Interview with AOB and SOFLE, March 14, 2025, US EMB Abidjan

**Issue of sovereignty and Russian value of not requiring human rights…**

From african perspective, for example in Niger, Chad, BF, this is period of time, post colonial where they are flexing their sovereignty. Sahel officer politics… They have differing opinions of democracy. People see it as a good thing because people with power now have power and that was not in the past.

Morocco, lots of different power

Djoubouti, every flavor of country is investing in the security scene in there.

West Africa… they don’t want to be told what is beneficial. Accepting Russian support is a means to an end to get at VEOs and counter government opposition. Russia is the action arm, they do not lecture about human rights, host conferences, they will help them resolve the conflict by arresting and killing bad guys. Though Russian human rights violations are a double edge sward.

Host nation does not want to be told they can’t interact with Russia.

When we have HR embargoes, 333 takes years, we are slow. Russia provides relative free access to security.

In south Africa, used this throwing off colonial power to support political moves in favor of owncountries. In both South Africa and Angola

Russia is seeking to sanction proof its economy by providing security and exploiting natural resources. Host countries know you have to give something to get something so they are fine giving up some resources to gain Russian security.

**China is the partner of choice for weapons/equipment/travel to china; US timeline delays hamper assistance.**

China. Provides weapons, vehicles, day to day supplies. China offers the Belt and Road. See china as the supplier of weapons. They are midgrade but everything breaks down eventually. They also provide equipment and training. China also provides specialized training for divers and pilots. Military officers go to China for training. In every country I have been to I have found military officers who have gone to China on these trips. On these trips they talk about some military issues but there is also cultural indoctrination.

Long story short, for partners, china is running the DIME model. We only do military. They have married the economic with the military part of DIME. If they supply guns and equipment at a cheap price then by default they are not partner of choice but the only partner.

We take too long to provide supplies so China is an “easy first call.” By giving vehicles China also burrows itself in the supply chain for parts.

Most East Africa from G39 perspective, hands are tied. See China development and showcase their flags. We can’t implement. Can’t message military. We can say we are doing training but we don’t have the money to do some things in comparison to china.

**Need for strategic partnership with COT**

From G39 perspective, if we want to accomplish this mission and be the preferred partner, we need to do this to make up partnership. We need to do training, infrastructure, economic development. But Africom has the smallest budget of all the COCOMs.

For example, look at the Bridge by the airport. There is a US flag there touting US support but with the pause in foreign assistance the road construction has paused so the flag merely advertises that the US is responsible for all the traffic backups.

Every two years, there is a country coordination meeting.

There is significant training component in our strategy. End of the day while relationships are strong and they want training, it is hard to counter ability to get equipment and advertise us support in Africa. China is hard to compete with.

Where sfab comes in, they do 321 authorities but it is a one-off.

CA team has been working CMO course development. This was started but then it stopped. No consistent effort by SETAF, they are one off events. There is a need for more persistent engagement

**Authorities**

341- Bilateral partnership with State national guard. They have not picked the guard unit yet, that is coming.

321 Train with friendly forces. This is where need 51% support to US.

332- Institutional capacity building. A pre-requisite for 333. Congress wants capabilitie we give them to be absorbed. So this allows for a MODA, Ministry of Defense Advisor. We will have this next year.

312 . maybe JSETs. 30-60 day training event led by US SOF with partner sof, focused on knowledge exchanges. Gives $50k in ammunication to partner force. Not allowed to build up capacity on things they already can’t do. Just reinforce host nation SRPs. SOCAF runs this. There is variation in amount of money per year and they have conference to determine allocation across AOR. Each year it changes.

So BPC money, certain money allotedand Africom resource conference decides what gets funded.

**If king for a day? Regional training center.**

Decide that COT will be a long term strategic partner. Have CA team work infrastructure projects. Econ growth view POLMIL. Build star partner relations. Identify top five countries and “truly invest”

From African perspective, many cultures. Going back to sovereignty, they want it, they want the responsibility, they don’t want France to choose a political party.

Look at Djoubouti, they are envious of djoubuti. They can develop relationships with multiple countries and get support from multiple countries.

My experience, despite wanting to pick and choose, they choose the US because we have relationships. We have good cultural connections between US nad African countries. It is harder for Chinese military officer to have a casual conversation with Ivorians.

Invest in a few countries with all resources. They want their military to be viewed as a regional center. Known for being a premier force. Morocco is viewed this way. They have a regional training center, they have African lion and they are a known broker.

Everybody wants that. They want security, also the investments so they can have own sovereignty. US relationships with African partners puts them in a position of power.

If COT had regional training center other nations would come to they would like this.

AILCT training center. 14 board members from different countries. Uae, china is trying to be on the board, the us, uk is trying, French, Dutch, Germans.

If we are generally concerned to empower fewer nations our efforts would be furthered. Messages would be consolidated. Empowering in cot an African partner to be the partner of choice for other African countries.

Greater sphere of influence. Other countries come here and see our partners.

If build up to Malawi to be partner of choice, sustained here and

Institutional investments from the beginning. SETAF HQ in Italy and some forward assets. They do mainly conferences, symposiums, eposidic training while return on investment is minimal. From partner perspective it is minimal. You hold a monthly knowledge exchange and then do a high five. Our own bureaucracy stands in the way. We high five ourselves.

**SETAF support: Bureaucratic delays and high fives**

We submit the paperwork to setaf to do the things we want to do and China has already done it and the embassy personnel have already rotated out. You don’t have that long engagement.

You high five after each event. And the high five is about the execution of the event, not the impact. It is like the relief in place in afganistan every six months and then it isw hard to have a sustained direction.

**More on regional training center**

If consolidating efforts you can be more consistent. You could have a PAO center of excellence and Benin officers coulde attend on a regular basis.

For this training center of excellence, would choose COT, Tunisia, Kenya, Zambia and Morocco. Would give regional security. Kenya for example is supporting UN peacekeeping in Haiti. Military coud have a strategic partner that affects every corner of the continent.

It would also hit the goal of synergistic opportunities. Have strategic influencde. Empower critical partner to maintain influence by proxy. From PA perspective, compete with chnina coming from the E. We can come at it from the I and M. They would lose the strategic competition space.

AILCT. Permanent training partners come in from Africa for the sniper course. If we invest, could do infantry basic course. They don’t care about the things we care about. Their officers are more tactical than US, like for example at the 06 level. Could do disaster relief. Many typhoons in Africa. So could train disaster relief, search and rescue, food supplies.

Does COT want this? If you approach this as a regional hub not a single country would say no.

One reason we were kicked out of Niger is we said you will not work with Russia.

**Messaging?**

We work through public affairs at the US embassy.

If want to message, SFAB needs PAO, they don’t have combat camera. If I have a guy who can take good pictures, send to setaf and they can message.

Djoubouti has CJTF, PAO shop. SSo they are doing training and messaging very well. Justified Accord, they did not “send stuff”. Nothing messaged maybe. **SETAF could run online ads. Could ping them with pictures and 5ws and they could send out content but have not seen that from SETAF.**

MIST team? The layers on the onion are extensive. MIST does not have permissions or authorities. SOCAF has authority. They do not have authorities to do MISO on social media. It is too touchy. Need pao with an x account that has easy kill chain for approval.

When mist team submits a series. I want to message something, needs approval. Runs channel of host nation concurrence, embassy concurrence, higher HQ concurrence. Only then do you get authority and money for the messaging series.

How about messaging counter malign Russian actions? We have zero input or control. Would take years and many dollars to get permissions.

Recommendations? PAO with SFABs and SETAF messaging. Embassy may need a PAO to more proactively message content.