Participant name: Pol Mil Attache, China expert

Notes

Understanding China is comparing it to Russia. Russia does disinformation while China does misinformation. China doesn’t have a wagner and doesn’t want instability. They would be fine with whoever is in power, but they want to know who they are doing business with. Doesn’t care who is in charge. CI’s view is that Russia is a major problem, and they are scared about the elections. By comparison, they are skeptical about China but not concerned. CI just wants to diversify their portfolio.

Example: Russia tried to sow discord in CI by promoting narratives about the Lebanese diaspora, and tried to threaten the social cohesion in a country that experienced a civil war even very recently. The Immonium Nitrate story tried to blame the Lebanese community of risking an explosion in the harbor like in Beirut, and the government swiftly acted to inspect the ships, but they think the Russians are to blame.

Russia gains when things are unstable. In Niger, China had very positive relations with the former government until it was coup’ed. A potential split with Russia, but they have yet to show publicly any sign of tension between them. Instead, they are in competition with us for influence, and try to shape the narrative.

The new financial crimes court operates in CI and finds a lot of Chinese nationals. But no newspaper has reported on it yet. Compared to Ghana, China is much less controversial because Ghana has a lot of free press too and the gold mines there had a lot of reporting, which led China to be on the defensive. In CI, China isn’t trying to save their nationals, but only care if it’s a PR problem. A woman who was sent back to China was not arrested and even succeeded in coming back to CI, proving they really don’t care.

US interests: basic economic competition. There is a perception that China is subverting the information environment to their advantage. The US has a good security partnership but isn’t THE partner of choice. Equals with France. China is trying to reshape the international order by putting itself as the leader of the global south, and is focused on rewriting norms in the information space.

Chinese people don’t like being in CI. They are only here to make money, and China isn’t doing so great economically anymore. There isn’t a Chinatown and their population is severed from the locals. For China this is about strategic competition. But China doesn’t make it a level playing field. For CI, on the other hand, it’s about having good partners. China though is very risk averse: we can send in troops to do CT but they don’t want to send troops. Instead they focus SC on arms sales. There’s also a couple of articles suggesting that China isn’t going to do USAID since they don’t do humanitarian aid and want to win from their investments.

CI wants to learn from the US on civ-mil, they know the real threat is civil war. And they also know that terrorism is a big challenge too. “GPC is also CT”.

Recommendations: take credit for the things we are already doing. People don’t understand the broad array of work. Raise the broad array of SC work being done. Like the recent TTX done with 20 African states organized by AFRICOM. But right now everything is being frozen with the elections. There was also a state security partnership approved but announcement has yet to be made. CI also wants these announcements because it makes them look good too. CI sees the US as a big security partner and views are very positive. There was a big scandal though that the capital had more positive views on Russia in a recent survey, but that didn’t track with later results.

On the high side, we should check the Undersecretary Dory’s visit.

Todd’s notes

Threat

* Russia is the malign actor and engage in disinformation. “Russia makes shit up”. Russia more present in the malign space. Russia is more focused on the French; Russia trying to undermine cohesion
* Russia benefits from instability and chaos so they want to undermine social cohesion and government, china does not do this.
* China is more narrative competition. A lot of what they say is wrong, they twist facts but they do not make stuff up out of nowhere or disseminate pure lies. China has best intentions in mind. We might disagree with what they say but it is not disinformation. China does not have wagner.
* China is not trying to topple democracy. they want stability and to know who is in charge.
* Illegal fishing is a big story, China is not trying to stop it, though China does not like it as a story
* China trying to restructure system of norms; China is voice of global south and argue US and West are colonial so look to China as preferred partner for economics and security; They want to influence mineral acquisition and gain UN votes. They say America is the past, China is the new and is fair and equal
* China does good job of raising its flag when it wins investment opportunities; US companies do not do this and US can’t highlight such efforts.

Ivorian perceptions

* Ivorians say Russia is the big problem. They see it as a major threat, especially from BF where they see Russia playing a malign role
* They don’t think this about China; China won’t throw election into chaso.
* They want additional partner options
* China not thought of well in Cot; severed from the local popualation

Key argument

* Economic competition! To be in the market and ensure US competes. Anything preventing a level playing field, thus impacts US ability to compete.
* US/French partnership is strong
* So we need to compete with Chinese programming; more competition on price, volume acess.

How to counter

* Strategic competition so need to compete
* Most effective strategy is competition, about being a better partner.
* China is risk averse in security realm, won’t send troops.
* US is seen as the better CT partner: if we show up and do CT it “scratches an itch”
* Buyers remorse in Burkina Faso. Wagner has not been good to people there, they kill civilians.
* **Messages: Take credit for what we do. Serious low hanging fruit whether CT or something else.**
* **Government asked flitlock not to take high profile as elections are coming.**
* **But after election need to do more. We are giving them 12 Armed personal carriers. A national guard unit in the states will serve as a sister force, take a long term relationship.**
* **Ivorians like these kinds of stories; there was a film crew tracking training**
* **Ivorians have positive view of us as security partner.**
* **Troubling survey: In Yanasucro, capitol region, surveyed showed that 70% viewed russia as good security partner vs. US at 69 but this has not been repeated**

Impact of usaid

* Couple of articles on how china is not going to replace USAID
* China doesn’t do aid, they do investment and lending
* Will loss of usaid hurt? There are still health programs, PEPFAR is still going but governance efforts are gone but loss of programs have hurt information collection on local dynamics (which engagement with local NGOs supportive)

Flintlock

* Largest software training in the world; 20 african states
* Starts April 12
* Last year COT major spokessite; for year one they did table top exercises, next year simulations and kick doors down.