

# Mahmoud Khalil files \$20 million claim against the Trump administration

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On Thursday, pro-Palestinian activist and Columbia University graduate Mahmoud Khalil filed a claim seeking \$20 million in damages from the Trump administration. Khalil, a Palestinian and permanent, legal resident of the US, was a leader of the Gaza Solidarity Encampment during April 2024 protests against the Gaza genocide at Columbia.

In a press release announcing the claim, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) noted that the claim is “a precursor to a federal lawsuit against the Trump administration” and that Khalil “would accept, in lieu of payment, an official apology and abandonment of the administration’s unconstitutional policy.”

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents abducted Khalil without a warrant or identifying themselves in front of his Manhattan apartment in March. The ICE thugs threatened to arrest his wife, eight months pregnant and an American citizen. Khalil was put in a detention center for immigrants in Louisiana and held there for over 100 days. He was released on June 20 by court order.

Khalil’s illegal abduction and detention were a key part of the White House’s efforts to overthrow the United States Constitution and establish a presidential dictatorship and part of the attempt, made by both Democrats and Republicans, to criminalize speech against the Gaza genocide.

Initially, the White House claimed that Secretary of State Marco Rubio had determined Khalil’s “presence or activities in the United States would have serious adverse foreign policy consequences for the United States,” which would justify his deportation under the McCarthyite Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952.

This argument was struck down in court, but the Trump administration continues to seek Khalil’s deportation based on allegations of omissions in his green card application.

In the press release, Khalil stated:

Nothing can restore the 104 days stolen from me. The trauma, the separation from my wife, the birth of

my first child that I was forced to miss. But let’s be clear, the same government that targeted me for speaking out is using taxpayer dollars to fund Israel’s ongoing genocide in Gaza... I will continue to pursue justice against everyone who contributed to my unlawful detention or spread lies in an attempt to destroy my reputation, including those affiliated with Columbia University.

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) assistant secretary Tricia McLaughlin responded by doubling down, stating, “The Trump Administration acted well within its statutory and constitutional authority to detain Khalil, as it does with any alien who advocates for violence, glorifies and supports terrorists, harasses Jews, and damages property.”

Khalil’s persecution is only the first in a series of cases in which the White House has detained and sought to deport students for pro-Palestinian speech. Courts have ordered the release of at least two other anti-genocide students from detention—Mohsen Mahdawi of Columbia University and Rümeyza Öztürk of Tufts University, as well as Badar Khan Suri, a professor at Georgetown University—while Momodou Taal of Cornell University was forced to flee the US.

The White House has targeted these students as part of a broader assault against immigrants. The illegal deportation of Kilmar Abrego Garcia, who was tortured in El Salvador’s notorious CECOT prison, and the detention of Ward Sakeik, a stateless Palestinian, are only two prominent examples.

The aim of this campaign is to establish precedents to criminalize political opposition. Already, Zohran Mamdani’s unexpected victory in last month’s Democratic party primary for New York City mayor has prompted a number of fascist Republicans to call for his deportation. The Trump administration is not afraid of Mamdani, a Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member calling for minor reforms, but it is terrified by the masses of people

who voted for him.

The efforts to deport pro-Palestinian students in particular are part of a campaign initiated by the Biden administration aimed at ending free speech on the campuses and subordinating universities to the state.

In March, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) released a statement condemning “the craven capitulation by Columbia University to the demands of the Trump administration to impose a regime of censorship on the campus.” The IYSSE wrote:

The university’s administration announced on Friday [March 21] a list of sweeping measures, including: banning masks on campus; hiring 36 “special officers” armed with powers to remove individuals and make arrests; and placing the Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies departments, as well as the Center for Palestine Studies, under the oversight of a senior vice provost appointed by the university.

In addition, the university announced the adoption of a new definition of antisemitism that includes criticism of Israel and “certain double standards applied to Israel,” a formulation designed to conflate anti-Zionism with antisemitism and suppress opposition to the crimes of the Israeli state.

The actions taken by Columbia have vast implications for free speech and democratic rights, not only on its own campus but across the entire system of higher education in the United States.

The IYSSE added that Columbia had responded to earlier pressure from the Trump administration by suspending and expelling student protesters and that Columbia had refused to defend Mahmoud Khalil from right-wing provocations by Zionist professor Shai Davidai.

Last week saw a number of developments indicating that the process of subordinating Columbia University to the Trump administration and the imperialist state has reached a new stage.

1. On Monday, Columbia’s Barnard College capitulated to a Zionist lawsuit. The college agreed to refuse to negotiate with pro-Palestinian groups on campus, restrict masks at protests and hire a new “Title VI coordinator” to enforce the equation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism.

2. On Tuesday, Shai Davidai left his teaching position at Columbia by mutual agreement with the university. The university had opened an investigation into Davidai’s harassment of pro-Palestinian students but dropped the

investigation Tuesday “without issuing any findings or conclusions of wrongdoing, and without imposing any discipline or penalty,” according to a statement.

3. On Wednesday, Columbia’s Acting University President Claire Shipman sent out emails apologizing for leaked text messages in which she criticized Zionist Columbia trustee Shoshana Shendelman. Fascist Republican Elise Stefanik, a leading member of the McCarthyite House Committee on Education and the Workforce, has called on Shipman to resign over the texts, which would make Shipman the third Columbia president to resign since Israel’s genocide in Gaza began.

4. On Friday, the *New York Times* reported that Columbia and the Trump administration may be near a deal to “restore at least some of the more than \$400 million in federal research funding the administration canceled. In exchange, Columbia would provide compensation to settle allegations of civil rights violations and increase transparency about admissions and foreign gifts, among other concessions.”

Meanwhile, Columbia students are bracing to be suspended or expelled for their participation in the “Basel Al-Araj Popular University” protest in May, which ended with the New York Police Department (NYPD) storming Columbia’s Butler Library and arresting about 78 protesters. On Thursday, the City University of New York (CUNY) suspended pro-Palestinian organizer Hadeeqa Arzoo Malik for one year and fired four pro-Palestinian faculty members.

With each passing day, it becomes ever more urgent to mobilize the working class against the White House’s attacks on immigrants and academic freedoms. Only the working class, organized independently of the Democratic and Republican parties and the trade union bureaucracy, has the power to ensure Mahmoud Khalil’s freedom, defend the rights of university students and faculty, and bring down the Trump administration.



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