

Date of Hearing: July 14, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

SB 509 (Caballero) – As Amended July 9, 2025

SENATE VOTE: 38-0

SUBJECT: Office of Emergency Services: training: transnational repression

SUMMARY: Requires the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to develop a transnational repression (TNR) recognition and response training through its California Specialized Training Institute, in consultation with the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires Cal OES, through its California Specialized Training Institute, and in consultation with POST, to develop a TNR recognition and response training that provides law enforcement with unbiased information, including trends and guidance from federal authorities, by July 1, 2026.
- 2) Requires the training to include:
 - a. How to identify tactics of TNR in physical and nonphysical forms, as specified.
 - b. Governments known to engage in TNR, including those used most frequently and their specific tactics.
 - c. Best practices for prevention, reporting, and response tactics by law enforcement.
 - d. Information about communities targeted by TNR and misinformation that may be perpetuated by foreign governments, including when foreign governments improperly identify dissidents as terrorists and abuse international law enforcement cooperatives, as specified.
 - e. Guidance, best practices, definitions, or identified trends or threats issued by federal authorities on national security and public safety.
 - f. Culturally competent outreach to impacted diaspora communities and subject matter experts to ensure effective and unbiased responses to transnational repression.
- 3) Defines “human rights” as “the free exercise or enjoyment of any right or privilege secured to an individual by the California Constitution or the laws of this state or by the United States Constitution or the laws of the United States, in whole or in part.”
- 4) Defines “transnational repression” as “any action taken by a foreign government, an agent of a foreign government, or a proxy of a foreign government involving the transgression of national borders through physical, digital, or analog means in order to intimidate, silence, coerce, harass, or harm members of diaspora and exile communities or organizations that advocate for individuals in diaspora or exile communities in order to prevent the exercise of their human rights. “Transnational repression” includes gathering

information about individuals in diaspora and exile communities or organizations that advocate for individuals in diaspora or exile communities on behalf of a foreign government with the intent to use that information to harass, intimidate, or harm an individual in order to prevent their exercise of their human rights.”

- 5) Makes declarations and findings, as specified.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Provides that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), under the federal Homeland Security Act of 2002, has responsibility for integrating law enforcement and intelligence information relating to terrorist threats to the homeland. (6 U.S.C. § 111.)
- 2) Provides that it is the sense of Congress that some INTERPOL member countries have repeatedly misused INTERPOL’s databases and processes to conduct activities of an overtly political or other unlawful character and in violation of international human rights standards, including by making requests to harass or persecute political opponents, human rights defenders, or journalists. (22 U.S.C. § 263b.)
- 3) Requires the U.S. Secretary of State to transmit to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate, by February 25 of each year, a full and complete report that includes, where applicable, a description of the nature and extent of acts of transnational repression that occurred during the preceding year, including identification of:
 - a) Incidents in which a government harassed, intimidated, or killed individuals outside of their internationally recognized borders and the patterns of such repression among repeat offenders;
 - b) Countries in which such transnational repression occurs and the role of the governments of such countries in enabling, preventing, mitigating, and responding to such acts;
 - c) The tactics used by governments of specified countries, including the actions identified and any new techniques observed;
 - d) In the case of digital surveillance and harassment, the type of technology or platform, including social media, smart city technology, health tracking systems, general surveillance technology, and data access, transfer, and storage procedures, used by the governments of specified countries for such actions; and
 - e) Groups and types of individuals targeted by acts of transnational repression in each country in which such acts occur. (22 U.S.C. § 2151n, subd. (d)(14).)
- 4) Establishes Cal OES within the Office of the Governor for the purpose of mitigating the effects of natural, manmade, or war-caused emergencies. (Gov. Code, § 8550)
- 5) Requires Cal OES to coordinate the emergency activities of all state agencies in connection with an emergency, and requires every state agency and officer to cooperate with Cal OES in

rendering all possible assistance in carrying out its duties, as specified. (Gov. Code, § 8587, subd. (a).)

- 6) Establishes the CSTI in Cal OES, to assist the Governor in providing training to state agencies, cities, and counties in their planning and preparation for disaster. (Gov. Code, § 8588.3, subd. (b).)
- 7) Establishes the Curriculum Development Advisory Committee to recommend criteria for terrorism awareness curriculum content to meet the training needs of state and local emergency response personnel and volunteers, and to make recommendations pertaining to training oversight agencies for first responders. (Gov. Code, § 8588.12, subd. (a).)
- 8) Specifies that Cal OES shall be considered a law enforcement organization as required for receipt of specified criminal intelligence information by persons employed by Cal OES whose duties and responsibilities require the authority to access criminal intelligence information. (Gov. Code, § 8585, subd. (c).)
- 9) Requires POST, in consultation with subject matter experts, to develop guidelines and a course of instruction and training for law enforcement officers who are employed as peace officers, or who are not yet employed as a peace officer but are enrolled in a training academy for law enforcement officers, addressing hate crimes. (Pen. Code, § 13519.6, subd. (a).)

