

The Honorable Lloyd Austin  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

May 18, 2023

Dear Secretary Austin and Secretary Blinken,

Public Citizen, a public interest organization with more than 500,000 members and supporters nationwide, is writing to strongly urge the U.S. government to abandon any and all efforts to utilize artificial intelligence for foreign influence operations, and lead the world in efforts to regulate and prevent the abuse of AI for such purposes.

At the March 2023 virtual Summit for Democracy, [President Biden noted](#), “We’re at an inflection point in history here, where the decisions we make today are going to affect the course of our world for the next several decades.” At the Summit, President Biden touted a recent Executive Order to prohibit U.S. government use of commercial spyware designed to target dissidents. And he underscored the importance of policies relating to artificial intelligence that align with democratic values. Earlier this month, the [White House announced](#) a series of actions designed to ensure that artificial intelligence is deployed in ways that protect people’s rights and safety.

Unfortunately, recent reporting from the [Intercept](#) has identified a [procurement document](#) from the U.S. Special Operations Command that appears completely out of step with President Biden’s commitment.

The procurement document says the Pentagon is seeking a contractor to “provide a next generation of ‘deep fake’ or other similar technology to generate messages and influence operations via non-traditional channels in relevant peer/near peer environments.”

As the Intercept notes, the document “represents a nearly unprecedented instance of the American government — or any government — openly signaling its desire to use the highly controversial technology offensively.”

It is clear that deep fake technology poses the possibility of sowing enormous distrust and confusion on the battlefield and in society in general. The world desperately needs binding agreements and newly established norms that forbid governments and others from weaponizing deep fake technology. Deep fake technology is inherently antithetical to democratic functioning.

Of course, the appeal of unilateral use against an adversary is obvious and evidenced in the Special Operations Command document: Tricking an adversaries' troops into following false orders could decisively swing a battle or war. The problem, which is equally obvious, is that there won't be unilateral use. Perhaps the U.S. military can harden itself against deep fake trickery, though there's no reason to be certain of that. However, widely available and increasingly powerful deep fake technology could easily be used by adversaries against American society, also with potentially severe consequences.

The only moral and practical course is for governments to forsake deep fake technology and work to forbid its deceptive use in all cases.

We urge you to:

- 1) Publicly withdraw the Special Operations Command document and strip out the deep fake provisions before re-issuing it.
- 2) Abandon any and all U.S. government programs to develop a capacity to use deep fakes for any kind of foreign influence.
- 3) Publicly commit that the United States will not use deep fakes against adversaries or allies in military or civilian contexts.
- 4) Initiate an immediate effort to reach global agreement among governments not to use deep fake technology and, ideally, to ban altogether its use for deceptive purposes.

Artificial intelligence technology is developing rapidly and the U.S. government must move expeditiously to preemptively regulate and prevent the misuse of such technology for foreign operations purposes. As President Biden acknowledged, failure to do so could have devastating consequences.

Sincerely,

Robert Weissman  
President, Public Citizen