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1. How are different actors sharing false, malign or harmful forms of information in Libya and West Africa? What is the impact of such efforts?

In Econ in this role for about 4 years. Reporting for four years on this and was at one point the China watcher. Rely heavily on Erik, specialist been working for embassy for decades. Administration has warmed to Russia, has been cautious engagement – but there is still a need to be vigilant. In terms of China in this space, from the Chinese Embassy I have found them to be even handed in their approach to Ghana and the economy. Where there have been breaches, Chinese nationals that have been involved in compromising or illegal activities – fishing and mining. The top three commodities – oil, gold, and cocoa exports. Two of those three have a nexus where individuals mine for gold, is ubiquitious, ends up in cocoa plantations – they are digging up or buying farms to get under ground and get the gold. Chinese natinoals have been accused of bringing in heavy machinery and with Ghanaian partners that know the landscape – traditional and cultural authorities – have been able to by pass the gatekeeps by bribery to mine. The illegal activity had largely fallen on the Chinese nationals. But the Ambassador of the Chinese embassy has publicly distanced himself from those actions by saying if theres a Chinese national involved in this activity they should be apprehended but we have legal Chinese entities working in this space doing good work. Beijing has been measured in calling a spade a spade in terms of illegal activity. Investigative journalists – many Ghanaians get their information from radio especially in rural areas – they have described individuals defending mining wearing US military attire. It says there is no associate with the US government, not sanctioned, but wearing military attire. Images shared on social media – One journalist won a bunch of awards – so respected as a news source.

As a Ghanaian, anything with the US is interesting to Ghanaians. But it is usually viewed positively. Particularly the younger generation moving more towards the US (instead of UK) – so sometimes it is dropped in to get attention, because it gets attention from local population. But locals use military uniforms to commit crime as well – so history of using military uniforms for that. News has been quite positive, until lately with what is happening.

And another one, Tommy Miles – on X – that talked about US coordinated digital strategy that was anti-China. That there was a China bot farm and there was a strategy to undermine China’s effort.

1. In what ways are governments, military and civil society organizations in Libya and West Africa working to counter this? What more can be done in this respect?

* What we have seen is that basically whoever – in the last administration the lay press and investigative jounralists pointed out several individuals in government or positions of influence who were involved in illegal gold mining and compromising nation’s local resources. Now with the new administration – Operation Recover All Loot. Trying to identify bad actors and bad contracts to identify resources that may have been taken illegal. The government has been active in the press to showcase confiscated heavy machinery or individuals who have been apprehending for prosecution. At least in the press it is more positive looking – but jury is still out because the scale of illegal mining is so large, it could not occur without the help of dishonest police, judiciary, customs etc. Those are the most distrusted institutions in the country.
* When you look at the countries that have more negative press in this country, starts with Nigerians and then Chinese. And then Lebanese. When you look at the reports about the Chinese, in the field of commerce, they are trading in a space that is reserved for Ghanaians – when you have Ghanaians fronting for them. Trade union that tries to accuse the countries that infringe in that space. The Chinese are the first to be mentioned in this space. You will see reports on them. So it isn’t positive for the, and then have the small scale mining where Ghanaians are fronting for them and go in and destroy in environment. They go in and call the Ghanaian partner to come in and provide the protection. Beyond the mining space, you find that some industries where they are doing some production people have issues where they get the contracts. Investigations where the current administration when in and found containers for electricity distribution companies have found their way into some Chinese companies – were melting them for the aluminum and export back to China. Couldn’t find the Chinese owner had run away. So the press hasn’t been very positive. Their media – Chinese – share content with media and radio houses and have some training. So they do it subtle, are doing the positive message. They veer away from the issues that give them negative press. They don’t talk about that, they don’t talk about mining, retailers, bad practices – they just message positive. The positive trade relationship – largest trade partner of Ghana (China) – most of the electronic stuff coming from China.
* But Ghana government doesn’t have a specific strategy to counter misinfo from other countries. Communication Minister recently said there should be a law. About defamation with AI. These are affecting mostly politicians. But there is no strategy to counter this from any country. From the Ghanaian government side they think all the countries are doing it anyways, they know the US has been here for a long time. So the country doesn’t really see this as a threat from a particular country. They lump it all together – not so worried at a strategic level – just at a personal defamation way.

