

US immigration officials arrest 10-year-old girl with cerebral palsy after surgery

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The Gestapo-like tactics of the federal immigration police were on display this week when officials in Texas arrested a 10-year-old girl with cerebral palsy, Rosamaria Hernandez, after she underwent gallbladder surgery, because she is undocumented.

On Tuesday at 2 a.m., officers of the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) stopped Rosamaria's ambulance at an immigration checkpoint as she was en route

to an emergency surgery at a hospital in Corpus Christi. Agents first tried to force Rosamaria's cousin, who has legal status, to take the young girl to a hospital in Mexico. Rosamaria's undocumented parents were not with her because they feared crossing the checkpoint. When her cousin refused, agents then followed Rosamaria to Driscoll Children's Hospital.

For more than 24 hours, agents took shifts guarding her room. The *Independent* reported, "Citing flight-risk concerns for a young girl with a degenerative muscle disease, agents involved themselves in every step of the medical process, according to the family lawyer. During surgery, agents were nearby. In follow up medical procedures, agents were in the room."

When doctors transferred Rosamaria to another hospital, an armed agent sat in the ambulance with at least four vehicles from the CBP and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) tailing behind.

By Wednesday evening, agents took Rosamaria from her cousin—against the advice of doctors who say she needs time to recuperate—and placed her in an immigrant jail for unaccompanied children. The facility is in San Antonio, over 150 miles from Laredo, where Rosamaria's parents live.

Rosamaria's 39-year-old mother, Felipa de la Cruz, said, "I'm a mother. All I wanted was for her to get the surgery that she needed. It never crossed my mind that any of what is happening right now could happen.

When you're a mother, all you care about is your child."

Officials are not allowing Rosamaria's parents to visit her, although her only request is, "She wants to see her mom." Rosamaria was brought to the US when she was three months old by her parents in order to acquire health treatment unavailable in Mexico.

The arrest of this young child is part of a Trump administration effort to transform the immigration agencies into a police force that operates increasingly outside the law and with ruthless disregard for any considerations of humanity and compassion.

Their methods increasingly parallel those of lynch mobs in the Jim Crow South or of the Nazi Gestapo. They are conducting a nationwide campaign whose express purpose is to terrorize millions of immigrants, make them fearful of appearing in public, and create a permanent underclass of people who cannot seek health care, cannot attend school, cannot report crimes committed against them to the police, and only venture out in public to work.

In recent months, the government has arrested homeless immigrants at a church in Virginia, a woman with a brain tumor from a hospital in Texas, a father as he dropped his children off at school in California, parents accompanying their two-year-old US citizen son to surgery in Texas, and women outside of courtrooms seeking restraining orders against physically abusive partners. ICE is also trapping parents by forcing them to sign federal paperwork to secure the release of their children from immigration custody, only to then use this information to arrest them.

Yazmin Rodriguez, an attorney for a Connecticut father arrested in this way, said: "My colleagues and I have been witnessing these deceptive practices for the

last couple of months. This new practice of luring parents with the sole purpose of tearing them apart from their children is the most despicable and inhumane practice we have witnessed.”

Immigration officials have also abandoned the policy of using warrants to make arrests, as legally required, instead using techniques such as showing pictures of brown-skinned people to immigrants and asking if they recognize the person, in order to gain entry to homes or to stop people on the street. The victims are then grabbed, in many cases by plainclothes officers using unmarked cars.

In Oregon, out-of-uniform immigration police arrested a man in a Portland home without a warrant last week. So widespread are these violations that Oregon Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley issued a statement raising concerns about the recent raid that “appears to be an illegal entry of a private home.” A similar raid took place in New Era, Michigan in September, when police raided a migrant labor camp without a warrant, only showing a picture of a Hispanic-looking person who did not live at the camp.

The Trump administration has targeted cities for raids because they passed ordinances prohibiting local officials from voluntarily turning over information about undocumented people to ICE and CBP. In September, ICE arrested 498 people in 42 different “sanctuary” counties, in a move that was explicitly aimed at targeting neighborhoods with large populations.

Also in September, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced it was going to collect social media information on all immigrants, including naturalized citizens and permanent residents. A new federal rule took effect on October 18 and allows the government to monitor “social media handles and aliases, associated identifiable information and search results” to determine immigrants’ political views, locations, and to create databases of where they work, live, and go to school.

These developments are the reactionary product of 25 years of permanent war, especially under the auspices of the “war on terror.” Both parties, Democratic and Republican, have expanded the power of the deportation machine and police-state intelligence apparatus.

Obama deported 2.7 million immigrants during his

two terms. The *Nation* noted in June 2016 that “instead of reversing that architecture [set up by the Bush administration for deportation], President Obama turbocharged it. To pay for the ballooning enforcement-first approach, the budget for immigration enforcement grew 300 percent from the resources given at the time of its founding under Bush to \$18 billion annually, more than all other federal law-enforcement agencies’ budget combined.”

Now, the basis has been laid for mass round-ups and deportations of millions of immigrants with deadly potential. Former DHS Director and current Trump Chief of Staff John Kelly circulated a draft memorandum calling for the deployment of 100,000 National Guardsmen to round up some 12 million undocumented people. Such a deployment would amount to the establishment of martial law across the American west and southwest.

This is further evidence that ICE, which employs 20,000 people, and CBP, which employs 45,000, are being transformed into an institutional base for fascistic methods. Far-right activists like Jon Feere and Julie Kirchner are now playing leading roles in the DHS, which oversees both agencies. Feere, a former analyst for the mass deportation advocate Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), is now a leading adviser to ICE acting Director Thomas Homan. Kirchner previously worked for the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR).



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