

Federal agents raid *Washington Post* reporter's home in crackdown on press freedom

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On Wednesday, agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation raided the Virginia home of *Washington Post* reporter Hannah Natanson, in an unprecedented escalation of the Trump administration's campaign against alleged leaks of classified information. The raid, ordered at the request of the Pentagon and approved by Attorney General Pam Bondi's Justice Department, was carried out under the pretext of investigating a government contractor accused of improperly retaining national defense information.

The FBI seized Natanson's phone, her personal laptop, a *Post*-issued laptop and a Garmin smartwatch, effectively ransacking the basic tools of her work and sweeping up material that includes confidential communications with hundreds of current and former federal employees. Natanson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who has been at the center of the *Post*'s exposure of President Donald Trump's purge and restructuring of the federal workforce, was present when FBI agents arrived with a search warrant authorizing the seizure of her devices.

Officials have claimed that the journalist herself is "not a target" of the investigation, which they say is focused on Aurelio Perez-Lugones, a Maryland-based Pentagon systems administrator charged in federal court with unlawful retention of classified documents. But the real purpose of the operation is unmistakable: to intimidate whistleblowers throughout the federal government and to send a warning to journalists who expose the criminal conspiracies of the state.

The *Post* reported Thursday that sources "already were in contact this morning to register their worry about being discovered in a similar way," i.e., through a government raid on a journalist's home. Alex

Papachristou, the director of the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice, warned the assault on press freedoms would have a "cryogenic [freezing] effect" on sources' willingness to speak out.

The raid took place just weeks after Natanson published reports drawing on confidential documents and an extensive network of sources inside agencies targeted by Trump's drive to dismantle large sections of the civil service.

Several lengthy articles published at the end of December detailed the Trump administration's assault on the federal workforce and the targeting of foundational social programs. A December 24 piece titled, "I am The Post's 'federal government whisperer.' It's been brutal" revealed the Trump administration's wrecking operation within federal agencies, leading to the firings or resignations of hundreds of thousands of workers and the destruction of the services they administered.

Among the more politically significant findings Natanson revealed were the workings of billionaire oligarch and one-time "special government employee" Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE. Workers reported being ordered to "get ... data sent to Doge" and feared that Musk and Trump were pooling "millions of Americans' personal information," turning government databases into instruments for the administration's authoritarian agenda.

One of Natanson's most recent published articles, "How Social Security has gotten worse under Trump," reveals the politically driven class character of Trump's budget cuts, staffing reductions and "anti-fraud" measures, all directed against the

program's most vulnerable beneficiaries.

The report details the pushing out of over 7,000 employees within months of DOGE's takeover and the closure of dozens of regional offices, eliminating access for tens of thousands of US senior citizens. This occurred while so-called "anti-fraud" policies forced basic transactions like direct deposit changes and immigrant work authorization to be done in person or online, rather than over the phone or by mail, even though many elderly, disabled and low-income beneficiaries cannot travel or use the Social Security website.

This has contributed to a massive backlog of claims at the agency, delaying millions of people's access to fundamental social benefits like retirement and assistance at an agency once referred to by Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt as "a cornerstone" program protecting working people from "the hazards and vicissitudes of life."

Attorney General Bondi boasted on social media that the FBI had executed a warrant at the home of a reporter who "was acquiring and reporting classified and illegally disclosed information," cynically denouncing the exposure of government secrets as a threat to "national security," concealing the illegal actions and intrigues being exposed.

News organizations and press freedom advocates condemned the search as a dangerous crossing of a line that even previous administrations, despite their own vicious pursuit of leakers, had hesitated to breach.

In an email to staff, *Washington Post* Executive Editor Matt Murray called the search and seizure an "extraordinary, aggressive action" that is "deeply concerning and raises profound questions and [concerns] around the constitutional protections for our work."

Former *New York Times* investigative journalist James Risen, who was previously targeted by the Obama Justice Department for his role in covering the illegal wiretapping programs of the Bush administration, stated the Trump White House's response "goes way beyond anything that is expected or required under any normal and traditional guidelines covering the way the government deals with the press."

Laura Poitras, one of several prominent journalists who helped reveal massive spying on the world's population at the National Security Agency, called the

home raid an "outrageous escalation."

Both Poitras and Risen were targets of the Obama administration, which brought a record number of Espionage Act cases against alleged leakers, targeting sources like Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden and others who provided classified information to the press.



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