Participant name: Local Embassy staff

Participant organization: US Embassy

Notes

What’s happening: Grand Muette is starting to end. Lots of information is circulating about military activity. After a workshop organized with journalists, government concluded that they needed to share sensitivity of security information.

On January 8 attack, influencer activist Komma (freedom of speech that is also doing reporting in Togo) was able to identify an attack on security forces which led to numerous deaths. Army does not communicate any failure.

Terrorist attacks grew since President Talon. He has a “normal communication” approach and is very secretive. Reinforced by Grand Muet and information sharing can be punished. Example: a former minister got exiled. “Public business is secret business”. The spokesperson is apparently very smart, and only talks if the president allows it. Government is very serious and has spies in Whatsapp forums, sometimes groups have rules of communication before they can allow a new member in. There are lots of resources spent to track, monitor, and report WA groups. “Walls have ears”. For the government, it is important to show control of the economy and positive results. Example of the voodoo conference: rumors of human sacrifice, and the person who accidently made the rumors had to make a public apology and was sent to jail.

Kemi Seba applies the lessons learned from Libya, accusing western interference of causing chaos. Seba said publicly he wanted to become President but the legal framework might stop him. He stays in the parameter of the law and is not doing anything illegal. He could become a martyr too to his fans in the event of the arrest. Happened with Sonko in Senegal, large scale riots in Dakar. Another very influential person is the former president yourbonné, and government will not arrest him but he is generally more discreet.

How to counter KS: you need to find a similar persona that is as smart. But no one wants to be humiliated. The government spokesperson is as smart and charismatic. But government doesn’t have the time. And there are tools in place to prevent the emergence of new voices. People are very scared of the CRIET.

China remains the preferred business partner for politicians, there are no strings attached. They don’t engage in “good practices”. The biggest political parties are modeled after the CCP structure, and have officials visiting China (current party in government has officials visiting China at the moment. In 2014, the then president had decided that the presidency should be 2 terms max, but after Xi Jinping revoked it they changed it back again. The west is still a partner of choice in many ways, like the army but they made a big public announcement with China on artillery the other day which was unprecedented. Chinese programs for journalists are also generous while the American programs are very selective.