

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

HEARING
TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION OF
FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

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Virtual Hearing

P A R T I C I P A N T S

USCIRF COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

CHAIR TURKEL: Good morning and welcome to today's hearing hosted by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

My name is Nury Turkel. I am the chair of the Commission.

Today's hearing will focus on transnational repression of freedom of religion or belief.

I would like to thank our distinguished witnesses for joining us for this important discussion.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, or USCIRF, is an independent, bipartisan U.S. government agency created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, or commonly known as IRFA.

The Commission uses international standards to monitor freedom of religion or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the United States government.

Today, USCIRF exercises its statutory

authority under IRFA to convene this hearing.

We would like to begin this morning's hearing with the recorded comments from Senator Jeff Merkley of Oregon. In March 2023, Senator Merkley introduced the bipartisan Transnational Repression Policy Act, S. 831, along with Senators Rubio, Cardin, and Hagerty.

SENATOR MERKLEY: [Prerecorded.] Greetings to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom and to everyone attending and participating in today's hearing.

I am Senator Jeff Merkley of Oregon. As co-chair of the Congressional Executive Commission on China and as a member of the United States Foreign Relations Committee, I believe that transnational repression's growing threat to the rights and freedoms of people all across the globe, including freedom of belief and worship, has to be a top priority.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Yet, more and

more often, we see authoritarian governments reaching beyond their borders to silence the voices of dissident diaspora and religious minorities.

Uyghurs, Tibetans and more living across the world and living right here in the United States have been targeted and harassed by the Chinese government in person, online, and through threats against members of their families still living back home in China.

One Uyghur man living here in Washington, D.C. was approached by a Mandarin speaking woman who asked if you get poisoned, do you know how to treat yourself?

The Chinese government is very powerful, she went on. You could die in a car accident or get poisoned. What a chilling encounter.

Just last month we saw two men arrested in New York for operating a secret Chinese police station that was there to intimidate and control China's citizens abroad right here in the United States to stamp out criticism of the Chinese Communist Party.

The Iranian government recently tried to kidnap and return a Brooklyn-based Iranian American woman who advocated against mandatory hijab laws and other religious restrictions back in her homeland.

The Belarusian government hijacked and diverted an airplane that was flying over its airspace to arrest an opposition activist and journalist.

Russia used these tactics against Ukrainians in the lead-up to its unprovoked invasion and has regularly gone after dissidents in Europe, most notably through poison.

But it's not just our adversaries that deploy this tactic. Even partners like Egypt and Saudi Arabia have gone after exiles on U.S. territory, as Freedom Initiative showed in its recent report.

The description for today's hearing puts this growing problem as plainly as possible. Thanks to technology and globally interconnected nature of modern society, authoritarianism is no

longer contained to authoritarian states. The United States and the world must not only recognize this danger but stand up and work together to put a stop to this menace.

It is jeopardizing the freedom and well-being of countless people across the planet and violating the sovereignty of democracies around the world.

Passing the Transnational Repression Policy Act that Senator Rubio and I introduced back in March, along with Senators Cardin and Hagerty, would be a vital step in holding foreign governments and individuals accountable when they stalk, intimidate, or assault people across borders, including right here in the United States.

And a special thank you to the organizations represented on the panel today who assisted in preparation of the bill—Freedom House, Freedom Initiative, and Uyghur Human Rights Project.

The Transnational Repression Policy Act would hold foreign governments and individuals

accountable by authorizing additional resources to train and fund personnel at U.S. government agencies, to better understand the tactics of transnational repression, and to crack down on perpetrators of it, both through law enforcement and sanctions authority.

It would help elevate the fight against transnational repression as a key U.S. foreign policy priority by creating a network of like-minded partners to combat transnational repression and buttressing assistance programming to support at-risk groups and civil society organizations documenting the problem just as USCIRF is doing by holding today's hearing.

You are helping to bring this issue further out into the light and elevate it in the eyes of the world. And that's something we need to keep working at every chance we get because the people committing these acts depend on the shadows to carry them out.

So thank you for holding this hearing and for all that you're doing to shine a light on and

bring an end to transnational repression.

Freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of worship demand fierce action to end transnational repression.

CHAIR TURKEL: On behalf of my colleagues at USCIRF, fellow commissioners, I wanted to thank Senator Merkley for those powerful remarks and, more importantly, his leadership, specifically on issues involving China and human rights and oppressed religious minorities in that country.

Religious freedom violations no longer stop at state borders. Governments across the globe are engaging in the transnational repression of religious minorities and those whose beliefs differ from official interpretations.

In today's interconnected world, this insidious repression is of a great concern to the United States and like-minded governments committed to advancing freedom of religion or belief.

Last month, as you may have read in the news, FBI counterintelligence officers reported that the transnational repression efforts by

countries like China and Iran have reached inflection point.

Today's hearing will assess the extent of global transnational repression, identify its effects on freedom of religion or belief, and pinpoint tools that the United States can use to combat it strategically, as an integral part of U.S. foreign policy.

Transnational repression has extended into the United States. Last month, FBI arrested two men for allegedly setting up a police station for the Chinese Ministry of State Security in Manhattan's Chinatown neighborhood.

This past January, the United States Department of Justice indicted two men over an Iranian government plot to kidnap an Iranian American activist in Brooklyn who has actively opposed mandatory hijab laws.

China has actively pressured governments around the world, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kazakhstan, to deport Uyghur Muslims who have fled the country seeking

safety from the ongoing genocide facing their community.

Saudi Arabia and Turkey have weaponized INTERPOL red notices to target dissidents abroad on the basis of their religion or belief, including religious dissenters and those who have criticized government treatment of religious and ethnic minorities.

Similarly, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have sought the extradition of Muslims who practiced Islam independent of the state and subsequently fled to various parts of Europe on religiously motivated and unsubstantiated charges of extremism and terrorism.

While social media and the Internet create unprecedented opportunity for communication and advocacy, they also create enhanced monitoring abilities for governments seeking to stifle religious expression and practice.

Shutdowns of public spaces spurred by the Covid-19 pandemic moved much of this expression and practice online, making it even easier for

governments to monitor and repress religious minorities and dissidents.

Russia, for example, has actively targeted those who speak up online about human rights violations in the country and, according to media reports, is assisting the government of Iran in doing the same to those protesting mandatory hijab laws.

India, similarly, has sought to silence the voices of Indian activists abroad for expressing concerns about religious freedom in the country, including through acquisition of extremism and shutting down social media accounts.

These campaigns are not always targeted at specific individuals. In March 2021, Facebook announced that hackers from China had targeted approximately 500 Uyghurs living abroad, including in the United States.

Repressive governments have also targeted the families of religious minorities and dissidents in other countries. In March, I testified at a hearing organized by the House Select Committee on

China alongside Uyghur concentration camp survivor Gulbahar Haitiwaji.

In an attempt to silence her, the government of China has denied Ms. Haitiwaji contact with her husband and other family members.

Another panelist, ethnic Uzbek Qelbinur Sidik, testified that Chinese security officials harassed her via phone after she fled to the Netherlands.

These examples of transnational repression should raise serious concern on Capitol Hill and within the Biden administration. They represent not only a threat to national sovereignty but to the international rights protections that we all enjoy.

As governments engage in transnational repression become more brazen, it is imperative for the United States and like-minded governments to respond forcefully. We simply cannot afford complacency as religious freedom violations chip away at universal rights protections, especially when this erosion takes place right here on U.S.

soil.

To discuss our policy recommendations for stemming this tide of transnational repression, now I'd like to turn the virtual floor to Commissioner Eric Ueland to make those recommendations.

COMMISSIONER UELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

The targeting of religious minorities and dissidents across state borders is a serious threat to protection of fundamental freedom of religion or belief guaranteed in international law.

Because a threat to religious freedom anywhere is a threat to religious freedom everywhere, the United States must play a critical role as a global leader in promoting religious freedom around the world while preventing foreign governments from trying to restrict it here at home.

There are three specific steps the U.S. government can and should take quickly to tackle the threat transnational repression poses to religious minorities and to dissidents.

First, USCIRF believes S.831, the Transnational Repression Policy Act, contains many worthy ideas. This bipartisan bill, sponsored by Senators Merkley, Rubio, Cardin and Hagerty, defines transnational repression, emphasizes the importance of policy coordination within the executive branch, and outlines specific actions the U.S. government can take in response to such repression.

This bill can serve as the foundation of a unified United States strategy to stem the tide of transnational repression and hold governments that engage in it accountable.

We find much in it to like and hope Congress will ultimately agree.

Second, the U.S. government must work more directly with international partners in combating transnational repression.

The Trump administration created the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, or IRFBA, which is comprised of governments that share America's commitment to preventing

transnational repression.

Coordinating directly with a partner country to disrupt repression campaigns, name and shame violators, enact legislation advancing similar policy outcomes across countries, any and all of these actions by the Biden administration would send a strong signal that IRFBA members refuse to tolerate the erosion of freedom of religion or belief and will actively respond when transnational repression stands to limit those freedoms.

The United States should respond not only to transnational repression within our borders but also should work bilaterally with IRFBA members to lead responses to such violations whenever and wherever possible.

Third, the United States should assess how U.S. companies could be held to account for complicity in transnational repression and examine ways that federal laws incentivize transnational repression as a business practice.

American companies should not aid and abet

the abet the repression of any religious minority. They should not provide technology or resources that allow repressive states to repress freedom of religion or belief.

It is disappointing that companies like Nike, Coca Cola and Apple reportedly lobbied against sections or all of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which prevents the import of goods made through the forced labor of Uyghur Muslims in China.

Efforts to tackle transnational repression should be welcomed by businesses, not slowed or blocked.

And we should examine why our laws allow foreign governments to employ U.S. citizens to target dissidents, including through legal action in U.S. courts.

I know that our State Department, were the situation to be reversed, would be very aggressive in confronting countries that would use those same tools to abuse U.S. citizens in their courts. That sort of energy should be applied here at home as

well when it comes to our laws.

The U.S. should do all it can to ensure that supporting transnational repression is just no longer good for business in the United States. Companies should not turn profits on the backs of enslaved religious minorities. This is something our chairman has worked tirelessly on over many years.

And it's important to remember that companies can and should play a role even without a law. For example, social media companies based in the United States should strive to protect the well-being of their users against transnational repression, especially those using their devices, their technology inside the United States.

Mr. Chairman, with your indulgence, two more quick issues.

First, in relation to that technology, I'm very concerned about the abuse of it to directly attack freedom of religion. The technology is exploited to traduce individuals and groups who wish to freely practice their faith, crack and

harass many faithful, drown out or silence voices who wish to express their faith, and serve regimes and groups which engage in heinous acts against their citizens.

You've outlined multiple examples of these uses and these abuses. I believe our Commission must be evermore focused on these efforts against freedom of religion and belief and scrutinize the complicity of companies when such practices occur and divine strategies and recommendations to confront this problem.

Second, this hearing today has also triggered robust engagement and feedback from the public. Our Commission chose to keep this hearing on the books to hear from witnesses on the significant topic of transnational repression.

However, no one should ever be confused about this Commission's perspective on antisemitic hatred. I condemn antisemitism in the strongest possible terms. It is vile, abhorrent and deserving of quick and unanimous condemnation.

Abroad, antisemitism, and its newer cousin

anti-Islamism, needs much closer scrutiny by this Commission and its staff as we continue our work in the years to come. We must always stand strongly against hateful speech designed to eliminate freedom of religion or belief.

So let all who hear my voice know I condemn utterly the blood libel that has caused so much death and destruction throughout our world's long history. For me, it is cursed, expelled anathema, and all ears should be closed to these most terrible of words.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your indulgence, and I applaud your leadership as chairman of our Commission. You've made incredible sacrifices, and your voice on behalf of Muslim Uyghurs imprisoned in China is a powerful inspiration to all of us as we fight in the arena on behalf of freedom of religion or belief.

Thank you for what you've done with your clarion and consistent call to daily bear witness in the face of so many challenges and threats to freedom of religion.

You and your family have paid a heavy price for your witness. While all of us can never fully know the cost you've carried for this sacrifice, what we all do know is that for that sacrifice we owe you a great and everlasting debt.

With much respect, Mr. Chairman, I yield the floor.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much, Commissioner Ueland.

I'm deeply moved by your gracious words and profound words of support of my work in and outside of the Commission. I'm very grateful. It's been a privilege working with you.

And I also wanted to thank you for your service for the American people over the years in Congress, at the White House, at the State Department, at senior level. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Our speakers today each bring considerable expertise to the topics of transnational repression, and we're very grateful for their participation today.

We begin with my old friend Scott Busby, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy and Human Rights and Labor, for remarks about Biden administration's perspective on transnational repression.

DAS Busby, floor is yours.

MR. BUSBY: Thank you very much, Chair Turkel, and thank you, chair and Eric, for your powerful remarks. I think they give us lots of food for thought as well as demonstrate the firm commitment of the Commission to addressing this significant problem.

Thank you also to the other distinguished members of the Commission who are participating today. I welcome this opportunity to testify.

The term "transnational repression" is relatively new, but the threat is not. Authoritarian regimes regularly seek to silence dissent to their regimes from beyond their borders.

In person and online, they physically intimidate and threaten those who have sought refuge from their regimes, in some cases against

persons who have citizenship in their countries of refuge, to prevent these people from exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of religion or belief.

They also put pressure on those speaking out by harassing or threatening their family members.

It should come as little surprise to the Commission and to the audience tuning in that some of the countries with the most troubling trendlines on transnational repression also happen to be among the worst violators of the freedom of religion or belief.

On November 30, 2022, Secretary Blinken designated 12 countries, including Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the People's Republic of China, as Countries of Particular Concern for not having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Governments in these countries increasingly seek to silence, intimidate and threaten members of religious communities,

spiritual practitioners and outspoken religious freedom advocates, both within and outside their borders.

As your recent Annual Report notes, the countries that carry out transnational repression often don't act alone. They pressure and coerce foreign governments to aid in their repression.

This includes the government of the People's Republic of China, which pressures foreign governments to return, otherwise known as "refoules," members of ethnic and religious minority groups.

If forced to return, many of these individuals will likely be subjected to torture, arbitrary detention or other human rights abuses.

In response to these actions, the U.S. government is executing a multifaceted strategy to counter, deter and mitigate the prevalence and impact of these actions.

The strategy revolves around four prongs:

First is coordination. The pervasive issue of transnational repression requires a whole-

of-government response, and we support the important work of our partners within the interagency, within the U.S. government, who are actively working to stop this kind of repression both here in the United States and abroad.

The administration has spearheaded a sustained interagency effort to encourage information sharing within the U.S. government on countering transnational repression.

We sought to develop public-facing materials to raise awareness, to share threat information with partners, to conduct outreach and offer resources to victims and to deploy accountability tools.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's recent arrest of individuals suspected of operating a, quote, "overseas police station"-closed quote-on behalf of the PRC in Manhattan cited information from the department's 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom in its indictment, and one defendant admitted to participating in PRC government-organized counterprotests against the

Falun Gong.

As articulated in the National Security Strategy, the United States government also engages our allies and partners to share best practices and mount coordinated multilateral response.

The next line of effort is education. Since 2021, the Department of State has included reporting on transnational repression in the annual Human Rights Report to make public the trends and incidents we are tracking.

We proactively engage the full spectrum of stakeholders impacted by transnational repression, including, most importantly, the targeted communities themselves, including religious and spiritual practitioners and advocates for religious freedom, civil society representatives, like-minded and affected governments, and the business and investor community.

Within our agencies and departments, we train officers to understand what transnational repression is and how to identify it.

We also train local law enforcement to

ensure they understand what transnational repression is and how to respond to it.

The fourth line of effort we're pursuing is on accountability and deterrence. We consider all available tools in coordination with our interagency partners to promote accountability for acts of transnational repression.

These include visa restrictions, economic and financial sanctions, investment restrictions by the Treasury Department, export controls by the Commerce Department on technology that could be misused to help facilitate transnational repression, and, of course, law enforcement actions in the United States to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of transnational repression.

Last year, for instance, the Department of State took action to promote accountability for the PRC's transnational repression. The Secretary of State imposed visa restrictions on PRC officials for their involvement in repressive acts against members of ethnic and religious minority groups and religious and spiritual practitioners inside and

outside of China's borders, including some who were within the United States.

We're also focused on curbing the ability of countries to perpetrate these abuses by engaging third-countries that may be implicated, willingly or not, in transnational repression efforts, as well as international law enforcement agencies and the private sector.

For example, we are facilitating more rapid diplomacy for individuals at risk of involuntary return, namely refoulement, including immediate and high-level engagement with host governments.

We are also taking action on the technologies that may be used to conduct transnational repression.

During the Summit for Democracy, the administration announced an Executive Order to prohibit the U.S. government use of commercial spyware that poses a risk to national security and risk of misuse by foreign governments to enable human rights abuses, demonstrating U.S. leadership

and commitment to countering the misuse of commercial spyware and other surveillance technology.

The Executive Order serves as a foundation to deepen international cooperation, and we are collaborating with allies and partners to promote responsible policies and practices, discourage the misuse of these tools around the world, and spur industry reform.

We are also increasing engagement with INTERPOL on the so-called "poison pen" issue—that is putting bad information into the international system—resulting in cases such as innocent Uyghurs having red notices applied to them.

We share publicly many of the actions we are taking because we want people to know the United States government will not tolerate these abuses within our borders.

A fifth line of effort is on resilience. We are seeking to build the resilience of targeted communities to transnational repression in the United States around the world, including through

listening sessions led by U.S. government officials, to better understand their needs and develop tailored responses.

Through our engagement in Washington and at our embassies, we proactively engage with affected communities, understanding their challenges and developing solutions in partnership.

While not always the case, oftentimes targeted individuals belong to communities marginalized for various reasons, including based on their ethnic or religious identity.

Our federal assistance programs empower civil society activists and others to mitigate and counter transnational repression by providing documentation and digital security tools.

In closing, I would like to echo the words that Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights, Uzra Zeya, delivered last year during congressional testimony on transnational repression.

While her remarks were specific to the PRC, I think we all can agree that they reflect the

grave risk that transnational repression poses around the world.

In characterizing the PRC's transnational repression, she said, quote, "It is the most sophisticated form of repression that exists in the world today. It is pervasive, it is pernicious, and it presents a threat to the values we hold dear as Americans and the integrity of the rules-based international order"—closed quote.

For the reasons articulated by the Under Secretary, we in the U.S. government will continue to address transnational repression with the utmost seriousness and attention it deserves.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR TURKEL: DAS Busby, thank you so much for sharing the administration's policy initiatives and some of the implementations it has been—that I personally have been aware of.

I'd like to indulge myself for a question, a follow-up question. As you know, seven out of nine commissioners, previous and current, and four commissioners currently serving in USCIRF have been

sanctioned by China and Russia since December 2021.

And we serve the American people even though we are not U.S. government employees. That is a clear retaliation. And, as you know, that several senior U.S. officials, including former Ambassador for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback, Secretary Pompeo, have also been sanctioned by China.

We also know that half of the Radio Free Asia Uyghur Service reporters who exposed the camp system early on have been subject to transnational repression and their loved ones are languishing in Chinese concentration camps, and they are U.S. citizens. They are serving American people.

With that background, when will we see further steps taken by our government, the Biden administration, to hold those Chinese bad actors to account?

Our government should know and could figure out who those people are, including those holding my mother as hostage and not letting her to return to the United States to be with her own

family.

So if you can comment on that, that would be terrific. We know that there have been a lot of public statements being made. I was listening to Under Secretary's testimony at the U.S. Congress, but we'd like to see some concrete steps to rectify this issue.

MR. BUSBY: Well, thank you, Chair Turkel.

We, of course, condemn the sanctions that have been imposed on members of the Commission and on others who have been active in advocating for respect and human rights and Russia.

