Iranian-Americans detained at US-Canada border in wake of Suleimani assassination

Benjamin Mateus
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Shortly after President Donald Trump's brazen criminal assassination of Iranian General Qassem Suleimani on January 3, the Department of Homeland Security began ramping up security at military bases and border crossings. These moves are aimed at boosting support for war against Tehran by whipping up anti-Iranian sentiment and fanning fears of a possible retaliatory attack by Iran inside the United States.

As part of this crackdown more than 60 travelers who are Iranian-American citizens or green card holders traveling from Canada into the US were detained by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Saturday at the Peace Arch Border Crossing in Blaine, Washington. They were all held there for several hours, subject to illegal detention and interrogation before being allowed to return to their own country.

Those who were detained reported that their passports were taken from them while they waited, leaving them with no legal means of leaving the border crossing. Once they were called up for questioning by CBP agents they were asked about the names of relatives and where they live and men were asked if they had ever served in the Iranian armed forces.

Negah Hekmati, a 38-year-old interior decorator and US citizen born in Iran, relayed to the *Los Angeles Times* how she, her husband and two children were detained and questioned after returning from a skiing trip in British Columbia. While they all held Nexus cards in addition to their American passports, meaning they had already been pre-screened by CBP, they were still pulled in for hours of detention and questioning.

Hekmati told the *Times* that her children were afraid to fall asleep out of the fear that their parents would be taken away from them. "They shouldn't experience such things," Hekmati said. "They are US citizens."

In another case, a Canadian citizen who was born in Iran, Sam Sadr, told Politico that he and his family were traveling to Seattle when they were detained at the border for more than eight hours after a US border agent took note that his passport indicated he was born in Tehran.

The Washington state chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations reported in a statement that it received information of source at US Customs and Border Protection that DHS sent out a national directive to agents to "'report' and detain anyone with Iranian heritage entering the country who is deemed potentially suspicious or 'adversarial,' regardless of citizenship status."

An official statement released by CBP denied that Iranian-Americans or others of Iranian origin were being detained and questioned "because of their country of origin." CBP spokesman Jason Givens reiterated this position on Monday, insisting that Iranian-Americans had never been detained or denied entry into the US. However, CBP did admit to Roll Call that the agency was "operating with an enhanced posture" in response to a DHS warning about a possible Iranian counter-attack.

A National Terrorism Advisory System alert published on January 4 warned that Iran is capable of carrying out attacks on "critical infrastructure" in the US and declared that "an attack in the homeland may come with little or no warning."

Rather than keeping Americans safe, these warnings are intended to provoke and provide the state the cause to begin the implementation of emergency measures whereby censorship, spying, and other coercive actions can be openly instituted.

Wide-scale attacks by the government on US citizens in violation of their constitutional rights is not without

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precedent.

Between 1942 and 1946, the Roosevelt administration, under the authority of a presidential executive order, interned more than 120,000 Japanese-Americans across the country without trial during World War II. The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC on September 11, 2001 were utilized to justify spying on Muslim-Americans and entrapping suggestible young men in phony terror plots along with the expansion of mass electronic surveillance of the entire population.

It is not a far stretch to assume that the Trump administration will utilize emergency powers, justified by a war against Iran, to detain Americans of Iranian descent and crack down on political dissent more generally.

The US has the largest population of Iranians and those of Iranian ancestry outside of Iran. By 2012, an estimated 1.5 million Iranians lived in the US with the largest concentration, approximately 300,000, living in Los Angeles.

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