

Press Freedom Threatened as U.S. Government Seizes Max Blumenthal's Devices

Max Blumenthal discusses how the US-Israel partnership undermines press freedom. Blumenthal is the editor-in-chief of The Grayzone, an award-winning journalist and the author of several books, including best-selling Republican Gomorrah, Goliath, The Fifty One Day War, and The Management of Savagery. He has produced print articles for an array of publications, many video reports, and several documentaries, including Killing Gaza. The Grayzone: <https://thegrayzone.com/> Buy Diesen merchandise: <https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. Max Blumenthal joins us today, the editor-in-chief at The Grey Zone, to discuss a recent trip of his to Iran. So thank you for coming back on. I see that coming home from this trip to Iran to report on the funeral of Ayatollah Khamenei—well, initially, I want to ask you about some of your takeaways, which I will. But first, I thought it was interesting that the U.S. government seized your electronic devices upon returning, which is an important issue in terms of press freedom. I was wondering what exactly happened here.

#Max Blumenthal

Well, it relates to the whole story. I mean, we're facing a new, more intense framework of repression in the United States, which is being administered by a kind of class of white-collar criminals who are under the influence of Zionism and the state of Israel. And so, in some ways, it wasn't entirely shocking, but it is completely illegal what they did to me. It should be protected under the Constitution. I went on this reporting trip on July 4th, reported from the largest gathering in human history, got insights I would have never gained from the ground there, interviewed officials, academics, influential people, including negotiators, and participated in a public press event.

All I did there was reporting, and no one denies that I'm a journalist. I mean, I've been doing journalism for 25 years. I don't pretend to be impartial. I'm not objective. Objectivity is a fake concept, defined according to the parameters of the militant Zionist ruling elite that control the

corporate media that upholds the mantle of objectivity. And regardless, I am entitled to certain constitutional protections under the First Amendment, which protects the freedom of the press and freedom of speech, and the Fourth Amendment, which forbids illegal search and seizure.

The United States government is increasingly using the border and airports as a kind of zone of exception, where the Constitution does not apply, and the Department of Homeland Security has declared they do not need even suspicion of criminal activity to seize your phone. This needs to be challenged at the highest level. But when I returned, as you said, my phones were seized on that basis after I refused to open them. And there was never any basis to suspect criminal activity on my part. However, if there had been a basis for that, the government could have gone before a judge and gotten a warrant. But this was a warrantless seizure.

It's something they would not have been able to validate in any other space outside of that secondary screening area in the airport, which is why they're using it so promiscuously. Now, what triggered that? I'd been to Iran. We were there together at the Soeb International Media Festival. It was a public festival. I did reporting from there. I produced a documentary on Jewish Iranians and their community. I interviewed negotiators back then in May 2023, went around the country freely. It was not as insecure a situation as it is today. And when I returned, I was not subjected to any harassment. So what changed? What was different? First, obviously, there's a U.S.-Israeli war imposed on Iran.

But also, Israeli interests put me in the crosshairs this time. Laura Loomer, who is the creation of Zionist billionaires in many ways and is probably a client of them, if not the Israeli government through its various influencer channels, declared that I should be arrested, hauled off the flight by U. S. Marshals when I return, that I'm the leading voice of communism in the United States—which would come as a surprise to many of the leaders of the tiny communist organizations that still exist in the U.S.—and that I'm an Islamist, and basically I'm a terrorist, and every other issue she could think of in order to trigger some kind of harassment. She dared Markwayne Mullin, the Department of Homeland Security Secretary, to have me arrested.

She called for my house to be raided at 5 a.m. She called for Marco Rubio, the Secretary of State, to withdraw my passport. She was declaring that Scott Besant, the Treasury Secretary, should investigate my finances. And it was clear that, you know, some interests had put her up to this. Not that she doesn't believe in what she's saying, but, you know, there was a script, and the script was echoed by Canary Mission, which is an organization founded in 2015 to destroy the lives of college students who participate in Palestine solidarity activity. It's like an anonymous organization. It's based out of Jerusalem. It's an Israeli intelligence cutout. And they, you know, put crosshairs on me, declaring that I'm like an extremist who's there to honor Khamenei and not do journalism.