In terms of further steps, we continue to collect evidence about individuals implicated in transnational repression in foreign governments, obviously includes the PRC, but other governments as well, and then deploy the accountability tools I described earlier, including visa restrictions, economic sanctions, and things of that nature.

So we will continue to collect that information about people responsible for this behavior and seek to take action against those

individuals.

The other thing we're doing is educational, both with the affected communities, but, also, as I mentioned in my testimony, with interagency partners and with foreign governments.

We have now conducted a number of what we call transnational repression road shows with governments where there may be transnational repression on their soil, and these governments are very interested, first of all, in receiving any information we have and understanding what actions we are taking within the United States to address that phenomenon.

So sharing information, educating affected individuals, affected institutions and governments is another key line of effort that we're undertaking.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

Now, I'd like to recognize my fellow commissioners, starting with Commissioner Davie and then Commissioner Schneck, and Commissioner Ueland.

COMMISSIONER DAVIE: Great. Thank you so much, Chair Turkel, and thank you, Mr. Busby, for your testimony.

I have a question related to the college and university systems here in the U.S. and their relationship to the PRC and the aspects of the PRC government that developed these relationships with the colleges and universities throughout the U.S.

I'm curious the degree to which the U.S. government is monitoring, appropriately, as allowed by law, these relationships, whether or not these relationships between colleges and universities and the PRC and its related agencies is helping to contribute to transnational repression and particularly concerned about the ways in which relationships with these colleges and universities might be affecting the freedom of religion or expression or belief of various communities around this country and around the world?

So just curious about the ongoing relationship between the Chinese government, some of its agencies, and our college and university

system?

MR. BUSBY: Thank you for the question, Commissioner Davie.

The responsibility within the State Department for liaising with our colleges and universities is outside of the ambit of my bureau, but I can say there is definitely evidence of the Chinese government inserting itself into our colleges and universities, among other things, through the so-called Confucius Institutes.

We are tracking that activity. We are calling it out where we can, where it is inappropriate, and where there are specific actions that may be taken by the Chinese government, let's say, in applying pressure on individual students, we are pushing back on that type of activity.

But I don't have more detail than that at this stage in response to your question.

COMMISSIONER DAVIE: Thank you. Thank you so much.

CHAIR TURKEL: Commissioner Schneck.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: Thank you, Chairman

Turkel.

Before posing my question to Mr. Busby, allow me to take a moment to fully endorse a few of the remarks by Commissioner Ueland. We must indeed be militant and unrelenting in our opposition to antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred.

And the Commission, indeed, must especially sharpen its voice against the resurgence of antisemitism around the world.

I also share Commissioner Ueland's gratitude, Nury, for your personal sacrifices and your extraordinary leadership of the Commission. Thank you.

The question I'd like to pose to Mr. Busby: how is the United States working with like-minded governments around the world to coordinate strategies in combating transnational repression?

MR. BUSBY: No. Very good question, Commissioner Schneck. Thank you for asking it.

So we are engaging with our allies and partners to mount coordinated multilateral responses to transnational repression.

One way in which we're doing this is advocating on behalf of political prisoners because there is often transnational repression against family members and others advocating for these political prisoners, and we launched here at the State Department a campaign called "Without Just Cause" earlier this year, to which we sought to bring allies.

As I mentioned, we are also holding these so-called "road shows" with other governments around transnational repression to share with them the information we have and what we're doing to address the phenomenon.

In conjunction with the Summit for Democracy, we also issued or endorsed a Declaration of Principles to Combat Transnational Repression, along with six other governments.

We've also recently joined ten partner countries in announcing the Dialogue on Cybersecurity of Civil Society Under Threat of Transnational Repression.

This is a forum that will support the

cybersecurity needs of high-risk communities, to share insights on the threat landscape impacting these communities, and to identify opportunities for collaboration on efforts to advance cybersecurity for civil society around the world.

So, bottom line is we fully recognize the importance of collaborating with allies around this. This is a global threat, and it's very, very important that we mount as much of a global response as we can.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: Thank you, Mr. Busby.

CHAIR TURKEL: Commissioner Ueland, you may have comments or questions.

COMMISSIONER UELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

DAS Busby, Scott, thanks for your discussion with us this morning and your explanation of a lot of significant work that the department now is focusing on the issue of transnational repression.

I think we all here very much appreciate all that, and my only observation in terms of concrete next steps is a strong encouragement that through the department and its Office of Legislative Affairs, there be a good, robust engagement with the senators we discussed earlier this morning as quickly as possible.

I think a statutory framework informed and improved by collaboration between the Department and Congress would provide additional footing and strength for the effort in this and future administrations against transnational repression.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Scott.

MR. BUSBY: Thanks, Commissioner Ueland, for the question and the point.

Yes, we are following with great interest the interest in the Congress on this issue and the various pieces of legislation that have been proposed.

We haven't taken a position on any of these pieces of legislation at this point, but I'll take you up on your suggestion to engage more

intensively with the members behind this legislation to make sure the administration's views and efforts are factored into the legislation.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

DAS Busby, before we let you go, I'd like to indulge myself for another question and possibly a few suggestions.

One, you mentioned in response to Commissioner Schneck's question about the partnership with our allies and partners. Do you see any specific steps that they are taking now with the news of more than 50 Chinese satellite police stations in Europe, for example? What is the Australian position?

As you remember or know, in the early parts of the camp system, the news about the camp system surfaced, we found out that Australian citizens, permanent residents, stuck within China.

So we haven't seen specifically European countries taking any concrete steps. I know that I'm grateful personally to the United States government specific law enforcement for those

actions that I mentioned.

What is your sense why they are not up to speed, up to the task yet?

And, then, the other, which is more like a suggestion, and also something that the administration should consider, the public display of support is as important as doing the actual or taking actual steps.

Last year, I had a chance to introduce a Uyghur American lady, whose mother in a camp, to President Biden at an event at the White House. And I still remember the exchange, President Biden's reaction, that makes me to believe that the meetings like that should happen (a) to give courage, support to fellow Americans; and, two, to show to the Chinese that our governments are serious, senior level, Secretary Blinken, President himself.

With that, would you be willing to push, advocate for Secretary Blinken or President himself to meet with the Uyghur American victims of the transnational repression and ongoing genocide?

MR. BUSBY: Well, thanks for your questions and comments, Nury.

Let me first say on other government actions, other governments are deeply interested in this phenomenon. When the Safeguard Defenders report came out last fall, the first report and then a second report, with information about overseas Chinese police stations, so-called "overseas Chinese policy stations," many of our partners reached out to us to ask us about this information, to what extent we could corroborate the information, and to what extent we might have additional information, and so we've had many conversations with like-minded governments, again, about the phenomenon, about what we're doing, and I think what they're doing now is figuring out for themselves what steps they can take within their own legal systems to address the phenomenon.

So even if not as many actions have been taken yet by foreign governments on these issues, I think there is an intent to take, to take such action.

In terms of giving profile to, greater profile to the issue, as well as the victims, totally agree with what you suggested, Nury.

I would say one of the ways we've tried to highlight the issue is now by having a dedicated section of our annual Human Rights Reports to transnational repression.

Indeed, it is now titled as such, "Transnational Repression," and in that section we are trying to capture any actions of transnational repression that a government may be taking.

So I would urge you and your colleagues and members of the public to look at our reports for information about transnational repression.

And as you say, Nury, profiling, highlighting the experiences of victims of transnational repression is an important component of the effort. I know that both Secretary Blinken and President Biden are deeply concerned about this issue, and I will continue, we will in DRL and elsewhere within the U.S. government, we will continue to recommend that the victims of

transnational repression are among the victims of human rights abuses who meet with the Secretary and the President.

Thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much.

On behalf of my colleagues, the policy team and commissioners, I wanted to thank you, Scott, for making the time and sharing your perspective with us.

I also, on a personal note, I'm very grateful for your service. I've known you many years, and I look forward to doing more specific on this issue with you.

Thank you.

MR. BUSBY: Thank you for highlighting this important issue.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much.

We will now hear from the members of our second panel consisting of experts on transnational repression.

First, we will hear from Andrea Prasow. She is the Executive Director of Freedom

Initiative, a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing, advocating for prisoners wrongly detained in the Middle East and North Africa.

Ms. Prasow is a lawyer by training and previously spent 12 years with Human Rights Watch.

Ms. Prasow, you are recognized, and you may begin your testimony.

MS. PRASOW: Good morning. Thank you, Chair Turkel, commissioners, for this opportunity to appear before you today.

As you've heard, my name is Andrea Prasow. I'm the Executive Director of the Freedom Initiative, an organization that advocates for the wrongfully detained in the Middle East and North Africa.

We work alongside the families of wrongfully detained individuals, most frequently in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to advocate for their freedom, tell their stories publicly, and urge U.S. policymakers to press for their release.

Political detention often serves as the lynchpin of autocracy, allowing authoritarian

leaders to induce fear and retain control over their populations.

In a world where people are detained over tweets, only a few will dare risk a similar fate.

The U.S. government has long recognized human rights abuses by authorities in both Egypt and Saudi Arabia, including through detailed chapters in the annual State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

U.S. policy towards these governments has been inconsistent. Over the past several years, we have become increasingly concerned about the ways in which authoritarian leaders have been employing the same tactics they use to curtail rights and freedoms at home to silence criticism beyond their own borders, including here in the United States.

Quite simply, authoritarian governments' repression abroad represents an extension of their repression at home.

Of course, this is not unique to the MENA region, as I'm sure will be evident from testimonies by my fellow panelists today. But it's

worth noting that governments like those in Egypt and Saudi Arabia see themselves as the guardians of morality and religion and, as such, view free religious expression as a threat whether at home or abroad.

Religious practice outside those borders where there may be greater variety of forms of religious expression, such as here in the United States, where religious freedom is protected by the Constitution, may be considered particularly threatening.

In Egypt, for instance, the Quranist community, a small Muslim minority that believes the Quran is the only valid source for Islam, has faced decades of repression, which led Quranist leader Sheikh Ahmed Subhy Mansour to flee Egypt and settle in the U.S. with his family and followers.

Mansour was a fellow at USCIRF in 2009 and 2020, and his son, Sherif, is an outspoken rights defender and the MENA Program Coordinator of the Committee to Protect Journalists.

But even after two decades of U.S.

citizenship, the family still faces repression. In August 2020, nine of Mansours' cousins in Egypt were arrested, and his cousin, Reda Abdelrahman, who had previously been targeted for his blogging on Quranist issues, was jailed for nearly 18 months.

Egyptian authorities are still preventing him from exiting the country to visit his family in Virginia. Sherif and Ahmed Mansour also face spurious legal charges in Egypt related to terrorism.

The Mansour family's case underscores how the Egyptian government has relied on state hostage taking and domestic prosecutions to curtail free expression, including free religious expression abroad.

We've also seen cases where the state will prevent scholars of religious freedom issues from freely conducting activities abroad as another mode of restricting free speech.

While the detention of scholar Patrick Zaki, for instance, may not be typically conceived

of as a case of transnational repression, because he was detained in Egypt, the allegations against Zaki related to, quote, "spreading false news inside and outside of the country," end quote, and stem from his work on Coptic Christians.

Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, we have seen cases of transnational repression that are designed to curtail free religious expression or observance, and which mirror the repressive religious dynamics within the country.

As USCIRF has noted in successive country reports, the country's Shi'a minority remains a target of state violence, particularly in the country's eastern provinces.

Any demands for greater rights are met harshly, and dozens of Shi'a have been executed in the country for protesting.

We're now seeing signs that Saudi Arabia is using its regional influence to target members of the Shi'a minority living outside of the country as well.

USCIRF has noted the case of Salma al-

Shehab, a University of Leeds Ph.D. student, a mother of two, and a Shi'a woman, who tweeted from the United Kingdom to demand greater respect for the rights for women.

During a visit to the Kingdom in 2021, in this case the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, she was arrested and initially sentenced to six years in prison.

That sentence was increased on appeal in 2022 to 34 years in prison. At the time, it was the longest documented sentence against a women's rights defender in Saudi Arabia. In January 2023, she was resentenced to 27 years.

In the interest of time, I refer you to my written testimony for additional examples. In our recent report on transnational repression in Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the shadows of authoritarianism, we recommend stronger legislation to define, criminalize, and punish this complex phenomenon.

We've already heard today about the Transnational Repression Act, S. 831, which would

mandate that the administration devise a strategy to combat transnational repression writ large, train federal employees to recognize and understand the issue, and improve reporting requirements, for instance.

While not a panacea, the bill is a crucial step in addressing the growing threat of transnational repression in the U.S.

And I urge the House to quickly adopt/introduce a companion bill.

We also recommend that Congress pass legislation and appropriate necessary funding for the creation of an interagency task force on transnational repression. That would, of course, incorporate religious freedom experts to improve coordination within the U.S. government.

Members of Congress and the Biden administration must take seriously reports of transnational repression from constituents targeted due to their faith, beliefs or opinions, and use public platforms to call out these abuses.

By holding this hearing, USCIRF is playing

an important role in ensuring that understanding and combating transnational repression remain important priorities for the United States.

This hearing presents an opportunity to bring attention to the complex ways in which transnational repression and restrictions on religious freedom intersect.

As the cases I discussed today, as well as those in my written testimony, illustrate, we need more expansive ways of thinking about transnational repression that recognize the varied forms it can take and the insidious ways it erodes our most prized freedoms of expression and belief.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you, Ms. Prasow, thank you. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Our next witness is Nate Schenkkan, Senior Director of Research for Countering Authoritarianism at Freedom House.

He worked previously as a journalist in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and has written widely on

Turkey and Central Asia.

Mr. Schenkkan, I recognize you for your comments. You may begin.

MR. SCHENKKAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to the commissioners, thank you for the invitation to testify for USCIRF. Thank you for this opportunity to share information about this very important topic.

I'm going to focus my brief spoken remarks on specific cases, especially emanating from Central Asia, and I'll conclude with very brief remarks about U.S. policy on transnational repression.

At Freedom House, through our research, we've compiled a global dataset of direct physical acts of transnational repression. This now includes 854 incidents since 2014. Of those 854 incidents, 35 percent have a religious character, meaning there's some element in them that corresponds to an existing pattern of religious persecution in the origin country.

And of that 35 percent, three-quarters

originate from the People's Republic of China, which I want to stress has pursued the world's most comprehensive campaign of transnational repression.

However, I'm going to leave that to other witnesses to discuss in more depth, as I know we have experts on that topic.

The other origin countries that I want to highlight are Egypt, which Ms. Prasow just discussed, and which has pursued the Muslim Brotherhood, as well, in a wide-ranging campaign of transnational repression, encompassing 36 incidents in the dataset; and finally Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which have pursued political opponents abroad in incidents also marked by religious difference, as well as individuals on more narrow religious grounds.

So allow me to focus on those Central Asian cases.

Tajikistan is, surprisingly, one of the most prolific perpetrators of transnational repression in the world. Despite a population of only ten million people, Tajikistan has the third-

most direct, physical incidents in the world in our dataset.

Among those prominently targeted are members of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, or IRPT. The IRPT was for many years the largest opposition party in Tajikistan until it was banned on spurious grounds in 2015 and also labeled a terrorist movement by the government, also spuriously.

Additionally, members of the Pamiri minority from Gorno-Badakshan, which is a region of Tajikistan, who are typically Ismaili Muslims, face persecution of a religious character as well.

There has been a tremendous wave of persecution both inside and outside Tajikistan in the last year against Pamiris after another cycle of protest in Gorno-Badakshan against the government of Tajikistan.

In 2022 alone, 11 citizens of Tajikistan were returned from Russia via illegal renditions.

Practices of transnational repression that Tajikistan applies to activists are also used

against religious figures. In March 2021, preacher Saidnuriddin Roziqov, also known as Ashani [ph] Saidnuriddin, was taken off the streets of the Russian town of Rezh, stripped of his Russian citizenship, and sent illegally to Tajikistan.

Uzbekistan also is a prominent practitioner of transnational repression, and as you've heard from other witnesses, this mirrors a pattern of repression of independent religious practice within the country, a policy that unfortunately did not end with the death of President Islam Karimov in 2016.

Concerns regarding transnational repression from Uzbekistan persists under the current President Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

In 2020, an Uzbekistani named Alisher Haydarov, who had left Uzbekistan following religious persecution, was illegally returned from Ukraine, prior to the war, of course.

Very short remarks. So let me close with a few very brief words about U.S. policy on transnational repression. As others have noted,

other witnesses, as DAS Busby discussed, there's tremendous bipartisan interest in the topic. We welcome the attention that members of Congress have brought to the issue and we support the Transnational Repression Policy Act, which has been discussed.

The administration's work, as DAS Busby discussed, is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat transnational repression that encompasses foreign policy, law enforcement and domestic security measures.

There's a great deal of work being done, and we commend the progress that has been made in the last two years. We also commend USCIRF for its growing attention to the issue through this hearing, as well as through its most recent report.

One underdeveloped area in U.S. policy that I would like to stress is that one of the best protections for individuals against transnational repression is to have authorized legal status to reside within a strong democracy, whether it's the United States or somewhere else, in a state with

strong rule of law, strong capacity to counter threats from overseas and the right to seek assistance.

Therefore, we commend USCIRF for its consistent recommendations concerning strengthening refugee resettlement and the asylum process, and I recommend to the panel Freedom House's recommendations in our reports, including our most recent report last month in April, a report in June 2022, policy recommendations concerning asylum, including strengthening existing programs, focusing on full status rather than temporary or subsidiary forms of protection, and strengthening resilience against manipulation of asylum claims by foreign governments, the poison pen phenomenon that DAS Busby mentioned, which itself can accomplish acts of transnational repression.

These steps are especially crucial regarding the issue of religious freedom, where individuals targeted for persecution are commonly characterized by their origin government as extremist or as terrorist.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions and to the discussion today.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Schenkkan, for your testimony. We always find the Freedom House reports to be very helpful.

I remember personally benefiting from the digital authoritarianism report that Sarah Cook did several years ago.

Thank you.

Our next witness is Dr. Teng Biao, an academic lawyer and human rights activist who serves as Hauser Human Rights Scholar at Hunter College and the Pozen Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago.

Dr. Teng is the founder of two human rights NGOs in Beijing and has defended cases related to religious freedom including for the Uyghur people in China.

Dr. Teng Biao, I recognize you for your comments. You may begin your testimony.

DR. BIAO: Thank you very much for your

important work.

For decades, the Chinese Communist Party's violation of free speech and religious freedom has transcended borders from expulsions, spying, sanctions, cyber attacks to physical attacks, overseas kidnappings.

So I'll briefly describe the spectrum of China's transnational repression. So the most frequently targeted people are human rights activists, the dissidents, critics and ethnic minorities, including Uyghurs, Tibetans, Falun Gong and other religions labeled as "evil cults" by the Chinese Communist Party.

Number one, visa denial, expulsion and exit ban.

Number two, disinvitation, cancellation and censorship.

Number three, informants and spying. The patterns are for journalists to have been expelled from China. Chinese government also expelled many foreign pastors, religious workers, since Xi Jinping came to power.

The CCP through its United Front Work, sometimes the CSSA, Chinese Students and Scholars Associations, sometimes economic methods to give pressure to the institutions in order to disinvite or cancel the speech or event by Dalai Lama, other religious leaders, or dissidents.

In 2019, a panel discussion I organized was cancelled by Columbia University due to the protests of CSSA.

And Confucius Institutes force their teachers to sign a contract that indicated that Falun Gong practitioners were barred from the teaching posts.

Chinese officers and United Front Work are monitoring Chinese people, as well as Uyghurs, Tibetans, Hong Kong diaspora communities, across the United States, with online surveillance and an array of informants motivated by money, ambition or fear.

