

Land of the Free? Better Watch What You Say and To Whom. The Confiscation of Scott Ritter's Passport

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Many individuals who actually care about the United States Constitution and its guarantee of basic liberties for the American people have been seriously concerned over how recent Administrations, both Republican and Democratic, have taken steps to control and limit the rights of citizens to exercise free speech as well as freedom to travel and associate freely. This abuse of power, for that is what it is, has unfortunately escalated sharply due to the uncompromising commitment of the Joe Biden White House to both Israel and Ukraine. It manifests itself in many ways, but most often includes steps to make it difficult for concerned Americans to learn for themselves the truth about what is taking place in the various international hot spots that the US State Department appears to be cultivating in such a fashion as to bring the world to the brink of nuclear war.

Those truth-tellers who persist in exposing the criminality in high places have been targeted and labeled in some government circles as "info-terrorists" and there has been what appears to be a sustained effort underway to undermine the credibility of journalists who are daring to report favorably on either Russia or the Palestinians. Interestingly enough, the Ukrainians have established the gold standard in identifying dissident journalists through their Department of Disinformation called "Myrotvorets." It includes a list of names of those individuals who might be assassinated to silence them. The US has, not surprisingly, been [seeking to establish](#) a similar government agency, though hopefully without the kill list.

In the latest manifestation of denial of fundamental rights in an attempt to shut down a critic, on June 3rd the State Department forced former Marine intelligence officer, Chief UN weapons inspector, journalist and author Scott Ritter off a plane headed to Russia by way of

Istanbul and confiscated his passport. According to Scott

“As I was boarding my flight out of New York I was pulled aside by three armed Customs and Border Patrol officers, who seized my passport. When asked why, they said orders of the State Department. No further information was provided. My bags were removed from the flight, and I was escorted out of the airport.”

Ritter, who has been a persistent critic of both the ongoing wars in Gaza and Ukraine, was traveling to participate in the highly respected annual St. Petersburg International Economic Forum as a guest speaker. The seizure of the passport to block his travel is a violation of the First, Fourth and Fifth amendments to the Constitution of the United States.

In [an interview](#) later that day with Judge Andrew Napolitano, Ritter admitted that he had been taken aback by what had happened to him and should have been more aggressive in defense of his rights. He did not, for example, demand to see a warrant or be given a receipt for the passport and did not get the names of the three officers who had taken it away and escorted him out. He also should have demanded the name of the State Department Official who had signed the order to accost him in the most embarrassing fashion possible as he was boarding the plane and take his document.

Interestingly, Scott Ritter’s name appeared prominently on the Ukrainian “Disinformation” hit list. And not terribly surprisingly, the mainstream media, which is in sync with the government on the wars in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, did not give the Ritter story much coverage. The silence is particularly remarkable as the press, which has been protecting President Joe Biden and his Homeland Security lackeys as they watched millions of people illegally cross the Mexican border into the US failed to exercise any vigilance when a single American citizen was unsuccessful in trying to go the other way completely legally.

Ritter, to be sure, has been a powerful voice critiquing the Iraq War, where his inspections turned up no WMD and he declared, in August 2002, that a case had not been made for attacking Saddam Hussein. If George W. Bush and his gang of neocons plus Congress had only paid attention to Scott Ritter, the US [would have been spared](#) the loss of thousands of soldiers and the utter waste of trillions of tax dollars. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis also died as a result of the US attack on their country.

Since that time, Ritter has been an activist who calls for dialogue, negotiation and diplomacy to avoid wars, particularly in the current context where the United States is supplying tens of billions of dollars in arms to expand the war with Russia, sustain the attacks on Gazans and establish a pretext for a war with China over Taiwan. Ritter has traveled to Russia and Iran, as well as to other hot spots, without regard for his personal safety, driven by the desire to tell the truth about what is being propagandized in hopes that he will make politicians think twice about what they are doing. Scott has reported what he sees and describes the conversations he has had with local people without fear or favor, always with the objective of avoiding war and death. For his pains, he inevitably is accused of being a source of Russian and anti-Israeli disinformation and even acting as “Putin’s poodle,” but his information has proven to be overwhelmingly reliable.

Interestingly, this week’s incident was not the first time when Ritter was targeted by the US government for truth-telling. In the wake of the passport seizure, he recounted on X how

"The similarities between what happened to me on June 3, and what transpired some 21 1/2 years ago, are disconcerting. Then, the FBI carried out a concerted effort to prevent me from making a documentary movie, 'Shifting Sands,' about the flawed case for war being promulgated by the US government. They threatened me with arrest, they engaged in acts of physical intimidation, and—when this didn't work—they played a role in manufacturing a case designed to destroy my personal character in the eyes of the general public. The 2001 incidents were a warning shot across the bow for me to begin toeing the line. When I refused to do so, releasing my documentary film and actively speaking out against the US case for war with Iraq, the FBI then arranged to have the information about the 2001 incidents leaked to the press in an effort to destroy my credibility on the eve of a February 2003 trip I was planning to take to Iraq, together with a high-profile international delegation, that was designed to prevent a war between the US and the government of Saddam Hussein."

Scott is not alone in being a target for government attempts to discredit him. Almost anyone who has good access to media and audiences and crosses the established line will be confronted to a greater or lesser extent. Sometimes the confrontation does real damage as in the recent cases of employees of universities and government who have lost their jobs for speaking out in defense of the Palestinians. Has anyone in America lost a job for promoting an ongoing and highly visible genocide, i.e. Israel's apparent inherent right to kill tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians? No, that is considered acceptable speech by those who govern us and make up the rules.

