



UNHRC

Oakridge MUN 2026

United Nations Human Rights Council

**Addressing Human Rights violations resulting from Foreign
Intervention in Domestic Political Processes, including Enforced
Disappearances, Political Assassinations, and State-Sponsored
Abductions.**

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Letter from the Executive Board

Dear Delegates,

We are very pleased to welcome you to the simulation of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) at Oakridge MUN 2026. It will be an honour to serve on your Executive Board for the duration of the conference. This Background Guide is designed to give you an insight into the case at hand. Please refer to it carefully. Remember, a thorough understanding of the problem is the first step to solving it.

However, remember that this Background Guide is in no way exhaustive and is only meant to provide you with enough background information to establish a platform for beginning the research. Delegates are highly recommended to do a good amount of research beyond what is covered in the Guide. The guide cannot be used as proof during the committee proceedings under any circumstances.

Finally, we would like to wish you luck in your preparation. In case you have any questions, procedural or otherwise, please feel free to direct them to any member of the Executive Board, and we will get back to you as soon as possible. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any queries or concerns. We expect all delegates to be well-versed with the various nuances of the agenda and geared up for an intense debate, deliberations, and great fun.

We are looking forward to meeting you at the conference!

Regards,

Sai Preethi Polu

Tanvi Kodali

Vaanya Sharma

Chairperson

Vice Chairperson

Rapporteur

MUN Rules Of Procedure (ROP)

1. Roll Call

- The Chair calls on each country to declare if they are "Present" or "Present and Voting." It refers to the voting procedure on the Draft Resolution, where a delegate can vote "Yes", "No", or opt to "Abstain".
- If "Present and Voting," the delegate cannot abstain from voting. If the delegate chooses to respond with "Present", they may answer with "Present and Voting" on subsequent days, but this is not permissible for "Present and Voting" as this reply must be used consistently from that point forth.

2. Setting the Agenda

- Delegates motion to set the agenda, followed by a formal debate on which topic to discuss first. This motion requires a simple majority to pass.

3. Speakers' List

- After passing a motion to enter formal debate, delegates are placed on a speakers' list to make formal speeches. Time limits are set, and the Chair calls on delegates to speak in order.
- A delegate must raise their placard if they wish to add their name to this list. They can be on this list only once on any occasion.

4. Points

- **Point of Order:** To correct a procedural error by the Chair.
- **Point of Personal Privilege:** For personal discomfort (e.g., if the room is too cold, or if a fellow delegate cannot be heard).
- **Point of Inquiry:** To ask questions about discussion or statements in committee.
- **Point of Parliamentary Inquiry:** To ask questions with regard to the Rules of Procedure.

5. Motions

- **Motion to Suspend the Meeting:** To break for caucuses or adjourn the session.
- **Motion to Close Debate:** Ends the discussion on a topic and moves to voting. Requires a two-thirds majority.
- **Motion to Table the Topic:** Postpones debate on a topic. Requires a majority vote.

6. Yields

- **Yield to the Executive Board:** A delegate yields their remaining time from their speech to the Executive Board. It is to be used as they see fit.
- **Yield to Another Delegate:** A delegate yields their remaining time for another delegate to speak. (This delegate's permission must be sought beforehand)
- **Yield to Points of Information:** A delegate yields their remaining time to Points of Information to the committee.
- **Yield to Comments:** A delegate yields their remaining time to comments from the committee.

7. Caucuses

- **Moderated Caucus:** The Chair controls the speaking order with shorter, focused speeches. The topic selected is a narrowed version of the agenda, chosen by the delegate who proposed the moderated caucus.
- **Unmoderated Caucus:** Informal discussion among delegates not under the moderation of the Executive Board.

8. Draft Resolutions and Amendments

- Delegates collaborate to create draft resolutions, which are formal solutions to the discussed issue.
- **Friendly Amendments:** Accepted by all sponsors without a vote.
- **Unfriendly Amendments:** Need to be voted on to be added.

9. Voting

- **Procedural Votes:** Includes motions and amendments; all members must vote.
- **Substantive Votes:** For resolutions and unfriendly amendments; only "Present and Voting" delegates may vote, and abstentions are allowed.

Points to Remember

A few aspects that delegates should keep in mind while preparing:

1. **Procedure:** The purpose of putting in procedural rules in any committee is to ensure a more organized and efficient debate. The committee will follow the UNA-USA Rules of Procedure. Although the Executive Board shall be fairly strict with the Rules of Procedure, the discussion of the agenda will be the main priority. So, delegates are advised not to restrict their statements due to hesitation regarding the procedure.
2. **Foreign Policy:** Following the foreign policy of one's country is the most important aspect of a Model UN Conference. This is what essentially differentiates a Model UN from other debating formats. To violate one's foreign policy without adequate reason is one of the worst mistakes a delegate can make.
3. **Role of the Executive Board:** The Executive Board is appointed to facilitate debate. The committee shall decide the direction and flow of the debate. The delegates are the ones who constitute the committee and hence must be uninhibited while presenting their opinions/stance on any issue. However, the Executive Board may put forward questions and/or ask for clarifications at all points in time to further debate and test participants.
4. **Nature of Source/Evidence:** This Background Guide is meant solely for research purposes and must not be cited as evidence to substantiate statements made during the conference. Evidence or proof for substantiating statements made during the formal debate is acceptable from the following sources:
 - i) **United Nations:** Documents and findings by the United Nations or any related UN body are held as credible proof to support a claim or argument.
 - Multilateral Organizations: Documents from international organizations like OIC, NAFTA, SAARC, BRICS, EU, ASEAN, the International Criminal Court,

etc. may also be presented as credible sources of information.

ii) Government Reports: These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country.

iii) News Sources:

a. Reuters: Any Reuters article that clearly makes mention of the fact or is in contradiction of the fact being stated by a delegate in the council.

b. State operated News Agencies: These reports can be used in the support of or against the State that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any country as such but in that situation, may be denied by any other country in the council. Some examples are – RIA Novosti (Russian Federation), Xinhua News Agency (People's Republic of China), etc.

***Please Note: Reports from NGOs working with UNESCO, UNICEF, and other UN bodies will be accepted. Under no circumstances will sources like Wikipedia, ChatGPT, or newspapers like the Guardian, Times of India, etc. be accepted. However, notwithstanding the criteria for acceptance of sources and evidence, delegates are still free to quote/cite from any source as they deem fit as a part of their statements.

Committee and Mandate

The United Nations is built on three core pillars: human rights, peace and security, and development. Within the UN system, the Human Rights Council (UNHRC) serves as the principal intergovernmental body responsible for addressing human rights issues worldwide. It works alongside the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and various treaty-monitoring bodies, all of which are headquartered in Geneva. The Council was established in response to concerns about the declining credibility and effectiveness of its predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights.

The UNHRC was formally created by the United Nations General Assembly through Resolution 60/251 on 15 March 2006. It replaced the Commission on Human Rights, which had existed since 1946. The resolution tasked the newly formed Council with reviewing existing human rights mechanisms and developing new methods of work. The establishment of the Council reflected a broader effort by UN Member States to strengthen the international human rights system and enhance its effectiveness.

A major milestone in the Council's development came in June 2007 with the adoption of Resolution 5/1, often referred to as the "Institution-Building Package." This resolution laid down the framework governing the Council's structure, agenda, procedures, and working methods. Most notably, it introduced the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a mechanism through which the human rights records of all UN Member States are regularly examined. Alongside this, Resolution 5/2 established a code of conduct for Special Procedures mandate holders. In 2011, the Council's work and functioning underwent a formal review to further improve its effectiveness.

The Council is mandated to address situations involving human rights violations across the world, whether they concern specific countries or thematic issues such as discrimination, freedom of expression, torture, or the rights of women and children. It examines allegations of violations, adopts resolutions, issues recommendations, and provides a platform for dialogue among states, international organizations, and civil society. While its resolutions are not legally binding, they carry significant political and moral authority within the international community.

A key aspect of the UNHRC's mandate is the development and strengthening of international human rights standards. The Council creates and oversees mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Special Procedures, Fact-Finding Missions, and Commissions of Inquiry. Through these mechanisms, it monitors the human rights performance of all UN Member States, investigates violations, gathers evidence, and promotes accountability. The Council also contributes to the drafting of new human rights norms and legal instruments.

Beyond monitoring and standard-setting, the UNHRC is tasked with promoting international cooperation in human rights through technical assistance, capacity-building, and advisory services. It works with governments, national human rights institutions, and civil society organizations to strengthen domestic human rights frameworks and help states fulfill their international obligations. Through dialogue, assistance, and oversight, the Council seeks not only to respond to violations but also to prevent them and foster a global culture of respect for human rights.

For further information about UNHRC: ohchr.org/en/about-us/mandate-un-human-rights; ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/about-council

Introduction to the Agenda

International law is built on a simple rule: every country has the right to govern itself without outside interference. However, in global politics, powerful nations frequently meddle in the domestic affairs of other states to change their leadership, sway elections, or gain a geopolitical advantage. When foreign powers interfere this way, human rights are usually the first things to collapse. Far from being just political games, foreign intervention directly leads to severe abuses, like state-sponsored abductions, targeted killings, and enforced disappearances, used to silence political opponents while avoiding international accountability.

Understanding Foreign Intervention in Domestic Political Processes

Foreign intervention in domestic political processes refers to actions undertaken by external state actors or entities acting on their behalf, with the objective of influencing the political, electoral, governmental, or social affairs of another sovereign state. Such interventions may occur through diplomatic, economic, military, intelligence, technological, or informational means.

Political intervention exists on a broad spectrum. Certain forms, such as diplomatic engagement, election observation missions, and development assistance, are generally accepted within international norms when conducted transparently and with the consent of the host state. However, intervention becomes contentious when external actors seek to manipulate political outcomes, undermine democratic institutions, support specific political factions, or eliminate perceived opponents through coercive means.

The distinction between legitimate international engagement and unlawful political interference remains a significant challenge for policymakers and international institutions. Consequently, debates surrounding foreign intervention often involve competing principles of sovereignty, self-determination, national security, and human rights protection.

Historical Evolution of Political Interference Across Borders

Foreign intervention in the domestic political affairs of states is not a recent phenomenon. Throughout history, powerful states have sought to influence the governance, leadership, and policies of other nations to advance strategic, economic, ideological, or security interests. While the methods of intervention have evolved

over time, the objective of shaping political outcomes beyond national borders has remained largely consistent.

The Colonial Era: During the colonial era, imperial powers frequently interfered in the political structures of occupied territories by installing compliant administrations, suppressing resistance movements, and restructuring local institutions to serve colonial interests. Such interventions often deprived indigenous populations of their right to self-determination and laid the foundation for prolonged political instability.

The Cold War: The Cold War (1947–1991) marked a significant shift in the nature of foreign political interference. As ideological competition between the United States and the Soviet Union intensified, both superpowers engaged in extensive covert and overt operations to expand their spheres of influence. These included supporting coups d'état, funding political parties and armed groups, conducting intelligence operations, and intervening in elections across regions such as Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Many of these interventions contributed to widespread human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture, and political assassinations.

Post-Cold War: Following the end of the Cold War, the focus of intervention gradually shifted. While military interventions continued in certain regions, states increasingly relied on diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, democracy-promotion initiatives, and counterterrorism operations to influence political developments abroad. The rise of globalisation and international institutions also expanded opportunities for both cooperation and political interference.

The Twenty-First Century: In the twenty-first century, rapid technological advancements have transformed the methods through which states project influence. Cyber operations, digital surveillance, online disinformation campaigns, election interference, and transnational repression have become increasingly prominent. Unlike traditional interventions, many of these activities are difficult to attribute and often occur below the threshold of armed conflict, complicating efforts to establish accountability under international law.

This historical evolution demonstrates that while the instruments of foreign intervention have changed, the underlying challenge remains the same: balancing the sovereign right of states to govern their own affairs with the international community's responsibility to prevent human rights violations arising from external political interference.

Contemporary Trends in Covert and Overt Foreign Influence

In the modern international system, foreign political intervention has become increasingly sophisticated, extending beyond traditional military and diplomatic means to include cyber operations, intelligence activities, economic coercion, and information warfare. These interventions can generally be categorised as overt, where the influencing state openly acknowledges its involvement, or covert, where actions are conducted secretly or through proxy actors to maintain plausible deniability.

Overt Foreign Influence: Overt foreign influence includes publicly visible actions such as diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, military assistance, official endorsements of political actors, and public statements intended to influence another state's domestic political decisions. While such measures may be justified on grounds of national security, foreign policy, or the promotion of democracy and human rights, they often raise concerns regarding state sovereignty and the principle of non-interference.

Covert Foreign Influence: Covert foreign influence, on the other hand, is characterised by secrecy and indirect methods of operation. Intelligence agencies and state-sponsored actors may engage in activities such as funding political groups, spreading disinformation, manipulating public opinion through social media, conducting cyberattacks on electoral infrastructure, or surveilling political opponents. In more severe cases, covert operations have been linked to enforced disappearances, political assassinations, and state-sponsored abductions carried out beyond national borders. Recent years have also witnessed the rise of transnational repression, whereby governments seek to silence critics, journalists, activists, and political dissidents residing abroad. Such practices may include digital surveillance, intimidation of family members, arbitrary detention upon return to the home country, extraterritorial abductions, or targeted violence. Advances in artificial intelligence, spyware, and digital communication technologies have further enhanced states' ability to monitor and suppress dissent across borders.

These evolving methods demonstrate that foreign political intervention is no longer confined to conventional forms of statecraft. Instead, it increasingly operates through interconnected political, technological, and intelligence networks that challenge existing legal frameworks and complicate efforts to ensure accountability. As these practices continue to evolve, the international community faces the pressing task of

distinguishing legitimate international engagement from actions that undermine sovereignty and result in serious human rights violations.

Human Rights Implications of Foreign Political Intervention

Foreign intervention in domestic political processes extends beyond questions of sovereignty and international relations; it often results in serious violations of internationally recognized human rights. Whether carried out through covert intelligence operations, political coercion, cyber activities, or direct state action, such interventions can undermine both individual freedoms and democratic institutions. The following are some of the most significant human rights concerns associated with foreign political interference.

Violations of Civil and Political Rights: Foreign intervention frequently infringes upon fundamental civil and political rights guaranteed under international human rights law. Political dissidents, journalists, activists, opposition leaders, and human rights defenders are often the primary targets of foreign-backed operations. Common violations include restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of association, peaceful assembly, political participation, and the right to privacy through surveillance and intimidation.

Enforced Disappearances, Political Assassinations, and State-Sponsored Abductions: Among the gravest consequences of foreign political intervention are enforced disappearances, political assassinations, and state-sponsored abductions. These practices violate the right to life, liberty, security of person, and due process, while often exposing victims to arbitrary detention, torture, or inhuman treatment. Beyond the direct impact on victims, these acts create fear within society, discourage political participation, and weaken public confidence in democratic institutions.

Transnational Repression and the Chilling Effect on Dissent: Advances in surveillance technology and international intelligence cooperation have enabled states to extend political repression beyond their own borders. Governments have increasingly been accused of monitoring, threatening, harassing, or forcibly returning political opponents, journalists, and activists residing abroad. Such practices not only endanger individuals but also create a "chilling effect," discouraging freedom of expression and civic engagement among diaspora communities and civil society.

Impact on Democratic Governance and the Rule of Law: Foreign interference can erode democratic institutions by manipulating elections, influencing public opinion

through disinformation, supporting particular political actors, or undermining judicial independence. These actions weaken the rule of law, reduce public trust in government institutions, and compromise the ability of citizens to freely determine their political future.

Challenges for the International Community: The evolving nature of foreign political intervention presents significant challenges for accountability. Covert operations, cyber activities, and proxy actors often obscure state responsibility, making investigation and prosecution difficult under existing legal frameworks. Consequently, the international community must strengthen mechanisms for international cooperation, promote transparency, and ensure that states remain accountable for human rights violations committed both within and beyond their borders.

The human rights consequences of foreign political intervention extend far beyond isolated incidents of violence or repression. They undermine democratic institutions, weaken public trust in governance, and create an environment in which accountability is difficult to establish and violations are increasingly difficult to prevent. As foreign influence continues to evolve in both scope and method, its implications for international human rights law remain an urgent and highly contested issue requiring careful examination.

Defining the Key Concepts

State Sovereignty and Non-Intervention

State sovereignty is a fundamental principle of international law that recognises the exclusive authority of a state to govern its territory, population, and internal affairs without external interference. Article 2(1) of the United Nations Charter affirms the sovereign equality of all Member States, regardless of their size, political system, or level of development.

Closely linked to sovereignty is the principle of non-intervention, which prohibits states from intervening in matters that fall within the domestic jurisdiction of another state. This principle is reflected in Article 2(7) of the UN Charter and has been reaffirmed through international law and state practice. Intervention may take various forms, including military action, political coercion, economic pressure, or covert operations intended to influence another state's internal political affairs.

Foreign Intervention

Foreign intervention refers to actions undertaken by a state, or actors acting on its behalf, to influence the domestic political, economic, military, or social affairs of another state. Such intervention may be overt, involving publicly acknowledged diplomatic, economic, or military measures, or covert, involving secret intelligence operations, cyber activities, disinformation campaigns, or support for political groups.

Enforced Disappearances

An enforced disappearance occurs when a person is arrested, detained, or abducted by state authorities, or by individuals acting on their behalf, and their detention or whereabouts are deliberately concealed. It is recognised under international law as a continuing violation of multiple human rights, including the rights to liberty, security of person, recognition before the law, and, in many cases, the right to life and freedom from torture. The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance provides the principal international legal framework addressing this crime and establishes obligations for states to prevent, investigate, and punish such acts.

Political Assassinations and Extrajudicial Killings

Political assassination refers to the deliberate killing of an individual for political purposes, often because of their political position, influence, or activities. Victims may include government officials, opposition leaders, journalists, activists, dissidents, or human rights defenders.

Extrajudicial killings are unlawful killings carried out without judicial process or legal authorisation. While political assassinations are a form of extrajudicial killing, not all extrajudicial killings are politically motivated. Such acts may be committed directly by state authorities or by individuals acting under their direction, support, or acquiescence.

State-Sponsored Abductions and Extraordinary Renditions

State-sponsored abduction refers to the unlawful seizure and transfer of an individual by state authorities, or actors acting on their behalf, often across international borders and outside established legal procedures. Such operations may involve arbitrary detention, denial of due process, and violations of the individual's legal rights.

Extraordinary rendition is a specific practice where individuals are transferred from one jurisdiction to another without formal extradition proceedings, typically for interrogation or detention. Although it is often justified on national security or counterterrorism grounds, extraordinary renditions have been widely criticised for facilitating arbitrary detention, torture, and other serious human rights violations.

Transnational Repression

Transnational repression refers to actions taken by a state to intimidate, monitor, harass, threaten, or silence individuals located outside its territorial jurisdiction. Those targeted are often political dissidents, journalists, activists, academics, or members of diaspora communities who are perceived as critical of their home governments. Methods of transnational repression may include digital surveillance, online harassment, intimidation of family members, misuse of international legal mechanisms, travel restrictions, arbitrary detention upon return, and, in severe cases, abduction or targeted violence.

Proxy Actors, Mercenaries, and Non-State Agents

States do not always act directly when seeking to influence political developments abroad. Instead, they may rely on proxy actors, mercenaries, private military companies, intelligence networks, or other non-state agents to conduct operations while maintaining plausible deniability.

Proxy actors are individuals or organisations that operate on behalf of, or receive support from, a state without being formal members of its government or armed forces. Mercenaries are individuals who participate in armed conflict primarily for private financial gain rather than national allegiance or ideological commitment. Non-state agents encompass a broader category that includes private military contractors, criminal organisations, armed groups, and other entities acting with varying degrees of state support or direction.

Vulnerable Groups and Targeted Populations

Individuals who challenge political authority, expose state misconduct, or belong to marginalised communities are often disproportionately affected by foreign political intervention. In many cases, external state actors target these groups through surveillance, intimidation, disinformation campaigns, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, political assassinations, and state-sponsored abductions.

Political Opposition Leaders

Political opposition leaders are one of the most common targets of foreign political intervention because of their influence over domestic governance and public opinion. External actors often seek to weaken or eliminate political rivals by supporting rival factions, financing political campaigns, spreading disinformation, conducting cyber operations, or facilitating acts of intimidation and violence. In more severe cases, opposition leaders have even been subjected to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, or political assassination.

The case of Alexei Navalny has become one of the most prominent examples of political repression in recent years. Following his poisoning in 2020, detention upon returning to Russia in 2021, and reported disappearance within the Russian prison system in 2023 before his death in custody in 2024, UN human rights experts repeatedly expressed concern regarding his treatment, detention conditions, and the state's obligations to protect his fundamental rights.

Human Rights Defenders

Human rights defenders, including activists, lawyers, researchers, and members of civil society organisations, play a crucial role in documenting abuses and advocating for accountability. This is because their work tends to expose state misconduct, and they may become targets of surveillance, harassment, travel restrictions, arbitrary detention, or violence by foreign governments seeking to suppress criticism beyond their borders.

Iranian human rights defender Narges Mohammadi has repeatedly been the subject of concern by UN human rights experts due to her detention and treatment in connection with her peaceful human rights advocacy. Similarly, Belarusian activist Ales Bialiatski, founder of the Human Rights Centre Viasna, has been recognised internationally while UN mechanisms have raised concerns regarding the detention and prosecution of human rights defenders in Belarus.

Journalists and Media Personnel

Journalists and media personnel are essential for ensuring access to accurate information and holding governments accountable. However, investigations on corruption, conflict, or human rights abuses may cause journalists to be at great risk of foreign interference. Tactics such as digital surveillance, online harassment,

censorship, arbitrary detention, targeted violence, and political assassination have increasingly been used to silence members of the press.

The killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi Arabian Consulate in Istanbul in 2018 prompted an inquiry by the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, who concluded that the incident warranted an international investigation into accountability.

In 2021, Belarusian journalist Roman Protasevich was detained after Ryanair Flight 4978 was diverted to Minsk, an incident that generated widespread international concern regarding the protection of journalists and political dissidents.

Whistleblowers

Whistleblowers are those who disclose information related to unlawful, unethical, or abusive practices within governments, security agencies, corporations, or other institutions. Their disclosures may expose corruption, unlawful surveillance, intelligence operations, or human rights violations involving foreign states. As a result, whistleblowers may face criminal prosecution, intimidation, digital surveillance, forced exile, or attempts at extradition and abduction.

Edward Snowden's disclosure of classified information concerning global surveillance programmes in 2013 sparked international debate regarding the balance between national security, privacy rights, freedom of expression, and whistleblower protection. His case continues to influence discussions on digital rights and international human rights standards.

Ethnic, Religious, and Indigenous Minorities

Ethnic, religious, and indigenous minorities become vulnerable when foreign actors exploit existing social, political, or ethnic divisions to advance strategic interests. Disinformation campaigns, support for armed groups, political manipulation, and incitement of communal tensions often affect these communities, increasing the risk of discrimination, displacement, arbitrary detention, and targeted violence.

The Rohingya crisis has been extensively examined by United Nations mechanisms, which have documented widespread human rights violations against the Rohingya population and their displacement across international borders. More recently, persecution of the Yazidi community in Iraq demonstrated how minority populations can become particularly vulnerable during conflicts involving foreign fighters and

transnational armed groups. United Nations investigations concluded that the attacks committed by ISIL (Da'esh) against the Yazidis constituted genocide and involved widespread killings, sexual violence, forced displacement, and abductions, highlighting the heightened risks faced by minority communities in conflicts involving external actors.

Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Exiled Dissidents

Individuals who flee persecution often continue to face threats after leaving their countries of origin. Refugees, asylum seekers, and exiled dissidents have increasingly been subjected to transnational repression through surveillance, harassment, intimidation of family members, misuse of international legal mechanisms, and, in some cases, state-sponsored abductions or targeted attacks.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Operation Condor involved coordinated intelligence cooperation among several South American military governments to locate, surveil, abduct, and, in some cases, assassinate political opponents who had fled across national borders. The operation demonstrated how refugees and political exiles could remain vulnerable to persecution despite seeking safety in another country.

Forms of Human Rights Violations Arising from Foreign Intervention

Foreign intervention in domestic political processes may give rise to a wide range of human rights violations that extend beyond traditional armed conflict. States and state-supported actors increasingly employ covert operations, intelligence networks, digital technologies, and proxy actors to influence political developments or suppress perceived threats beyond their borders. These actions often target political opponents, journalists, human rights defenders, and minority communities, undermining both individual rights and democratic institutions.

Enforced Disappearances

Patterns and Methods: Enforced disappearances typically involve the secret deprivation of liberty by state authorities or individuals acting with the state's authorisation, support, or acquiescence, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the detention or disclose the individual's fate or whereabouts. Victims may include political opposition leaders, journalists, human rights defenders, activists, or

members of minority communities. In cases of foreign intervention, disappearances may occur through joint intelligence operations, coordinated actions between multiple states, or proxy groups acting on behalf of external actors. Operation Condor, conducted during the 1970s and 1980s, involved coordinated intelligence cooperation among several South American military governments to identify, abduct, detain, and forcibly disappear political opponents across national borders. The operation remains one of the most widely documented examples of transnational enforced disappearances facilitated through interstate collaboration.

Impact on Victims and Families: Enforced disappearances have profound and long-lasting consequences for both victims and their families. Victims are frequently deprived of legal protection and may be subjected to arbitrary detention, torture, or extrajudicial execution. At the same time, families often endure prolonged uncertainty regarding the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones, resulting in psychological trauma, financial hardship, and the inability to pursue legal remedies or obtain justice. Beyond individual suffering, enforced disappearances create a climate of fear that discourages political participation, freedom of expression, and civic engagement.

Accountability Challenges: Holding perpetrators accountable for enforced disappearances remains particularly challenging due to the secretive nature of the crime. States may deny involvement, destroy evidence, refuse to disclose detention records, or obstruct independent investigations. When disappearances involve multiple jurisdictions or proxy actors, determining responsibility becomes even more complex. These challenges are compounded by limited access to victims, political interference in judicial processes, and the reluctance of states to cooperate with international investigations. Consequently, enforced disappearances continue to represent one of the most difficult human rights violations to investigate, prosecute, and remedy under international law.

Political Assassinations

Targeted Killings of Political Leaders: Political leaders and opposition figures are frequently targeted because of their ability to influence public opinion, mobilise political movements, or challenge those in power. Their assassination may destabilise governments, weaken opposition movements, and alter the political trajectory of a state. In cases involving foreign intervention, these acts are often linked to broader geopolitical interests or attempts to influence domestic political outcomes. The assassination of Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in 1961 remains one of

the most significant historical examples of political assassination linked to foreign involvement. United Nations investigations and subsequent historical inquiries have highlighted the role of external actors in the political circumstances surrounding his death, illustrating how geopolitical rivalries can contribute to the targeting of national political leaders.

Assassinations of Journalists, Activists, and Dissidents: Journalists, human rights defenders, activists, and political dissidents are often targeted because their work exposes corruption, human rights violations, or abuses of power. Attacks against these individuals not only silence critical voices but also weaken press freedom, civil society, and democratic accountability.

Cross-Border Targeted Killings: Advances in intelligence capabilities and international mobility have enabled states to conduct operations beyond their own territories, resulting in an increase in alleged cross-border targeted killings. These operations often involve intelligence agencies, diplomatic facilities, or proxy actors, making attribution and accountability particularly difficult. Such incidents raise complex legal questions regarding state sovereignty, jurisdiction, and compliance with international human rights law. In June 2023, Canadian authorities publicly alleged a potential link between agents of the Government of India and the killing of Sikh activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British Columbia. India rejected these allegations. The case has attracted significant international attention and remains the subject of ongoing criminal investigations and diplomatic discussions, illustrating the legal and political complexities associated with alleged cross-border targeted killings.

State-Sponsored Abductions

Extraordinary Rendition Programmes: Extraordinary rendition refers to the transfer of individuals from one country to another without formal judicial or extradition procedures, typically for the purposes of interrogation or detention. Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, several states employed extraordinary rendition as part of counterterrorism operations. These programmes attracted widespread criticism due to allegations that detainees were transferred to secret detention facilities or countries where they faced torture or other forms of ill-treatment. The case of Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen detained in the United States in 2002 and subsequently transferred to Syria, became one of the most widely recognised examples of extraordinary rendition.

Forced Repatriation of Dissidents: Forced repatriation occurs when individuals are compelled to return to their country of origin despite facing risks of persecution, arbitrary detention, or other human rights violations. Such actions may involve diplomatic pressure, coercion, intimidation of family members, or misuse of immigration and extradition mechanisms. Political dissidents, activists, journalists, and members of diaspora communities are particularly vulnerable to these practices. UN human rights experts have repeatedly expressed concern over reports of transnational repression in which governments have sought to pressure political dissidents and activists residing abroad to return to their countries of origin. These concerns include allegations of intimidation, threats against family members, and misuse of legal processes to facilitate involuntary returns.

Kidnappings Conducted Through Proxy Actors: In some instances, states rely on proxy actors, including intelligence networks, militias, criminal organisations, or private individuals, to abduct individuals while maintaining plausible deniability. The use of intermediaries makes it more difficult to attribute responsibility and often complicates international investigations. Victims may subsequently be subjected to enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture, or unlawful transfer across borders.

Arbitrary Detention and Torture

Secret Detention Facilities: Secret detention facilities are unofficial or undisclosed locations where individuals are held outside the protection of the law. Detainees are often denied contact with their families, legal counsel, or independent monitoring bodies, increasing the risk of torture, enforced disappearance, and other forms of abuse. The secrecy surrounding these facilities also makes independent investigations and accountability particularly difficult. Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the existence of a network of secret detention facilities operated by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), commonly referred to as "black sites," became the subject of international scrutiny. United Nations experts and other international bodies expressed concern over allegations that detainees held in these facilities were subjected to torture, enforced disappearance, and prolonged incommunicado detention.

Incommunicado Detention: Incommunicado detention occurs when detainees are denied communication with family members, legal representatives, or independent authorities for prolonged periods. Without external oversight, individuals become particularly vulnerable to torture, ill-treatment, and enforced disappearance. In the

context of foreign intervention, incommunicado detention is often used during intelligence operations or politically sensitive investigations to conceal the whereabouts of detainees and limit public scrutiny.

Coercive Interrogation Practices: Coercive interrogation refers to the use of physical, psychological, or other abusive methods to obtain information or confessions from detainees. These practices may include prolonged solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, stress positions, sensory deprivation, threats, and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. International human rights law, including the Convention against Torture, prohibits torture and other forms of ill-treatment under all circumstances, regardless of national security or other exceptional situations. Investigations into the CIA detention and interrogation programme, including the 2014 report of the United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, documented the use of what were described as "enhanced interrogation techniques" on detainees held in secret detention facilities. These findings contributed to widespread international debate regarding the legality of coercive interrogation practices and states' obligations under international human rights law.

Suppression of Political Participation

Intimidation of Opposition Groups: Political opposition parties and movements are often subjected to intimidation through surveillance, harassment, arbitrary detention, disinformation campaigns, and threats of violence. Foreign intervention may intensify these practices by providing financial, technological, or intelligence support to state authorities or allied groups seeking to suppress political competition. As a result, opposition groups may be unable to campaign freely, organise public demonstrations, or engage with voters without fear of retaliation.

Electoral Interference and Coercion: Foreign actors may attempt to influence electoral processes through cyber operations, disinformation campaigns, illicit financing, coercive diplomacy, or support for particular political parties or candidates. Such actions can undermine electoral integrity by manipulating public opinion, reducing trust in democratic institutions, and influencing voter behaviour. Although not all foreign involvement in elections constitutes unlawful interference, covert efforts to alter electoral outcomes remain a significant concern under international law.

Silencing Civil Society: Civil society organisations, independent media, academic institutions, and grassroots movements play a critical role in promoting transparency, accountability, and democratic participation. However, these groups may become targets of foreign intervention through digital surveillance, online harassment, funding restrictions, disinformation campaigns, or intimidation of their members. Such actions limit public debate, discourage civic engagement, and reduce opportunities for independent oversight of government actions. United Nations human rights experts have expressed increasing concern regarding the global rise of transnational repression targeting civil society organisations, journalists, and activists operating in exile. Reports have documented the use of digital surveillance technologies, online harassment, and intimidation of family members to silence critics beyond national borders, illustrating how foreign intervention can restrict civic space even outside a state's territory.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: Operation Condor in Latin America

Operation Condor stands as one of the most extensively documented cases of state-sponsored transnational repression in modern history and remains the archetypal reference point for international legal discussions of coordinated cross-border enforced disappearances, political assassinations, and state-sponsored abductions. Its study is foundational for any analysis of the agenda before this committee.

Origins and Formation

Fifty years ago, between November 25 and December 1, 1975, military intelligence officials from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay gathered in Santiago, Chile, invited by Colonel Manuel Contreras, head of Chile's Directorate of National Intelligence (DINA). At that meeting, they formally established what they called Sistema Cóndor, a secret network designed to allow officials to collaborate more efficiently in the harassment and elimination of political opponents living in exile across South America and beyond. The system later expanded to include Brazil in 1976 and Peru and Ecuador in 1978.

