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Participant organization: Africa Bureau, FCDO, manages Integrated Security Fund

**Interview with Jake Allen, FCDO, Africa Bureau, January 8, 2024**

Integrated security fund, global fund, billion pounds. Africa portfolio is 62 million, drop to 58 next year. Fund focuses on national security threats to UK and allies and I lead on state threats in Africa. Lots of different bits.

UK funded. It is about 62% official development and non ODA. OECD manag… non ode funded for military and intelligence and when no development benefit for the country. The isf unique in that we can blend in where.

In Africa portfolio, we deliver programs and… focus on Sahel, Somalia, coastal west Africa, thematic programs that look at state threats, hostile threats and some other stuff. Obliviously programs geographically focused on this region but then the cross cutting elements of state threats we work with team sw to understand context. Focus a lot on Sahel and particularly on info ops. **When this rose on the policy agenda, most obvious manifestation was information threats. And where gov focused. Recognition that is hard to do stuff about disinformation, so endemic and multifaceted and time it takes to do something about I, what the networks, how we take it down, take it down and something else pops up. So massive asymmetry. Gov moved from disinformation to fimi. Disinfo is a subset of that but more networks and ppl behind it and how information is used and disinfo is still important, can’t give up on truth and facts but if you chase it all down you will use it up pretty quick.**

How does fimi change what you do? The way we did it in my program was to stop looking at manifestation, visible bit and go behind it. We run a number of projects in Ethiopia and east Africa, where the nodes and where disinfo is being amplified and through cir, try to map that against am more immediate contextual analysis. How the information relates to particular individuals and entities and networks and how they relate back to hostile states and asking so what. That is the main thing. The so what with disinfo…the political question, who in the org entities and entities promoting and why how linked to the region… not unnecessarily unlocked but getting us toward that.

What part of so what? All of those things. Definite direct threat to the uk, to some extent homeland but we can justiably make case that can’t make the link … we accept that there are teams that focus on homeland and they can have that wrap.

ANDY PRYCE. They focus on Ukraine and promote pro Ukrainian narrative es and drum roll for that. And then cyber ppl they take the angle. And the rules based international system. How do you address that. What should we

Goals for west Africa? There are hmg strategies which we draw from and sort of speak to each other. High level integrated view is online. Which is a little old now but sets high level objectives to include countering hostile activity. We have Russia and Africa strategic direction at the public level and classified. There is a new Russia strategy developed in the moment and that will update.. supposed to be a state threat strategy. If you are looking at the whole picture it is multifaceted and when applied to different countries this is the process of cross gov coordination. And which levers are relevant in a particular geography and a particular time. **For me personally the objective is to increase the cost of malign state actors and proxies from the cost of their malign activity and their attempts to harm the Uk and her interests … with minimal costs to us and maximal costs to them. Next phase is driving at that as an objective. Below that on an outcome level there is still a need for us to update our analysis so we have to stay pretty live on that. Snap analysis on what is going on deep dive on networks.**

Then resilience building as well and our own as as well… civil society. You can do both direct malign state activity and violent extremism.

In Ethiopia, exploratory, the embassy worried about disinformation but they had no evidence base so we looked at info env, what is being said, how is it being publicized what is the revenue generation and whether ppl using revenue generation, amplification. That was similar to what we did in central Sahel, mali, burkina and Niger. So we start off scoping out what was happening there.

In Ghana a lot of concern about elections so we supported work there that will wind down working both with the gov and electoral commission about their capacity to do disinformation which was a request from them. They said they were worried so we funded an advisor to go out. We are exploratory study in Uganda on not so much disinformation but looking across the waterfront corporate ties, defense, securities, depth of Russian penetration.

Looking at elicit economy in central Africa to coast, Cameroon. More around.

We have a bit more money to scale up but it is still… all of the money, Sudan, right back up on the agenda how all the different bits of gov come together.

We do a little bit of capacity building. You get a metric out of it, tick boxes. I was a bit skeptical about it, more ppl more positive and think its necessary. The tricky thing is a values piece, we will train you to stop state threat and a value laden term assuming everyone works on the same definitional basis that things are state threats or disinformation. High amount of risk, we trained journalists, hackles. Gov not interested in a strong journalistic center so we have to be careful with it. **Cir, they have lots of on the ground networks and they train them up and when we want to get info out we can push it through their networks.** Ghana, electoral commission. A lot of work in Nigeria, CT, every perspective. Senegal and Cot’v are similar, primary countries, ppl we can talk to and get ahead. I think one of the things to consider is where the threat is going next. Places like seneg, cotdv, Togo.

Senegal as well, ports and bases as well,

What more to do? Money is not the issue. There is a lot of credible alternative offer, especially the UK is too holier than though and engaging with ppl willing to talk to multiple partners and if we don’t offer they go with an adversary. So we need to be pragmatic and realistic. We need to be faster. In the uk gov our decision-making is far too slow. You guys, the U.S., civ and mil completely siloed. They are amazed how frequently we are in each others buildings anesp this area , need to integrate and break that down. a lot of this is to some extent strategic patience, we need to let this play out and can focus on the noise and light and chase our tails and doing things that won’t have a lot of effects. In Burkina we need to let it play out and not assume it will go in straight direction and be attuned when moments happen and chinks in the relationship and be bold (seize opportunities).

Is there any more to say on working with actors looking at both us and adv? We are sort of thinking through, Sudan, which is priority and next few weeks we will talk about this, one of these situations, who do you engage with, you have absolutely dreadful waring parties but if want to engage need to find a way to do that. So unpleasant process of tradeoffs. What do we want to achieve and what tradeoffs we tolerate and recognize we might get it wrong and… on other side the..

Burkina, the three states breaking away, we assume that that was something Russia finagled them to do doing and wouldn’t last but we may need to take them seriously as a political block. We talk about sovereignty and we have to be serious about that. Sover countries can make choices we don’t like and we need to find ways to engage. If it does become more fragmented and multipolar…. Having an offer, being willing to be part of the offer… placement and access? We are still adjusting to where things are going. Much more transactional

This is the point, being clever how we brand what we want to achieve. It doesn’t land at all. There are ways to get at the same point, through different branding and approaches. We funded cyber capacity training with African union, didn’t mention state threats but apart of it and we brough it ppl to talk about that. There are things around regional stability…. Need rules based system, use something in their interest and what they want

How think about risk and capacity building?

I think the gov usually comes about through discussions so it would be clear if they want something from us. Nigeria saying we worried about xyz. Or we say we have this thing…. The risks are manageable because they are asking for them. Through our bilateral engagements, we wouldn’t do something that was so high risk.

Concern about using tools in ways unintended. Yes, we have ways to monitor those risks

Capacity building? Talk to cir. We are stepping back from information threats space to let other department do that. I… more direct…. Much more niche things, things that come up over next few years…

We develop things, top down and bottom up, we get uk priorities, we get priorities from isf fund, we take those and talk to post, look at the evidence. Good at flexing.

We had a lot of engagement with state last year but a lot of the analyses cir doing for us and send it to state and they would turn it into a report and send it to us. Focused on cso, WE HAVE PROJECT IN SAHEL, FOCUSES MORE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND ATROCITIES AND I KIND OF THOUGH WE LIKE WAGNER BUT THEY WERE MORE HUMAN RIGHTSY SO MY ENGAGEMENT WITH STATE HAS FIZZLED OUT. I SIT ON AFRICA SECURITY POLICY TEAM

We sit in this department … FCDO has bilateral funding

It is oda, developmental but not development. If focused on institutional reform, that would be oda, we will still be looking security institutions.

Department of office of conflict stabilization and mediation. All of that atrocity prevention, theyl.. at outer edges they nudge up on what we do. If exaggerated by arms….

MSE, Libya desk,