Participant name: French 3 Star General Pascal Iannis

Participant organization: Commander of the French AFRICOM

Notes:

FR is convinced that the past 3 tears in the environment there has been an organized and purposeful effort to impact fundamentally the mission of French forces’ credibility and ability in the region, and countering this has been a priority for the past 2 years.

Long term objectives: play on the perceptions of military members, and make distribution. VoA and USAID were very good in contributing to this mission.

Short term objectives: defend French message and attack adversaries. And detect and monitor, threats are a “roller compressor” of messaging – FR can respond as a roller compressor themselves

FR structure their work from official channels and local channels. “Talking about France” is counterproductive. FR have governments locally that are helping with this objective and method as well.

Consider the info environment as a combat environment. Russia is a competitor in the information space. Capable of conducting autonomous operations against them. FR doesn’t have interest in combatting frontly with China.

When they talk to local Governments, the French characterize what they get as the surface part of the iceberg. But there is a problem with the youth, and perception of France, that the government locally says there isn’t.

Coordination with MFA: regularly at the strategic level, after the Burkina Faso.

Coordination with EU: really administrative and doesn’t talk a lot with European partners. The Cell that was created in 2022. With the US: risk taking that led to no cooperation. “we have less problem in sending troops on the ground than making social media posts”. 1-2 years ago CENTCOM,

Social media: engagement in official is much more so to prevent that they don’t

In covert: give opportunities for communication to partners on the ground. A lot of the work with media.

In Benin, the FR have a lot of comms. The BAF are really proactive. CI also. No issue of hiding or miscommunicating information and are good partners, and themselves are partners of choice.

There are China information threats: In Cotonou, there are not offensive. But they’re much more active to convey the message of “new world order” via local media. And they are making their messaging free. Partnerships with Media TV, and cultural. China is seen as a long-term threat for France and for all European countries, especially because of its messaging.

USAID and VoA contributes to local messaging, and fact checking. France doesn’t do it because of a lack of means. Commander would want to but incapable of doing at the same scale. China would fill that role very quickly lost.

We need to occupy the information space, English and French language is not sufficient. North of the country and local language is a loophole. Speak in ahoussa. Community radios are a priority for the future. In CI, a bigger social media presence. Solutions on local space. TV series, soap opera, on social media, with local language, it is very popular. We need to exit the perception that just Twitter is enough. Youtube is also an emerging topic.

USA: Speak more with allies.

Libya is not a topic for France. There is not much from there.

Diasporas play a role essential in disinformation. For Mali, there are local, Kemi seba, Franklin Niamcy is another. Army cannot do counterinfluence. Communication with MOI is very limited. Action is limited, but cabinet communications. We don’t perceive the possible threats they can pose.

Communications with other European countries doesn’t work.

AFD cannot contribute more now that USAID. Credits of AFD have also diminished.

Fragile governments with real dependence on China. Perception that they are a credible partner. We are not a country that can counter this perception. Youth is exploding in the region, generational change is coming, with different perception is IMF. Theories of Gender, and LGBTQ is leveraged by our partners who value.

Un-zoom and look at strategic competition globally, ignore Africa is leaving a new realm for our competitors for a 2.5 billion in 25 years.