Operation Condor was officially founded on November 28, 1975, in Santiago, Chile, during the closing session of the First Meeting of National Intelligence, signed by intelligence representatives from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, and Paraguay. The timing was not accidental. The operation was inspired by the Cold War's National

Security Doctrine, and its founding reflected a shared ideological commitment among the Southern Cone's right-wing military governments to eradicate left-wing political movements that had fled repression in their home countries by seeking refuge across national borders.

Structure and Operational Architecture

What distinguished Operation Condor from prior bilateral repression efforts was its degree of institutional sophistication. The system was founded on three pillars: first, a secret communications network called Condortel that enabled member states to rapidly exchange intelligence on targets and joint operations; second, an operative axis called Condoreje, a forward command and operations office in Buenos Aires from which abduction operations were planned and executed; and third, a computerized data bank in Santiago that collated intelligence files and profiles on sought targets across the region.

The operation deployed unusually sophisticated technology for its era. Condortel connected to a U.S. base on the Panama Canal that served as the operation's overwatch station, and CONDOR maintained a computerized database, extensive archives, and psychological profiles of suspected leftists. Chile's DINA served as the operational nerve center. DINA operated a network of secret detention centers across Chile, including the notorious Villa Grimaldi in Santiago, the ship Esmeralda in Valparaíso harbor, and Colonia Dignidad, a fortified German settlement where political prisoners were subjected to systematic torture including electric shock, near-drowning, prolonged suspension, sexual assault, and forced witnessing of the torture of family members.

Phases of Operation

Condor operated across three distinct phases of escalating severity. The first phase involved intelligence sharing and the exchange of information about targeted dissidents across member states. The second involved active bilateral and multilateral operations, abductions, renditions, and interrogations carried out jointly by the security forces of member countries on one another's soil. The third and most secret phase involved the formation of special teams from member countries tasked with traveling anywhere in the world, including to non-member countries, to carry out "sanctions up to assassination" against targeted opponents.

For this third phase, a specialized assassination unit called Teseo was created. The Teseo unit, composed of agents from Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, was trained in

Buenos Aires in late 1976 and dispatched to Europe. Intelligence leaks eventually forced all of Teseo's operations to be aborted. However, not before significant operations were carried out. On September 21, 1976, exiled Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier was assassinated in a car bombing in Washington D.C., one of the most brazen acts of state-sponsored cross-border political killing of the Cold War era, carried out on the soil of a superpower ally. In Rome, former Chilean Vice President Bernardo Leighton survived a Condor-linked assassination attempt on a public street in 1975.

Human Rights Impact

The scale of suffering inflicted by Operation Condor was immense. Conservative estimates place the toll at up to 50,000 killed, 30,000 disappeared, and 400,000 arrested and imprisoned across the Southern Cone. Some human rights organizations have put the figure of deaths as high as 90,000.

The principal method of enforced disappearance involved secret arrest, torture, interrogation, and clandestine disposal of bodies. A new word, "disappearance", was effectively added to thousands of Latin American political prisoners secretly kidnapped, tortured, and killed by the region's security services.

These archives were instrumental in eventual prosecutions. In May 2016, a four-judge court in Buenos Aires concluded a landmark trial lasting over three years, convicting 15 defendants of illegal kidnappings and torture carried out against over 100 victims of Operation Condor. The verdict determined that Operation Condor amounted to a transnational joint criminal enterprise that used states' resources to amplify member countries' repressive policies at a regional scale, the first time a domestic court had formally characterized such a cross-border arrangement as a criminal conspiracy. Fifty criminal cases across Argentina, Brazil, Chile, France, Italy, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and the United States have since specifically investigated Condor's atrocities, with first-instance sentences delivered in thirty-six of those cases.

Legacy and Relevance

Operation Condor's relevance to this committee extends beyond its historical record. It established and field-tested the operational blueprint for transnational repression: inter-state intelligence sharing, coordinated renditions, secret detention facilities, and targeted assassinations across borders, all conducted with the deliberate design of evading legal accountability. The institutional innovations of Condor prefigure

many of the transnational repression tactics observed in the contemporary era, discussed in later sections of this guide.

Case Study 2: Extraordinary Rendition Programs after 9/11

The post-September 11 extraordinary rendition program represents the most extensively documented instance of state-sanctioned transnational abduction in recent history, and one of the most consequential human rights scandals of the 21st century. Unlike clandestine Cold War operations that were denied for decades, the program was ultimately acknowledged, partially investigated, and the subject of landmark judicial rulings, making it a central reference point for any discussion of state-sponsored abductions and their accountability gaps.

Definition and Distinction

What made post-9/11 renditions "extraordinary" was the complete absence of judicial proceedings or due process: after the abduction, suspects simply disappeared into a system of secret prisons for long-term detention and interrogation, sometimes accompanied by torture. This distinguished them from prior U.S. practice in the 1980s and 1990s, which involved capturing terrorist suspects abroad and bringing them to trial. The program was deliberately designed to place detainee interrogations beyond the reach of law; suspects were seized and secretly transported across national borders to be interrogated either by foreign governments that used torture, or by the CIA itself in clandestine "black sites."

Scale and Global Complicity

The program's reach was staggering. At least 136 individuals were reportedly extraordinarily rendered or secretly detained by the CIA, and at least 54 governments reportedly participated in the CIA's secret detention and extraordinary rendition program. The involvement of these governments was wide-ranging, and included hosting CIA prisons on their territories; detaining, interrogating, torturing, and abusing individuals; assisting in the capture and transport of detainees; permitting the use of domestic airspace and airports for secret flights; providing intelligence leading to secret detention; and interrogating individuals secretly held in the custody of other governments.

Known black sites, secret prisons run by the CIA on foreign soil, existed in Afghanistan, Lithuania, Morocco, Poland, Romania, and Thailand. Research revealed that the CIA operated some 30 aircraft disguised through shell companies, with 32

such aircraft making at least 1,245 stopovers in European countries between October 2001 and the end of 2005 alone.

Treatment of Detainees

Interrogation methods used by the CIA included waterboarding, mock execution, prolonged sleep deprivation, and stress positions, some of which constitute torture under international law in and of themselves, while others would amount to torture when combined or applied for prolonged periods. While secretly detained in Poland, interrogators subjected Abd al Rahim al Nashiri to a mock execution with a power drill as he stood naked and hooded, held a semi-automatic handgun close to his head as he sat shackled, placed him in standing stress positions, and threatened to bring in his mother and sexually abuse her in front of him. Abu Zubaydah was waterboarded at least 83 times by the CIA.

Cases of Erroneous Rendition

Particularly grave from a human rights standpoint were documented cases where the program targeted entirely innocent individuals. Maher Arar, an innocent Canadian, was rendered to Syria for interrogation, where he was beaten with shredded cables and held in a space described as a "grave" measuring three feet by six feet for ten months. Khaled El-Masri, an innocent German national, was seized in Macedonia after being mistaken for an Al Qaeda suspect with a similar name, then stripped, beaten, sodomized, drugged, and flown to a secret CIA-run prison in Afghanistan, where he was held for five months. CIA officers ultimately concluded he was not a terrorist shortly after first questioning him, yet his release was still delayed as different CIA components disagreed about what to do. The CIA's own Office of Inspector General investigated a number of "erroneous renditions" in which the CIA had abducted and detained the wrong people entirely, with one officer acknowledging there was in many cases "only some vague association" with terrorism.

The downstream consequences of torture-derived intelligence were also severe. After being rendered to Egypt in 2002, Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi fabricated information, under threat of torture, relating to Iraq's provision of chemical and biological weapons training to Al Qaeda. In 2003, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell relied on this fabricated information in his speech to the United Nations making the case for war against Iraq.

The Senate Intelligence Committee Report

Following a five-year investigation, the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee released a 525-page portion of its findings in December 2014, concluding that the CIA had routinely conducted brutal and ineffective interrogations at its black sites and had repeatedly misled federal officials and the public about their existence and activities. The full report ran to over 6,700 pages and remains classified. The report demonstrated that after 9/11, the CIA engaged in a sophisticated program of calculated, aggressive, and egregious state-sanctioned torture, and lied about how the program operated and the utility of the information obtained, with high-level government officials authorizing, justifying, and covering up these actions.

Despite the committee's oversight role, no committee members other than the then-chairman and vice-chairman were briefed about the program until September 2006, hours before President Bush disclosed it publicly. In March 2014, Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Dianne Feinstein further reported that the CIA had spied on committee staff computers while they were conducting their oversight investigation.

