



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on March 12, 2025

Trump's Deportation Policies: Curtailing Free Speech, Shielding Israel?

For decades, the United States has positioned itself as the global champion of free speech. Now, under the Trump administration's latest crackdown, that ideal is being discarded — not to protect Americans, but, apparently, to shield a foreign government from criticism.

The administration's purge of pro-Palestinian voices, under the banner of fighting "antisemitism," sets a chilling precedent: Foreign-born residents no longer need to break laws to be detained or deported — they just need to hold the wrong opinion.



AP Images

The first casualty? A Columbia University graduate student whose supposed "threat to national security" boils down to condemning a military campaign funded by the Biden administration — now fully endorsed by President Donald Trump, who once rallied on a "pro-peace" platform.

The Detention of Mahmoud Khalil

Last Saturday, [ICE agents arrested](#) Columbia graduate Mahmoud Khalil (born in 1995) in a pre-dawn raid at his university-owned apartment in Manhattan. His crime? Apparently, there wasn't one.

Instead, Khalil, a Palestinian-born activist with Algerian citizenship, was targeted for his vocal role in campus protests against Israeli military operations in Gaza — actions that human rights groups have increasingly described as war crimes and genocide.

Originally, ICE agents attempted to justify his arrest by citing visa violations — only to discover that Khalil, in fact, holds a valid green card. In response, they shifted tactics and accused him of "antisemitic" activity, a term that, under Trump's new executive order (more on that later), includes organizing protests critical of Israel's military actions.

[Reportedly](#), Secretary of State Marco Rubio personally authorized the arrest. Under the law, he needed only "reasonable grounds" to decide that Khalil's presence posed "potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences" for the United States.

And what were those "reasonable grounds"? At a press briefing the next day, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt [spelled it out](#). She said Khalil was detained because he "sid[ed] with terrorists" and "disrupted college campus classes." She also said the activist harassed Jewish students and "made them feel unsafe." Finally, Khalil distributed "pro-Hamas propaganda." Ultimately, said Leavitt, he was "adversarial" to American "foreign policy and national-security interests."

Khalil's wife, an American citizen and eight months pregnant, said she was threatened with arrest for refusing to leave her husband with the agents. She claimed they never showed a warrant, [according](#) to ABC News.



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The court hearing of the Khalil's deportation case is set for today.

Khalil's Activism

If the Trump administration and its allies hoped to paint Mahmoud Khalil as a dangerous radical, their case took an unexpected — and deeply ironic — turn.

One of the notable examples came from former IDF member Eitan Fischberger, who took to social media with what he clearly believed was a smoking gun exposé. He laid out Khalil's supposed offenses: condemning Israeli occupation, negotiating with Columbia University on behalf of pro-Palestinian encampments, and giving interviews to " Hamas-aligned " media.

When you see people gnashing their teeth and rending their garments over the arrest and potential deportation of Mahmoud Khalil, one of the lead Hamas acolytes at Columbia University, show them this thread of his greatest hits □ pic.twitter.com/0neyS1mDGv

— Eitan Fischberger (@EFischberger) [March 10, 2025](#)

But Fischberger wasn't just making a political argument — he claimed Khalil was deportable under U.S. law. His reasoning? Khalil was a spokesman for [Columbia University Apartheid Divestment](#) (CUAD). That is a group advocating for Palestinian liberation through Columbia's economic and academic divestment from Israel. Fischberger reposted the assertion that CUAD had [voiced support](#) for "armed resistance by Hamas." That ostensibly placed Khalil under [8 U.S.C. § 1227\(a\)\(4\)\(B\)](#), a provision allowing for the deportation of non-citizens who represent groups endorsing "terrorist activities."

If this was meant to solidify the case against Khalil, it did the opposite. Because, as this crackdown makes clear, it's not about what Khalil has done — it's about what he represents.

Terrorists vs. Rebels

It is worth considering that, as inconvenient as it may be for those pushing this narrative, [resistance to occupation is legal](#) under international law. Despite withdrawing settlements in 2005, Israel remains the *de facto* occupying power in Gaza. It is still controlling the enclave's borders, airspace, and essential infrastructure. Multiple legal statutes distinguish between "armed resistance" and "terrorism." But geopolitical interests override legal precision and moral consideration, erasing that nuance.

Tellingly, the United States has not adopted the key international legal frameworks that define resistance against occupation as legitimate. That includes Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions and UN resolutions affirming the right to self-determination through armed struggle.

This omission is no accident. By rejecting these legal standards, the United States reserves the power to label groups based on geopolitical convenience, not consistent principles. It condemns resistance when it threatens U.S. interests while backing armed insurgencies when useful.

The result? Palestinian militants are "terrorists," but U.S.-sponsored rebels — no matter how cruel — become "freedom fighters." From Nicaragua to Syria to Afghanistan, history is littered with U.S.-funded forces that committed atrocities. Yet the groups never faced the same sweeping condemnations applied to those resisting Western-backed occupations.

In short, the legal distinction exists, but Washington ignores it. In that sense, "terrorism" is not a fixed legal category — it is a weaponized label, wielded as a foreign policy tool.



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Trump Applauds the Arrest, Promises More to Come

If anyone was still under the impression that Mahmoud Khalil's arrest was a benign immigration matter, President Trump himself wasted no time in dispelling that illusion.

On Monday, Trump took to [Truth Social](#) to personally celebrate Khalil's detention. He made it abundantly clear that this was just the beginning of a broader crackdown.

This is the first arrest of many to come. We know there are more students at Columbia and other Universities across the Country who have engaged in pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity, and the Trump Administration will not tolerate it. Many are not students, they are paid agitators.

If that wasn't clear enough, the official White House X account followed up:

SHALOM, MAHMOUD.

"ICE proudly apprehended and detained Mahmoud Khalil, a Radical Foreign Pro-Hamas Student on the campus of [@Columbia](#) University. This is the first arrest of many to come."

—President Donald J. Trump pic.twitter.com/gfuPd0tskf

— The White House (@WhiteHouse) [March 10, 2025](#)

Because, apparently, nothing quite says "equal application of the law" like a government account mocking a detained individual with a Hebrew greeting. Notably, Trump's [repeated use](#) of "Shalom" — a biblical word for "peace" — in a taunting context didn't go unnoticed. Some [Israeli groups](#), as well as major Israeli media outlet [Haaretz](#), condemned it as both inappropriate and blatantly political.

Trump's border czar, Tom Homan, reinforced the president's message. He told [Fox News](#) that Khalil is "one of many" to face deportations for their "crimes."

Trump's Executive Order: The IHRA Definition as a Weapon

The legal foundation for this crackdown is Trump's new executive order, signed in late January. The order builds upon the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. The definition states:

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

This definition is so open-ended that it arguably conflates political speech with bigotry. Calling Israel an apartheid state? Antisemitic. Opposing its military campaigns? Antisemitic. Questioning its [immense influence on U.S. policy](#)? Definitely antisemitic.

The new executive order expands upon Trump's EO 13899, signed in 2019 to clarify discrimination laws related to antisemitism on college campuses. As [reported](#) by *The New American*, the 2025 version shifts from clarification to active enforcement. It broadens federal authority and instructs agencies to take



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action against individuals based on speech rather than conduct.

For years, Donald Trump has railed against “cancel culture” and preached “America First.” Now, his administration is deporting foreign students for their political activism at the behest of a foreign state.

The irony would be amusing — if it weren’t so dangerous.

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