**Cot d’Ivoire Desk** State

Arrived august, I was overseas in the consular section.

**Cot Amb is a go getter.** She wants that bilateral relationship to be where you look at the region, what is going… center piece of us diplomacy in the region. Tons of visits…. She wants ppl to say what is going on in cot’d. it does work bc they can and have in certain spaces served in the lead role, pulling the togos. What ghana is for anglophone west Africa.

She doesn’t say no to anything. They have a lot of visits, CDP was out ther

They are capable, when we want someone, and CDP, they had fruitful talks and they had ppl to talk with and that is what we heard. Dori, I don’t know her full title, under secretary for policy, they have been ramping up the DoD presence since the fall of Niger. Rebasing is one. They have tons of TDyers. Hundreds of DoD running around. . CROAT and AILAT a French acronym, they are both training centers, where they are bringing ppl in from the region. They are working really well with anglophone country neighbors. The main theme I’ve learned is that that power vacuum from the fall of Sahel, Alliance of Sahelian states, burkina, mali and x? the three coup countries. **Russia’s strategy is to use that as a linchpin. I’m surprised not doing Togo, they are more likely to break from ECOWAS and join AES.** He says I can translate… besides rhetoric and propaganda there is kinetic activity and violence and IEDs happening on a day… along the border of all those coastal west African countries. A togo delegation here and showed images of blown apart bodies by ieds. They said daily basis. When you put all the states goether there are daily attacks. The problem is getting the news. Cotv and ghana are better, they have that capacity, have control of their borders. They can keep that activity mostly on burkina side. There is refugee flows. Cotd is doing a good job welcomimg BF refugees. Hosting them in refugee centers and integrating them in.

That is the bigger background. There is an anti-french element in all of that… Russia is targeting propaganda into anti French anti colonialist. Someone forewarded me on Twitter, French soldiers marching in cot’d and Wagner helping to free them from French colonialists. There is a presidential election in oct 2025. The last election was marred by violence might be a thing. There was violence. Has to do with the president who has done the classic dictator thing where reset the clock. I can run again because we redid the constitution. He is plugged into the west. He is not this erdowan type figure or putin type. From what I’ve heard, most./ a sense he has the people’s heart. “he has to keep us safe.” There has never been a peaceful transition of power. If there was a transition it was marred by violence. In 2020, he said I am not running. He has his person he trained up to run.

The candidate who said I am not running I am handing this off, he naturally died. He reluctantly said I will run again.

Bagbo, who was the president, they blocked him from running last time because of a criminal conviction. K

Fault lines? A north south divide. It is somewhat tribal. They are banned from creating political parties around tribal lines. That is illegal. If you see guy in your tribe who is running a party you can connect the dots. Abijan is 80% of the economy. Center-periphery. Religion plays less of a role. Whatsaura grew up muslim and married French catholic lady. They take French civic non religiouns seriously.

Civil society? Works well, they have civil society among the many lines … huge abijan focus. Might be a disconnect between what ngos say and what is needed outside the city. And there is, ghana had elections in last weekend and anti-gay bill that featured prominently… the law passed but it is a gray space. Hoping they might not sign it.

There is a mismatch with our lgbtqi plus and their thinking. For our same sex spouses they made a way they can register and be part of the community.

Cot’d with BF? There is some friction. Bc of the coup, I’m not sure if their gov has met with the coup gov. they had to come down on one side or another. My guess is the coup was bad for that.

Influence outside in? Togo is interesting case study. The leader of togo, this guy is an authoritarian, inherited leadership from dad. Not a democrat and not pretending to be. He is positioned himself, I understand, I can talk to these three coup led states. Which is weird bc you’d think those in fragile power position would not want to vonnect with couop ppl.

Last year he woke up and said we are changing the constitution and do it over a year and we are changing the make up of the gov and not much explanation as to why or how. Our understanding is they do these changes, he is going to have a new title. He is going to be president of the council. He is supposed to nominate senators but the senators choose the council so weird loop. He wants to stay in power. But they are having terrible problems with their border. They are closer to Russia. His father was … probably getting money from USSR. We view him as terribly fragile. He is under a lot of pressure bc he has generals in the north saying ppl getting blown to bits and they can’t be happy about that. Embassy has a no go zone in the north. We have a bad relationshiop with the country.

So talk about influencing from outside, he got in a photo shoot with trump at notre dam. It had front page news. This is a major… he was here for the African leadership conference. He is not anti-american but trying to maintain ora of power.

So togo good to focus on because it might keep them from tipping.

Will Russia try to get into Cot’d from coup countries? Yes, they want to get a coastal base.

Interviewer: Todd and Jackie

Participant name: Senegal Desk

Participant organization: State

Date of Interview: Dec 9

1. First Impressions: What struck you as most interesting and insightful about this interview?
   1. Two presidents in Senegal
   2. Senegal 2050: Ambitious economic plan
   3. US did a joint economic conference in November
   4. Country stable, no history of coups, but some threats from porous border
   5. MCC Compact, the millenian challenge corporation, focusing on blue maritime economy; MCC bigger than USAID in Senegal
   6. Worries about giving Senegalese c-disinfo capability
   7. Role model for the region and good connections to AES countries
   8. Focus needs to be on helping Senegal, not countering Russia or China
   9. Sovereignty is a way to open up the conversation
2. What existing counter disinformation initiatives (by host or supporting government) did the participant identify? (list)
   1. Usaid had a program that to do with election disinformation.
   2. The GEC funded something related to Dakar Bienelle, massive art event. Opened on nov 6 and ended dec 6. The premier art event on the African continent. And the us was the non African guest of honor so the GEC funded part of the us pavilion.

**Interview number two. Senegal**

The whole political environment is best place to start. Disinfo comes up every so often but not a focus by itself. Senegalese has concerns about disinformation but the … everyone is trying to figure out what is going on with the new gov and what direction they will take. Soco is head of party and head of gov and the Senegalese themselves say do we have two presidents? For now the two getting along ok. They said they make all their decisions together. Political observers including ourselves say at what point will this break down and be a clash. We are not there yet. The other thing we were watching, when the Pacef party won the presidency, but they didn’t have majority in parliament and they just had legislative elections Nov 17 and now they have majority so that will make it easier to move forward with agenda.

And they have an ambitious one, Senegal 2050, focused on economic development, jobs creation is a big focus, youth employment. They have a youth bulge. They were swept into office on enthusiasm of the youth so a debt to pay back.

Both leaders were tax collectors by trade but no experience running a gov. that sometimes shows. They don’t have political experience, executive experience, international multilateral experience. the prime minister likes being very provocative and will say provocative things. Sonko is very anti-France and that shows up in his rhetoric. There is an anti-west polisiton that shows up and pan African position. To the point that even I, do I think he is the new Thomas Sankara, he was the leader of BF, in the 1960s. he was assassinated. He was very pan Africanist. Renamed ministry of foreign affairs and Senegalese abroad and now it is the ministry of African integration and foreign affairs. So that fouc on Africa integration. After they came into power, President Fays first visit was to neighboring countries. So observers wonder what direction will they take, will they run into arms of china. What will they do, is this anti-france rhetoric going to mean they will be anti-us. **So far they have cooperated well with the US, we just did a joint economic event with them on nov 22.** Has fit in with their economic development agenda. A lot of synergy. Focus on economic development and we were able to come to the table, not just econ assistance but commercial diplomacy. How to attract us investment. We had a good talk. That was received well on their side. ….. pretty good cooperation and discussion on CT. we have not seen any particular attacks but their border with Mali is vulnerable. Their south western border has some the vulnerabilities, porous, not able to secure it perfectly. Traffic back and forth. Most of what we have seen back and forth is more illicit economic activity as opposed to recruitment activity and terror attacks but we don’t want it turn into what we see in benin. Senegal is stable, no coup in their history and everybody would like to keep it that way if we can. In the interests of economic development they are willing to take money and support from whereever they can get it. Most African countries happy to talk with china and see what they get. I have not followed closely what is happening in china…

We have been seeing them get closer to Russia which is something new. It is not a history with a closeness of Russia. They don’t have a history of leaders being educated in Russia. Now lately we are seeing one of her first trips was to Russia and we are seeing Fays had a call with putin. So we are seeing some reproachment.

