Interview with POL-ECON-USAID personnel, March 17, US embassy for Libya, Tunis.

Info threats

* Russia is the main concern; they wish to maintain the status quo of an east-west divide
* Russia uses disinformation platforms to muddy the water and inject hate and discontent in social discussions about east/west reconciliation
  + Recently, issue of migration meeting with IOM (International Organization for Migration)-Libya, they have a pretty large foot print and in minutes of the meeting of local governance officials on March 9, notes were put out misconstruing meeting to be about settling non-North African migrants in Libya. It was very contentious. We think it is Russia bc it happened so quickly. It prompted meeting in East and west. East said look what the West is doing.
* We watch migration patterns in the EU (migrants coming from Africa through Libya and into Europe), we are not concerned though that the moving migrants will move to the US
* China does not engage in disinformation. China pulled out its companies in 2011, recently started going back in. with diplomatic presence announced that embassy will open in April
* China engages in the commercial sector and they have invited Libyan office to go to Beijing; their engagement is mostly economic, less so from a national security perspective. Their engagement with Libya is new.
  + Should us be concerned from national security angle? China may be working with the ports and try to win contracts on electronic scan-ion capability, which will provide them valuable data on shipping.

**USAID**

* From USAID perspective, Libya and Global Fragility act, a focus has been the southwest of the country, demographically there are ethnic groups that do not get along and there is displacement
* There are 10 serious development awards which differ from humanitiarian assistance. 4 of 10 are in Fezzan in the southwest border of Niger. So conflict in the past , especially in the Mrzuq area. Usaid came up with a roadmap and usaid had two million dollar seed moneyh with UK company (?). All 10 development programs were terminated
* Seen infrastructure projects to attract people and it has been a slow progress with people returning.
* Last November, an event held by eastern Libyan authorities, past year out from to promote our own development initaitives.
* There is a son of a warload who is close to Tripoli but manges from Benghazi. Shiny infrastructure around ?? and positioned as better alternative to U.S. multilateral programs. Their approach though is not consultative and may not meet needs of the people. USAID partners careful to not exploit grievances. Chinese companies stand by the warlord’s son. So the Chinese have a partner that goes against zus interest of stability and unification.
* CPIF, counter china money pot at state. Every post has been encouraged to submit grants and that is under review. We proposed to take money to support telecom sector to make bidding by us companies more transparent. The award was terminated.
* The only program that is alive is food and nutrition to refugees. 50/50 chance it may survive. Next hurdle is to obligate new monbey with more of a focus on human lifesaving.
* Impact of restrictions?
  + All programs designed to counter malign influence and increase unification and decrease conflict and increase stability. It is not always evident that a specific award is relevant to this so we need to help ppl understand
* GFA?
  + Likely to continue but target countries could change. There is a question on whether Libya qualifies. Compared to coastal west Africa, GFA money in Libya is half half of the USAID budget so GFA is a lifeline here. In Mozambique for example the GFA is a drop in the bucket compared to usaid.
  + GFA is 60 percent of usaid funds here. All bets are off on GFA, this is a new era.
  + Decreased USG money will not create a vaccume. Russian will not provide aid (Not sure if they said China will fill hole or not) but may inflame opinions against the US
  + Libya is keen to acquire military hardware. Libya operates under US arms embargo but money finds its way in. there is a pentum appetetie for arms here.
  + In terms of halt in FA, Libya is wealthy…
  + Trump/Musk/Rubio says that USAID terminated bc of corruption; Libyans hear this and think it is being terminated bc of their corruption. See rhetoric on Libya on social media that aid stopped bc of libyian corruption.
    - There is damage, China will say I told you so.
  + Working with BBC action, 5 year program, 9 million dollars to support independent journalism. El Kul is social media platform that reaches 1.3 million Libyans which is 25% of the online population. They try to produce content that counters divisive hate speech. They do research on Libyan public perception and work to analyze mis/disinformation. This is at risk of going away. They bhave 40 content providesrs, Libyan journalists who produce content. They are now looking for work and china might hire.
* Recommendations?
  + Maintain BBC program
    - Pushing against disinformation is important, they let false narratives go on social media, especially if it is anti US. BBC MEDIA PROGRAM IS VERY USEFUL TO SEE HOW Libyans observe and push back on false narratives.
    - Africom aware of el kul, influencers know and like it.
  + Provide visa opportunities for Libyans to go to US
    - On China, they are offering more opportunities to go to China, offering more opportunituy to go China and that contrasts with unwelcome attitude from the US.
    - Not just programs, smaller things like robotic competition that will take place in the states. We would like to send Libyan reps to this event and they want to go but they may not go now, may not happen now.
    - Could be new story, China comes in and more likely
    - Libya is number four advisory for US so we do not encourage Americans to come to the Libya and now with potential (?) visa restriction, Libyans cannot come to the us . but they can easily visit china. If there is a full suspension, America perception is that America is closed for business and china will open.
  + Open us embassy or presence in Libya
    - Russia and china have embassy in tropoli. We don’t, our presence is a big deal for trade delegations. Chinese do this and we don’t.
  + Avoid inflaming situation in gaza
    - General sentiment in Libya affected by gaza and disinformation surrounding gaza. US stratatement about settling gazas supported anti-us sentiment
  + If king for a day, nock Libyan heads together to get them to unify. Stable, democratic goals are important
  + USAGM not a big presence; no discussion of this.