



SALDEF Transnational Repression Topline Messaging

What is Transnational Repression?

According to the FBI, “when foreign governments stalk, intimidate, or assault people in the United States, it is considered transnational repression. It is illegal¹”.

Transnational repression may take the following forms:

- Stalking
- Harassment
- Hacking
- Assaults
- Attempted kidnapping
- Forcing or coercing the victim to return to the home country
- Threatening or detaining family members in the home country
- Freezing financial assets
- Online disinformation campaigns
- Assassinations/murders ²

Usual targets are political and human rights activists, dissidents, journalists, political opponents, and religious or ethnic minority groups.

Transnational Repression in the United States

There have always been incidents of transnational repression in the United States, going back to the 1950s³. However, as [Freedom House’s 2022](#) report demonstrates, foreign governments such as “Iran, China, Egypt, Russia, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, and other states are increasingly and more aggressively disregarding US laws to threaten, harass, surveil, stalk, and even plot to physically harm people across the country”.

The Transnational Repression of Sikhs

- Transnational repression impacts the Sikh diaspora in the United States and other countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom.
- Since 2020, SALDEF has been tracking instances of censorship of diasporic Sikh voices.
 - SALDEF Censorship Report: *When #Sikh Was Banned, Worldwide Social Media Censorship of the Punjab Farmers’ Protest: Analysis and Recommendations*⁴ highlights that the Indian government pressured Twitter to remove over 500

¹ <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/transnational-repression>

² <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/transnational-repression>

³ <https://online.ucpress.edu/phr/article/90/4/508/118640/The-Boundaries-of-DemocracyTransnational-Political>

⁴ https://saldef.org/wp-content/uploads/SALDEF_Social-Media-Censorship-Report-02282023.pdf

accounts and more than 150 tweets related to Sikhism and the Farmers' Protests, many of which were based in countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada.

- SALDEF continues to track incidents of censorship of diasporic voices - including those due to takedown notices, content moderation policies, or online harassment
- This is not an isolated incident but a part of a broader pattern of silencing Sikh American voices.
- Transnational repression comes in many forms. The silencing of voices and communities paves the way for more extreme forms of repression, such as intimidation, online hate, and physical violence.
- In 2023, a Sikh, Canadian citizen, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, was murdered outside of a Sikh Gurdwara in British Columbia. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made a statement in Parliament, suggesting that India was involved in Nijjar's murder. Trudeau later spoke to reporters, expressing his concerns and mentioning "credible reasons" for India's involvement.
 - If these allegations based on "credible reasons" prove to be accurate, it raises serious concerns and underscores India's transnational repression of the Sikh population abroad.
 - The United States government is supporting the Canadian investigation.
- In September 2023, the FBI warned 3 Sikh activists in the United States that their lives were at risk of attack⁵

Alleged Indian Government Attempt to Murder a Sikh American

- In November 2023, the U.S. government unsealed a criminal indictment against Nikhil Gupta, an Indian national, alleging that he conspired with the Indian Government to “assassinate” a Sikh, American citizen in New York
- This attempt reflects a significant violation of America’s sovereignty, an attempt to deprive an American citizen of their constitutional rights, and violations of international law and the judicial process.
- On November 22, 2023, following initial reports of this alleged incident, SALDEF called on the DOJ to increase transparency into the investigation and unseal the indictments in this case and increase transparency into the investigation.
- In response, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, a congressionally chartered oversight and advisory body, issued a statement calling on the Biden Administration to designate India a “country of particular concern”.

⁵<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/26/indian-government-sikh-activist-hardeep-singh-nijjar-murder-canada-fbi-warning>



Sikh American Community Response

- The Sikh and other minority communities are concerned and on alert.
- SALDEF has engaged with the White House, the State Department, Executive Agencies, and Congress, including submitting written testimony for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Transnational Repression. International collaboration and transparency are crucial in addressing and preventing such transnational threats and protecting human rights.
- The censoring of Sikhs, the murder of a Canadian Sikh, and the attempted murder of a Sikh American demonstrate transnational repression to silence Sikhs. We must elevate this issue and ensure the safety of our communities across the world.

Freedom of Speech and Religion

- These incidents of violence and censorship are not isolated issues; they are concerted attempts to stifle speech and curtail freedom—the very ideals that define our nation.
- Freedom of speech and religion are two of the pillars of democracy in America. We must protect these at all costs for all communities.