

CBP Lied About Iranian-American Detentions, Leaked Memo Suggests

If this memo is authentic, CBP has been caught in a lie.

By [Scarlet Kim](#) and [Hugh Handeyside](#)

Global Research, February 07, 2020

[ACLU](#) 3 February 2020

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence, Law and Justice](#)

Last month, U.S. Customs and Border Protection [adamantly denied](#) that it was detaining U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents of Iranian descent and interrogating them about their religion and political views. The agency also assured the public that it had not issued any directive related to the detentions and interrogations.

There was already strong reason to question CBP's denials, given the [mounting](#) and [consistent](#) reports that border officers were, in fact, targeting travelers of Iranian heritage returning to Washington state from Canada. Now, we have even more reason to think CBP lied.

Last Thursday, a local Washington paper [published](#) a leaked [CBP directive](#), which appears to have originated with CBP's Seattle Field Office. Sure enough, the directive instructs officers to target and detain travelers based on their national origin and to interrogate them about their religious background and beliefs.



Source: [The Northern Light](#)

If this directive is authentic, CBP has been caught in a lie — one that concealed troubling and abusive treatment of travelers who hadn't done anything wrong.

The directive is a damning document. It makes clear that CBP officers are to target and detain travelers whose national origin or citizenship is Iranian, Lebanese, or Palestinian. It also explicitly instructs officers to interrogate these travelers on their religious affiliation and beliefs, specifically making references to Muslims of the Shia sect.

To be clear, the government has the authority to question travelers to verify their identity, citizenship, or legal status, and to conduct reasonable searches for contraband. The government cannot, however, select travelers for further questioning based on their national origin. And questioning travelers about their political views, associations with others, or religious beliefs and practices can infringe on rights guaranteed by the Constitution and federal law, which we do not surrender at the border.

This kind of biased targeting is nakedly discriminatory. It wrongly renders whole classes of people inherently suspect simply by virtue of who their parents are, where they were born, or what religion they practice. It is also, in many ways, an extension of the Muslim ban —

which affects a large number of Iranians — and the Trump administration’s stereotyping, unjust profiling, and targeting of Muslims more broadly.

This targeting is also incredibly demeaning and stigmatizing to the people who experience it. One [mother](#) who was detained in Washington state by CBP in early January couldn’t bring herself to explain to her two young children what was happening during their detention. Instead, she went outside the facility to cry so they wouldn’t see her break down. Others — including U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents — lamented that even if they are born in the United States or have lived here for decades, they’re still being treated as outsiders.

The reported CBP directive also puts the agency’s downright bigotry and ignorance on full display. The directive states that CBP is looking for people with connections to the military or Iran’s specialized Quds Forces, and then draws a broad and vague connection to the Shia sect of Islam. But there are between 160 and 210 million Shia Muslims [worldwide](#), and approximately 93% of Iran’s population is Shia, so the connection CBP is drawing is based on nothing but bias.

CBP goes on to warn in the directive that “anyone can state they are from a different faith to mask their intentions.” But one’s faith — whether it is Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or any other religion — says nothing relevant about one’s “intentions,” whatever that means. That is why this kind of broad-brush targeting, in addition to being wrong and unfair, is a colossal waste of time and taxpayer resources.

Compounding these concerns, the directive instructs CBP’s highly secretive teams, dubbed Tactical Terrorism Response Teams, or “TTRTs,” to vet travelers of Iranian, Lebanese, or Palestinian heritage. According to [public statements](#) by CBP officials, these secret teams already have a troubling record of harassing innocent travelers, and the officers who comprise them may rely on their “instincts” to target travelers who the government has never identified as posing a security risk. We’re currently [suing](#) CBP over the secrecy shrouding these teams.

The leaked directive continues a broader pattern of CBP misconduct that ranges from [humiliating](#) and [harassing](#) to [cruel](#), [inhumane](#), and [lawless](#). CBP treats the border as a massive [dragnet](#) for vacuuming up [intelligence](#) on anyone who crosses it — a gross distortion of CBP’s actual authority. And this is not the first time CBP has lied or misled the public to conceal its [misdeeds](#). CBP officers have written [fake court dates](#) to send asylum seekers back to Mexico and [distorted statistics](#) to mislead the public about realities at the U.S.-Mexico border.

We will continue to hold CBP accountable and demand that Congress investigate CBP abuses. In the meantime, it is critical for all travelers — U.S. citizens, legal residents, and visitors — to [know and assert their rights](#) when crossing the border.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

[Scarlet Kim](#), Staff Attorney; [Hugh Handeyside](#), Senior Staff Attorney

The original source of this article is [ACLU](#)
Copyright © [Scarlet Kim](#) and [Hugh Handeyside](#), [ACLU](#), 2020

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Scarlet Kim](#) and
[Hugh Handeyside](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca