



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)**

## ***Safeguarding Dissident Voices: Addressing Transnational Repression Threats to Homeland Security***

**January 17, 2024**

Transnational repression is a relatively new term being attached to a substantial - but under reported - common global practice. Transnational repression is an extremely dangerous and serious threat to national security, diaspora, and exiled communities.

Common practices of transnational repression are slander and libel to attack human rights defenders, journalists, and activists. Transnational repressors also resort to threatening family members of the dissidents who still live in the country of origin. The perpetrators will even go as far as physically assaulting or killing their targets to send a message to the masses.

These intimidation methods act to deter and silence the diaspora communities from speaking out against the injustices taking place in their homelands. The ultimate goal of transnational repression is to end the targeted individuals' desire for activism all together. Transnational repression is not only related to activism against transgressions of government. It is simultaneously connected to working to asphyxiate the desire for freedom among ethnic and religious minority groups.

I have long been an advocate for people of all backgrounds to be able to exercise religious freedom in their preferred houses of worship without fear of harm or persecution. In recent years, we have seen an increase in threats of violence towards houses of worship. As a democratic nation that prides itself as being the land of the free, it is paramount that the U.S. provide safety to all people within its borders regardless of ethnic or religious background.

In 2019, I sponsored the *Securing American Nonprofit Organizations Against Terrorism Act*. In 2022, this Act authorized the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) Improvement Act. Through the Department of Homeland Security, the NSGP provides funding for physical security enhancements and other security-related activities for eligible nonprofit organizations, which includes houses of worship, that are at high risk of a terrorist attack or threats. While bolstering resources under the NSGP is a critical piece to addressing the threat of transnational repression, as transnational repression is proving to be much more broad and far reaching than previously believed, more must be done.

In the past, transnational repressive activities have been associated with authoritarian and adversarial nations such as China, Iran, and Russia. Recently, it has become more apparent that diaspora communities from democratic nations and allies of the U.S. also experience repression from their countries of origin. More, repressive activities are now much more expansive with governments' use of modern technology, thereby increasing the ability for transnational repression to "hide in plain sight." The fact that perpetrators of transnational repression are also allies to the U.S. and that the internet has made it more convenient for perpetrators to reach across borders and harass and intimidate individuals, presents unique challenges to identifying viable mechanisms to hold foreign nations accountable.

It is my hope that the testimony we receive today will illuminate some potential ways we can address the very serious and evolving threat of transnational repression.

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