

**Partnerships, Policy, and Public Diplomacy: A Deep Dive into Influencer  
Diplomacy for the Secretary's Priorities**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social media presents a novel space of contested narratives. Partnerships with social media influencers are rapidly being recognized as an effective way to communicate a message to the public in an increasingly digital world. A wide variety of corporations make use of social media influencers to publicize their brand and reach a greater audience. This is not just the purview of the private sector, as nations have come to see influencers as a potential conduit for pursuing their interests, for good or for bad.

Our team recommends 24 influencers in this report who have the attributes to be effective partners in advancing United States' foreign policy objectives as part of the State Department's public diplomacy (PD) work. The selected influencers range significantly in audience, follower count, and country of origin. This diversity is intentional. The State Department should not be limited to one category of influencers or have a baseline follow count to partner with an influencer. While an influencer with a smaller audience should not be the centerpiece of any given initiative, there are many targeted audiences where more specialized influencers can provide low-cost ways to bolster a multifaceted strategy. In today's fragmented media ecosystem, a wide variety of voices should be sought to connect with the range of audiences that can be important for US messaging.

More broadly, the presence of social media influencers is likely to persist for the foreseeable future. Our team surveyed the relevant literature and interviewed experts in hope of adding additional value for those working to better harness the power of social media influencers in achieving the United States' public diplomacy objectives. The team drew from the work and words of esteemed scholars and practitioners such as Nicholas Cull, Vivian Walker, and Ilan Manor. The team has also sought wisdom from the extensive literature on the use of influencers in the private sector. Many of the lessons from the private sector are broadly applicable to the use of influencers for public diplomacy goals.

One of the research team's central findings is that these relationships will be most productive as two-way partnerships. Influencers are trusted figures among their audiences. For that good will to be channeled positively for U.S. goals, the audience must maintain that trust. One-way relationships are likely to come across as inauthentic and therefore backfire.

Long-term partnerships will also help prevent feelings of inauthenticity and can build in valuable feedback from influencers on trends and developments in their circles to share with public diplomacy officers. The value of longer-term partnerships is consistent with the literature

and the team's interviews regarding private-sector and public-sector experiences. It is also fundamentally grounded in the psychological explanation for the effectiveness of influencers.

Transparency is a major strength of the United States' PD and the central distinguishing factor that separates the current practices of the United States and its fellow democracies from those of authoritarian regimes. From countries as varied as Russia, China, El Salvador, and the UAE, regimes worldwide have taken to using influencers for propaganda. Instead of communicating facts to a broader audience, such countries use influencers to spread misinformation and conceal their own behavior. Often, these nations partner with influencers without the nature of the partnership being known. Such influencers often purport to be regular citizens, further muddying the information space.

When an influencer partners with the State Department, that fact is clearly advertised. There is a practical utility in this openness. For one, this openness is the first step in developing an organic, trust-based partnership. Organic partnerships are key as they encourage an influencer to communicate in their own voice. This will lead to a better reception and enable the United States to achieve its public diplomacy goals. Also, in cases where the partnership's nature is concealed and later revealed, the trustworthiness of the influencer and likely future partnerships involving either partner is greatly diminished. Finally, transparency in partnerships aligns with the values of the United States and the State Department. The research team believes that the United States should continue leaning into the central strength and great tradition of transparency in partnerships.

Our selection process of influencers was varied. The team started by surveying all of the State Department's public events in 2023 to get a good idea of the range of options and those that were likely to repeat annually. The team identified three key themes from the many 2023 events and then as a first step tried to identify potential influencers that could be good partners for the State Department in those areas going forward. The team conducted simple search engine queries to gather a basic understanding of influencers in various sectors. Once this was completed, the researchers conducted a more thorough search. This was often done by simply following a recommendations chain on a particular platform. After this portion was completed, the team compiled a list of influencers and assessed them according to the criteria that we had developed.

The team identified three main themes from its review of the 2023 State Department events: Security; Economics/Finance/Development; and Social Justice. The team then identified three events that could benefit from influencer partnerships: the International Women of Courage Award Ceremony, Pride Month at the State Department, and the APEC Women and the Economy Forum.

The team followed the same selection process for identifying influencers and then for the countries and topics that our State Department's Bureau of Global Public Affairs had

established as priorities for the teams work. These priorities and countries are, the NATO Summit (with focus on Turkey and Hungary), Migration and Refugees (with focus on Mexico and Guatemala), and Climate (with focus on India and Nigeria).

Ultimately, the team's recommendations for potential partners fall into these three broad categories:

1. Influencers recommended for an identified theme.
2. Influencers recommended in conjunction with a particular event.
3. International influencers relevant to the topics and countries of priority concern for our State Department clients.

All these categories provide different avenues for a successful partnership. Some will be best suited toward a partnership centered around a particular event. Other partnerships could be conducted more fluidly. Of course, there is significant overlap; some influencers would be successful in both forms of partnership.

The suggested themes, events, and influencers (and proposed pitches for their participation) are detailed in the main body of this report.

At the end of the report, the team provides a succinct recommendation section that highlights the most critical insights, including a recommendation to try to develop lasting partnerships with influencers.

The team, drawing on its extensive research, is confident that the influencers we have selected and the insights that we have outlined will provide significant value to State Department practitioners. The team believes that this will continue to be a regularly evolving space. We hope reports like this one will continue to be a valuable resource well into the future.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Six seniors from American University, under the guidance of Ambassador Earl Anthony Wayne, produced this report for the Department of State's Bureau of Global Public Affairs. The report entails an analysis of how partnerships with social media influencers can advance the Secretary of State's policy goals and priorities. The research team is composed of Matthew Evans, Matt Lipka, Joshua McDaniel, Isa Nambo, Evan Rein, and Gabriel Teitelbaum.

For this study, the research team defines influencers as those who have built a reputation and following on social media related to a specific topic or area of expertise. The report discusses how partnerships with influencers can improve and modernize the way the State Department conducts public diplomacy. The research team concludes that in mutually beneficial, two-way partnerships, influencers can highlight the State Department's work and events while growing their own following.

To craft this report, the research team began by surveying the scholarly and journalistic sources on public diplomacy and influencer diplomacy. 63 sources were read and seriously considered for our literature review. The core ideas and sources were incorporated. Additionally, the team, with support from Ambassador Wayne, reached out to public practitioners of PD and private organizations involved with influencers, interviewing five distinguished PD practitioners and educators, which increased the team's understanding of public diplomacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Then, the team reviewed 2,849 State Department press releases from 2023 to determine broad themes within all identified domestic events that could benefit from influencer partnerships. Specific events that could benefit from influencer partnerships were also identified. During this process, the team developed criteria for selecting events and influencers that became important in our selection of them.

The team then found influencers to partner with for three topics identified by our State Department clients. Within these topics, our team focused on two countries prioritized by the clients.

The team searched online for influencers for these themes, events, and topics, performing a basic review and due diligence of their work. Finally, the team selected the most applicable influencers to our criteria and desired audiences. All recommended influencers are highlighted within one of three categories: broad themes, specific domestic events, and client prioritized topics. For each influencer, potential pitches are provided for how the influencer can best be utilized in a potential partnership.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Public Diplomacy Overview*

**Nicholas Cull**, a leading historian and scholar of public diplomacy, has broken down public diplomacy (PD) into five different categories and applications: “listening; advocacy; cultural diplomacy; exchange diplomacy; and news/international broadcasting.”<sup>1</sup> The first four will be examined and explained for this report. Cull places great importance on listening, as by engaging and incorporating foreign publics opinions, one not only utilizes that information in public diplomacy efforts but increases one’s ability to make the relevant public target audiences feel good.<sup>2</sup> This listening becomes crucial in implementing advocacy.

Despite being thought of as opposite extremes of the Fisher/Bröckerhoff influence spectrum, advocacy alone cannot be the backbone of PD as listening can.<sup>3</sup> Advocacy is about directly affecting other’s thoughts on a state opinion or policy via communication.<sup>4</sup> It is vital in effective PD but must be shaped and carried out to have the best chances of success with target audiences.

Thus, another central tenet is the role culture plays in PD. In a basic sense, Cultural Diplomacy exports something more intangible about a state to affect opinions on the world stage.<sup>5</sup> Whether through official state or international actors, or non-governmental or private actors, understanding local cultures and building mutual understanding has for centuries been seen as a critical aspect of diplomacy.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, it is worth briefly mentioning exchange programs, which build long-term-oriented, broad foundations between countries.<sup>7</sup> While exchanges have focused on physical travel and collaboration (whether for education, future leaders, or work skills), the U.S. has been incorporating stand-alone online exchange/connection programs and adding online components to traditional exchange programs for years.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the five categories, Cull also discusses the role of partnerships in PD. Partnerships share credibility and authority with each other, spread the message in more ways, and overall can be positive ways to have more leverage with information.<sup>9</sup> Cull also pulls ten tips for partnerships from a State Department report, which includes recommendations from

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<sup>1</sup> Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 40, 20.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 70-1, 63-7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 90, 95.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 142.

establishing/protecting trust and expectations/objectives to being cognizant impactful partnership length to not overdo it.<sup>10</sup>

Altogether, Cull gives an important and impactful breakdown of modern PD. With the discussion of listening, advocacy, and cultural diplomacy, one can see some of the tools PD practitioners utilize – and how partnerships can fit into that. This paper expands on this baseline with specific influencer recommendations and broader theories.

With a crucial baseline from Cull, this report can briefly survey the relevant literature for key insights. Firstly, scholars discuss how listening to or understanding the audience is integral to PD. Researcher Van Doeveren argues, with a concept called New PD, that messaging *and* listening are both crucial aspects of PD. She uses the Bush Administration's messaging to Arab and Muslim populations after 9/11 as an example of what can go wrong.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, academic Di Martino postulates that an active listening philosophy could "offer [governments] a space for ethical forms of governmental listening to be discussed and developed" in social media instead of using surveillance or simply measuring numerical responses.<sup>12</sup> While Cull highlights listening but quickly moves on to forms of influence, these scholars centered listening in their analysis of PD.

Beyond listening, different types of messaging are crucial for reaching audiences. Nicholas Cull in a different piece describes four theories categorizing the kinds of PD he saw during the coronavirus pandemic: self-praise, framing other actors as failures, highlighting gifts and exchanges, and showcasing collaboration.<sup>13</sup> These framings are not redefining PD, but they may have shifted countries' perceptions of each other.<sup>14</sup> Through these examples, the importance of audience in interpreting and having input in PD is seen to be crucial.

Some scholars have focused directly on technology's role in PD. The rise of "Silicon Valley Diplomacy," corporate technology executives meeting with ambassadors, showcases the intertwined nature of social media platforms and diplomacy.<sup>15</sup> Many actors use social media to communicate effectively, influence wartime opinions, or encourage global cooperation. This construction of narratives—whether through online pleasantries from an American diplomat

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>11</sup>Rianne van Doeveren, "Power and the Evolution of Public Diplomacy," *Engaging the Arab World through Social Diplomacy* (Clingendael Institute, 2011), 7–9, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05438.4>.

<sup>12</sup>Luigi Di Martino, "Conceptualising Public Diplomacy Listening on Social Media," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 16, no. 2 (June 2020): 138–40, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-019-00135-5>.

<sup>13</sup>Nicholas J. Cull, "From Soft Power to Reputational Security: Rethinking Public Diplomacy and Cultural Diplomacy for a Dangerous Age," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 18, no. 1 (March 2022): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-021-00236-0>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>15</sup>Corneliu Bjola, Jennifer Cassidy, and Ilan Manor, "Public Diplomacy in the Digital Age," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 14, no. 1–2 (April 22, 2019): 94, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191X-14011032>.

about living in China or warring factions presenting arguments rapidly online—is a crucial use of technology in PD.<sup>16</sup>

**Vivian Walker** notes some factors regarding the decreasing state part because of technology, specifically noting how dependence on the internet, declining trust in traditional authority like government and the media, and social fragmentation created by technology are important strategic challenges for PD in a digital age.<sup>17</sup> Whether focusing on the audience of the specifics of technology, we can see how public diplomacy incorporate new ways to influence specific groups of people. The tools and challenges presented above can be guiding principles for practicing PD in the future and can help guide our decisions on influencer partnerships.

### *Role of Influencers*

Celebrities have long been used for public diplomacy purposes. With the advent of the digital age, a new kind of celebrity, the social media influencer, has emerged. The private sector has extensively used influencers over the years to promote products and their brands. Influencers have an audience that feels more personally connected to them.<sup>18</sup>

Many argue that the effectiveness of influencers can be explained by "**balance theory**," or the idea that if a consumer has a positive image of an influencer, the consumer will develop a positive image of an endorsed product to reach a level of psychological comfort.<sup>19</sup> The dialectical approach of "new public diplomacy" is well suited for the emergence of influencers.

Given the evolving media landscape, influencers are especially crucial to public diplomacy. One of the primary draws of influencers is the public's decreased confidence in traditional outreach. One potential analog to the possible role of influencers is the role of non-traditional media. Scholars have argued the influence of the "**Al Jazeera effect**," which is new media lowering the market share of voices from traditional media and government sources and empowering more marginalized voices.<sup>20</sup> In the case of Al Jazeera, the more marginalized voices

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<sup>16</sup> McAndrews, Ethan, "Nicholas Burns: Influencer? The Twitter Diplomacy of Biden's New China Ambassador," USC Center on Public Diplomacy, July 5, 2022, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/nicholas-burns-influencer-twitter-diplomacy-bidens-new-china-ambassador>; Singer, P.W. and Brooking, Emerson T., "Gaza and the Future of Information Warfare," Foreign Affairs, December 5, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/middle-east/gaza-and-future-information-warfare>.

<sup>17</sup> Walker, Vivian S., "Public Diplomacy in the Digital Age: Concepts Contexts Consequences Craft."

<sup>18</sup> Liselot Hudders, Steffi De Jans, and Marijke De Veirman, "The Commercialization of Social Media Stars: A Literature Review and Conceptual Framework on the Strategic Use of Social Media Influencers: International Journal of Advertising," *International Journal of Advertising* 40, no. 3 (2021): 327–328, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1836925>.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Belanche et al., "Understanding Influencer Marketing: The Role of Congruence between Influencers, Products and Consumers," *Journal of Business Research* 132 (August 1, 2021): 187–188, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.03.067>.

<sup>20</sup> Tal Samuel-Azran and Ilan Manor, "Empirical Support for the Al-Jazeera Effect Notion: Al-Jazeera's Twitter Following," *International Communication Gazette* 85, no. 5 (August 1, 2023): 386, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485221142466>.

are those in the non-Western world, but other forms of new media can speak to disparate communities and segments in a population.

Naturally, influencers come from a variety of backgrounds, and their audiences are similarly varied. All, and likely most, will not fit under the paradigm of marginalization. However, an important commonality is the direct nature through which influencers communicate with their audience. While a country or brand may be more limited in its voice, partnerships with a multitude of influencers enable many voices to promote the same or similar agendas and priorities. In this divided, low-trust world, influencers can help bridge the gap and effectively communicate the message of the United States to a broader variety of people around the world.

Understanding influencer partnerships considering Cull's framework of public diplomacy, new public diplomacy, and balance theory begins to truly highlight the utility of these **partnerships**. These are **two-way relationships** that enable outreach to disparate communities. Influencers are trusted figures who can break through to audiences who would not have otherwise been reached. Importantly, one-way relationships do not fit into this successful paradigm. Such relationships miss out on the "listening" portion of public diplomacy. Additionally, instead of invoking a feeling of "balance," inauthentic partnerships will likely invoke feelings of revulsion toward the intended message.

#### *State Uses of Social Media and Influencers*

Many nations seek to tap into the public diplomacy potential of influencers. Worryingly, **authoritarian regimes** have used influencers for propaganda and hard selling of a country's reputation. For example, influencers have, for example, been used to mislead the public in the United Arab Emirates, and El Salvador, among other nations.<sup>21</sup> Our rivals, such as Russia, also seek to do this in many countries as well as at home.

Often, the line between state-sponsored voices, the voices of the people, or the voices of big companies and private interests is unclear and takes various patterns. Intimately tied to these practices is the spreading of misinformation. Influencers can certainly spread misinformation completely unprompted by foreign governments; this happened during the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries, which led to increasing mistrust of more mainstream sources.<sup>22</sup> A good recent study tracks how Russia uses influencers in Latin America to stoke anti-

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<sup>21</sup> Kinoshian, Sarah, "Trolls, Propaganda & Fear Stoke Bukele's Media Machine in El Salvador," *Reuters*, November 29, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/el-salvador-politics-media/>; Sabrina Zahren, "Saudi YouTube Influencers, Their Relationship to Dubai and the Role of Social Media in Dubai's Urban Branding Strategy," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 15, no. 3 (September 6, 2022): 259–261, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18739865-01503003>.

<sup>22</sup> Darian Harff, Charlotte Bollen, and Desiree Schmuck, "Responses to Social Media Influencers' Misinformation about COVID-19: A Pre-Registered Multiple-Exposure Experiment: Media Psychology," *Media Psychology* 25, no. 6 (November 2022): 831–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2022.2080711>.

US sentiment.<sup>23</sup> Combining the inherent misinformation capability of an influencer with the intentions or capabilities of a foreign government is a potent combination for authoritarian governments.

**Transparency** is the critical first differentiator between the practices followed by the United States and authoritarian governments. This great tradition of transparency in partnerships must be continued, but what might be most illuminating to the general population at large is for them to see the fruits of U.S. partnerships. Perhaps paradoxically, the best way to show this may be through the influencer partnerships in and of themselves. Instead of fearmongering and misinformation, the public will see positive partnerships. Simply being virtuous with partnerships is likely to lead to a better reception and be in the state's interests.

While this paper focuses on influencers, **states also play a direct role on social media.** An interesting point of discussion can come from looking at Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) accounts on the Chinese social media site Weibo, with scholars coming to distinct but related results on the role follower count plays. Scholar Ying Jiang argues that more followers and interactions with an MFA account's audience do not lead to a positive influence on the country for the audience,<sup>24</sup> while academics Luwei Rose Luqiu and Fan Yang found that MFA accounts with a higher quantity and quality of posts attract more followers on Weibo, not necessarily the MFA accounts from larger countries or countries with a closer economic relations to China.<sup>25</sup> Together, these studies make an argument that follower count alone is not crucial in having effective an social media presence and influencing audiences – and through the other literature, we can argue this applies to influencer partnerships too. These studies were not exact replicas, but they still show that how information is disseminated and absorbed by foreign publics is changing. Therefore, the specific account matters more than the follower count – which can be extended as a supporting point for the role of micro-influencers.

### *Best Practices*

Before delving into the specifics of our events and potential partnerships, it is important to discuss some best practices that the research team identified from both the private and public sectors on how to collaborate with influencers and create effective content. Our primary suggestions have been found throughout the literature.

**First, states need to utilize the full breadth of their domestic cultural resources.** In PD and Influencer diplomacy, these resources would fall more into soft power. A great example of

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<sup>23</sup>Office of the Spokesperson, “The Kremlin’s Efforts to Covertly Spread Disinformation in Latin America,” *United States Department of State* (blog), November 7, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/the-kremlins-efforts-to-covertly-spread-disinformation-in-latin-america/>.

<sup>24</sup>Jiang, Ying, “The Use of Chinese Social Media by Foreign Embassies: How ‘generative Technologies’ Are Offering Opportunities for Modern Diplomacy,” in *Making Publics, Making Places* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2016), 159, <https://doi.org/10.20851/publics>.

<sup>25</sup>Luwei Rose Luqiu and Fan Yang, “Weibo Diplomacy: Foreign Embassies Communicating on Chinese Social Media,” *Government Information Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (July 1, 2020): 1, 7, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2020.101477>.

this is culinary (or gastro) diplomacy, where a state's food is used in events or campaigns to promote positive opinions of the country abroad.<sup>26</sup> Of course, this does not need to be limited to food. Countries often have national culture institutes to play a role in handling the soft power of cultural exports.

Scholars Younseo Ahn and Sijeong Lim argue that, at least when analyzing their case of South Korea, the cultural centers made the target countries more likely to vote the same way as the South Korean government in the United Nations and enter economic treaties with the ROK.<sup>27</sup> By harnessing one's cultural strength, foreign countries can take actions that benefit your state - and influencers can be an impactful way to do this. While not directly the same, this idea harkens back to Cull's discussion on cultural diplomacy on how a state can use their intangible cultural products to influence global opinions.<sup>28</sup>

**The private sector's extensive use of influencers provides a test case for what influencer diplomacy could be. Brand fit is of paramount importance;** if the audience does not believe that the partnership is a good match, they are less likely to be attracted to the product; this is in concord with the idea of balance theory. Picking the right influencers to partner with is crucial for influencer diplomacy to be effective. Professor Johanna Arnesson explains how different **tools of authenticity** (such as transparency, personal experiences, and relatability, among others) can help make a partnership successful.<sup>29</sup> In the fashion industry, Daniel Belanche et al. highlight the importance of having an influencer, audience, and partner that are all related. Insights from the private sector are likely to be broadly applicable.

US Embassies can play an important role in building connections with influencers and may help the State Department to better identify good candidates for collaboration. In recent years, U.S. embassies have taken a more active role as social media users. This new role in conjunction with their long-standing position embedded in local communities makes them prime candidates for shepherding influencer partnerships in diverse locations.<sup>30</sup>

Stronger connections on social media can also go beyond influencer partnerships. U.S. Ambassador to China Burns' cordiality on Twitter helps showcase the personal, authentic side of an important government official and share effective U.S. responses against Chinese posts

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<sup>26</sup> Parasecoli, Fabio, "How Countries Use Food to Win Friends and Influence People," *Foreign Policy*, August 20, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/20/food-diplomacy-countries-identity-culture-marketing-gastrodiplomacy-gastronativism/>.

<sup>27</sup> Younseo Ahn and Sijeong Lim, "Role of Cultural Public Diplomacy in Enhancing Foreign Policy," *Korea Observer* 54, no. 4 (Winter 2023): 525–56, <https://doi.org/10.29152/KOIKS.2023.54.4.525>.

<sup>28</sup> Cull, Nicholas, *Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Johanna Arnesson, "Influencers as Ideological Intermediaries: Promotional Politics and Authenticity Labour in Influencer Collaborations," *Media, Culture & Society* 45, no. 3 (April 1, 2023): 540, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221117505>.

<sup>30</sup> Zin and Liu, "Public Diplomacy Meets Social Media", 42.

online.<sup>31</sup> Other US ambassadors have and can become effective messenger on social media due to the way they connected with local audiences.

Influencers are also often not state-partnered, however, and this can create newfound factors in diplomacy. While the Obama administration was negotiating with Cuba, for example, the ability of their PD message to spread was based on how the public spread that information through actions like retweeting.<sup>32</sup> While influencers were not directly mentioned in this conclusion because it appeared to be a more widespread public activity, it is not unreasonable to conclude that influencers could well have helped magnify these public actions in Cuba.

**Humor** can also be an essential tool in spreading PD and building connections. Respected Israeli **social media scholar Ilan Manor** notes how humor can be used to achieve strategic PD goals, using Russian Diplomats in the UK as an example. Notably, the Russian Embassy used local issues (i.e., Brexit) as a basis for its humor, which shows the importance of understanding your audience when using PD tools.<sup>33</sup> These tools both help build connections with audiences.

Altogether, these best practices provide helpful hints for the influencer partnership. **Influencers provide a unique way to reach audiences, and the State Department role of matching all the parts together – audience, policy goal, influencer, the post itself – remains the most important.** The literature provides effective examples on how broader partnerships goals like discussed in Cull’s book can be effective for the U.S. government.

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<sup>31</sup> McAndrews, Ethan, “Nicholas Burns.”

<sup>32</sup> Ricardo J. Valencia and Derek Moscato, “Navigating #ObamainCuba: How Twitter Mediates Frames and History in Public Diplomacy,” *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 17, no. 2 (June 2021): 168–79, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-020-00162-7>.

<sup>33</sup> Ilan Manor, “The Russians Are Laughing! The Russians Are Laughing! How Russian Diplomats Employ Humour in Online Public Diplomacy,” *Global Society* 35, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 78–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2020.1828299>.

## INTERVIEWS

Throughout the research process, the project team conducted interviews with public diplomacy experts. These interviews provided helpful suggestions for identifying influencers and effective uses of PD. One of those interviewees, **Michael Chadwick**, a foreign service officer and teacher at the Foreign Service Institute, discussed the importance of transparency in PD and specifically influencer partnerships.<sup>34</sup> This was discussed in tandem with a conversation on misinformation and disinformation, and specifically how creating a new positive narrative can hold its ground over short-term disproving of disinformation.<sup>35</sup>

**Vivian Walker**, former executive director of the State Department’s Advisory Council on Public Diplomacy, noted the vitality of the audience in modern public diplomacy.<sup>36</sup> She suggests, consistent with Cull, that the initial step is not persuasion but listening to their views and needs. Walker also brings attention to the inherent risk behind influencer partnerships. Should prior research detect controversial political activity from the influencer, for instance, the State Department can dodge a bullet by refusing to cooperate. The government’s message must not be confused with the influencer’s past beliefs and other statements.

The group also received general advice regarding influencer diplomacy. Michael Chadwick and others emphasized transparency. Trust in media and information produced by the US government is low among the general population. In other countries, discreet cooperation with influencers would only intensify the issue. **Joe Johnson**, retired senior board member of the Public Diplomacy Council of America (PDCA) also prioritized professional ethics when working with influencers, ensuring that they did not misrepresent the position of the US government.<sup>37</sup> He promoted cooperation with selected non-governmental organizations (NGOs), supposing that they share the State Department’s values and long-term partnerships with them and influencers.

**Ilan Manor**, professor at the Department of Communications at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, and perhaps the most well-known recent scholar on social media, noted Ukraine’s utilization of influencers, who are from a variety of fields (i.e., history scholars, entertainment figures, etc.) as a form of legitimate PD.<sup>38</sup> This allows them to reach multiple different audiences, with the influencers acting as “digital ambassadors.”

**Jeff Fairbanks**, an instructor at the State Department’s internal professional development school, mentioned the importance of local influencers, especially in an age in which micro-influencers are enjoying more prominence.<sup>39</sup> A vital piece of advice he imparted

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Chadwick, Zoom Meeting Schedule for Public Diplomacy Student Group, Zoom, February 7, 2024.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Vivian Walker, Diplomacy Lab Group - Request for Insights on Public Diplomacy, Zoom, February 14, 2024.

<sup>37</sup> Joe Johnson, Influencer and Public Diplomacy Meeting, Zoom, February 21, 2024.

<sup>38</sup> Ilan Manor, Conversation on Social Media, Influencers, and Public Diplomacy, Zoom, February 15, 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Jeff Fairbanks, Zoom Meeting Schedule for Public Diplomacy Student Group, Zoom, February 7, 2024.

was that the influencer field is perpetually changing. This puts the burden on the State Department to adapt.

Some additional points from **Professor Manor's interview** are worth discussing. First, he mentioned **how the influencer influences the message**.<sup>40</sup> This can be seen in the platform the influencer is posting their content on – certain platforms like TikTok bring opinions with them that an MFA may not want.<sup>41</sup> But beyond the platform itself, the influencer carries agency in their perception. Whether a more drastic move like suddenly peddling conspiracy theories, or something less malicious like an audience that is not receptive or interested, an influencer can sour a strong relationship.<sup>42</sup> Second, Manor highlights **the importance of a customized, or multifaceted approach**.<sup>43</sup> For MFAs, this could come from different content for each platform they use – and in addition, influencers can have a customized approach to reach their unique audience that may not be following MFAs.<sup>44</sup> This customized approach is also important in a growing world of automation in social media – when it becomes easier and easier to mass fire posts, Manor argues the customized connection influencers bring will become more and more important.<sup>45</sup> Altogether, this interview was worth highlighting as it positions some of our recommendations into a top scholar's summation and analysis of the field.

To adapt well to the changing public diplomacy landscape, our interviewees centered on the importance of the audience – both as something the State Department looks for and something that the State Department needs to earn trust from. Close cooperation with U.S. embassies/PD sections overseas provides opportunities to better target to local populations abroad.

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<sup>40</sup> Manor, Conversation on Social Media, Influencers, and Public Diplomacy.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

## METHODOLOGY

The research team read 63 articles, reports, and other types of texts that covered topics essential to this research, such as public diplomacy and the use of the Internet, to gain a better understanding of what would need to be considered when undertaking this report. As noted above, the team also conducted five interviews with distinguished PD practitioners and educators, some of whom are leading experts in their field. They helped answer our questions about Public Diplomacy and effective diplomatic partnerships.

With the sources and the interviews in mind, the team looked at events hosted by the State Department and issues important to the State Department. With these events and themes, we began researching influencers that could be paired with said events and issues.

Every year the Department of State undertakes and engages in thousands of events domestically and globally. **The project team reviewed the 2,849 press releases issued by the State Department throughout 2023.** The team chose to focus on 2023 because the general themes we identified are critical and reoccurring in the modern age. In our review of the releases, the research team selected releases that related to events and issues that could pair well with influencers. These events must have been open to the public either during or after their occurrence and must have taken place in the US.

The team delegated the search of these press releases so that each member covered two months. Each member identified events occurring in the US annually during the delegated months. The team then crafted a spreadsheet listing these press releases, which highlighted the notable events, in order by date. In the next columns, we noted the event highlighted in the press release, and up to 3 tags which grouped the events into similar themes. From these tags, we took note of how many similar types of events there were and **agreed on the importance of three general event themes, as they were the three most common identifiable themes in the events reviewed. These are Security, Economic/Finance/Development, and Justice.**

**We also identified and voted as a group on three events that would benefit the most from influencer partnerships and that are likely to be repeated annually. Those with the highest scores are the International Women of Courage Award Ceremony, the Reception in Honor of Pride Month at the Department of State, the “APEC Women and the Economy” Forum.**

To help prepare for the future, **the team then identified influencers that they concluded would be great partners for these events and themes** when the State Department again organizes these or similar events in the year(s) ahead.

**Additionally, the team selected three topics from the list provided by the State Department client suggested areas of focus for finding foreign audience-focused influencers. These topics, the NATO Summit, Migration and Refugees, and Climate were chosen based on group interest and experience. We then focused on two countries per topic from the list of countries provided by our client. Our country selection was based on a combination of the**

**country's importance to the topic and the ability of our group to find potential influencer partnerships.**

In searching for influencers for the three general themes, specific events chosen by the team, and three topics from the client, the project team started by looking online for influencers. For the influencers the team sought to pair with specific topics/themes, by search with phrases such as "social justice influencers" or "climate change influencers from India." These searches led us to websites that would list the "top ten climate change influencers from India," from there, we would find links for these influencers.

The team compiled lists of influencers that the researchers thought would work for the event/topic. They then crafted a short summary of information about the influencers found. The team used criteria it had developed for choosing influencers to pick influencers.

After compiling lists of influencers for all the topics, themes, and events, the team chose which influencers we thought worked best for the topics, themes, and events as a group. An important detail we noted for each influencer is their follower count and average view count on each of their respective platforms. This was determined by taking a gauge of views from at least over 20 pieces of video-based content. For the topics from the client, we chose a primary influencer for each country in the topic and an alternative influencer as more options for influencers.

## CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF EVENTS AND INFLUENCERS

### *Criteria for Events*

In this section, we discuss the criteria that the team developed and used for events to pair with influencers, describe the general themes of events that pair well with influencers, and then offer several specific events that State Department should consider for use of influencers.

To begin, below is **the team's five criteria for selecting events**, which will be expanded upon in the paragraphs below:

- Relevancy to a theme or initiative
- Sponsored by State Department and/or U.S. Embassy in Country
- Potential for unique influencer content coverage
- Availability of key individuals
- Bringing the Public into the event and conversation

Establishing criteria for what types of events State Department should pair with influencers is important. Not all events need influencers or are intriguing for influencers and their audiences.

First it is important to consider **the relevancy of the theme or initiative of the event**. Is this topic something that is important and relevant in the world or conversations online? Events that are relevant right now are more intriguing to influencers especially if they can be at the forefront and be one of the first in the conversation. The team additionally prioritized events that were directly sponsored by the State Department or in conjunction with the U.S. embassy in country, as they will be more easily organized by the State Department and used for US-based influencers. These two primary criteria initially narrowed the focus.

Then the team asked **what unique content could an influencer bring to the event?** Is the goal of the media exposure to bring younger and more diverse audiences into the conversation, for example, or is the focus going to be on traditional media and broader audiences? The design of an event is integral to ensuring that influencers can authentically cover the event and connect their audience to the event. In a review of some examples of previous partnerships, the Global Music Initiative was seen as an example of these considerations in action. The team concluded that the partnership with creator Kurt Hugo Schneider was not set up in with the right media exposure in mind, for example.<sup>46</sup> The YouTube Short focuses briefly on the event but does not say what the event is about or why it is important. The coverage by Schneider does not encourage the view to explore further about

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<sup>46</sup> "Global Music Diplomacy Initiative," U.S. Department of State, September 27, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/music-diplomacy/>; Kurt Hugo Schneider, "Thanks to @YouTube for Inviting Me to This After-Party Celebrating with the @StateDept," October 10, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/pzvrkbl6lAg>.

the initiative further. From a production side, Schneider was placed at the side of the event, capturing a view that was not particularly interesting for the viewer.

The team noted the importance when planning an influencer partnership of **assuring the availability of key individuals to participate in the interaction and to help bring key public audiences into the messaging**. The availability of key individuals also helps one of the foundations of influencer outreach, new and different audiences. The use of influencers is to draw different identifiable and important audiences into the conversation and make new audiences aware of issues. Events and the availability of key individuals must also satisfy the mission of including the public and reaching out to new and different communities. There are a wide variety of “key individuals” based on the type of event. For events run and coordinated by the State Department the availability of the Secretary of State, a Deputy Secretary, an Under Secretary, an Assistant Secretary, or an ambassador offers more of a draw and legitimacy to the event and partnership. Looking at State Department’s partnership with Devon Rodriguez in conversation with Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, for example, the availability of a key individual offered a more intimate and personal experience for the viewer.<sup>47</sup> In this collaboration the availability of a key Department official willing to sit in conversation with an influencer was important to ensuring that the conversation is high profile and important for the State Department. However, this willingness was met with an influencer who can thoughtfully engage with a key individual in a way that fits with their style, or niche, of content online. This idea will be further explored when discussing influencer criteria.

### ***Criteria For Influencers***

While searching for influencers who would advance the Secretary’s priorities and promote DOS events, the project team developed a set of criteria to use when deciding who could be an effective partner. The criteria are based on our research and interviews, but also come from the trial and error of the searching process and the guidance provided by our client.