Resources that Russia wants? I’m not clear what Russia wants. It is not clear to me. The wagner group is active next door so if ti is this typical Russian expansionist. There has been talk of building a factory in Senegal for Russia mrap vehicles. Unclear whether that is going forward.

Vote on Ukraine? I don’t know.

A lot of African countries don’t like to break with eachother, many will at best abstain so as not to look like they are breaking with the African group or the G77 (the developing countries). African countries like to stay together and not break.

What is Senegal getting? Maybe a factory, but it is unclear. Talk in the press but not sure if contracts are signed. Senegal wants tech transfer, knowledge transfer, etc. may work with those they can get it from. Anti west decolonize rhetoric, the US is the preferred partner. Tech industry and innovation wise. Usaid? Yes, getting a lot of support.

MCC Compact, the millenian challenge corporation. One of them focused on power generation, one on port infrastructure, they are also now, mcc started doing regional contacts, so Senegal is involved in first regional compact, focused on blue, maritime economy. MCC formed under George W. Bush with theory some countries need big push for development so the compacts are a large amount of money. It is administered by a corporation, it has a board. The state department is one of the board members. It is an investment and investments work better if the recipient is invested. So country driven. There is a mirror orgn, Senegal has a milenial challenge account/office.

MCC is bigger than usaid in Senegal. They have a score card for every country for it to be eligible. The country must pass half the score card and control of corruption and one other. Score cards are up on the mcc website.

Disinfo/Russian malign influence on radar? It is. Especially with this new gov. fay and sanco, they are relatively in experienced in gov and they want to do the right things. They campaign on anti-corruption. There seems to be a certain amount of motivation to be transparent about here is what we found. They found they have more public debt then previously reported to IMF. Current gov is a little frustrated, we were transparent and now the imf is saying mis reporting when we did the right thing. IMF suspended program for the moment. The IMF when they do their programs they do so based on numbers that were reported and now the numbers are incorrect so they avhe to recalculate things. The messaging in the mean time is not good and moves markets.

They are getting friendly with Russia, they are inexperienced so may be more vulnerable to disinformation/Russia. Sanco hates being criticized and he goes after the press for being criticized. A little worry of dong’be the thing you were campaigining against. How much is it genuine concerna bout disinformation and how much is it you want to go after your critics.

Todd: risk of giving capabilities? That is my fear, the president doesn’t seem to be that punative personality and vengeful personality while sanco does seem to be. So that is some thing I worry about.

Counter-terrorism. Concern about us capabilities used wrongly? The concern is not that training will be used poorly but that the law will be created and used wrong.

In perfect world Senegal is good role model for region, good track record, good reputation with their neighbors. So in that sense it is stabilizing influence in west Africa. They have a good relationship with the coup countries so they are good partner for us.

For countering, no one wants to go back to the cold war model, the best way to be friends with Senegal is to be doing what we are doing to try to have more economic development, more trade and econ ties.they appreciate that. It is a win win. Not just how can we counter Russia or china but how can we help Senegal develop while helping our own countries do business.

Senegal really likes the word sovereignty. Data sovereignty. Senegal is concerneda bout data sovereignty. Where is … concerns about passing law that requires data to be in Senegal and risks that it could be used malignly. Something was raised as a vulnerability.

Soverignty is a way to open the conversation. Not being controlled by outside sources.

