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Columbia University Student Activist Detained by Department of Homeland Security Following Threats of Deportation of Pro-Palestinian Students

The arrest comes on the heels of the Department of State's announcement that it plans to deport students affiliated with pro-Palestine protests. The student, who is Palestinian, is a lawful permanent resident of the United States.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK—On March 8, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agents arrested Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist and recent graduate student at Columbia University, at his place of residence, an apartment building owned by the university.

The DHS agents said that the U.S. Department of State had revoked Khalil's green card.

At approximately 8:30 p.m. ET, Khalil and his wife, a U.S. citizen who is eight months pregnant, had just unlocked the door to their building when two plainclothes DHS agents forced their way in behind them. The agents initially refused to identify themselves, instead asking Khalil to confirm his identity before detaining him without explanation. The agents proceeded to threaten his wife, telling her that if she remained by his side, they would arrest her too.

Later, the DHS agents stated that the U.S. Department of State had revoked Khalil's student visa, despite the fact that he has a green card, not a visa, and is a lawful permanent resident. An agent showed Khalil what he claimed was a warrant on his phone. Khalil's wife went into their apartment to retrieve his green card while the agents remained with Khalil downstairs. When she returned, advising them of Khalil's legal status and presenting them with Khalil's green card, one agent was visibly confused and said on the phone, "He has a green card." However, after a moment, the DHS agents stated that the State Department had "revoked that too." Khalil's wife then phoned his attorney, who spoke with the agents in an attempt to intervene. When Khalil's attorney requested that a copy of the warrant be emailed to her, the agent hung up the call.

Khalil is currently being detained in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody at 26 Federal Plaza pending an appearance before an immigration judge.

This significant deviation from normal immigration proceedings comes in the wake of increased and abnormal scrutiny concerning the actions of students alleged to hold pro-Palestine views. [Axios recently reported](#) that the State Department, Department of Justice, and DHS were launching a “Catch and Revoke” effort to identify alleged pro-Palestinian activists based on artificial intelligence screening of social media.

Khalil has been specifically and discriminatorily targeted by Columbia University for his Palestinian identity and outspoken activism on multiple occasions over the last 17 months. He served as a lead negotiator during the Gaza Solidarity Encampment last spring. He has frequently appeared in media interviews and press conferences. The university suspended him while he was on a student visa and reversed it within the same day.

Columbia University has published guidance on [how best to collaborate](#) with federal enforcement, including advising faculty and staff “not to interfere” with ICE agents even if those agents are unable to present a warrant. Over the last few days, there have been several reports of ICE agents approaching pedestrians and students in the neighborhood surrounding Columbia University’s Morningside campus, creating unsafe environments for students (particularly students of color), regardless of their immigration status.

Columbia’s continued acquiescence to federal agencies and outside partisan institutions has made this situation possible. A Palestinian student and member of the community has been abducted and detained without the physical demonstration of a warrant or officially filed charges. Like many other Arab and Muslim students, Khalil has been the target of various Zionist harassment campaigns, fueled by doxxing websites like Canary Mission. This racist targeting serves to instill fear in pro-Palestine activists as well as a warning to others.

An activist familiar with Khalil’s solidarity work said, “Mahmoud is foundational to our community. The state has escalated its repression of student opposition to the U.S.-backed genocide in Palestine, in which Columbia and all American universities are complicit.” Despite the chilling effect of this repression, the activist said that students “will keep fighting for Palestinian liberation and against state violence.”

Today, activists in solidarity with Khalil launched a petition demanding his release from ICE custody. The petition can be found at <https://shorturl.at/Lm86S>.