Influencers are vital to bringing awareness of the State Department’s goals to audiences on social media, which constitutes most of the world’s online engagement. Through mutual partnerships, influencers and the State Department can collaborate on content which engages a base passionate about these issues. **The six influencer criteria developed and applied by the team are:**

- Social media presence
- Level of Engagement
- Authenticity
- Connection to event topic

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<sup>47</sup> Devon Rodriguez, “It’s the UN General Assembly in New York This Week — and I Got to Draw the U.S. Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield! Thank You for the Conversation on What It’s like to Be a Diplomat 🙏 @usun,” Instagram Reels, September 21, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cxd6p9ZP8i3/>.

- Positive influence
- Likelihood of passing State Department due diligence

**It is essential for an influencer to have a presence on social media.** Whether it's Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, or another large-scale platform, a presence on social media indicates that the influencer has a basis for building a following and posting content. Celebrities who are famous via other means (such as traditional media) that later gained social media followings are not our first choice for influencers unless they have now become influencers first and foremost.

Furthermore, **identifying a level of engagement information for an influencer's page(s) will give a better idea of how involved their audience is with the content.** High average viewership on video-based content relative to an influencer's following shows that a larger percentage of the audience is invested in the content. A track record of higher engagement is a great indicator that collaborative content is likely to reach more of an influencer's following. Importantly, this is not solely the number of followers or subscribers on an account – small accounts have great partnership potential – as many have high engagement.

**Authenticity: It is imperative to investigate whether an influencer's audience finds them to be authentic.** Part of this includes reading comments under content and gauging how connected the audience feels to the influencer. If the audience thinks the influencer is relatable, welcoming, consistent, and genuine, they will be more inclined to consistently watch their content. This also means analyzing the content itself and how it's presented. Audiences are attracted to the familiarity of a shtick or consistent way of delivering content. When an influencer has this trait, it can be used to develop creative, collaborative content using that shtick.

**The influencer needs to have a connection to the topic of the content.** Whether their content specializes in that topic, they're passionate about it, or are just simply related to it in some capacity, a connection is necessary for the content's message to be delivered effectively. This connection can be a secondary part of their channel (especially if the goal is to find new audiences), but there must be a logical reasoning for how the influencer connects.

Also, **potential influencers should be making a positive impact with their content.** This can be as simple as brightening the day of their audience members. If the influencer is known to make harmful content towards others or spew false information, they shouldn't be considered as a partner. Although this part of the criteria can be subjective, anyone who has the potential to harm the Secretary's priorities and goals should be avoided.

Finally, the influencer must be **able to pass a due diligence examination from the State Department or a similar organization.** While political disagreements with the US government on their own are not a negative (and can potentially build credibility), the prevalence and extremity of differences is worth flagging. Additionally, prevalence of drugs, alcohol, and violence is not a good quality for potential partnership. Finally, any influencer that has prior

experience working with the US government should be a good candidate for partnerships, particularly long-term partnerships, as some of this vetting has already occurred.

## **GENERAL THEMES IDENTIFIED FROM 2023 EVENTS FOR LIKELY FUTURE USE**

In this section we discuss the general themes that our team identified in our review of the State Department's events in 2023, and we identified several influencer collaborators that could work on any event in that theme area. These themes covered a wide variety of events, most of which could pair well with influencers to increase the public reach of the event and provide a different perspective compared to traditional media. **The general themes that we identified are 1) Security, 2) Economics/Finance/Development, and 3) Social Justice.** Each theme is important for the State Department and a priority for the Secretary of State and other top officials at the State Department. A full list of the events we compiled from State Department releases can be found in Appendix A of this report.

**The first theme the team identified from the 2023 events is labeled Security and covers global, regional, and domestic security topics and issues.** Many but not all these events involve key individuals meeting with counterparts from other countries. There were several events and announcements related to security. Some of the events that we found in 2023 included the OSCE Permanent Council Meeting, the Raisina Dialogue: Quad Foreign Ministers' Panel, the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual CSIS Republic of Korea-United States Strategic Forum 2023, and the U.S.-Mexico High-Level Security Dialogue.<sup>48</sup> These and similar events put on by the State Department offer a sufficiently interesting and impactful event for an influencer to cover. Additionally, working to overlap issues with other major themes and subthemes offer the State Department a wider audience and reach of its messaging.

**The second theme the team identified among the 2023 events related to Economics, Finance, and Development issues.** In this category there is a great diversity of events and opportunities for the State Department to work with partners globally to improve the economic situations for individual states, regions, and the global economy. Economics, Finance, and Development events touch many other subcategories and are important for multiple initiatives. One event with overlapping priorities, for example, was when Deputy Secretary Sherman delivered the opening remarks at the U.S.-India Alliance for Women's Economic Empowerment

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<sup>48</sup> Anthony Blinken, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken at a Virtual OSCE Permanent Council Meeting," U.S. Department of State, February 24, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-a-virtual-osce-permanent-council-meeting/>; Anthony Blinken, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken And Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, and Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi At the Raisina Dialogue: Quad Foreign Ministers' Panel," U.S. Department of State, March 3, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-indian-external-affairs-minister-subrahmanyam-jaishankar-australian-foreign-minister-penny-wong-and-japanese-foreign-minister-yoshimasa-hayashi-at-the-raisina-dialo/>; "Secretary Blinken to Deliver Remarks at the 8th Annual CSIS Republic of Korea-United States Strategic Forum 2023," U.S. Department of State, September 21, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinken-to-deliver-remarks-at-the-8th-annual-csis-republic-of-korea-united-states-strategic-forum-2023/>; Anthony Blinken, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken At the U.S.-Mexico High-Level Security Dialogue," U.S. Department of State, October 5, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-the-u-s-mexico-high-level-security-dialogue/>.

Shatter Summit.<sup>49</sup> In this event there are ties to both economic issues and women's empowerment, pairing multiple themes can increase the audience and reach of the State Department's message. Another two examples of overlap were the 2023 Indo-Pacific Business Forum with focused on Inclusive and Sustainable Growth, and the DOS and USAID Award for Blended Finance for the Energy Transition Program.<sup>50</sup> Increasing the reach and audience of the State Department's initiatives helps to drive issues home.

**The third and final theme identified encompasses a broader range of events focused on social justice. Social justice events seek to spread values of equality and equitable treatment of all people globally, especially values which are priorities for the State Department and Secretary.** Rather than directly involving security or economics, these events commemorate and grow social and human rights-based principles, and additional values the U.S. administrations would like to champion as core values. Working with influencers the State Department can expand knowledge of these efforts. Similarly to other sections there are several subthemes that apply to every event relating to social justice. In January of 2023, the State Department commemorated National Human Trafficking Prevention Month.<sup>51</sup> In February the release for the first report on the implementation of a national strategy on gender equity and equality had important overlaps with both women's issues and wider goals of equality and equality globally.<sup>52</sup> Occasions when the UN Human Rights Council meets are another fantastic opportunity for the State Department to not only share its views on human rights in general but to spotlight a few key areas of human rights and the social justice agenda with influencer collaborations.<sup>53</sup> Another partnership could be made on advocating for the rights and protection

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<sup>49</sup> "Deputy Secretary Sherman to Deliver Opening Remarks at the U.S.-India Alliance for Women's Economic Empowerment Shatter Summit," U.S. Department of State, January 25, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/deputy-secretary-sherman-to-deliver-opening-remarks-at-the-u-s-india-alliance-for-womens-economic-empowerment-shatter-summit/>.

<sup>50</sup> "2023 Indo-Pacific Business Forum Promotes Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in the Indo-Pacific," U.S. Department of State, January 12, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/2023-indo-pacific-business-forum-promotes-inclusive-and-sustainable-growth-in-the-indo-pacific/>; "The U.S. Department of State and USAID Announce Award Winners of the Blended Finance for the Energy Transition Program," U.S. Department of State, December 4, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/the-u-s-department-of-state-and-usaid-announce-award-winners-of-the-blended-finance-for-the-energy-transition-program/>.

<sup>51</sup> "National Human Trafficking Prevention Month 2023," U.S. Department of State, January 19, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/national-human-trafficking-prevention-month-2023/>.

<sup>52</sup> "The First Progress Report to the President on Implementation of the U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality," U.S. Department of State, February 27, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/the-first-progress-report-to-the-president-on-implementation-of-the-u-s-national-strategy-on-gender-equity-and-equality/>.

<sup>53</sup> "52nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council," U.S. Department of State, February 27, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/52nd-session-of-the-un-human-rights-council/>.

of children, similarly to the U.S. and Colombia’s Dialogue Under the Child Protection Compact Partnership.<sup>54</sup>

While these themes came from our review of 2023 events, it is reasonable to hypothesize that these themes will appear again in future Department of State or US Government Events more broadly. These themes could let the Department of State keep a bank of influencers in this broad category available and ready for events as they appear. Therefore, the following influencers are recommended as a baseline for these broad categories and have some flexibility in their specific implementation.

After identifying and establishing the general themes for events that the State Department engaged in during 2023 the team worked to identify influencers that could speak on several topics contained in each theme. These influencers were identified and selected based on their engagement on the general theme and covered a wide range of topics. All the influencers contained in this section are based in the United States but have large and wide followings.

### ***Suggested Influencers for Security Connection***

The team identified two influencers who could speak on a broad range of global, regional, and domestic security issues while continuing to provide the content their audiences know them for. Our team identified V Spehar and Pete Zeihan as two content creators who have the necessary experience and knowledge to engage critically with the State Department and make the content relatable to their audiences. V Spehar has experience covering a wide variety of global and domestic security and other news events. They (their preferred pronouns) have also worked in collaboration with the Washington Post recently. They have also participated in Department of Defense programs allowing journalists to better cover military operations globally. Peter Zephan covers geopolitical issues on his YouTube channel in long-form explanatory videos covering international security and diplomatic issues.

### **Security Influencers - Background and Pitch**

- **V Spehar** – Followers: 3.1 million ([TT](#)), 388k ([IG](#)). Average views: 100k (IG), 500k (TT). V is non-binary and hosts their daily news segment, “Under The Desk News.” Covers daily news and analyzes present domestic and international issues. Also, a government watchdog that reports on government action in relation to security issues. New podcast titled “American Fever Dream.”
  - **Pitch:** V would conduct an “Under the Desk” short-form video format consisting of talking to the camera directly while under a desk. They can talk about security

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<sup>54</sup> “United States and Colombia Convene First Annual Dialogue Under the Child Protection Compact Partnership,” U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/united-states-and-colombia-convene-first-annual-dialogue-under-the-child-protection-compact-partnership/>.

issues with someone at one of these events or could have a guest on their podcast.

- **Peter Zeihan** – Followers: 756k ([YT](#)). Average views: 250k (YT). He gives talks on geopolitics and is an author. A thesis of his is that the American-led order will decline due to economic and political trends in the United States. He is against this outcome however, and advocates for greater American involvement in the world and aid for Ukraine. He has been involved in fundraising for Ukraine. He offers sharp criticism of both major political parties but does not formally support either. He spoke at the Maneuver Center of Excellence.<sup>55</sup>
  - **Pitch:** Peter can give a public conference or lecture for the State Department.

#### ***Suggested Influencer for Economics/Finance/Development Connection***

The team identified one influencer who could effectively cover topics of economics, finance, and development. Humphrey Yang is a former financial advisor and now a digital content creator who focuses on providing his followers with financial advice and commenting on trends. It was important that the team identify an influencer who had a background in financial topics so that they could engage thoughtfully and engage their audience on the topics discussed at a variety of events.

#### **Economics/Finance/Development Influencer - Background and Pitch**

- **Humphrey Yang** – Followers: 610k ([IG](#)), 1.2 million ([YT](#)), 3.3 million ([TT](#)). Average views: 20k (IG), 100k (YT), 400k (TT). He used to be a financial advisor but now posts financial advice to YouTube about wealth and self-improvement. His content is mostly explanations of events/concepts that beginners in personal finance may have questions about.
  - **Pitch:** Humphrey can cover current financial trends in a short-form video. He can also talk about a financial-related event that the State Department is hosting.

#### ***Suggested Influencer for Social Justice Connection***

Exploring the many issues of social justice required the team to identify influencers who were passionate and experienced in the field. The team identified two influencers, Mel D. Cole and Stephen Satterfield, as possible candidates for partnerships. Both Cole and Satterfield work in the journalistic field and have covered social justice topics in the United States. Mel D. Cole is a photojournalist with experience working with both celebrities and the public alike, showcasing his work through black and white photography. Satterfield's unique platform of food journalism allows him to tell stories and share information in a unique and different way but exploring justice issues through food.

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*The Changing Character of War Maneuver Center of Excellence*, Maneuver Center of Excellence (Youtube, 2022), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0CQsifJrMc&ab\\_channel=MCoEFortMoore](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0CQsifJrMc&ab_channel=MCoEFortMoore).

### Social Justice Influencers - Background and Pitch

- **Mel D. Cole** – Followers: 157k ([IG](#)). Average views 10k (IG). He is a photojournalist who focuses on the HipHop scene and has recently been focusing on social justice issues. He is well known for his black and white photos. He may not want to collaborate with the State Department, and a potential concern for a partnership with the State Department is that some of his photos are controversial and create heated discourse online. His audience is very general as he does take many photos of celebrities which gives him lots of followers and because of that his photos on social justice issues have comments from all different perspectives on these issues.
  - **Pitch:** Mel would take portrait photos of notable guests at justice-related State Department events. He could show a more personal side of the person he is photographing and highlight pictures of them working on a social justice issue.
- **Stephen Satterfield** – Followers: 100k ([IG](#)). Average views: 1k (IG). He is a food journalist who focuses on the history of food and has created a magazine, podcast and documentary to explore this connection through an anthropological perspective. His exploration of the connection food has to history could be a unique way of exploring the priorities of the State Department in terms of Justice.
  - **Pitch:** Stephen could interview someone from the State Department while explaining how a certain dish is connected to a social justice issue. This could take the form of short-form videos about cooking.

Altogether, these influencers can work in a multitude of potential events under the broad themes the team identified in our review of the State Department's 2023 events. While some of the pitches are based around a hypothetical event or key individual visit, others are based around broader, perennial discussions not tied to a specific location and day. This flexibility fits well with broad themes.

### **SPECIFIC STATE DEPARTMENT EVENTS FOR INFLUENCER PARTNERSHIPS**

After evaluating the general themes that we found across the 2023 events at the Department of State, the team moved to identify several specific events that we could identify as good opportunities for collaboration with influencers. These will be likely to repeat in 2024 and beyond.

**The team identified three events that could benefit from the inclusion of an influencer or multiple influencers: International Women of Courage Award Ceremony; Pride Month at the State Department; and the APEC Women and the Economy Forum.** By increasing the reach of these events, the State Department can better showcase its priorities to a global audience and promote the Secretary’s initiatives. We will highlight each event, why it is important, and offer suggestions on influencers that could be paired with the event.

**The International Women of Courage Award Ceremony** takes place in the spring of every year.<sup>56</sup> This event offers great opportunities for collaboration with influencers to both promote the event and raise awareness for the issues and projects these women advocate for. While there has been some increased attention on the event, there has still been a general lack of coverage even by traditional media.

State Department sponsored **Pride Month** events are a great opportunity to address multiple initiatives that the State Department and Secretary prioritize.<sup>57</sup> These events are also a great opportunity to partner with organizations like GLIFAA and others to promote diversity and inclusion, while also promoting careers in the Foreign Service.

The **Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum on Women and the Economy** is a great opportunity for the State Department to highlight the global issues that women face and how they can help grow the global economy.<sup>58</sup> Events like this benefit from non-traditional media coverage because there is so little coverage from traditional sources. Influencers can promote the State Department’s work pushing for equity and equality for all people globally.

These events have some overlap with our themes but can fundamentally stand alone. They embody U.S. values and offer opportunities for successful influencer partnerships.

#### ***Suggested Influencers for International Women of Courage Awardees at White House Ceremony***

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<sup>56</sup> “Secretary Blinken to Honor International Women of Courage Awardees at White House Ceremony,” U.S. Department of State, March 3, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinken-to-honor-international-women-of-courage-awardees-at-white-house-ceremony/>.

<sup>57</sup> “Public Schedule – June 29, 2023,” U.S. Department of State, June 28, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/public-schedule-june-29-2023/>.

<sup>58</sup> “Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues Rao Gupta Travels to Seattle for the APEC Women and the Economy Forum,” U.S. Department of State, August 17, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/ambassador-at-large-gupta-travels-to-seattle-for-apec-women-and-economy-forum/>.

- **Becca Rae-Tucker** (TheSweetFeminist) – Followers: 228k ([IG](#)). Average views: 30k (IG). Becca is based in Austin, Texas. Mainly an Instagram-based influencer who combines her feminism with baking. Videos mainly consist of a baking tutorial with commentary on women’s issues - namely reproductive rights. She also addresses issues of mental health with baking as a form of personal therapy.
  - **Pitch:** Becca could bake dishes from the countries of recipient awardees while highlighting the work awardees are doing. This would be done in a short-form video.
- **Zerlina Maxwell** – Followers: 50k ([IG](#)), 5k ([TT](#)). Average views: 25k (IG), 10k (TT). Black political influencer who hosts “Mornings with Zerlina,” a radio channel on SiriusXM. Has a largely engaged base that she appeals to. Large following among POC and women. Notable guests on her radio show include Hillary Clinton, Ayanna Pressley, and Elizabeth Warren. Law school graduate with a political focus on gender inequity, sexual consent, and structural racism.
  - **Pitch:** Zerlina highlights Women of Courage Awardees as guests in her morning radio show - same style as her typical short-form videos.
- **Fariba Balouch** – Followers: 58.3k ([IG](#)). Average views: 50k (IG). Former Women of Courage Awardee and Iranian human rights activist based in London. Member of the marginalized Baluchi ethnic group. Despite her family members being arrested in Iran and continued violence towards her community, she believes protest is what is needed to draw attention to ethnic discrimination in Iran.
  - **Pitch:** Fariba could be part of an initiative where the State Department highlights stories of past and future awardees who are members of marginalized groups in their own countries. This would be done in a short form video. This would generate public awareness while advancing the secretary’s commitment to human rights.

***Suggested Influencers for Reception in Honor of Pride Month at the Department of State***

- **Jonathan Van Ness** – Followers: 5.7 million ([IG](#)), 1.1 million ([TT](#)). Average views: 1.5 million (IG), 100k (TT). Non-binary LGBTQ+ activist and actor who stars who stars in the Netflix show “Queer Eye.” They typically post lifestyle/brand content while occasionally posting videos about current LGBTQ+ injustices. They have a large LGBTQ+ following and is a massive influencer in the makeup industry.
  - **Pitch:** Jonathan could generally cover the reception while highlighting the importance of non-binary representation in mainstream media in a “Get Ready with Me” short-form video.
- **Chella Man** – Followers: 421k ([IG](#)), 100k ([TT](#)). Average views: 100k (IG), 75k (TT). Chella Man is an Asian, Jewish, and trans, and deaf influencer who posts daily lifestyle content

on their life. With an intersectional identity, they can attract a very diverse audience who are able to learn more about LGBTQ+ issues. They have no consistent video formats.

- **Pitch:** Generally, Chella Man could cover the reception in a short-form video while also explaining how important diversity and intersectionality within the LGBTQ+ community is.

***Suggested Influencers for APEC Women and the Economy Forum***

- **Vivian Tu** – Followers: 2.3 million ([IG](#)), 2.5 million ([TT](#)), 723k ([YT](#)). Average views: 500k (IG), 100k (TT), 20k (YT). Economist and former Wall Street employee who does quick, flashy videos on how to save money, plan for your retirement, and manage your financial stability. She is an Author with NYT bestselling books.
  - **Pitch:** Vivian can analyze the Economic Forum and the role of women in advancing economic equality in a short-form video.

Through the pitches we have proposed, connections between the influencers recommended and the specific events identified were highlighted that could lead to a potential partnership. By harnessing these connections, the State Department can potentially tap into audiences that correlate with the event as well.

## SPECIFIC TASKING SOUGHT BY THE TEAM'S CLIENTS FROM THE GLOBAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS (GPA) BUREAU

The following influencers come from our dive into more foreign-located audiences, as requested by our client at the State Department's Global Public Affairs bureau. The team chose two countries for each of the three topics on which our group was asked focus on – the NATO Summit, Migration and Refugees, and Climate. These defined the scope of our search. For the NATO Summit, the team focused on Turkey and Hungary; for Migration and Refugees, the team focused on Mexico and Guatemala; and for Climate, the team focused on India and Nigeria.

The project team chose two influencers to recommend per country. These two influencers were identified as either a top choice for the country, or an alternative influencer that is a good fit for the country and goals if an alternative audience or partnership is desired or needed. The top choice(s) is bolded for each country the team focused on. These influencers not only fit the task given to us by the State Department but focus on a foreign audience in comparison to the domestic-focused recommendations of the previous section.

### ***NATO Summit***

The NATO Summit is of critical importance. It presents an opportunity to intensify NATO's cohesion and the relations between each member states. **In recent years, Hungarian and Turkish leadership have become increasingly critical of NATO's role** in the world and have deviated from liberal democratic norms, as seen in their respective decisions to admit Finland and Sweden into the alliance.

Therefore, it is vital that the State Department identify good means to reach out to the Hungarian and Turkish populations in ways that help convince them of the vitality of NATO in providing security for their daily lives. Domestic influencers will play a critical role in reaching those audiences, especially as political leadership is less likely to outwardly praise NATO. These influencers should not be used to generate conflict with government narratives of our allies Hungary and Turkey, but rather to fill a void – to remind the Hungarian and Turkish populations of the importance and vitality of the alliance.

### **Turkey:**

- **Emirhan Ozhan** – Followers: 14 million (**IG**), 2.8 million (**YT**). Average views: 20k (IG), 10k (YT). Emirhan focuses on daily life in Turkey, philanthropy. He also creates social experiments and comedy videos. He also touches on social issues afflicting Turkey on occasion. His videos are non-political.
  - **Pitch:** Emirhan creates a comedic video with a State Department official that also touches on the importance of NATO to the daily lives of the Turkish people. This

would go outside Ozhan’s typical format but could be filmed in the informal manner his videos are known for.

- **Pitch:** Emirhan creates a music video related to the NATO Summit. The song can be a review of the Summit or go over the benefits of NATO for Turkish citizens (while keeping in mind that Emirhan has creative control over the creative process). The benefits emphasized in the song can relate to NATO’s values of freedom and democracy as well as collective security, guaranteeing the safety of all Turkish citizens. The music video would be posted on YouTube, where he published similar content in the past.
- Murat Yetkin – Followers: 413k ([X](#)), 146k ([YT](#)), 45k ([IG](#)). Average views: 40k (YT). Yetkin is a journalist that takes a neutral approach to Turkish domestic politics. This makes him ideal to engage with. His paper has [criticized](#) the harassment of journalists. Most of his audience seems to be supportive of the opposition leader and Istanbul mayor. This makes his work appealing to people who would be more sympathetic to the West.
  - **Pitch:** Murat interviews a State Department official discussing the importance of Turkish-American relations and how it impacts the people of Turkey in a short-form video. Yetkin has done interviews in the past and would thus be consistent with his normal format. The interviews are shown on YouTube. Considering his other interviews, the interview could be half an hour in length.
  - **Pitch:** Murat can do a question-and-answer session on Twitter with his followers regarding the NATO Summit. It can be done in conjunction with State Department-associated accounts.

