

Trump administration targets Hasan Piker, Medea Benjamin over Cuba trip

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This past Saturday, Fox News, in collusion with the Trump administration, announced that the federal government was targeting streamer Hasan Piker, antiwar activist and CODEPINK co-founder Medea Benjamin and some 40 others.

The investigation centers on whether they, or organizations they are affiliated with, violated US sanctions by providing support to the Cuban government.

Fox News reported that Piker and Benjamin were being sent “administrative subpoenas” from the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). In a livestream over the weekend, Piker said he had not received a subpoena, nor had he been contacted by the US government. He said he found out about the investigation from reading the Fox News report.

This past March, as the US military illegally blockaded Cuba, starving the island nation of fuel and plunging millions into electrical blackouts, Piker, Benjamin, *Drop Site* journalist Ryan Grim and dozens of others flew to Cuba on a humanitarian and journalistic mission. Once on the island, Piker, Grim and others interviewed local residents, medical staff and government officials. Benjamin and others provided medical supplies to pediatric hospitals, along with food, toiletries and school supplies to local residents.

The group traveled on humanitarian visas and also received journalism visas from the Cuban government. Unlike fascist political operative Nick Shirley, who also traveled to the island to film another propaganda piece for the Trump administration, Piker, Benjamin and Grim did not stay at a hotel that the US State Department has placed on a “Cuba Restricted List” because it is allegedly tied to the government.

In other words, right-wing operatives are permitted to travel to Cuba to produce anti-communist propaganda, while antiwar activists, journalists and streamers who bring medical aid and report on conditions produced by the US blockade are targeted for federal investigation.

In a video posted on her social media accounts, Benjamin responded to the investigation, saying it “looks like the Trump administration” was targeting her, Piker and others for bringing “medicines and medical supplies to Cuba’s pediatric hospitals. Basically we want to help save babies. And that, according to Trump, is something that must be investigated. Because how dare we wanna help the Cuban people. How dare we love the Cuban people? And if indeed the charge is that we love Cuban people: guilty!”

She added, “I want my government to leave the Cuban people alone! Not to be strangling them by keeping oil from the island, by sanctions that are so brutal. I want them to stop threatening to invade Cuba... So please, if any government officials are watching, don’t investigate us for trying to save Cuban babies. Investigate yourselves for what you are doing to kill Cuban babies and make lives of the Cuban people miserable.”

On his livestream over the weekend, Piker said the investigation was an attack on the First Amendment and an attempt to intimidate those who oppose the Trump administration’s policies. “America’s galloping towards fascism,” he said.

He noted that the subpoena followed the Trump administration’s issuing of NSPM-7 last September. The presidential memorandum directed federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the State Department, the Department of Justice and the Treasury Department, to focus their

efforts on countering an imagined vast left-wing conspiracy allegedly responsible for various unrelated violent acts and attempted assassinations.

The memorandum is silent on fascist and right-wing violence but names “anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism, anti-Christianity” and alleged “extremism on migration, race and gender” as “common threads animating ... violent conduct.”

Piker presents himself as a “leftist” and, like millions of other young people and workers in the United States, opposes illegal US wars in Iran and Africa, as well as the ongoing genocide in Gaza and ethnic cleansing campaign in Lebanon. For this, and for his support for so-called “progressive” candidates in the mold of Bernie Sanders, Piker has been increasingly attacked by Republicans and Democrats.

As Piker himself noted in the same livestream over the weekend, “I started aiding in certain insurgent campaigns. I just didn’t stick to this platform, I am very pragmatic, I started working with, within the ranks of the Democratic Party, or within the primary system of the Democratic Party...”

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party have well-established political differences with Piker’s reformist politics and his attempts to shepherd workers and youth into the Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street and war no less than their “Republican colleagues.”

But we unequivocally oppose the Trump administration’s McCarthyite investigation into him, Benjamin and anyone else targeted by the administration for traveling to, and providing aid to, the Cuban people.

Despite Piker’s best efforts to promote and prettify the Democratic Party, following the announcement of the investigation, very few Democrats spoke in defense of the streamer. In fact, on CBS’s “Face the Nation” on Sunday, Democratic Rep. Joshua Gottheimer (New Jersey) and Republican Rep. Mike Lawler (New York) joined to denounce Piker and conflate his anti-Zionist politics with genuine antisemitism promoted by figures such as former *Daily Wire* commentator Candace Owens.

Gottheimer claimed antisemitism was rising on “both sides, whether it’s Hasan Piker who is a streamer on the left or Candace Owens on the right, who are campaigning with candidates around the country

actually encouraging some of the most vile antisemitic language.”

He added that “none of this should be acceptable” and pointed to his collaboration with Lawler on the Antisemitism Awareness Act and legislation condemning Piker and Owens. “Both of us believe deeply that we need to stand up to this,” Gottheimer said, adding that political leaders had to make clear “that you don’t stand with these, with people like Owens and Piker, and they are not welcome in our districts.”

Gottheimer, an ardent Zionist and proponent of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, said nothing about the bogus investigation into Piker, Benjamin and others. The CBS host likewise did not raise the subject.

The bipartisan silence over the investigation underscores the central fact: The attack on Piker, Benjamin and others is part of a broader campaign to criminalize opposition to US imperialist policy, from the blockade of Cuba to the genocide in Gaza and the expanding wars in the Middle East.

The defense of those targeted cannot be left to the Democratic Party, which has helped construct the machinery of repression now being deployed by Trump. It requires the independent mobilization of the working class in defense of democratic rights and against war, dictatorship and the capitalist system that produces them.



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