

FBI raids pro-Palestinian activists at University of Michigan, indicting 8 and arresting 7

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The Trump administration escalated its political persecution of anti-war protesters on Wednesday, as the FBI and federal law enforcement agencies raided homes across Southeast Michigan and unsealed a 63-page indictment charging eight individuals associated with pro-Palestinian activism at the University of Michigan (U-Mich) in Ann Arbor. Seven of those indicted were arrested in the raids.

The indictment, secretly filed on May 20 in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan and unsealed Wednesday morning, names:

- Zainab Hakim, 23, of Canton Township
- Amatullah Hakim, 21, of Ann Arbor
- Paige Feyock, 26, of Ann Arbor
- Ahmet Korkaya, 28, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Jonathan Zou, 22, of Ann Arbor
- Alexander Sepulveda, 23, of Chicago
- Miriam Odeh, 24, of Dearborn
- Colin Weger, 24, of Ann Arbor

Seven of the eight were arrested, six of whom appeared in federal court in Detroit on Wednesday. One person was arrested in Wisconsin, while another remained out of custody. A federal magistrate judge ordered that the defendants be held by U.S. Marshals until a 1:00 p.m. Friday detention hearing.

Some 40 people demonstrated outside of the federal courthouse in Detroit on Wednesday to protest the crackdown on anti-genocide activists and the widening assault on democratic rights. The *Detroit Free Press* reported one of the protesters, James Johnson of Detroit, a former member of the Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO), the union that covers graduate student workers at U-Mich, as saying: "I'm sick of the repression of anti-war voices. I'm sick of the black bagging of political protesters by our government."

The indictment alleges the defendants and unindicted co-conspirators, most of whom studied or worked at U-Mich, used encrypted messages, social media and collaboration with partners overseas to research, target and attack alleged victims, subsequently publicizing their activities on social media. In fact, the allegations involve non-violent acts of vandalism carried out to protest the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, which has directly to date killed 72,971 people, according to official figures, including tens of thousands of women and children.

The actual number of civilian deaths in Gaza is likely far higher, when deaths due to malnutrition, lack of health care and lack of housing are taken into account. An estimated 173,012 people have been injured.

The charges carry onerous federal penalties. The indictment charges members of the group with conspiracy to transmit threats to interstate and foreign commerce, a crime punishable by up to five years in federal prison. Zainab Hakim and Paige Feyock face the most serious charges, witness intimidation, a 20-year felony. The indictment also charges Alexander Sepulveda with destruction of property, which carries a five-year sentence.

U.S. Attorney Jerome Gorgon Jr. framed the prosecutions in nakedly political terms, declaring: "In America, we rule by law not by fear. These alleged threats and attempts to terrorize government officials, businesses, and the Jewish Federation are anti-American. We will counter intimidation with justice."

FBI Director Kash Patel amplified the announcement on social media, describing the arrests as targeting individuals who allegedly used "violent threats and attacks" following the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel.

The government's framing cannot be separated from its broader political context. The indictment notes that defendants were motivated by the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack and the ensuing war in Gaza—a conflict that Amnesty International and a United Nations independent commission have since characterized as a genocide perpetrated by Israel.

The University of Michigan has been a focal point of the anti-war movement since October 2023. Students have repeatedly demanded that the university divest its endowment from companies tied to Israel's military operations in Gaza. The university has refused all such demands.

The specific incidents cited in the indictment span from October 2023 through May 2024 and involve acts of vandalism, including the placement of broken dolls on the lawn of a university board member, spray-painting at the home of U-Mich Provost Laurie McCauley, and the throwing of jars containing a noxious substance into a private residence. The indictment also describes vandalism targeting the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit in Bloomfield Hills.

The indictment accuses defendants of marking targets with symbols associated with Hamas, including red inverted triangles and red handprints, and of using the internet and social media to amplify threats. It links their activities to pro-Palestinian campus groups, including the TAHRIR Coalition and Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE), the U-Mich chapter of Justice in Palestine. The University banned SAFE last year in retaliation for anti-genocide protests, including an encampment that was broken up by police in 2024.

