

Louisiana immigration judge orders Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil deported to Syria or Algeria

Kevin Reed
18 September 2025

On Wednesday, a Louisiana immigration judge's order to deport Palestinian activist and Columbia University graduate Mahmoud Khalil to either Syria or Algeria was made public.

The order by Judge Jamee Comans is a significant escalation of the Trump administration's efforts to criminalize free speech and target opponents of the Gaza genocide for removal from the US.

The basis of the ruling is the claim that Khalil "willfully misrepresented" facts on his green card application and it denies him the discretion for relief, asserting he is unworthy of continued permanent resident status.

The ruling is notable for its transparent political purpose. Trump administration immigration authorities are pursuing a vendetta against Khalil who has no criminal record and has steadfastly refused to be intimidated.

The 22-page removal order, issued Friday and unsealed Wednesday, claimed that Khalil—a 30-year-old permanent resident and leading critic of US-backed Israeli war crimes in Gaza—failed to fully disclose information on his I-485 application for adjustment of status, specifically his affiliations with organizations supportive of Palestinian rights.

Judge Comans wrote that Khalil's "misrepresentations in his immigration paperwork were deliberate, made for the sole purpose of circumventing the immigration process and reducing the likelihood his application would be denied," and that "this court cannot and will not condone such action by granting a discretionary waiver."

The judge did not produce evidence of any criminal activity or security risk. Rather, she referenced Khalil's political organizing as a rationale for rejecting his requests for relief. The judge's arguments are a continuation in a different form of her prior ruling in

April, where she deemed Khalil a "national security threat," a finding his attorneys called baseless, highlighting the absence of any criminal allegations or evidence.

The order specifies deportation to either Syria, where Khalil was born to Palestinian refugee parents, or Algeria, from which he holds citizenship through a distant relative. Comans justified the dual destinations under statutes governing removal of stateless persons and nationals of more than one country. Sending Khalil to Syria may well be a death sentence. As for Algeria, he possesses no meaningful ties to that country.

Khalil retains protection from immediate deportation or further detention from a federal injunction by Judge Michael Farbiarz in New Jersey that prohibits his removal pending appeal. His legal team has 30 days to challenge Comans' order before the Board of Immigration Appeals and is preparing to escalate the case, citing grave constitutional concerns.

In public comments, Khalil spoke unequivocally about the intent behind his targeting, saying, "It's no surprise the Trump administration continues to retaliate against me for my exercise of free speech. Their latest attempt, through a kangaroo immigration court, exposes their true colors once again."

Khalil also stated to the ACLU, "This is further proof of retaliation for my political activity. They want to silence anyone who stands against genocide in Gaza."

Khalil completed his undergraduate studies in computer science at the Lebanese American University and was admitted to Columbia University's prestigious School of International and Public Affairs for his master's degree, graduating in December 2024.

While at Columbia, Khalil emerged as a leading spokesperson and negotiator for campus protests

denouncing the Israeli assault on Gaza. He came to the US as a student in late 2022 and has been a lawful permanent resident since 2024, building both personal and professional roots. He is married to a US citizen and is the father of a five-month-old son born while he was previously illegally detained.

Khalil's ordeal began in the early days of the Trump administration's campaign against critics of the US-backed Israeli ethnic cleansing operation in Gaza. On March 8, 2025, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents entered his Manhattan apartment building and seized him without warning.

Khalil denies any intentional misrepresentation, and no supporting evidence or criminal charges have ever been brought. He was detained in isolation for 104 days at the LaSalle immigration jail in Louisiana and was denied timely access to family and legal counsel.

As the Columbia protests, and others across the country, drew the attention of national and international press, Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio incited a campaign to label Khalil and other pro-Palestinian activists as "security threats" and "terrorist sympathizers," directly linking his case to efforts to criminalize protest protected by the first amendment.

The release of Khalil in June 2025 came after a federal court ruled that his detention was "unconstitutional," with Judge Farbiarz finding Khalil was "neither a flight risk nor a danger to the community," and that the government's case depended on "unverified tabloid reports and post-hoc justifications."

Still, the administration immediately appealed the order, pursuing an aggressive deportation campaign against him. Khalil has consistently maintained his innocence and denounced the political nature of the charges, stating upon his release, "They targeted me as a warning to others—this is about silencing opposition, not upholding the law."

The Trump administration, with the assistance of the Democratic Party and corporate media, painted his peaceful and lawful protest activity on campus as "anti-semitism" and support for "terrorism." Khalil was never involved in campus occupations or charged with any infraction during the protests, nor has he ever been arrested outside of the politically motivated detention.

Immigrant rights and civil liberties organizations have condemned the latest order. The ACLU, NILC, and Amnesty International have protested Khalil's punishment as "politically motivated retaliation" and called the decision by Comans a "dangerous escalation in Biden-Trump era criminalization of protest."

The National Immigration Law Center stated, "Khalil is entitled to due process. The Trump administration's open effort to deport him for activism exposes the accelerating slide toward fascism and the normalization of police-state tactics."

Student, faculty and legal defense organizations have issued statements, with Columbia's faculty union writing, "Khalil's persecution is an attack on all who seek to speak and organize against war and genocide—no immigrant is safe when protest itself is grounds for expulsion from the country."

The attack on Khalil's rights is central to Trump's bid to suppress any opposition to US foreign policy and the descent into dictatorship within this country. The argument that Khalil poses a national security threat—the same argument originally used by Secretary of State Marco Rubio in an unsuccessful effort to revoke his green card—is a fraud manufactured to conceal the administration's war on dissent, civil liberties and the First Amendment.

The deportation order also takes place within the context of the expanding repression in cities across the US, an expansion orchestrated by the White House. National Guard troops, federal police and ICE and FBI agents have been unleashed upon cities under the guise of stopping street crime.

In the aftermath of the shooting death of fascist political operative Charlie Kirk, the FBI has targeted student organizations, workers have been doxxed by fascist social media influencers and then fired by employers, and outspoken critics like Khalil have been publicly vilified as "terrorists."

There is a direct connection between that assault on Khalil's rights to the broader witch-hunt, as administration officials are using his case as precedent for mass removals and blacklists. As Khalil himself has declared: "They are expanding the police state and using my case as a blueprint. But we will not back down. The fight for Palestine and for democracy in the US are the same struggle."



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact