolese government and MONUSCO have jointly agreed on a disengagement plan for the mission's withdrawal. On 23 November 2023, DRC Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Christophe Lutundula and MONUSCO SRSG Bintou Keita co-signed a comprehensive disengagement plan, which was submitted to the UNSC.[198] As part of this approach, the mission announced that it would withdraw from South Kivu by the end of June 2024, which was agreed to by the UNSC. These agreements enabled the mandate to be renewed for one year, with a view to an accelerated but gradual, orderly and responsible withdrawal of MONUSCO from the DRC. The Security Council has renewed the mission's mandate until 20 December 2024.[199] The renewed MONUSCO mandate also includes language on MDMH. The Security Council asked MONUSCO "to support or undertake local mediation initiatives and advocacy at the national level to prevent the intensification of violence and counter hate speech, disinformation and misinformation."[200] The new mandate has the first priority to "prevent, dissuade and deter armed groups and local militias from committing violence against the population, in particular by preventing them from invading, attacking or encircling large towns." This is clear language supporting Operation Springbok's aim to protect Goma from M23 attacks. In line with its new mandate, MONUSCO has been conducting joint operations with the FARDC against M23 since early 2024, even though some do not believe these operations are against M23, as illustrated by Figure 10.[201]

198 UN. (2023). S/2023/904. 23 November. And: MONUSCO. (2023). Le Gouvernement de la RDC et la MONUSCO signent un plan de désengagement pour le retrait de la Mission. 22 November. https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/cp-le_gouvernement_de_la_rdc_et_la_monusco_signent_un_plan_de_desengagement_pour_le_retrait_accelere_progressif_et_responsable_de_la_mission_final_0.pdf

199 UN. (2023). RDC: le Conseil de sécurité renouvelle le mandat de la MONUSCO jusqu'au 20 décembre 2024 tout en entérinant le plan de retrait progressif de la Mission. 19 December. https://press.un.org/fr/2023/cs15538.doc

200 Ibid.

201 TMD Bany. (2024). X post. 9 February.
     https://twitter.com/tmdbany/status/1755891259732787464?s=61&t=LGegdU0AFNgPDrI6ZblCxA

Figure 10: An illustration shared on Facebook in December 2023 by activist Jack Sinzahera targeting MONUSCO instead of M23[202]

Congolese citizen: "MONUSCO, are you sure you are aiming at the M23?"Response: "Yes yes don't worry, I already see it for sure".

On 7 February 2024, some Wazalendo fighters claimed that MONUSCO facilitated the loss of two positions that fell into M23's hands.[203] Additionally, a YouTube channel posted a video (which received 24 000 views) with allegations that MONUSCO helicopters supply the rebels in the territory of Masisi, even sharing the positions of local forces (Wazalendo and FARDC) with the enemy. The influencer on the YouTube channel amplified this narrative by linking MONUSCO to the UN and, by extension, to the US, urging the Congolese government to restrict MONUSCO's movements in rebel areas. A second YouTuber accused MONUSCO of betraying the Congolese forces by abandoning its positions to the M23. In a long monologue that garnered 39 400 views, the influencer incites protest in the DRC and elsewhere against the international community, notably the US and the UK, using rhetoric that accuses "Westerners" of favouring Rwanda, while highlighting the alleged inaction and bias of MONUSCO. She even goes as far as to say on a live broadcast that Americans can shoot at point-blank range at the population and that Congolese can die.[204]

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202 This is a clear case of misinformation as the US has no military presence in DRC or contingent deployments as part of MONUSCO's Operation Springbok and this operation did not target civilians.

203 Michombero, D. (2024). X post. 9 February.
https://twitter.com/michombero/status/1755888112322985989?s=61&t=SZJwiIrN82xg7ZlRaXpFBw

204 Confidential UN DPO report, received on 19 March 2024. Due to sensitivities, UN DPO deliberately removed names, video content and mentions of WhatsApp groups and these details are therefore not reflected in this report.

In response to these claims, MONUSCO posted a short video clip showing a peacekeeper in an operational zone with the following message:

> Operation Springbok conducted jointly by MONUSCO and the FARDC continues. In response to an M23 attack on FARDC, UN Peacekeepers engaged the M23 from their blocking positions around Sake and pushed them back.[205]

On 10 February 2024, protests were organised against Western embassies and MONUSCO was accused of not supporting DRC against M23. Several UN vehicles were set on fire. Reacting to the violent protests, MONUSCO SRSG Bintou Keita strongly condemned these attacks and warned that this would "strengthen the negative forces and weaken MONUSCO that it is fighting with its Congolese partners (FARDC, PNC)".[206] The Congolese security minister, Peter Kazadi, condemned the violence and reminded that "the facilities and vehicles of foreign diplomats and MONUSCO staff are inviolable." In the meantime, many sources accused young men close to the ruling party of being involved in these acts.[207] In response to the protests, MONUSCO's Strategic Communication and Public Information Division aimed to mobilise its partners and journalists quickly to refute the rumours accusing the mission of abandoning its positions and opposing the FARDC. From 10 February 2024, communications highlighting MONUSCO's interventions in the field and their interactions with the FARDC were broadcast. On his return to Goma on 13 February 2024, the Vice-Prime Minister/Minister of Defence, Jean-Pierre Bemba, spoke to the press about reinforcing the population's confidence in MONUSCO's commitment against the M23 rebels. This assurance was backed up by a statement from Lt. General Fall Sikabwe, Coordinator of military operations in North Kivu, who, after a meeting with the interim MONUSCO Force Commander, Major General Diouf Khar, and in the presence of community leaders at a meeting in Goma, helped to allay sceptics about the spread of false information. Lt. General Fall Sikabwe specifically contradicted the rumours circulating on social networks, asserting that the FARDC are indeed collaborating with MONUSCO in their military operations (36 7000 views, 201 likes, 64 shares and 48 comments on MONUSCO's X account). Following these two major interventions by the Congolese government and army, as well as the factual media relay of drone images, notably by Grand Lacs News, the rumours have dissipated.[208]

205 MONUSCO. (2024). X post. 10 February.
https://twitter.com/monusco/status/1756262045970735383?s=61&t=PEyKMze19cJpCEDH0fIjDQ

206 Keita, B. (2024). X post. 10 February.
https://twitter.com/un_bintoukeita/status/1756370671121072366?s=61&t=hUaRP-wlUZfq6-JmnVu_ug

207 MiandaMH. (2024). X post. 10 February.
https://twitter.com/miandamh/status/1756389308150292788?s=61&t=hUaRP-wlUZfq6-JmnVu_ug

208 MONUSCO source, March 2024

Figure 11: An illustration accusing MONUSCO of killings that has been widely shared in WhatsApp groups[209]

The examples presented in this section demonstrate some of the MDMH challenges faced by MONUSCO and highlight the need for proactive actions to promote information integrity, including adapting the UN MDMH strategies to the DRC context and political environment.

7.2. Central African Republic

Over recent years, misinformation, disinformation and hate speech campaigns have sought to impact the credibility of MINUSCA, and to undermine their efforts to maintain peace and security. These campaigns have targeted MINUSCA with accusations of trafficking weapons to armed groups, supporting terrorists, and exploiting natural resources.[210] As in other contexts, MDMH has complicated the implementation of MINUSCA's mandate and fuelled anti-UN sentiments among local populations, often targeting areas with mining activity and prominent presence of armed groups.[211]

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209 Ngoyi, E. (2024). X post. 9 February. https://twitter.com/end70/status/1755890469345824888?s=61&t=vL7FkjHjKbm-Vl0mRcg0-yg. Posted on X with the following message: "Curses to the international community. Damn MONUSCO. Damn Rwanda. They must leave immediately. They are against us. They have been destroying the country for over 30 years. Enough is enough #Monuscodegage".

210 Trithart, A. (2022). Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations. IPI, 7 November. https://www.ipinst.org/2022/11/disinformation-against-un-peacekeeping-operations

211 Africa Defence Forum. (2023). Peacekeepers Campaign Against False Information. 19 September. https://adf-magazine.com/2023/09/peacekeepers-campaign-against-false-information

In CAR, the rise of social media and new technologies has facilitated and accelerated the spread of MDMH, operating as a force multiplier that makes it easier for malicious actors to disseminate false and/or manipulated information, thereby exacerbating threats to peace and security.[212] In response to these challenges, UN PKOs, including MINUSCA, have initiated efforts to counter MDMH.[213] These efforts include building a "digital army" with smartphones, editing apps, and innovative approaches to combat falsehoods that can trigger tensions and violence.[214] Additionally, UN PKOs, including MINUSCA, are working to discredit MDMH campaigns aimed at undermining their credibility by using strategic communications and situational awareness to monitor social media and educate field personnel.[215]

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A notable example of MDMH in CAR is the case of allegations against four senior MINUSCA staff members of being mercenaries and sponsoring the prolongation of the crises in CAR. [216] They were also accused of being behind the sale of weapons to armed gangs in the PK 5 district in Bangui. On 17 February 2020, the Foreign Affairs Ministry of the Government of CAR, in a letter to MINUSCA's Special Representative of the Secretary-General, demanded the departure of the four men. Although this letter was later rescinded, it led to the spread on social media channels of rumours and questions about the credibility of MINUSCA.

On 17 March 2020, the Movement of Central African Patriots for Peace (MPCP) and the National Network for the Preservation of Peace Achievements (RNSAP), two youth movements that initiated the February anti-MINUSCA campaign against the four senior staff

212 US Institute for Peace. (2023). Confronting Disinformation in Central Africa: Perspectives from Civil Society in Chad and Central African Republic. 13 November. https://www.usip.org/events/confronting-disinformation-central-africa

213 UN Peacekeeping. (2021). Media and civil society leaders briefed on tackling disinformation. 24 June. https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/media-and-civil-society-leaders-briefed-tackling-disinformation

214 UN News. (2023). Building a digital army: UN peacekeepers fight deadly disinformation. 19 August. https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/news/2023/08/84108/building-digital-army-un-peacekeepers-fight-deadly-disinformation

215 Goswami, P.K. (2023). Misinformation and Disinformation in UN Peace Operations. *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, CLIII(633), July-September. https://www.usiofindia.org/publication-journal/Misinformation-and-Disinformation-in-UN-Peace-Operations.html

216 UNSC. (2020). Letter dated 8 July 2020 from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to Resolution 2507 addressed to the President of the Security Council. S/2020/662. https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n20/151/08/pdf/n2015108.pdf?token=CJAW1wI3qCriFz4ZF6&fe=true

members, issued a communique. They urged the Central African population to participate in a "ville morte" (ghost town) operation on Friday, 20 March. The objective was to secure the departure of the targeted individuals. Furthermore, they demanded that no MINUSCA vehicles traverse the territory of CAR and that no government minister's vehicle move within Bangui on that day. They called on the citizens to intervene if necessary. The communique was accompanied by a warning that any incidents would be attributed to MINUSCA and the government.

> UN PKOs, including MINUSCA, are working to discredit MDMH campaigns aimed at undermining their credibility by using strategic communications and situational awareness to monitor social media and educate field personnel.

On 18 March 2020, the Honourable Henri Wanzet Linguissara, Minister of the Interior, issued a response to the MPCP and RNSAP, reminding them that the planned demonstrations were prohibited on grounds of security, underscoring the paramount importance of adhering to the rule of law within CAR. The Minister formally forbade the "ville morte" operation, accentuating in his statement that the government had embarked upon measures to "seek a peaceful resolution." On 19 March, the MPCP and RNSAP released a subsequent communiqué, revealing that they had convened with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who "reassured them of the Government's earnest attention to the matter." Expressing confidence in both the government's and the mission's integrity and commitment to swiftly finding a lasting solution grounded in evidence presented to the Central African judiciary, they urged the populace to adopt the same level of trust and, consequently, called off the operation on 20 March 2020. Media outlets circulated the statements on social media. In turn, these reports were disseminated via WhatsApp and Facebook.[217] Examples included copies of the initial government letter but without the accompanying information that the letter had been rescinded.

MINUSCA sent the four men at risk on extended administrative leave.[218] MINUSCA SRSG Ndiaye, in 2020, strongly defended the MINUSCA personnel. However, internal MINUSCA relations and morale were also negatively impacted by the situation, with some staff citing tensions between international and local staff around the rumours.[219] Mission effectiveness was compromised because of these internal tensions created by MDMH, and trust with some local populations was siarupted. According to interviewees, this strained the internal workings within MINUSCA.[220]

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217 As reported by several MINUSCA staff members working at the time.

218 UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) conducted a security assessment.

219 Interview with MINUSCA personnel.

220 Ibid.

MINUSCA staff members shared messages about the case on social media, eroding trust between team members. Community meetings meant to address other issues were overshadowed by discussions about the role of international staff in CAR. The consequences for MINUSCA were significant. The extent of the MDMH spread meant that the affected personnel could not return to work for an extended period. This situation led to further internal tensions within MINUSCA, particularly between international and local staff, with differing views as to the veracity of the rumours.[221]

> Mission effectiveness was compromised because of these internal tensions created by MDMH, and trust with some local populations was siarupted. According to interviewees, this strained the internal workings within MINUSCA.