1. In what ways are the U.S. or allied governments working to counter this in Libya/West Africa? How are they working to build institutional capacity in Libya/West Africa?

MFWA big report on gold mining and government officials and expose of individuals and who was benefiting and who got contracts.

Econ section had high level engagements with the Amb and government officials. Our EPA administrator was here and met with them. Worked with civil society to get an inside view of what was happening. Toward the end of last year – with water, farms, and livelihoods being destroyed. CSOs would be taking government to court or suing indvidiauls who should have been gatekeepers of licenses and then would circulate this.

IVLPs had used for media to expose them to the US system. So when they report, they have a way of knowing what they are doing what they do. Training done out of here – through PD/PA. But not targeting specifically at the Chinese.

PA was doing training.

Academia hasn’t done a lot of criticizing of Chinese, because they have been supporting some of the negative universities. So they don’t want to say anything negative about China. Confucius Institute. And another one somewhere. Trojan horse. Because they are part of the academic system, not out there in the press, but a steady stream of engagement with professors and students. Embedded within the existing universities – University of Accra/Ghana – in Accra – trying to get people to learn the language.

1. What more can the U.S. or allied governments do in this respect?

Development partners in the illegal mining space, have lacked influence to significantly change the direction of the way things are happening led by the EU. When you look at the fact the Chinese have had development aid – have overtaken the other western countries. In direct support. Have to be careful. Ghana has a freer press, and the government cannot control what the media puts out there. Government finds the process of getting support from Western governments or IMF very laborious, but with the Chinese you don’t have to through all the hoops. But fortunately that given the democracy in Ghana, Chinese engagement a bit more subtle. When you go to the officials and it doesn’t conform to constitutions, they aren’t going to support. Get pushback. On the media side the government doesn’t really get into the Government trying to support what they do and doesn’t have a strategy to counter disinfo. Media houses distributing content, but no clue on whether Chinese government supports or finances media houses. Use star times media to influence media content. But in social media space. Example – beginning to use influencers to do some of the things – because quite a lot of the youth using social media. They have followers that may be influencing. Number one culprit for environmental degradation – is Chinese.

Started an Econ AFAS (foreign agriculture assistance) Cocoa sector working group, and an interagency China working group. Mostly reporting. DOD and INL – marine security components – last year DOD was looking to formalize a marine security agreement to help patrol waters. Should ask DOD about this. Need to have good working relationships to socialize ideas and move them forward. Previously the military donated boats for patrols and other activities those are some activities that have been done.

1. How does the U.S. conduct interagency coordination or inter-government coordination with respect to its policies and operations in Libya/West Africa?
2. Who else should we speak to?
   1. Civil Society
   2. A Rocha – been active in the press – lawsuits with government.

Other notes

Most Ghanaians trust Radio and TV – social media and facebook. Journalists also pretty well trusted.

DoD misinfo stories – have been seen as credibile.

Both talked about US social media being a source of disinformation. Russian peer reviewed article

Focus on bad actors has mostly been internal. They go with the flow. Unless something is really terrible. If someone is an MP or minister – in power – some level of immunity for their actions. But little to do against them. Cadre of individuals benefiting from illegal activities – trying to slander one person or another. But doesn’t have much of an effect because the whole party eating from the buffet of natural resources. The focus is internal.

Negative perception on outside investment – not just US – external partners – take advantage of raw commodities that are non-value added. Extractive activities – general negative impression about the US embassies about taking raw materials. Buy raw oil and cocoa beans and the refine and sell it back. But if the government should allow foreign investors into the country, Ghana should be benefiting. So what the government to negotiate better. Felt the contract for oil was better for foreigners then for Ghana. Concern about no repercussions. Bur recently found interesting China/Ghanaians formed a mining association.