



GEORGETOWN LAW

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**Escalating Authoritarianism in the United States: Disregarding
International Law, Dismantling of Civil Society, and Undermining
Fundamental Rights
*April 2025 – April 2026****

**Joint Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council Reviewing the United States
under the Universal Periodic Review**

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**This stakeholder report is an update to “[Entrenching Authoritarianism: Expanding the Terrorism Framework and the Infrastructure of Surveillance to Repress Expression and Stifle Dissent](#)”, a joint-report submitted on April 7, 2025, and is submitted by the following human rights and community organizations: Center for Constitutional Rights, Center on Privacy & Technology at Georgetown Law, Community Justice Project, International Justice Clinic at UC Irvine Law School, Muslim Advocates, Sierra Club - Georgia Chapter, University of Dayton Human Rights Center. The partners welcome the opportunity to contribute to the UN Human Rights Council’s review of the United States’ National Report under the Universal Periodic Review.*

Introduction

This submission updates the April 2025 joint stakeholder report, *Entrenching Authoritarianism: Expanding the Terrorism Framework and the Infrastructure of Surveillance to Repress Expression and Stifle Dissent*, and documents developments between April 2025 and April 2026 that reflect a marked acceleration in the erosion of human rights protections in the United States.¹ Over the past year, the U.S. government has not only failed to address concerns raised in the prior submission, but has deepened its departure from international human rights norms through a combination of intensified militarism, expanded use of national security authorities, and escalating repression of civil society and political dissent.

This period has also been marked by the United States' refusal to meaningfully cooperate with the Universal Periodic Review process itself; an alarming development that underscores and reinforces the concerns detailed in this submission. The government's disengagement from this core accountability mechanism reflects a broader pattern of retreat from international oversight and signals a diminished commitment to transparency, scrutiny, and compliance with its human rights obligations.

During this period, the United States has demonstrated increasing disregard for its international legal obligations, including through unilateral uses of military force, disengagement from multilateral institutions, and the creation of parallel governance structures that undermine rule-based international cooperation. At the same time, the government has continued to expand and weaponize counterterrorism frameworks in ways that aim to justify the suppression of political opposition, disproportionately targeting marginalized communities and movements advocating for racial, environmental, and international justice.

These trends have coincided with a broader contraction of civic space. Civil society organizations, particularly those engaged in advocacy related to Palestine, have faced heightened surveillance, stigmatization, and even legal sanction. Freedom of expression has come under sustained attack through both state action and coordinated private-sector repression, while new forms of technological surveillance and AI-enabled state power have further eroded transparency, accountability, and due process protections.

Taken together, the developments documented in this update point to a rapidly consolidating framework of authoritarian governance in the United States; one that operates through the convergence of militarized foreign policy, expansive national security powers, corporate-state alignment, and the systematic targeting of dissent. This submission highlights these

¹ *Entrenching Authoritarianism: Expanding the Terrorism Framework and the Infrastructure of Surveillance to Repress Expression and Stifle Dissent*. April 7, 2025, available at: <https://ccrjustice.org/sites/default/files/attach/2025/04/UPR%20Joint%20Submission%20Entrenching%20Authoritarianism%20April%202025.pdf> (also referred to as “Joint Submission 15 (JS15)” in Summary of stakeholders’ submissions on the United States of America, 1 September 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/WG.6/50/USA/3>)

interconnected trends and underscores the urgent need for international scrutiny and accountability in the context of the United States' Universal Periodic Review.

Key Updates April 2025 - April 2026

1. Dismantling of International Law

Since officially withdrawing from the Universal Periodic Review process last year, the United States has accelerated its retreat from the international legal order it once helped build, replacing multilateralism and legal constraint with unilateral military force, parallel governance structures, and open defiance of core principles of the UN Charter. This shift not only increases precarity for the most marginalized communities by eroding global norms, but also signals to other states that international law is optional, particularly for the most powerful and their allies.

Over the past 12 months, a series of U.S. actions have been widely criticized as eroding core pillars of the post–World War II international legal order. The creation of the “Board of Peace,”² a U.S.-led body established in 2025–2026, reflects a shift toward **parallel U.S.-dominated governance structures** that are designed to sideline multilateral decision-making. At the same time, **U.S. military actions in Venezuela**³, including reported bombardments⁴ and the abduction of its head of state, were condemned by UN experts as a “grave” violation of the UN Charter’s prohibition on the use of force and respect for sovereignty.⁵ Similarly, the **U.S. war on Iran** has been a flagrant violation of the ban on aggressive force and coercive intervention. Alongside these wanton displays of unchecked state violence, the U.S. has **withdrawn from or defunded key multilateral institutions**, including disengagement from the UN Human Rights Council and other agencies, and initiated a broader review and withdrawal from 66 international organizations and agreements deemed contrary to U.S. interests.⁶ Taken together - unilateral military interventions, creation of alternative governance bodies, and retreat from multilateral institutions - these actions signal **a move away from rule-based international cooperation toward a more unilateral, power-driven approach** that recalls an era of colonial conquest,

² Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *UN experts condemn ‘Board of Peace’, call for a reparative, rights-based approach to reconstruction in Gaza*. March 2, 2026, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/03/un-experts-condemn-board-peace-call-reparative-rights-based-approach>

³ Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Joint Statement on the Situation in Venezuela*, January 6, 2026, available at: <https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/joint-statement-situation-in-venezuela/>

⁴ Center for Constitutional Rights, *An Indictment of Empire: Center for Constitutional Rights Responds to U.S. Escalation in Venezuela*, January 3, 2026, available at: <https://ccrjustice.org/home/press-center/press-releases/indictment-empire-center-constitutional-rights-responds-us>

⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *UN experts condemn US aggression against Venezuela*, January 7, 2026, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/01/un-experts-condemn-us-aggression-against-venezuela>

⁶ The White House, *Withdrawing the United States from and Ending Funding to Certain United Nations Organizations and Reviewing United States Support to All International Organizations*, February 4, 2025, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-and-ending-funding-to-certain-united-nations-organizations-and-reviewing-united-states-support-to-all-international-organizations/>

domination, and human hierarchy that undermines international law itself.

Recommendations:

As a commitment to accountability, the principles of international law and the system of global cooperation, Member States must condemn the United States' retreat from the multilateral system and its flagrant disregard for human rights and demand that the U.S.:

- **Cease all uses of force inconsistent with the UN Charter**, including unlawful acts of aggression, military interventions, and acts of coercion against other states, including in Venezuela and Iran.
- **Release any foreign officials unlawfully detained** and ensure full compliance with international legal obligations.
- **Ensure prompt, independent, and impartial investigations** into alleged violations of international law, and guarantee accountability for those responsible.
- **Re-engage with the United Nations system**, including by restoring participation in the Human Rights Council and resuming financial contributions to UN bodies and agencies.
- **Reaffirm a commitment to multilateralism** and international law, including by participating fully in the Universal Periodic Review process, and complying in good faith with all international legal obligations.
- **Dismantle parallel governance structures** such as the “Board of Peace” that undermine the UN system.

2. Abuse of an Ever-Expanding “Terrorism” Framework

Over the past year, the United States has significantly expanded and politicized its use of “counterterrorism,” increasingly deploying the framework to target dissent, blur the boundaries between protest and violence, and justify the use of extraordinary powers in blatantly unlawful and unconstitutional contexts.⁷

Under counterterrorism authorities, the Trump administration has attempted to justify **maritime boat strikes** off the coast of Venezuela, resulting in the murder of more than 160 people in operations framed as responses to “narcoterrorism,” blurring the line between criminal activity and armed conflict.⁸ Policy instruments like **National Security Presidential Memorandum 7** further entrench the elasticity of the “terrorism” framework by broadening executive discretion to define and target so-called threats with limited transparency.⁹ This framework is being

⁷ Center for Constitutional Rights, *We Must Dismantle the “Counterterrorism” Framework*, March 12, 2026, available at: <https://ccrjustice.org/home/blog/2026/03/12/we-must-dismantle-counterterrorism-framework>

⁸ Center for Constitutional Rights, *Burnley v. United States*, January 27, 2026, available at: <https://ccrjustice.org/home/what-we-do/our-cases/burnley-v-united-states>

⁹ The White House, *Countering Domestic Terrorism and Organized Political Violence*, September 25, 2025, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/09/countering-domestic-terrorism-and-organized-political-violence/>

extended to queer and trans communities as well¹⁰, with accusations of “radical gender ideology” rendering trans rights organizations as “domestic terrorists.”¹¹ The “**Antifa Executive Order**” and the framing of popular protest as terrorism signal a growing shift toward applying national security frameworks to political expression, assembly and association.¹² In Minnesota, mass mobilizations against the weaponization of executive power by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) were met with **excessive, militarized state violence and the killing of two protestors** who the Trump administration then framed as “domestic terrorists” in an attempt to justify the use of unlawful force.¹³ The **PrairieLand ICE detention center case** also vividly illustrates this trend: following a July 4, 2025 protest in which a police officer was shot, federal prosecutors charged multiple participants with “material support to terrorists,” even as only one individual was convicted of the shooting.¹⁴ Critics argue that this widening and increasingly discretionary use of “terrorism” as a legal category risks undermining civil liberties, diluting the meaning of terrorism in international law, and enabling the use of extraordinary powers against movements of political dissent rather than organized armed violence.¹⁵

Recommendations:

- **Refrain from using terrorism designations or related charges to criminalize protected expression**, assembly, and association, including participation in protests and social movements.
- **Rescind executive policies and directives that expand the scope of “domestic terrorism”**, including National Security Presidential Memorandum 7, to ensure they do not enable the targeting of political dissent.
- **Rescind executive actions that improperly designate or treat domestic political movements as terrorist organizations**, in the absence of a clear legal basis and in violation of constitutional protections.
- **End the use of counterterrorism authorities to justify unlawful lethal military operations outside armed conflict**, including maritime military attacks framed as responses to “narcoterrorism,” and ensure accountability for resulting civilian harm.

¹⁰ The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security, Red Flag Alert – Anti-Trans Genocide in the USA – #3, March 11, 2026, available at: <https://www.lemkininstitute.com/red-flag-alerts/red-flag-alert---anti-trans-genocide-in-the-usa---%233>

¹¹ Center for Constitutional Rights, *We Must Not Look Away: The Escalating Targeting of Trans People*, December 23, 2025, available at: <https://ccrjustice.org/home/blog/2025/12/23/we-must-not-look-away-escalating-targeting-trans-people>

¹² The White House, *Designating Antifa as a Domestic Terrorist Organization*, September 22, 2025, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/09/designating-antifa-as-a-domestic-terrorist-organization/>

¹³ Michael Gold and Madeleine Ngo, *Noem Defends Describing Minneapolis Protesters’ Actions as Domestic Terrorism*, New York Times, March 3, 2026, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/03/us/politics/kristi-noem-senate-hearing.html>

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Justice, *Antifa Cell Members Convicted in PrairieLand ICE Detention Center Shooting*, March 13, 2026, available at: <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/antifa-cell-members-convicted-prairieland-ice-detention-center-shooting>

¹⁵ Center for Constitutional Rights, *We Must Dismantle the “Counterterrorism” Framework*, March 12, 2026, available at: <https://ccrjustice.org/home/blog/2026/03/12/we-must-dismantle-counterterrorism-framework>

- **Guarantee prompt, independent, and impartial investigations** into all alleged unlawful killings and abuses carried out under so-called counterterrorism authorities, and ensure access to effective remedies for victims.