And everything flowed from there. It became very clear who wanted me to face harassment and repression when I came home. And it looks to me like I was targeted because of my viewpoint, because of my journalism, and because these elements, which effectively control the Trump

administration and its policy towards Iran, which emanate from Israel, needed to be satisfied that I was subjected to questioning, which kind of tracked with a lot of the attacks on me, as well as the seizure of my devices. Two other points I just wanted to make up front: one, they didn't seize all my devices. So if you're really looking for criminal activity, why wouldn't you take my laptop? I also had a digital camera. They just weren't interested in it at all. And two, no other journalist... I was in Iran on a press visa.

I was around all these other journalists. None of them were subjected to this level of harassment, and they were in many of the same places as I was. So, what explains that disparity in treatment? Again, it's viewpoint discrimination. And that is the basis of the lawsuit filed by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee on my behalf, led by its president, Janine Yunus, who is doing an incredible job representing so many targets of the Israel lobby in its censorship frenzy. Soon after that lawsuit was filed, Customs and Border Patrol called me up and said, "We have your phones. Come get them." They didn't seem, in my opinion, to want this to go before a judge. And the media pressure is beginning to get to them.

#Glenn

Well, in Europe as well, if they want to crack down a bit on press freedom or freedom of speech, they usually use that magical word "propaganda." Once someone throws this out, they don't have to define what it means. It's opposing the government narratives. They can throw out the word "propaganda," and suddenly all of those freedoms which one thought were carved into stone suddenly mean nothing, it seems. Yeah.

#Max Blumenthal

Exactly. I mean, it's all buzzwords. That's why the word "communism" was used, because the Trump administration, really under the influence of Marco Rubio, who's the king of the Gusano Industrial Complex of South Florida, has launched this new initiative against communism. It relates to Cuba. They're now targeting American left-wing activists. It's a way they're going to try to neutralize and criminalize the left. And so the word "communism" was used on me to try to paint me as some kind of threat who needed to be investigated without a warrant, in an extrajudicial, unconstitutional, and fundamentally illegal way. And I'm not, you know, knocking communists or, you know, I'm not issuing a critique of communism, but I've just never represented myself as a communist or participated in organizing along those lines. So it really just shows how desperate they are.

#Glenn

Well, what was it about your reporting, possibly, though? Or it could have been, again, just personal attacks against you. But what is it that you uncovered or reported on from Iran? Because I've seen some—well, you were there at the funeral. I saw you have a discussion with the creator of the Lego movies, which are excellent, by the way. But what is it that you discovered from your trip to Iran?

What was the mood among the people? Because the assumption in the media when the bombing began appeared to have been a consensus that the people would topple the government—or sorry, topple the regime—and essentially welcome, a little bit like the argument with Iraq, would welcome the U.S. and Israel as liberators.

#Max Blumenthal

Yeah, it's funny. I was just on Piers Morgan, and he was asking me, like, why didn't you investigate all the thousands of people who were slaughtered in the riots? And, you know, I did. They just didn't like the way that I investigated that because, you know, I went and looked for police officers to talk to about having their police stations surrounded by MEK members with automatic weapons and shotguns who were attempting to kill them, burn them, and behead them. It all started with police stations being attacked because it was a regime change attempt that was being instrumentalized by foreign intelligence from Israel and the West. So, you know, I'm doing the kind of critical reporting that exposes the criminal machinations of Western countries that have wanted regime change in Iran. And I'm showing a different side of Iranian culture.

For example, talking to women who are supporters of the Islamic Republic, who are out there participating in these kinds of patriotic rallies, and asking them, like, do you need to be liberated? And having them tell me, I'm a university professor, and it was our leader, Ali Khamenei, who gave me the space to be able to move to that place of leadership in our society, that there are more women in universities than there are men now in Iran, that we, you know, we don't want to be commodified and have our bodies objectified like women in the West are. So, you know, you're not supposed to show that. I went to the scene of U.S. war crimes. I think I was the first American reporter to report on an entire eastern Tehran neighborhood just being bombarded with eight missiles.