A comment in class about Tiananmen, Tibet or Uyghur genocide can result in retaliation against the students and their families back in

China.

Number four, economic coercion.

Number five, sanctions.

Number six, lawfares. In 2021, 2022, China's Foreign Ministry blacklisted scholars, lawmakers and think tanks in Europe and United States because of their political opinions, activities and research about the Uyghur genocide and other sensitive issues.

And companies from Xinjiang filed a lawsuit in a court against researcher Adrian Zenz. Article 38 of Hong Kong's National Security Law has long-arm jurisdictions. Hong Kong government had issued arrest warrant for Samuel Chu, who has lived in the United States as a citizen for more than two decades.

In the reports, Safeguard Defenders documented how Chinese government misused the INTERPOL to harass and intimidate the people who are critical of Beijing, including Uyghurs, Tibetans and religious leaders.

Number seven, interruption, humiliation

and the intimidation.

Number eight, cyber attacks. The Uyghur activist scholars were often interrupted by pro-Beijing audience, and Vicky Xu for her research about the forced labor of Uyghurs faced an immense harassment campaign by the Chinese authorities in the form of intimidation, slander, humiliation, death threat, and rape threat.

And I myself received death threat on social media.

And overseas Uyghurs were threatened or forced to spy on their own community.

Number nine, deportation. Thousands of Uyghurs were forcibly deported to China where they will definitely be detained in the camps or disappeared.

Number ten, break-in, theft and sabotage. Professor Anne-Marie Brady encountered theft of her computer from her home and her car tires deflated. She received numerous anonymous phone calls in the middle of the night.

Number 11 is hostage taking and

collective—number 12, collective punishment. We know the case of two Canadian Michaels being detained after Meng Wanzhou was arrested in Canada.

The president of Uyghur Congress, Dolkun Isa, his parents died in the concentration camps, and his brother was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Number 13, physical attacks. A case that Falun Gong practitioner and technician Li Yuan was severely assaulted and robbed in his Atlanta home.

And as widely reported, China has established 102 police stations in 53 countries, and these, these policing operations often use local, the Chinese overseas hometown associations linked to the United Front Work, and they frequently use stalking, threats and intimidations to target dissidents and ethnic minorities.

Number 14, criminal detention.

Number 15, abduction.

Number 16, torture.

Number 17, assassination and murder.

We know the extremely horrifying case of Gui Minhai, a publisher with Swedish passport, was

kidnapped by Chinese secret agent in Thailand and sent back to China and was forced to give up his Swedish citizenship under brutal torture.

So the Chinese Communist Party's desire to interfere with global free speech and religious freedom is motivated by the attempt to silence critics, cover up truths that harm the regime, and shape a new international narrative, produce an environment that fosters safety for the dictatorial regimes.

And China's transnational repression is in many, many forms, often hidden, subtle and sophisticated. It's important that international institutions are made aware of China's international human rights violations and prevent further complicity in China's overseas suppression.

United States and the free world must take firm and effective steps to protect free speech and religious freedom.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR TURKEL: Dr. Teng Biao, thank you very much for your testimony. I also wanted to

thank you for your courage and work representing political prisoners in China when the other lawyers could not even get close. You've been a remarkable leader and thank you very much for all that you have done, even at personal cost.

Thank you very much.

Now we will hear from Dr. Marcus Michaelsen, a senior researcher at Citizen Lab and post-doctoral researcher at Open Democracy.

He's an expert on digital surveillance and transnational repression by authoritarian states and has conducted extensive research in both Pakistan and Iran.

Dr. Michaelsen, you may begin your testimony.

DR. MICHAELSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the—okay, again. Next attempt. Yeah. I was muted again.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the commissioners for the invitation to testify today.

My work focuses on digital transnational

repression against exiles and diaspora activists in different host countries and of different origin countries.

And my input here represents my own views and not necessarily those of the Citizen Lab.

First, I wanted to highlight that digital technologies are a key element of all forms of transnational repression. The Internet and social media have allowed migrants to stay closely connected to families and friends in their countries of origin, and they have also helped diaspora activists and exiled dissidents to mobilize for human rights and political change from afar.

Yet, at the same time, authoritarian power holders are using these very same technologies for political control and repression beyond borders.

These regimes rely on hacking attacks, targeted surveillance, smear campaigns and disinformation. They also use sophisticated commercial spyware and artificial social media accounts to intimidate, threaten and silence

political opponents in other countries.

Digital repression can have deep and often very disturbing impacts. In our interviews, the targets of online harassment or intrusive surveillance report mental stress, paranoia, and social isolation.

They reduce contacts to families and friends. They engage in self-censorship or withdraw entirely from activism.

Digital transnational repression can also target individuals and communities on the basis of their religious identity or belief. To give you a few examples, the Uyghur diaspora worldwide has been subjected to a wide range of digital attacks, including phishing campaigns, infiltrations of online meetings and online harassment.

Members of the Baha'i community have been targeted by hackers affiliated with the Iranian regime, and Iranian diaspora activities supporting the recent protests against religiously motivated gender discrimination have been targeted by phishing attacks and defamation campaigns.

Liberal democracies should work together to counter digital transnational repression that undermines the security, rule of law, and democratic institutions.

In Europe, where I live and conduct most of my research, the issue of transnational repression is often blurred into debates on foreign interference and disinformation. The current U.S. government should work with its European partners to get to a common and comprehensive definition of transnational repression and coordinated responses.

And with regards to digital transnational repression, I want to highlight three areas of collaboration.

The first, countering the proliferation of surveillance technologies. In the EU, the regulation of spyware falls in the national security domain of each member state and this makes it much harder to ban or blacklist any commercial spyware on an EU-wide level.

And the U.S. should push European national governments to establish oversight, transparency

and human rights safeguards on the trade and use of spyware.

Second, strengthening the digital resilience of civil society. More participatory and cross-sectoral mechanisms are needed for documenting, investigating and deterring digital threats against civil society, and the U.S. Cybersecurity Agency, CISA, has taken steps to coordinate tech companies, civil society, and government in response to digital transnational repression.

This is a promising model, and CISA should share any lessons learned with its counterparts in other democracies.

And, finally, we need to improve also the mechanisms of big tech platforms to address digital transnational repression. Targets still face hurdles and reporting threats and getting support from tech companies.

Platforms need more staff with training on human rights, gender issues, and language skills to support activists.

Together with the EU, the U.S. government should work to bring platforms to improve the accountability mechanisms for victims of digital transnational repression.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much, Dr. Michaelsen.

Now, we will move to our last witness for today's hearing, Julie Millsap, a Government Relations Manager for the Uyghur Human Rights Project.

Ms. Millsap has conducted tireless advocacy both here in Washington, D.C. area and around the world on behalf of the Uyghur people.

Previously, she spent ten years in China's Inner Mongolia and has experienced firsthand while living there and while even working and living in Washington specifically dealing with the Chinese government.

Ms. Millsap, you're recognized for your testimony. You may begin.

MS. MILLSAP: Thank you.

Hello, everybody. I'd like to start by thanking the Commission and Chair Turkel, in particular, for highlighting this issue of transnational repression in connection with the freedom of religion or belief.

USCIRF's role in the protection of this particular freedom has really become extremely relevant by recognizing that it's vital to address to effectively combat those extreme violations worldwide.

Unfortunately, I'd like to start by acknowledging reality, which is that we are very behind the curve in addressing this threat to our sovereignty as democratic countries, and we need to recognize that intent has not yet produced many results in terms of protection for most of the innocent people that are suffering here on our soil in the United States and around the world.

And, obviously, for the Uyghurs, this represents a massive human rights crisis of our time. The way that this plays out, as some of my

fellow witnesses have highlighted, manifests in different ways.

But to reiterate, I have served as a Government Relations Manager for the Uyghur Human Rights Project, and so working publicly in advocacy and living formerly in the PRC from the year 2010 until my necessitated departure in 2020, have observed a lot in both continents.

My spouse is a Chinese citizen and a U.S. green card holder, and I am a U.S. citizen, for some relevant context.

And during my time in China, particularly years in public advocacy, I've been observing and interviewing many Uyghurs and Chinese individuals who have been the victims of such targeted harassment surveillance and physical threats by the Chinese Communist Party.

I'd like to highlight that even a few years ago most people were still saying that Chinese government was not likely to engage in a lot of the tactics that we've seen unfolding at present.

And so this has really escalated as an issue quite rapidly, and it's beyond concerning.

So in my capacity working in Government Relations, it's been my job to advocate for policy responses to hold the CCP accountable for genocide, but recently this accountability also centers around helping to craft those policy responses to transnational repression.

Our organization, the Uyghur Human Rights Project, has reported extensively on the CCP's acts of transnational repression against Uyghurs and other targeted peoples.

But I'd like to start out by sharing a little bit about what constitutes an average week and put a little bit of a human face from the diaspora on how this issue is affecting us.

So an average week for myself and my colleagues, and we're talking an uneventful week, two days ago, a friend forwarded me a voicemail message from her phone in Chinese, and asked me what it meant, instructing her to press a number to answer the voice message, and I told her don't

press it; clearly they're trying to hack your phone.

This is not someone that works in Uyghur advocacy; it's someone peripherally connected, who has spoken about Uyghur genocide very briefly.

A Uyghur American friend forwarded me a screenshot in Chinese with similar messaging the same day. Her husband has been prevented from leaving China to join her and the daughter that he's never met right here in my own town of Alexandria, Virginia.

Another friend tells me he's traveling overseas, and he's going to reconnect with a friend whose father died in a concentration camp in the Uyghur homeland.

She didn't learn of his death until years after because of her outspoken advocacy in Australia, and, like most Uyghurs, she had lost contact with her family.

She was the first colleague I knew who had a family member die in a concentration camp, but she's not been the last.

Two nights ago before this hearing, I had an anxiety induced panic attack sitting in a hotel room because my family members who were supposed to show up for a visa appointment with the U.S. Embassy inexplicably cancelled their appointments and refused to tell me the reasons why.