Figure 12: Posters around Bangui calling for a demonstration against senior MINUSCA staff
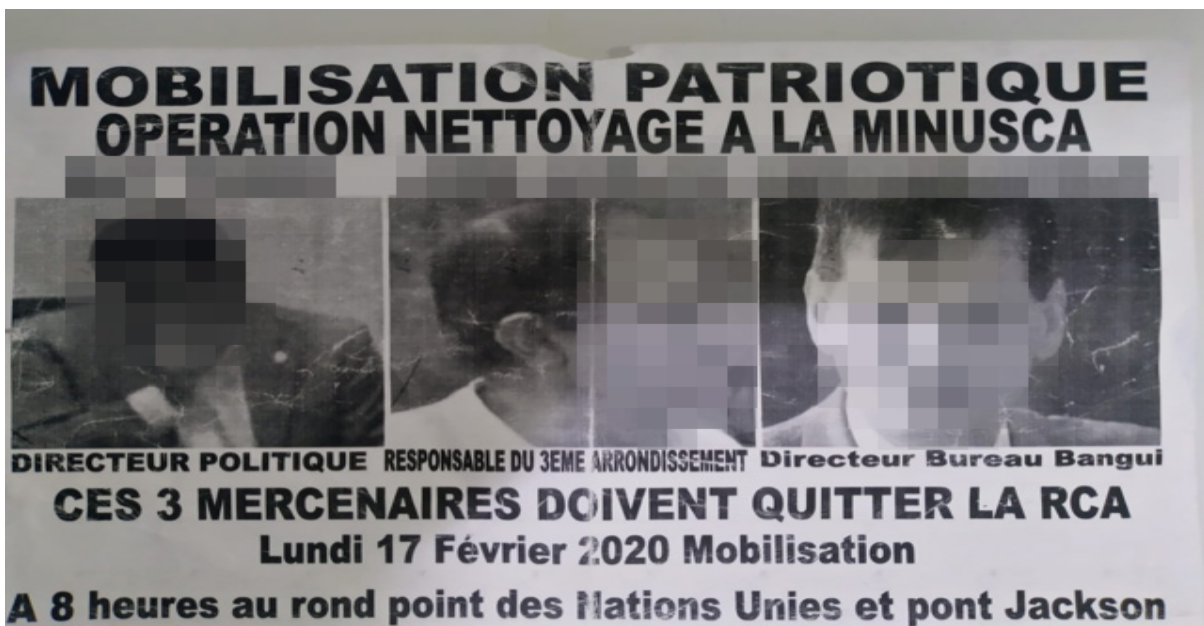
Attack at Ndélé base

A second example of MINUSCA being impacted by MDMH followed an explosion at the Russian security forces base in November 2022. The events surrounding the explosion at the

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221 Interviews with local and international staff members within MINUSCA.

base in Ndele, Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture, on 28 November 2022[222] remain shrouded in mystery and MDMH. Initial reports from community sources suggested that the blast resulted from an accident within the camp. However, for two months, the incident went without further disclosure, and MINUSCA was unable to investigate.

In a sudden turn of events on 21 January 2023, the Russian security personnel claimed their base had come under attack by an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV),[223] which allegedly detonated five bombs and destroyed a helicopter. They asserted that two additional bombs were dropped near the MINUSCA base in Ndélé. Contradicting these claims, MINUSCA forces did not report any explosions, and UN officials, along with locals, did not confirm any such disturbances or UAV sightings.

Amidst this confusion, articles emerged in Afrique Média[224] accusing MINUSCA of intentionally targeting CAR military assets. These articles echoed the sentiments broadcasted by Radio Lengo Sango talk show hosts. Yet, UN officials could not substantiate these claims. Interviews with officials in Ndélé reinforced the absence of any explosions that night. The dissemination of this narrative, which blamed MINUSCA for the supposed attack, raises concerns about deliberate disinformation by malicious actors aiming to erode trust between the CAR government and MINUSCA. The inability of MINUSCA to verify these events, hindered by Russian security forces restricting access to the alleged blast site, further complicated the situation.

Following the alleged aerial assault in Ndélé, CAR authorities altered the operating procedures for MINUSCA's Peacekeeping-Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (PKISR) flights. They posited that MINUSCA's Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) had "accidentally" dropped explosives over the Russian security forces base camp. MINUSCA refuted these accusations, clarifying that their PKISR flights had not commenced at the time of the alleged incident. Nonetheless, the CAR Ministry of Defense, on 3 February 2023, issued a directive prohibiting UAV usage over CAR territory, exempting only national security services.

This climate, rife with MDMH, led to the grounding of MINUSCA's surveillance flights. Though not a permanent measure, it significantly hinders aerial support, requiring case-by-case approval, escalating the risks for MINUSCA troop movement and compromising the safety and situational awareness essential to the mission's operations.

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222 The first reference to an explosion being heard is shared on local WhatsApp groups.

223 UN Flash report 21/01/23.

224 Afrique Média. (2023). The Ministry of Defence Prohibits Drone Flights in the Sky of the Central African Republic. 9 February. https://afriquemedia.tv/2023/02/09/the-ministry-of-defence-prohibits-drone-flights-in-the-sky-of-the-central-african-republic

8. UN PKOs Addressing MDMH

The next section of the report sets out some of the opportunities, challenges and issues facing the UN DPO and UN PKOs in general regarding addressing MDMH and their associated actions, responses, and impact. The section begins by outlining the critical policy, guidance and training initiatives that have been implemented or are in progress globally in support of UN PKOs. This is followed by an analysis of how UN PKOs have engaged on priority issues related to MDMH, accompanied by an analysis of lessons learned and best practices developed. The section ends by setting out the critical challenges of effectively engaging with MDMH from a mission perspective. The section provides additional context-specific challenges experienced by MINUSMA, UNMISS, MINUSCA, and MONUSCO in recent years, expanding on the analysis of the UNSG's quarterly reports. These challenges include the general explosion in the number of actors[225] contributing to the digital information space through social media platforms[226] and the increased involvement of several empowered actors who have invested considerable energy in both undermining the agenda of peace and attacking the agents of peace.[227]

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225 Benkler, M., Hansen, A.S., and Reichert, L. (2022). Protecting the truth: Peace operations and disinformation. Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF), October.

226 Lahmann, H. (2022). Working Papers: The Future Digital Battlefield and Challenges for Humanitarian Protection: A primer. The Geneva Academy, April.

227 Benkler, M., et al. (2022). Protecting the truth. op. cit.

8.1. The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C34)

The C34 is a subsidiary body of the Fourth Committee of the UNGA and is mandated by the UNGA. It reviews issues related to UN PKOs and works on formulating recommendations for peacekeeping stakeholders. In its 2023 comprehensive review, the C34 makes two critical indications about MDH. The first is with respect to PoC and the second concerns the safety and security of missions and their personnel. It is understood that it took considerable effort to ensure the inclusion of the 'controversial' terms of mis- and disinformation by the C34 as they have different meanings for members of the UNSC, in particular, for its permanent members. For some, they have specific technical meanings and could originate from any actor, while for others, they refer specifically to the information operations of actors and political issues. There is more common ground when it comes to troop-contributing countries (TCCs) and the specific connection between MDMH and the safety and security of peacekeepers. As such, the 2023 report "emphasizes the importance of enhancing the safety and security of peacekeepers, and notes with great concern the increasing amount of disinformation and misinformation directed against United Nations peacekeeping operations, which may negatively impact missions and peacekeepers". Based on these observations, the Special Committee included three key requests in its 2023 report to address MDMH:

- Firstly, the Secretariat is requested "to monitor and report on instances of misinformation and disinformation and to share this information with all relevant stakeholders".

- Secondly, "that adequate resources and expertise be provided to peacekeeping operations to identify, monitor, analyse, respond to and counter misinformation and disinformation, including for the training of uniformed and civilian public information officers".

- Thirdly, "peacekeeping missions to work with national authorities in this regard".[228]

8.2. UNHQ entities and initiatives to address MDMH

At the UN DPO, the workstream on MDMH was established by the Policy, Evaluation and Training Division (DPET) and the Strategic Communications Section (SCS) in response to developments in the field and in the absence of an HQ structure on this issue. In the face of the growing challenges in the field and with support from Member States, in early 2022, the Addressing MDMH team was created with a focus on supporting UN PKOs.[229] Recognising the urgency of MDMH challenges, NORCAP supports this team through the deployment

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228 UNGA. (2023). A/77/19. op. cit.
229 Trithart, A. (2022). Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations. op. cit.

of an MDMH policy specialist since 2023. In 2024, the name of the team was changed to the Information Integrity Unit. As a Secretariat entity situated within the Policy and Best Practices Section (PBPS) at the DPET, the Unit aims to develop a series of guidance documents (policy notes, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and guidelines) and tools primarily targeted for UN PKO staff between 2023 and 2025. The aim is to support UN PKOs to identify and address MDMH at the field level. The team's effort is intended to assist the missions to develop in-house tools, which are supported by evidence-based work. It is also designed to backstop the missions based on their specific contextual needs. To address MDMH in peacekeeping environments, the guidance documents cover four different pillars, namely: 1) monitoring, 2) analysis, 3) response, and 4) organisational issues.[230] At the time of writing, this is the only dedicated unit supporting UN PKOs to better identify, prevent and address issues linked to information disorder. The Information Integrity Unit works closely with other Secretariat entities to ensure streamlined support to UN PKOs. It aims to enhance their ability to adapt adequately and respond with a more holistic and people-centred approach.

In 2022, the Information Integrity Unit and SCS produced a set of tips and tools to address mis- and disinformation in UN Peacekeeping settings, following the A4P+ initiative and the Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping. These additional tools act as supplementary actions designed to address information disorder. The tools acknowledge the severe impact information disorder can have on UN PKOs, including mandate implementation and the safety and security of peacekeepers and the communities they serve. They focus on how information disorder can affect the missions and their work. The tools make a more explicit link to misinformation, disinformation and malinformation and make a distinction between these and hate speech by referring to the different initiatives by the UNSG to address hate speech.[231,232]

The MDMH workstream "aims to buttress prevention, risk mitigation and management, while working towards sustained resourcing of peacekeeping efforts".[233] The four objectives of the workstream are: 1) deepen understanding of the mis- and disinformation landscape and raise awareness on its scope and scale, 2) build a peacekeeping community to take action and strengthen the resilience of missions and host societies, 3) support multidimensional responses, including preventive actions, and 4) establish partnerships and networks with the UN and external actors. To support these objectives, the DPO established a community of practice where colleagues across peacekeeping can access resources, tips and practical tools that provide an overview of approaches on identifying and responding to mis- and disinformation. While this workstream represents concrete and useful support to address mis- and disinformation at the field level, this document addresses misinformation and disinformation without linking the concepts to hate speech.

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230 UN DPO. (2023). Addressing Mis/Disinformation in Peacekeeping Environments: Guidance Framework. 10 March.

231 UN DPO. (2022). Addressing mis- and disinformation in United Nations peacekeeping settings. Tips and Tools.

232 The Secretary-General's initiatives they refer to are the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech and the Detailed Guidance on Implementation for UN Field Presence. They further mention that the DPO and DPPA are developing a Joint Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech.

233 UN DPO. (2022). Addressing mis- and disinformation. op. cit.

The Information Integrity Unit has worked closely with the missions, providing direct, strategic and operational support. This includes technical and subject matter support on responses to MDMH, such as advising MONUSCO on their radio programming on MDMH, providing feedback on media literacy campaigns, and proposing ideas for new campaigns. As a result of these collaborations, three missions have started preparing regular monitoring and analytical reports, which are critical for MDMH early warning and to inform responses.[234] To further this work, the Information Integrity Unit has worked with MONUSCO, MINUSCA, UNMISS, and the former mission MINUSMA to establish multidimensional working groups to coordinate work on MDMH. For example, in the case of MINUSMA, the Information Integrity Unit provides monitoring and analysis of the use of MDMH on a weekly basis. Despite the mission being closed, the team still provides that information fortnightly to the liquidation team present in Mali. This includes an analysis of information across Facebook, X, YouTube, and blog websites using an ABC framework.[235] Additionally, the Information Integrity Unit is designing custom software that utilises AI coding to detect the use of MDMH. Despite *tech companies,* including Facebook, Google and X, "now assessing 89% of flagged content within 24 hours" and removing 72% of the content deemed to be illegal hate speech,[236] according to UN personnel that the research team engaged with, tech companies are slow and even non-responsive when it comes to removing content that is MDMH-related and focuses on UN PKOs. One personnel went as far as to say that this is even more true with organisations such as Meta, "especially when you follow the trends, and you can see that the same people/Internet bots are appearing and reposting the information using the same tactics across different platforms". Another added that "in our work, we find that the person reviewing the content is not very well familiar with the context of the situation on the ground and the wider implication it has for UN missions".[237] For another respondent, this included situations where the person(s) were a government official (residing inside the country) and a major influencer (residing outside the country). In both cases, the influence that the person(s) had on the mission was significant.

Despite the challenges described above, the research team noted that the Information Integrity Unit has tried to circumvent this challenge by conducting perception surveys on MDMH since 2022. The surveys engaged respondents from a cross-section of peacekeeping components, including substantive and support, uniformed and civilian, and national and international staff. It is important to note that the goal of these surveys:

> was to reach respondents with insight into mis/disinformation challenges in mission and to aggregate their views on the on-the-ground impact in a systematic and structured way,

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234 Interview with UN personnel working on MDMH, March 2024.

235 Ibid.

236 European Commission. (2019). Countering illegal hate speech online.
     https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_805

237 Interview with UN personnel working on MDMH, March 2024, online.

and not necessarily to provide a representative sample of 'average' views across all personnel (who may or may not engage regularly on the topic).[238]

The sample size is limited, however, these surveys have generated important insights regarding the impact of MDMH on mandate implementation, safety and security of peacekeepers, as well as attitudes, perceptions and behaviour in relation to MDMH. A key finding of the perception survey conducted in June 2023 was that the impact of MDMH worsened between 2022 and 2023, as illustrated in Figure 13. The survey results also show that several groups were targeted by MDMH in CAR, Mali, DRC and South Sudan, respectively, as indicated in Figure 14. Representing one of the key target groups of MDMH in UN PKO environments, the quotes in Figure 15 from peacekeeping personnel illustrate how they were threatened, harassed, attacked, and targeted, either as groups or as individuals.
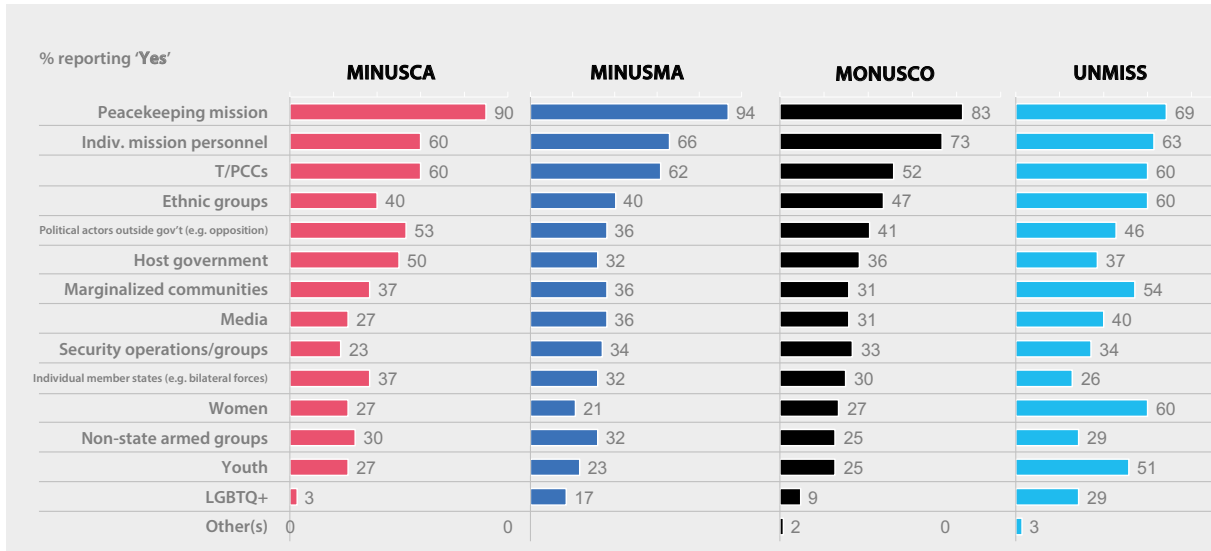
Figure 13: UN DPO mis- and disinformation survey results for UN PKO personnel, June 2023

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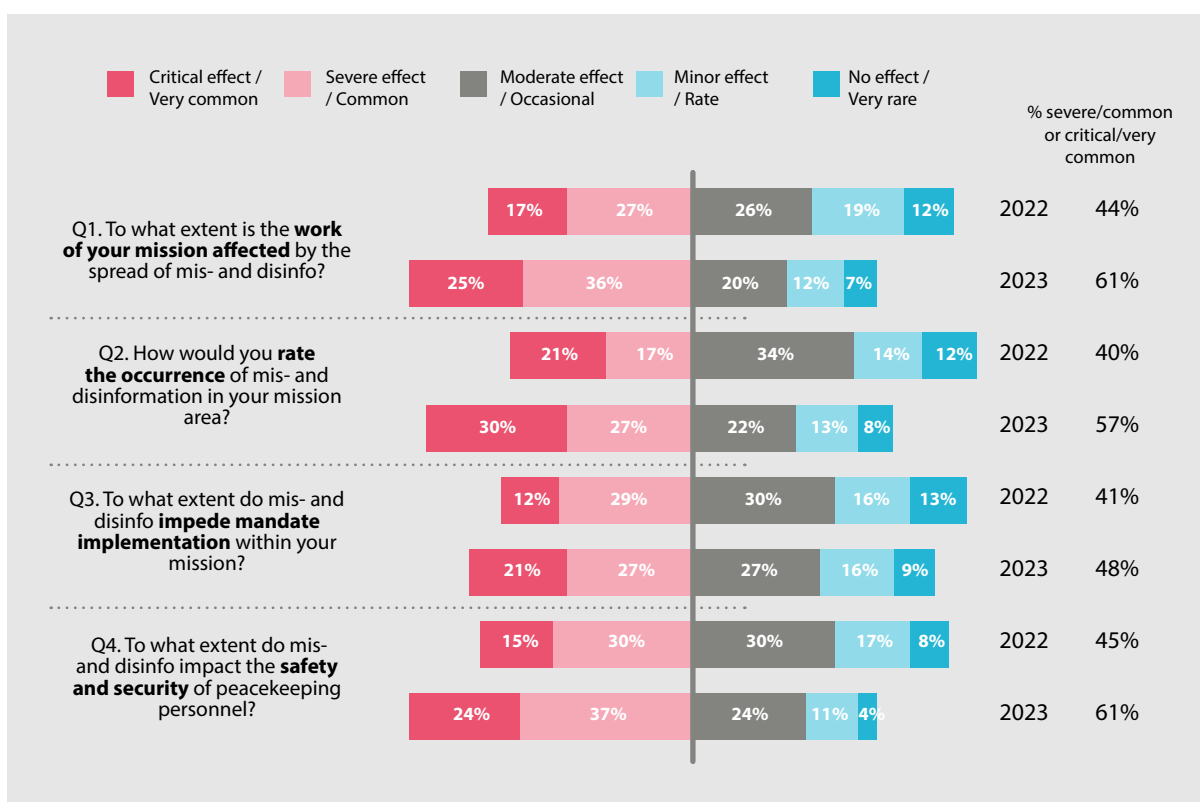
238 UN DPO. (2023). Second Mis/disinformation Survey. Addressing Mis/Disinformation Unit. The sample size of this perception survey was 261, including 35 respondents from MINUSCA, 51 respondents from MINUSMA, 67 respondents from MONUSCO, and 44 respondents from UNMISS.
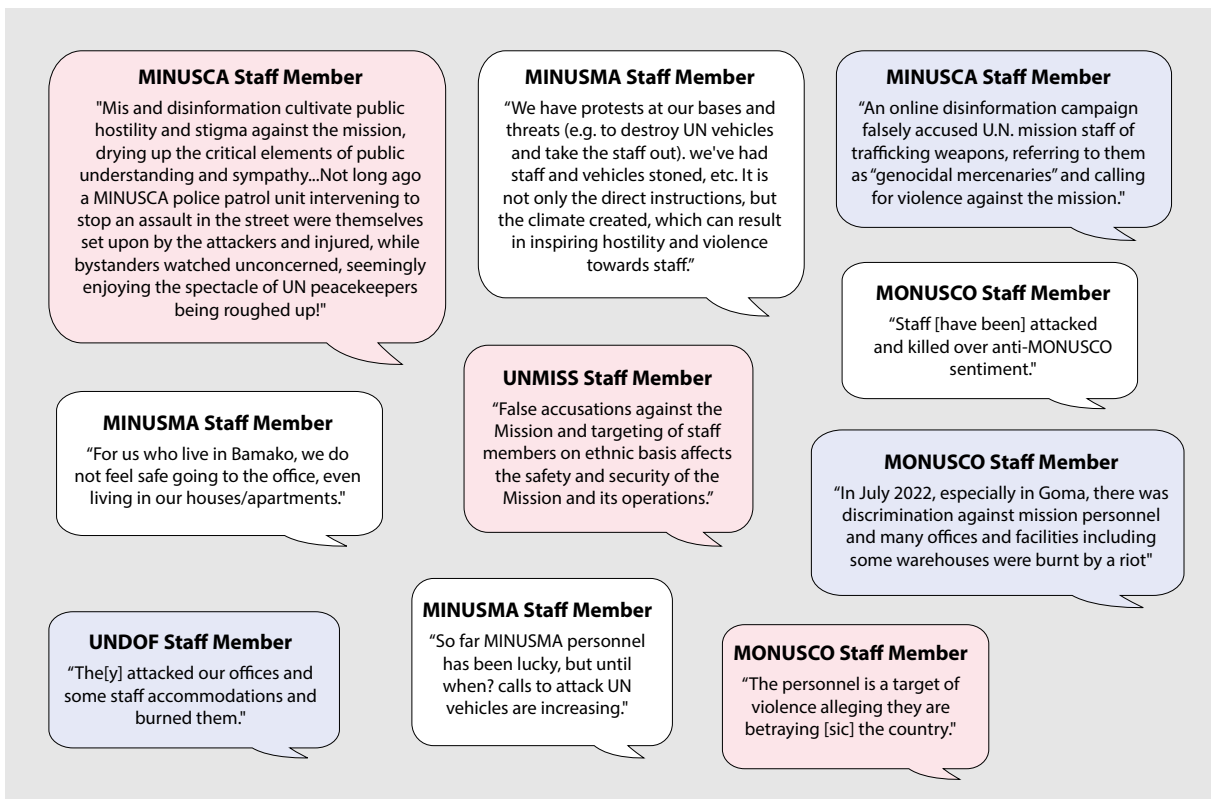
Figure 14: UN DPO mis- and disinformation survey results for specific groups and individuals targeted by MDMH in CAR, Mali, DRC and South Sudan, June 2023

Q: Who is targeted by mis- and disinformation within your mission and mission area?

% reporting 'Yes'	MINUSCA	MINUSMA	MONUSCO	UNMISS
Peacekeeping mission	90	94	83	69
Indiv. mission personnel	60	66	73	63
T/PCCs	60	62	52	60
Ethnic groups	40	40	47	60
Political actors outside gov't (e.g. opposition)	53	36	41	46
Host government	50	32	36	37
Marginalized communities	37	36	31	54
Media	27	36	31	40
Security operations/groups	23	34	33	34
Individual member states (e.g. bilateral forces)	37	32	30	26
Women	27	21	27	60
Non-state armed groups	30	32	25	29
Youth	27	23	25	51
LGBTQ+	3	17	9	29
Other(s)	0	0	2	3

Figure 15: Quotations from the UN DPO mis- and disinformation survey of UN PKO personnel, June 2023

Q: To what extent does mis- and disinformation impact the safety and security of peacekeeping personnel?

MINUSCA Staff Member
"Mis and disinformation cultivate public hostility and stigma against the mission, drying up the critical elements of public understanding and sympathy...Not long ago a MINUSCA police patrol unit intervening to stop an assault in the street were themselves set upon by the attackers and injured, while bystanders watched unconcerned, seemingly enjoying the spectacle of UN peacekeepers being roughed up!"

MINUSMA Staff Member
"We have protests at our bases and threats (e.g. to destroy UN vehicles and take the staff out). we've had staff and vehicles stoned, etc. It is not only the direct instructions, but the climate created, which can result in inspiring hostility and violence towards staff."

MINUSCA Staff Member
"An online disinformation campaign falsely accused U.N. mission staff of trafficking weapons, referring to them as "genocidal mercenaries" and calling for violence against the mission."

MONUSCO Staff Member
"Staff [have been] attacked and killed over anti-MONUSCO sentiment."

MINUSMA Staff Member
"For us who live in Bamako, we do not feel safe going to the office, even living in our houses/apartments."

UNMISS Staff Member
"False accusations against the Mission and targeting of staff members on ethnic basis affects the safety and security of the Mission and its operations."

MONUSCO Staff Member
"In July 2022, especially in Goma, there was discrimination against mission personnel and many offices and facilities including some warehouses were burnt by a riot"

UNDOF Staff Member
"The[y] attacked our offices and some staff accommodations and burned them."

MINUSMA Staff Member
"So far MINUSMA personnel has been lucky, but until when? calls to attack UN vehicles are increasing."

MONUSCO Staff Member
"The personnel is a target of violence alleging they are betraying [sic] the country."

In an attempt to address the urgency of these developments, the first UN DPO Policy on Information Integrity in Peacekeeping Settings will be adopted in 2024, setting out "the approach, parameters, methods, and processes by which United Nations peacekeeping operations and Headquarters will strengthen information integrity and address misinformation, disinformation, malinformation and hate speech (MDMH)."[239] Formalising guidance on MDMH for UN PKOs, the policy will be an important tool for the missions to streamline and further the work on MDMH. It provides guiding principles for peacekeeping action in relation to information integrity, including multidisciplinarity, integrated effort, a proactive and preventive stance, and people-centred and gender-responsive approaches. In addition to these, peacekeeping action needs to be conducted in a non-clandestine manner, while respecting data protection and privacy. The policy also offers five key approaches to strengthen information integrity and tackle MDMH, focusing on understanding the MDMH landscape, mapping the information environment, considering the harm and threat level, ensuring preparedness, and partnerships with key actors. It makes explicit the roles and responsibilities of mission personnel, including leadership and various sections such as JOC, JMAC, Civil Affairs, Political Affairs, and uniformed components.[240] In addition to the overarching policy, the Information Integrity Unit is developing other guidance documents related to Operational Security, practical anticipatory actions that mission components can take, and guidance on the prevention and mitigation of MDMH during elections, and separately, MDMH during transitions.

Training

To support missions in implementing the guidance, the UN DPO Information Integrity Team developed and delivered 11 foundational training modules on all aspects of MDMH, including on responses, and rolled out tools and methodologies for monitoring and analysis. The Information Integrity Unit has developed training materials for UN PKOs and conducted much training across and for mission staff since 2022, focusing on monitoring, analysing and responding to MDMH. Given the impact of MDMH on UN PKOs, it is critical to cover MDMH in pre-deployment training (PDT), induction training, general in-mission training, and/or by offering online training on the issue. As the content of in-mission training depends on each UN PKO and its leadership, it would be up to UNHQ and troop- and police-contributing countries (T/PCCs) to see how to include it in pre-deployment training systematically. The UN DPO and DPET Integrated Training Service (ITS) is currently developing training materials for this purpose, which Member States should integrate into PDT as soon as they become available.

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239 UN DPO. (Forthcoming, 2024). Policy on Information Integrity. op. cit.
240 Ibid.

Strategic communications

Responding to MDMH in and outside of mission environments is not the role of Strategic Communications components only. Responding to MDMH through communications has been identified as a critical communications activity,[241] and the Strategic Communication Section works (SCS) closely with the Information Integrity Unit. The UN DPO's SCS is working on initiatives to enhance proactive communications through story-telling and visual imagery. Consequently, slide-deck training has been developed by the DPO SCS to upskill relevant peacekeeping personnel on MDMH. The training aims to contribute to common reasoning and understanding of the phenomena and to address it in a coherent, effective and efficient way. A DPO Strategic Review led by the Under-Secretary-General (USG) is currently ongoing, seeking to improve Strategic Communications capacity and to ensure that it is commensurate with the needs at UNHQ and in UN PKO contexts, both at mission HQ and FO level. As observed, the "2016 Strategic Communications and Public Information Policy for peacekeeping missions does not adequately reflect the rapidly evolving media landscape in which peacekeepers operate".[242] The intention of this initiative is to enable the UN to move from a reactive to a proactive stance.[243] It also provides training to both mission leadership and mission staff dealing with strategic communications and helps to build confidence and improve the quantity, quality and rapidity of information shared. Emphasis is placed on identifying the appropriate technical expertise to process the digital information environment. However, internal human resource processes make this a time-consuming process.[244]

A component recommended in the Strategic Review is perception surveying to better understand the views of key stakeholders in UN PKO environments and, more broadly, a better understanding of what the mission is trying to achieve. This could enable UN PKOs to "see whether their messages are reaching the right audiences, resonating with those audiences and contributing to their objectives".[245] Hence they can use different tools to monitor the information environment and to build a nuanced picture of it – though all of these tools have limitations and may not be appropriate at all times. As such, the quantitative results need to be calibrated with qualitative approaches and the experiences of peacekeepers and partner engagements. The analysis produced can then be included in evaluation and review processes and actions implemented by the missions through the various communications engagement approaches. While the increasing importance of digital communications required recognition, traditional media, such as radio transmissions and word-of-mouth, also required focused support and additional human resources. However, with the limited human resources capacity at UNHQ to support

241 UN DPO. (2020). The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook.

242 Sherman, J. and Trithart, A. (2021). Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations: From an Afterthought to an Operational Necessity. IPI, August.

243 Consultations at UNHQ, 27-30 March 2023.

244 Consultations at UNHQ, 27-30 March 2023.

245 Sherman, J. and Trithart, A. (2021). Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations. op. cit.

UN PKOs on strategic communication, and limited capacity at mission level to work on these phenomena, missions are somewhat left in the dark in terms of how to adapt.

> For example, in the South Sudan context, there is a need for the mission to better understand online and offline media and how they can be used to intervene in the context on the ground by utilising MDMH. Radio is used and considered a key tool to inform the population in a country where most people do not have access to TV or newspapers.

For example, in the South Sudan context, there is a need for the mission to better understand online and offline media and how they can be used to intervene in the context on the ground by utilising MDMH. Radio is used and considered a key tool to inform the population in a country where most people do not have access to TV or newspapers.[246] In 2016, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights identified and warned that the "rising ethnic rhetoric, hate speech and incitement to violence against certain ethnic groups is highly dangerous and could result in mass atrocities if not reined in by community and political leaders at the highest levels."[247] Unfortunately, the war in South Sudan was already ongoing, and it continued to experience the use of hate speech "that would serve as fuel to the violence rolling out across the country."[248] Later on, radio and social media were used to "take up violence", fuel hatred, and "spread false information to trigger escalations" and transform the information into weapons.[249] To address the hatred, some organisations conducted engagement activities with the population, such as "rumour control", to address certain information, bring credible messengers together, sensitise the population to the positive and negative impacts of social media, and use tools to fact check certain information.[250] This work seemed to render these organisations vulnerable where a trusted radio station, for example, was misused by someone who created fake Facebook profiles under the radio station's name and then spread hatred, misinformation and disinformation against particular ethnic groups. The radio station had to contact Facebook several times to delete the fake profiles.[251] The online and offline information interact and can fuel each other, rendering misinformation and disinformation more believable for the population.

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246 UN News. (2022). Radio Miraya builds trust in South Sudan, amid hate. 10 February. https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1111722

247 UN OHCHR. (2016). South Sudan: Dangerous rise in ethnic hate speech must be reined in. 25 October. https://www.ohchr.org/en/2016/10/south-sudan-dangerous-rise-ethnic-hate-speech-must-be-reined-zeid (consulted on 21.02.2023)

248 Easthom, T. (2020). Rumor Control & Hate Speech in South Sudan. *The Koff Peacebuilding Magazine*, 168, November.

249 Ibid.

250 Ibid.

251 UN News. (2022). Radio Miraya builds trust in South Sudan. op. cit.

Since 2015, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO and UNMISS "have been explicitly mandated to carry out strategic communications"[252] and deployed strategic communication divisions or sections that have often been the first port of call for the mission leadership to counter MDMH. Several recommendations have been made regarding improving communications with the local populations. For example, the mission should enhance the information environment by "proactively spreading authoritative information, especially considering that in CAR, Mali, and the DRC, [where] disinformation often arises out of an information vacuum".[253] Currently, these missions face a variety of actors spreading MDMH that may impact mandate implementation, safety and security of communities and peacekeepers alike, and the broader political and peace processes. Thus, it is crucial for missions to move beyond "counter misconceptions but to proactively create alternative narratives around their work to improve understanding of what they seek to do and how they intend to do it, to build trust, and to deter potential spoilers".[254] Hence, it is critical to understand the information environment, how information travels, is shared, and shapes public opinion to develop true, timely, story-based and purpose-driven messages that target audiences understand.[255] What UN PKOs need to do is move from a reactive position to a more proactive stance. Hence, a more proactive and healthy communication exchange applied consistently to prevent possible MDMH finding their roots is needed going forward. This should also include more holistic considerations regarding the interpretation of the context for different communities and languages and appropriately disseminated in different geographical areas of a country. This will help UN PKOs to pivot their approach to a more localised, context-specific approach.

Analytical support tools

Digital tools used to monitor and analyse the information environment generally pick up keywords and phrases that have been identified by analysts as concerning. While this requires in-depth knowledge of the context, digital tools offer the possibility to parse through large amounts of data to help identify malicious actors, signatures of inauthentic behaviour and disinformation narratives. [256] Tools can be used to consider both online media and digitised offline media. While many commercial and open-source tools exist to monitor and analyse the information environment, these are not tailored to the needs of peacekeeping missions which often operate in rapidly changing and unique information landscapes. The DPO Information Integrity Unit is taking a suite of tools approach to address this challenge – leveraging third-party software for their various strengths while augmenting these with tools developed in-house. Two tools developed by the DPO Information Integrity Unit together with the Office of Information

252 Sherman, J. and Trithart, A. (2021). Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations. op. cit.

253 Trithart, A. (2022). Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations. op. cit.

254 Udupa, S., Gagliardone, I., Deem, A. and Csuka, L. (2020). Hate Speech, Information Disorder, and Conflict. The Social Science Research Council (SSRC), February. https://s3.amazonaws.com/ssrc-cdn1/crmuploads/new_publication_3/the-field-of-disinformation-democratic-processes-and-conflict-prevention-a-scan-of-the-literature.pdf

255 Sherman, J. and Trithart, A. (2021). Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations. op. cit.

256 Lahmann, H. (2022). Working Papers. op. cit.

and Communications Technology (OICT) are the Unite Wave project, a system for monitoring and analysing online and offline radio broadcasts, and the Monitoring and Analysis of the Information Environment (MAIE) platform, a tool for advanced analysis of the information environment including online and social media.[257] While these two projects were initiated at different times and have different levels of maturity, close coordination takes place between the project teams to ensure complementarity of efforts and alignment of usage at mission level. Looking ahead, these projects will require continued adaptation as AI improves in its ability to target audiences with engaging narratives as "recent advances in natural language processing could even 'leverage sentiment analysis to target specific ideological audiences'".[258] It is also notable that tracking "deep fakes across the Internet is a critical priority that will only become more urgent".[259]

8.3. Mission-led initiatives

MDMH is a multidisciplinary challenge which requires a multidisciplinary response. This following section sets out key strategic, operational and tactical level initiatives to counter MDMH threatening to undermine UN PKO mandate implementation and the safety and security of peacekeepers, the communities they serve, and other key stakeholders. Existing divisions and challenges that UN PKOs are facing can be exploited by armed actors and other stakeholders to influence and shape the information environment. This can include the political landscape to "undermine confidence in missions, and, at times, to mobilize violence against civilians, UN personnel, and other targets".[260] The efforts of UN PKOs are carefully scrutinised by external actors, such as parties to the conflict and their supporters, as well as by the civilian population. Additionally, digital technologies contribute to the challenges with far-reaching implications[261] for UN PKOs, their mandate implementation and the people they are there to protect. In certain contexts and countries, government-aligned media can be influenced by cronyism[262] and hence can instigate, amplify, and contribute to MDMH campaigns to support their objectives, which abuses and mobilises the "general public and unsuspecting users".[263] Thus, while the four UN PKOs have all experienced the use and impact of MDMH during different periods as reflected in UNSG reports and UNSC resolutions and included in their mandates,

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257 Interview with UN personnel, March 2024.

258 Lahmann, H. (2022). Working Papers. op. cit.

259 Radsch, C. (2022). Artificial Intelligence and Disinformation: State-aligned information operations and the distortion of the public sphere. Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), July.

260 Sherman, J. and Trithart, A. (2021). Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations. op. cit.

261 Lahmann, H. (2022). Working Papers. op. cit.

262 Dragormi, M. (2021). State of State Media: A Global Analysis of the Editorial Independence of State Media and an Introduction of a New State Media Typology. CEU Democracy Institute; Aro, J. (2016). The Cyberspace War: Propaganda and Trolling as Warfare Tools. *European View*, 15(1), June; Wierzejski, A. (Ed.). (2017). Information Warfare in the Internet: Countering Pro-Kremlin Disinformation in the CEE Countries. Centre for International Relations.
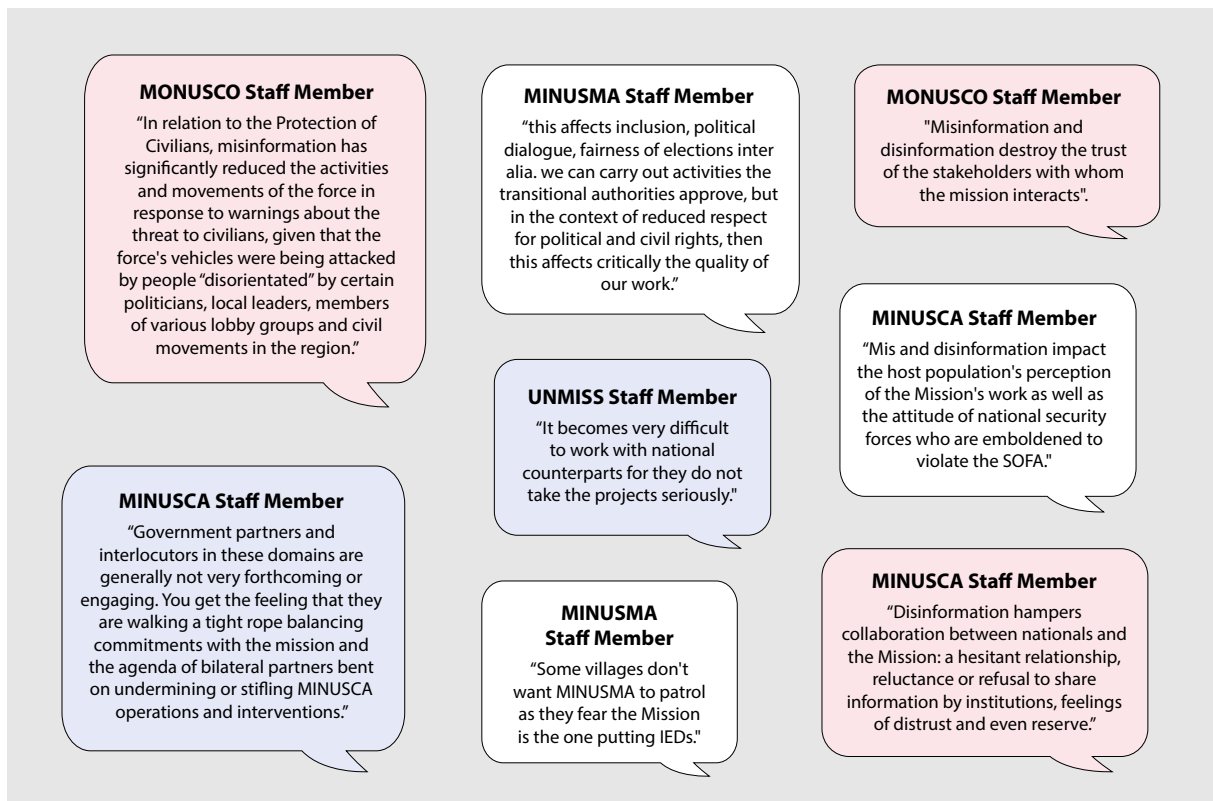
263 Radsch, C. (2022). Artificial Intelligence and Disinformation. op. cit.

these missions understand and address the challenges differently based on the country context, the mission leadership stance and other factors.

Over the past few years, the UN DPO Information Integrity Unit carried out perception surveys among UN Peacekeeping personnel to reach respondents with insight into mis- and disinformation challenges in UN PKOs and to aggregate their views on the on-the-ground impact in a systematic and structured way. The quotes in Figure 16 illustrate how mission personnel in various UN PKOs understand MDMH to impact mandate implementation. Drawing from the same survey, Figure 17 illustrates that PoC, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), human rights and political work are among the most impacted by MDMH. To prevent and respond to MDMH, missions have undertaken several efforts, including through communication on social media, as illustrated in Figure 18.

Figure 16: Quotations from the UN DPO mis- and disinformation survey of UN PKO personnel, June 2023

Q: To what extent does mis- and disinformation impede mandate implementation in your mission area?

MONUSCO Staff Member
"In relation to the Protection of Civilians, misinformation has significantly reduced the activities and movements of the force in response to warnings about the threat to civilians, given that the force's vehicles were being attacked by people "disorientated" by certain politicians, local leaders, members of various lobby groups and civil movements in the region."

MINUSMA Staff Member
"this affects inclusion, political dialogue, fairness of elections inter alia. we can carry out activities the transitional authorities approve, but in the context of reduced respect for political and civil rights, then this affects critically the quality of our work."

MONUSCO Staff Member
"Misinformation and disinformation destroy the trust of the stakeholders with whom the mission interacts".

MINUSCA Staff Member
"Mis and disinformation impact the host population's perception of the Mission's work as well as the attitude of national security forces who are emboldened to violate the SOFA."

UNMISS Staff Member
"It becomes very difficult to work with national counterparts for they do not take the projects seriously."

MINUSCA Staff Member
"Government partners and interlocutors in these domains are generally not very forthcoming or engaging. You get the feeling that they are walking a tight rope balancing commitments with the mission and the agenda of bilateral partners bent on undermining or stifling MINUSCA operations and interventions."

MINUSMA Staff Member
"Some villages don't want MINUSMA to patrol as they fear the Mission is the one putting IEDs."

MINUSCA Staff Member
"Disinformation hampers collaboration between nationals and the Mission: a hesitant relationship, reluctance or refusal to share information by institutions, feelings of distrust and even reserve."

Figure 17: UN DPO mis- and disinformation survey responses of UN PKO personnel on mandated areas impacted, June 2023 and March 2022
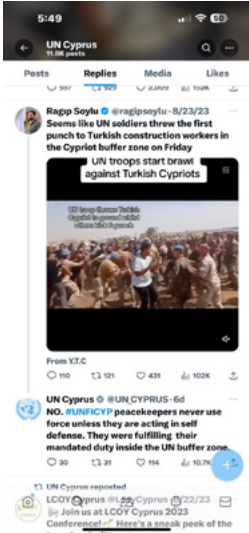
Q: To what extent does mis- and disinformation impact the following areas (where mandated)?

Figure 18: UN DPO, DOS and DMSPC strategic communications and mis- and disinformation presentation, November 2023

- MINUSCA training media, bloggers and civil society. Dedicated radio programming and joint communication with national authorities.

- UNFICYP responded rapidly and robustly to allegations of violence against civilians.

- MINUSMA providing regular updates on withdrawal process, intensive key leader engagement, and online campaign to promote legacy impact on peace and stability.

- MONUSCO increased digital coverage of Force protection efforts from 0.5% to 40%. Online campaign to pre-bunk and build resilience Using proxy communicators for increased credibility.

- UNMISS scaling up awareness-raising efforts ahead of elections to create a safe space for civic engagement.

While "peacekeeping operations typically include large military and police components and may use force in a time-bound, localised way, most missions employ a range of civilian, military, and police efforts to achieve political objectives".[264] Therefore, "UN PKOs need to use a wider, people-focused approach towards its deployment of strategic communications".[265] Given the

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264 Sherman, J. and Trithart, A. (2021). Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations. op. cit.
265 Ibid.

vast number of peacekeepers from different cultural backgrounds, the mission leadership needs to see strategic communication as core to improving its capacity and reaching effectiveness. This is not to say that mission effectiveness hinges only on how it responds to MDMH, but it should be seen as part of the mission's efforts to be more people-focused and respond to wider issues, like the protection of civilians and community engagement. A more adaptive approach which incorporates awareness of MDMH can help to improve the "fragmented, unclear, and inconsistent reporting lines [that] emerge and create a disconnect between strategic communications personnel and mission leaders or other mission sections or components" but also the wider communities that these missions are deployed to serve.[266] Hence, mission-led initiatives should depend on leadership and harness the management and leadership capacity at the strategic level to ensure that mission sections and components jointly identify the priority threats to address at strategic, operational and tactical levels, in close consultation with communities, humanitarians and other actors.[267]

MDMH Working Groups within UN PKOs

Over the past few years, the UN DPO Information Integrity Unit led the establishment of Mis- and Disinformation Working Groups in several UN PKOs. In MINUSMA, the Working Group aimed "to take a proactive approach to communications to limit mission vulnerabilities to mis and disinformation, as well as ensure the mission messaging is effective at countering such information". The aim was for this to be achieved "by ensuring all mission stakeholders support an integrated planning process that will enable early or pre-emptive identification of possible communication issues and an integrated response before such issues trigger a crisis response."[268] This work was anchored in a term of reference (ToR) for the Working Group, highlighting the need for a proactive and integrated whole-of-mission approach to consistently engage with external stakeholders, outlining objectives, roles and responsibilities of various mission components, and providing a range of response options to MDMH. Importantly, the ToR provided clarity on the information flow and the decision process through charts. The creation of such mission-specific charts provides peacekeeping personnel with clarity on roles and responsibilities in addressing MDMH and the sequence of steps.

A key directive from mission leadership in various UN PKOs, and based on requests from UNHQ, was to establish Working Groups focusing on MDMH. These Working Groups are an important tool in clarifying, processing, and responding to reports that mission leadership receives, including on the circulation and interpretation of social media posts. While it is common to receive quantitative reports, qualitative context-specific analysis seems to be missing and lacking in its understanding of why and how the respective posts are targeting the UN PKO.[269]

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266 Ibid.

267 UN DPO. (2019). Policy, The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping.

268 UN. (2023). MINUSMA Misinformation and Disinformation. op. cit.

269 Trithart, A. (2022). Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations. op. cit.

While MINUSCA, MONUSCO and UNMISS have each taken steps to build capacity within the mission to engage on MDMH through their respective Working Groups, the coordination of such Working Groups requires dedicated time and efforts in order for their work to (continue to) be mainstreamed throughout the missions. In addition, dedicated resources are required to ensure the effectiveness of these Working Groups, including a united and adaptive mission strategy and approach and a systematic understanding of how MDMH is evolving and interacting with broader aspects of the missions' work and situational awareness.

> Each of the UN PKO Working Groups has differing ToRs and involves the participation of different sections and components. However, a common thread runs through these work strands relating to both PoC and the safety and security of peacekeepers.

Each of the UN PKO Working Groups has differing ToRs and involves the participation of different sections and components. However, a common thread runs through these work strands relating to both PoC and the safety and security of peacekeepers. In each mission, the Working Groups have different reporting lines, yet in composition, it is key that a whole-of-mission approach is taken by engaging different civilian and uniformed components. The use of technology in each differs. However, core tasks include coordination, information sharing, monitoring and analysis, as well as developing proactive, preventive action, and responses that draw from weekly consolidated analysis and risk assessments.[270]

Capacities

The evolution in the information environment and associated analytical approaches requires updated staff profiles with new specialisations and experiences, including capacity for online data and social media analysis. UN PKOs are not only lacking "strategic communications personnel with the up-to-date, specialised skills needed in today's technology and media environment",[271] the MDMH challenge also calls for the involvement of capacities that are to be found elsewhere, such as digital forensics. New and specific skills need to be completed with a good understanding of the country context while being able to capture the information dissemination through social media channels on a 24/7 basis. While much is benign, some are attempting to toxify the information environment, and some effectively succeed, risking destabilisation and the safety and security of the UN staff. It was observed that civilian communications staff "lack

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270 UN. (2023). MINUSCA Interoffice Memorandum, Terms of Reference for the Working Group to Addressing Mis and Disinformation targeting MINUSCA.

271 Sherman, J. and Trithart, A. (2021). Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations. op. cit.

skills in areas such as data analysis and digital technology, and this skill set is not reflected in the generic job postings that missions use to recruit".[272] Coordination between the staff managing UN PKO social media accounts and those utilising more traditional analytical approaches also requires specific skillsets and capacities. A possible consequence of this is that mission reporting on MDMH is still variable, as illustrated in Figure 21.

Figure 21: UN DPO mis- and disinformation survey responses for UN PKO personnel, June 2023 and March 2022

Q: Does your mission's mis- and disinformation monitoring feed into analysis and reporting?
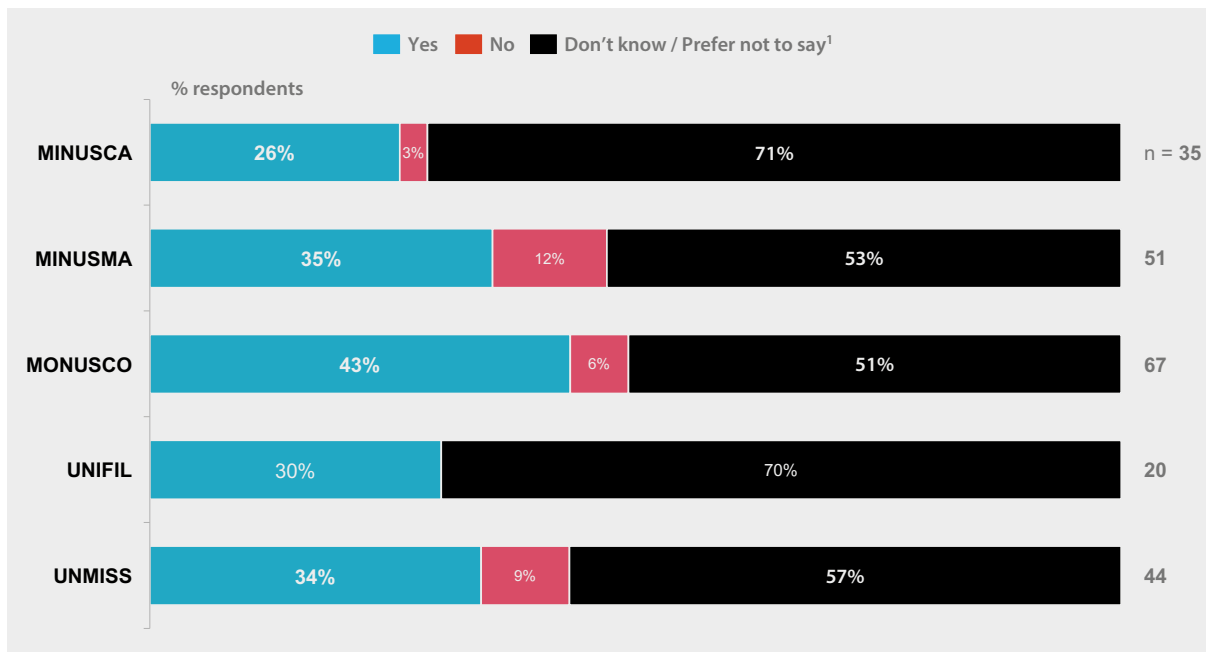
In their work to address MDMH, UN PKOs have identified community engagement and information-sharing sessions with local media, community leaders and host governments as a key element. In many UN PKO environments, this can be a delicate exercise. For example, strategic communication remains a challenging endeavour, even for experienced professionals, because it depends on the country contexts and political changes, as the expulsions of MINUSMA's and MONUSCO's spokespersons in Mali[273] and DRC demonstrate. The expulsions formed part of a much wider diplomatic and political matter that enabled the host countries to accuse the spokesperson of working in opposition to the authorities. For instance, in DRC, the government effectively expelled the MONUSCO spokesperson after accusing him of making "indelicate and inappropriate" statements that authorities said contributed to the tensions with

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272 Ibid.

