Interviewer: Khrystyna

Participant name: Chris Doege, Assistant Spokesperson

Participant organization: U.S. Embassy Cairo, Egypt

Date of Interview: April 22, 2025 (online)

1. First Impressions: What struck you as most interesting and insightful about this interview?
   1. The U.S., China (and Russia) compete for the same small pool of capable individuals, like influencers.
   2. Government is tightly controlling the media environment. The only space with a free flow of information and opinion is online, but this is where the disinformation proliferates.
   3. Egyptians are not interested in U.S.-China relations, so it’s a balance between trying to push China’s narratives out and disseminating U.S. messages.
2. What existing information threats did the participant identify? (list)
   1. Government’s tight control of the media
   2. China building a positive image of itself at the expense of the U.S.
   3. Russia spreading disinformation.
3. What was the most insightful in participant’s description of threats from China?
   1. China is not really involved in disinformation directly. It’s official messaging (unlike Russia) is on being a viable economic partner.
   2. China has a network of bots and associated accounts that spread fake information.
   3. China has ties to the government and provides incentives for the influencers.
4. What needs did the participant identify?
   1. NA
5. What support did they identify that they would like to see from the US?
   1. NA

Interview with **Chris Doege**, Assistant Spokesperson, U.S. Embassy Cairo, Egypt

April 22, 2025 (online)

**Participants from RAND:** Khrystyna Holynska

**Introductions**

* **I would like to see the report before it gets published!**
* Our spokesperson is unable to join. She is out for another week. She would be able to provide more details and speak more for attribution.

**Can you give us your overview of the situation?**

* Information environment in Egypt is really interesting
* There isn’t really free media. Everything here is controlled and censored by the Egyptian media. No free-flowing media here.
* My team – I’m the head of the digital media team – oversees platforms. We look into creating content but also monitor what is going on. We do it for some of the traditional media, too.
* I shared our China and Russia narrative report. We create this product to help highlight for DC, other policymakers, what narratives from China and Russia [are out there]. We do it as a two-week snapshot. [It helps us observe how] the CCP’s social media or news outlets are making the decision to put out content in Arabic, making it accessible to Arabic audiences.
* From the CCP, we are seeing not much disinformation from a traditional standpoint. It’s more of a focus on the economy and their investments in Egypt – China moving factories to Egypt, car production, working to enhance the economy here, how America is starting a trade war, and how it’s going to be bad for everyone.
* They [highlight] government-to-government interactions, for example a meeting between an Egyptian minister and Chinese Ambassador [recently]. They talked about improvements in health, education, and the good things China is going through economically. You do not see a ton of outright misinformation on Xinhua or CGTN – traditional media.
* We do see more flagrant disinformation, more excessive on social media. But it doesn’t come from the Chinese embassy in Egypt. Russian Embassy in Egypt can call Zelenskyy a dictator or a Nazi sympathizer. [China will not do it directly like that.] But we see that China built a network of bot accounts and associated accounts spreading disinformation and fake news.
* Last week, they created an [AI video](https://x.com/mog_china/status/1909475141429448991) and shared it about Americans working in a factory now because of the tariffs. It crossed over into my personal Instagram. It was posted on their X account of MOG. It is Chinese-built; it is a CCP arm that puts out disinformation or videos, and it's all in the Arabic language, targeting Arabic audiences. They respond to the messages and make social media comments.
* Bigger question – to what extent is it effective? I don’t think it is. You are not seeing the ton of engagement with the post, not a lot of sharing, limited retweets, and shares. Of course, metrics on social media can be misleading. We don’t know. We do know from pure volume that the US vastly outperforms both Russia and China combined. There is a ton of content mentioning the U.S. There are generally more negative stories about the U.S. than Russia and China. Not a lot of crossovers from the media world and disinformation. You will see things like last week. Also, Egyptian journalists are engaging, talking about transfers, industrial growth, cooperation, and economic or positive messaging. [Some Egyptian journalists are a part of it.]
* Social media influence – we work with diplomacy to promote different programs. We highlight our programs. We send influencers to the U.S. as part of the International Visitor Leadership Program. [The participants] do not have any obligations to do stuff with us. We’ve seen them travel to Russia and China – our participants. We can see them doing a video about their participation in the programs in China.
* We try to identify genuine media voices in Egypt.
* Right now, it’s mostly monitoring from our side. Next steps will be – to what extent is there an audience for pushing back on disinformation specifically? Or is it more about making sure they understand the [Chinese narratives]? [So the question is whether to] present our information truthfully or try to push Chinese disinformation out. Egyptians want to see more information about the U.S.-Egypt relationship. They don’t care about the US-China relationship. So, we are not sure whether to push that narrative out. We have to push our own.

**What is the U.S. government or other governments doing in this space?**

* There are [programs] at the Latvian embassy. They are doing a lot of training in the information space – Baltic Center for Media Excellence. They are teaching journalists, training them in what disinformation is. They play a leading role in this space – they trained Egyptian journalists in Latvia as well. Their primary focus is on Russian disinformation because of their location.
* We had a conversation about collaboration, possible work with Egyptian journalists – we are still in a bit of a wait-and-see mode - what type of training will look like, and what that space can look like, who the right partners will be. It depends on the administration.
* We sent a group of 5-6 influencers to the International Visitor Leadership Program in DC. They met with the State Department and had a tour of the capital. They had a great time. We should have brought them to RAND. We have been trying to line up a debrief to discuss what their experience is, whether they have been targeted for similar programs. We heard that when they go to Russia or China, they [have an obligation] to need to write X number of stories. There is a requirement. We just send them [to these programs] and hope you’ll do good work. We do not have a requirement to write a number of stories.
* IVLP is a good opportunity to connect with influencers. Unique.

**Any donor coordination?**

* Not that I know of. We had a working-level discussion with the Latvian embassy, given their focus. But it was prior to the new administration. [Now we have to wait and see] what the priorities are.

**What are the objectives of China?**

* Good question. Given the new narratives you see now, it is focused on economics and being an economic partner. This is the angle they are going for – presenting China as a viable partner, Chinese products being more acceptable to Egyptian markets, more manufacturing, and an alternative to American products.
* A lot of that – they weigh in, especially on official channels – Facebook, Xinghua – mostly economic focus.

**What are the information threats Egypt is facing more broadly?**

* Traditional media environment – nighttime TV shows, print media are pretty controlled. Access to information is difficult.
* Digital space is relatively free – there is space for a number of opinions. But this is where the pro-government bots, Chinese disinformation, and Russian disinformation are operating. Online spaces are hard to manage – it is different from the traditional media environment.
* People get their news from nightly TV news shows traditionally. But there are 56 million people on social media – Instagram, Facebook, X – it is a bit audience that is possible to reach

**What is the Egyptian government doing?**

* I can’t speak specifically. I didn’t have these types of conversations.
* It is a pretty tightly controlled media environment.
* On their state information website, there is a link to Xinghua news – right there.

**Anything else I should have asked?**

* Background and atmospherics here are important for those working in the information space. We are looking at a big audience here, a huge audience for this type of information.
* If we are looking for something more policy-focused and attribution, our spokesperson can add a little bit more context and color. She returns in early May. She will be more comfortable, being more responsible for the U.S. embassy's opinion on certain relationships.