And as soon as I hear this news, my mind immediately thinks it's because I reposted this hearing notice. I posted it too frequently. It caught attention in advance of the appointment. My mistake. The Chinese public security officials must be back.

And to reiterate, my experience is relatively minor compared to what most people in diaspora are experiencing on a daily basis in terms of direct calls from the Chinese police, harassment on U.S. soil, even physical stalking, unauthorized photography, death threats, et cetera.

What I wish every single American knew, but, more importantly, what our policymakers would bear in mind, is that it's beyond urgent to address this issue, that it's affecting our neighbors right

here in the United States, and that it will eventually affect every single one of us if not addressed.

As my own story illustrates, our freedom of speech is being restricted through these tactics expanding, and we've been in many ways willfully naïve regarding the Chinese regime and other malign state actors who engage in such behaviors.

So, in addition to these attacks on freedom of speech and U.S. sovereignty that have really been borne by the Uyghur American community in many ways, our own government from our perspective has almost expected them to treat such things as normalized.

So within the diaspora, this type of existence has become almost internalized, something that's treated as "every day," but it doesn't make it any less traumatic.

So another aspect of this that I'd really like to highlight is that our reporting has detailed that the experience of these Uyghurs living in diaspora in democratic countries has

shown in one of our surveys in 2021, 74 percent reporting digital harassment, which included threats, and only 44 percent felt that the host governments take the intimidation seriously. Only 21 percent felt that they would fix the issues.

This data trend has been recently collaborated by a recent University of Sheffield report that I would commend to the Commission and anyone watching to review from Dr. David Tobin and Nyrola Elima who have done a very impactful work on this, on transnational repression and the Uyghur diaspora, which reported that two-thirds of Uyghurs surveyed in the United Kingdom had experienced direct threats against themselves or their families while living there. And according to that same report, the numbers shifted to four in five Uyghurs reporting the same living in Turkey.

I'd also like to highlight here that something that has been touched on by several witnesses, and I'm in complete agreement with, is that highlighting individual cases can be extremely valuable when done strategically and should be

done.

We have very notable cases of family members connected to U.S. citizens, including Chair Turkel, including the case of Dr. Gulshan Abbas, whose detention was labeled arbitrary recently by the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, who has disappeared and been cut off from communication from her family, later confirmed to be sentenced to prison, in what is clearly a case of retaliatory hostage taking behavior by the Chinese government against U.S. citizens.

My experiences in observing how even our government is highlighting these cases have been somewhat disappointing, to be honest. So as we're talking about these measured impacts, including mental health impact, the consequences for personal lives, the implications for our U.S. national security and national sovereignty, we are pleased to see that Congress has taken the lead in a lot of things.

And, again, this is why we're appreciative to USCIRF for taking the lead on these issues as

well.

So when we have legislation like the Anti Social CCP Act and the Transnational Repression Policy Act, which we're supportive of, these do contain provisions that are really strong steps to addressing the issue.

But as to Chair Turkel even mentioned earlier in the hearing, without that sort of public statements of support, public solidarity with the victims of these acts, it's more difficult to deter, and that deterrence piece is something that I would highlight as being very key, as we're encouraging allied countries to join us in calculating policy responses on these issues.

And so while these present actions of the Chinese state can be summarized as crimes committed with impunity on U.S. based persons, and law enforcement, such as the FBI, are increasingly cognizant and outward facing with addressing those issues, there have been a lot of notable missteps in the process of addressing those concerns and making the community feel comfortable and

incentivized to report what's happening to them.

So I would highlight that I've included some suggestions for USCIRF in my written testimony along those lines. I remain at your disposal, and I look forward to engaging with the questions.

Thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much, Ms. Millsap, for your work and excellent testimony.

As somebody who has been experiencing the same, I can relate to the sacrifice that you're making, helping the Uyghur people to be heard, and thank you very much for sharing those personal stories.

Some of it also has been brought to my attention in the past, specifically Dr. Gulshan Abbas' case, whom I had the pleasure of meeting, knowing years ago when I was living in the Bay Area.

I often say this: she is the least political person and one of the nicest people that I know, but Chinese throw her into the dungeon and that's what we're dealing with today.

I wanted to thank all of our witnesses before we move to the next stage, which is a Q&A session. Before we begin, because this is a two-part hearing, it needs a little bit more time. So we decided to extend the hearing until 12:30 so the next 34 minutes, 30 minutes, we'll be having Q&A conversation between the commissioners and our witnesses.

With that, I'd like to recognize myself for the first line of questions. This question is to all of you. Picking up what Ms. Millsap said earlier, if you could, all of you, briefly share your honest assessment on U.S. government's actions or lack thereof.

I know this has to be handled two ways. Law enforcement, we've seen at least two instances that the law enforcement agencies step up to the plate, going after those trying to assassinate Masi Elinaja [ph], a dear friend of mine.

And also going after the Chinese individuals committing similar type of transnational crimes in the United States.

But on a political side, I wanted to hear from you what are being done correctly, effectively, and what more need to be done?

If I could start with Dr. Michaelson, and then just go down the list, all of you, quickly, briefly, comment on this.

DR. MICHAELSON: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this question.

As I said, I am, my research is focused on the European context, and I'm not a particular expert on the U.S. policies, but, of course, I observe with great interest the promising steps that have been taken, especially in the recent month.

What I would like to highlight or what I find interesting, as I already highlighted in my brief input, is the outreach of the U.S. Cybersecurity Agency, CISA, to civil society organizations, to establish countermeasures in coordination with civil society and technology companies, to protect these civil society actors against the threat of transnational repression, and

it will be interesting to observe how this evolves.

But I would like to highlight that it will be very difficult to find the right interlocutors among civil society and diaspora organizations to find a common language from this governmental cybersecurity organization with, yes, diaspora organizations under threat from their authoritarian home countries, and to build trust.

So this will be a critical process that other organizations, similar organizations in other democracies, should observe and CISA should definitely share any lessons learned in this process.

Yeah. Thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

Mr. Schenkkan.

MR. SCHENKKAN: Yes, I can speak to it.

I would take a step back, I think, and again I want to note that in the last two years, this topic has really been something that's been seized by the administration, and I do think that that's noteworthy. I think that it's valuable and

important.

I think that what is missing rather than I would say a specific policy step is missing, it is this holistic framework and coordinating drive.

So I know, I believe DAS Busby used the words himself, certainly we've heard it from people we speak with in the U.S. government, that it is a whole-of-government approach, that there's an interagency process, that there is work across many different areas, and that's as it should be because it's a very complex policy problem that spans domestic policy, law enforcement, migration, foreign policy, sanctions policy, et cetera.

But we still don't quite know who's driving it; right? Who is the person or who is the, whether it's an individual or whether it's a particular office, who's in charge of it?

And how do they make sure that all of those different parts are working together? And that the right tool is being used for the right problem?

And this cuts in different ways.

Sometimes it is, is the response strong enough? So is it appropriate to the level of threat that people are experiencing? Sometimes it's not strong enough.

In other areas, and so I know one of the commissioners raised the question of universities, is it the right tool?

We have a lot of questions about whether a law enforcement approach in a university setting where transnational repression in universities is a very serious issue in the U.S., but is a law enforcement approach going to be the right approach in that setting?

Or do we need some other kind of cooperative approach with universities in order to mitigate that risk and reduce it, while still respecting freedom of expression and discussion within an academic setting?

So I do think that that is really the big missing piece is, and I know the new legislation essentially mandates that strategy or mandates that a strategy be developed, and that it be housed and

that it be run.

And I think that's very important. It may be preferable that it come organically from the administration or it may be preferable, if it has to, from Congress, if Congress needs to tell them that it has to be done.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

Ms. Prasow.

MS. PRASOW: Thank you for this important question.

On the law enforcement side, I agree with you that I think we're all familiar with numerous cases where law enforcement has been appropriately robust and, in fact, proactive when it comes to responding to transnational repression through the use of cells, local field offices.

I know my staff has had really positive interactions with law enforcement dealing with cases of transnational repression against them.

But in many respects, I don't want to call that engagement meaningless, but worth very little, when we step back and look at the overall policy

implications of the U.S. government's approach to countries.

I'll speak specifically of the countries that I work on the most—Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Take, for example, perhaps the most egregious example of transnational repression, the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, followed by, of course, several years later President Biden's trip last year to Jeddah, the fist-bump seen round the world, which, you know, at the time, we were working very closely with people from Saudi Arabia, who had either experienced transnational repression, other forms of repression, family members, who felt just utterly betrayed by their own government.

That's one very prominent example, but it's an incredibly powerful one because actions at the highest level of the United States government are perceived as a green light of a range of repressive actions by MBS, in this case, in Saudi Arabia.

Another example is in Egypt. I was present in Egypt for COP27, in Sharm El Sheikh,

when President Biden, Secretary Blinken, then Speaker Pelosi, were present, and again sitting with human rights activists saying how can they do that? How can they—they shake his hand, you know, hug him, have this public display of friendship, and we're supposed to take their word seriously about respect for human rights?

I know that there are both public and private statements made by the United States government consistently against those governments, towards those governments rather, and others, and engagement on a variety of issues, including transnational repression related to religious expression.

But they have very little effect when the overarching public display of closeness, of friendship, of unwillingness to push back against conduct by allies, contrasted to a more robust, though far from perfect, public response by the U.S. government when it comes to so-called enemies such as Russia or China.

So there needs to be consistent to what

others have been saying, I believe that a more comprehensive approach would be valuable not only at the nitty-gritty, day-to-day level, but an overall statement of U.S. policy towards this type of conduct regardless of who the perpetrator is.

Thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Ms. Millsap, do you have comments, response?

MS. MILLSAP: Yes, I completely agree with the comprehensive strategy and reiterate messaging matters.

To give a positive example from a U.S. government official, if anyone would like to know how to take a photo with a dictator or an authoritarian figure that's directly responsible for a lot of these acts, I would commend Nick Burns, our Ambassador to China, his photograph with Xi Jinping upon Xi Jinping finally receiving his diplomatic credentials.