273 France24. (2022). Mali expels spokesperson of UN Peacekeeping mission in row over tweets. 20 July. https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220720- -mali-expels-spokesperson-of-un-peacekeeping-mission-minusma

the local population.[274] Similarly, in Mali, the government took more radical actions regarding information and communication in general and expelled the MINUSMA spokesperson and the MINUSMA Human Rights Director.[275] The government also prohibited certain international media (such as RFI and France24),[276] limited the work of NGOs receiving French funds, and used certain Malian media to conduct disinformation campaigns.[277] In this context and according to researchers, anti-MINUSMA protests, organised by an anti-Western and anti-MINUSMA civil society movement which backed the military government, accused the mission of undermining the country's sovereignty. For instance, Yerewolo (civil society pro-Malian junta movement) waved the flags of Mali and Russia and chanted slogans against MINUSMA during a rally in Bamako in September 2022.[278] These examples illustrate the challenges faced by empowered and experienced staff who are able to read and understand the country contexts and the potential impact of information disorder on the mission mandate implementation and PoC. It also underlines the importance of consistent and continuous efforts to share information and engage communities, as was echoed by UN PKO personnel in the DPO survey when speaking about their efforts in the mission (see Figure 22).

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274 This can also affect issues related to UN Missions, where Peacekeeping Missions are facing doubts by the population, leading to crisis where they face mis-, and disinformation linked to their limited operational effectiveness and the erosion of core UN Peacekeeping principles. "These are the nation's consent and the operation's legitimacy in the eyes of local populations". Dessu, M.K. and Yohannes, D. (2022). What do protests say about UN Peacekeeping in Africa? Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 28 October. https://issafrica.org/iss-today/what-do-protests-say-about-un-peacekeeping-in-africa; Muhindo Sengenya, C. (2022). Why we're protesting against UN peacekeepers in DR Congo. op. cit.

275 Podcast RFI. (2023). Revue de Presse Afrique, A la Une: Sergueï Lavrov à Bamako. 6 February. https://open.spotify.com/episode/6HDxAfwXk81YGur1GofWh3?si=eDptt_J-QM6tVCODuHigjA&nd=1

276 Podcast RTS. (2022). Studio Tamani se bat pour informer dans un Mali en crise. https://www.rts.ch/audio-podcast/2022/audio/studio-tamani-se-bat-pour-informer-dans-un-mali-en-crise-25876797.html

277 Podcast RFI. (2023). Revue de Presse Afrique, A la une: l'idylle entre le Mali et la Russie. 8 February. https://open.spotify.com/episode/6I8CTiFog4M4Vxy32Ytmrm?si=4vsq_VykQwyomiAvM-Scsw&nd=1

278 Dessu, M.K. and Yohannes, D. (2022). What do protests say about UN Peacekeeping in Africa? op. cit.

Figure 22: UN DPO mis- and disinformation survey responses for UN PKO personnel, June 2023 and March 2022
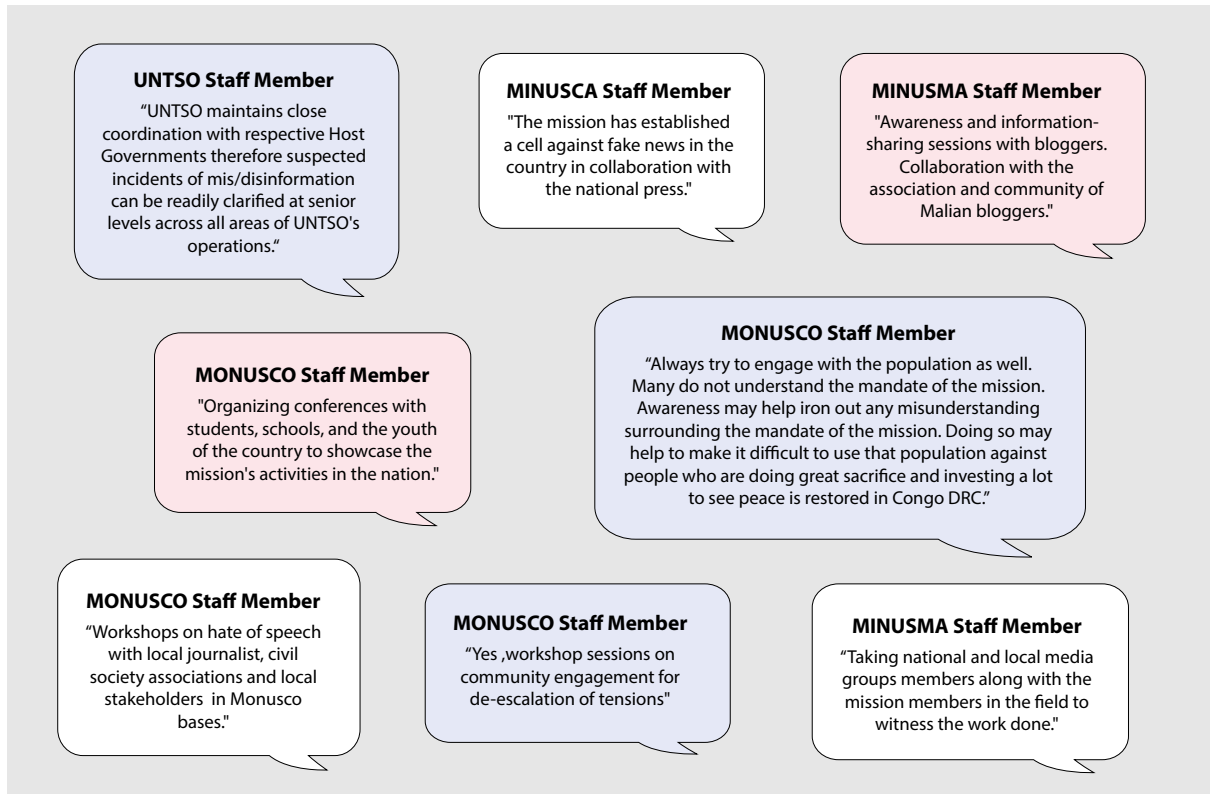
Staff working on MDMH and strategic communication require an in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics linked to multiple ethnicities and languages co-existing in a region of the country. The linguistic diversity in a country impacts the capacity of AI to "effectively counteract disinformation or online harassment",[279] as the respective languages are not prioritised by major platforms. Similarly, linguistic diversity in conflict areas is not matched by linguistic capacity in key analytical and communications roles. For instance, "monitoring misinformation that spreads by word-of-mouth requires substantial community engagement – an area where missions sometimes fall short".[280] Challenges (COVID-19 linked) to direct engagement have further limited the ability of UN PKOs to monitor and address MDMH effectively. As such, UN PKOs have often been slow to understand and acknowledge that a problematic narrative is receiving attention among key stakeholders. Additionally, Civil Affairs components, through their work on community-level confidence-building, outreach and engagement, have a key role to play in this area.

UN PKO uniformed and civilian personnel play a crucial role in both analysing MDMH and developing appropriate responses. Information operations are a central element of domestic politics as well as geopolitics all over the world,[281] as well as in UN PKOs, where uniformed

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279 Radsch, C. (2022). Artificial Intelligence and Disinformation. op cit.

280 Trithart, A. (2022). Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations. op. cit.

281 Radsch, C. (2022). Artificial Intelligence and Disinformation. op. cit.

components monitor and contribute to online and offline information streams.[282] The military component plays an important role in early warning, adjusting postures based on perceptions, and liaison with national security counterparts. However, the staffing within UN PKO military components focusing on this issue remains minimal. For instance, the officer responsible for information operations in MONUSCO is alone at the Force Headquarters, with a considerable workload leading to prioritisation and selection regarding MDMH.[283] The frequent rotation of uniformed personnel is an additional challenge as it impacts the contextual knowledge the position requires to monitor MDMH effectively and not take the expression of opinions as such.

In close coordination with the DPO Strategic Communication Team, efforts have been undertaken to strengthen the UN Police (UNPOL) Division's strategic communications capacity to engage host-state entities, local communities, and other stakeholders to highlight the work of the UNPOL. Acceptance by local stakeholders increases impact and effectiveness and enhances the ability to respond to incidents, developments, and opportunities. Of particular interest is training and capacity building to respond to threats linked to MDMH by allowing the UNPOL Division to better "monitor and analyse content that may cause civil unrest, put local populations at greater risk, jeopardize the safety and security of peacekeepers, and fracture peacekeepers' relationships with local communities".[284] Key activities have included overhauling the general communications strategy and redesigning the UNPOL website, the development of promotional materials to support understanding of the work, organisation of training initiatives with counterparts in the field to ensure cohesive and comprehensive messaging, and provision of support to field-based personnel in improving and further developing their own communications capacities.

UNPKOs "need to be able to tailor their outreach and messaging to different local communities, armed actors, government officials, and regional and international partners to communicate their objectives, build trust in political processes, raise awareness of potential threats of upcoming operations, quell rumours and mitigate negative perceptions".[285] Thus, it is not only the responsibility of the missions' strategic communication team to address MDMH, but a whole-of-mission approach and understanding. For example, Political Affairs components can advise on political strategies for engagement with political or security actors, while Human Rights components are actively working on hate speech:

> The Missions can support dialogue and mediation efforts, ... which aim to peacefully settle disputes which may otherwise trigger intercommunal conflicts. In situations where other actors may be better placed to provide support or where the mission does not have access

282 Trithart, A. (2022). Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations. op. cit.

283 Consultations at UNHQ, 27-30 March 2023.

284 UNCOPS. (2022). Addressing Key Challenges Facing UN Peacekeeping Through Action For Peacekeeping+ (A4P+). https://police.un.org/sites/default/files/20220823_uncops_background_note_session_01.pdf

285 Sherman, J. and Trithart, A. (2021). Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations. op. cit.

or if its presence may put civilians at risk, it can do this so by supporting third party organizations particularly.[286]

Furthermore, it is of particular interest not only to know how MDMH "emerge and what consequences they may have, but to understand how they arise and travel".[287]

Community outreach and engagement

Effective community outreach and engagement has the potential to mitigate MDMH, reduce dissemination and ensure that key stakeholders have access to both alternative information sources and support. As such, awareness of the circulation of MDMH among key stakeholder groups can and should be factored into ongoing engagement approaches and dialogues by UNPKOs. Digital communications, mission radio and social media are among the tools used by UNPKO components in support of engagement strategies. Active participation of UNPKOs on platforms such as X, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp groups have increased in recent years and in certain instances, peacekeepers engage directly or indirectly with stakeholders through the myriad of opportunities that exist in the information environment.

As illustrated in the quote below, community outreach is one of the most used actions by missions to respond to MDMH, while mission radio stations and various social media platforms are frequently used to counteract MDMH. As noted in the UN DPO PoC policy, engagements:

> with communities should be an inclusive, two-way exercise which begins with listening to communities about their protection needs and capacities. It should identify, support and bolster existing structures and mechanisms to resolve and respond to conflict and be inclusive of the protection needs of all community members, for example, by considering the specific security needs of women. Where appropriate, it should also reinforce trust by building relations between authorities and the population and preventing security vacuums. For example, the use of community-oriented policing can help enhance the trust of the public in local state institutions, as well as building situational awareness and community cooperation and public confidence in the mission.[288]

When this link to the population can be established and maintained, it may reduce the risk for communities to believe in MDMH used against UN PKOs.

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286 UN DPO. (2019). Policy, The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping. op. cit.

287 Udupa, S. et al. (2020). Hate Speech, Information Disorder, and Conflict. op. cit.

288 UN DPO. (2019). Policy, The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping. op. cit.

Communication strategies and non-strategic communications

It is critical that addressing MDMH is approached as a shared, mission-wide responsibility and that there is a clear division of roles and responsibilities engaging all mission components, as each can play a role in addressing MDMH through their ongoing dialogues and engagements with stakeholders. "Disinformation is not only a strategic communications issue; it affects all mission components, and effectively tackling it requires situating it in the broader political context and understanding its drivers".[289] It should be noted that some individuals and sections are highly active in using digital media to promote their work. While the targeted audience is often somewhat removed from the conflict, there is a degree to which this information is accessible to those directly involved and affected by the conflict. While it can be that the digital media is used by the UNPKOs in a strategic and controlled way through official accounts, peacekeeping personnel may also privately post and share work-related content on their personal social media accounts, including X, LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok and others. These social media accounts offer the possibility for the local population to connect, follow and engage directly with UN PKO personnel, national or international, which impacts the diffusion of a posted message. While the mantra "communication should also be two-way so that missions are not simply informing local communities but also being informed by them"[290] should be followed, it comes with the concern that little strategic consideration is being given regarding how to utilise the significant amount of information sharing and exchanges. It should be acknowledged that much unregulated sharing is already taking place, which may positively or negatively impact UNPKOs. This should, in part, assuage those with worries regarding in-mission opportunities to increase the volume of positive narratives and those that counter concerning narratives.

The UN Secretariat has published guidelines for the personal use of social media, which state that:

> staff are encouraged to promote a better understanding of the objectives and work of the Organization through social media and to advocate for the ideals, principles and values enshrined in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other decisions taken by the Organization.[291]

There are, however, often strict limitations on how this may be done.[292] While these guidelines acknowledge the importance of the role of each staff member regarding communication, it remains difficult to generalise as these information pieces can be problematic. As stated in the guidelines:

> a staff member's activity on personal social media, even when unrelated to official duties, may reflect on the Organization and may expose the UN to reputational risk. As international

289 Ibid.

290 Sherman, J. and Trithart, A. (2021). Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations. op. cit.

291 UN Secretariat. (2019). Guidelines for the personal use of social media. February.
     https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/handbook/UNS%20personal%20use%20social%20media%20guidelines.pdf

292 Consultations at UNHQ, 27-30 March 2023.

civil servants, staff have a duty to be and appear to be both independent and impartial. As such, staff must ensure that the expression of their personal views and convictions on social media does not adversely affect their official duties, reflect poorly on their status as international civil servants or call into question their duty of loyalty, impartiality and responsibility to the Organization.[293]

It might be considered an unexploited opportunity given the potential that nonstrategic and personal information sharing has on the information environment, both as a challenge and an opportunity worthy of consideration as Missions grapple with how they might appropriately engage.

Quick-impact projects (QIPs)

A UN study noted that "local perceptions can assist missions in identifying strategic confidence building measures, such as campaigns to correct misinformation, QIPs and initiatives to improve mission's reputations".[294] The small-scale, low-cost and short-term projects called QIPs, funded and monitored by the respective UN PKO, can play supportive roles in addressing MDMH.[295] The primary goal of QIPs is "to improve the perception of the peacekeeping mission rather than to contribute to the long-term development and well-being of the local population… [and] should instil trust in the mission, its mandate and the peace process".[296] Planned and implemented within a short timeframe with a view to responding to the needs and concerns expressed by local communities, they offer opportunities for dialogue and relationship building. Covering a wide range of activities from refurbishing schools to providing women with safe water points, they offer an opportunity to counter MDMH related to the mission and its personnel indirectly.

Gauging appropriate reaction

The Protection of Civilians handbook states that UN PKOs:

cannot – and should not – react to every piece of disinformation. Mission personnel thus identified several factors that play into their decision on whether to respond. One factor is virality: Missions only respond to falsehood if it has spread widely. A second is the egregiousness of the falsehood.[297]

293 Ibid.

294 UN. (2013). Understanding and Integrating Local Perceptions in multi-dimensional UN Peacekeeping. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/2013.dpko_.localperceptionsstudy.en_.pdf

295 Consultations at UNHQ, 27-30 March 2023.

296 Sauter, M. (2022). Humanitarian-Peacekeeping Tensions in UN Missions in Africa. Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP). https://www.gcsp.ch/publications/humanitarian-peacekeeping-tensions-un-missions-africa

297 Trithart, A. (2022). Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations. op. cit.

Despite this formal guidance seemingly advocating a selective and reactive rather than proactive approach to address MDMH, UN PKOs increasingly face challenges with this approach. Once MDMH is spreading widely, it is difficult to control, mitigate or ignore the potential impact it has, as it has already entered the minds of people. Rather than focusing on reacting to select MDMH, one may argue that a greater emphasis should be placed on proactive communication to prevent MDMH from finding its place to harm people. Within UN PKOs, further clarity is required regarding at what level proactive communication and responses to MDMH should take place and who should take the lead on these efforts.

MDMH, misconduct of UN peacekeepers, and safety and security

The UN DPO Policy on the Protection of Civilians and UNSCR 2436 (2018) state that it is critical to have a "comprehensive and integrated performance policy framework"[298] that creates standards for the performance reviews of civilian and uniformed UN Peacekeeping personnel and improves accountability mechanisms of UN PKOs and their personnel. Among other things, this framework helps UN PKOs to hold their personnel accountable for misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse.[299] Greater performance and accountability, as well as transparent communication on this, may help to reduce frustrations within communities about UNPKO performance, which in turn may decrease breeding grounds for MDMH targeting UNPKOs. Misconduct by peacekeeping personnel has the potential to fuel MDMH, contributing to a vicious circle in which UN peacekeepers and assets are targeted by violence, impacting their safety and security, and shrinking the space in which they can conduct activities to implement their mandated tasks. The UN PKO's subsequent limited performance, including failure to protect civilians, provides further fuel for criticism against these missions, spiralling into a ruthless and uncontrollable MDMH environment.

"Feeding off of long-standing public frustration and genuine instances of UN missteps or misconduct... anti-UN disinformation makes it harder for peacekeeping operations to implement their mandates and has put the safety of peacekeepers at risk".[300] To illustrate this, over the past years, MONUSCO has faced widespread MDMH, which has directly impacted the space in which the mission is able to operate and, as a result, has decreased the mission's ability to implement mandated tasks. It is "currently subject to anti-mission sentiment in some parts of the country and warns that narratives of concern, including fake news, spread by militias on social media are difficult to distinguish from reality and will soon be virtually undetectable".[301] MONUSCO has been increasingly facing protests calling for its withdrawal for multiple reasons, including accusations pointing to failure to protect civilians as well as misconduct

298 UN DPO. (2019). Policy, The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping. op. cit.

299 Ibid.

300 Trithart, A. (2022). Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations. op. cit.

301 Benkler, M., et al. (2022). Protecting the truth: Peace operations and disinformation. Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF), October.
      https://www.zif-berlin.org/sites/zif-berlin.org/files/2022-11/ZIF_Studie_Desinfo_en_FINAL.pdf

of peacekeepers. 302 These protests have led to violent demonstrations against the mission, particularly in Kinshasa and Eastern DRC, and analysts say that in the wake of the 2023 elections, political actors are fuelling unrest. While the population considers MONUSCO ineffective in its actions, the mission's communication is often seen as unclear by communities, which contributes to further frustration rather than understanding.

Despite zero-tolerance efforts on misconduct by UN staff, missions continue to experience negative publicity due to allegations and verified incidents of conduct and discipline problems. Each mission must be particularly "aware of the potential risks to civilians caused by their own actions".[303] It is without question that information related to the negative behaviour of peacekeepers has the potential to damage the overall reputation of the mission and the trust the population shows towards it. Additionally, this information can be blown out of proportion to support an anti-mission or anti-mandate agenda and, hence, could be used as malinformation to damage the relationship with the population. As already mentioned above, it seems to be obvious that proactive communications on these issues are more effective than limiting information and negatively impact operations and programmes.[304] Immediate communication on receipt of the allegation and updating regularly with regard to how the allegation is being processed is considered a more effective crisis communications approach. It allows emphasis to be placed on the corrective capacity of missions and the work of many other colleagues who have not been accused, and by assuring "the population of the Mission's intent to protect civilians from physical violence and the establishment of community engagement and alert mechanisms in coordination with civilian components".[305]

Managing and preventing MDMH

Engaging with the complex information environment in UN PKO contexts is a task that takes dedicated resources, time, and experience. Clear communication is required to provide clarity around mandated tasks of UN PKOs as well as their relation to other stakeholders, managing expectations of what these missions can and cannot deliver. Proactive, transparent and relatable communication approaches that present UN PKO roles and responsibilities in an understandable manner to communities are crucial elements in preventing MDMH from spreading widely. The three approaches highlighted in Figure 23 are essential in preventing MDMH.

302 Al Jazeera. (2022). UN peacekeepers open fire in DR Congo, causing several casualties. 31 July.
     https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/31/un-peacekeepers-open-fire-in-dr-congo-causing-several-casualties

303 UN DPO. (2019). Policy, The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping. op. cit.

304 Consultations at UNHQ, 27-30 March 2023.

305 UN DPO. (2019). Policy, The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping. op. cit.

Figure 23: UN DPO, DOS and DMSPC strategic communications and mis- and disinformation presentation, November 2023

Proactive messaging
- **MINUSCA:** 'Prebunking' harmful narratives
- Increased presence on social and traditional media
- **MINUSMA:** Showcase personal commitment
- **UNIFIL:** illustrate historical contributions
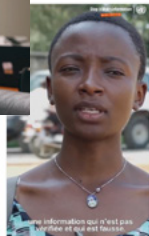
Outreach and Engagement
- Engage with community leaders, **MINUSCA** interviews with community leaders aired on Radio Guira
- **MONUSCO** media literacy campaign
- **MONUSCO:** built a network of 'proxy communicators'
- Network of CLAs for offline monitoring and engagement
- **MINUSMA** workshops with local bloggers

Preparedness
- In person and virtual training to multiple missions
- Guidelines in development on anticipating vulnerable moments and mitigation measures
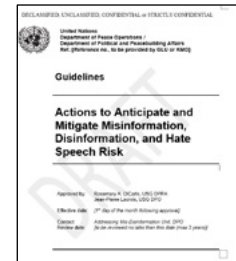
When undertaking these activities, particular attention must be given to the protection of national staff. While best placed to comprehend the environment, they may also be targeted if publicly connected with controversies linked to the mission. This "expectations gap can lead to resentment or anger, undermining public trust in the mission and jeopardizing its ability to protect civilians, demobilize former combatants, or secure and maintain participation in political processes".[306] An example of the complexity of a mission context and the actors involved is MINUSMA in Mali. For instance, after continuous discontent from the population regarding the French military Operation Barkhane and two coups d'état that impacted the political environment, France closed Operation Barkhane and left the country. According to analysts, this played into other countries' strategies, such as Russia, which "has been adept at playing on and inflaming anti-France sentiment in former French colonies, from Mali to the Central African Republic"[307] and tying closer alliances with some African leaders while using certain elements such as colonialism, slavery, or crimes to position itself as supporter and liberator of these African countries from past colonialism.[308] Such messages can be easily posted on social media and fuel MDMH, as they have little protective policies, offering themselves as "unfettered space for Russian propaganda" and enabling "a broad, long-term influence operation."[309]

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306 Sherman, J. and Trithart, A. (2021). Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations. op. cit.

307 Lawal, S. (2022). Russian trolls and mercenaries win allies and good will in Africa. 25 August.
     https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/russian-mercenaries-mali-africa

308 Ibid.

309 Ibid.

8.4. Converging and complementarity of efforts

Overall, while much has been achieved already at both UNHQ and UN PKO levels, there remains a significant amount of work to do to ensure that the capacities of UN PKOs are commensurate with the demands of the information age. MDMH are drivers of negative value with regards to communications 'between the peoples', further compounding the challenges facing the UN in terms of international peace and security. There is widespread acknowledgement of the seriousness of the issues and critical momentum behind this work currently. Much of the critical support being developed is likely to come to fruition soon. Efforts to contextualise approaches in each of the UN PKO contexts are considering the differing manifestations of the phenomena. However, UN PKOs continue to face limited efficacy, credibility and reputation-based communications. Appropriate cooperation approaches with key partners, such as both humanitarians and national authorities, remain undefined and underdeveloped, showing divisions that can be exploited by certain actors.

The technological challenges remain significant and are unlikely to diminish in the short to medium term. Rather, it is likely that they increase as AI proliferates. To counter these developments in a coherent way, and to get ahead of them, collaboration both horizontally and vertically is key. To achieve the development of effective responses, UN PKO leadership need to ensure "joint threat assessments and effective information-sharing, early warning and coordination among civilian and uniformed components at senior and working levels, as well as consultation with other relevant protection actors".[310]

Questions remain as to whether the issues can be resolved by technical improvements to mission approaches, or whether an entire rethink is required of mission positioning, objectives and timeframes to minimise negative attention paid to both UN PKOs and their mandate. Overall, "disinformation is a symptom of broader challenges facing UN Peacekeeping operations, including international and regional geopolitics and often-tense relationships with host-state governments and populations".[311] As such, the UN DPO needs to engage strategically in terms of where to prioritise efforts and comprehensively in terms of engaging all relevant sections and components of UN PKOs and partners to the mission in these efforts. Strategic communications capabilities should be enhanced and utilised where most appropriate. However, proactive communication and dialogue approaches should be equally considered with regard to how best to engage both MDMH creators and their audiences.

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310 UN DPO. (2019). Policy, The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping. op. cit.
311 Sherman, J. and Trithart, A. (2021). Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations. op. cit.

9. Conclusion

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The complexity of understanding how MDMH can infiltrate, embed, and intervene in conflict and fragile settings is still emerging, and this report has attempted to provide some understanding of its spread in four different contexts, specifically through examples in the DRC and CAR. As the analysis in this report has demonstrated, the spread of MDMH is nothing new. However, the modern and sophisticated forms that it takes should be of concern because of the nature that it takes on when its use interacts with different fragile and conflicted-affected settings and during peaceful times.

> The spread of MDMH is nothing new. However, the modern and sophisticated forms that it takes should be of concern because of the nature that it takes on when its use interacts with different fragile and conflicted-affected settings and during peaceful times.

The report has demonstrated that while at the UNHQ level there have been strategic efforts to support UN PKO through policies, working groups, training and lessons learned, these efforts can be further enhanced by including more robust and consistent support from Member States. While the on-the-ground realities varied, the report does note that efforts by UN PKO FOs were present, but they needed more long-term support in terms of human resources, financing and sustained engagement from the entire mission.

> While the on-the-ground realities varied, the report does note that efforts by UN PKO FOs were present, but they needed more long-term support in terms of human resources, financing and sustained engagement from the entire mission.

More broadly, the report highlighted that when this support is not put in place, missions under observation, and other EPON studies focused on UN PKOs in Africa have demonstrated that these missions tend to suffer from a negative spectral timelapse where the mission shifts into survival mode and continues to push on despite clear evidence that things are not working. In this case, the report identifies that in all four cases selected, missions tended to struggle during pivotal moments with the issue of MDMH essentially because local actors were connecting PoC, political, human rights and other challenges to the mission's responsibility in its mandate. While we also note that many of these issues are the responsibility of States, the missions become scapegoats for States' lack of presence or ineffectiveness. As a result, the missions become targets by the State to deflect from their inabilities to protect its people, provide aid or humanitarian support or, in many cases, provide the needed governance that communities deserve and want. When this situation connects with a negative spectral time-lapse effective in UN PKOs in Africa, we are more likely to see a surge in the use of MDMH, particularly hate speech and disinformation.

> While we also note that many of these issues are the responsibility of States, the missions become scapegoats for States' lack of presence or ineffectiveness. As a result, the missions become targets by the State to deflect from their inabilities to protect its people, provide aid or humanitarian support or, in many cases, provide the needed governance that communities deserve and want.

MDMH can further escalate the negative spectral time-lapse effective on a mission and intervene indirectly with the difficulties of establishing concrete ways and guidance to prevent and address the spread of MDMH. Despite these challenges, many UN entities undertook various initiatives to identify and address the challenges linked to the evolving use of MDMH. However, the different approaches introduced different understandings of the phenomena, depending on which thematic area it is being designed to address.

> These differences are significant because they mean that
> missions are trying to adopt their own unique ways to adjust
> to the situation, but this difference is not always reflected in
> the bottom-up approach of the FO to UNHQ, UNSG and
> UNSC, which can result in MDMH being understood slightly
> differently in respective UN entities.

These differences are significant because they mean that missions are trying to adopt their own unique ways to adjust to the situation, but this difference is not always reflected in the bottom-up approach of the FO to UNHQ, UNSG and UNSC, which can result in MDMH being understood slightly differently in respective UN entities. This produces situations that make it difficult to elaborate joint actions to address the phenomena as well as to agree on a common understanding, which loops back into the negative spectral timelapse effective on the UN missions. This challenge is compounded and influenced by different Member States' political interests and strategies. Unfortunately, this siloed approach to a transversal issue seems unrealistic when addressing the phenomena effectively. It also refers to the need to understand the actors involved in the dynamics around MDMH as any UN initiative, no matter the thematic area, should be able to map the threat, the alleged perpetrator, and the potential victims or targets, and what action should be taken by whom to address the threat and protect the potential targets.

> This challenge is compounded and influenced by different
> Member States' political interests and strategies. Unfortunately,
> this siloed approach to a transversal issue seems unrealistic
> when addressing the phenomena effectively.

Therefore, to address these challenges, the EPON team offers a few specific recommendations for the UNSG, UNHQ, UNSC, Member States, and UN PKOs to enhance the mission's work and engagement with the communities and governments where they are deployed. The recommendations should be adapted to the context where missions are based and complemented with local knowledge and analysis of the situation. Thus, the recommendations should not be seen as a blanket list for all missions but as a reflection of common challenges showing the need to provide adaptive, adequate, blended, and sustained responses to the challenges that missions face.

10.   Recommendations

Recommendations for UN Peacekeeping Missions

- The mission leadership must ensure a whole-of-mission and people-centred approach by including strategies to analyse, address and tackle the embedded use of MDMH. This should include ensuring that this is embedded and institutionalised within and beyond the mission strategies and the coordination structures. It should further ensure that the threat linked to the use, manifestation and impact of MDMH is included in mission training and capacity building, including induction training, refreshment training, cross-cutting section training (PoC, human rights, conduct and discipline, etc.), and other relevant in-mission training. Mission leadership should ensure that the FOs receive dedicated and sustained support to make appropriate and localised contributions and engagements with the population. Hence, the different Heads of FOs should ensure local-level strategic communications to contribute to the information environment and complement ongoing engagement and dialogue approaches.

- Missions should receive additional technical, experienced and trained staff with context-specific knowledge who have dedicated analytical capacity to monitor and analyse the information environment and identify potential threats and actions linked to MDMH, including AI tools.

- Missions should enhance the coordination within the mission and with other missions on the issue of MDMH by systematically including specific role(s) in an existing section, such as the communications team, but where the reporting lines could link directly to the mission leadership. Reporting lines should also be specifically integrated into the office of the SRSG or the office of the Deputy SRSG (DSRSG), while having focal points at

the Joint Operations Centre (JOC), Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC), Force and UNPOL at HQ and FO level. The role(s) should also be embedded with JMAC, JOC, and uniformed components to ensure that the work carried out by the appointed personnel is part of a joint approach where knowledge and information are shared.

- Strategic Communication is critical in preventing and addressing the use of MDMH. Therefore, missions should increase and ensure that strategic communication efforts include the specific contexts and issues covered by the FOs, demonstrating ongoing efforts while ensuring their link with the mission's objectives. Adopting proactive communication, maintaining a trusting relationship with civilians, community leaders, women's groups, and critical officials, and acknowledging shortcomings will be crucial to building trust and managing expectations.

- Mission sections should invest in their stakeholder engagement strategies while considering MDMH circulating in the information environment. In a whole-of-mission approach, the respective sections should further consider how social media can augment engagement approaches, while doing their daily work and reinforcing their capacity to address MDMH through existing engagement approaches. The sections should collaborate closely with the SCS and the Conduct and Discipline Team (CDT) regarding the misconduct of specific mission staff that can create frustration and a breeding ground for MDMH against the mission. By working together, the different sections must ensure that (social) media coverage of allegations related to the misconduct of peacekeepers is responded to strategically and transparently.

- Mission personnel should be sensitised on their private use of social media as they continue to represent the mission after official working hours. Hence, their social media presence and actions can contribute to the information environment and even to frustrations that represent the breeding ground for disinformation.

Recommendations for the UNSC

- The UNSC should consider the threat caused by MDMH to the missions, its personnel and assets, and the population the mission is mandated to protect, as it threatens safety, security, and protection.

- When the UNSC issues a revised UN PKO mandate, the link between the threat caused by MDMH and PoC should be clearly defined as it is not only a safety and security issue from the mission but has become a protection matter. This requires an adjustment from seeing it as an intervening factor to seeing it as a consequence of a threat to the aims of achieving peace and security and the broader work the mission is doing.

Recommendations for Member States

- As part of the legislative bodies (Fifth Committee), Member States should support the establishment of sustainable teams to address MDMH and provide sustainable funding to the MDMH work at UNHQ and at the mission level. This will support enabling and enhancing analytical capacity to assess the information environment, engagement capacity to ensure ongoing dialogue with key stakeholder groups, and strategic communications to ensure that key messages from the mission are accessible to all stakeholders.

- Member States, through the C34, should request the Secretariat to develop indicators of information harms and systematically document the impact of MDMH on safety and security and mandate implementation.

- The C34 language and references to safety and security, monitoring and reporting, national authorities, and resources and expertise for identification, monitoring analysis and response are important signals of support for UN PKOs, which are critically needed.

- Member States should express support for proactive communication and integrated approaches to monitor, analyse, and respond to MDMH in missions and at UNHQ. They should also request that the Secretariat strengthen capacities to address MDMH, particularly in analysis and strategic communication.

- Member States should support and share lessons learned and context-specific best practices on responses to MDMH with UNHQ, and deploy personnel with requisite capacities and training, as per the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial pledge guide. This should include the provision of additional specialist support through mechanisms like NORCAP to UNHQ as well as the missions.

- Member States should lend technical expertise or other support to the new DPO Strategic Communications/MDMH training for mission leaders and uniformed personnel.

- T/PCCs and regional peacekeeping training centres should provide MDMH pre-deployment training for the various units deploying to UN PKOs.

- Pre-deployment preparations should also include better language training that helps TCCs, which should be used to improve their own communication and social media presence to align it with the mission strategy regarding strategic communication and the communities they are designed to protect.

Recommendations for UNHQ

- Continue efforts to develop official guidance and training on MDMH to identify, address, and engage effectively with the various elements of MDMH, and this should be backed up with adequate support. In doing so, it is recommended to enhance collaboration between different UN entities, including the DPO, DPPA, OHCHR, and Office of Genocide Prevention, on MDMH and continue using new and emerging communication and AI software tools.

- It is recommended that efforts be made to strengthen and find common terminology to articulate the challenges faced at the mission level and the need to prevent and address them. This includes considerations related to the legal frameworks that can address the issue. Common terminology is needed to create joint strategies and actions to address the threats caused by MDMH.

- Institutionalise capacity to address information harms, which would enable UN peace operations to better adapt to today's complex conflict environments, and would be in line with the UNSG's "UN 2.0" vision.

Annexure: Project Summaries

The Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON)

Peace operations are among the most important international mechanisms for contemporary conflict management. However, their effectiveness remains the subject of confusion and debate in both the policy and academic communities. Various international organizations conducting peace operations, including the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU), have come under increasing pressure to justify their effectiveness and impact. Although various initiatives are underway to improve the ability to assess the performance of peace operations, there remains a distinct lack of independent, research-based information about the effectiveness of such operations.

To address this gap, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), together with over 40 partners from across the globe, have established an international network to jointly under- take research into the effectiveness of peace operations. This network has developed a shared methodology to enable the members to undertake research on this topic. This will ensure coherence across cases and facilitate comparative research. The network produce a series of reports that are shared with stakeholders including the UN, AU, and EU, interested national government representatives, researchers, and the general public. All the EPON reports are available via https://effectivepeaceops.net. The network is coordinated by NUPI. Many of the partners fund their own participation. NUPI has also received funding from the Norwegian Research Council and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support the Network and

its research, including via the UN Peace Operations project (UNPOP) and the Training for Peace (TfP) programme.

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NORCAP

NORCAP works to improve aid to better protect and empower people affected by crisis and climate change. We do this by providing expertise and solutions to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding partners.

NORCAP works in two complementary ways to improve aid:

- We provide targeted expertise to strengthen our partners' response.

- We collaborate with partners to develop solutions to un-met gaps and challenges.

NORCAP is a part of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Over the past decades, the use of misinformation, malinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDMH) has contributed to the escalation of violence in environments where the United Nations deployed Peacekeeping Operations (UN PKO). The widespread utilisation of modern technology in UN PKO environments raises the magnitude of the MDMH threat. In some settings, MDMH places communities and peacekeepers at risk of harm, but more broadly, MDMH places UN PKOs in ever more challenging situations which they are often incapable of responding to. The spread of information by actors as part of hearts and minds campaigns and other information strategies to bring populations on the ground on their side is nothing new. Simultaneously, the diffusion of rumours and false information can contribute to the escalation of tensions between and within groups and communities and result in widespread violence. All of these can support and contribute to the intensification and acceleration of MDMH, impacting not only the conflict dynamics but also the use of indiscriminate violence. The online uptake of MDMH may further aggravate these dynamics. It can undermine the stability of mission environments, local conflicts, indiscriminate use of violence by non-state and state actors, impact detrimentally on human rights, and jeopardise overall processes of achieving and sustaining peace and supporting its processes.

The report draws on four UN PKOs as case studies and hinges further analysis on two UN PKOs to provide and understand context specific examples of the rising challenges that UN PKO face with MDMH. This report by the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) in collaboration with NORCAP and Training for Peace sets out to explore some of these key developments and challenges questioning, what is the impact of MDMH on UN PKO's and their ability to effectively implement their mandates? What efforts have the selected UN PKO's taken to respond to MDMH? What are the lessons identified and recommendations for UNPKOs to address MDMH?

EPON ✕

Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network

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