

FBI raids home of Washington Post reporter in ‘highly unusual and aggressive’ move

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The FBI raided the home of a [Washington Post](#) reporter early on Wednesday in what the newspaper called a “highly unusual and aggressive” move by law enforcement, and press freedom groups condemned as a “tremendous intrusion” by the [Trump administration](#).

Agents descended on the Virginia home of Hannah Natanson as part of an investigation into a government contractor accused of illegally retaining classified government materials.

An email sent on Wednesday afternoon to Post staff from the executive editor, Matt Murray, obtained by the Guardian, said agents turned up “unannounced”, searched her home and seized electronic devices.

“This extraordinary, aggressive action is deeply concerning and raises profound questions and concern around the constitutional protections for our work,” the email said.

“The [Washington Post](#) has a long history of zealous support for robust press freedoms. The entire institution stands by those freedoms and our work.”

“It’s a clear and appalling sign that this administration will set no limits on its acts of aggression against an independent press,” Marty Baron, the Post’s former executive editor, told the Guardian.

Murray said neither the newspaper nor Natanson were told they were the target of a justice department investigation.

Pam Bondi, the attorney general, said in [a post on X](#) that the raid was conducted by the justice department and FBI at the request of the Pentagon.

The warrant, she said, was executed “at the home of a Washington Post journalist who was obtaining and reporting classified and illegally leaked information from a Pentagon contractor. The leaker is currently behind bars.”

The statement gave no further details of the raid or investigation. Bondi added: “The [Trump administration](#) will not tolerate illegal leaks of classified information that, when reported, pose a grave risk to our nation’s national security and the brave men and women who are serving our country.”

The reporter’s home and devices were searched, and her Garmin watch, phone, and two laptop computers, one belonging to her employer, were seized, the newspaper said. It added that agents told Natanson she was not the focus of the investigation, and was not accused of any wrongdoing.

A warrant obtained by [the Post](#) cited an investigation into Aurelio Perez-Lugones, a system administrator in Maryland with a top secret security clearance who has been accused of accessing and taking home classified intelligence reports.

Natanson, the Post said, covers the federal workforce and has been a part of the newspaper’s “most high-profile and sensitive coverage” during the first year of the second Trump administration.

As the paper noted in its report, it is “highly unusual and aggressive for law enforcement to conduct a search on a reporter’s home”.

In a [first-person account](#) published last month, Natanson described herself as the Post’s “federal government whisperer”, and said she would receive calls day and night from “federal workers who wanted to tell me how President Donald Trump was rewriting their workplace policies, firing their colleagues or transforming their agency’s missions”.

“It’s been brutal,” the article’s headline said.

Natanson said her work had led to 1,169 new sources, “all current or former federal employees who decided to trust me with their stories”. She said she learned information “people inside government agencies weren’t supposed to tell me”, saying that the intensity of the work nearly “broke” her.

The federal investigation into Perez-Lugones, the Post said, involved documents found in his lunchbox and his basement, according to an [FBI](#) affidavit. The criminal complaint against him does not accuse him of leaking classified information, the newspaper said.

Press freedom groups were united in their condemnation of the raid on Wednesday.

“Physical searches of reporters’ devices, homes and belongings are some of the most invasive investigative steps law enforcement can take,” Bruce D Brown, president of the Reporters’ Committee for Freedom of the Press, said in a statement.

“There are specific federal laws and policies at the Department of Justice that are meant to limit searches to the most extreme cases because they endanger confidential sources far beyond just one investigation and impair public interest reporting in general.

“While we won’t know the government’s arguments about overcoming these very steep hurdles until the affidavit is made public, this is a tremendous escalation in the administration’s intrusions into the independence of the press.”

Jameel Jaffer, executive director of the Knight First Amendment Institute, demanded a public explanation from the justice department of “why it believes this search was necessary and legally permissible”.

In a statement, Jaffer said: “Any search targeting a journalist warrants intense scrutiny because these kinds of searches can deter and impede reporting that is vital to our democracy.

“Attorney General Bondi has weakened guidelines that were intended to protect the freedom of the press, but there are still important legal limits, including constitutional ones, on the government’s authority to use subpoenas, court orders, and search warrants to obtain information from journalists.

“Searches of newsrooms and journalists are hallmarks of illiberal regimes, and we must ensure that these practices are not normalized here.”

Seth Stern, chief of advocacy for the Freedom of the Press Foundation, said it was “an alarming escalation in the Trump administration’s multipronged war on press freedom” and called the warrant “outrageous”.

“The administration may now be in possession of volumes of journalist communications having nothing to do with any pending investigation and, if investigators are able to access them, we have zero faith that they will respect journalist-source confidentiality,” he said.

Tim Richardson, journalism and disinformation program director at PEN America, said: “A government action this rare and aggressive signals a growing assault on independent reporting and undermines the First Amendment.

“It is intended to intimidate sources and chill journalists’ ability to gather news and hold the government accountable. Such behavior is more commonly associated with authoritarian police states than democratic societies that recognize journalism’s essential role in informing the public.”

The Post has had a rocky relationship with the Trump administration in recent months, despite its billionaire owner, Jeff Bezos, the Amazon founder, attempting to curry favor by blocking it from endorsing Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee, in the 2024 presidential election.

Bezos defended the action, which saw [the desertion of more than 200,000 subscribers](#) in protest.