

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8929>



USA

The attacks on us all

- IV Online magazine - 2025 - IVP603 - April 2025 -

Publication date: Saturday 5 April 2025

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A multi-front attack is in full swing — not only on supporters of Palestinian freedom, but on everyone’s First Amendment and civil rights. The abduction of Mahmoud Khalil, the peremptory deportation of Brown Medicine Dr. Rasha Alawieh, the attempt to detain and deport Columbia University Ph.D student Ranjani Srinivasan who’s fled to seek asylum in Canada, and the seizure of Georgetown University scholar Badar Khan Suri — none of these, and many more cases that haven’t attracted public attention, are happening in isolation.

The same Trump executive orders withdrawing \$400 million in federal grants to Columbia University — whose administration’s response will live forever in the chronicles of cynical cowardice — are now also pulling \$175 million from the University of Pennsylvania for the unrelated offense of allowing transgender athletes to compete in male sports.

These are not separate issues or individual cases to be legally parsed on their own. The open intention of the Trump regime and the gaggle of billionaires, far-right ideologues and white-supremacist Christian nationalists behind it, is to destroy, intimidate and convert U.S. universities and colleges into fully obedient agencies of corporate power and political reaction.

The same agenda is evident in the drive to criminalize Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) programs in the public and private sector, cripple Social Security and Medicaid, pulverize the federal work force and wipe out the agencies that serve military veterans, school children and the rights of workers to organize unions and survive on the job.

Attacking the brave and powerful Palestine solidarity movement on U.S. campuses and communities is a wedge to pursue this all-out rightwing offensive. Palestine in its own right, of course, is an absolutely central global issue as the full-scale joint Israeli-U.S. genocide in Gaza has resumed with Israel’s defense minister vowing “total destruction” of what’s left of that territory and its 2.2 million people.

To review a few basic facts: Mahmoud Khalil, the Columbia graduate with a green card and eight-month pregnant wife Noor Abdalla, was grabbed March 8 by Department of Homeland Security plainclothes agents as the couple returned to their university-owned residence. Columbia had ignored Khalil’s requests for protection as he’d sensed he was being followed.

A prominent activist during last year’s encampment and a negotiator for the peaceful resolution of the occupation, Khalil has never been charged with any crime or university disciplinary action. Upon being told his “student visa” (nonexistent) and then his green card were “revoked,” Mahmoud was taken to New Jersey and whisked to an isolated Louisiana detention facility before courts could intervene. A federal judge has ordered the case to be moved back to New Jersey. These days, whether the Trump regime will obey remains to be seen.

Columbia student Yunseo Chung, 20, is a permanent resident who has lived in the United States since age 7. Now at an undisclosed location, she’s suing to prevent being deported after ICE agents raided and searched Columbia residences on the pretext that the school or its residences are “harboring and concealing illegal aliens on its campus.” Supposedly, participation in pro-Palestinian demonstrations makes her “a detriment to U.S. foreign policy goals” under the terms of a 1952 McCarthy-era law authorizing deportation on those grounds.

Dr. Alawieh, the kidney specialist, surgeon and assistant professor at Brown University, returning from a trip to

Lebanon, was detained for 36 hours and then put on a return flight — in blatant violation of an emergency court order barring her deportation. The ostensible “grounds for removal” was her attendance at the funeral of Hasan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah leader assassinated by Israel, where tens of thousands of Lebanese were present.

These are far from the only cases of Trump’s agents ignoring a court order, as illustrated by the mass removal of alleged Venezuelan “gang members” — absent any proof or shred of legal process — to an infamous deadly prison in El Salvador.

Ranjani Srinivasan, whose doctoral work in urban planning is almost completed, was “disenrolled” by Columbia after ICE agents arrived at her apartment and, failing to gain entry to detain her, said her visa was cancelled and informed her that she had 15 days to leave the country. Now seeking asylum in Canada but not disclosing her location to protect her safety, she’s told CBC News that she had no actual involvement in campus protests (she was apparently spotted in a crowd last spring at a time when her campus residence had been blocked off).

Columbia’s despicable behavior in suppressing and expelling students last year is now compounded with its cowardly kowtowing to a set of draconian demands from the Trump White House, including not only banning masks — notably, Mahmoud Khalil was easily targeted because he didn’t mask — and placing its Middle East, African and Asian Studies center under “external trusteeship.”

Badar Khan Suri is a Georgetown professor and postdoctoral scholar on religion and peace processes in the Middle East and South Asia, legally in the United States on a research scholar and professor visa. An Indian national who lives with his U.S. citizen wife and three children in Rosslyn, Virginia, when he arrived home March 17 after a Ramadan iftar meal celebration, Suri was taken into custody by masked federal agents without being accused of any crime.

