

**Testimony of
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“Combatting Authoritarianism: U.S. Tools and Responses”
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Thank you, Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the Committee for inviting me to speak with you today about how we confront the challenges posed by authoritarian regimes.

Authoritarianism poses a clear threat to the global interests of the United States, democracies, and open societies. A key weapon in the authoritarian arsenal is their willingness to lie to public audiences, limit freedom of expression and independent media in their own nations, and exploit freedom of expression and independent media in open societies. These dynamics are not new, but modern communications greatly exacerbate the impact of their deceptive public engagement.

Competition for the attention of foreign audiences is intense, and earning attention, trust, and favorable opinion requires intentional, principled, and consistent engagement. To this end, the Department, working with interagency partners, maintains a full-spectrum approach to both counter the influence of authoritarian regimes, and – equally as important – to demonstrate in word and in deed the value of democratic governance, government transparency, and the rules-based international order. The Department’s 4,000 Public Diplomacy professionals at 185 U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide engage publics through social media, traditional media, and in-person interactions.

The Department’s Global Engagement Center works to counter the foreign disinformation and propaganda of the governments of Russia, China, Iran, and others, who leverage information manipulation to negatively impact U.S. national security or that of our allies and

partners. As one aspect of this mission, the GEC exposes Kremlin-funded media disinformation campaigns. Recent GEC reporting, for example, has informed efforts by major social media companies to address false content, ensure platform accounts are appropriately identified, and suspend accounts that violate their terms of service. The GEC also actively exposes information authoritarian regimes seek to hide. The GEC's support for the development of the largest online repository of open-source data on the PRC's atrocities in the Xinjiang region of China has provided people around the world access to the truth.

It is not enough to expose foreign disinformation and propaganda. We must also engage global publics with honest and credible information about U.S. values, priorities, and policy objectives and the strengths of alternatives to authoritarian governance. The Bureau of Global Public Affairs executes global communications campaigns with messages tailored to audiences overseas. The Bureau employs data analytics to monitor evolving narratives, understand shifting perceptions, and inform content deployed through traditional media and our 1,200 social media accounts.

Because we understand it is not enough for the United States to state the truth or call out disinformation and propaganda in messaging, we also cultivate networks of like-minded individuals who champion the same ideas we do and are trusted voices within their communities. We seek partners who share a mutual interest in promoting human rights and democratic principles.

Through exchange programs led by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, we build lasting relationships. Over 1.7 million people globally have participated in U.S. government exchanges, and approximately one in three current world government leaders are alumni of those programs. Alumni from all over the world also account for thousands of leaders in business, civil society, and academia, and work every day with Americans in the public and private sector.

While bringing aspiring foreign leaders to the United States is one of the best ways to give them first-hand exposure to the democratic principles we support, we also understand the value of engaging people in their local communities and through digital networks. In addition to the many Americans we send abroad on our exchanges, our 600 American Spaces provide programming to promote understanding of American and democratic values. Our digital networks allow us to regularly engage almost a million partners in discussions about U.S. policy priorities. These are citizens and leaders who question authoritarian regimes and their assault on democracy. They do so not because we told them to, but because they believe in what they are doing, and know they are part of a global community that supports them. We do not anticipate or require they will always share our point of view, agree with us on policy or practice, or convey government talking points.

Our efforts stand in stark contrast to the manipulation and censorship of authoritarian regimes, who build networks of proxies who disguise their funding and direction, serve as mouthpieces for government talking points, or worse – actively lie and conceal to sow confusion and contempt and improve their own global standing albeit with false information and propaganda.

The relationships Public Diplomacy professionals build through engagement with foreign citizens require us to model the integrity and principles we advocate. The relationships require trust and credibility, characteristics authoritarian regimes lack. Earning trust and credibility is neither easy nor to be taken for granted. The Department's Public Diplomacy efforts are critical to combatting authoritarianism. We must show up for this fight and hold firm.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.