ACTION MEMORANDUM FOR The Honorable Antony Blinken, Secretary of State

SUBJECT: Deploy Branding and Emerging Technologies to Advance Democracy

Executive Summary: The purpose of this memorandum is to highlight opportunities for the United States to provide clear visibility of the benefits and long-term value of democracy. America should recommit and dedicate resources to the advancement of democracy abroad. We recommend rebranding U.S. foreign assistance, increasing resources towards U.S. public diplomacy, and establishing greater interpersonal connections for future leaders.

Issue: The United States is missing an opportunity to promote democracy in the face of rising autocracy through cohesive and unified public diplomacy messaging. This void of democratic leadership has left the international community without a clear incentive to democratize, allowing autocratic countries to advance competing governing models. More unified public diplomacy efforts (through government, academia, civil society, technology, and media) can enhance America’s brand abroad.

Strategic Analysis: Since a global democratic high point in 2005, democratic backsliding has outpaced institutionalized political freedoms. Democratic values are not represented when we see unfair electoral processes, information restrictions, and a closing of civil society, which characterize hybrid autocratic regimes. Bad governance is the most important catalyst for democratic regression, where there is a decline in the rule of law. When accountability institutions are eroded, power and wealth accumulate for autocratic leaders, and democracy is threatened. To counter leading autocracies, the United States should leverage its democratic values and economic incentives when managing global and regional strategic interests.

Relevant National Interests: Combating authoritarianism and spreading democracy are in America’s national interest. The People’s Republic of China and Russia are expanding their global influence through increased engagement with autocratic regimes. A great power competition has emerged where China’s and Russia’s military and infrastructure assistance in strategic regions of the world diminish the incentive to democratize. Similarly, regional powers such as Iran seek to undermine U.S. influence through violent destabilization. This makes countries increasingly authoritarian and hostile to U.S. interests. The U.S. should reconsider how it communicates democratic values with the world. We currently provide significant amounts of assistance to countries susceptible to autocracy, but this assistance is not marketed under a cohesive scheme. Rebranding America’s assistance will create a positive and cohesive perception of democracy, which will combat autocratic influence. By 2030, we expect our recommendations will reverse the resurgence of authoritarian tendencies and democratic backsliding in key countries.
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Strategic Options
○ Rebrand U.S. Foreign Assistance: To ensure that assistance is clearly attributable to America, agencies should streamline and unify their branding in line with an integrated and cross-agency profile led by the Department of State (DOS). A previous USAID rebranding campaign successfully increased U.S. support abroad. DOS should unify branding of all U.S. foreign assistance.
○ Promote American Values Through Media Presence: The U.S. should expand programs in agencies like the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) to rival the influence of strategic competitors. Research on USAGM and similar programs has demonstrated its significant role in bringing about the dissolution of the USSR. With the advent of artificial intelligence (AI), further research should be conducted into its role in U.S. public diplomacy and the promotion of human rights abroad.
○ Increase People-to-People Connections: There should be a targeted increase of international students and military-to-military exchanges from countries listing towards autocracy. In 2009, 46 current and 165 former heads of government received education in the U.S. These exchanges foster camaraderie and cooperation between future civilian and military leaders that promotes the intercultural dialogue needed to encourage democracy abroad.

Recommendations: DOS should encourage the Executive Branch to standardize official USG media (social media, emerging technology, broadcasting, etc.) and branding strategy on American foreign assistance. This strategy will demonstrate a bipartisan U.S. commitment to champion American democracy abroad. DOS should also foster civilian and military exchange programs between the U.S. and strategic partners.

Implementation
○ DOS should encourage President Biden to issue an executive order mandating the creation of an integrated and cross-agency style guide for all U.S. foreign assistance and social media promotion utilizing the American flag as the universal symbol.
○ Agencies similar to USAGM should be expanded in order to combat autocratic influence abroad.
○ Artificial intelligence is a new frontier for public diplomacy and should promote U.S. interests in the defense of human rights. When this gains traction, our partners will model similar initiatives.
○ DOS and DOD should work together to increase civilian and military educational and strategic exchanges.

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Authoritarian and Democratic Political Institutions Across the World
UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY