



PROTECT DEMOCRACY AT HOME AND ABROAD BY CLOSING THE “AUTHORITARIAN REVOLVING DOOR” EXPAND THE BIPARTISAN CARDIN-RISCH RULE

SUMMARY

- + Authoritarian regimes, in order to grow their geopolitical and economic influence, are increasingly using corruption [strategically](#) in order to destroy public faith in democracy. The U.S. National Security Council, in its [designation](#) of the fight against corruption as a core national security interest, noted that corruption “provides authoritarian leaders a means to undermine democracies worldwide.”
- + In the United States, these regimes exploit gaps in our national security laws in order to hire former high-level U.S. Government officials and military officers to work for them as lobbyists, consultants, and advisers. These hired guns are used by these regimes to shape U.S. Government policy in their favor, to launder the reputations of the regimes for global audiences, and to provide a veneer of American approval for their actions, by exploiting the knowledge, expertise, and relationships those officials gained during their public service.
- + Current U.S. law (18 U.S.C. § 207) in general only prohibits certain senior U.S. Government personnel from advising, representing, or aiding a foreign entity with the intent to influence the U.S. Government for a period of **one year** after leaving that position.
- + Bipartisan majorities in Congress began to close these gaps recently by passing a measure known as the “Cardin-Risch Rule” (described below) as part of the 2023 annual defense spending bill. However, this new rule only applies to certain former U.S. State Department officials.
- + **Congress must build upon the bipartisan success of the Cardin-Risch Rule, and harmonize national security laws across the U.S. Government, by expanding the Rule to cover additional U.S. departments and agencies.**

EXAMPLES OF THE “AUTHORITARIAN REVOLVING DOOR”

UAE



Less than three years after leaving government service, a former Acting Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Treasury Department was [hired](#) by a consulting firm that had a multi-million-dollar contract with an entity wholly owned by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in order to “use his influence, access and contacts for its advantage.”

TURKEY



Less than three years after leaving government service, a former Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and retired lieutenant general was [paid](#) to represent the interests of the Turkish government.

UAE



Less than three years after retiring from the U.S. military, a former four-star general in the U.S. Marines (and future U.S. Secretary of Defense) [worked](#) as a military adviser to the UAE.

SINGAPORE



Less than three years after retiring from the U.S. military, a former four-star Marine Corps Commandant [joined](#) the board of a technology, defense, and engineering firm majority-owned by a Singaporean government holding company.

QATAR



Less than one year after leaving government service, a former Ambassador to Pakistan and the UAE and former Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan [lobbied](#) on behalf of the Qatari government. The official ultimately pled guilty to federal charges of illegal lobbying—yet had he waited only a few more months, existing law would have permitted him to engage in lobbying.

HOW EXPANDING THE CARDIN-RISCH RULE WOULD PROTECT DEMOCRACY

- + The bipartisan Cardin-Risch Rule of the 2023 annual defense spending [bill](#) (§ 2915) bars all future secretaries and undersecretaries of state from [ever](#) advising, representing, or aiding any foreign government, governing foreign political party or coalition, or majority foreign government-owned or -controlled entity, before U.S. executive branch officials.
- + It also bars every other Senate-confirmed employee of the State Department from doing the same within [3 years](#) of leaving that position (or for the duration of the term(s) of the president who appointed them, whichever is later) and, with regard to six particularly high-risk “countries of concern” (including China and Russia), from [ever](#) providing such services.
- + The Cardin-Risch Rule should now be expanded by:
 - + Extending the lifetime ban to *every* secretary and undersecretary (and other position of equivalent seniority that is subject to Senate confirmation) in the Executive Branch, and by barring such activities before both executive *and* legislative branch officials; and
 - + Extending the 3-year “cooling off” period to *every* position in the Executive Branch that is subject to Senate confirmation, and by barring such activities before both executive *and* legislative branch officials.
- + Mirroring the Cardin-Risch Rule, those who violate the expanded rules could face a civil penalty of up to \$50,000 per violation (or the amount that was received or offered for the activity, whichever is greater), and a prison sentence of up to one year. Those who *wilfully* violate the expanded rules could face the same civil penalties and a prison sentence of up to five years.
- + **Republicans and Democrats alike strongly support these rules.** According to a 2022 public consultation [survey](#) of registered voters by the University of Maryland, 71% of Republicans and 74% of Democrats support a [lifetime ban](#) on former senior executive branch officials lobbying for foreign governments.
- + **Authoritarian and corrupt regimes are actively undermining democracy at home and abroad.** The expansion of the Cardin-Risch Rule serves as a strong and bipartisan means of helping to prevent these regimes from bending U.S. policy to their benefit, using U.S. leaders as instruments for geopolitical and economic influence, and weakening the foundation of American global leadership.