Participant name: Stephen Kingdom, Thomas Coombs, Steve ?

Participant organization: Military Strategic Effects, MOD

**Conversation with MSE, London, January 9, 2025**

**Interview with Stephen Kingdom, Thomas Coombs, Steve ?, MSE, MOD, January 9, 2024**

ITAC, Info and Threats Analysis and Cell. Have Jake make introduction.

Key UK shops: GIF – Gov Information Cell, ITAC, CITT (Cyber Information Threats Team),

Ask Jake to link, up with ITAC. Our own vested interests in Russia, other things as well. And how we can utilize avenues to share the ability to go and do some of the operations we try to do.

MSE does the broad strategy, PGHQ, can’t go permanent joint headquarters, they are the operational layer. 77th is more tactical.

Tanhauser is useful, for permissions we can do things you can’t do. Want to overlay … we have either the platforms or the US might have platforms have…

Stevie and Tom done, discovered deceptive recruitment on young by Russians (we can send you something). And we realized French were doing that and we were able to synchronize the actions and releases on that. Synchronized release and made.

Tom did work with Jake Allen on identifying narratives that could hit the news and put pressure on Russia. A report was made by CIR. But it is a deceptive recruitment of 18-22 year olds who are given a web of lies to say if you want to work in the STEM environment and get a diploma in aerospace engineering you can work here in Russia on drones. That got a lot of legs and was well received. Something the beauty of the Tanhauser framework, allowed us to reach into it to get method of performance but also able to get the message out in francophone countries with French translation of the news article. It will grow legs and the story isn’t going away, websites were taken down by Google and Youtube, recruitment websites, but now they are coming back online.

What is interesting for Tampa, we saw the reaction, the other side and how it effected the information campaign so we know we were successful and we know how much they care about the program.

What makes it work? Face to face, meeting every three months and being able to pick up the phone to discuss things directly with them without having to go through a siloed effort. Deliberately kept it loose and collaborative in nature. How we do it, what our national priorities, we don’t interfere with each other. We have a bit of an issue, can you help us out? Have you heard info on this? It deliberately kept quite loose.

\*\*Cannot mention Tanhauser in a public report.\*\*

Seems obvious but it needed ppl to drive it forward. We knew there was some cooperation between some states and parts and thought it would be good to get together. Trying to establish joint working relationship. … countering disinformation is one of the main elements. The US, COL Sheiffer would likely call it psyop, we call it information ops. If we could do more, just having an appetite.

**Resourcing for Africa?** Everything is geared toward the fight in Europe. One challenge over the last year, that happens when the war in Europe ends, are there other actors building capability, we will not be able to have that space bc we won’t have the five or ten year look like our adversaries. Go look at the map where our adversaries were and see rapid investment, what happens if we don’t (become engaged?).

Niger, where they push out US forces all stationed there and that was all from Russian influence. (other individual response) I don’t know if it was Russia but they took advantage of it. They were quick to turn the narrative. That feeling they could capitalize on. A lot of that sits in the mis/disinformation sphere and if we are not quick enough to do something about that we will miss out. What Africa provides the world, growing economy, youthful population and we risk missing out on. A lot of the minerals, that the world will need, cobalt, aluminium, … it is not about minerals but if Russia has access and does not allow sovereign control (then that be bad).

Audiences Russia dealing with in Africa, proliferating autocracy and normalizing that. Also some of the narrative we had, we don’t care about the war in Ukraine…we have to be careful balancing and aim of countering mis/dis, than proliferating our own narratives. Our narratives don’t resonate well, coercive diplomacy, and Russian…

**Russian goal Africa?** Global… un votes. A vote from Africa is the same as a vote from Canada. Sends message not unified resolve. Don’t even have to vote no. A vote from burkina faso equals a vote from Canada. We probably find examples with the UN in which decisions have not gone the way we would like them to go. And in some cases abstaining tips the balance. Libya is a good example, look in the news, suddenly got credit there. We are a global force of good, humanitarian assistance. And Libyans point to Russia. They are playing the long game, Russia and China, they have this huge resource.

Convenient sanctions avoidance, using those countries for finance flows, they using the fractious nature of African countries to avoid the sanctions to operate freely. And they can do a lot with not a lot of ppl. They don’t have to send thousands of troops to support a junta, they can send 3-400 Africa corps PMCs. The west always comes with promises where Russia says what do you need. The kind of regimes or ppl… when we call Russia out behaviors you have a host of other consternations, it is not malign anymore, which complicates our own interests.

Russia does not have a redline when it comes to influence. We, US, UK and France, we have certain red lines we won’t cross. Wont’ put out messages that harm human life. Russia will, we won’t do that.

Easier to mess things up than bring order.

**Talk about narrative and mis/dis, we try to point out humanitarian abuses, who are we telling? The gov doesn’t care, we are saying these things, how do you find a narrative?**

**Build regional capability in West Africa?** Instead of an outside nation saying this is bad, invest it in the country, to take some tactical issues like… give those nations their own agency for growing themselves. That is the champaign solution. Once you created that infrastructure you don’t have any control over it. Do you need or want control or leaving the door for something like Russia or china.

**Regional solutions?** Need to look at other regional entities. a lot of disin…aimed at ECOWAS. Beyond economics, it is more a security organization. Nigeria is the loudest voice in ECOWAS (and it is based in Nigeria) so a lot of disinfo aimed at Nigeria to dominate the region. …I don’t see anything countering that disinformation.

ECOWAS a small nato -like organization, NATO has its own J10 info ops. Does ECOWAS have a c-disinfo cell that fights that Russia presence? Basically Russia, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger left ECOWAS and established AES (evil cabal). Sahelian … could have a department in Nigeria that does disinfo on behalf of members of ecowas to have that e… rather than each country info cells. Been some work in 9 mo where French and US have Debunk.org, a fact checking op, goes into countries and sets up a fact checking service like Ghana. That is a good start, foot in the door. That country makes it own decisions on what it gets after and if it needs assistance they can reach out.

What about Russian efforts to target health initiatives? We don’t see that. Instead, Russia providing initial services, if outbreak, (they go in and do vaccinations and provide assistance). … we could have been better at identifying these opportunities. The Libyan foot in the door, we could have been quicker but Russia got in their mi-8, and provided other services. This in respect to a flood that happened Oct/Nov, 2023. Russia knew this and quick to put on a the west is not helping you.

Russians fill vacuum and then we have to fight a narrative and we almost have to try to disprove their narrative. Culture, something Russia is good at. They have invested in for a long time.

They are also more creative with how they look at influence. They will do something…

It would be difficult to see what the Rusisan info ops cells are made of. 30 ppl in France, UK and US doing info ops. Probably four hundred in moscow. Some stuff coming out with deceptive recruitment, we could see the box, the online platforms trying to counter the message really quickly. To have that quick response means they have lots of ppl. Probably not as much of a restriction or censorship that we face or (a response we often get) “we can’t do this.” We then get asked, “Why aren’t you doing more info ops?” Well we can’t.

If we think they are trying to be an influencing force for good in the world… is it for the good of mother.

**Todd mentions Der Spiegal report on leak from Russian Social Design Agency.** MOE is hard for us too.

**French?** Different than the west, we are more open. So that has been challenging. When we work with the French we highly aware of their reputation. In countries such as Niger a French branded product would not have the message value. They are aware of that.

We will have meetings… and the US and UK counterparts will have a chat together in the corner of the room (to talk about the French). Last meeting the French set the US and UK folks on opposite ends of the room so we couldn’t chat together.

French are more siloed. Matt Schaifer works IO just for Africa. His equivalent in Paris does IO for the world. They are a small unit doing big problems, they struggle with IA coordination. We have to struggle to show we can work with FCDO colleagues so they understand how things need to be done. It is better. But if you go to Tampa, they will see you. Their system is tough to navigate.

COL Blair (of the French), spoke with FCDO colleagues on issues and we saw that as a win.

Fiona Power, head, one star equivalent in CITT, she runs all the programs. They were talking email but at the start would not talk in the room.