In just over 72 hours, he was transferred to multiple immigration detention centers and then to an ICE staging center in Alexandria, Louisiana. (His colleagues suspect that the government’s real target is his Palestinian-American wife Mapheze Saleh, who as a citizen can’t be rounded up for deportation.)

By the time you’re reading this statement, the outrages perpetrated by the gangster Trump regime will have proliferated further.

What’s at stake

In two short months, Trump’s rule has become a metastatic cancer on the already-weakened body of democratic rights in the United States. In fact, over the years preceding the current reign of terror, Trump, the right wing and their stacked Supreme Court majority have chalked up some significant accomplishments — including turning the historic Voting Rights Act into a dead letter, wiping out campaign finance laws so that billionaire parasites like Elon Musk and the Adelsons can purchase the government, and of course abolishing federal abortion rights.

The present course — on many fronts, from rule by executive decree to terrorizing immigrant communities and pro-Palestinian activists to abolishing birthright citizenship — leads toward the substantive destruction of constitutional government in the United States. Only some decorative wallpaper will be left in place to disguise the rot.

Civil liberties organizations and attorneys for targets of deportation are energetically intervening in court cases and

sounding the alarm in media outlets. But from the top leadership of the Democratic Party comes deafening silence on the destruction of Gaza and rampant ethnic cleansing in the occupied West Bank. And while dozens of Democratic members of Congress have issued a letter challenging Mahmoud Khalil's detention, minority leader Hakeem Jeffries' name is conspicuously absent. On the Senate side Chuck Schumer appears to be in deep hibernation after his vote to pass the House Republicans' slash-and-burn budget "continuing resolution."

Resistance is emerging on multiple fronts, from the Columbia student worker union CSW-UAW 2710 call for action on Mahmoud Khalil's case, to postal workers' unions staging demonstrations to protest the plans to devastate and then privatize the postal service, to pickets at Tesla showrooms against billionaire Elon Musk's business empire. We are delighted to see Palestinian and Ukrainian flags flying together at solidarity demonstrations — as Trump green-lights Israel's drive for the final destruction of Gaza and prepares to carve up Ukraine in collaboration with Vladimir Putin.

Any illusion that terrorizing Palestinian activism and immigrant communities, assaulting transgender, Queer and feminist rights, gutting government agencies, and the drive to abolish federal workers' unions, Social Security and Medicaid, are "separate" issues, is fatal. Protecting our rights requires a monumental and unified effort of grassroots resistance, civil liberties and popular movement forces.

The outrageous case of Mahmoud Khalil in particular has gained mass attention, and his letter from detention as a political prisoner is a powerful clarion call. Demonstrations have been held around the country, including Jewish Voice for Peace — New York's occupation of the Trump Tower lobby.

It is a fight to be waged on multiple fronts. Of course, any supporter of basic First Amendment rights should be demanding Mahmoud Khalil's immediate release, regardless of what they think of his activism for Palestine — and no one should be ideologically excluded from that legal and civil liberties struggle, whatever their political views.

At the same time, the agitation and activism for Palestinian freedom and against the genocide will and must continue, inspired by Khalil's own example and courage. The fate of the Palestinian people as a mass human sacrifice on the altar of political cynicism, imperialism and settler colonialism is not an isolated matter. It is inextricably tied to the future of us all.

Some Sources

Mahmoud Khalil's March 18 letter dictated from his Louisiana detention center:

<https://www.aclu.org/news/free-speech/a-letter-from-palestinian-activist-mahmoud-khalil>

A petition in support of Badar Khan Suri:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfznp-mVhvKXv0mxUMgwLMAuvjP7Z9wnwz3clvcGehjy3tfTA/viewform>

Emergency motion to stop Dr. Suri's peremptory deportation:

<https://www.acluva.org/en/press-releases/aclu-virginia-files-emergency-motion-stop-trump-administrations-illegal-deportation>

In support of Professor Steven Thrasher, targeted for pro-Palestinian activism at Northwestern University:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdfXeE0eCIMlnBZD8djSblYWVl4Alhq_DknTqFAy16_tJh35g/viewform?fbzx=3017609832160450586

The attacks on us all

Protest in support of Dr. Alawieh: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PpcsSAVGGk>

Among many responses from the left, we especially recommend this excellent statement by the Tempest Collective: <https://tempestmag.org/2025/03/free-free-mahmoud-khalil/>

Solidarity

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