ICE terror campaign continues at US airports

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On Thursday, November 19, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Gestapo deployed at Reagan National Airport in Virginia kidnapped Princeton University PhD student Eva Yi Xie, a Chinese-born researcher who has lived in the United States since 2016. The neuroscientist was on her way home to New Jersey when she was taken. The day before she was kidnapped, Xie presented her research to colleagues at the Society for Neuroscience's annual meeting in Washington D.C.

Two days later, passengers boarding a flight to Los Angeles at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport watched masked and plainclothes agents seize Ricardo Larrondo Mendoza and his daughter, Sofia Hernandez Mejia, on the jet bridge. Both had lived in Washington state since 2015. Like Xie, they had entered the US legally, held federal work permits and were waiting for the government to decide their asylum case. Neither flight crossed an international border.

Xie came to the United States from Shanghai in 2016 at age 14. As a high school student in New York, she wrote, "My parents were compelled to flee to America to seek refuge after being politically persecuted." She became a finalist in the Regeneron Science Talent Search, graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and joined the Princeton Neuroscience Institute in 2024. Now in the third year of her doctorate, she studies how the brain makes decisions.

The Department of Homeland Security claims Xie "chose to violate our nation's laws" when, as a child, she remained in the country after her temporary visa expired in September 2016. Her attorney, Kerry Doyle, said Xie has no criminal history and is authorized to live, work and study in the US while her asylum claim is pending. The government has scheduled her next immigration court appearance for January 2028.

Princeton arranged counsel for Xie, whose lawyers filed a habeas corpus petition challenging her detention. On Friday, federal Judge Anthony Trenga barred ICE from moving her outside the Eastern District of Virginia without a further court order and gave the government until 5 p.m. Wednesday, November 25, to respond. On Monday, Xie remained imprisoned at the Caroline Detention Facility in Bowling Green, Virginia. Students and local organizations called an emergency rally for her release at Princeton.

Xie's arrest is part of an ongoing and escalating campaign by the immigration police targeting international students. On October 30, ICE seized University of California, Berkeley student Paula Valentina Albornoz Hernandez at San Francisco International Airport as she waited to fly to Portland, Oregon. She, too, had a work permit and a pending asylum case. A federal judge ordered her release, and she went free on November 9.

For Chinese scientists, the threat extends into the laboratory. As Washington accelerates its preparations for war with China, federal authorities have cast scientific exchange with Chinese colleagues as a threat to "national security." At the University of Michigan, prosecutors invoked the specter of "agroterrorism" over samples of a common plant fungus used in research. In a massive frame-up, the government kept plant biologist Yunqing Jian in jail for months. She eventually accepted a plea and was deported. In a separate case at Michigan, prosecutors dropped all charges against Xu Bai, Fengfan Zhang and Zhiyong Zhang in February, after the three postdoctoral researchers had already spent more than three months in federal custody.

On March 19, Danhao Wang, a 30-year-old postdoctoral researcher at Michigan, took his own life. The Chinese consulate in Chicago reported that federal agents had interrogated him the previous day. The university initially withheld his name and only publicly identified Wang only after the WSWS reported his death and named him on April 2.

At Sea-Tac on Saturday morning, Mendoza and Mejia were boarding Alaska Airlines Flight 1306 to attend a family baptism in California. Mejia's husband, a US citizen, was traveling with them. Passenger John Gaedeke told the Associated Press that the men who rushed the

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family never identified themselves. Passengers filmed the struggle in the narrow jet bridge. Mejia clung to an agent's leg, pleading, "Please, I beg you, I beg you, I beg you, no." In solidarity with Mendoza and Mejia, the flight crew refused to board the plane and departure was delayed nearly three hours.

Like Xie, Mejia was 14 when she came to the US. Family attorney Olia Catala told Seattle public radio station KUOW that Mendoza and his daughter entered on tourist visas in 2015 and that he filed for asylum for both of them within a year. Mejia graduated from Western Washington University and worked for a Seattle-area youth nonprofit. After marrying a US citizen, she also applied for a green card. Neither father or daughter has a criminal record. "Both entered this country legally. Neither has a criminal history. Both are pursuing their immigration cases through the proper legal process," Catala wrote.

Catala told King5 News in Seattle that the ICE thugs did not make themselves known before the boarding process. Instead, the agents attacked the father and daughter on the jetway as they were boarding the plane.

"Imagine if someone is running at you, who is not dressed as an officer ... you don't know who they are. So there was a lot of panic, a lot of chaos, officers grabbing her, coffee spilling," Catala told King5.

The liars at DHS accused Mejia of hurling hot coffee at the agents and announced that she would face a felony charge for assaulting a federal officer. Catala said the coffee spilled when the plainclothes agents rushed the family and grabbed her client. KUOW reported Monday that federal prosecutors had yet to file a criminal complaint. In an act of deliberate cruelty, the immigration Gestapo has separated father and daughter while they remain detained at the Northwest ICE Processing Center in Tacoma. When Catala visited on Sunday, her clients briefly crossed paths in a hallway where they could see one another but were not allowed to embrace.

Mass outrage over the latest kidnappings prompted Washington Democrats to spout empty words aimed at placating the population while the kidnappings and attacks on democratic rights continue. In a Saturday press conference, Democratic Washington Governor Bob Ferguson characterized ICE's actions as "deeply un-American" and called for "Donald Trump's ICE" to be "abolished and replaced with something more sane." In other words, the Democrats support immigration police; they just want to restore their reputation with a different name and uniform.

How did the immigration police come to be stationed at airports in the first place? In May 2025, ICE and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) formalized an agreement to share passenger information for immigration enforcement. This March, Trump ordered armed agents into major airport terminals, using long security lines during the partial DHS shutdown as his pretext. TSA screeners had gone weeks without full paychecks. ICE agents, financed under a separate multiyear appropriation, continued to draw theirs.

Senate Democrats agreed in March to fund the rest of DHS without securing a single restriction on the immigration police or requiring their withdrawal from the airports. Separating the spending bills allowed Republicans to use budget reconciliation to finance ICE and Border Patrol with a simple majority.

While millions voted in the midterm elections against the Trump administration and its fascistic anti-immigrant rampage, which serves as a spearhead for the attacks on the democratic rights of everyone, the Democrats have dropped any demands for ICE to leave the airports. Instead, as Rep. Smith wrote, they are seeking to "rein in" the federal agency with cosmetic measures, such as requiring agents to use body cameras or to be maskless.

The demand raised at Sea-Tac for ICE to be removed from airports and abolished entirely deserves the support of airport workers, airline crews, students and university workers across the country. But this demand will not be won through appeals to the Democratic Party or the corporate airlines. The fight to free Eva Yi Xie, Ricardo Larrondo Mendoza and Sofia Hernandez Mejia and all other victims of Trump's anti-immigrant rampage requires an independent movement of immigrant and native-born workers to drive ICE out of the airports, abolish the immigration police and concentration camps, and secure full democratic rights for all workers, regardless of birthplace.

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