3. Dismantling Civil Society

Over the past year, the United States has intensified efforts to restrict civic space to unprecedented levels, increasingly targeting civil society actors, particularly those engaged in advocacy related to Palestine, through surveillance, stigmatization, and the weaponization of national security frameworks.

The broader pattern of shrinking civic space has reached unprecedented levels of censorship and criminalization, particularly **targeting organizations and advocates engaged in human rights work related to Palestine**.¹⁶ Palestinian human rights organizations, both in the occupied Palestinian territory and in the United States, have faced intensified political attacks, surveillance, and efforts to delegitimize their work, often framed through security or counterterrorism narratives. This trend is reflected in the **unprecedented sanctioning of UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese**,¹⁷ a move widely criticized as retaliation against independent human rights monitoring. At the domestic level, efforts such as the **attempted terrorism designation of the Council on American Islamic Relations in Texas**¹⁸ and **Florida**¹⁹ signal an alarming willingness to apply national security labels to mainstream civil society actors. Meanwhile, a growing ecosystem of think tanks promoting racist and repressive agendas, including the **Capital Research Center**, has produced reports that seek to criminalize and demonize human rights organizations, particularly those advocating for an end to the genocide in Gaza, by portraying them as extremist or linked to terrorism.²⁰ Taken together, these developments point to an increasingly hostile environment for civil society, where advocacy for human rights, especially in politically sensitive contexts, is met with legal, financial, and

¹⁶ Center for Constitutional Rights, *Mahmoud Khalil Asks Full Appeals Court to Reconsider Decision That Would Allow Government to Re-detain Him*, March 31, 2026, available at: <https://ccrjustice.org/home/press-center/press-releases/mahmoud-khalil-asks-full-appeals-court-reconsider-decision-would>

¹⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *US sanctions on Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese threaten human rights system: UN experts*, August 8, 2025, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2025/08/us-sanctions-special-rapporteur-francesca-albanese-threaten-human-rights-system>

¹⁸ Office of the Texas Governor, *Governor Abbott Designates Muslim Brotherhood, CAIR as Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, November 18, 2025, available at: <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-designates-muslim-brotherhood-cair-as-foreign-terrorist-organizations>

¹⁹ Office of the Governor of Florida, *Executive Order 25-244: Protecting Floridians from Radical Islamic Terrorist Organizations*, December 8, 2025, available at: <https://www.flgov.com/eog/sites/default/files/executive-orders/2025/EO%2025-244.pdf>

²⁰ Capital Research Center, *When Charities Betray America: How “Pro-Palestinian” Protest Groups Promote Anti-Americanism*, March 26, 2025, available at: https://capitalresearch.org/app/uploads/CRC_WhenCharitiesBetrayAmerica_Report.pdf

reputational threats that undermine the fundamental freedoms of expression, association, and dissent.

Recommendations:

- **Ensure full protection of the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly**, in accordance with international human rights law, including the ICCPR.
- **Refrain from using counterterrorism and national security frameworks** to target civil society organizations and human rights defenders, including those engaged in advocacy related to Palestine.
- **Cease all forms of harassment, intimidation, and surveillance** of civil society actors, including through politically motivated investigations or designations.
- **Rescind or halt efforts to designate civil society organizations as terrorist entities** without a clear legal basis, including attempts targeting mainstream organizations such as the Council on American Islamic Relations.
- **Respect and protect the independence of UN mandate holders**, including by refraining from sanctions or other retaliatory measures against Special Rapporteurs and other experts.
- **Respect all provisions of the Agreement regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations**, including not imposing any impediments to transit to or from the United Nations headquarters for categories of persons identified in Art. IV, Sec. 11.
- **Ensure access to funding and resources for civil society organizations** without undue restriction, including by refraining from policies that indirectly criminalize or financially isolate human rights groups.

4. Freedom of Expression

Over the past year, the United States has seen a marked deterioration in the protection of freedom of expression, with increasing restrictions on political speech and growing structural pressures that narrow the broader information environment.

Over the past year, attacks on freedom of expression in the United States have intensified, particularly **targeting advocacy related to Palestine** while reshaping the broader information environment.²¹ Palestine activists on campuses, in workplaces, and across public spaces have faced escalating censorship, surveillance, and retaliation, including doxxing campaigns, arbitrary detention and attempted deportations,²² firings, and restrictions on protest, often justified through expansive claims about antisemitism or security. Legislative efforts such as **California’s AB 715**

²¹ International Federation for Human Rights, *Criminalisation and Narrative Control: Solidarity with Palestine in the Crosshairs*, October 14, 2025, available at: <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/freedom-of-expression/fidh-publishes-a-report-on-the-repression-of-the-solidarity-movement>

²² Center for Constitutional Rights, “Trump Administration’s Board of Immigration Appeals Denies Mahmoud Khalil’s Bid to Throw Out Deportation Case,” 9 April 2026, available at: <https://ccrjustice.org/home/press-center/press-releases/trump-administrations-board-immigration-appeals-denies-mahmoud>

exemplify this trend, raising concerns among civil liberties advocates that vague or overbroad provisions could chill protected speech and advocacy.²³ At the same time, structural pressures on independent expression have deepened through the **continued consolidation of media ownership in the hands of government-aligned billionaires**, including the growing influence of figures like the Ellison family, which critics argue dangerously narrows the range of public discourse.²⁴ Parallel to this, **widespread attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs** through legislation, funding cuts, and institutional bans have further constrained spaces for marginalized voices and critical perspectives. Together, these dynamics point to a narrowing expressive landscape in which political dissent, especially on Palestine, is increasingly stigmatized, regulated, or suppressed, raising serious concerns about the erosion of First Amendment protections and democratic pluralism.

Recommendations:

- **Ensure full protection of the right to freedom of expression**, including political speech, in accordance with international human rights law, including Article 19 of the ICCPR.
- **Refrain from restricting or penalizing advocacy related to Palestine** or other political issues, including through overly broad interpretations of antisemitism or national security concerns.
- **Review and amend legislation that may unduly restrict freedom of expression**, including laws with vague or overbroad provisions such as California’s AB 715.
- **Protect students, workers, and activists from retaliation** for engaging in protected expression, including arbitrary detentions, attempted deportations, firings, disciplinary actions, and doxxing campaigns.
- **Promote media pluralism and prevent excessive concentration of media ownership**, including by adopting measures to safeguard the independence and diversity of the media landscape.

5. Tech and Surveillance

Over the past year, the intersection of AI, tech, and state power has raised profound concerns about **surveillance, accountability, and the erosion of due process**.

²³ Council on American-Islamic Relations California, *AB 715 Has Been Signed Into Law—Here’s What That Means*, October 23, 2025, available at: <https://ca.cair.com/updates/ab-715-has-been-signed-into-law-heres-what-that-means/>

²⁴Committee to Protect Journalists, *How US Media Consolidation Endangers Press Freedom*, April 3, 2026, available at: <https://cpj.org/2026/04/how-us-media-consolidation-endangers-press-freedom/>

One salient area is immigration policy, despite the Human Rights Committee having already expressed serious concerns in 2023.²⁵ To meet the goal of deporting one million people, **DHS undermined oversight bodies** such as the Privacy Office and the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.²⁶ They **then mobilized a wide array of commercial tools with virtually no limitation**, including mobile phone geolocation tracking,²⁷ automated license plate readers,²⁸ facial recognition,²⁹ iris scanning,³⁰ and DNA testing,³¹ while also accessing data from other

²⁵ United Nations Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United States of America, CCPR/C/USA/CO/5 (Dec. 7, 2023), https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2F5&Lang=en; Georgetown Law Center on Privacy & Technology and UCI Law International Justice Clinic, Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee During its Period Review of United States of America, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FUSA%2F55913&Lang=en; Emily Tucker & Hinako Sugiyama, Does ICE Data Surveillance Violate Human Rights Law? The Answer is Yes, and It's Not Even Close, Tech Policy .Press (Nov. 14, 2023), <https://www.techpolicy.press/does-ice-data-surveillance-violate-human-rights-law-the-answer-is-yes-and-its-not-even-close/>.

²⁶ Peter Andringa, *Trump's immigration data dragnet*, Financial Times (Dec. 9, 2025), <https://ig.ft.com/us-ice-surveillance/>.

²⁷ Eva Dou, Artur Galocha & Kevin Schaul, *The powerful tools in ICE's arsenal to track suspects – and protesters*, The Washington Post (Jan. 29, 2026), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/interactive/2026/ice-surveillance-immigrants-protesters/>.

²⁸ Eva Dou, Artur Galocha & Kevin Schaul, *The powerful tools in ICE's arsenal to track suspects – and protesters*, The Washington Post (Jan. 29, 2026), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/interactive/2026/ice-surveillance-immigrants-protesters/>.

²⁹ ICE has recently employed new facial recognition technology, including Mobile Fortify, a new app from NEC, and the Clearview AI facial recognition system. Eva Dou, Artur Galocha & Kevin Schaul, *The powerful tools in ICE's arsenal to track suspects – and protesters*, The Washington Post (Jan. 29, 2026), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/interactive/2026/ice-surveillance-immigrants-protesters/>. See also Kat Lonsdorf, Jude Joffe-Block & Meg Anderson, *ICE has spun a massive surveillance web. We talked to people caught in it*, NPR (Mar. 5, 2026), <https://www.npr.org/2026/03/04/nx-s1-5717031/ice-dhs-immigrants-surveillance-confrontation-deportation-mobile-fortify>.

³⁰ In the fall of 2025, ICE purchased an iris-scanning mobile app from BI2 Technologies. Eva Dou, Artur Galocha & Kevin Schaul, *The powerful tools in ICE's arsenal to track suspects – and protesters*, The Washington Post (Jan. 29, 2026), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/interactive/2026/ice-surveillance-immigrants-protesters/>.

³¹ Raiding the Genome: How the United States Government Is Abusing Its Immigration Powers to Amass DNA for Future Policing, Georgetown Law Center on Privacy and Technology (Apr. 8, 2026, 12:21pm), <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/privacy-technology-center/publications/raiding-the-genome/>.

³² ICE agents used facial recognition technology to scan driver's license photos and DMV databases. Since 2015, at ICE "has requested face recognition scans ... in at least 14 states." American Dragnet: Data-Driven Deportation in the 21st Century, Georgetown Law Center on Privacy and Technology, May 10, 2022, <https://americandragnet.org/finding2#:~:text=A..pipelines%20to%20access%20driver%20data.&text=This%20set%20of%20communications%20reference,to%20ICE%20agents%20and%20others>.

³³ Tom Bowman, *Weaponizing Immigrant Tax Data: How IRS-DHS Cooperation Would Undermine Tax Compliance, Increase Burdens, and Threaten Data Privacy*, Center for Democracy & Technology (Mar. 24, 2025), <https://cdt.org/insights/weaponizing-immigrant-tax-data-how-irs-dhs-cooperation-would-undermine-tax-compliance-increase-burdens-and-threaten-data-privacy/>; Immigration, DOGE, and Data Privacy, Center for Democracy & Technology, The Leadership Conference's Center for Civil Rights and Technology (May 9, 2025), <https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/CDT-and-LCCHR-May-9-2025-Immigration-DOGE-and-Data-Privacy-Explainer.pdf>.

agencies,³² including IRS taxpayer records³³ and voter registration databases.³⁴ AI then consolidated these datasets, and agencies are sometimes making enforcement decisions based solely on AI inferences. In 2025, DHS spent \$353 million on acquiring such technologies—27% more than the previous year—partly in response to vendor lobbying.³⁵

Major technology companies have also increasingly become extensions of state power, providing data, analytics, and AI systems that enable authorities to bypass traditional legal safeguards, often with limited transparency or judicial oversight.³⁶ This dynamic is especially stark in the **rapid militarization of AI**: during the recent war on Iran, U.S. forces used advanced systems, including Anthropic’s Claude model and Palantir-linked tools, to accelerate the “kill chain,” generating and prioritizing targets at machine speed. These systems have been scrutinized following the **bombing of a girls’ school in Minab** that killed more than 170 civilians, mostly children, where investigators are examining whether AI-assisted targeting contributed to the strike.³⁷ At the same time, a high-profile **conflict between Anthropic and the Pentagon** has exposed the stakes of unchecked AI deployment: the company resisted government demands for unrestricted use of its models, citing concerns about mass surveillance and autonomous weapons, while the Pentagon insisted on broad authority to deploy AI for “all lawful purposes.”³⁸ Together, these developments illustrate a rapidly evolving ecosystem in which **private tech firms are deeply embedded in surveillance and warfare infrastructures**, enabling the state to

³² ICE agents used facial recognition technology to scan driver’s license photos and DMV databases. Since 2015, at ICE “has requested face recognition scans ... in at least 14 states.” American Dragnet: Data-Driven Deportation in the 21st Century, Georgetown Law Center on Privacy and Technology, May 10, 2022, <https://americandragnet.org/finding2#:~:text=A..pipelines%20to%20access%20driver%20data.&text=This%20set%20of%20communications%20reference,to%20ICE%20agents%20and%20others>.

³³ Tom Bowman, *Weaponizing Immigrant Tax Data: How IRS-DHS Cooperation Would Undermine Tax Compliance, Increase Burdens, and Threaten Data Privacy*, Center for Democracy & Technology (Mar. 24, 2025), <https://cdt.org/insights/weaponizing-immigrant-tax-data-how-irs-dhs-cooperation-would-undermine-tax-compliance-increase-burdens-and-threaten-data-privacy/>; Immigration, DOGE, and Data Privacy, Center for Democracy & Technology, The Leadership Conference’s Center for Civil Rights and Technology (May 9, 2025), <https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/CDT-and-LCCHR-May-9-2025-Immigration-DOGE-and-Data-Privacy-Explainer.pdf>.

³⁴ For more information on DHS unlawfully repurposing voter verification data, see Center for Democracy & Technology et al., *How Federal Efforts to Access Voter Data Affect Our Privacy, Civil Liberties, and Democracy* (Dec. 12, 2025), <https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/How-Federal-Efforts-to-Access-Voter-Data-Affect-Our-Privacy-Civil-Liberties-and-Democracy-final.pdf>; Tim Harper & Isabel Linzer, *CDT Joins EPIC’s Comments Urging DHS and SSA to Reverse Overhaul of the SAVE Program*, Center for Democracy & Technology (Dec. 16, 2025), <https://cdt.org/insights/cdt-joins-epics-comments-urging-dhs-and-ssa-to-reverse-overhaul-of-the-save-program/>.

³⁵ Peter Andringa, *Trump’s immigration data dragnet*, Financial Times (Dec. 9, 2025), <https://ig.ft.com/us-ice-surveillance/>.

³⁶ Peter Andringa, *Trump’s immigration data dragnet*, Financial Times (Dec. 9, 2025), <https://ig.ft.com/us-ice-surveillance/>; Anika Venkatesh & Lauren Yu, *DHS is Circumventing Constitution by Buying Data It Would Normally Need a Warrant to Access*, ACLU (Jan. 12 2026), <https://www.aclu.org/news/privacy-technology/dhs-is-circumventing-constitution-by-buying-data-it-would-normally-need-a-warrant-to-access>.

