

Hasan Piker detained and interrogated at Chicago airport by Trump's border agents

Andy Thompson
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On Sunday, May 11, prominent left-wing political commentator and Twitch streamer Hasan Piker was detained by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents at Chicago's O'Hare Airport after returning to the US following a trip to France. Piker was traveling to the University of Chicago for a speaking event where he was featured.

The incident, which Piker recounted in detail during a live broadcast, is part of the Trump administration's escalating efforts to intimidate critics of US foreign policy and suppress opposition to imperialist wars, particularly Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Piker described being pulled aside during a routine Global Entry screening and subjected to a two-hour interrogation in a detention facility at O'Hare airport. CBP agents questioned him extensively about his political views, his journalism and his criticism of the US government. The interrogation focused on his coverage of Israel's war on Gaza, his interviews with Yemeni civilians and his opposition to the Trump administration's policies.

Piker has committed no crime and has every right to speak out against the government, express his views and travel freely. Additionally, Piker is a native born US citizen. The government has no legal right to deny or delay his entry to the country, and especially not for exercising his constitutionally protected rights under the first amendment.

The detention of Piker is an escalation of Trump's attacks on the democratic rights of the population. It is meant both to intimidate workers and youth from speaking out and is a testing of the waters for the administration to begin the criminalization of political speech of citizens and non-citizens alike.

In a Twitch stream following the incident, Piker reported that agents repeatedly asked him about his

stance on Hamas, the Houthis and Hezbollah, demanding to know whether he supported these groups. "They kept saying stuff like, 'Do you like Hamas? Do you think Hamas is a resistance group or a terrorist group?'" Piker stated. "I kept repeating that the US State Department designates Hamas as a terrorist organization, but they kept pressing."

The agents also grilled him about his Twitch content, specifically his critiques of US imperialism and President Donald Trump. "They asked, 'Do you talk about Trump? Do you support him?'" Piker told his viewers that in the interests of testing how far the agents would go, he answered some of their questions. "I told them, 'I don't like Trump. He hasn't ended the wars. Civilians are dying.'"

Notably, agents referenced Piker's past interview with a Yemeni civilian, falsely insinuating ties to the Houthis. "They asked if I'd ever interviewed a Houthi member or provided 'support' to Hamas," Piker explained. "I told them I'm a journalist—I talk to people affected by US-backed wars. That's not a crime."

After Piker aired his May 2024 interview with Rashad al-Had, a Yemeni citizen whose family was killed in a US-backed Saudi airstrike, right-wing groups began spreading lies about the discussion claiming that al-Had was a member of the Houthis. The right-wing commentators have been attempting to create a false association of Piker with the Houthis, Hamas and other groups that the government has designated as "terrorist organizations" in order to prompt law enforcement to arrest the Twitch streamer.

All stories that Piker has any contact with any of the mentioned groups are total fabrications. But that Piker was detained and questioned on these grounds demonstrates that the Trump administration is using the lies of fascist groups to justify the persecution of

political opponents.

Piker condemned the detention as a deliberate attempt to silence dissent. “The reason they’re doing this is to create an environment of fear,” he said. “They want people like me—or others without my platform or resources—to shut the f***k up. They’re testing how far they can go to criminalize speech.”

He stated his worry that what follows could be laws banning oppositional political views outright. “I just need you to understand nothing I have done thus far is illegal.” Piker said on Twitch, “now laws may change in the future, and they might actually start prosecuting speech which I do fear is the goal of this administration. But so far, everything I’ve done is fully protected under the First Amendment.”

In an NBC report on Piker’s detention, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin accused Piker of “lying for likes.” She told NBC, “Claims that his political beliefs triggered the inspection are baseless. Upon entering the country, this individual was referred for a further inspection—a routine, lawful process that occurs daily and can apply for any traveler.”

In other words, any traveler crossing the US border can be stopped and interrogated about their political views before being admitted into the country.

Piker responded to the DHS statement by asking, “What part of a ‘lawful routine inspection’ requires DHS to question me about my political views, my opinions on Donald Trump, or my stance on Israel and Palestine?” He continued, “The agent was cordial, but the experience, along with reports of other Americans facing similar questioning, seems intended to create a chilling effect on speech.”

Piker’s detention follows a wave of recent crackdowns on opponents of the genocide in Gaza including:

- The violent suppression of pro-Palestinian protests at UCLA, Columbia, and the University of Washington
- NYU’s blackmailing of law students to abandon activism under threat of expulsion.
- The Trump administration’s illegal arrests of immigrant students like Rümeysa Öztürk and Mahmoud Khalil.

All these attacks, including Piker’s detention and questioning, are part of a coordinated assault on

democratic rights, spearheaded by the ruling class and enforced by both Democrats and Republicans.

Piker has a following of over 3 million people on platforms like Twitch and YouTube. His denunciations of imperialism and capitalism have made him one of the most viewed political commentators among socialist minded youth. His detention and harassment was not just an attack on Piker as an individual, but an attack on the millions of young people who are furious at endless war, social inequality and the descent into fascism.

The incident confirms the warnings by the WSWS that the fascist methods of Trump will not be limited to immigrants but will be used against all those opposed to war and the capitalist system that produces it. The attack on Piker’s speech must be opposed and all attempts to prevent freedom of expression fought by building a movement for socialism in the working class.



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