



Silence is Not an Option: The Deportation of Mahmoud Khalil and the Future of Genocide Prevention in the U.S.

Released 26 September 2025

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security is alarmed by the recent decision from an immigration judge in Louisiana who ordered the deportation of Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil to Algeria or Syria despite a separate order from a federal district judge prohibiting the U.S. government from deporting or detaining Khalil while his case is adjudicated. Khalil, a Columbia University grad student and green card holder married to a U.S. citizen, was unlawfully arrested and detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in March 2025 for his leadership role in Columbia University's student protest movement calling for a ceasefire and an end to Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza. He was one of the first targeted by the Trump Administration's pledge to detain and deport student activists for their alleged "antisemitism" and "sympathizing with Hamas" in Trump's January 29 executive order, Additional Measures to Combat Antisemitism. Khalil's case not only demonstrates the intersection between Trump's crackdown on immigrants and those critical of the U.S. and its allies, namely Israel, but also is yet another nail in the coffin for the future of fundamental human rights and genocide prevention in the U.S.

The Lemkin Institute has previously written about the U.S.'s negation of international law, complicity in the genocidal projects of its allies, and open contempt for and undermining of international genocide prevention and accountability measures, specifically those of the United Nations and the International Criminal Court (See Red Flag Alert: Axis of Genocide - U.S.A., Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Israel, Russia & the Era of "Acceptable Genocide"). This contempt for and undermining of genocide prevention efforts has continued domestically as the Trump Administration has sought to criminalize said efforts in the case of Gaza and in turn use this criminalization to further demonize, detain, and deport noncitizens and citizens alike.

The Trump Administration used Israel's deliberate mischaracterization of genocide prevention advocacy in the case of Gaza as "antisemitic," "pro-Hamas," and "supporting or sympathizing with terrorism" to crack down on noncitizens, particularly international students. Trump's January 29 executive order uses this false characterization to justify revoking the visas of international students under 8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(3) for suspicions of "engaging in or endorsing terrorist activities" and "associating with terrorist organizations." In March 2025, Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced plans for an AI-assisted "Catch and Revoke" program to review thousands of student visa holder social media accounts in an effort to cancel the visas of those found to have "sympathized" with terrorists after Hamas' October 7th attack. The Administration even temporarily paused scheduling student visa interviews as it prepared to expand screening of applicants' social media accounts. Universities faced pressure from the Administration to collaborate by providing additional information on their international students and noncitizen staff and reporting on their activities. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem terminated Harvard University's Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) certification, which affects the university's ability to enroll international students, after the university refused to hand over information on the supposed "illegal and violent activities" of its international students.

The characterization of anti-genocide work related to Gaza as "sympathizing or supporting terrorists" also puts U.S. citizens at risk. In June 2025, the Trump Administration announced that it was prioritizing denaturalization efforts for naturalized U.S. citizens "who pose a potential danger to national security, including those with a nexus to terrorism." Republican lawmakers also recently introduced a bill that would give the Secretary of State the power to deny or revoke the passports of U.S. citizens who have been deemed to "provide material support" to terrorists. Thankfully, this provision was removed; however, Republicans will surely try again. Additionally, both noncitizens and citizens in the U.S. are at risk of criminal sanctions if they are found to make "any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services" to or receive any such contribution or provision from any individuals or organizations designated by the Trump Administration's ICC sanctions. Recently, the Secretary of State designated multiple Palestinian human rights organizations as subjects of sanctions, further threatening genocide prevention and accountability efforts.

While he was a grad student, Mahmoud Khalil was a permanent resident married to a U.S. citizen. ICE claimed that Khalil's status had "been revoked" and unlawfully arrested and effectively disappeared Khalil in March without a clear warrant, charges, or evidence of criminal wrongdoing. ICE then detained him in a facility in Jena, Louisiana. While an immigration judge in Louisiana ordered Khalil to be deported, U.S. District Judge Michael Farbiarz ordered that Khalil be released in June 2025 due to the fact he was unlikely to flee and had not been accused of any violence. Farbiarz also ruled that the Trump Administration violated Khalil's right to free speech by detaining and attempting to deport him under the Immigration and Nationality Act for

his pro-Palestine beliefs, an overreach that could have “potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences for the United States.” Khalil’s legal team [filed a claim](#) for damages for “false imprisonment, malicious prosecution and being smeared as an antisemite,” and federal judges in New York and New Jersey have ruled that Khalil cannot be deported or detained as his case continues. However, on 12 September 2025, an immigration judge in Louisiana ordered the removal of Khalil to Algeria or Syria, claiming that he had “[willfully misrepresented facts](#)” on his green card application. If the Trump Administration succeeds, this order would strip Khalil of his green card, though the previous order protecting Khalil from removal would still be in effect. In response, Khalil [stated](#), ““When their first effort to deport me was set to fail, they resorted to fabricating baseless and ridiculous allegations in a bid to silence me for speaking out and standing firmly with Palestine, demanding an end to the ongoing genocide.”

The Lemkin Institute has already reported on the Trump Administration’s genocidal aims to criminalize the mere existence of noncitizens in the U.S. by weaponizing lawful status and citizenship to target those deemed undesirable within MAGA’s vision for U.S. society (See [Trump's MAGA Model for Citizenship: The Supreme Court & the Threat Posed by Trump's Assault on Birthright Citizenship in the USA](#)). The Trump Administration’s increasing criminalization of genocide prevention and advocacy efforts regarding Gaza has fast tracked this process, allowing the Administration to target noncitizens and critics (both noncitizen and citizen). Those who find themselves stripped of their legal status by the Trump Administration due to their advocacy are at increasing risk of having their due process and first amendment rights violated. Like Khalil, these noncitizens are at risk for being unlawfully detained in the U.S.’s internal concentration camp system (See [Red Flag Alert for the USA #6: ‘Alligator Alcatraz’ & the Emerging Internal Concentration Camp System](#)) or deported to the growing network of third countries which form its external concentration camp system (See [Red Flag Alert for the USA #7: Trump’s Third-Country Network as an Emerging External Concentration Camp System](#)). With the escalation of the Trump Administration’s denaturalization efforts, U.S. citizens could also be vulnerable to these systems.

The future of grassroots and institutional genocide prevention efforts in the U.S. is under attack and inextricably linked to the Trump Administration’s contempt for fundamental human rights. U.S. society cannot stand by as activists like Mahmoud Khalil’s human rights are threatened for calling for an end to Israel’s genocide in Gaza. If the Trump Administration succeeds in removing Khalil, it will set a dangerous precedent not only for free speech but also for anti-genocide advocacy. The U.S.’s role as an Axis of Genocide at home and abroad must be stopped.