This is how you take a photo. We don't fist bump. We don't engage in these types of affirming things. This is not a minor thing.

Messaging really does matter, and a lot of that is tied into, I think, a lot of complaints that we have about inconsistent messaging, to speak specifically on China.

And how human rights is raised? Is it treated as a sideline issue? Is the issue of transnational repression treated as one of many agenda items that we're putting forward in our conversations with the Chinese, or is this front and center?

These types of attacks on our sovereignty, on our citizens, on people who are asylum seekers here, who are here on our soil, this has been a recommendation that's been made by other colleagues and which I would submit here, which is that any time that these incidents are being reported, we should be calling Chinese diplomats in to answer for them.

This should be flagged for our embassy in Beijing, and they should be asking for an answer there as well. Why is this happening?

Again, I think it could start a lot with

pressing and with, yes, having a comprehensive strategy. I'll admit my preference, based on observations of how these issues are affecting the Uyghur community right now, would be to have more public statements from the White House, and I think that we can't really underestimate the impact that has and what it's articulating to the malign actors that are watching very carefully whether we mean what we say.

CHAIR TURKEL: Dr. Teng Biao, do you have any comments, responses?

DR. BIAO: Sure. As a dissident and activist targeted by China's transnational repression, I'm grateful to the American government's efforts to counter that repression from Chinese government.

And, but I know the American government has taken this issue more and more seriously, but it's far from enough. There are some, some legislations like Forced Labor Act or Global Magnitsky Act, but it should be, these acts should be effectively and rightly implemented.

And I think we need more arrests like the people who work in transnational repression, the overseas police stations, and we need more sanctions of the human rights abusers, and also the American companies, the global enterprises being complicit with China's suppression of freedom and human rights violations, and we need more scrutiny of American, I mean the associations, the organizations under the umbrella of United Front Work, like CSSA, Chinese Students and Scholars Associations, and many others, United Front Work organizations, and more scrutiny of the money from the Chinese government or the governments linked to companies.

Thanks.

MS. MILLSAP: Could I interject a comment off of that also to kind of reiterate?

I think I would also like to say that there are some positive things that the U.S. government is doing and even statements that have come from the FBI recently about investing with local law enforcement more to give them the

capacity that they need to address these issues.

Even there have been statements referencing that private investigators a lot of times are pulled in and made complicit in these acts of transnational repression unknowingly.

And so the FBI's recognition of that and proactive approach to begin to equip local law enforcement to address, I think is a positive sign.

Again, I just think that one thing we need to continue to bear in mind is that in a lot of ways our government agencies may be working with incomplete datasets still because of some of these very base level hindrances to getting accurate reporting from the communities affected.

So, you know, are you providing language resources, are you providing training to tip line operators so that they understand when somebody calls and is fearful of speaking on the phone, what the next step should be?

And are you communicating well? I think this approach of having even from the State Department of having these public meetings and

engagements, this is fantastic. This is much needed, but in those meetings, what's being articulated to the community?

So beyond just listening, are you also articulating that, yes, we understand that you're gathering evidence, but that's not incentivizing for somebody who is dealing with this very immediate consequence to engage with you, especially if they're going to face further repercussions for giving you the information.

People are very fearful. There are spies in our community. There are police stations set up on U.S. soil, and so if we're not also articulating to them this is the direction, again, without a comprehensive strategy that the United States is trying to go, this is the direction that the administration is going or different department, this is why we need your reporting.

Then my observation is that it's still the case that most people that are experiencing the most brutal forms of transnational repression are very reticent to report it to law enforcement.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much. Thank you.

Fascinating responses. I do agree that we need to have strong policy steps articulated by the administration. It has to go hand-in-glove with the law enforcement aspect.

And also, Teng Biao, you're right that technology firms are equally, I mean they're complicit, the companies that are in the news being part of the public debate these days helping, specific in Chinese case, in furtherance of the transnational repression.

With that, I'd like to recognize Commissioner Schneck for comments or questions. And then after that, Commissioner Davie.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: Thanks, Chairman Turkel.

I have a question that I'd like to pose to the whole panel as well. I'm curious what the, I'm curious about how new technologies, and maybe even beyond new technologies, new techniques are being used by governments around the world in their

efforts to engage in this kind of repression.

Obviously, I'm thinking about something like artificial intelligence, but I don't want that to be kind of like the only focus. What should we be looking for? Where should we look for, I hate to call it cutting edge, but what, what new things are being done that we need to pay attention to?

Perhaps I could start with Dr. Michaelson.

DR. MICHAELSON: Yes, thank you for this excellent question.

I think often what we observe in digital attacks, digital transnational repression attacks, is that perpetrators like Iran, or, yeah, other countries don't really need to rely on sophisticated technology to do a lot of harm to their targets.

So they can use off-the-shelf criminal malware to launch wide-scale phishing attacks against targets in the diaspora and scare the diaspora.

But, of course, other countries, other perpetrators use very sophisticated, even you have

military grade spyware, and the spyware market, the surveillance technology market, is still very obscure, unregulated, the Wild West of spyware technology.

And this is where still a lot of threats evolve and happen, as new technologies come up. Now we have seen that Twitter, for instance, will introduce messaging or calls, video calls in its application, and these are applications, yeah, tools that spyware companies will seek to exploit, to find vulnerabilities, to use them in attacks against, yeah, civil society organizations and other, within authoritarian countries and across borders.

So it is, yeah, as technology evolves, these companies, as long as they go unregulated and are left free to work, they will find these exploits to launch further attacks against civil society and harm human rights.

Thank you.

MR. SCHENKKAN: If I may make an addition, just to second one of the points that Marcus was

making there, is that one of the issues that we've seen in this area is the proliferation of commercial spyware as an industry, including at the very highest end.

So we're talking about a situation where ten or 15 years, there was only a handful of countries in the world that had the capacity to do infiltration of devices without any clicking so without the user taking any kind of activity in order to allow the penetration of their device.

But through the commercialization of those technologies and through their proliferation from including intelligence agency-linked companies, most prominently in Israel, but also in Italy, we saw this spyware being deployed by countries that don't have that capacity themselves.

They didn't develop that capacity on their own. They purchased it. And the purchase prices may be large in absolute terms, but it's actually quite small relatively.

And so, you know, you basically were able to in-source an intelligence capacity and a spying

capacity that otherwise you would not have obtained.

And so you saw these technologies then being used by governments all over the world in ways that are extremely invasive of individual's privacy, that are extremely harmful to them in terms of their rights, and that also facilitate physical acts of transnational repression, facilitate kidnappings, facilitate assassinations, murders.

And so this is, to speak of steps that have been taken in the United States, at least they've begun. They have taken steps to limit some of those activities by adding several of these companies to the Entity List, at the Commerce Department, to try to cut off their access to technology that they need in order to create these softwares, to write these softwares.

And that's a step. It's definitely still the beginning. I think we're still also again catching up. I think we're catching up on this problem of the really serious proliferation of the

highest end of commercial spyware, and in terms of the more sophisticated additional cutting-edge technologies, I am certainly not a technologist. I think that one of the things I would believe would probably emerge from that is that it's going to again, it may facilitate the ability to write code or the ability to develop programs, and to, again, to spread malicious technologies more rapidly.

And that is certainly something that I do believe the administration is concerned about, about what the impacts are of these cutting-edge technologies, and I imagine they're looking at ways to slow down some of the spread before it gets out of control.

MS. MILLSAP: I'd highlight also that I think, again, U.S. engagement strategically on these issues is really important with countries like Israel.

And, again, I think being able to connect a lot of points, even in our diplomatic engagement with human rights and the ways that surveillance technologies have been implemented by the Chinese

government in addition to other authoritarian governments, as we're having those conversations is really important.

I think in terms of implications of technologies, you know, we do need more to be done in terms of adding to the Entity List and sanctions, et cetera, but also just to kind of highlight for everyone the expectation from affected communities, of course, is that with the development of AI, that this will be utilized to again deploy false narratives that right now are done in a less sophisticated manner.

Somebody can manipulate photographs and spread those around. The Chinese government does that often. But with development of AI technologies and as that does get more sophisticated, there are a lot of extremely concerning implications for people that are already the targets of smear campaigns and false narratives that are being put out, whether about their character, about corruption, et cetera.

MS. PRASOW: If I could just add briefly.

CHAIR TURKEL: Ms. Prasow.

MS. PRASOW: I defer entirely to the technologists on what new technologies to look towards.

But I would encourage the Commission to keep in mind that while that question is incredibly important, and these new technologies need to be addressed, the old school form of transnational repression is the easiest, simplest, and maybe at its sort of base standard level is the detention of someone in a country who has a relative or loved one in the United States or elsewhere.

The founder of the Freedom Initiative, Mohamed Soltan, Egypt continues to detain his father, Salah Soltan, as punishment for Mohamed's human rights activism here in the United States, including by founding the Freedom Initiative.

It's a very low cost, low effort by those regimes. Egypt has an estimated 50 to 60,000 political prisoners. If you compound the number of people affected by that kind of detention, that can be far more powerful and wide-reaching than the use

of a new technology, though, of course, the technologies are incredibly important to be mindful of as well.

DR. BIAO: Two directions in terms of China's technology.

First, the Chinese government exported civilian technology, censorship technology, to other countries, and some Chinese companies like Tashan [ph], Hikvision, Huawei, ATE, TikTok. So we do need more, more policies, like new policies to sanction these technology companies.

And second is that American companies also, other, the Western companies, are complicit in China's great firewall, the censorship and the surveillance system, like Cisco provided technology, equipment, and training to Chinese government. And also like Facebook, Google, Apple, in different levels help China's human rights abuse and suppression of freedom.

Thanks.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: Thank you all.

CHAIR TURKEL: Commissioner Davie.

COMMISSIONER DAVIE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me take this opportunity to thank our witnesses for their testimony today and for all the work they do when they're not in these hearings to help protect freedom of religion around the globe.

Let me also take an opportunity to thank you, Mr. Chair, for your leadership. I've had the privilege of knowing you now for these last three years, both as a fellow commissioner, and then as vice chair and chair, and really appreciate your leadership. And looking forward to one more year together, which will be both of our last years, I guess.