Judicial Accountability and European Responses

In 2014, the European Court of Human Rights became the first judicial body in the world to formally confirm the existence of CIA black sites, finding that Poland had allowed the CIA to detain and torture two suspects on its domestic soil. The Court later ordered Romania and Lithuania to each pay €100,000 in damages for violating detainees' rights through their participation in CIA black site operations. An Italian court convicted in absentia 22 CIA agents and one Air Force pilot for their roles in the extraordinary rendition of Abu Omar. The European Parliament's 2007 report concluded that secret detention centers used in the program violated the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Convention Against Torture, treaties that all EU member states are bound to follow.

Impunity and Absence of Accountability

Despite the scale of documented violations, accountability has remained deeply inadequate. The United Nations Convention Against Torture, which the U.S. Senate ratified, and a 1998 federal statute both explicitly prohibit extraordinary rendition. Yet not one victim has received an apology, let alone a day in court in U.S. jurisdiction. A Justice Department investigation launched in 2009 examined 101 cases of CIA abuse, including two detainee deaths in CIA custody, yet was closed in 2012 without bringing any criminal charges, limited in scope to abuses that went beyond what the

Justice Department itself had authorized, even though some of those authorized techniques were later acknowledged to constitute torture. To date, the United States and the vast majority of the other governments involved, more than 50 in all, have refused to acknowledge their participation, compensate the victims, or hold accountable those most responsible for the program and its abuses.

Relevance to the Committee's Agenda

The post-9/11 rendition program is critical to this committee's deliberations for several reasons. First, it demonstrates how national security framings can be mobilized to justify the systematic violation of the prohibition against torture and the guarantee of due process, normalizing practices that in earlier decades were condemned precisely when conducted by adversarial states. Second, it illustrates the central accountability problem of state secrecy: the program operated for years behind classification barriers that suppressed both internal dissent and external scrutiny. Third, it exemplifies how complicity can be globalized, spreading responsibility across dozens of states in ways that make clear attribution and legal redress exceptionally difficult. The program's legacy continues to shape international human rights law debates around rendition, non-refoulement, and the obligations of third states.

Case Study 3: The Spyware Industry and Its Human Cost

The commercial spyware industry has become a central enabler of transnational repression, effectively privatizing surveillance capacities that were once the exclusive preserve of state intelligence services. In summer 2018, the smartphone of Omar Abdulaziz, a Saudi political activist living in Canada and a close associate of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, was infected with Pegasus, a powerful spyware tool produced by the Israeli NSO Group, giving the attackers access to his personal files, emails, and messages. A few months after the hacking, Khashoggi was murdered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. An investigation by the Citizen Lab established that the spyware on Abdulaziz's device had been operated from Saudi Arabia. NSO Group's spyware may have been sold to more than 45 countries around the world, and the same tool used to monitor Abdulaziz had also been used to infiltrate the devices of other Saudi human rights defenders based abroad, as well as foreign critics such as a New York Times Middle East correspondent.

This case illustrates a critical pattern: digital surveillance frequently functions as the reconnaissance phase preceding physical violence, rather than as an alternative to it. By exploiting technical vulnerabilities of devices such as mobile phones,

governments harass, surveil, and threaten targets living abroad, compromising the physical safety of targets as well as everyone with whom they communicate.

Importantly, the proliferation of this technology is not confined to authoritarian states. Israel, a democracy, permits private firms to export spyware under a state-regulated system, with Pegasus marketed as a tool licensed to government agencies for counterterrorism and serious crime investigations, yet in 2023, Apple warned at least 20 Indian opposition politicians and journalists that their iPhones may have been targeted by state-sponsored attackers. In one notable case, senior executives at French surveillance companies Amesys and Nexa Technologies were indicted for alleged complicity in crimes of torture and enforced disappearance, for allegedly providing surveillance technology to governments in Libya and Egypt. This dimension of complicity, Western and democratic firms supplying the tools later used for repression, represents a significant accountability gap that existing legal frameworks have struggled to close.

Case Study 4: The Assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the 2026 Iran War

The single most consequential recent case of foreign political assassination is the killing of Iran's head of state by a close U.S. ally acting with direct American intelligence and military support. On 28 February 2026, Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, was assassinated in Tehran as part of a series of Israeli airstrikes aimed at high-ranking Iranian officials. His death occurred as part of a wider joint operation by the United States and Israel, using intelligence from the CIA to determine the whereabouts of several leaders. About a dozen members of Khamenei's family and close entourage, along with 40 other senior Iranian leaders, died in the attacks, with at least 13 top defence officials confirmed killed, including the Commander of the IRGC, the Defence Minister, and the Head of the National Defence Council.

On 17 March 2026, Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and the most powerful man in Iran in the lead-up to the war, was also assassinated in a separate Israeli airstrike, becoming the most senior official killed after Khamenei. Larijani had presided over the crackdown on the 2025–2026 Iranian protests and the subsequent massacres of protestors by the IRGC. His son and the head of his office were also killed in the strike, alongside the commander of Iran's internal Basij militia in a separate attack the same night.

Strategic Context and Stated Justification

The strikes did not occur in a vacuum. In January 2026, the Iranian government had massacred thousands of civilians in a crackdown on the country's largest protests since the 1979 revolution. President Trump responded by initiating the largest US military buildup in the region since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Netanyahu stated the goal of the strikes was to "remove the existential threat posed by the terrorist regime in Iran," while Trump stated the attack aimed "to prevent this very wicked, radical dictatorship from threatening America" and to eliminate "imminent threats." Notably, the attacks were launched amidst active Iran-US negotiations toward a nuclear peace agreement.

Legal Controversy

The strikes have triggered an extraordinarily intense legal debate, larger in scale than almost any prior case examined in this guide. The joint operation marked the first time either the United States or Israel has directly killed a sitting head of state. Public statements emphasized Khamenei's record and the sophistication of US-Israeli intelligence cooperation, but did not articulate a credible legal basis for the strike.

Ben Saul, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counter-terrorism, stated that Iran had not enriched uranium to the point of building a nuclear device, that experts agreed Iran did not possess a nuclear weapon, and that the case was nowhere close to satisfying the threshold of self-defense against an imminent attack. Don Rothwell, professor of international law at the Australian National University, stated that the UN Security Council had not passed a resolution authorizing an attack on Iran and that there was no legal basis for the use of force. Over 100 international law experts subsequently issued a joint warning that the US strikes on Iran violated the UN Charter and may constitute war crimes.

The operation has also reopened a long-dormant U.S. domestic legal question. In 1976, President Gerald Ford issued an executive order banning the U.S. government from engaging in political assassinations, following Church Committee revelations of CIA plots against figures such as Patrice Lumumba; the ban has been reaffirmed by every president since. The targeted killing of Khamenei departs from the established legal framework distinguishing lawful wartime targeting from assassination: political leaders can be considered lawful military targets only if their political role is incidental to their real function as military commanders, a test that figures like Qaddafi and Soleimani arguably satisfied, but which critics argue Khamenei's killing does not meet.

A parallel and arguably even graver allegation has emerged regarding civilian harm. It has been reported that a US weapon hit an Iranian school, killing over 100 children. Human Rights Watch found that information about the destruction of Shajareh Tayyebbeh Primary School suggested the attack was the result of "highly accurate, guided munitions", undermining claims of inadvertent error, while neither Israel nor the United States has taken accountability for the strike.

Erosion of the International Norm Against Assassination

Legal scholars have specifically connected this case to the Maduro capture discussed below, identifying both as part of a single accelerating trend. As with the US's January 2026 operation against Nicolás Maduro, what stands out about the Khamenei killing is not only the gravity of the act but the manner of its justification: emphasizing the target's record and the sophistication of intelligence cooperation, without articulating a credible legal basis. When assassination is openly acknowledged and only minimally justified in legal terms, as was also the case with the killings of Soleimani, al-Zawahiri, Haniyeh, and Nasrallah, the threshold shifts from whether the act can be legally justified to whether the target is sufficiently "bad" to warrant elimination. Should other states emulate this model and should international responses remain muted, the international norm against assassination will continue to hollow out.

International Reactions

The killing drew sharply divided reactions that closely track existing geopolitical alignments. Russian President Vladimir Putin offered condolences, condemning "the assassination of Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran Seyyed Ali Khamenei and members of his family, committed in cynical violation of all norms of human morality and international law." Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated it was "unacceptable for the US and Israel to launch attacks against Iran in the midst of their ongoing negotiations, still less to blatantly assassinate a leader of a sovereign country and instigate regime change," describing the actions as violations of "international law and fundamental norms of international relations." Turkey's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan condemned "the political assassinations perpetrated by Israel, including those of Iranian statesmen and politicians," stating that they "constitute illegal acts contrary to the laws of war." Bangladesh's foreign ministry similarly condemned the assassination as a "violation of international law and norms." By contrast, several Western and Gulf-aligned states offered measured or implicitly supportive responses, with some characterizing the killing as a strategic blow against Iran's alliance network rather than condemning its legality.

Case Study 5: The U.S. Military Capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro (January 2026)

A second, closely related case from the same period involves a sitting head of state captured rather than killed. On 3 January 2026, the United States captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, in a military operation in Caracas. President Trump announced that the US would "run the country until we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition" of power.

The operation, codenamed "Absolute Resolve," had been rehearsed for months. US helicopters touched down at Maduro's compound, and the Venezuelan president and his wife were taken into US custody within hours, then placed aboard the USS Iwo Jima before being transported to New York. The CIA had sent a team into Venezuela that tracked Maduro's movements for months using a source close to the Venezuelan president, while Delta Force and other participants built a physical mockup of the suspected safe house to rehearse the extraction. Venezuelan authorities confirmed that a large part of Maduro's security detail was killed in the raid, while the Cuban government stated that 32 Cuban personnel "lost their lives in combat" while assisting Venezuela's military.

Maduro and Flores were charged in a superseding indictment in the Southern District of New York on narco-terrorism, conspiracy, drug trafficking, and money laundering charges, and are currently detained at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, having pleaded not guilty. At his arraignment, Maduro stated through an interpreter, "I am innocent. I am not guilty of anything mentioned here," and told the court he remained "still president of my country." His attorney, Barry Pollack, indicated they would raise "questions about the legality of his military abduction" and seek to assert head-of-state immunity.

The operation has generated sharp divisions over its legality and characterization under international law. Venezuela's Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court ordered Vice President Delcy Rodríguez to assume "the office of President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela" following what it explicitly termed Maduro's "kidnapping." Maduro's son, Nicolás Maduro Guerra, publicly warned: "If we normalize the kidnapping of a head of state, no country is safe. Today it's Venezuela. Tomorrow it could be any nation that refuses to submit. This is not a regional problem. It is a direct threat to global political stability."

International reactions diverged sharply along familiar geopolitical lines. Demonstrations both celebrating and condemning the capture took place across

Latin America and within Venezuela itself, Venezuelan expatriates and refugees celebrated in Cúcuta, Buenos Aires, Lima, Quito, and Santiago, while Maduro's supporters protested in Caracas, with the ruling PSUV party calling for citizens to demand his release. Russia's UN representative condemned the operation in terms directly invoking the principle of non-intervention central to this committee's agenda. Russia's UN representative stated: "We cannot allow the United States to proclaim itself as some kind of a supreme judge, which alone bears the right to invade any country, to label culprits, to hand down and to enforce punishments irrespective of notions of international law, sovereignty and nonintervention." Turkish President Erdoğan stated that Venezuela "must not be dragged into instability" and stressed that Turkey did not condone "any action violating political legitimacy or international law."

Notably, accountability efforts against the deposed leader had also proceeded through ordinary international legal channels in parallel to the forcible capture. An international arrest warrant for Maduro had already been issued by Argentina in 2024 in connection with a case alleging crimes against humanity, including torture, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearance carried out by Venezuela's Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN), and following his capture, Argentina formally requested his extradition.

Key Challenges

Attribution and Proof of State Involvement

Attribution is the process of establishing with sufficient legal certainty that a state was responsible for a given act of enforced disappearance, political assassination, or abduction. It is the foundational challenge from which virtually every other accountability problem in this agenda flows. Without attribution, there can be no prosecution, no diplomatic sanction, no reparation, and no deterrence. The architecture of international human rights law is built on the premise that responsibility can be traced to a state actor; yet the very design of foreign-intervention operations is intended to frustrate precisely this process.

States conducting operations of political assassination, enforced disappearance, and cross-border abduction employ systematic strategies to obscure their authorship. These strategies have grown more sophisticated across the historical periods, evolving from the relatively direct chain of command visible in Operation Condor

documentation to the multi-layered deniability architectures of contemporary operations.

The Evidentiary Problem: What Counts as Proof?

International law has not established a uniform evidentiary standard for attributing extraterritorial human rights violations to states, and the standards that do exist vary significantly across different legal bodies and proceedings. This inconsistency is itself a structural accountability gap.

The Litvinenko case illustrates both the possibilities and the limits of attribution evidence. The British public inquiry concluded that Litvinenko's assassination was "probably" approved by President Putin himself, based on strong circumstantial evidence including the use of polonium-210, a rare radioactive substance whose acquisition would have been "extremely difficult" without government assistance, and the demonstrated absence of personal motive on the part of the identified Russian intelligence operatives. The European Court of Human Rights subsequently found Russia in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, ordering damages. Yet Russia refused to accept the ruling, declined to pay, and faced no enforcement mechanism that could compel compliance. The case thus demonstrates that even where evidence is forensically unambiguous, the use of exotic military-grade substances that could only have been obtained through state channels, the gap between legal attribution and meaningful accountability remains vast.

The Khashoggi case presents a parallel trajectory at higher political stakes. A CIA assessment directly attributed the operation to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman; a subsequent declassified intelligence report made this conclusion public. Yet the United States declined to sanction the Crown Prince personally, while Saudi Arabia denied involvement for weeks before offering shifting alternative explanations. The gap between the intelligence community's attribution and the legal or diplomatic accountability that followed it reveals a structural problem: attribution based on intelligence assessments is not the same as attribution in a legal proceeding, and the political will to translate the former into the latter is frequently absent, particularly when the perpetrating state is a strategic or economic partner of those capable of imposing consequences.

In the post-9/11 rendition program, attribution was available; the Senate Intelligence Committee documented the CIA's operations in exhaustive detail, yet no criminal

charges were brought. The case illustrates that attribution failure is not always an evidentiary problem. Sometimes it is a political one: the evidence exists, is acknowledged, and is nonetheless allowed to remain legally inert.

Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Concerns

Jurisdiction is the legal authority of a state or international body to prescribe, adjudicate, and enforce law with respect to a given act or actor. It is the terrain on which the accountability of foreign intervention in domestic political processes is most consistently contested and most frequently defeated. The central tension this challenge presents is structural: the same principle of state sovereignty that international human rights law seeks to deploy in protection of individuals from foreign intervention is simultaneously invoked by perpetrating states to shield themselves from accountability. This double function of sovereignty, as both the right being violated and the defence against accountability, constitutes one of the deepest contradictions embedded in the international legal framework governing this agenda.

Head of State and Official Immunity

Among the most consequential jurisdictional obstacles this agenda confronts is the doctrine of immunity, the principle that certain senior state officials are shielded from the criminal jurisdiction of foreign courts. The International Court of Justice confirmed in its landmark 2002 Arrest Warrant Case that incumbent heads of state, heads of government, and foreign ministers enjoy full personal immunity from criminal jurisdiction in foreign courts throughout the duration of their office, and critically, the ICJ concluded that it was unable to identify any exception to this immunity under customary international law even where the person concerned is suspected of having committed war crimes or crimes against humanity.

This ruling has profound consequences for accountability in cases of foreign-directed political assassination and enforced disappearance. It means that the senior officials who authorize operations of transnational repression, the heads of state, intelligence ministers, and national security council members who sign off on disappearances, cross-border abductions, and assassinations, are precisely the individuals most comprehensively insulated from foreign judicial accountability as long as they remain in office. Only four circumstances can overcome this immunity: if the official's own state initiates proceedings against them; if the state waives immunity; if the official leaves office and is subsequently prosecuted in another state for acts

committed in a private capacity; or if an international criminal court with accepted jurisdiction takes up the case. In practice, none of these circumstances reliably materializes.

The Pinochet case offered a rare and partial exception. The 1998 indictment of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in Spain, and his subsequent arrest in the United Kingdom, established the landmark principle that former heads of state cannot claim immunity for acts of torture that constitute international crimes, setting aside functional immunities on the grounds that genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity are not genuine acts of state, and that the *jus cogens* prohibition on torture cannot be eroded by immunity doctrines. However, the Pinochet exception applies only to former officials, not sitting heads of state, and requires domestic legal frameworks that explicitly criminalize the relevant international crimes and assert universal jurisdiction, a step most states have been reluctant to take.

The Non-Ratification Problem and Treaty Gaps

The jurisdictional challenge is compounded by the fragmented state of treaty ratification across the legal instruments most directly relevant to this agenda. The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which entered into force in 2010, has been ratified by a significant number of states but not by several of the major perpetrators or enablers of enforced disappearance documented in this guide. The Rome Statute, which provides ICC jurisdiction over crimes against humanity including enforced disappearance, has not been ratified by the United States, Russia, China, or India. The practical consequence is that the individuals most likely to bear command responsibility for the operations this committee is examining operate in a zone largely outside the reach of the international criminal justice framework.

