

Iraq War Resister Unlawfully Arrested in Canada

Arrested at the Request of the US Army

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Iraq War Resister Kyle Snyder Arrested in Canada , then Released

On Friday, February 23, U.S. war resister Kyle Snyder was arrested in British Columbia for unspecified immigration violations. Police in Nelson, BC barged into Snyder's home, handcuffed him, and hauled him off to jail. The police had no warrant. Snyder, who was wearing only a robe and boxer shorts at the time, was not allowed to put on clothes or shoes. He was not read his rights or allowed to call his lawyer. Nelson police told him he would be deported to the U.S. , where he is wanted for unauthorized absence from the U.S. Army.

Snyder's housemates, Ryan and Jenna Johnson, frantically called Members of Parliament who, in turn, called Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Immigration officials then informed Nelson police they had no legal basis for arresting Snyder. Nelson Police released Snyder after holding him incommunicado for six hours. Joci Peri, an Immigration official in Vancouver , later told Snyder he had been arrested at the request of the U.S. Army.

Being AWOL from another country's military is not an extraditable offense in Canada , nor does it have any bearing on immigrating to Canada , according to Vancouver lawyer Daniel McLeod, who is representing Snyder. "And the U.S. Army is not the boss of the Canadian police," says Gerry Condon of Project Safe Haven.

War resister advocates on both sides of the border were outraged upon hearing the news of Snyder's arrest.

"We hope that the Nelson, BC Police will be held accountable for their actions," said Lee Zaslofsky, who coordinates the War Resister Support Campaign in Toronto . "Kyle was treated in a degrading manner that is completely contrary to Canadian values. Kyle Snyder is a man of courage and decency. He spent months in Iraq under very difficult conditions. It is disgraceful that he should receive such ill treatment in Canada ."

But Zaslofsky was grateful that the incident was favorably resolved in a matter of hours.

"We believe that the quick response of Alex Atamanenko, (NDP- British Columbia Southern Interior) and Bill Siksay (NDP - Burnaby Douglas) shows that war resisters in Canada have strong allies who are ready to act to protect their rights. We thank them for their energetic and effective intervention."

The War Resister Support Campaign is pressing the Canadian government to create a sanctuary policy for military personnel who, obeying international laws, refuse to participate in war crimes. Member of Parliament Alex Atamanenko agrees:

" Canada needs to rethink its policy in regard to war resisters and needs to welcome in Americans who have made the decision to say no to military involvement in their country's war. I am pleased that Kyle Snyder has been released from detention and I am thankful that joint action on a number of fronts helped lead to his release."

Kyle and his Canadian fiancé, Maleah, are recovering from his traumatic abduction.

"I wake up thinking, 'Did that really happen?'" says Snyder. "I thought Canada was a sovereign nation."

Snyder, 23, came to in Canada in April 2005 while on leave from the Iraq War. Declaring the Iraq War to be "illegal and immoral," he applied for refugee status. But he was haunted by his uncertain future in Canada . Late last year the Colorado native turned himself in to U.S. Army authorities at Fort Knox , Kentucky , who told his lawyer he would be quickly discharged and would not be imprisoned.

"But the Army lied," says Snyder. Faced with the prospect of being sent back to Iraq or to prison, he went AWOL again and traveled throughout the U.S. calling for an end to the war. On December 8, police in Alameda , California , attempted to arrest Snyder at a public event. Alameda police told the San Francisco Chronicle the Army had requested the arrest. So Snyder decided to return to Canada .

"I was planning to return to Canada anyway," says Snyder. "I love Canada and I love Maleah." The two will be married soon. Eighteen months later, Snyder may become a permanent immigrant of Canada .

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