### Hungary:

- **Nemakarokbeleszolni** – Followers: 183k ([IG](#)), 20.3k ([TT](#)). Average views: 300k (IG), ~12k (TT). Funny parenting videos posted by a group of content creators including Judit Banyai. Their videos have them facing the camera, with a small cast of regulars narrating. It cannot be verified what they are saying due to the language differences. There is slight hesitation recommending this influencer because they speak Hungarian and thus cannot be vetted the same way, but it was an example given on the Radio Free Europe article.<sup>59</sup> The stars from this parenting videos account worked with Partizan and many others on protests about the recent scandal surrounding former President Katalin Novák.<sup>60</sup> Novák pardoned a deputy leader of a public children’s home who had been imprisoned for attempting to cover up sexual abuse allegations against the director. The protests, which included a younger public normally not interested in politics in Hungary, were organized

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<sup>59</sup> Rutai, Lili, “How Hungarian Influencers Are Turning The Politically Apathetic Into Protesters,” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, February 21, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/hungary-influencers-politics-protesters/32829282.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

by influencers. This connection could be used as a basis for working with an account that does not include politics. This is also the potential risk with this partnership – Hungarian young people generally do not like party politics and generally prefer issue-based concerns (specific social, educational, or environmental),<sup>61</sup> so we cannot tell exactly what Nemakarokbeszolni politics are until they are approached by the Department of State. Since Novák is an ally of Orbán,<sup>62</sup> and the goal of these partnerships is to present narratives that often run against those of the Hungarian government, there is a potential for a partnership. While their name translates to “I don’t want to tell you what to do, but”<sup>63</sup> their account description on Instagram translates to, “our whole life is a joke.” Both phrases are hard to determine if they are political statements.

- **Pitch:** In a series of short-form videos, Nemakarokbeszolni splices their normal parenting content with updates from the conference that educate their younger, less political audience (according to RFE/RL) on the importance of NATO. Their funny, parenting direct-to-camera content could transition to the importance and vitality of the alliance relatively easily. Perhaps they could compare the strength of NATO to the strength of a family, where everyone comes together in times of crisis – but this is dependent on the exact phrases and terminology used in their Hungarian-language videos. In both pitches, the connection to the Secretary’s goals is more indirect – promoting pro-NATO values helps the Secretary and the U.S. since the U.S. is in NATO.
- **Pitch:** Nemakarokbeszolni, taking a more serious tone, connects their work on the recent protests to the importance of a democratic, free Hungary away from the corruption of the former president with the vitality and importance of NATO. They would do this in one or a series of short-form videos. This would be a safer pitch for the Department of State, as there would be less chance of misinterpretation and less comedy, but could be a harder sell to Nemakarokbeszolni, as they would have been straying from their traditional video style. Though, they may approach a clearer separation from their comedy to their more political content.
- Partizán – Followers: 450k ([YT](#)), 97.8k ([IG](#)), 101.6k ([TT](#)). Average views: 100k (YT), 40k (IG), 10k (TT). Márton Gulyás, the leader of Partizán Politics, makes video essays about politics, mostly in Hungarian but sometimes in English. He also often interviews , in private or sometimes in public. The video linked earlier could be a potential concern for the state department because he appears to call out a US political party. There is some hesitation in recommending this influencer because many of his videos are in Hungarian

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

and thus it is difficult to vet him thoroughly, but he is a very popular Hungarian influencer who does most of his content in Hungarian with occasional English-language videos. He, like Nemakarokbeleszolni, was a focus of the RFE/RL article on the protests surrounding former President Novák.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, the channel has an anti-Orban voice, which while the account and its audience may sometimes say things the State Department desires, may look bad to influence a US ally against its leader. This political influence may have problems with approval, but with a subject like NATO something like this may be needed.

- **Pitch:** Partizán creates a video essay about the NATO summit from his home in Hungary, where he has free editorial reign to see what he wants but is given access to high-level USG figures online or on their next trip to Eastern Europe. One strong potential interviewee is Administrator Power, as she visited Hungary in 2023 and met with young people, human rights advocates, journalist, and governance experts along with officials from the Hungarian government.<sup>65</sup>
- **Pitch:** Partizán could use one of their less frequent formats and go onto the street to interview local Hungarians. The topics of these questions would be about NATO and the transatlantic alliance – and if a local Hungarian takes an anti-NATO opinion, Partizán would provide facts about the positives of NATO to debate them with. Therefore, counterarguments are presented but they are debunked live. There is a similar potential to bring on a high-level USG official like Administrator Power at the end of the video for a brief interview as well.

### ***Migration and Refugees***

Migration is one of the most pressing and divisive issues in the United States right now. A deteriorating and inefficient legal immigration system leaves many hopeful potential migrants and refugees waiting years to take the first steps in a long immigration and asylum process. This has led to a growing, record number of illegal migration crossings through the southern US border, a life-threatening risk, as well as many refugees waiting in third countries while seeking admission.

President Biden’s “Executive Order on Restoring Faith in Our Legal Immigration Systems and Strengthening Integration and Inclusion Efforts for New Americans,” issued on February 2, 2021, outlines seven sections to improving legal immigration systems. These include, “Policy; Revocation, Rescission, and Reporting; Special Immigrant Visas for Iraqi and Afghan Allies; Steps

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Office of Press Relations, “Administrator Samantha Power Visits Hungary,” U.S. Agency for International Development, February 11, 2023, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/feb-11-2023-administrator-samantha-power-visits-hungary>.

to Improve the Efficacy, Integrity, Security, and Transparency of USRAP, Improving Performance; Climate Change and Migration; General Provisions.”<sup>40</sup>

There is a focus on **Mexico and Guatemala** in this report due to the large number of individuals from these nations seeking entry into the US every year. Year after year, since the 1980s, the largest number of migrants have come from Mexico. Connecting to the audience of those who have directly experienced the immigration system is crucial to improving our legal immigration systems.

### **Mexico**

- Luis Arturo Villar Sudek (**Luisto Comuica**) – Followers: 42.4 million (YT), 33.5 million (IG), 16.9 million (TT), 8.8 million (X). Average views: 5 million (YT), 1 million (IG), 2 million (TT), 40k (X). Luis is a Spanish language influencer based in Mexico City who is originally from Puebla and has had a long career in the social media field. He began by creating piano tutorial videos on YouTube; however, he has since grown to be one of the largest influencers in Mexico for his travel videos and posts. Luisto Comuica is not afraid to engage with other peoples and cultures from his own. In January 2023, he was one of six prominent Youtubers invited to cover the World Economic Forum’s annual conference. Luissillo’s extensive audience and extensive engagement prove him to be an important voice who can engage on issues of migration and refugees. Connecting with the largest audience possible, a collaboration with Luis covers his YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok audiences reaching 92.8 million accounts.
  - **Pitch:** Luis could attend an event with U.S. Embassy Mexico City discussing migration and refugee topics. Prior to the Event Luis would conduct a 10min interview with a high-level Embassy official to speak about issues hear the work that the State Department is doing on these issues. Luis would also show himself attending the event after the interview.
  - **Pitch:** Luis would attend an event at the State Department in Washington, D.C. highlighting policy changes and programs. Luis would attend the event filming in a vlog style highlighting his arrival and an introduction to the event. He would then include a casual style interview with an important guest of the event highlighting their attendance. Finally, he could have a longer interview with a State Department Official (Secretary of State, Under Secretary for Civilian security, Democracy, and Human Rights, or Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration) to discuss current policy and changes that have taken place. This video would work best on his YouTube channel.
- Mariand Castrejon Castañeda “Yuya” – Followers: 16.4 million (IG), 12 million (FB), 962k (TT). Average views: 500k (IG), 40k (FB), 2m (TT). A Mexican-based beauty influencer, she has a large following in Mexico. She was once the second most popular YouTuber in

Mexico, and the 32<sup>nd</sup> most subscribed YouTuber globally. She now focuses primarily on Instagram and has recently made a few TikTok videos. She began her social media presence in the mid-to-late 2000s and grew to her greatest popularity around 2016. In 2016, she worked with the UN on their sustainable development goals predominantly focusing on Women and Girls empowerment. While she may have a lack of experience working on social issues beyond her work with the UN, her large following and presence could effectively spread the State Department's message.

- **Pitch:** Yuya would attend an event at U.S. Embassy Mexico City or the Ambassador's residence. She would produce a short-form video showing her getting ready for the event, playing off the popular get ready with me videos by influencers. She would describe the event she is attending and the importance.
- **Pitch:** Yuya would attend a State Department sponsored event either in Mexico City or Washington, DC highlighting U.S. migration policy. She would post a short-form video on her social media platforms highlighting the event and policies shared. Yuya would post a video where she is sitting, highlighting the event to her followers which showing pictures she took while at the event.

## Guatemala

- **Adriana Alejandre** – Followers: 113k ([IG](#)), 13k ([TT](#)). Average views: 5k (IG), 1k (TT). Owns a brand called LatinxTherapy which addresses mental health challenges and issues faced by those from Latin America. As a Guatemalan Mexican woman with American citizenship, Adriana runs a platform which delivers daily content in both Spanish and English, meant to destigmatize mental health topics as taboo in the Latinx community. This includes daily affirmations and tips on how to improve day-to-day mental health.
  - **Pitch:** Adriana can do a video in her typical format - short-form, direct to camera in a personal video. This would be in collaboration with the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and could feature an official of the bureau. Both Adriana and the PRM official would be speaking to the audience, addressing the mental toll of migration and how improvements to the migration process would help millions of Guatemalans and potentially others from Central America. There would be an emphasis on the PRM bureau's commitment to humanitarian assistance and easing the suffering of those who have been displaced.
  - **Pitch:** Adriana can do another collaborative, dialogue-style video with an official from the US embassy in Guatemala City to discuss the 2023 National Migration Policy (NMP) framework put forth by the Guatemalan government and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). More specifically, they would highlight the physical/mental healthcare resources and assistance available for vulnerable populations.

- Sara Curruchich – Followers: 40k (IG), 13k (TT). Average views: 20k (IG), 50 (TT). Musician and indigenous activist born in Guatemala and now based in the US. Sara uses her platform to convey her activist background in her music and by uplifting modern issues faced by Guatemalans, Guatemalan Americans, and indigenous Guatemalans. Her content is mainly in Spanish.
  - **Pitch:** Sara could write a song addressing the struggle faced by Guatemalans trying to migrate to the US. A song about rebuilding the lives of those in Guatemala while addressing the need to improve the US migration system. An official from the PRM bureau could talk with Sara in a short-form video about the song. This song would be posted on music streaming services.
  - **Pitch:** Sara could create a short-form video of her process of crafting a song. This song could pull inspiration from the stories & experiences of Guatemalans who have emigrated to the US, conveying a message of hope through their journeys. Sara could perform this song at a future Global Music Diplomacy event. This song would be posted on music streaming services.

### ***Climate***

Climate change affects everyone in various ways, and even as governments are trying to ensure that their citizens will have a future, it is vital to ensure that climate change is at the forefront of people’s minds. It is essential to look at **India** when discussing climate change as it is an example of a country where the government has worked rapidly and efficiently to help reduce its carbon emissions and try to curb some of the practices that are detrimental to the earth. An example from India that stands out is solar power, which not only helps curb carbon emissions but also, in turn, helps people live a better quality of life.<sup>66</sup> **Nigeria** is also important to look at in terms of its relation to the issue of climate change. Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa and has many natural resources, such as oil and natural gas.<sup>67</sup> Nigeria has a large population of which many are youth, which is critical to consider when thinking about the future of Nigeria as it has rapidly adapted to the threat of climate change like India with things like sustainable land use, which leads to many benefits for people who live there.<sup>68</sup> Influencers from India and Nigeria will be useful for the State Department to partner with as they can bring more awareness to their audiences on how nations are currently trying to reduce the threat of climate change.