Civil liberties organizations and activists say the charges represent a dangerous conflation of political protest with terrorism. The TAHRIR Coalition stated that the raids targeted pro-Palestinian protesters who participated in campus activism.

Council on American-Islamic Relations-Michigan (CAIR-M) Executive Director Dawud Walid condemned the raids, stating:

We call into question the aggressive nature of this morning’s raids of activists’ homes, which follows the recent misuse of prosecutorial power in Michigan and throughout our country against pro-Palestinian activists. In any other context, such minor infractions would be handled by local law enforcement or referred to local, elected prosecutors—not escalated to federal intervention.

The GEO issued a statement declaring: “We strongly condemn the actions taken today and all past and present repression of political activism.” It continued: “We urge University of Michigan administrators, the Regents of the University of Michigan, and Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel to end their campaign against students and stop putting academic graduate workers in harm’s way.”

Wednesday’s indictments are the culmination of a years-long campaign to suppress anti-war dissent at U-Mich that has enlisted local, state and federal authorities. This assault on political speech and democratic rights has been entirely bipartisan.

The Democratic Party administration of Joseph Biden, which armed and politically supported the Israeli genocide in Gaza, oversaw a nationwide crackdown against pro-Palestinian protests. It joined with the Republicans in smearing anti-genocide activists as antisemites, ignoring the fact that large numbers of those protesting were Jewish. The University of Michigan Board of Regents, which has pushed for the repression, is largely composed of Democratic Party supporters.

At the same time, U-Mich has collaborated in a government witch-hunt against Chinese researchers at the university, which has seen the arrest, jailing and deportation of scholars on trumped-up charges of smuggling toxic substances into the US. This campaign led to the suicide in May of post-doctoral research scientist Danhao Wang.

In April 2025, FBI agents and local police first raided homes in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Canton, seizing electronic devices from individuals associated with pro-Palestinian organizing. The raids were overseen by Attorney General Dana Nessel, a Democrat. At the time, rights groups condemned the raids, with CAIR asserting that “peaceful dissent is not a crime.”

In May 2024, following a large campus demonstration, several students were suspended from university jobs, and criminal felony charges were filed against multiple activists linked to protests and encampments. Attorney General Nessel ultimately dropped those felony charges in May 2025.

However, the university responded by intensifying internal disciplinary measures. In June and July 2025, the Office of Student Conflict Resolution charged 11 current and former students with violations stemming from protest activities, with possible sanctions, including suspension, expulsion and permanent bans from campus facilities.

The levying of federal charges under the Trump Justice Department marks a further escalation. What state authorities once deemed

insufficiently evidenced to prosecute is now being repackaged as a federal conspiracy, with the full weight of the FBI and the Justice Department brought to bear against student activists.

Meanwhile, fascist MAGA activists are being shielded by the Trump administration and the courts. On Tuesday, one day before the FBI raids, a three-judge panel of the Michigan Court of Appeals unanimously overturned the conviction of Joseph Morrison, a member of the Wolverine Watchmen militia, who is serving a prison sentence in connection with a plot to kidnap and possibly kill Governor Gretchen Whitmer during the 2020 election season.

The U-Mich prosecutions are part of a nationwide pattern. Since 2023, hundreds of students and faculty across the country have been arrested, suspended, expelled or placed on federal watchlists for participating in demonstrations against Israel’s military campaign in Gaza.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Michigan has filed a lawsuit challenging what it characterizes as the University of Michigan’s repressive policies toward pro-Palestinian protesters, suing on behalf of five people who received trespass bans following protest activities.

The charges unsealed Wednesday send an unmistakable message: Those who organize, protest and agitate against US support for the Israeli government’s operations in Gaza will face the full punitive apparatus of the state.

The working class must unequivocally oppose this assault on democratic rights. Whatever one’s assessment of the specific tactics alleged in the indictment, the deployment of the FBI, federal grand juries and sweeping conspiracy charges against anti-war activists is a blow against the democratic rights of the entire working population. The same legal machinery being used against pro-Palestinian students today will be used against striking workers, socialist organizers and all those who challenge the interests of the capitalist class tomorrow.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) demand the immediate dropping of all charges against the University of Michigan Eight and an end to the persecution of anti-war protesters nationwide.



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