

# Federal judge issues preliminary injunction against detention and removal of Mahmoud Khalil

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On Wednesday, US District Judge Michael Farbiarz of the Northern District of New Jersey granted a preliminary injunction blocking the detention and deportation of Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist and Columbia University graduate student.

Khalil has been targeted by the Trump administration for his outspoken opposition to the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza and his participation in pro-Palestinian demonstrations at Columbia University.

In an Opinion and Order, Judge Farbiarz ruled that the government “cannot detain or deport Mahmoud Khalil for the foreign policy reasons cited by the Trump administration.” The ruling specifically addresses the government’s reliance on a determination by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who invoked a little-known clause of the Immigration and Nationality Act to claim that Khalil’s “presence or activities would compromise a compelling US foreign policy interest.”

Judge Farbiarz found that the government’s actions were inflicting “irreparable harm” on Khalil, both professionally and personally, and that the chilling effect on his speech was a violation of his rights. The judge wrote:

The Court finds as a matter of fact that Khalil’s career and reputation are being damaged, and his speech is being chilled—and this adds up to irreparable harm.

The judge cited evidence that the revocation of Khalil’s green card had already led to the loss of a job offer from Oxfam International and deterred him from

participating in constitutionally protected protests and free speech activities.

Ramzi Kassem, a co-director of CLEAR, a legal clinic at the City University of New York that represents Khalil, said:

Mahmoud has maintained since day one that the government should not be allowed to detain or deport him based on Rubio’s say-so. Today, the court agreed, and ICE should release Mahmoud immediately so he can return to his home and family in New York City.

While the preliminary injunction represents a legal obstacle to the Trump administration’s fascistic agenda, Judge Farbiarz paused the order until Friday morning to give the White House an opportunity to appeal. Meanwhile, Trump has made it clear that he and his Homeland Security apparatus have no intention of abiding by court rulings.

Judge Farbiarz’s ruling hinges on the use of the Secretary of State’s discretionary authority to override ordinary immigration protections for legal permanent residents. Secretary Rubio’s invocation of a “foreign policy interest” as grounds for Khalil’s detention and deportation was the central issue considered by the court, not any alleged irregularity in Khalil’s application or status.

The judge had previously indicated that seeking to deport Khalil for such reasons was “probably unconstitutional,” and his latest ruling makes clear that the government’s attempt to use foreign policy as a

pretext for silencing dissent contradicts the First Amendment and due process protections.

In addition to explicitly delaying the effect of his own ruling until 9:30 a.m. Friday, allowing the Trump administration to seek an emergency appeal, the judge also left open the possibility that Khalil could be detained for other, unrelated reasons should the government attempt to pursue them. These legal openings for the Trump administration show that Khalil's ordeal is far from over.

Mahmoud Khalil, a legal permanent resident and prominent Palestinian activist, was arrested by federal immigration agents on the night of March 8, 2025, inside his university-affiliated apartment near Columbia's campus in Manhattan. The agents informed Khalil's attorney that they were acting on a State Department directive to revoke his green card, citing his participation in pro-Palestinian protests and opposition to US support for Israel's war in Gaza.

Khalil was swiftly transferred to an immigration detention center in Elizabeth, New Jersey, before being moved over 1,400 miles away to a remote facility in Jena, Louisiana—isolating him from his wife, legal counsel and support network. Despite being a green card holder who had committed no crimes, Khalil has been held in custody for over three months, missing the birth of his first child after immigration authorities denied his urgent request for temporary release.

Khalil's arrest and ongoing detention are central to the assault by the Trump administration on pro-Palestinian activists, particularly targeting students and faculty at Columbia University and other universities where protest activity erupted following the launching of the genocide in Gaza on October 7, 2023.

The administration has threatened mass arrests and deportations for what it calls "anti-American" activities and has sought to punish Columbia University by withdrawing federal funding over its alleged failure to curb what it refers to as "antisemitism," i.e., denunciations of Zionist ethnic cleansing in Gaza.

Mahmoud Khalil was born in 1994 in the Gaza Strip, where he experienced first-hand the violence and deprivation imposed by Israel's blockade and repeated military assaults. As a teenager, he participated in youth-led initiatives for education and peace, before earning a scholarship to study in the United States.

Khalil arrived in New York in 2016 to pursue

graduate studies at Columbia University, focusing on Middle Eastern politics and international law. At Columbia, Khalil quickly became known for his eloquence, leadership and commitment to social justice. He played a leading role in organizing campus protests against the US-backed Israeli assault on Gaza, advocating for Palestinian rights and an end to the genocide.

Khalil married Noor Abdalla, a fellow graduate student and US citizen, in 2023. Their son was born in April 2025 while Khalil was still in ICE custody, a traumatic separation that has drawn widespread condemnation.

From the outset, the *World Socialist Web Site* has been at the forefront of the campaign to secure Mahmoud Khalil's release, denouncing his arrest, detention and threatened deportation as an attack on basic democratic rights.

The WSWS has warned of the implications of Trump's treatment of Khalil for freedom of speech and the democratic rights of the entire working class. The WSWS has demanded his immediate release and called upon students to fight for the mobilization of international working class in mass actions that would both win Khalil's freedom and halt the Gaza genocide.

The WSWS has insisted that the fight to free Mahmoud Khalil is inseparable from the struggle against war, dictatorship and the capitalist system as a whole, which is the source of repression and inequality.



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