³⁷ Julian E. Barnes et al., *U.S. at Fault in Strike on School in Iran, Preliminary Inquiry Says*, The New York Times (Mar. 11, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/11/us/politics/iran-school-missile-strike.html>.

³⁸ Lauren Edmonds & Lakshmi Varanasi, *The fallout over OpenAI’s Pentagon deal is growing*, Business Insider (Mar. 7, 2026), <https://www.businessinsider.com/openai-pentagon-deal-fallout-backlash-anthropic-altman-amodei-trump-2026-3>.

act with unprecedented speed and scale, often ahead of the legal and ethical frameworks meant to constrain it.

Importantly, the government has **blatantly used surveillance as behavioral and ideological control**. For example, the government expanded social media monitoring on immigrants³⁹—resulting in the **deportation of students on political views**.⁴⁰ ICE has threatened protest observers in Minneapolis by indicating they are on a watchlist.⁴¹ With the **metastasized terrorism framework** that we outlined above, the government control likely chills civil society at large, as it appears to target anything the government deems anti-American.⁴² This is especially true with recent reports that DHS has collected 40 U.S. citizens' DNA without justification, six of whom were minors, suggesting that surveillance measures are being used to intimidate and chill supporters of “anti-American” practices.⁴³

Recommendations:

- **Ensure full protection of the right to privacy** for both U.S. citizens and immigrants;
- **Limit the use of commercial surveillance tools to what is strictly necessary and proportionate for achieving a specific, individualized, and legitimate purpose.** Effective procedural safeguards and thorough documentation should be implemented in every use case to prevent abuse and ensure remedy.
- **End ideology-based surveillance** targeting U.S. citizens and immigrants.

³⁹ DHS conducts social media monitoring via their Catch and Revoke policy. For more on this policy, see Lisa Femia, Sophia Cope & Saira Hussain, *Trump Administration's Targeting of International Students Jeopardizes Free Speech and Privacy Online*, Electronic Frontier Foundation (Apr. 25, 2025),

<https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2025/04/trump-administrations-targeting-international-students-jeopardizes-free-speech-and>; Center for Democracy & Technology, *Automated Tools for Social Media Monitoring Irrevocably Chill Millions of Noncitizens' Expression* (Apr. 15, 2025), <https://cdt.org/insights/automated-tools-for-social-media-monitoring-irrevocably-chill-millions-of-noncitizens-expression/>; *Viewpoint-based Online Surveillance of Permanent Residents and Visa Holders Violates First Amendment, Lawsuit Argues*, Muslim Advocates (Oct. 16, 2025), <https://muslimadvocates.org/2025/10/labor-unions-sue-trump/>.

⁴⁰ Niha Masih, *Inside the little-used foreign policy cited for student deportations*, The Washington Post (Apr. 19, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/04/29/khalil-mahdawi-deportation-foreign-policy-rubio/>.

⁴¹ Sheera Frenkel & Mike Isaac, *How ICE Already Knows Who Minneapolis Protesters Are*, The New York Times (Jan. 31, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/30/technology/tech-ice-facial-recognition-palantir.html>.

⁴² Sheera Frenkel & Mike Isaac, *Homeland Security Wants Social Media Sites to Expose Anti-ICE Accounts*, The New York Times (Feb. 13, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/13/technology/dhs-anti-ice-social-media.html>; Alan Feuer, Alexandra Berzon & Ernesto Londoño, *'Go Big and Go Loud': Inside the Justice Dept.'s Push to Prosecute Protesters*, The New York Times (Mar. 19, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/19/us/politics/justice-dept-prosecute-protesters.html>.

⁴³ Georgetown Law Center on Privacy & Technology, *Raiding the U.S. Citizen Genome* (Sept. 23, 2025), https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n_3EX9QQzWX599UWy00-DtWh8sZyg65v/view.

- **Disclose the full details of all commercial surveillance technology procurements, as well as vendor lobbying activities**, in a timely and meaningful manner to ensure effective public oversight.