### **India**

- **Licypriya Kangujam** – Followers: 51k (IG), 206k (X), 56k (YT), 72k (FB). Average views: 50k (IG), 25k (X), 20k (YT), 400 (FB). She is a 12-year-old climate activist who is compared to Greta Thunberg, as she also started her activism very young. However, her comments

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas Kerr, “India Is Making Strides on Climate Policy That Others Could Follow,” February 5, 2024, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/02/climate-policy-india/>.

<sup>67</sup> “Nigeria,” Climate Knowledge Portal, n.d., <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/nigeria>.

<sup>68</sup> “Nigeria.”

are limited, which can make it hard to gauge the actual engagement, as all the information that is present is the likes on a post.

- **Pitch:** Licypriya posts a lot of photos of herself doing actual climate change work, such as picking up trash or holding a sign calling for change. Following the same format, she can attend a climate event promoting cleaning the planet hosted by the State Department, with an ambassador or other official. In a short video she and a State Department Official will pick up trash while discussing the importance of combatting climate change and how everyone can do their part. Additionally, the video may end with Licypriya standing with the official holding a sign calling for everyone to do their part.
- **Pitch:** Licypriya interviews other youth from India about climate change before going to a State Department event related to climate change and explains how climate change affects the daily life of Indian youth. This would be posted to Instagram.
- **Diipa Büller-Khosla** – Followers: 2.1 million ([IG](#)), 18.6k ([YT](#)). Average views: 450k (IG), 15k (YT). She is a famous Indian influencer who has worked on ICC but is now a fashion influencer. She is conscious of social issues as she participates in different campaigns and is the founder of the nonprofit Post for Change, which works for gender equality. There are no major concerns, though she no longer lives in India. However, she still has a large audience from India. She also may have her comments limited, making it harder to gauge engagement past likes on a post.
  - **Pitch:** Diipa could post a video compilation or series of photos taken with a high-up official from the State Department at an event related to climate change and the importance of female entrepreneurship to combat climate change. These would showcase different aspects of the event promoting women and climate suitability priorities. There is also the opportunity to partner with Diipa over several events each showcasing climate issues as well as how women can help contribute to mitigating the climate crisis.
  - **Pitch:** Diipa makes a video promoting sustainability in India with a focus on sustainable vs fast fashion, which can be done in a video at a State Department event in India related to climate change. In the video, she wears sustainable fashion and talks about the harms of fast fashion in a long-form video.
- **Dhruv Rathee** – Followers: 3.5 million ([IG](#)), 16.3 million ([YT](#)), 1.9 million ([X](#)). Average views: 500k (IG), 10 million (YT), and 100k (X). He creates educational content for Indian youth. He speaks on social issues and has talked about climate change before. He has not been involved in any scandals, but he does talk about a variety of topics and criticizes Indian politicians openly, which may make him a less desirable option to partner with.

- **Pitch:** Dhruv makes a long-form YouTube video about climate change in India and why it is important, following his usual format. At the end of the video, he talks about a climate change event he went to or someone he talked to from the State Department.
- **Pitch:** Dhruv makes a long-form YouTube video interviewing a State Department official at a Climate event about the effects of climate change on India to educate the youth on how they can have an impact in combatting climate change related to government policies and creating change through their officials.

## Nigeria

- **Egemba Fidelis “Aproko Doctor”** – Followers: 1.6m(IG), 2.3m(X) 136k (YT). Average views: 80k (IG), 80k (X), 55k (YT). He is a Lagos-based doctor dedicated to spreading medical awareness to the general Nigerian public. He founded the 100k Club, a health-focused non-profit. He communicates in a clear, personable manner, enabling him to reach a wide audience. He has previously collaborated with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to advocate for the United Nations' goals for sustainable development. Climate change is not a widely discussed topic in Nigeria, so his advisory medical perspective can provide a novel way to spread awareness.
  - **Pitch:** Egemba uploads a short-form interview style Instagram video discussing the potential health effects of climate change, such as worsened air quality and increased risk of waterborne illness, with an official from the State Department. We would suggest an official from the Global Health Office or OES Environmental Affairs.
  - **Pitch:** Egemba posts a long-form YouTube video where he and an official from the U.S. embassy in Lagos discuss climate change with members of the Nigerian public. He can ask questions and correct misconceptions.
- **Ebuka Plantboyng** – Followers: 16.2k (TT), 19.2k (IG). Average views: 5k (TT), 10k (IG). He is a Nigerian, Lagos-based content creator who primarily posts content detailing proper plant care and exhibiting his own plants. He has also hosted events in Lagos and advocated for more vegetation and eco-friendly planning in his home city. Ebuka has an engaged audience that is primarily made up of hobbyists who are likely to care deeply about the environment. His focus on local issues, demonstrated passion, and audience engagement all indicate the potential for a successful partnership.
  - **Pitch:** Ebuka makes a short-form informational video highlighting a pressing local environmental initiative in Lagos, Nigeria. He would take an official from the U.S. Embassy walking in Lagos to showcase how climate change is affecting the people's daily lives.
  - **Pitch:** Ebuka makes a longer form informative video along with a State Department showcasing the role that plants can play in combatting climate change.

## OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

In this report, we have discussed and analyzed scholarly and journalistic sources, reported highlights from interviews with professionals in public diplomacy, identified State Department events that could benefit from the use of influencers, and discussed potentially valuable influencers from the United States and abroad. Building on this research, analysis, and discussion, the project team offers the following observations and recommendations regarding their Influencer Diplomacy program.

**First, there are many philosophies, strategies, and methodologies already utilized by GPA and the State Department that were reiterated and recommended across our research and influencer identification process.** This includes continuing to not limit oneself to influencers of a particular minimum follower count. **Whether through the unique audience niches and focuses a smaller influencer can provide to state, or simply for a diversity of influencers, influencers of all sizes are important for PD.** Embassies can also play a crucial role with finding and vetting influencers due to their knowledge foreign areas that may be of interest to the State Department. **State and GPA should also keep playing a supportive role for influencers, providing an effective, transparent, two-way relationship with an influencer that amplifies and shapes their message much like how an orchestra supports and amplifies a soloist without hampering their independence and message. This is the superpower the U.S. and its fellow democracies have against our authoritarian rivals, and continuing this great tradition is vital for further success.**

**Second, the project team wants to emphasize the potential for long-term partnerships between influencers and GPA.** This comes from a few different points of analysis. Long-term partnerships could borrow from academic theories of exchange programs within PD and traditional partnerships. **Influencer partnerships at home or abroad could be used to build long-term foundational relationships between the U.S. and other countries, as they not only would have this short-term advocacy and listening effect but also are building relationships with potential future cultural leaders globally.** In addition, when asked about long-term partnerships, our experts expressed various opinions on the trend. Former senior PD Foreign Service Officer, Joe Johnson mentioned how thinking long-term is a trend in PD, and how embassies have limited but important tools to build long-term partnerships abroad in areas other than with influencers.<sup>69</sup> Vivian Walker highlighted the importance of long-term exchange programs in their traditional sense, and how technology can play a role in them but how they should not be reinvented.<sup>70</sup> **Influencers, in the project team's opinion, could fit into this role of longer-term exchange programs well, much like musicians have for decades.** Beyond the academic argument, longer-term partnerships have immediate benefits as well. Social media is perennially changing, and influencers are sensitive to and aware of these changes - making them valuable partners. **If the State Department can partner with especially effective influencers, they can have an already vetted and approved partner consistently watching trends and tailoring their message based on said trends.** Long-term partnerships do leave open more opportunities for a partner to go rogue and post something violent, derogatory, or

<sup>69</sup> Johnson, Influencer and Public Diplomacy Meeting.

<sup>70</sup> Walker, Diplomacy Lab Group - Request for Insights on Public Diplomacy.

too far against USG positions while in partnerships, but the project team believes that potential positives outweigh the negatives. That is in part why the project team has recommended 5 influencers based on the general themes created from our review of 2,849 State Department press releases. These influencers are examples of how broad themes of interest for State could be regularly served by a group of influencers. In practice, to unlock the benefits of exchange diplomacy, influencers from abroad may be better suited for these partnerships - but the potential can be found in both groups.

**Finally, the team believes authenticity should be encouraged as a core value in influencer partnerships. This applies to the content's perceived authenticity and the partnership's authenticity.** Audiences choose to follow influencers who are relatable and engaging. These qualities should be sought out in partnership candidates and should remain apparent throughout the partnership. The final product of any partnership should be content that is wholly consistent with the influencer's prior work. **The research shows that the harmony of beliefs and perceptions drives the effectiveness of influencers. In the private sector, this manifests as "I like influencer X, Influencer X likes product Y, therefore I will probably like product Y."** **To fully take advantage of this dynamic in State Department partnerships the influencer should be a credible messenger, and their voice should be perceived as their own.** Even when an influencer is free to create their own content, they may still be operating under their own self-created constraints. Therefore, this point needs to be communicated to the influencers themselves. Since audience perception is paramount, "the audience is always right" as they determine whether a message is authentic. The team believes this balance theory framework should be incorporated as a key part of a multifaceted influencer diplomacy decision making matrix.<sup>71</sup> This approach is grounded in empirical research based on the private sector's use of influencers. Public sector partnerships should seek to utilize the same psychological mechanism.

In the rapidly evolving social media space, additional research will be needed. While experiences from the private sector are helpful and have been drawn on for this report, there may be critical points of difference when it comes to public sector partnerships. Additionally, while we have relied on public diplomacy experts, a new generation of researchers may challenge core assumptions. Our insights should be adjusted accordingly as more experiences and data are collected regarding this rapidly evolving field. However, after our exhaustive survey of the issue, the team firmly believes that our recommendations provide a valuable path forward at this time.

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<sup>71</sup> Belanche et al., "Understanding Influencer Marketing."

**DELIVERABLES**

- General Themes Influencers
  - V Spehar (Security)
  - Peter Zeihan (Security)
  - Humphrey Yang (Economics)
  - Mel D. Cole (Justice)
  - Stephen Satterfield (Justice)
- Specific Events Influencers
  - Becca Rea-Tucker (International Women of Courage Ceremony)
  - Zerlina Maxwell (International Women of Courage Ceremony)
  - Fariba Balouch (International Women of Courage Ceremony)
  - Jonathan Van Ness (Pride Month Reception)
  - Chella Man (Pride Month Reception)
  - Vivian Tu (APEC Women and the Economy Forum)
- Client Task Influencers - Principles
  - Emirhan Ozhan (Turkey)
  - Nemakarokbeleszolni (Hungary)
  - Luisto Comuica (Mexico)
  - Adriana Alejandre (Guatemala)
  - Licypriya Kangujam (India)
  - Diipa Büller-Khosla (India)
  - Egemba Fidelis (Nigeria)
- Client Task Influencers – Alternative
  - Partizán (Hungary)
  - Murat Yetkin (Turkey)
  - Mariand Castrejon Castañeda aka Yuya (Mexico)
  - Sara Curruchich (Guatemala)
  - Dhruv Rathee (India)
  - Ebuka Plantboyng (Nigeria)

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## APPENDIX A

## Department of State Events 2023

Date	Title	Type	Tag 1	Tag 2	Notes
1/3/2023	<a href="#">Launch of First U.S. Strategy on Global Women's Economic Security</a>	Notice to the Press	Women	Economics	
1/9/2023	<a href="#">U.S. Department of State and Amazon Team Up to Support Women Entrepreneurs and Increase Educational Opportunities in Mexico</a>	Media Note	Women	Education	May not be a repeat event
1/11/2023	<a href="#">Secretary Blinken to Deliver Remarks at the United States Conference of Mayors' 91st Winter Meeting</a>	Notice to the Press	Indo-Pacific	Economics	
1/12/2023	<a href="#">Indo-Pacific Business Forum Promotes Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in the Indo-Pacific</a>	Fact Sheet	Economic		Happend every 2 years
1/16/2023	<a href="#">National Religious Freedom Day</a>	Press Statement	Religion		No event attached
1/19/2023	<a href="#">National Human Trafficking Prevention Month 2023</a>	Press Statement	Social Issues	Human Trafficking	
1/23/2023	<a href="#">Overseas Schools Advisory Council Meeting</a>	Media Note	Education		May not work for out group
1/25/2023	<a href="#">U.S.-India Alliance for Women's Economic Empowerment Shatter Summit</a>	Notice to the Press	Women	Economics	
2/1/2023	<a href="#">Global Human Rights Defender Award Recipients Announced</a>	Media Note	Human Rights	Award	
2/3/2023	<a href="#">ASEAN-U.S. Cyber Policy Dialogue</a>	Media Note	Cyber	ASEAN	
2/7/2023	<a href="#">Diplomatic Culinary Partnership Reception</a>	Notice to the Press	Culinary		Document in folder with the chefs and their social media following
2/9/2023	<a href="#">Human Trafficking Task Force Meeting</a>	Media Note	Social Issues	Human Trafficking	
2/22/2023	<a href="#">Expanding Regional Economic Integration through I2U2's Business-to-Business Cooperation</a>	Media Note	Economic	Business	When the event is in the U.S.
2/24/2023	<a href="#">OSCE Permanent Council Meeting</a>	Remarks	Security	Europe	
2/27/2023	<a href="#">The First Progress Report to the President on Implementation of the U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality</a>	Press Statement	Social Issues	Gender Equality	
2/27/2023	<a href="#">Country Reports on Terrorism</a>	Media Note	Security	Terrorism	
2/27/2023	<a href="#">52nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council</a>	Press Statement	Human Rights	United Nation	
3/1/2023	<a href="#">Summit of the Americas: Supporting Green Shipping and Coastal Ecosystems in the Americas</a>	Media Note	Eco	Americas	
3/3/2023	<a href="#">International Women of Courage Awardees at White House Ceremony</a>	Notice to the Press	Women		Actually Hapaned 3/8/2023
3/3/2023	<a href="#">Raisina Dialogue: Quad Foreign Ministers' Panel</a>	Remarks	Security	Australia, India, Japan, US	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
3/17/2023	<a href="#">March Madness Sports Visitor Exchange with Serbian Basketball Coaches</a>	Media Note	Sports	Ed and Cultural Affairs	
3/29/2023	<a href="#">Summit for Democracy</a>	Media Note	Democracy	Costa Rica, Netherlands, South Korea, and Zambia	
4/10/2023	<a href="#">State Department Partners with Africa Fintech Summit</a>	Media Note	Finance Technology	Africa	Happens every 2 years
4/24/2023	<a href="#">United Nations Economic and Social Council Youth Forum</a>	Media Note			Forum 4/25-27/2023
4/24/2023	<a href="#">TechWomen Delegation Travel to Kazakhstan. Aims to Increase Number of Women and Girls in STEM</a>	Media Note	Women	Technology	4/23-28/2023
5/2/2023	<a href="#">Asian American Foreign Affairs Association Annual Leadership Dinner</a>	Public Schedule			
5/4/2023	<a href="#">2023 SelectUSA Investment Summit</a>	Notice to the Press	Economic		

5/9/2023	<a href="#">Freedom House 2023 Annual Awards Ceremony</a>	Notice to the Press	Democracy	
6/12/2023	<a href="#">Foreign Policy for America 2023 Leadership Summit</a>	Remarks		
6/23/2023	<a href="#">U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum</a>	Public Schedule	India	
6/7/2023	<a href="#">RightsCon 2023 session</a>	Remarks		“Promoting a Positive Vision for the Internet and Digital Technologies Through the Freedom Online Coalition”
6/29/2023	<a href="#">Reception in honor of Pride Month at the Department of State</a>	Public Schedule	LGBTQ	
7/10/2023	<a href="#">Regional Summit for the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs in East Africa</a>	Media Note	Women	
7/11/2023	<a href="#">STEM Exchange Program for TechGirls from 36 Countries in Washington, DC</a>	Media Note	Women	Technology
7/12/2023	<a href="#">2023 ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting</a>	Fact Sheet	ASEAN	Meeting 7/13-14/2023
7/14/2023	<a href="#">2023 US-Indonesia Ministerial Strategic Dialogue</a>	Media Note		
7/19/2024	<a href="#">Annual Session of UNHRC</a>	Media Note	Human Rights	
7/20/2023	<a href="#">2023 U.S.-Arab League Strategic Dialogue</a>	Media Note	Middle East	
7/21/2023	<a href="#">International Visitor Leadership Program Alumni Impact Awardees</a>	Media Note		
7/27/2023	<a href="#">U.S. Soccer Take Global Efforts to Grow the Game of Soccer, Sports Diplomacy to Next Level Through New Partnership</a>	Media Note	Sports Diplomacy	FIFA Women's World Cup
8/1/2023	<a href="#">Launch of the Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy</a>	Remarks		
8/2/2023	<a href="#">Mandela Washington Fellowship Summit for Young African Leaders</a>	Remarks	Africa	
8/8/2023	<a href="#">Secretary's Award for Global Anti-Racism Champions</a>	Media Note	Anti-Racism	Global
8/10/2023	<a href="#">2023 P3 Impact Award Finalists Announced</a>	Media Note		
8/17/2023	<a href="#">APEC Women and the Economy Forum</a>	Media Note	Women	Economy
9/8/2023	<a href="#">Second Senior Officials Meeting on Atlantic Cooperation</a>	Media Note	Environment and Oceans	UNGA
9/11/2023	<a href="#">Anniversary of the September 11, 2001, Attacks</a>	Press Statement	Terrorism	Security
9/14/2023	<a href="#">Art in Embassies Launches New Events</a>	Media Note	Democracy	Culture
9/15/2023	<a href="#">United Nations General Assembly United States and Colombia Annual Dialogue Under the</a>	Press Statement	United Nations	UNGA
9/19/2023	<a href="#">Child Protection Compact Partnership G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting at the High-Level Week of the UNGA</a>	Media Note	Human Rights	Western Hemisphere
9/19/2023	<a href="#">the UNGA</a>	Media Note	UNGA	
9/19/2023	<a href="#">UN Sustainable Development Goals Summit</a>	Remarks	Development	
9/20/2023	<a href="#">USAID Democracy Delivers Event</a>	Remarks	Democracy	Human Rights
9/20/2023	<a href="#">I2U2 Announcement at United Nations General Assembly High-Level Week</a>	Notice to the Press	Environment	UNGA
9/20/2023	<a href="#">Advancing the 2030 Agenda through Inclusive and Rights-Respecting Digital Policy Event</a>	Remarks	Technology	
9/20/2023	<a href="#">U.S. Department of State Hosts Environmental Defenders Event at UNGA</a>	Media Note	Environment	Human Rights
9/21/2023	<a href="#">Annual CSIS Republic of Korea-United States Strategic Forum 2023</a>	Notice to the Press	Asia	Security

9/21/2023	<a href="#">U.S. Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGI) Investor Forum</a>	Media Note	Economic	
9/21/2023	<a href="#">United States and Côte d'Ivoire Launch Child Protection Compact Partnership Activities</a>	Media Note	Children	Human Rights
9/21/2023	<a href="#">Special Competitive Studies Project (SCSP)'s Global Emerging Tech Summit</a>	Remarks	Technology	
9/21/2023	<a href="#">Advancing the Sustainability and Adaptability of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda Event</a>	Remarks	Women	
9/25/2023	<a href="#">U.S.-Pacific Islands Forum Summit</a>	Remarks	Oceania	
9/27/2023	<a href="#">Global Music Diplomacy Initiative</a>	Media Note	Music	
9/27/2023	<a href="#">Peace Through Music Award</a>	Fact Sheet	Music	
9/27/2023	<a href="#">The HealthTech Hub Africa Named 2023 P3 Impact Award Winner at Concordia Summit</a>	Media Note	Technology	Africa
9/29/2023	<a href="#">Program to End Modern Slavery Awards</a>	Media Note	Human rights	Global
10/5/2023	<a href="#">U.S.-Mexico High-Level Security Dialogue</a>	Remarks	Security	Mexico
10/19/2023	<a href="#">Celebrating the Power of Youth Exchange</a>	Media Note	Children	Education
10/19/2023	<a href="#">Secretary of State's Award for Corporate Excellence</a>	Media Note	Economic	
10/20/2023	<a href="#">Conference of the States Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption</a>	Media Note	Democracy	Economy
10/20/2023	<a href="#">Climate and Fragility Workshop</a>	Media Note	Environment	
10/23/2023	<a href="#">United States-Indonesia Senior Officials' 2+2 Foreign Policy and Defense Dialogue</a>	Media Note	Security	
10/24/2023	<a href="#">Meeting of the Trilateral Working Group on Trafficking in Persons</a>	Media Note	Human rights	
10/26/2023	<a href="#">Intersex Awareness Day</a>	Press Statement	LGBTQ	
10/26/2023	<a href="#">Annual Japan-U.S. Energy Security Dialogue</a>	Media Note	Asia	Environment
10/27/2023	<a href="#">International Religious Freedom Day</a>	Press Statement	Religion	
10/27/2023	<a href="#">International Religious Freedom Day</a>	Press Statement	Religion	
10/31/2023	<a href="#">Launch of the 2023 U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)</a>	Remarks	Women	Security
11/2/2023	<a href="#">International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists</a>	Press Statement	Human rights	Democracy
11/4/2023	<a href="#">The 44th Anniversary of the Takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran</a>	Press Statement	Terrorism	
11/10/2023	<a href="#">Fifth Annual India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue</a>	Media Note	Security	
11/15/2023	<a href="#">Third Annual Meeting of States of the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap</a>	Media Note	Security	Latin America
11/17/2023	<a href="#">U.S. Department of State Launches First-Ever Academy for Women Entrepreneurs Indo-Pacific Women-in-Tech Summit</a>	Media Note	Indo Pac	Women
11/17/2023	<a href="#">International Education Week 2023, Recognizing Gilman International Scholarship Program and Alumni Awardees</a>	Media Note	Education	Award
11/25/2023	<a href="#">Observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women</a>	Press Statement	Women	Human Rights
11/28/2023	<a href="#">Meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs</a>	Remarks	NATO	Security
11/29/2023	<a href="#">International Women Human Rights Defenders Day</a>	Press Statement	Women	Human Rights
12/1/2023	<a href="#">Leadership on Climate Change and Global Food Security through the Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils</a>	Press Statement	Environment	Food Security

12/1/2023	<a href="#">World AIDS Day</a>	Press Statement	Global Health	HIV/AIDS
12/1/2023	<a href="#">U.S.-EU Security and Defense Dialogue</a>	Media Note	EU	Defense
12/3/2023	<a href="#">On International Day for Persons with Disabilities The U.S. Department of State and USAID Announce Award Winners of the Blended Finance for the Energy Transition Program</a>	Press Statement	United Nations	Human Rights
12/4/2023	<a href="#">Honoring Global Anti-Corruption Champions Human Rights Day, Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights</a>	Media Note	Economics	Environment
12/7/2023	<a href="#">International Migrants Day</a>	Remarks	Anti-Corruption	Democracy
12/10/2023	<a href="#">U.S. National Space Council Meeting United States Hosts Quad Counterterrorism Working Group</a>	Press Statement	United Nations	Human Rights
12/18/2023		Press Statement	United Nations	Immigration Science, Technology, Innovation
12/20/2023		Remarks	Space	
12/22/2023		Media Note	Counterterrorism	Indo-Pacific