Those of us who are under attack regularly for going against government writ sometimes exchange jokes about how defying the administration or Congress means going it largely alone in a fight against thousands of government lawyers who will be able to write or interpret the "rules" to crucify you staged in a selected court house before a co-opted judge where you will be certainly convicted. The threat is real, think of what Julian Assange is going through driven by a vengeful US government aided and abetted by those of a like mind in Britain, the home of the Official Secrets Act. The government nearly always wins when it comes to ruining one's life on spurious or transmutable charges like the Espionage Act of 1918. Scott will have to get a lawyer and sue the government in an attempt to get his passport back and along the way a faceless bureaucrat will no doubt accuse him of high crimes and misdemeanors.

This latest outrage reminds me of something that I and others went through a few years ago relating to Iran, another preferred target of Israeli/US government rage. In May 2018 I and others from many nations, including Israelis and even an American rabbi, attended what was a public media annual conference in Masshad, Iran hosted by the Iranian NGO New Horizon foundation to discuss "Jerusalem/al-Quds the Eternal Capital of Palestine." The discussions were wide ranging and include some sharp criticisms of Iranian policy. At the time, the Trump Administration was preparing to withdraw from the JCPOA agreement which monitored the Iranian nuclear program and was also ready to declare Jerusalem the capital of Israel, an illegal move. Trump's Treasury Department was pursuing a policy of "maximum pressure" on Iran and groups like the Jewish Anti-Defamation League were calling the conference an ["anti-Semitic gathering"](#) that "included US and international anti-Semites, Holocaust deniers and anti-war activists." The conference nevertheless proceeded peacefully, culminating in a press conference in Tehran that I and others spoke at which was open to the international media.

Image: Sigal Mandelker (From the Public Domain)



Unfortunately, someone in Washington did not like the idea of a conference that brought together people from many nations and beliefs to discuss a contentious international problem. In February 2019, Sigal Pearl Mandelker, then Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence and an Israeli citizen, ordered the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) to sanction the American-educated founder of New Horizon Nader Talebzadeh Ordoubadi as well as his Lebanese wife, Zeina Mehanna, his organization The New Horizon Conference (NHC), and some of its staff for holding the conference. Ostensibly and perhaps inevitably the reason was “anti-Semitism, Holocaust Denial, and allowing Iranian intelligence to recruit attendees.” Mandelker, by the way, was suspected of having links to Israeli intelligence, Mossad. She was *inter alia* [reportedly involved in brokering the infamous Florida deal](#) that allowed the wealthy child sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein and probable Israeli spy to avoid federal charges.

I may have inadvertently been the source of the claim about Iranian intelligence operating at the conference in Mashhad. Shortly after I returned from Iran to the US, I was visited by two FBI officers who wanted to talk about the gathering. They were polite enough, and when they asked if I thought that Iranian intelligence officers were “working” the conference I replied that they most definitely were but while New Horizon certainly knew about it I strongly believe that they had no choice and were not actually complicit in what was going on. In fact, I was personally “pitched” three times – once by an officer posing as a journalist; once by an officer posing as a foreign ministry official; and once by two intelligence officers using alias names who, I later learned, were the head and deputy head of the Ministry of Intelligence. I was not threatened in any way during the pitches, but I was, of course, in their country and completely under their control.

In order to place in context what took place, I would point out that any international conference almost anywhere in the world like the one we attended in Mashhad would be covered by the local intelligence service in an attempt to make recruitments and obtain information. The CIA has an entire division called National Collection which spends much of its time going to conferences in the US where foreign targets will be present. In like fashion operate the British, French, Mossad, Russian and Chinese services. In my opinion, targeting New Horizon for sanctions because an event hosted by it was exploited by its country’s intelligence service is wrong because NH clearly had no choice in the matter. And it is what the United States and other countries do regularly.

The sanctioning of New Horizon became relevant when NH sought to host another conference in Beirut, Lebanon in September 2019. Roughly the same group of Americans, myself included, was invited to speak or otherwise participate. Several of the Americans were approached in advance by FBI agents, evidently acting under orders from Sigal Mandelker. The Agents warned that any participants in the conference might be subject to criminal indictment upon return to the US because New Horizon was under sanctions. One of those who was approached by the Bureau elaborated how “They’re interpreting the regulations to say that even if you only associate with someone who has been sanctioned, you are subject to fines and imprisonment...” The Bureau went on to explain how Iranian sanctions are somewhat unique. That’s because Iran is a “comprehensively sanctioned” country, meaning that anything having to do with “supporting it” is sanctionable, including tourist visits that aid its economy. We were informed confidentially that if we attended the conference we would be arrested upon our return and would face criminal prosecution as well as possible fines up to \$300,000. We all decided not to go and the conference gathering proceeded peacefully without any US input.

The point I am trying to make is that this has been going on for quite some time and rather aggressively by the US government, yet even a well-informed American is probably completely unaware of how he or she can be stripped of fundamental constitutional rights without any ability to push back against the system. And it comes from both Democratic and Republican administrations as well as from government agencies that have been corrupted to the point where they exist to serve their political masters rather than the American people. Hopefully, Scott Ritter will get his passport back and be free both to travel again and speak his mind. We need him and also millions more voices challenging the horrors that have been coming out of Washington.

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