



## Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

# Transnational Repression and the U.S. Response

**Rep. Chris Smith, Co-Chairman**

**February 15, 2024**

Late last summer I met Emin Bayramli – a young man advocating for his father, a prominent Azerbaijani economist named Gubad Ibadoglu. Ibadoglu had lived abroad for many years, including in the United States. Last summer he returned to Azerbaijan to visit his mother – and was arrested and imprisoned on patently ridiculous charges of possessing a bag of counterfeit currency.

The real reason? He was researching corruption on the part of the dictator of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and firms linked to President Erdogan of Turkey – and was a leading authority on economic responses to regime corruption.

I made a strong public statement on behalf of Mr. Ibadoglu, and am his Congressional advocate within this Commission's Defending Freedoms Project. Emin has been a nonstop advocate for his father – working tirelessly to keep his father's imprisonment in the news, to inform and rally support. Really, Mr. Ibadoglu must be very proud to have such a son.

Well, sometime late on Aug. 18 or in the early morning hours of Aug. 19, someone entered the New Jersey house in which Emin lived and ransacked his room. An investigation is ongoing, but it is clear from other actions of digital harassment and surveillance that Azerbaijani agents or those working on their behalf were responsible.

This breaking and entering, ransacking, and digital surveillance marks the first known attempt by the Azerbaijani regime to target Azerbaijanis inside the United States. I'd like to add to the hearing record an article by Michael Rubin, who met personally with Emin: "Joe Biden Must Act: Don't Let Azerbaijan's Regime Get Away with Murder."

I'd like to be able to say that these stories of transnational repression are rare – that it is unusual or uncommon for foreign governments to harm, intimidate, silence, abduct, or spy on members of diaspora and exile communities.

But it's **not rare**. As a legislator who works on human rights issues, and meets regularly with people from China, Turkey, Russia, Egypt, Belarus, Iran Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Cuba, and other countries, I meet **regularly** with people who are targeted and persecuted by foreign governments that go after them inside the United States.

I believe our government's response to this transnational repression has been very weak. That is why I have authored the Transnational Repression Policy

Act, H.R. 3654. It has seven cosponsors, and I'd like to thank my friend Rep. McGovern for being the lead Democratic cosponsor of that bill.

The bill would require the President to impose property- and visa-blocking sanctions on foreign individuals and entities that directly engage in transnational repression, and would require the State Department to develop a strategy to fight transnational repression, direct the intelligence community to identify the perpetrators of transnational repression, and the Justice Department to train law enforcement and other employees in detecting and fighting it.

I encourage Members and victims of transnational repression to support my bill.