

Trump administration admits Mahmoud Khalil committed no crime, seeks deportation based solely on his “beliefs, statements, or associations”

Jacob Crosse
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More than a month after Mahmoud Khalil—a legal US resident and graduate student at Columbia University—was abducted outside his New York City apartment, the Trump administration admitted in a court filing Thursday that he is being targeted solely for his participation in anti-genocide protests.

The stunningly threadbare memorandum, authored by Trump’s Secretary of State Marco Rubio, amounts to a blatant declaration by the US government that it reserves the right to disappear anyone who opposes its policies—no matter how criminal or widely opposed those policies may be.

On March 8, Khalil was kidnapped outside his apartment by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents who refused to present a warrant or identify themselves. He is currently imprisoned at the LaSalle Detention Center in Jena, Louisiana—more than 1,300 miles away from his pregnant wife, who is expected to give birth to their first child later this month.

During an April 8 hearing in Louisiana, Judge Jamee Comans ordered the government to provide evidence that Khalil is eligible for removal—or she could order his release as early as April 11. At the hearing, the government accused Khalil of withholding information about his contacts and associations and claimed that his “presence or activities in the United States would have serious adverse foreign policy consequences.” Khalil’s attorney, Marc Van Der Hout, firmly denied these allegations.

Instead of producing a shred of evidence to support its allegations from the April 8 hearing, the Trump administration submitted a two-page memorandum on April 10, signed by Rubio, justifying Khalil’s removal under the McCarthyite Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (INA).

Under the INA, Rubio wrote, if the case involves an individual’s “past, current, or expected beliefs, statements, or associations” that are otherwise lawful, the Secretary of State must personally determine that their presences in the country “would compromise a compelling US foreign policy interest.”

In his memo, Rubio provided no justification or evidence for his assertion, simply declaring that he had made this determination

based on information provided by the DHS/ICE/HSI regarding the participation and role of [redacted] and Khalil in antisemitic protests and disruptive activities, which fosters a hostile environment for Jewish students in the United States.

The claim that Khalil participated in “antisemitic protests” or fostered a “hostile environment for Jewish students” is simply made up out of whole cloth—a continuation of the slander that opposing Israel’s massacre of Palestinians is “antisemitic.”

The memo continued:

The public actions and continued presence of [redacted] and Khalil in the United States undermine US policy to combat anti-Semitism around the world and in the United States, in addition to efforts to protect Jewish students from harassment and violence in the United States. Consistent with E.O. 14150, America First Policy Directive to the Secretary of State, the foreign policy of the United States champions core American interests and American citizens and condoning anti-Semitic conduct and disruptive protest in the United States would severely undermine that significant foreign policy objective.

Everyday the Trump White House, and large sections of the ruling class, mine the fascist policies of Hitler, Mussolini and others for inspiration. If the US government was honest about

deporting those who “condone anti-Semitic conduct and disruptive protests” in the US and on college campuses, the gang of fascists in the White House would be on the first plane to El Salvador. During his first term, it was Trump who praised the “very fine” neo-Nazis that rioted in Charlottesville, Virginia, leading to the death of anti-fascist protester Heather Heyer.

In a statement issued after the government provided its “evidence,” Khalil’s lead lawyer Van Der Hout stated, “Rubio cites no real foreign policy issues or evidence whatsoever, and it is critically important to note that the US government is always constrained by the constitution, regardless of what officials might think.”

He added:

There is not a single shred of proof that Mahmoud’s presence in America poses any threat. Rather, what the government presented consists of Mahmoud’s role as a negotiator between Columbia University and hundreds of other diverse students, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, who spoke out against Israel’s slaughtering of innocent Palestinians in Gaza and the U.S. support and funding of that slaughtering.

Khalil—like the millions of students and workers who have participated in anti-genocide protests over the past 18 months—is not antisemitic. In multiple interviews and statements, he has spoken out against antisemitism, emphasized that the protests he joined were aimed at advancing “equality for everyone,” and affirmed that “the liberation of the Palestinian people and the Jewish people are intertwined.”

The “big lie” that opposition to the US-backed Israeli genocide of Gaza, which has killed or injured over 200,000 people, mostly women and children, is synonymous with “antisemitism” was first advanced by the Biden administration and has continued under Trump, with Democratic Party support. Three days after Khalil was kidnapped, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer released a statement that began:

I abhor many of the opinions and policies that Mahmoud Khalil holds and supports, and have made my critics of the antisemitic actions at Columbia loudly known.

Speaking during a Cabinet meeting on Thursday, Rubio promised to continue waging war on the democratic rights of students and workers, including sending them to the massive torture complex in El Salvador known as the Terrorism

Confinement Center or CECOT. He said:

We’ve also found cooperation in other countries that are willing to take some of these people, some very dangerous criminals. The president of El Salvador will be here next week. He has really been a good friend to the United States in that regard. These are some of the worst people you will ever encounter.

Referring to Trump’s “leadership” and “executive orders” Rubio added:

If you come to this country as a student we expect you to go to class, study and get a degree. If you come here to like vandalize a library, take over a campus and do all kinds of crazy things, you know, we are going to get rid of these people. And we are going to continue to do it. So when we identify lunatics like these, we take away their student visa.

In a revealing expression of the Trump administration’s overtly fascist character, the official ICE account posted a graphic on social media Thursday claiming that the agency’s job is to stop “people,” “money,” “products,” and “ideas” from “illegally” crossing the border. The post was eventually taken down after public backlash, with DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin telling CNN that the word “ideas” was a mistake and should have read “intellectual property.”

As of April 10, *Inside Higher Ed* has identified over 640 international students at over 120 colleges in the US who have had their legal status changed by the State Department, many with no warning or justification. On Thursday the *Daily Cardinal*, the student newspaper for the University of Wisconsin-Madison, reported that 26 student visas and alumni visa employment extensions had been terminated at the school.

This fascist campaign must be opposed by students and workers everywhere. In a statement issued on April 10, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US) called on students to not only organize on campuses but turn to the working class, “the vast majority of the population—as an independent force, against both capitalist parties, and on the basis of a socialist program.”



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