At least 40 people were killed. An entire family was killed in one strike, except for two members who were out of town. I went to some other sites that others had previously visited, like my colleague Wyatt Reed, but also just to highlight the criminality of the bombing of the Gandhi Hospital, which happened to be next door to the IRIB media complex, which was the target. Like 500 staff of the hospital are out of work. The IVF clinic was destroyed. The ICU clinic was destroyed. It was pretty upsetting to see that. I went to the Rafinia Synagogue, which was totally destroyed in an Israeli strike. You would think this would be a huge story in U.S. media. If Iran had firebombed a synagogue in London, it would be front page.

But Israel bombed a 50-year-old congregation in Tehran, and it barely registered. So I went to expose that—the bombing of the Azadi Stadium's volleyball and wrestling complex, where international competitions were held. I think I was one of the first reporters to visit that. And that's just a really titanic crime, considering how important wrestling is to Iran's athletic infrastructure. And I guess you could even say it's soft power because they win so many competitions on the world stage. And it was of a part with the attack by FIFA and the U.S. government on Iran's World Cup

soccer team, which they sought to cripple and strip visas from their training staff, preventing them from crossing into and staying in the United States.

It was pure oppression, and I would say rigging. So being able to do that before a very large audience—we have a big platform at The Grayzone, we're consistently one of the top 20 Substack sites in world politics—I think was a threat. But it's also my entire portfolio of reporting that I've been doing since 2009, when I started focusing on the region, that has put me in their crosshairs. And they were looking for an opportunity to harass me and get me persecuted by the government. And to them, this is the perfect opportunity, as well as to cast a pall of suspicion over me, like I'm some sort of Iranian agent who's collecting some paycheck to be there.

And when I came back, Customs and Border Patrol asked me, was I paid to conduct interviews? Which echoed the kind of sleazy smear attacks that I was getting. Like, why would I need to go all the way over there, traveling like 20 hours, to collect some money when I can just sit right here and monetize all of our content, which average Americans and people across the West support because they want to see me do this kind of independent and critical journalism, unlike a corporate press that has been discredited. So that's really why I was targeted. I was targeted because I was exposing the criminals, not because I was committing any crime.

And others who have been targeted as well in Iran, you could say the same thing about them. And that's why The Grayzone has consistently been targeted by these Five Eyes or harassed by these kinds of Five Eyes elements. It's not because we're criminals. It's because we're against the criminals who are setting the world on fire right now, not just in Iran, but also with Ukraine, through the Ukraine proxy war, really provoking Russia to retaliate against a NATO state. So we're in a very dangerous time, and it's a dangerous time for independent journalism. We're on the front lines of that at The Grayzone, and we are being targeted for that reason.

#Glenn

Well, obviously, yes, you say so yourself. You're quite critical of Israel's influence over American politics and society. And indeed, the people who harass you personally, as well as The Grayzone, also have their ties with the Israeli state. But how do you see this development going now? Because on one hand, one gets the impression that more people are essentially joining or sharing your sentiment — that is, there's a big split now from Israel, or at least much more criticism. But at the same time, we're also seeing Israel integrating further with the United States — for example, the fusing of the two militaries. This is quite interesting because it seems to be heading in two directions at once.

#Max Blumenthal

There's a new Washington Post-Ipsos poll out today that, uh, it's not being reported right. The way the corporate press is reporting it is they're focusing on how just 23% of Americans think Trump will

be able to get a better Iran deal than Obama did with the JCPOA, and 11% of independents have confidence in Trump. But if you look deeper into the poll, it shows that almost no one outside the Republican Party in the United States supports this war. There's not just a majority, but a whopping majority who see no value in the U.S. war on Iran.

Then if you go back to June last month, or sorry, two months ago, to a Quinnipiac poll, almost no one outside the Republican Party supports the war or aid to Israel. A whopping majority opposes aid to Israel and thinks the current level of U.S. support for Israel is too much. So I'm pretty much, in many ways, in line with the majority of the American public, and that's another reason why there's this crackdown. There's nothing left. The last time we interviewed Glenn Diesen, you asked me, how far can Israel go? And when we say Israel, what are we talking about?

