

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 17, 2024

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to express our deep concern about credible allegations of the Indian government's involvement in a foiled plot to assassinate an American citizen on U.S. soil, as well as reports of ongoing harassment and threats against Sikh Americans. We urge a strong diplomatic response to ensure that all of those who were involved are held accountable, and request a briefing on the status of the Administration's engagement with the Indian government on this matter.

The United States and India have a crucial relationship across multiple domains – from security cooperation, to trade and investment, to strong cultural and people-to-people ties. As the two largest democracies in the world, this partnership must not only be based on mutual strategic interests, but also grounded in shared commitment to democratic principles and the rule of law, including respect for sovereignty and the individual rights and freedoms that are fundamental to any democracy.

On November 29, 2023, the Department of Justice (DOJ) announced an unsealed indictment of Indian national Nikhil Gupta for participation in a foiled plot to assassinate a U.S. citizen in New York.¹ The target, who media reported to be Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, is a vocal critic of the Indian government and advocate for the secession of Punjab, a state in India with a sizable Sikh population.

As detailed in the announcement, an unnamed Indian government official, working with Gupta, directed the plot, which was foiled by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The announcement further stated that Gupta revealed there were a total of four targets, including Hardeep Singh Nijjar – a Canadian citizen and Sikh separatist leader who was murdered in Canada in June 2023 by masked gunmen.

An in-depth investigative article in *The Washington Post* in April provided greater context on the case, noting that the individual who directed the plot attempted by Gupta was an officer in India's intelligence agency.² The article cites evidence that higher-ranking intelligence officials are also implicated, with potential links to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inner circle. In late November 2023, the Indian government announced a probe panel to look into the matter.³

¹ "Justice Department Announces Charges in Connection with Foiled Plot to Assassinate U.S. Citizen in New York City," U.S. Department of Justice (November 29, 2023), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-charges-connection-foiled-plot-assassinate-us-citizen-new-york>.

² "An assassination plot on American soil reveals a darker side of Modi's India," *The Washington Post* (April 29, 2024), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/04/29/india-assassination-raw-sikhs-modi/>.

³ "India sets up panel to probe US' allegations of involvement in plot to kill Khalistani leader Pannun," *The Economic Times* (November 30, 2023), <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/india-to-set-up-probe-panel-to-investigate-security-concerns-raised-by-us/articleshow/105586273.cms>.

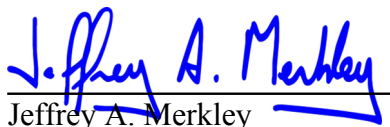
Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu told the House Foreign Affairs Committee on March 20 that the Biden Administration has raised the plot “at the highest levels with India” and, referencing the panel, affirmed, “we ask them to work quickly and transparently to make sure justice is done.” However, on March 21, *Bloomberg* reported that the panel found that “rogue operatives” had been involved, and that at least one person was no longer working for the intelligence agency, but was still employed and not facing criminal prosecution.⁴

While we fully support the DOJ’s efforts to bring Gupta to justice and the Department of State’s prior statements, the Administration must match words with actions to hold Indian officials involved in the plot accountable, and to send a clear message that there will be consequences for such behavior. It is imperative that we take an unequivocal stand against such a threat to the rights of a U.S. citizen and violation of U.S. sovereignty, which are examples of India’s increasingly irresponsible efforts to silence critics of its government among its diaspora around the world.

As such, we ask that the briefing include a discussion of how the Department of State intends to pursue follow-up action – to press the Indian government to hold those involved criminally accountable, and to ensure the government does not repeat such acts of transnational repression. India must maintain its commitment to respecting human rights at home and abroad as it aspires to global leadership. Now that India’s 2024 general election has concluded, with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and Prime Minister Modi returning to power, the United States has an opportunity to include this issue as a core agenda item with the Indian government.

The United States must be firm and resolute in opposing transnational repression, no matter the perpetrator.

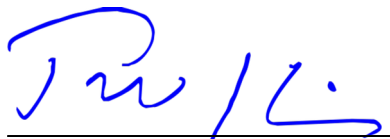
Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

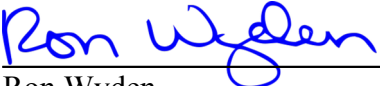


Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

⁴ “India Probe Finds Rogue Officials Involved in US Murder Plot,” *Bloomberg* (March 20, 2024), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-03-20/india-s-probe-finds-rogue-officials-involved-in-us-murder-plot>.



Ron Wyden

United States Senator