The ICPPED does provide for a form of compulsory jurisdiction: states parties are obliged to establish competence over the offence of enforced disappearance when the alleged offender is present in their territory, unless they extradite or surrender the individual to another state or to an international criminal tribunal. This *aut dedere aut judicare*, extradite or prosecute, obligation creates at least a theoretical basis for accountability when perpetrators travel abroad. But its practical operation depends on the willingness of states to exercise jurisdiction against foreign intelligence officials present on their soil, a step that, in the absence of exceptional political will, states have consistently declined to take in order to preserve diplomatic relationships.

Questions A Resolution Must Answer (QARMA)

1. How should the Council distinguish between legitimate foreign policy engagement (diplomatic pressure, sanctions, aid conditionality) and unlawful intervention that violates the principle of non-interference under Article 2(4) and 2(7) of the UN Charter?
2. Where is the line between covert influence operations (disinformation, funding of opposition groups) and direct operational involvement in disappearances, assassinations, or abductions?
3. How does state responsibility attach when intervention is carried out through proxies, private military contractors, or intelligence-linked non-state actors rather than uniformed state agents?
4. How can the Council strengthen implementation of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) in states that have not ratified it, particularly where foreign actors are implicated?
5. What evidentiary standards should apply when attributing a disappearance to a foreign intelligence service versus a domestic security apparatus acting under foreign direction?
6. How should the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) adapt its urgent action procedures when cross-border rendition or extraordinary rendition networks are suspected?
7. What obligations exist for third states whose territory or airspace is used to facilitate a disappearance (e.g., rendition flights)?
8. How should host states balance the right to asylum for political exiles with the security risks posed by transnational repression targeting them?
9. What mechanisms of accountability exist when assassinations occur on the soil of a third country (jurisdictional questions, extradition, universal jurisdiction)?
10. How should the Council treat the use of exotic or deniable methods (poisoning, cyber-enabled targeting) that complicate attribution?
11. How does the Council define and respond to "transnational repression" as a distinct human rights violation, encompassing abduction of dissidents, diaspora surveillance, and coercion of family members left behind?

12. What role should INTERPOL reform play in preventing the abuse of Red Notices as a tool for politically motivated abduction or detention of exiles?
13. How can host states strengthen protections for refugees and asylum seekers against abduction attempts by their country of origin?
14. What combination of international mechanisms (ICC referral, universal jurisdiction, targeted sanctions, UN commissions of inquiry) offers realistic accountability given that intervening states often hold Security Council veto power or significant geopolitical leverage?
15. How should reparations and truth-recovery processes for victims' families be structured when perpetrators are foreign state actors rather than the territorial state?
16. What is the evidentiary and due-process standard for the Council to formally attribute a violation to a foreign state absent a judicial finding?
17. Should the Council establish a standing early-warning mechanism for transnational repression, given the current fragmentation across WGEID, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, and the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders?
18. How can financial and diplomatic tools (targeted sanctions like Magnitsky-style regimes) be integrated into a UNHRC response given the Council's own lack of enforcement power?
19. What role should national human rights institutions and civil society play in documenting and reporting cross-border cases that states have an incentive to obscure?

Further Reading and Research Resources

International Legal Instruments and Official UN Documents

- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/61/177 (2006). Full text available at: [ohchr.org](https://www.ohchr.org)
- Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, UNGA Resolution 47/133 (1992)

- Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation Among States, UNGA Resolution 2625 (XXV) (1970)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966)
- Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) (1984)
- Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998)
- UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances: Annual Reports and Thematic Studies, available at ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-disappearances
- Committee on Enforced Disappearances: Session Reports and Urgent Actions, available at ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/ced
- UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions: Annual Reports, available at ohchr.org
- UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights While Countering Terrorism: Annual Reports, available at ohchr.org
- OHCHR, Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons (2019)
- OHCHR, Fact Sheet No. 6 (Rev. 4): Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

Key Reports and Investigations

- United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program (Executive Summary, 2014), the "Senate Torture Report"
- Freedom House, Transnational Repression: Annual Global Report (2025 and 2026 editions), available at freedomhouse.org/report/transnational-repression
- Citizen Lab, University of Toronto: Reports on Pegasus spyware, commercial surveillance, and targeted digital attacks against civil society, available at citizenlab.ca
- Human Rights Watch: Reports on Syria, Ukraine, Mali, Sudan, Venezuela, and commercial spyware, available at hrw.org

- Amnesty International: Reports on enforced disappearances, transnational repression, and digital surveillance, available at [amnesty.org](https://www.amnesty.org)
- UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria: Reports to the Human Rights Council, available at [ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria)
- UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine: Reports on enforced disappearances and filtration operations, available at [ohchr.org](https://www.ohchr.org)
- UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan: Reports on RSF and proxy force violations, available at [ohchr.org](https://www.ohchr.org)
- International Criminal Court: Case information on Venezuela, Philippines, and Ukraine, available at [icc-cpi.int](https://www.icc-cpi.int)
- Koblenz Trial Verdict: Oberlandesgericht Koblenz, Judgment in the case of Anwar R. (2022), affirmed by the Federal Court of Justice (2024)

Academic and Scholarly Works

- Enforced Disappearances in International Law, Nikolas Kyriakou, University of Melbourne (doctoral thesis, available at law.unimelb.edu.au)
- Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War, Lindsey O'Rourke (Cornell University Press, 2018)
- The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents, John Dinges (The New Press, 2004)
- Extraordinary Rendition in U.S. Counterterrorism Policy, Stephen Grey (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)
- Surveillance Valley: The Secret Military History of the Internet, Yasha Levine (PublicAffairs, 2018)
- This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality, Peter Pomerantsev (PublicAffairs, 2019)
- Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism, Anne Applebaum (Doubleday, 2020)
- The Autocratic Alliance: How Democracies Can Defend Against the New Axis of Authoritarians, Robert Kagan (forthcoming essays and policy papers, Brookings Institution)

- "The Golden Age of Transnational Repression", Freedom House Policy Brief (2025)

Investigative Journalism and Media Resources

- The Pegasus Project: Consortium reporting by Forbidden Stories and 17 media partners (2021), available at forbiddenstories.org
- The Guardian: Ongoing coverage of transnational repression, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and commercial spyware
- Washington Post: Coverage of the Khashoggi assassination, CIA accountability, and extraordinary rendition
- Bellingcat: Open-source investigations into state-sponsored assassinations, including Salisbury and GRU operations, available at bellingcat.com
- The Intercept: Investigative coverage of NSA surveillance, post-9/11 rendition programs, and intelligence accountability
- BuzzFeed News Investigations: "From Russia with Blood", investigation into Russian-linked deaths in the United Kingdom
- Reuters Investigates: Coverage of Operation Condor legacy trials and Latin American transitional justice
- Al Jazeera Investigative Unit: Coverage of transnational repression targeting diaspora communities

Civil Society and Policy Organizations

- Freedom House, freedomhouse.org (annual Transnational Repression reports, country profiles, and policy recommendations)
- Citizen Lab, Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto, citizenlab.ca (digital surveillance, spyware research)
- TRIAL International, trialinternational.org (universal jurisdiction cases, enforced disappearances)
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), fidh.org
- Human Rights Watch, hrw.org
- Amnesty International, amnesty.org

- Syrian Archive / Mnemonic, syrianarchive.org (digital preservation of evidence of Syrian atrocities)
- Fortify Rights, fortifyrights.org (Southeast Asia transnational repression)
- Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), cpj.org (journalist killings and abductions)
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF), rsf.org

Regional and Specialized Resources

- Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR): Reports on enforced disappearances and Operation Condor legacy, available at oas.org/en/iachr
- Inter-American Court of Human Rights: Landmark jurisprudence on enforced disappearances and amnesty laws, available at corteidh.or.cr
- European Court of Human Rights: Judgments in Litvinenko v. Russia, El-Masri v. Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and CIA black site cases against Poland, Romania, and Lithuania, available at echr.coe.int
- African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights: Ongoing proceedings on Mali/Wagner Group violations, available at african-court.org
- The Archives of Terror (Paraguay): Digitized documents available through the Centro de Documentación y Archivo para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, Asunción
- The Caesar Files: Documentation of Syrian government detention atrocities, analyzed by the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA), available at cijaonline.org