We're talking about a borderless country that has a concept that's based its political system along ethno-supremacist lines, that has no internationally recognized borders that it respects, in a permanent state of war with eight countries, the eighth being the United States—and it's a cognitive war, as Netanyahu defines it. So we know where the occupation starts, but we don't know where it ends. And when we talk about Israel, then we're talking about the Trump administration. We're talking about the Department of Justice. We're talking about, in many senses, the leadership of the FBI and other major government institutions, as well as state governments across the U.S., especially in red states. How far will they go? That was the question.

And I said, you know, my fear is that as they lose support and the public starts to turn against them and begin to actually organize against them and elect officials who, like the New York mayor, are considering arresting Netanyahu when he comes to New York according to the ICC warrant, or want to suspend aid to Israel, that they're going to take the same kind of actions that we've seen them use in the region, in southern Lebanon and in Gaza. We're talking about assassinations, kinetic action, terrorism, sabotage—worse than the kind of character assassination that we're being subjected to every day here already. And as I was away, a letter sat at my address, addressed to me by "YourDeadMeat," Y-O-O-R-D-E-D-M-E-E-T, you know, trying to be funny.

And it read, "Hey, fucking capo, you are moving up on the list. You are fucked. Signed, the Committee." And the return address was the field office of Representative Rashida Tlaib, who's the only Palestinian member of Congress, which means it's effectively a threat to her as well. I publicized this letter, and I started to hear from people across the country who got these same death threats from YourDeadMeat, postmarked in Buffalo. They're always postmarked at 2 a.m., which is interesting. And these are people who have been previously targeted by major Zionist institutions, like Zionist media organizations or campus Zionist organizations, and then they received these letters. One person I spoke to who received this letter has actually received 20 threatening letters.

The letters they showed me were shocking compared to what I received. One contained powder, which was rat poison, and another contained a rusty nail. We have a real problem on our hands here in the United States. We have an element that is primed for terrorism, that is entitled, that is

accustomed to having \$4 billion of aid a year sent to the apartheid colony that forms the central pillar of their identity. And the American public is moving away from them and moving against them politically and wants to push toward an end to this disastrous special relationship, which has been so costly to Americans, as we see through the economic cost of the Iraq war and now the death toll of U.S. service members. And as that contradiction grows, I think we're going to see an increasing threat of Jewish extremist violence in the U.S., and we have to worry. Has the FBI been so thoroughly penetrated that they cannot crack down on it? I reported that letter to the postal inspection and have heard nothing back. Fortunately, Representative Tlaib has reported the letter to the U.S. Capitol Police. I wonder what they are going to do. Is there a manhunt for the person sending this letter?

#Max Blumenthal

Are they under— is there an investigation? As far as I know, the only person who's been investigated in the last week or two around this whole scenario is me, for doing journalism.

#Glenn

Yeah, this is a problem when countries are at war. It's very hard to maintain basic civil liberties and freedom of speech and, well, not be intimidated or threatened in this way. Anyway, yeah, we can leave it there. I just always think that... if the US isn't able to stand up for basic press freedoms and freedom of speech, it doesn't look good in Europe. Anyway, do you have any final thoughts before we wrap up?

#Max Blumenthal

Yeah, I do. I mean, democracy is not—our system is not fundamentally democratic. Democracy is simply defined by the rights that we force our system and our government to provide to us through mobilization and through action. And it's only thanks to the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee—and its President Jeanine Yunus and their team—that I have had any legal recourse against this legal action. And so these are the true democratic fighters in our country against a system that is shredding the Constitution right before our eyes. So I just wanted to highlight the important work they're doing for me and for so many other people who are facing the consequences of this massive censorship frenzy, which is guided by a foreign apartheid state.

#Glenn

Well, Max, thank you so much for your time.

#Max Blumenthal

Thanks a lot, Glenn Diesen.