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Committee on Appropriations:

“**CalOES:** CalOES estimates four positions would be required to implement SB 509 totaling \$905,000 General Fund for initial and ongoing costs related to researching, developing and implementing the required course as well as necessary “train the trainer” courses to ensure California’s current and future law enforcement are well equipped to recognize and respond to transnational repression.

POST: POST indicates no significant fiscal impact given that this bill only requires POST to serve in a consulting role.”

COMMENTS:

Purpose of this bill: According to the author, “SB 509 is a necessary, first-of-its-kind bill that will safeguard the human rights of diaspora communities in California who are at risk of transnational repression and are at risk of political repression, threats, harm, or even death. By requiring the Office of Emergency Services (OES) and the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) to develop specialized training for law enforcement, this bill will equip officers to recognize and respond to the growing threat posed by foreign governments targeting diaspora communities. This measure strengthens our commitment to protecting vulnerable individuals and their families and ensures safety, justice, and freedom of expression for all, regardless of their background or country of origin.”

Equity Impact: According to the author’s office, “Defining and providing law enforcement with guidance on how to appropriately respond to transnational repression will almost exclusively

protect diaspora and exile communities, most of whom were marginalized in their country of origin and may remain disadvantaged in California.”

Transnational Repression: The FBI defines transnational repression as when foreign governments reach beyond their borders to intimidate, silence, coerce, harass, or harm either their own citizens visiting or living in the United States or members of their diaspora and exile communities in the United States. Foreign governments engaging in transnational repression typically target political and human rights activists, dissidents, journalists, political opponents, and religious or ethnic minority groups.

Transnational repression may include stalking, online disinformation campaigns, harassment, intimidation or threats, forcing or coercing the victim to return to their country of origin, threatening or detaining family members or friends in the country of origin, abusive legal practices (e.g., lawsuits, asset freezes, or withholding legal documents such as passports), cyberhacking, assault, attempted kidnapping, and/or attempted murder.

According to Freedom House, 48 countries have engaged in 1,219 cases of transnational repression in 103 countries between 2014 and 2024 to target individuals beyond their borders to silence dissent and control political opposition. Ten countries are responsible for about 80% of all direct, physical incidents documented between 2014 and 2024. The Chinese government is the most active, responsible for 22% of cases. Russia, Turkey, Egypt, Tajikistan, and Cambodia are also identified as actively engaging in transnational repression. There is also a significant increase in entire communities being targeted. Journalists are also frequently singled out. Since 2014, at least 26 governments have been responsible for 124 cases of repression targeting exiled journalists.

Another trend identified by Freedom House is the manipulation of terrorism charges to justify transnational repression. They argue authoritarian governments routinely exploit host countries’ concerns about terrorism to validate their cross-border intimidation tactics, which in turn, enables international cooperation or complacency. Since 2014, nearly half—over 46 percent—of all known cases involve the accused being labeled a terrorist or extremist. These claims are frequently rooted in religious discrimination or politically motivated accusations aimed at members of separatist or minority movements, including Sikh, Kurdish, and Biafran leaders.

Federal Law: Federal law does not currently define “transnational repression.” However, there are three bills pending in Congress that would define this term, educate the public, improve the monitoring of transnational repression incidents, and develop policies and training materials to recognize and respond to incidents of transnational repression. These bills include:

- 1) H.R. 2116 – 119th Congress (2025-2026), which would direct the Office of Partnership and Engagement of the Department to conduct a public service announcement campaign educating the public and international allies on the issue of transnational repression and terrorism threats related to transnational repression and the resources available to victims of transnational repression and terrorism threats related to transnational repression, including the appropriate manners of contacting the Federal Bureau of Investigation to anonymously report suspected acts of transnational repression and terrorism threats related to transnational repression.

- 2) H.R. 2158 – 119th Congress (2025-2026), which would authorize a dedicated transnational repression working group within the Department of Homeland Security to analyze and monitor transnational repression and terrorism threats related to transnational repression, and for other purposes.
- 3) H.R. 2139 – 119th Congress (2025-2026), which would require the Secretary of Homeland Security to prioritize strengthening of State and local law enforcement capabilities to combat transnational repression and terrorism threats related to transnational repression, and for other purposes.

If any of the above bills pass, along with AB 509, California may establish statutory provisions that become inconsistent with federal law. For example, the definition of who can be targeted by transnational repression in SB 509 includes “organizations that advocate for individuals in diaspora and exile communities”, and the definitions in the federal legislation do not include organizations, only individuals. Additionally, this bill asserts that a “proxy of a foreign government” may engage in transnational repression, while the federal bills only include foreign governments and agents of foreign governments.

Agent of a Foreign Government: According to the Foreign Agents Registration Act (22 U.S.C. §611(c)(1)), an agent of a foreign principal includes an individual or organization who directly or through any other person—

- (i) engages within the United States in political activities for or in the interests of such foreign principal;
- (ii) acts within the United States as a public relations counsel, publicity agent, information-service employee or political consultant for or in the interests of such foreign principal;
- (iii) within the United States solicits, collects, disburses, or dispenses contributions, loans, money, or other things of value for or in the interest of such foreign principal; or
- (iv) within the United States represents the interests of such foreign principal before any agency or official of the Government of the United States.

A foreign government, among other entities, is considered a foreign principal. (22 U.S.C. §611(c)(1))

Recent Acts of Transnational Repression in America: There are a number of transnational repression cases documented by the FBI. Recent examples of transnational repression include, but are not limited to:

In May 2025, a foreign national from China and a foreign national from the United Kingdom who is a lawful permanent resident of the United States were charged with interstate stalking and conspiracy to commit interstate stalking (Los Angeles) and conspiracy, smuggling, and violations of the Arms Export Control Act. These individuals are charged with allegedly plotting to harass and interfere with an individual who criticized the actions of the People’s Republic of China while exercising their constitutionally protected free speech rights within the United States of America.

In April 2025, a United States citizen was sentenced to 18 months in prison and ordered to pay an \$11,000 fine for acting as an illegal agent of the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC). He was sentenced for interstate stalking, conspiracy to commit interstate stalking, and for his participation in a scheme to coerce repatriation of a U.S. resident to the PRC as part of its international repatriation effort known as "Operation Fox Hunt." Two other co-defendants, also citizens of the United States, were convicted of similar charges in 2023 and sentenced to 24 months and 16 months in prison, respectively.

In March 2025, a citizen of Iran and a citizen of Georgia were convicted of murder-for-hire and attempted murder in aid of racketeering charges. These individuals were high-ranking members of an Eastern European organized crime group who attempted to kill Masih Alinejad on behalf of high-ranking members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The Government of Iran has repeatedly targeted Alinejad due to her work as a journalist, author, and human rights activist who has publicized the Government of Iran's human rights abuses around the world. In 2020 and 2021, there were attempts by Iranian intelligence officials to kidnap Alinejad from within the U.S. and bring her to Iran to silence her criticism of Iran's leaders.

In October 2024, charges were filed against an Indian citizen for using his position of authority and access to confidential information to direct the attempted assassination of another Indian citizen who is an outspoken critic of the Indian government within the United States.

Additionally, there are currently six individuals wanted by the FBI for engaging in transnational repression. These individuals are citizens of China, India, and Iran, respectively.

Committee Amendments: The Committee recommends the following amendments:

- 1) Extend the deadline to January 1, 2027.
- 2) Strike proxy from the definition of transnational repression.
- 3) Add "Nothing in this section shall prohibit the exercise of rights under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution."

Arguments in Support:

The Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund write in support, "Serious and credible TNR-related threats have been lodged and in several cases carried out against Sikh Californians. Digital threats and abuse of diplomatic channels have escalated into overt violence; up to and including extraterritorial covert lethal actions against Sikh Americans and Sikh Canadians, connected via federal indictments in both the U.S. and Canada to agents of the government of India... However, as we and our partners have made clear in our past advocacy, this is not a problem that is unique to the Indian diaspora. TNR is a daily assault on the constitutionally protected rights of racial and ethnic minority Californians that, as SB 509 makes clear, is not limited to any one state or even a particular group of states. The practice of TNR must itself be defined and the groundwork laid to combat it by the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES), including standardized definitions and protocols, and appropriate trainings at every level of law enforcement, to recognize TNR and respond effectively. By centralizing responsibility to address transnational repression within Cal OES, SB 509 ensures there will be consistent coordination between federal, state, and local agencies. Cal OES has deep experience serving as the coordinator between multiple levels of agencies in response to different threats to

Californians and their property and must be the nerve center of California's response to TNR, as it is in the framework SB 509 seeks to create. Perhaps most importantly: SB 509, if enacted, would reaffirm California's commitment to upholding the civil rights, free speech, and human rights of all Californians."