**Usaid had a program that to do with election disinformation.**

**The GEC funded something related to Dakar bienelle, massive art event. Opened on nov 6 and ended dec 6. The premier art event on the African continent. And the us was the non African guest of honor so the GEC funded part of the us pavilion.**

Concerns about visit? There are concerns about French. Talk with them but don’t tell ppl you talk to them. I would be careful how you characterize anything that looks like great power competition. Stay away from anything like the cold war. Lets not go there.

This language or verbiage goes back multiple versions.

**Interview 3. Benin**

Covers Benin and Liberia.

Global Fragility Act. We have several countries in coastal west Africa. A lot ends up being military assistance. Concept is you need whole of gov approach and addressing root causes. To enhance security and democracy and gov and the region. That is where we spent 300 million dollars in that region and we don’t like to contextualize it or say how that money is spent as there are a lot of rivalvires and mostly spent in ghana so most countries not happy about that. There are other pots of money but that is where we mainly draw.

We are very interested in what projects

Political? We have a good working relationship; it is a democracy. There are a lot of challenges. Fairly autocratic. I don’t have a lot of confidence in leadership there. President Tallin are very obsessed with power and… main opposition leaders in prison. His opponents in the last election; he won the election by coming with terrorism charges so they are in prison now. We have continual issues about similar kind of incidents and processes that seem to be developing. Oliviai Bocco, he is buddy lifetime friend of Tallin, he is this wealthy cotton king. Lot of money, he support tallin but he seemed to be making noises that he was considering running for president in 2026 when the next election comes and tallin will have had two terms and cant continue. But in august, last few month he is in jail too. He was arrested with other people. He seems specious charges of plotting a coup. Something funny in benin, they always have some completely unbelievable story about how that happen. Why would he do a coup when you have to step down and you seem to lik this guy, he is popular. They sent out diplomatic notes. A van full of cash.

Flawed democracy? Extremely flawed. This is not the state departments view. But when we have interactions with our counter parts there, we had a ghana security dialogue. We have had talks withds… consistent theme, we are always harping on Russian influence and they seem to buy into that and use that to manipulate us. I don’t think it is a widely expressed view but we should be careful assuming everything is Russian disinformation. If we create this paradign that Russia is involved in everytyhing they wills ay it was not us but Russia. Also distinct possibility that mis/dis is true but we would rather not recognize that. We have in my opinion, I don’t think wide spread opinion, I think our buacratic processes play into that and magnify these risks.

Example is CPF Countering PRC Influence Fund. CT. what seems to end up happening, there is a pot of money. You can apply for this. One of the countries I’ve been involved with, say we want to get this funding. So you have to answer the question, what can be done to counter Chinese influence? They say we don’t have chines operating in this country. Well, maybe they are interfering with x. back and ct they collect requests and analyze them, this creates impression china is everywhere, look how strong they are.

In all these countries there is violence, they have their own interests and we call them veos. So how are you going to counter violence? More violence.

Blah blah blah.

I get a call from usaid, food fund, same dynamic … they wondering… they want to protest that the war in Ukraine is disrupting food supplies. We like them bc they tend to vote with us in the un and they support our polic proposals, esp if Ukraine has nothing to do with them. And do they get money out of it.

Has not been high level engagement with state department on democracy issues, diplomacy and focusing on other than the security relationship. That is an issue esp since the coup in niger.

Us military in benin? I would hate to get this wrong but I don[t think we have a base. We give a lot of assistance to benin including training and equipment.

How are the French seen? They don’t like the French. They are often seen as by the local gov as a tool to manipulate us. I don’t think they are doing much that is significant. Recently some misinformation, things came out in social media in benin, one was supposedly internal comm about Africom and how we will builod a base and how we would deal with the French. Not true. At least nothing been decided. I’m not sure it is Russian disinformation. Is it benin disinfo? I think it is important to look at who would benefit from mis/dis before automatically assume where it is comoing.

I would caution, be careful in approaching this study. Might see a lot we produce, our statements but it doesn’t necessarily align with what is happening on the ground.