But thank you.

Also, I want to echo my co-commissioners, my fellow commissioners' very strong statements about antisemitism and anti-Islamism, and how strongly we stand in opposition to both of those.

Now with that, I'd just like to shift gears for a minute and ask a question of Ms. Prasow, first, and then if anyone else wants to address it, they could.

And that has to do with how is transnational repression used by governments to invoke religion as a basis for targeting women and members of the LGBTQ+ communities outside their borders?

MS. PRASOW: Thank you, commissioner. I appreciate that.

There's a particular case that is in my written testimony that I will commend to you regarding one of the more prominent instances. Of course, given the time limitations, I was not able to discuss that earlier, but I'll highlight it now.

For example, of the case of Eden Knight, Saudi transwoman, who settled in the United States, where she discussed her transition and grappled with her faith in online fora, as people do, and should, in the United States and elsewhere. In this case, two private investigators reached out to her—my colleague has already mentioned this phenomenon—and convinced her to meet with a Saudi lawyer who brought her meals, rented her an apartment, and then ultimately pressured her to

return to Saudi Arabia.

When there, she was forced to de-transition and eventually took her own life. It's obviously a horrific case that highlights so many of these instances.

We've been talking about different features using U.S. private investigators, using private attorneys, physically targeting someone here in the United States, getting them into the place where, you know, greater pressure can be put on them, in her case, and ultimately with extremely tragic results.

That's just but one prominent example that we have, and I think in most cases, the repression of human rights violations, the human rights violators seek the most vulnerable people first because they're using the easiest to target, and unfortunately in our world, LGBTQ+ people often are those most vulnerable, including here in the United States where they may feel that they have less protection, less freedom, less comfort than they should have.

Therefore, it is incumbent on the United States and other governments to do even more to protect them, to ensure that they have that kind of security, that kind of protection.

And as I mentioned in my oral remarks, in countries like Saudi Arabia or Egypt that perceive that their interpretation of, in this case, Islam is the only right one, that opens up an even greater risk. So people are targeted not just because of political threats, but because of comments they make about what they believe to be either the correct interpretation of religion or exercise of religion or inconsistency in a religion that should allow for their own personal expression, gender identity, whatever the case may be.

You know, in a different instance, not dealing with women's rights particularly, is the case of Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, Saudi Red Crescent worker, who was detained for tweeting about comments about the religious establishment in Saudi Arabia, another case where it looks at first glance

like a domestic case.

He was arrested in Saudi Arabia, but the comments that he had made had been related to tweets he issued in the United States.

We've seen many, many cases where people freely exercising their constitutionally and internationally protected rights of free expression inside the United States, then when they're within the borders of those countries, they are prosecuted, detained, mistreated and so on.

So I think that's a particularly important component of this to keep in mind the sort of permeability of borders, including the lack of online borders, that can facilitate transnational repression.

COMMISSIONER DAVIE: Thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Commissioners, do you have any additional questions? Feel free to jump in.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if I might pose one, one quick question to Mr. Schenkkan.

This is, I realize that you're an expert

on Central Asia, that that is your focus. However, Freedom House's recent report mentioned the way that India engages in transnational repression.

But I wonder if you might say a word or two about that for the Commission?

MR. SCHENKKAN: Yes, thank you. Thanks for asking.

That's correct. India is an unusual country within our dataset so the dataset that we have collected is global in its scale and scope encompassing 850 cases. There's a very small number of cases that meet that very strict physical direct criteria.

So to be clear, that's a very narrow criteria, and that's why the number of cases, incidents, that we code in it is quite small. In India's case, I believe it's two incidents over the course of these nine years.

One of them does, in fact, have a religious character. I believe it was in 2015, an individual of Sikh background, who was, had received asylum in the United Kingdom in 2000, and

was detained in Portugal in December 2015.

He was released without being returned to India, thankfully. This component of INTERPOL abuse, which I believe is referenced by DAS Busby, is an ongoing issue across the board. It's a pervasive issue in this transnational repression space, which I could elaborate on further.

It's notable, I think, that in a case like this, where you have someone who has already been recognized as a recognized asylum seeker, then receives status within a democratic country, and yet their case is still entered into the INTERPOL database and disseminated around the world through INTERPOL systems.

In terms of your original question about India's practices, I would not argue that India is a pervasive or systematic practitioner of transnational repression. Certainly when we look at in comparison to the PRC or Egypt or Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, some of the other countries that we've spoken about at more length today, or Rwanda, which we haven't had to, it is

not a pervasive and systematic practice, but we do still see it occurring.

I would speculate that some of the ways in which this occurs can come through the kinds of transnational law enforcement cooperation that INTERPOL represents, in which you can actually have, you know, lower level or federal, below the federal level, below the national level—apologies—law enforcement engaging and submitting notices or requests for notices through INTERPOL.

And if those are accepted by INTERPOL, if they're not adequately vetted, so in this case it's not noted that this individual is, in fact, a recognized refugee, they are then disseminated through the system.

And to your previous question about technology, this is one of these subtle ways, in fact, in which technology is part of the issue, is INTERPOL, 20 or 30 years ago, when it was a much more manual process, did not present this large of a risk.

Part of the risk that comes from INTERPOL

now is that it's very, it's very rapid, and it's very easy to disseminate very quickly at a global scale problematic notices.

And so we see these things replicated and you can then, yes, reach someone all the way from India into Portugal.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: Thank you very much. Really appreciate it.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much.

Now we are getting close to the end of the hearing. Before we close, I would love to hear any final thoughts or comments that each and every one of you might have.

If I could start with Ms. Millsap.

MS. MILLSAP: Sure. Thank you, again, to the Commission and Chair Turkel, for having this very important hearing.

For my closing thoughts, I'd like to just remind us all as concerns, in particular, the Uyghur genocide, it's a human rights crisis that's unprecedented in the world today, but that's not

just because of the mass detention of an ethno-religious group that's unparalleled in scale.

This is also in terms of this emboldened reach that's being exercised by the Chinese Communist Party to systematically pursue people, not only that have been the victims of such an atrocious human rights situation, but anyone who is peripherally committed to addressing it.

And so thank you again to USCIRF for taking leadership and including this in reporting and then continuing to push Congress and, in turn, the administration on these issues. It couldn't be at a more vital and frankly dangerous time in our modern age. So thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much.

Mr. Schenkkan.

MR. SCHENKKAN: Thank you.

I also want to thank the Commission. I very much appreciate the work. I appreciate its inclusion in the reports. I think that's very valuable. As we've all stated, the more information that's collected, the more information

that's systematically included across multiple sources, the more effective it will be.

And I would only say to those who are watching or who are interested in the topic that I want to always stress that it's about protection of your rights, your protection of your rights wherever you are, and that is the goal of an effective transnational repression policy, is that it will be about protecting people's rights all over the world, and if we can keep that lodestar in mind, I think that's where we'll succeed.

Thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

Next, I'd like to go to Ms. Prasow.

MS. PRASOW: Thank you. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here and I want to really commend the Commission for taking up this important issue.

I would just urge everyone to consider in this case, although the exercise of transnational repression, particularly in the case of religious freedom, is an egregious human rights violation

that we all wish to see an end to, it also presents an opportunity to engage the American public more broadly on the importance of protecting human rights and U.S. foreign policy.

And so in addition to the value that there is in saying the names of the victims of transnational repression, because it provides them some degree of comfort, it also protects them. The reality is it provides a degree of protection in the countries they may be in.

It also humanizes their stories. It also makes them more accessible to the American public more broadly. And ultimately, although I would like to see top down policy change, it also needs to come from the bottom up.

And the more that we engage the American public on these issues, the more that they understand that not only are these rights universal, but that the violations affect their friends, their neighbors, their community, the more likely we are to see that kind of change in the near future.

Thank you.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

Dr. Michaelson.

DR. MICHAELSON: Yes, thank you for giving me this opportunity for some concluding remarks, and thank you also for highlighting this important issue at the time when the U.S. government is taking really promising steps. So for USCIRF to keep on pushing and highlighting this issue is very important.

I think one thing that I would like to mention is that it is very important to work, if we are to counter digital transnational repression, to work across sectorals, or include the private sector in any response to digital transnational repression, and also include the communities who are targeted.

So establish mechanisms to reach out and include them in any responses because these people have often left their countries because they stood up for liberal values, and entered in conflict with their home governments. So they should be seen as

strategic allies in the fight against expanding authoritarianism.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you.

Dr. Teng Biao.

DR. BIAO: Thank you very much.

The Chinese Communist Party has been one of the biggest threats to global free speech and religious freedom, and it violates human rights in the United States and other countries.

So I think the United States should take the lead to coordinate other like-minded countries to take more effective steps to counter the transnational repression from China and other authoritarian, totalitarian regimes.

The steps should be, the responses should be legal, economic and technological and political. So it's not easy, but it's really necessary and in urgent need.

CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you, Dr. Teng Biao.

Before we conclude this hearing, I wanted

to take a moment to thank our distinguished witnesses for sharing their expertise and insights with us today.

I also want to thank the commissioners who attended today's hearing, and our amazing policy team, staff team, who work tirelessly to make today's hearing possible.

Today's hearing has shed light on the issues of transnational repression and its impact on our sovereignty, freedom and the fundamental human rights.

We have heard firsthand how foreign governments are using their power to silence, silence dissidents and retaliate against those who speak up against their regimes, even here in the United States.

It is imperative that we take transnational repression seriously and work together to stop these malign foreign government activities.

We must protect our sovereignty and defend our freedom, especially freedom of speech, which is

a cornerstone of our democracy.

No one should be pressured, retaliated against for speaking their mind or expressing their opinion.

I hope this hearing has raised awareness about the seriousness of this issue, and that we will continue to work together to find solution to this serious problem.

Thank you again to everyone who has participated in this hearing and look forward to continuing to work with you in this important work.

With that, today's hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:37 p.m. EDT, the hearing was adjourned.]