The California Police Chiefs Association writes in support, "CPCA recognizes the critical need for law enforcement agencies to stay ahead of evolving threats, particularly those that impact the safety and rights of individuals within California's diverse communities. Transnational repression represents a grave violation of human rights that can have a significant and far-reaching impact on both individuals and democratic institutions. These tactics, often involving surveillance, intimidation, cyberattacks, and coercion, target individuals in exile, dissidents, and diaspora communities, threatening their safety and freedom of speech. The training outlined in SB 509 will provide invaluable tools to law enforcement agencies across California, equipping officers with the knowledge to identify and respond to transnational repression. This is crucial for protecting the civil liberties of those who may be subjected to these foreign-directed tactics."

Arguments in Opposition:

The Hindu American Foundation writes in opposition, "SB 509, while appearing to be a benign bill to train emergency management personnel and law enforcement about transnational repression, would actually indoctrinate racist, dual-loyalty tropes in these trainings. Under the guise of protecting "dissent," SB 509 would empower law enforcement and emergency management personnel to criminally prosecute diaspora groups and community organizations who merely speak out against terrorism and extremism, by accusing them of engaging in "transnational repression" on behalf of a foreign country. A previous version of the bill from last session explicitly targeted Californians and community groups that represent diaspora communities from specific countries, including India and China, to be treated with suspicion as "proxies" or foreign agents."

The Coalition of Hindus of North America write in opposition, "The bill does not make clear who will work with the state agency to design and implement the "training" proposed by the law. The serious gaps outlined above often result in deliberate sidelining of Hindu voices in the process, as we have seen in the lack of action on anti-Hindu violence. This should give everyone pause. In the absence of any data that indicates a serious need for a bill like SB 509, we are concerned that this bill can cause immense harm to immigrant communities of minority faiths in the State, such as Hindu Americans. Repeated attacks on Hindu temples under the guise of anti-India speech, have already threatened our ability to worship freely and the response of the state machinery shows the dynamics at play. And with SB 509, Hindu Americans asking for justice against the actions of self-declared "dissidents" can be dismissed as 'proxies' of the Indian government."

Prior Legislation:

AB 3027 (Bains, 2024). This bill would have required California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to develop a transnational repression recognition and response training, and requires CalOES to regularly update the training to address emerging threats and information on tactics used by foreign governments. (Held in Senate Appropriations).

AB 640 (Frazier), Chapter 177, Statutes of 2019: Requires the training course developed by the advisory committee within Cal OES for district attorneys on the investigation and prosecution of

sexual assault cases, child sexual exploitation cases, and child sexual abuse, to also include training on the investigation and prosecution of sexual abuse cases involving victims with developmental disabilities.

SB 833 (McGuire), Chapter 617, Statutes of 2018: Requires Cal OES, in consultation with specified stakeholders, to develop voluntary guidelines for alerting and warning the public of an emergency, and requires OES, through its CSTI to develop an alert and warning training, as specified.

AB 2384 (Gallagher), Chapter 268, Statutes of 2016: Requires Cal OES to adopt a public education program to enhance the public's knowledge about how to identify and report suspected terrorist activity.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Americans for Kashmir
 California Police Chiefs Association
 Center for Security, Race and Rights
 Hindus for Human Rights
 Immigrant Defense Advocates
 India Civil Watch International
 Indian American Muslim Council
 Indo-american Center
 Jakara Movement
 Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)
 Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)
 South Asian Network
 The Sikh Coalition

Opposition

Americans4hindus
 Bay Area Jewish Coalition
 Bay Area Youth Vaishnav Parivar
 Coalition of Hindus of N. America (COHNA)
 Gopio
 Hindu American Foundation, INC.
 Hindu American Political Action Committee
 Hindu Americans of San Diego
 Hindu Community Institute
 Hindu Delegates Forum
 Hindu Speakers Bureau
 Hindupact - Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective
 India Heritage Foundation
 Indo American Community Federation
 Interfaithshaadi
 Israeli-american Civic Action Network

Karya Siddhi Hanuman Temple
Republican Hindu Coalition of California
Riverside County Sheriff's Office
Sanatana Hindu-dharma International Vedic Awareness
Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office
Smvs Newarkca LLC
Sohum
Sri Venkateshwara Temple
Stand With US
The Avanti Foundation
The Bay Area Hindu Democratic Coalition
The Khalsa Today
United Hindu Council

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