MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN

THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

AND

THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC

ON COUNTERING FOREIGN STATE INFORMATION MANIPULATION

The Department of State of the United States of America and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Italian Republic (hereinafter referred to as together, "the Participants" and individually a "Participant")

Preamble

RECOGNIZING that foreign State information manipulation, in forms that include propaganda and disinformation, can create or exploit divisions within and among countries, imperil election integrity, and undermine public trust in government.

CONSIDERING that, while foreign State information manipulation operations characteristically target particular audiences concentrated within specific countries and tailor messaging to those audiences, these operations are designed to advance wider geopolitical objectives.

NOTING that, while many government measures for addressing foreign State disinformation can be applied to propaganda, this Memorandum of Understanding principally concerns countering foreign State information manipulation in the form of disinformation.

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT that, as exemplified in the counterterrorism context, transnational security threats are most effectively responded to through coordinated, multilateral solutions. Multinational approaches are strongest, most

effective, and most rapidly deployed when there is consensus on how the problem is understood – in other words, when decision makers agree about the seriousness of a threat and the most effective tools for addressing it. This includes having a shared understanding of how foreign governments use disinformation as an instrument of Statecraft to surreptitiously change minds, values, and attitudes in other countries. Having a common operational picture of the foreign State information manipulation problem enables timely information sharing as well as coordinated strategic action among international partners.

Have entered into the following Memorandum of Understanding (hereinafter referred to as "MoU"):

Section 1
Purpose

1. This framework is designed to help international leaders and decision makers develop the fullest possible common operational picture of the foreign State information manipulation threat and identify and implement effective ways to counter it.

In particular, this MoU sets forth a shared understanding of lines of action in five key areas: 1) national strategies and policies; 2) governance structures and institutions; 3) capacity; 4) civil society, independent media, and academia; and 5) multilateral engagement.

2. The actions set forth in this MoU are expected to advance the goal of maximal coordinated effort by the Participants to counter the threat of foreign State information manipulation while respecting freedom of expression online and offline.

3. This MoU represents the political commitments of the Participants and does not give rise to legal rights and obligations under international or domestic law.

4. This MoU is expected to be used to build a shared understanding of approaches amongst the Participants to countering foreign State information manipulation and is not intended to be a binding international agreement.

Section 2
Key Action Areas

1. National Strategies and Policies

Effectively addressing foreign State information manipulation requires countries to go beyond "monitor-and-report" approaches, to include developing and implementing strategies to counter this threat.

- ***1.1: Policy Prioritization.*** The Participants should prioritize countering foreign State information manipulation in their national efforts, in a manner that complies with international human rights law.

- ***1.2: Safeguards for Freedom of Expression, including for Members of Marginalized Groups and At-risk Groups.*** The Participants should establish and implement counter foreign State information manipulation strategies and practices that respect and promote the human rights that are essential to upholding information integrity, especially the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information regardless of frontiers, while safeguarding media pluralism.

- ***1.3: Foreign State Information Manipulation Adversely Affecting Members of Marginalized Groups and At-risk Groups.*** The Participants, as part of their overall efforts to address foreign State information manipulation, should address disinformation that adversely affects persons and groups in vulnerable situations such as LGBTQI+ persons, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples, acknowledging, in particular, the specific targeting of and impact on women and girls in all their diversity, and on persons belonging to underrepresented and/or minority communities.

- ***1.4: Transparency.*** The Participants should promote transparency in the financing and ownership of media, including the role of government, and in the provenance of foreign-sourced news and media. Transparency is also an effective tool to disincentivize and thus to limit the risk of interference with editorial independence.

- ***1.5: Election Interference.*** The Participants should be appropriately responsive to requests for assistance from other countries regarding countering election interference and malign influence engaged in by a foreign government, or any person acting as an agent of or on behalf of a foreign government, undertaken with the purpose of influencing, undermining confidence in, or altering the result or reported result of, an election, or undermining public confidence in election processes or institutions, as corroborated by internationally recognized election monitors.

2. Governance Structures and Institutions

Marshalling and administering a national-level approach to countering foreign State information manipulation requires designated governance structures and institutions.

- ***2.1: Organization.*** The Participants should adopt national approaches to countering foreign State information manipulation, as appropriate and should consider adopting a whole-of-society approach through the engagement of civil society, independent media, platforms and academia.

- ***2.2: National Lead.*** The Participants as a best practice may assign a government organization to coordinate national efforts to counter foreign State information manipulation and designate areas for international engagement.

- ***2.3: Digital Communications.*** The Participants should develop official digital communications channels that ensure credible, fact-based information is openly available to the public.

3. Capacity

Effectively countering foreign State information manipulation requires technical means and human capacity to maintain threat awareness.

- ***3.1: Technical Means and Human Capacity.*** The Participants should invest in the technical means and human capacity needed to recognize and counter foreign State information manipulation activities, mindful of the role artificial intelligence-enabled capabilities play in foreign State information manipulation.

- ***3.2: Digital Security Tools.*** The Participants should invest in emerging technologies and artificial intelligence-enabled digital security tools that support foreign State information manipulation detection. These tools should be used in a manner that respect human rights including freedom of expression.

- ***3.3: Interoperability.*** To maximize the benefits of unclassified information sharing and joint analysis of foreign State information manipulation activities, the Participants should utilize analytical methods and techniques, lexicons, and capabilities that are commonly understood and interoperable.

- ***3.4: Archival.*** The Participants should leverage international partnerships and digital platform technology to enable a shared archive of foreign State information manipulation activities and related information to include disinformation activities and narratives. Such tools should be used by governments in a manner that respects human rights including freedom of expression.

4. <u>Civil Society, Independent Media, and Academia</u>

Civil society, independent media, academia and platforms play essential roles in informing and supporting government-led initiatives to counter foreign State information manipulation.

- ***4.1: Utilization.*** The research, documentation, and digital forensics work of civil society, independent media, platforms and academia to expose foreign State information manipulation activity can build societal resilience to it. The Participants should adopt an inclusive multi-stakeholder approach, as governments develop and implement counter disinformation strategies.

- ***4.2: Public Advocacy.*** The Participants should welcome the role of civil society, independent journalism, and academia as sources of public advocacy on the issue of countering foreign State information manipulation.

- ***4.3: Literacy and Awareness.*** The Participants should reinforce through government action, as appropriate, civil society initiatives designed to strengthen digital literacy, media literacy, and public awareness of the foreign State information manipulation threat, so that individuals are empowered to think critically about the information they are consuming and sharing and are also able to use media effectively and safely, and societies become more resilient to the negative impacts of disinformation.

- ***4.4: Independent Media.*** The Participants should protect and support the role of civil society organizations in fostering independent media.

- ***4.5: Fact-checking.*** The Participants should promote civil society organizations' engagement in unbiased fact-checking initiatives designed to identify and counteract foreign State information manipulation messaging, to include pre-bunking and debunking of disinformation narratives.

5. <u>Multilateral Engagement</u>

Multilateral organizations that are leveraging international cooperation to counter and build resilience against foreign State information manipulation are indispensable to alleviating information and capability shortfalls across partner nations.

- ***Action 5.1: Active Participation.*** The Participants should dedicate resources and efforts to participate in multilateral and international processes aimed at strengthening nations' ability to recognize and counter foreign State information manipulation, and to strengthen information integrity. Participants intend to coordinate efforts to counter disinformation and foreign State information manipulation also in the international organizations to which they participate, as appropriate.

- ***5.2: Information Sharing.*** The Participants should maximize the benefits of multilateral engagement by sharing unclassified information, analysis, best practices, and lessons learned concerning the foreign State information manipulation threat, in accordance with their respective national laws.

Section 3
Bilateral Consultation Mechanism

In order to deepen the Participants' partnership on these challenges and to set the direction for future activities, the Participants intend to establish a bilateral consultation on countering foreign information manipulation, to set the direction for future activity. The Department of State of the United States of America and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Italian Republic are expected to jointly lead such consultations.

Section 4
Implementation

1. Any expenses arising from the implementation of this MoU are subject to the availability of funds for such purposes.

2. This Memorandum of Understanding is expected to be implemented in accordance with applicable US and Italian law, including applicable international law and, as for the Italian Participant, the obligations arising from Italy's membership of the European Union.

3. The Participants intend that any information exchanged under this MoU would be provided with an expectation of confidentiality and should not be disclosed outside of the receiving Participant's government, save where disclosure is otherwise required by the receiving Participant's domestic law.

Section 5
Differences

Any differences in the interpretation or implementation of this MoU are expected to be resolved amicably through discussions between the Participants.

Section 6
Final Provisions

1. This MoU takes effect on the date of signature and is intended to continue, unless one of the Participants notifies the other of its intention to discontinue it with a six (6) months' prior written notice.

2. The Participants may modify this MoU in writing by mutual decision.

Signed, in duplicate, at Capri on April 17, 2024 in the English and Italian languages, all texts being equally official.

FOR DEPARTMENT OF STATE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State

FOR THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC

Antonio Tajani, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation