



**MUSLIM PUBLIC
AFFAIRS COUNCIL**

**U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)
Hearing Addressing Entities of Particular Concern:
Non-State Actors and Egregious Violations of Religious Freedom**

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I wanted to start by thanking the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the commissioners, and its staff for inviting me to address some of the most egregious instances of Violations of Religious Freedom by Non-State Actors. This panel could not be more timely. There is no doubt that we have seen an acute increase in the number of non-state actors engaged in promoting religious nationalism, fueled by the internet and dark web—which has significantly increased—leading to new violations of religious freedom for minorities and vulnerable populations globally. We are entering a new reality where hate is no longer contained within borders.

Let me start by stating that it is the belief of my organization, the Muslim Public Affairs Council, or MPAC, that religious freedom is a basic human right, but most of all a God-given right. We sincerely believe that the right to worship should extend to every human being, regardless of whether they are religious or not. That is why, since the inception of our institution, we have been on record calling out the violation of rights of religious minorities wherever they occur - even and especially in Muslim-majority nations. When Christian minorities were under attack by non-state actors in Pakistan, we were amongst the first groups to condemn them. We asked the authorities to protect the Christian community. When synagogues and Jewish institutions were under attack in Turkey, Tunisia, and India by non-state actors, we were amongst the first to condemn them. We also asked authorities to ensure their safety and security. Needless to say, our record has been clear and consistent regardless of the perpetrator.

Some of the most heinous violations of religious freedom are being live-streamed in nations who proudly call themselves democracies. These violations happen in nations that we call partners and allies, nations with which we have deep economic, military, and diplomatic ties. In Europe, we have seen an acute rise of Islamophobia led by non-state actors. In England recently, right-wing Islamophobic riots wreaked havoc on British Muslim communities. In France, French Muslim communities have been facing anti-Muslim sentiments by right-wing and left-wing groups under the guise of stricter immigration policies.



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But today, I want to address two trends that are immensely concerning: those taking place in the occupied Palestinian territories and India. It is important to note here that in many of these instances, the states of Israel and India are either turning a blind eye or, worse, encouraging this violence by non-state actors. The line between state and non-state actors is increasingly being blurred.

In the occupied West Bank, specifically in Jerusalem, Israeli right-wing extremists have a free hand in committing acts of violence and intimidation against Christian and Muslim worshipers and houses of worship. Recently, Dimitri Diliiani, head of the Palestinian National Christian Coalition, said they felt “more threatened” now by “Israeli policies than any other time.” Tag Meir, an Israeli organization working on hate crimes and racism, has documented dozens of attacks by Israeli civilians against churches, mosques, cemeteries, and monasteries in the occupied West Bank. Over the past year in Gaza, countless videos and testimonies have emerged publicly showing Israeli soldiers, many of them reservists, part of extremist settler organizations, vandalizing mosques and churches and desecrating copies of the Quran.

In August of this year, far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, accompanied by thousands of Israeli settlers, stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem while they were performing prayers. Despite Jewish religious rites being banned at the location, Israeli police reportedly offered protection to extremist illegal settlers involved in violence in the West Bank. The situation has gotten so bad that even the United States government has sanctioned a handful of extremist Israeli settlers, and dozens of members of Congress have recommended sanctioning two Israeli ministers: Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. Yesterday, the State Department sanctioned Amana, a U.S. entity that funds illegal settlements. The second trending issue at hand is the troubling alliance between Hindu nationalist forces in India, primarily represented by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and extremist Zionist entities—a partnership rooted in a common anti-Muslim agenda. In recent years, the RSS and key Israeli figures have engaged in reciprocal visits, promoting a shared ideological affinity - one rooted in hate.

Notably, RSS leaders, including Indresh Kumar and Ram Madhav, have visited Israel to hold discussions with high-ranking officials. In return, figures from the Israeli government have attended gatherings in India organized by RSS-affiliated groups.

In the United States, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), which was recently described by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) as an RSS-affiliated entity, has furthered this bond. HAF publicly tweeted about anti-Muslim events, reinforcing its role as a significant promoter of the RSS’s anti-Muslim rhetoric within U.S. borders.



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Additionally, many Kashmiri-Americans have expressed deep concern that their advocacy here in Washington has directly led to repercussions by Indian forces against their families back in India-occupied Kashmir. Dossiers with the names, faces, and known relatives of Kashmiri-American activists have been circulated by Indian-controlled police forces in Jammu and Kashmir. In one case, one of the top human rights organizations in Kashmir, the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, had its offices raided and its staff jailed shortly after they presented key data to the US State Department on religious and human rights violations.

This alignment also has alarming transnational implications. Canada, for instance, has publicly accused Indian diplomats of orchestrating a campaign of extortion, arson, and murder targeting the Sikh diaspora. In October, Canada expelled six Indian diplomats following revelations that these officials were collaborating with incarcerated gang leader Lawrence Bishnoi, allegedly under the direction of India's Home Minister Amit Shah, a far-right RSS architect of India's anti-Muslim, anti-Christian policies. According to Canadian investigations, Bishnoi was instructed to use local, non-state actors to eliminate "targets" identified by Indian officials.

The assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British Columbia is a striking example. Several non-state actors have been apprehended, exposing the extent of India's covert operations on foreign soil. Further evidence of India's transnational repression surfaced when Nikhil Gupta, a non-state actor linked to India's intelligence agency, RAW, was apprehended in Prague for plotting to assassinate a Sikh American activist; he is now in U.S. custody and has been indicted.

In the U.S., this issue has led to bipartisan condemnation, with both Republicans and Democrats highlighting India's use of non-state actors to target U.S. citizens. Congressional hearings in 2023 and 2024, held by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the House Homeland Security Committee, and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, have underscored the severity of India's transnational repression. In September, Congressman Adam Schiff introduced HR 9707, proposing a mechanism within the Department of Justice and other federal agencies to track and address these threats. The Trump and Biden administrations have failed to direct federal agencies to take the threat of transnational repression seriously, hold perpetrators accountable, and use multilateral institutions to uphold their own state sovereignty and international law.

The implications are clear: India's RSS-aligned network is more than a domestic entity; it is actively fostering extreme global partnerships to pursue a dangerous anti-Christian, anti-Muslim, and anti-Sikh transnational agenda. It is time we recognize and address these entities of particular concern.



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I want to end by stating that this threat is not theoretical. It is very personal for us at MPAC. In 2001, two Jewish Defense League leaders, chairman Irv Rubin and his associate Earl Krugel, had been arrested in California and charged with plotting to blow up a mosque, along with MPAC offices and the office of Congressman Daryll Issa, an Arab Republican from California. According to U.S. Attorney John S. Gordon, the militants were arrested after the last component needed to make the bombs—explosive powder—was delivered to Krugel’s home. The newly appointed Israeli Ambassador to the United States has links to the JDL.